



'HOPE'

LEGO SUFFRAGETTE EXHIBITION

10TH - 28TH FEBRUARY 2025 • AGORA, FAB BUILDING

Raising awareness of local Votes for Women campaign stories and sparking diverse conversations about women's voting and equal rights in Britain and across the globe today.

This event is organised by the History Department, University of Warwick.



WELCOME TO HOPE: LEGO SUFFRAGETTE EXHIBITION

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This digital exhibition guide has been created by the University of Warwick's History Department to reduce print in line with the university's paperless environment and sustainability goals.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION



The 2025 Hope: Lego Suffragette Exhibition will be on display in the Agora (atrium) of the Faculty of Arts Building 10th – 28th of February and coincides with the University of Warwick's 60th birthday.

2025 also commemorates 75 years since the election in 1950 of the first female MP for Coventry, Elaine Burton. The university's Modern Records Centre holds an Elaine Burton archive, details can be found later in this exhibition guide.

For more information about the History Department's research and collaborative work surrounding the themes of the Hope: Lego Suffragette Exhibition, and for details of upcoming events, please visit [Hope, the life-sized Lego Suffragette Statue website](#).

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HOPE: LEGO SUFFRAGETTE

In 2018, UK Parliament commemorated 100 years since (some) women over 30 in Britain first won the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

It held a range of public exhibitions, events and activities to encourage diverse conversations about women's political and other forms of equality. These celebrations included the construction of 'Hope' a life-size Lego suffragette who was originally displayed in the House of Commons.

'Hope' was named in a public poll and stands 5 ft 6in (1.7m) in height. She was built by The Lego Group using an impressive 32, 327 Lego bricks taking a team of three 171 hours to create.



She is currently traveling the country to raise awareness of local Votes for Women campaign stories and to spark conversations about women's voting and equal rights in Britain and across the globe today.

The University of Warwick is proud to host Hope on her journey as we celebrate 60 years of research and community collaboration and work toward 2028 commemorating 100 years since the 1928 Equal Franchise Act when all women in Britain finally gained equal voting rights to men.

THE VOTES FOR WOMEN CAMPAIGN: A POTTED HISTORY

The campaign for women's political equality was a difficult struggle which took place in villages, towns, and cities right across Britain for over 60 years.

It was also a global movement that unfolded during the age of British imperialism impacting women across the empire in complex and differing ways.

Women in Britain had a long history of political activism but their fight for the right to vote in parliamentary elections – to have a say in who governed the land – became a nationally organised movement in 1866. Signatures were gathered from women across the country for a petition to parliament demanding a woman's suffrage amendment be added to the forthcoming 1867 Second Reform Act which was set to extend existing voting rights for men.

The petition was unsuccessful but sparked the founding of multiple women's suffrage organisations in the years that followed. By the time the First World War began in 1914, over 50 diverse women's suffrage societies were campaigning for the vote across England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Many formed along the lines of women's occupations, religion, or professions such as

the *Jewish League for Woman Suffrage* (1912) and the *Actresses Franchise League* (1908). Supportive men also formed organisations such as the *Men's League for Women's Suffrage*.

At the height of the movement's popularity in the early twentieth century, two organisations defined the women's suffrage campaign. *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies* (NUWSS) founded in London (1897) and led by Mrs Millicent Fawcett and the *Women's Social and Political Union* (WSPU) formed in Manchester (1903) and led by Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst.

The NUWSS and WSPU both based themselves in London, but local branches, shops and offices flourished across towns and cities nationwide including in Coventry and Warwickshire. Coventry had a WSPU and NUWSS branch by 1908 and 1910 respectively. Leaders Mrs Fawcett and Mrs Pankhurst both visited to give speeches in the city and held meetings in local Warwickshire towns like Royal Leamington Spa.



Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst



Mrs Millicent Fawcett

THE VOTES FOR WOMEN CAMPAIGN: A POTTED HISTORY

The NUWSS and the WSPU shared the same aim - to win Votes for Women - but the tactics they employed differed drastically. Referred to as 'suffragists' NUWSS members were committed to lawful methods of campaigning such as petitioning, lobbying MPs, holding meetings and processions and printing their own newspaper, *The Common Cause*.

WSPU 'suffragettes' also campaigned this way but in addition its members were willing to break the law to increase the pressure on government to grant Votes for Women. Its members 'militant' tactics ranged from heckling government ministers in public and encouraging acts of civil disobedience, to orchestrated window smashing raids, attacks on works of art and later, arson and bombing campaigns.

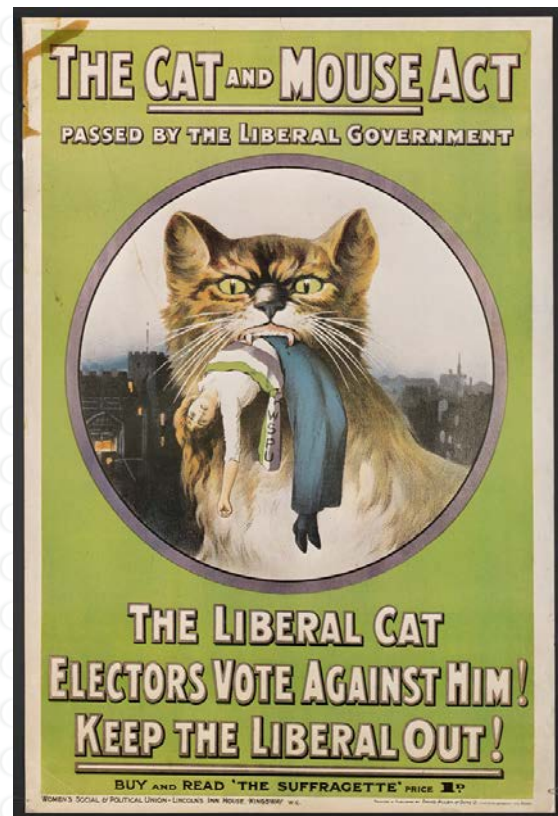
The government was not in favour of women's right to vote and there was considerable opposition and apathy from the public. Many men and some women who opposed it formed societies like the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage (1910). The arguments they made often relied on gender prejudices about women's intellectual and physical inferiority or on societal notions that their rightful place was in a domestic setting and not in the public world of politics.

The anti-suffrage movement in Britain contained powerful voices some at the heart of government and the state. Suffragettes who were arrested and imprisoned for militant acts were treated harshly. Some went on hunger strike in prison and were forcibly fed, a brutal practice which often damaged women's health long term. In 1913, fearful of the death of an imprisoned suffragette, the government introduced the Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Act, better known as the 'Cat and Mouse' Act. This allowed suffragette prisoners to be temporarily released until their health had recovered sufficiently to have them re-arrested and returned to prison.

The outbreak of war in 1914 intervened in the campaign for women's suffrage and broke the spiralling cycle of violence between suffragettes and the state. The WSPU and the NUWSS both suspended their activities to help the war effort, and many suffragists and suffragettes worked in munitions factories, on farms, and as nurses during the war.

Popular narratives suggest that when women gained partial enfranchisement in 1918 under the Representation of the People Act, this was a reward for their war work. However, many of the young women who performed these jobs were not eligible under the terms of the Act which only applied to women over 30 with certain property qualifications, as well as enfranchising all men over the age of 21.

Therefore, many women's suffrage organisations continued campaigning for equal suffrage until all women had the right to vote and on the same terms as men. This finally came a decade later with the passing of the Equal Franchise Act of 1928.



Source: Schlesinger Library

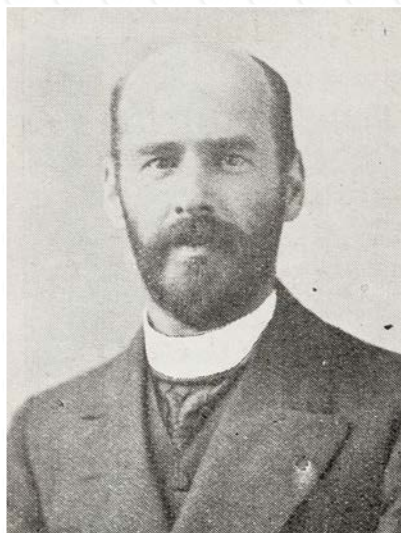
SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGNER GALLERY: CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

Women and men from all walks of life participated in the fight for women's right to vote in Britain.

Many belonged to the middle and upper classes of society who had greater time and resources to dedicate to political campaigning, but working-class women and men were also active in the movement.

Current histories of the campaign are uncovering fresh stories of diverse sexualities, religions, disabilities and ethnicities broadening our understanding of who took part in the struggle.

This gallery snapshots and celebrates a handful of those campaigners, including from Coventry and Warwickshire, with illustrations courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Museum of London, UK Parliament, Schlesinger Library and the Women's Library (London School of Economics) with special thanks to curator Gillian Murphy.



LETTICE ANNIE FLOYD

'She feels strongly that women should have a voice'

Lettice was born in Berkswell, near Coventry in 1865, the daughter of William Floyd, a farmer and landowner and her mother, Alison Clapperton. Lettice is well known for her suffragette antics but also her open lesbian relationship with life partner Annie Williams.

In March 1891, Lettice enrolled for a nurse training course at the Nottingham Children's Hospital. She qualified two years later and worked for several years as a children's nurse gaining promotions for her good work. In 1898, Lettice took on the role of under matron at Bedales school, Hampshire, leaving in 1901 to return to life in Berkswell.



Lettice lived with her sister Mary Floyd and the two decided to form a Berkswell branch of the Birmingham Women's Suffrage Society in 1907 with some seventy members. Mary was secretary, Lettice, the treasurer. However, soon attracted to more militant methods, the sisters joined the WSPU in 1908, and Lettice travelled extensively during the campaign as an organiser. That year, she met her future life partner, Annie Williams a primary school teacher. The same-sex relationship between Lettice and Annie was open and lasted from 1908 to the latter's death in 1934.

Lettice was imprisoned with other suffragettes during the 'rush' on the House of Commons, and for window smashing in 1912 for which she was imprisoned, went on hunger strike, and was subjected to the brutal practice of forcible feeding. She was rewarded with a WSPU hunger strike medal for 'valour'. The suffragette newspaper Vote for Women wrote of Lettice: 'She feels strongly that women should have a voice'.

When the WSPU suspended its activity at the outbreak of war in 1914, Lettice returned home to Berkswell where she lived with Annie and they started a branch of the Women's Institute. In 1918, when some women were given the right to vote, Lettice joined the National Council of Women and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, believing that women's rights and peace were the most important issues.

Lettice died in 1934, after an operation, with Annie beside her. She bequeathed money to create a nursing home and left what is now called "Floyd's Field" (Tile Hill Village) to the city of Coventry, now a sports facility and children's play area.

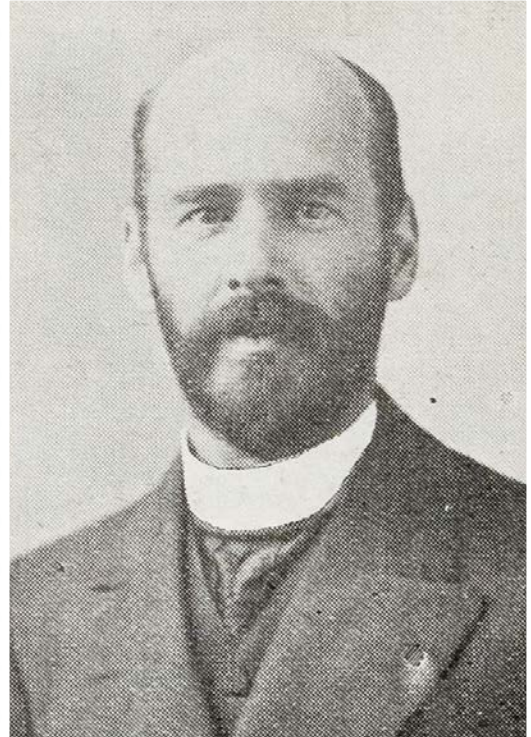
Image source: Museum of London

REVEREND PERCY WIDDRINGTON

'We are extremists...'

Percy was born in Southampton and was ordained as a priest in 1897. He was committed to his faith and to challenging injustice wherever he found it as he moved around the country. Always outspoken, Percy openly challenged distinctions between church and politics, was described as a socialist of deep-rooted conviction, and as a man of personal charm and eloquence.

He moved to Coventry in 1906 following his appointment as Parish Priest to St. Peter's Church, Hillfields, after the death of his first wife Enid. He made an immediate impact in the city quickly becoming a prominent figure in local Votes for Women campaigning. Percy spoke regularly at suffrage meetings, hosted many at the vicarage, and publicly championed the WSPU's 'suffragette' militancy. In 1911, Percy married local suffragette Miss Helen Dawson, joint secretary of the WSPU's Coventry branch. Headlines in the tabloid press reported sensationally: 'Socialist Vicar Weds Suffragette'!



Supporting the Votes for Women campaign was controversial for a clergyman. The clergy was generally not supportive of female suffrage advocating a domestic, passive role for women. Nonetheless, some clergymen spoke out in support and suffragists formed several religious organisations such as the largest Church League for Women's Suffrage.

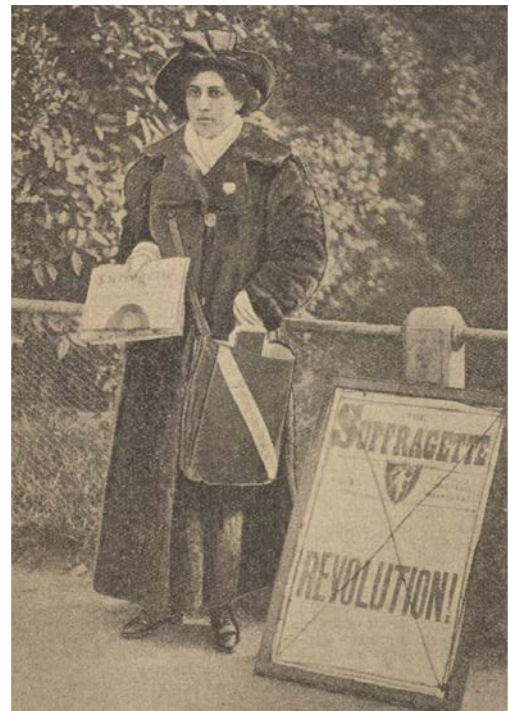
Speaking of the WSPU, Percy said 'it was a society of extremists' who would 'use strong means to get what they wanted'. He could support but not join the WSPU, who unlike other societies accepted only women as official members. Nevertheless, he counted himself among them stating: 'We want it to be plainly understood that we are extremists... and probably very much more violence will be used in the future than has been in the past'. This made clear his admiration for 'suffragettes' law-breaking tactics and he strongly encouraged other Coventry women to follow them.

PRINCESS SOPHIA DULEEP SINGH

'This is very unjustified...'

The daughter of an Indian Maharajah, Sophia was born in 1876 and moved to England as a child, growing up among the British aristocracy. She was a close friend of Queen Victoria. Following a visit to India, her social conscience was awakened, and she joined the WSPU becoming a militant suffragette.

Sophia was a committed member of the WSPU, taking part in one of the deputations to Parliament on 'Black Friday' (18 November 1910) that resulted in violent scenes in Parliament Square and clashes with police. At another time, she threw herself onto the Prime Minister's car pressing a 'Votes for Women' pamphlet against the windshield. She was arrested during the suffrage campaign but was never sent to prison because of her high social status.



A member of the Women's Tax Resistance League, Sophia had goods seized on several occasions after she refused to pay her taxes. When questioned in court, she replied: 'I am unable conscientiously to pay money to the state, as I am not allowed to exercise any control over its expenditure, neither am I allowed any voice in the choosing of members of Parliament. This is very unjustified.'

Sophia also took to selling the Suffragette newspaper outside her home at Hampton Court Palace, where she lived in a 'grace and favour' apartment granted by the Queen, standing next to an advertising board. Her suffragette activities embarrassed and enraged the Royal family and prompted calls for her removal from the palace apartment to try and halt her antics.

During the First World War, Sophia took part in WSPU leader Emmeline Pankhurst's Women's War Work procession, volunteered for the Red Cross, and took up work in India. Princess Sophia was a strong supporter of Indian servicemen and seamen, particularly the wounded that she encountered who often received treatment inferior to that of the British servicemen. She raised money for wounded Indian servicemen and to publicise their contribution to the war. She died in 1948.

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

'The right to experiment'

Laurence Housman was an artist, playwright, novelist, and an ardent supporter of the Votes for Women campaign. He was also a homosexual man at a time when this was illegal in Britain, so Laurence joined several organisations such as the secretive Order of Chaeronea that worked in different ways to try and destigmatize homosexuality.

He was born in 1865 and raised in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, moving to London with his sister Clemence in the 1880s where the two sought to make their living as artists. There, they were exposed to the heady atmosphere of the women's suffrage movement and after hearing a speech by WSPU leader Emmeline Pankhurst, Laurence joined the Votes for Women cause.



Laurence and his sister were important figures in the founding of an art organisation, the Suffrage Atelier, which together with the Artists Suffrage League produced suffrage posters, postcards, banners and other artistic goods to promote and raise funds for the suffrage cause. Laurence was also instrumental in formulating a boycott of the 1911 government census survey taken up by members of the militant WSPU and Women's Freedom League.

During the campaign, Laurence discovered his own talent for public speaking and his witty talks, poems, and writings on the suffrage movement were much in demand. Within this space, Laurence created fresh opportunities to challenge the era's proscribed notions of femininity and masculinity. In one speech he pointed out that 'every generation has a different conception of what is womanly' and therefore this 'false code of womanliness, makes a false code of manliness' opening for women and for men the 'right to experiment' with gender norms.

A member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage and supporter of the WSPU, he later turned away from the latter as suffragette violence escalated. In 1914, he helped form the United Suffragists bringing together former suffragettes and suffragists. When the First World War broke out, he became a committed pacifist and later in life a campaigner for nuclear disarmament.

Image source: National Portrait Gallery

SARAH WANLEY

'Nothing ever came of violence.'

Sarah Wanley was a working-class woman living in Coventry who was active in the women's suffrage campaign.

She lived with her husband John - a storekeeper at a cement works - her daughter Alice, and a lodger in a small house in Cromwell Street. She was a 'suffragist' belonging to the Coventry branch of the law abiding NUWSS led by Mrs Millicent Fawcett.

Sarah was a self-employed dress maker working from home. Dressmakers' wages were low and their working hours long. Their plight was well-known to those campaigning for women's wage equality including those fighting for Votes for Women as a mechanism for improving women's working and family lives.



An ordinary working-class woman, what Sarah thought or said about her involvement in the Votes for Women campaign at the time, is not recorded. However, we do know that she struggled against poverty and domestic violence. These were likely factors in her support for the cause and perhaps the thought of a better future for her daughter Alice.

In 1939, Sarah was interviewed by a Coventry newspaper. Speaking about the campaign she eschewed suffragette militancy saying 'People get resentful of a movement that only causes trouble. Nothing ever came of violence'. Nevertheless, she recalled her most exciting moment was being mistaken for suffragette leader, Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst, at a local meeting in Warwick!

She also remembered how her husband was opposed to Votes for Women, but she was resolute, stating: 'it made no difference to me. It is only right that women should have the vote'. Asked if she would do it all again, Sarah replied with an emphatic - 'I would'.

ROSA MAY BILLINGHURST

'My heart ached...'

May (Rosa May) was born in 1875 to a relatively wealthy family in London. At around the age of 5 months she became ill (probably with polio) which left her with paralysis from the waist down.

Afterward, her legs were strapped in irons, and she relied on the use of an invalid tricycle for mobility.

May received a good education but her disability and gender limited her options. At 25 years old, she took on some voluntary work to rescue young girls from prostitution in Greater London which shaped her commitment to the Votes for Women cause. She later described how her 'heart-ached' at the injustices wrought by unequal power between women and men and her belief that Votes for Women could bring real change to women and girls' lives.

In 1907, May joined her local WSPU branch, helping with the everyday running of the office, event organising, and the WSPU shop. However, May soon became embroiled in disruptive suffragette activism including window smashing, destroying pillar boxes and their contents, and attending protests including outside Buckingham Palace in 1914. May often decorated her tricycle on such occasions in the WSPU colours of purple, white, and green.

May was arrested and imprisoned more than once and used her popularity with the press, who liked to picture her as one of life's victims, to draw attention to the Cause. She was known to the press and to Votes for Women comrades as "The Cripple Suffragette" reflecting the language and attitudes of the time.

During an imprisonment in 1913, May went on hunger strike and was brutally force fed by prison authorities leaving her teeth damaged. The forcible feeding of hunger striking suffragettes, and where necessary their temporary release and rearrest under the 'Cat and Mouse' Act 1913, was sanctioned by government to avoid the prospect of suffragette 'martyrs' dying in prison. Following protests about her treatment, May was released after serving only ten days. May stopped campaigning when some women got the vote in 1918. Remaining with her parents, she later adopted a daughter and left her body to science upon her death in 1953.

Image source: The Women's Library (LSE)



DID YOU KNOW...

2025 marks 75 years since Elaine Burton Coventry's first female MP was elected in 1950.

ELAINE BURTON COVENTRY SOUTH MP

Elaine Frances Burton, later Baroness Burton of Coventry, was born on the 2nd of March 1904. After an early career encompassing teaching, social work, keep-fit instruction and writing, Burton first stood for Parliament for the socialist Common Wealth Party in the 1943 Hartlepool by election, before switching to the Labour Party and losing as a candidate in Hendon South in the 1945.

In the following general election of 1950, she was elected for the newly created constituency of Coventry South, holding the seat until 1959, when it was gained by the Conservative candidate Philip Hocking.

In the Commons, she pushed both Conservative and Labour Governments hard on equal pay. She spoke regularly about trading standards and the need for honest labelling, so that "rayon would be rayon, fish cakes would be fish cakes, and words would mean what they said." Her successful private Member's Bill, the Disposal of Uncollected Goods Act 1952, allowed traders to dispose of goods left for repair but not collected.

A regional sprint champion in her youth, Burton's contributions often reflected her lifelong sporting interest. She argued for better school sports provision and the establishment of a national sports council, and pointed out sport's potential as a tool of soft power in a debate in 1956: "a British team abroad is a team of ambassadors".

Burton became the first woman to serve as chair of an Estimates sub-committee—a predecessor of Select Committees—in 1957

before losing her seat in 1959. Burton was elevated to the peerage in April 1962 as Baroness Burton of Coventry in the County of Warwick, where she spoke on topics including women's

opportunities in business and public life, and campaigned for the creation of an independent grant-supported body for sport, leading to her appointment to the newly formed Sports Council in 1965. She was also appointed to the Independent Television Authority between 1964 and 1969.

In March 1981 Burton was one of nine Labour peers who left the party to join the newly formed Social Democratic Party (SDP). She became their spokesman in the Lords on civil aviation and consumer affairs. Like most other SDP peers, she objected to her party's merger with the Liberal Party in 1988 to become the Liberal Democrats, and became a member of David Owen's 'continuing' SDP until its dissolution in 1990. Thereafter, she sat as a crossbencher until her death on the 6th of October 1991.

The university of Warwick's Modern Record's Centre has a small archive on Elaine Burton [The Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick](#)

With grateful thanks for additional material to UK Parliament.

