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Vote 100: A Lincolnshire View of Women's Suffrage



Large print booklets are available at the exhibition entrance. This booklet is also available on our project website, hosted on Bishop Grosseteste University website <https://www.bishopg.ac.uk/vote100/>

Edited by Dr Claudia Capancioni with Dr Andrew Jackson, Siân Hope-Johnson, MA, Elaine Johnson, MA, and Jasmine Mills, MA

Designed by Alan Stacey, MInstLM.

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June 2019

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For further information and reproduction, contact:

Dr Claudia Capancioni claudia.capancioni@bishopg.ac.uk

Cover: from the left, Jasmine Mills, Elaine Johnson, and Siân Hope-Johnson

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VOTE100: A Lincolnshire View of Women's Suffrage



This exhibition celebrates 100 years of women's suffrage by narrating national events from a regional perspective through stories that are founded on archival material including letters, national and local Lincolnshire newspapers, and magazines.

In collaboration with Lincoln Central Library, the City of Lincoln Council, and the Lincolnshire Branch of the Fawcett Society, we developed this exhibition, which was displayed first at Lincoln Central Library in July 2018. It then toured the city of Lincoln and was further assisted and supported by North Kesteven District Council, Spilsby, Franklin Hall, and the Fawcett Society.

The research, visual material, and reproductions included in this exhibition are supported by Bishop Grosseteste University Learning and Teaching and Research Innovation Funds.

In June 2019, VOTE100: A Lincolnshire View of Women's Suffrage joins the 'Wolds Women of Influence' to outline the legacy of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century women of Lincolnshire.

The Research Team at Bishop Grosseteste University:

Dr Claudia Capancioni, Dr Andrew Jackson, Siân Hope-Johnson, MA, Elaine Johnson, MA, Jasmine Mills, MA.

With the help of:

Guenever Moyes, University Archivist;
Jane Rogers, Senior Technician; and
Alan Stacey, Reprographics Manager.

At Lincoln Central Library:

Nicola Grigg, Manager, Louise
Woolley, Library Manager; Ghislaine
Chisnall, Cultural Services Advisor.



Our special thanks go to:

Lincoln Central Library for inviting us to contribute to their
Vote100 programme of events in 2018

Vera Barwick

Maxine Grimshaw

At Bishop Grosseteste University:

The University Archive

The Centre for Enhancing Learning and Teaching (CELT)

The Reprographics Team

The Research & Innovation Centre

Marketing Team

Porters Team

Maintenance Team

For referencing and visual material:

City of Lincoln Council

Grantham Library

Lincolnshire Archives

Lincoln Central Library

Lincolnshire Echo

Lincolnshire Library Local Collections

Lincolnshire Co-operative Ltd.

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

The British Newspaper Archive

The Fawcett Society

The National Trust at Gunby Hall, Spilsby

The Women's Library, The London School of Economics

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to **VOTE100: A Lincolnshire View of Women's Suffrage**, an exhibition designed and curated by Bishop Grosseteste University Dr Andrew Jackson, Head of Research, Dr Claudia Capancioni, Programme Leader for English, and MA students, Siân Hope-Johnson, Elaine Johnson, and Jasmine Mills, with the help of the Lincoln Central Library staff.

For the anniversaries of the 1918 *Representation of the People Act* and December General Election, and the 1928 *Equal Franchise Act*. Our display explores a period of democratic uncertainty, injustice, and militancy both nationally and locally and highlights how women in Lincolnshire took part in debates and actions that led to the right to vote on equal terms for women and men.

Divided in five parts, our panels provide an overview of the early origins of the suffrage movement, showcasing both the women who helped to shape the movement's beginnings, and those who opposed suffrage. Our narrative encompasses the broadening of the suffrage and anti-suffrage movements. It examines a time of mounting pressure for the movements. It gives context to some of the subsequent militant actions of the suffragettes until the passing of the *Representation Act*. It concludes with two short biographies of Maria Elizabeth Nevile (1861-1946) and Emily Gilbert (1872-1959), pioneers in holding public positions in Lincolnshire, and an account of the first time that women voted in Lincoln.

Our aim is to emphasise the connections between these historic national changes and the lives of Women in Lincolnshire. We hope you enjoy learning about the strong commitment so many had for so long in order for women and men to have an equal right to vote. Help us celebrate their legacy by keeping their stories alive.

Please give us your feedback by filling in the questionnaire you find in this booklet. To get in touch with us please email: claudia.capancioni@bishopg.ac.uk.

Part 1 Origins of the Movement

1832: *The Great Reform Act* defined voters as 'male persons' thereby excluding women. Henry Hunt, M.P. for Preston, presented the first petition to Parliament supporting women's franchise on the same conditions as men. He was ridiculed.

1866: 7th June, Louisa Boucherett from Willingham, Market Rasen, and her youngest daughter, Emilia Jessie Boucherett (1825-1905), were among the 1500 signatories on the petition for women's suffrage presented to Parliament by John Stuart Mill, M.P.

1867: Giving the vote to women was debated for the first time in Parliament and defeated by 123 votes to 73. This event led to the beginning of formal political campaigning.

1868: Lydia Becker (1827-1890) formed the National Society for Women's Suffrage, the first national group to campaign for women's suffrage, in Manchester. The first meeting was held on 14th April 1868.



Portrait of Lydia Becker before 1890, ArtUK.
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1869: Single women who had sufficient property were granted the right to vote on the same terms as men in some municipal elections.

Part 2 **Broadening of the Movement**

1873: 21st February, a public meeting was held at the Town Hall in Grimsby to consider giving the parliamentary vote to women householders. The Grimsby committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage was formed. Rev. John Fordyce, the treasurer, said:

So long as woman is compelled ... to regard herself as a chattel ... so long must she remain a degraded creature; but when she realises that she is a person ... responsible to God and herself for her actions, a new life becomes possible to her (Crawford 2006).

1874: 1st June, a petition in favour of women's suffrage was presented in the House of Commons by Mr. Winn from Tealby and Legsby.

16th December, a public meeting 'in furtherance of the Women's Suffrage movement was held in the Assembly-rooms' in Lincoln. It was addressed by Lydia Becker.

1875: 9th February, a petition in favour of women's suffrage was presented in the House of Commons by John D. Astley from Louth.

13th December, a public meeting to consider extending the parliamentary suffrage to women was held in the Masonic Hall, Lincoln. It was addressed by Lydia Becker and support for the proposal was agreed.

1887: Emily Massingberd (1847-1897) inherited Gunby Hall, Spilsby, on the death of her father. She was a friend of suffragettes Laura Ormiston Grant and Caroline Biggs.

1889: Emily Massingberd became a member of the Society for Promoting the Return of Women as County Councillors. Standing for election to the ward of Partney, she lost by only 20 votes. She was one of the first women in the country to stand for public office.

1890: Emily Massingberd is recorded as being a member of the Women's Franchise League, founded by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928). In 1892, she became a member of the executive committee of the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage.

1897: 3rd February, the second reading of the Women's Suffrage Bill was carried by 228 votes to 157. This was reported in the *Lincolnshire Echo* on 4th February, in an article entitled, 'Dominance of the Petticoat'. Some M.P.s were in favour of property-owning women being given the vote; others thought the government should 'remain under masculine guidance'. There was fear of an 'Amazonian constitution' and that admitting women to politics 'would be a serious hindrance to political progress'.

1897: The National Union of Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S.) was formed, drawing together peaceful campaign groups. Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929) was elected as its first president.

1898: Lincoln Diocesan Training College (L.D.T.C.) students debated the proposal '[t]hat women should be allowed a vote in Parliament'. It was soundly defeated by the 'very womanly and conservatively-minded household', including most of the staff. They had a 'very feminine dread of women's home duties becoming neglected.'



Illuminated miniature water-colour of Lincoln Diocesan Training College decorating the list of contributors that commissioned a commemorative portrait of Canon Hector Nelson (1815-1896), and was presented to him on 9th December 1884. The portrait was painted to celebrate his 21 years as Principal of the College, from 1862, when the College was established, to 1892.

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Part 3 Mounting Political Pressure

1903: October, The Women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.) was formed by Emmeline Pankhurst, with an exclusively female membership and the motto, 'Deeds not Words'.

1905: October, the first suffragist arrests took place in Manchester. Christabel Pankhurst (1880-1958) and Annie Kenney (1879-1953) were imprisoned for three days after refusing to pay fines for disorderly behaviour.

1906: The N.U.W.S.S. maintained peaceful pressure as suffragists. The militancy of the W.S.P.U. led to the name 'suffragettes' being coined by the *Daily Mail*.

Sara Jessie Stephenson (1873-1966) from Louth joined the W.S.P.U., aged 34, though her parents thought that, 'a woman's sphere must be limited to domesticity' (Crawford 2006).

1907: 7th February, the N.U.W.S.S. held a demonstration of over 3000 women in London. It is remembered as the 'mud march' because of the weather conditions.

13th February, the first 'Women's Parliament' is held at Caxton Hall, London. Emmeline Pankhurst presided. A march on Parliament was dispersed by the police with some violence: 57 women were arrested.

1907: The Women's Freedom League was formed by Teresa Billington-Greig (1877-1964) and Charlotte Despard (184-1939) in a protest against the despotic leadership of the W.S.P.U.

1908: January, two women chained themselves to the railings of 10 Downing Street and had to be cut free.

21st June, at a W.S.P.U. rally in Hyde Park, the official colours of the suffragettes were seen in public for the first time:

purple = loyalty to cause and king;

white = purity;

green = hope.

Sara Jessie Stephenson was 'Chief Marshall' of the rally's Paddington section. In her autobiography, she writes:

my milliner and dressmaker took endless pains with my attire. A white lacy muslin dress, white shoes and stockings and loves and, like an order, across the breast, the broad band in purple, white and green emblazoned "Votes for Women", a white shady hat trimmed with white. (Crawford 2002).

1908: 7th October, Ten militant suffragettes, including Florence E. M. Macaulay (1862-1945) and Mary Leigh (1885-1978), interrupted the Home Secretary, H. J. Gladstone, in Lincoln Corn Exchange. After being evicted, they held a meeting outside in the Cornhill.

November, some women chained themselves to the grille of the Ladies Gallery in the House of Commons. The entire grille had to be removed to release them.



Suffragettes addressing a public meeting in the Cornhill, Lincoln, *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 16th Oct 1908. Reproduced by kind permission of the Lincolnshire Libraries Local Collections.

1909: The Lincoln Women's Suffrage Society was formed by Lucy C. Wickham (1879-?), daughter of the Dean of Lincoln, Edward Charles Wickham (1834-1910). M. Harrison was the assistant secretary.

5th May, a public meeting of the Lincoln Women's Suffrage Society was held at Central Hall, chaired by Canon Hicks. Kathleen Huddleston, who trained as a teacher at L.D.T.C., was present.

Support for women's suffrage was strong:

if no class could be properly legislated for [without parliamentary representation], then a whole sex could not be properly legislated for unless they had the franchise;

a woman should not be prevented from voting merely because she was a woman and when she had the same qualifications that entitled a man to vote.

Part 4 **Militant Action and Force-Feeding**

1909: July, Marion Wallace Dunlop (1864-1942) went on the first hunger strike in protest at being imprisoned in Division 2 as a criminal, not as a political offender and placed in Division 1. Further hunger striking followed.

23rd September, force-feeding of hunger strikers began.

October, two alumnae argued opposing views on women's suffrage in the L.D.T.C. magazine.

Annie M. Royce was for:

the great prospect of the future – the emancipation of women;

sitting impotent and voteless before so terrible a wrong' [sweated labour];

women of all classes desire the vote;

courageous women who have suffered ... for conscience sake;

we are pioneers ... we see ourselves in all sorts of positions which we never should have dreamed of a year ago.

Winifred N. Waller was against:

The average woman would tell you that she ... did not want the vote;

the interests of every woman ... are represented by the men;

a woman's work ... is not as good as a man's, women are not always at their best;

women voters ... would agitate for women M.P.s and women in the cabinet.

1910: January, Constance Lytton (1869-1928) was arrested for the third time. On the first two occasions, she was well-treated. On the third time, under the pseudonym Jane Warton and dressed as a poor working-woman, she was treated very differently and force fed.

1910: 18th November, remembered as 'Black Friday', a large delegation of women marched on Parliament. 119 were arrested. They were assaulted and manhandled by police. A telegram describes their '[d]eputation being brutally treated. Knocked down and kicked.'

24th November, Sara Jessie Stephenson and Edith Kerwood pleaded guilty to breaking a glass panel in the door of the Postmaster-General's house, at Porchester-street. It was alleged that Stephenson did the damage with Edith's boot. She was ordered to pay a fine of £5, with £1 10s. for damage, in default, one month. Edith was fined 40s or 14 days, for aiding and abetting.

1911: April, a mass census evasion was organised in protest against the government. Sara Jessie Stephenson took charge in Manchester.

June, Lincoln branch of the N.U.W.S.S. sent a contingent to a demonstration in London in favour of women's suffrage.

15th December, a debate was held under auspices of the Lincoln Junior Constitutional League about women's suffrage. Although the proposal that women should be given the vote was carried, several points were made against it including, '[w]omen are physically and mentally (politically speaking) unfit to exercise the vote' and '[d]isastrous from a national point of view to grant votes to women.'

1912: 4th November, Bishop Hicks of Lincoln supported the cause of women's suffrage but deplored militant activity.

Lincoln Bracebridge branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild held a meeting entitled 'Women and Their Place', whilst the Lincoln Burton Road branch held a meeting titled 'What Women's Suffrage Really Means.'

1913: Suffragette increased militancy, for example they smashed windows, bombed and vandalised uninhabited properties. These

actions led to the closure of public buildings, including Tattershall Castle. Letters in the Lincolnshire Archives show how visitors to the castle had no sympathy with the suffragettes.

1913: The Liberty and Property Defence League offered to supply special private police 'for the purposes of watching ... property and frustrating attempts at destruction and violence.'

February, two articles in the *Lincolnshire Echo*, 'Suffragettes War on Society' and 'Why Women Do Not Want the Vote' by the Countess of Jersey, precipitated considerable correspondence, including letters from Helen Page, the assistant secretary of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage.

April, the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-health) Act, aka Cat and Mouse Act, was passed. Hunger strikers were released on license when they became too weak. They were to be re-arrested when they recovered but many evaded re-imprisonment.

4th June, Emily Wilding Davison (1872-1913) stepped out in front of the King's horse on Derby day at Epsom. She died four days later from her injuries. Thousands attended her funeral procession on 14th June.

1914: At L.D.T.C. the debating society carried out a proposal '[t]hat women should be allowed to sit in parliament' by 39 votes to 11 but, a proposal that '[m]ilitant methods in the cause of woman's suffrage are justifiable' was defeated by 62 votes to 14.

21st May, a deputation to Buckingham Palace was led by Emmeline Pankhurst, who was arrested. The *Lincolnshire Echo* reported that, 'a good deal of hand-to-hand fighting took place. Several policemen had their helmets knocked off.' It was the last mass demonstration in support of women's suffrage before war was declared.

4th August, war was declared. The W.S.P.U. suspended its militant action in order to give its support to the war effort.



Winifred Todhunter, Principal of the Lincoln Diocesan Training College from 1912 to 1919, with students wearing gymslips. She was the first woman to become Principal of the College. Reproduced by kind permission of Bishop Grosseteste University.

Part 5 Aftermath, Legislation, & Representation

1918: 6th February, *The Representation of the People Act* granted the vote to all men over the age of 21 and to women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification (a house of a yearly value of not less than £5), or were university graduates.

December, the first election in which some women could vote took place. There were 17 female candidates. Constance Markiewicz (1868 - 1927) was the first woman to be elected as M.P. but, she was a Sinn Fein representative and did not take her seat.

1919: 1st December, in the Plymouth Sutton by-election Nancy Astor (1879-1964) was elected as M.P. and took her seat. She was the first woman to sit in the House of Commons. She died at Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire, 2nd May 1964, aged 84.

1921: The second woman M.P., Margaret Wintringham (1879 1955) from Grimsby, succeeded her husband as M.P. for Louth. She was a long-time member of the N.U.W.S.S. She campaigned for the lowering of the voting age to 21 and for women to sit in the House of Lords.

1923: December, 8 women were elected at the General Election, including Nancy Astor and Margaret Wintringham.

1925: Maria Elizabeth Nevile (1861-1946) became the first female Mayor of Lincoln. During her tenure (1925-26), she laid two foundation stones for the Usher Art Gallery in 1926, which were left plain at her request.

1928: 2nd July, *The Equal Franchise Act* finally granted the right to vote to women and men on equal terms.

1936: The Mayor of Lincoln, Councillor J.E. Fordham, appointed Emily Gilbert (1872-1959) as his Sheriff. Following Nicola de la Haye (b. before 1169-1230), Emily held this office after more than seven hundred years. To some Councillors' concerns, she replied:

Throughout the years, women have been regarded as anything from chattels to angels but this honour, paid to a woman, is a recognition of the admission of women to full citizenship. With St. Paul I can say that "I am a citizen of no mean City" (Rodgers 2001)

Emily was engaged in campaigning for the franchise for women.



Photo of the *Illustrated London News*, January 28th 1922, pages 124-125

Woman's Invasion of Parliament: The Two Sitting Members; and Prospective Candidates for Election.

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Maria Elizabeth Nevile (1861-1946)

Born in 1861, Maria Nevile moved to Lincoln in 1880. She left school at the age of 15 and volunteered at the workhouse on Burton Road. She was a Guardian of the institution and became their first female Chair. The record of the Lincoln Women Suffrage Society shows that, soon after its establishment in 1909, she attended their meetings.

A founding member of the Children Care Committee, she became Chair of the committee dealing with cases of children with conditions that prevented their access to mainstream education. The school at South Park in Lincoln was established directly through the recommendations of this committee.

In March 1919, she won a by-election for Minster Ward, and became the first female City Councillor. She was instrumental in the formation of the Lincoln and District Nursing Association and represented the council on the hospital board.

She was awarded an M.B.E. in 1929 in recognition of her political and public services, whilst Chair of the Lincoln Women's Unionist Association. In the same year, she was presented with a watch by the women of Lincoln in tribute to her work.

Maria Nevile retired from her civic duties in 1930, aged 69, and died on the 10th November 1946, aged 85.



Mayor Maria Elizabeth Nevile 1925
Photograph of Miss M. E. Nevile, O.B.E in
City of Lincoln: Mayors and Sheriffs 1921 to 1940.
Reproduced by kind permission of City of
Lincoln Council.

Emily Gilbert (1872-1959)

Emily Gilbert was born on the 8th October 1872 on Waterside South in Lincoln. She lived in a small two up, two down property with eight others. Her father manufactured bicycles. Forbidden to ride bicycles herself she cycled off one day in disguise wearing a pair of her brothers' trousers. She was the first woman to ride a bike in Lincoln along Carholme Road.

In 1898, she started working in the family cycle business. Two of her sisters moved to London and were in favour of women's suffrage.

They shared their views with Emily who became a firm supporter of the women's suffrage campaign. In 1899, she became Lincoln's first woman motorist and one of the first in the country.

In 1936, Emily was appointed Sheriff by the then Mayor of Lincoln, Councillor J.E. Fordham. She held this post, following Nicola de la Haye (b. before 1169-1230), after more than seven hundred years.

An outstanding citizen of Lincoln, Emily Gilbert died in 1959, aged 86.



Photograph of Emily Gilbert Sheriff of the City of Lincoln 1936-1937 in *City of Lincoln: Mayors and Sheriffs 1921 to 1940*.

Reproduced by kind permission of City of Lincoln Council.

Women turn out to vote in Lincoln for the first time

1918 finally heralded the passing of the *Representation of the People's Act*, meaning that women over thirty with property were eligible to vote. That December a general election was held. The massive change in the electorate would make changes across the county and Lincoln was no exception.

On December 13th 1918, in the *Lincolnshire Echo*, the Coalition candidate Alfred Thomas Davies (1881-1941) ran an extensive political advertisement entitled, 'The Women's Vote. An Appeal to the New Power in Lincoln.' The advert claimed that, it was 'the greatest opportunity our women have ever had.' It stated the women of Lincoln should 'vote early and certainly vote.' A third of the eligible electorate, the women of Lincoln certainly represented a very significant demographic.

A suffragette, Lena Ashwell (née Lena Margaret Pocock, 1872-1957), spoke to a crowd in Lincoln Theatre Royal on behalf of Davies. Ashwell was a British actor, theatre manager and producer. She was known for her work entertaining troops in World War One and awarded the Order of the British Empire in 1917. She also helped to establish the Actresses' Franchise League. She wrote an autobiography, *Myself a Player*, published in 1936. Her message of the women of Lincoln was of ambition and duty:

There were many things women meant to have ... better housing and better education, and ... equal pay for equal work. They also meant to have open competition in every part of the nation's work, for which the best brains were needed, and coming into which women meant to take part without any sex barrier whatever. (Leask 2012)

Ashwell was a hit with the crowd.

On December 14th 1918, polling day, the *Lincolnshire Echo* reported that when Ashwell addressed women in the Cornhill, she appealed to the apparent superfluity of those women in the audience over thirty. She declared that '[t]hose of them who were over 30 were jolly glad to be over 30 [...]. They needed better housing conditions [...] education, and equal pay for equal work.' Ashwell's manner certainly befitted the cause, '[s]he preferred, she said, to address the ladies present as women because there was no name bigger than women.'

On this historic polling day, the *Lincolnshire Echo* reported '[t]he number of women going to the polling stations with their husbands was the most novel scene of early hours.' The women indeed turned out to vote, empowered to do so by the toil of so many women before them.

Alfred Davies became M.P. for Lincoln with what the *Lincolnshire Echo*, on the 30th of December described as a 'smashing majority'. Davies made a speech to the crowd that had gathered to see the results. He thanked the returning and deputy returning officers, Lloyd George and the coalition party. What was missed was gratitude for the thousands of women who, for the first time, took their place among the electorate in Lincolnshire, eligible to vote for the very first time.

Siân Hope-Johnson, MA June 2019



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is an exhibition designed and curated by:
Dr Claudia Capancioni, Dr Andrew Jackson
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Jasmine Mills, MA, Ghislaine Chisnal
Alan Stacey, MInstLM

Supported by:

Bishop Grosseteste University
Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund,
Research Innovation Fund

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