

## TIMELINE: THE EXTENSION OF THE FRANCHISE AND WOMEN'S DEMANDS FOR POLITICAL RIGHTS

NOTE: Listed below are important points in the process of the development of representative democracy in the United Kingdom. The Reform Acts/Representation of the People Acts listed often made provisions other than extension of the franchise, such as the redistribution of seats, creation of university seats and so on. Only the main provisions concerning the extension of the franchise are outlined here. It was usually the case that separate legislation had to be enacted for Scotland, and the relevant Acts were not necessarily passed for England and Wales and Scotland in the same year. The system of local government in Scotland also differed from that in England and Wales, and therefore the extension of the municipal franchise to women did not occur simultaneously in England and Wales and Scotland, although the process was a broadly parallel one.

### TIMELINE

- 1792 Publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Rights of Women*, which asserted women's equality with men.
- 1820s/1830s Organisation of Ladies' Emancipation Societies, demanding end to slavery, and beginning the adoption of political and human rights demands which would influence women to demand rights for themselves. Edinburgh Female Anti-Slavery Association established 1830.
- 1832 Petition to parliament from Mary Smith, presented by Henry Hunt MP. Smith, from Stanmore in the County of York, objected to the Reform Act on the grounds that she paid taxes and should have a share in the election of a representative. Her petition asked that 'every unmarried female, possessing the necessary pecuniary qualification, should be entitled to vote for Members of Parliament.'
- Reform Act, England and Wales - limited the vote to male householders, and resulted in a modest extension of the vote, which was dependent on property qualifications.
- Reform Act – Scotland. This transformed the parliamentary franchise in the burghs, and extended the county franchise, resulting in a considerably larger and more representative electorate, although both franchises were dependent on property qualifications.
- 1838 Working class disappointment with the 1832 Reform Act led to the launch of the People's Charter, and Chartist Associations were formed in various parts of Britain and Ireland. This working class movement was active until the 1850s. Demands of the People's Charter:
1. Every man over 21 who is not a criminal or insane should be allowed to vote.
  2. Voting should be done in secret.
  3. You do not have to be rich or own property to become an MP.
  4. All MPs should be paid for doing their job.
  5. All voting areas should be the same size.
  6. Elections should be held every year.
- There were at least twenty-three female Chartist associations in Scotland. In Glasgow lectures were regularly given on women's rights, and some female Chartists demanded the vote for women.
- 1843 Publication of Marion Reid's *A Plea for Women*, which advocated political rights and the vote for women.
- 1867 Reform Act - England and Wales. The borough franchise was extended to all male householders as long as they were not in receipt of poor relief and met

registration requirements. Lodgers occupying lodgings worth £10 were also enfranchised. The property qualification for the county franchise was reduced. There was an unsuccessful attempt by John Stuart Mill to amend the 1867 Reform Act to include women under the definition of 'person'.

In 1867 Mill and his stepdaughter Helen Taylor had set up a provisional women's franchise committee, which in 1868 became the London National Society for Women's Suffrage. Suffrage societies were founded in Manchester and Edinburgh in 1867.

- 1868 Reform Act – Scotland. The burgh vote was extended to householders not in receipt of poor relief, and to lodgers in lodgings valued at least £10. The county franchise qualification threshold was also lowered.
- 1869 Municipal Franchise Act, 1869 – women ratepayers in England and Wales given right to vote for and stand as poor law guardians.
- 1870 Elementary Education Act, 1870 - women in England and Wales given right to vote and stand for School Boards.
- 1872 The Ballot Act [Parliamentary and Municipal Elections Act 1872] introduced the right to vote by secret ballot.
- Women in Scotland given right to vote and stand for school boards. Eligibility was based on the Valuation roll and included only those who were owners or occupiers of lands or houses at £4 annual value.
- 1881/1882 Women ratepayers in Scotland given the right to vote in burgh [town councils and police burghs] elections.
- 1884 Reform Act - Extended the the householder voting rights enjoyed in Parliamentary boroughs [England and Wales] and burghs [Scotland] to counties. An attempt to amend the Act to extend franchise to women was rejected. One of the impacts of the enfranchisement of a substantial number of working-class men was the shift towards a new form of party organisation. New structures recruited both working-class men and women of both middle- and working-class backgrounds, with women increasingly taking part in party political activities from the 1890s onwards.
- 1888 Women ratepayers in England and Wales given right to vote in borough and county council elections.
- 1889 Women ratepayers in Scotland given right to vote for county councils.
- 1894 Women in Scotland, where qualified for registration on county council and municipal registers, given right to vote and stand for parish councils.
- 1903 Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) formed in Manchester by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.
- 1906 WSPU branches formed in Scotland – beginning of period of militancy in Scotland.
- 1907 Women eligible to stand for town and county councils. Lavinia Malcolm elected as first woman town councillor in Scotland.

- 1908 Chrystal Macmillan argued the case for Scottish women graduates to be enfranchised. Rejected by Court of Session and House of Lords.
- 1909 Gude Cause demonstration in Edinburgh.
- 1913 Lavinia Malcolm elected as first woman provost of town council - in Dollar, Clackmannanshire.
- 1918 Representation of the People Act introduced: universal male suffrage – all men over the age of 21 eligible to vote; partial enfranchisement of women – women over 30 could register for the Parliamentary franchise if they, or their husband in the case of married women, qualified for a local government franchise. Women over 21 were also given the local government franchise. University Parliamentary franchise granted to all male graduates who were of age and were graduates of one of the universities forming university constituencies.
- Parliament Act 1918 – allowed women to stand for Parliament.
- 1919 General Election. Eunice Murray stands unsuccessfully as independent candidate in Glasgow (Bridgeton) – Scotland’s first woman Parliamentary candidate.
- 1923 Katharine, Duchess of Atholl elected as Unionist MP for Kinross and West Perthshire - the first woman to represent a Scottish constituency in Parliament.
- 1928 Representation of the People Act, 1928 - women given the vote on same terms as men.

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