

Lesson 1:

Enquiry 4: Resources

Four historians

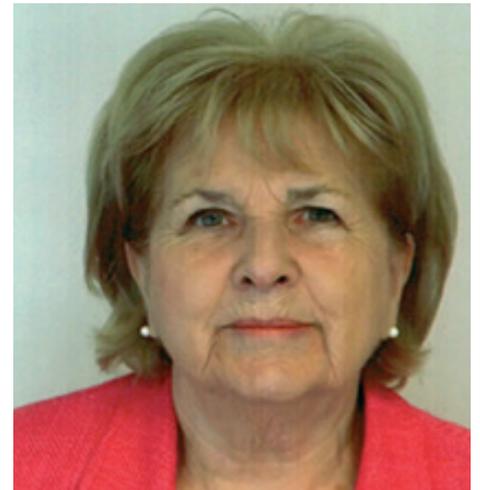
Professor June Purvis

'The campaign for the parliamentary vote for women in Britain was a long and bitter struggle that began in the mid-19th century. However, it really took off in 1903 when Emmeline Pankhurst founded the women-only Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). With the slogan, "Deeds, not words", the charismatic Emmeline, a brilliant orator, together with her eldest daughter Christabel, the key strategist of the WSPU, roused the women of Britain to abandon the ladylike tactics of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and to demand, not ask for, their democratic birthright.

The suffragettes engaged in daring and brave deeds, often putting their own lives at risk, even when engaging in peaceful demonstrations. But from 1912, more violent tactics were adopted including window-smashing raids in London's West End and the vandalising of pillar boxes. Such a change in strategy, which never endangered human life, was a response to the stubbornness of the Liberal government of the day that, over a long period of time, had debated women's suffrage bills but never passed them, and then prohibited women from protesting in public arenas.

Many of the 1,000 women who were imprisoned adopted the hunger strike as a political tool, only to be forcibly fed by an unyielding government. At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the patriotic Pankhursts called a

halt to all militancy and urged their followers to take up war work as a way to win their enfranchisement. That wish was partly fulfilled when, on February 6 1918, nine months before the war ended, eight and a half million women over 30 years of age – householders, wives of householders, occupiers of property of £5 or more annual value and university graduates – were finally allowed to vote.'



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Dr Julie Gottlieb

'Both groups (suffragettes and suffragists) had distinct identities and followed different tactics. The suffragists were part of a longer tradition dating from the 19th century, based on peaceful protest rather than militancy. The militant acts of the suffragettes were a response to the slow progress of democratic suffragism. Although suffragists don't get as much attention, we can't ignore the less spectacular but much longer campaign. There are historians who argue that the constitutionalists were in fact the more effective of the two wings, and the credit for the vote belongs to them. But, as I say, this is a heated debate to this day.

The suffragettes endured great suffering – violence, imprisonment, hunger strike and force feeding. We just have to be careful that their considerable sacrifices shouldn't overshadow the breadth of the movement and the effectiveness of campaigning, petitioning, canvassing, and writing that came from the suffragists.

We also need to remember that there weren't just these two organisations, that's another misconception – there were dozens. There were suffrage organisations representing different occupations, religions, and interests, and each political party had their own movement, including the Conservatives, which you might not expect. There were dozens of occupationally-based and regionally-defined suffrage societies too.

The acts of martyrdom which are being widely acknowledged on the part of the suffragettes shouldn't be underplayed because this is what makes this anniversary so poignant, so rich and so inspiring. On the other hand, that should not come at the expense of acknowledging how constitutional democratic practices can achieve the same goal. Nor should that de-radicalise the suffragists – their fight for universal suffrage was already radical enough, they were just using different means. Fawcett was not just a stiff, Victorian figure – she was a real radical, who had greater faith in the system.'



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Dr Fern Riddell

'So is it possible to accept our heroes as flawed? This is a question I have returned to over and over again while piecing together Kitty's life. On the one hand (...) I can fall in love with a romanticised idea of bands of passionate women, running around the countryside in the dead of night with guns loaded with blanks, cans of petrol and firelighters, breaking into the empty or abandoned home of The Man, and setting fire to it as a beacon of rebellion. I can hear the breathless laughter, I can almost feel the adrenaline, I can picture what it would have been like – frost crunching under your shoes in the twilight, the heavy bag, the intense, addictive relationship between doing something bad, something criminal, and the commitment to the holy cause of your shared sisterhood. How alive it would make you feel, how powerful.

But on the other hand, there is the brutal destruction of homes, places of worship, trains, communication networks, and the chemical and physical attacks on ministers, postmen – people going about their daily lives. Perhaps growing up with the constant threat of terror, and at a time when so many of our wars for equal rights have been fought and won – enables us to see what has so often been dismissed or sanitised before: that the suffragettes were truly dangerous. They wanted to terrorise and destroy the very fabric of British society, and were committed to doing so with a violent and aggressive campaign. For all that the official line and leadership claimed to value human life, who knows how far the violence could have gone if the First World War hadn't stopped it?

I cannot reconcile these two halves of the same whole. I cannot excuse the actions of the suffragettes, but I will always support their reasons for fighting. So I have learned to accept one idea above all others; history is not supposed to be comfortable. It should always be questioned, it should always be held to account. False idols are the most dangerous gift history can give you. If we choose to ignore or sanitise the actions of those who founded our societies, who changed them and, in the long run, made them a better, fairer place to live, we choose a life of ignorance and lies. Heroes can be corrupted, leaders can make terrible choices, but each moment, each action – whether questionable or justified – has led us to where we are today.'



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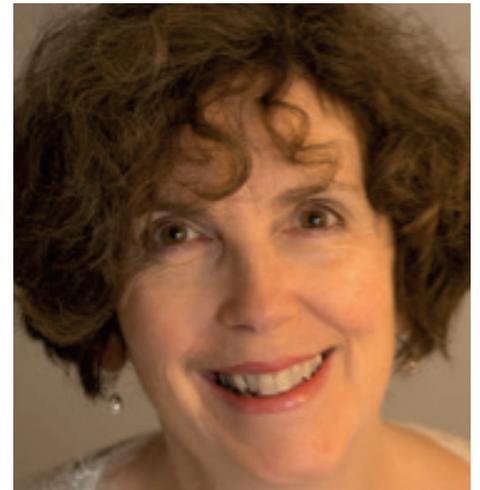
Four historians

Jane Robinson

'Being a suffragette did not necessarily mean that you were an extremist, or even a rebel. Victoria Liddiard was a proud follower of suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst and a member of the militant Women's Social and Political Union, but she would never have dreamed of going on hunger strike, because her mother told her she mustn't.

Secondly, and much more importantly, this movement was not all about the suffragettes. They played a vital part and, as we shall discover, some lost their health, families and even their lives in defence of their beliefs. But they were a minority, the ones who caught the headlines. Their confrontational approach distracted public attention from the imaginative and quietly courageous work done by tens of thousands of others across Britain, dressed not in amethyst and emerald but in their own uniform of berry-red and leaf-green; not singing Ethel Smythe's anthem about battle and strife but Parry's "Jerusalem" instead. They were the suffragists, who were just as determined about emancipation as their suffragette sisters, but more persuasive.

Some say victory might have been won much sooner had it not been for the militants, and if someone in your family fought for the vote, they are far more likely to have been a "gist" than a "gette". Many men campaigned for women's suffrage too, and plenty of women opposed it. So as well as being a people's history, based on contemporary first-hand and unpublished accounts, this – like all my books – is also an exercise in shattering stereotypes.'



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Biography of four historians



Biography: Professor June Purvis

Professor Purvis is a historian who mainly works on the suffragette movement. She has written a biography of Emmeline Pankhurst and is writing one about Christabel. The extract you have been looking at was from an article in the *Guardian* newspaper where Professor Purvis was defending the WSPU from critics who claimed that the movement was both violent and ineffective in promoting the cause of Votes for Women.

Professor Purvis's main research interests are in women's and gender history in Modern Britain (19th and 20th centuries). Her specialism is the suffragette movement in Edwardian Britain on which she has published extensively. Her single-authored book of the leader of the suffragette movement, *Emmeline Pankhurst: a biography* (2002) received critical acclaim. Her most recent book, the co-edited *Women's Activism: global perspectives from the 1890s to the present* (2013), looks at the international dimension of women's activism.

She is also the Editor of the international journal *Women's History Review* (Routledge), the Editor of *Studies on Women and Gender Abstracts* (Routledge), the Editor for a Women's and Gender Book Series with Routledge, a regular contributor to

BBC History Magazine and reviews regularly for *The Times Higher Education Supplement*. She sits on the Women's History Network (UK) Committee as the representative of the International Federation for Research in the History of Women, is on the Advisory Board of Women and Social Movements International, and has been elected to roles as Convenor of the Women's History Network (UK) and as Treasurer and Secretary of the International Federation for Research in Women's History. She has made frequent appearances on BBC radio and TV.

Source: [https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/june-purvis\(84ffe230-039b-4ba4-90c9-431c37aa98d9\).html](https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/portal/en/persons/june-purvis(84ffe230-039b-4ba4-90c9-431c37aa98d9).html)

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Biography of four historians



Biography: Dr Julie Gottlieb

Dr Gottlieb is a historian who works on women and political movements in the nineteenth and twentieth century. She was the historical advisor to the team creating the statue of Millicent Fawcett (the leader of the NUWSS). In the extract you have been looking at, she is explaining what her aims were in helping to create the statue and how she wanted to represent as many groups as possible.

Dr Gottlieb's research interests are broadly in:

- Modern British political history (principally the period 1918 to 1945)
- the history of political extremism (with a focus on right-wing extremism in Britain)
- women's history and gender studies (particularly women in politics, the construction of gender identities in the political sphere, and women in the Conservative Party)
- comparative fascism (particularly gender and fascism in comparative perspective)
- race and ethnicity in the British context

Her most recent book examines women's participation and their representation in British foreign affairs

between the wars; women's political activism in a range of internationalist, feminist and pacifist organisations; women's contribution to resistance to fascism at home and abroad; and the gendering of the appeasement in the late 1930s. *Guilty Women: Gender, Foreign Policy and Appeasement in Inter-war Britain* was published in 2015 and became available in paperback in 2017.

She is currently working on a number of projects concerning women's politicisation in Modern Britain; people's histories of international crises; and the emotional fallout of the Munich crisis.

Source: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/history/staff/julie-gottlieb>

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Biography of four historians



Biography: Dr Fern Riddell

Dr Riddell is a historian who specialises in gender, sexuality and entertainment in the Victorian era. The extract you have been looking at comes from her book *Death in Ten Minutes*, which is a biography of one of the most radical suffragettes, Kitty Marion.

A graduate of the BBC Academy's 'Expert Women' programme, Fern was selected as one of the 10 AHRC/BBC Radio 3's 'New Generation Thinkers' for 2013. She wrote and filmed *Shooting the Victorians*, a series exploring how the nineteenth century is represented in films, TV, radio and literature. Her first book, *A Victorian Guide to Sex*, explored the sexual ideas and advice that helped to build an empire.

She has been a historical consultant for the BAFTA award-winning BBC and Amazon drama *Ripper Street*, she advises on both specialist factual and drama productions for the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky Arts, and has appeared as an expert

historian for radio and television nationally and internationally. She writes for a number of publications including *The Guardian*, *Huffington Post*, *Times Higher Education* and *The Telegraph* and is a columnist for *BBC History Magazine*.

Source: <https://www.fernridell.com/>

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Biography of four historians



Biography: Jane Robinson

Jane Robinson is a historian who focuses on the lives of ordinary people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The extract you have been looking at comes from her book *Hearts and Minds: The Untold Story of the Great Pilgrimage and How Women Won the Vote*, which focuses on the ordinary women and members of the NUWSS who joined the suffragists' 'Pilgrimage' in 1913.

She has worked in the antiquarian book trade and as an archivist and is now a full-time writer and lecturer, specialising in social history through women's eyes. She is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, member of the Society of Authors and founder member of Writers in Oxford.

Her previous books include:

- *Unsuitable for Ladies* (1994), an anthology of women travellers' writings.
- *Pandora's Daughters* (2002), exploring 'enterprising women' including early Venetian writer Christine de Pizan, criminal Moll Cutpurse, and Christian Cavanagh, who joined the army in male disguise.

- *Mary Seacole* (2005), a biography of the nurse who was, in 2004, voted 'the top black Briton of all time'.
- *Bluestockings* (2009), which describes women's entry into English universities from the 1860s to 1939.
- *A Force to be Reckoned With* (2011), a history of the Women's Institute.
- *In the Family Way: Illegitimacy Between the Great War and the Swinging Sixties* (2015), a book on attitudes to illegitimacy.

Source: <http://www.jane-robinson.com/>

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Evidence pack

Bills to give women the vote came before Parliament and were thrown out 21 times between 1871 and 1918.	The NUWSS was formed in 1897 by Millicent Fawcett. The WSPU came along later in 1903.	In 1905, members of both the NUWSS and the WSPU lobbied the House of Commons.
The first large-scale outdoor demonstration for women's suffrage was the NUWSS's 'Mud March' in 1907.	In 1907, some of the suffragettes left the WSPU to form the 'Women's Freedom League' in protest at the increasing violence of WSPU tactics.	In 1908, the WSPU launched a campaign of window-breaking.
In 1909, Marion Wallace Dunlop was the first suffragette to go on hunger strike. The authorities responded with force-feeding.	Suffragists and suffragettes collaborated in the 'Tax Resistance League' of 1909.	In 1910, the WSPU suspended militant activities for almost a year as it thought the government might compromise.
In 1910, a suffragette protest at Westminster descended into violence as policemen attacked the women, beating many of them badly.	In 1911, suffragettes and suffragists combined to avoid being counted by the government in the census.	In 1911, suffragettes and suffragists held a joint procession to celebrate the coronation of King George V.
When the government did not grant women votes in 1911, the suffragettes began to use tactics like arson.	In 1913, suffragette Emily Wilding Davison was killed by being trampled by the King's horse at the Epsom Derby.	In 1913, the NUWSS held a 'Great Pilgrimage' – a peaceful procession of its members from across the country.
In May 1913 alone, there were 52 suffragette attacks, including 29 bombs and 15 arson attempts.	In 1913, the 'Cat and Mouse Act' was passed, meaning that suffragettes on hunger strike would be let go and rearrested once they'd recovered.	With the outbreak of war in 1914, the WSPU and the NUWSS stopped campaigning.
In 1917, Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst both met with David Lloyd George to push for the bill that would eventually become law and give some women the vote in 1918.		

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Evidence pack: Key quotes

The scheme had been well thought-out. On gaining an entrance the perpetrators had taken the bomb to the top of the spiral stairway under the dome and carried a fuse thirty feet long down into the chronograph room, where it was fired by means of a lighted candle, the remains of which were found. The quantity of gunpowder used must have been considerable, as fragments of the earthen jar which held it were embedded in the wall and woodwork, and the glass of two windows was blown out and carried a considerable distance. A bag, some biscuits, and Suffragette literature were left behind.

Account of a suffragette bomb in the Western Gazette

I take this opportunity of saying that in my opinion, far from having injured the movement, they (The WSPU) have done more during the last twelve months to bring it within the realms of practical politics than we have been able to accomplish in the same number of years.

Millicent Fawcett, 1906

Perhaps the Government will realise now that we mean to fight to the bitter end... If men use explosives and bombs for their own purpose they call it war, and the throwing of a bomb that destroys other people is then described as a glorious and heroic deed. Why should a woman not make use of the same weapons as men. It is not only war we have declared. We are fighting for a revolution.

Christabel Pankhurst, 1913

Some suffragists, not a very numerous group, have temporarily lost faith in all human honour and are attempting to grasp by violence what should be yielded to the growing conviction that our demand is based on justice and common sense.

Millicent Fawcett, 1912

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Evidence pack: Key images



Image credit: © Museum of London

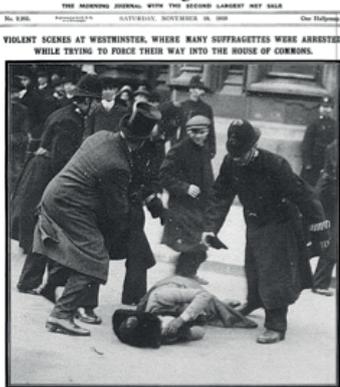
Women's Sunday – peaceful procession of approximately 250,000 supporters organised by the WSPU in 1908



Image credit: LSE Library

Suffragists on NUWSS's 'Great Pilgrimage' of 1913, their banners making it clear they are 'law-abiding', in contrast to the suffragettes

The Daily Mirror



The newspapers showing police attacking a suffragette during the demonstration in 1910

Image credit:
Archives of The Daily Mirror



Aftermath of suffragette window-smashing

Image credit: US Library of Congress



Building destroyed in suffragette arson attack

Image credit: <https://womanandhersphere.com/>