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VALUATIONS



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Votes for Women: The Legacy of the Suffragettes

As we approach Spring and International Women's Day, it seems the perfect time to take a moment to remember the huge sacrifices made by thousands of pioneering women in the 19th and early 20th century, in the bid to gain votes for women. Jeopardising their lives, safety and often their place in society this incredible group secured the right to vote for future generations.

Although it was as early as 1832 that the first petition of Women's Suffrage was presented to Parliament, it was the years that followed which saw the movement gain momentum.

As one of the most recognisable names associated with the vote for women campaign Emmeline Pankhurst was involved with Women's Suffrage from 1880 and was one of the original founding members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the motto of which was 'Deeds Not Words. Led by an all-female staff, in a combination of paid and volunteer roles, 1906 saw the WSPU headquarters open in central London. This quickly became the base for planning the more confrontational stage of the campaign and the use of more radical tactics, and planned protests started to appear, alongside a more creatively-minded publicity campaign. A weekly newspaper was launched and by 1909 it had a circulation of an impressive 22,000. Various fundraising events and high profile demonstrations were planned throughout the ninety regional offices.

Following this increase in headline-catching protests more than thirteen

hundred women were incarcerated, a large percentage in Holloway Prison, which became all female prison in 1903. The following poem was penned by Kathleen Emerson who was jailed for taking part in the mass window breaking in London, 1912.

The Women in Prison by Kathleen Emerson (1912)

*Oh, Holloway, grim Holloway
With grey, forbidding towers!
Stern are they walls, but sterner still
Is woman's free, unconquered will.
And though to-day and yesterday
Brought long and lonely hours,
Those hours spent in captivity
Are stepping-stones to liberty.*

Although Millicent Fawcett, Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst are amongst the most recognisable names in suffrage history it is a myth that the groups were made up of entirely middle-class white women. In fact, the cause attracted women of many classes and nationalities. It was reported by inmates at the time that depending on their class the women were treated very differently.

Having had a privileged upbringing, Queen's Victoria's goddaughter Sophia Duleep Singh, an important supporter of Indian heritage in Britain, dedicated much of her time to campaigns and worthy causes and became one of the more militant campaigners. We continue to pay tribute and recognise the selfless acts of the countless courageous women who fought against the odds for their future, the future of their families and of generations of women to come.

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Selected significant dates:

1832

First petition on women's suffrage presented to Parliament.

1889

The Women's Franchise League is formed and aims to win the vote for married women as well as single and widowed women.

1897

Formation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), led by Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929).

1903

The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) is founded in Manchester by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928).

1908

Hunger striking adopted as a WSPU strategy leading to forcible feeding in 1909.

1909

Muriel Matters hires an airship painted 'Votes For Women' to fly over The House of Commons dropping propaganda leaflets.

1913

'The Cat and Mouse Act', is introduced, targeting suffragettes on hunger-strike permitting them to be released into the community to then be rearrested once they had regained their health.

1914

Britain declares war on Germany on 4 August. 1914-18 saw an estimated two million women replace men in traditionally male jobs.

1918

The Representation of the People Act is passed on 6 February giving women the vote provided they are aged over 30 and either they, or their husband, meet a property qualification and women vote in a general election for the first time on 14 December with over eight million women eligible.

1928

The Equal Franchise Act is passed giving women equal voting rights with men. All women aged over 21 can now vote in elections. Fifteen million women are eligible.

Notable auction highlights of suffragette related ephemera



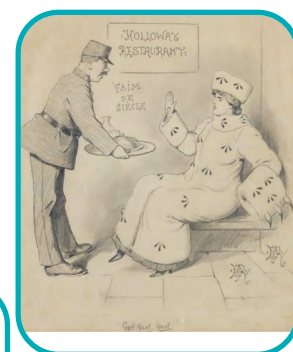
Lot 14 Hunger Strike Medal 1912, WSPU to Maud Joachim, the first woman to hunger strike in Scotland, sold for £41,600, insurance value £75,000.

Lot 15 Scottish Cup and Saucer, designed by Sylvia Pankhurst, for The Scottish WSPU Exhibition, Glasgow 1910. Sold for £3,200, insurance value £5,500.



Lot 46 Suffragette 'Angel of Freedom' Brooch, designed by Sylvia Pankhurst c1909. Sold for £1,280, insurance value £3,500.

Lot 63 'Panko' original drawing by E.T Reed, c1909. Sold for £3,840, insurance value £6,000.



Lot 71 Suffragette Chess Set. Sold for £38,400 Insurance value £60,000.

The above five lots were part of the auction 'Votes For Women, the Lesley Mees Collection.' Bonhams, Knightsbridge, 22 September – 33 October 2023. Photographs courtesy of [Bonhams](#).

For further information, artefacts and objects relating to the campaign, please visit [The London Museum](#).