



[OUPblog](#) > [History](#) > [UK](#) > Celebrating the suffrage movement in International Women's History Month



**Celebrating the suffrage movement in
International Women's History Month**

[permalink](#) [read more](#)

Posted on Thursday, March 28th, 2013 at 8:30 am **SHARE:**

By **Laura Dawkins**

The campaigners for women's suffrage rightfully occupy a place at the forefront of the coverage of International Women's History Month. Women such as [Emmeline](#), [Christabel](#) and [Sylvia Pankhurst](#), [Millicent Fawcett](#), [Josephine Butler](#), and [Nancy Astor](#) earned themselves recognition from their involvement in the campaign for women's suffrage. The women who campaigned against granting women the right to vote are less frequently commemorated, although many were also prominent figures at the time. Their positions provide an interesting insight into women's varying roles in and expectations of political life; they assumed positions of leadership and often argued for the advancement of women's rights in education and the workplace while attempting to preserve more conservative gender roles.



Who Was Who entries provide insight into the diversity of attitudes to women's suffrage in the early years of the twentieth century. The career section of the suffragette [Constance Lytton's](#) entry details the injuries she sustained after being force fed during a prison hunger strike, while [Ellen Odette, Countess of Desart's](#) work was summarized as "The usual duties of a well-educated, intelligent woman, conscientiously carried out; very strong anti-suffrage views." To celebrate that variety, here are a few of the accomplished and occasionally surprising women who weighed in against suffrage:

[Mary Augusta Ward](#), known as Mrs Humphry Ward, was the first head of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, which she helped found in 1908, and edited the *Anti-Suffrage Review*. She came to public prominence as a novelist; her books were much disliked by Virginia Woolf, who wrote that "[Ward] is as great a menace to health of mind as influenza to the body," but were phenomenal bestsellers on both sides of the Atlantic. Ward was a philanthropist, social reformer, advocate of women's education, war correspondent, and eventually became one of England's first female magistrates. She believed that national politics dealt with "constitutional, legal, financial, military, international problems — problems of men, only to be solved by the labour and special knowledge of men, and where the men who bear the burden ought to be left

unhampered by the political inexperience of women.” (*The Times*, 27 February 1909).

[Gertrude Bell](#) was the founding secretary of the Anti-Suffrage League, and eventually headed their northern branch. Whilst she also believed most women did not have the experience to take part in politics, her own career, which included stints as a diplomat, archaeologist, traveller, writer, mountaineer, linguist, political officer and spy, meant that she was highly influential and made huge contributions to British imperial policy in the Middle and Near East. There was a strong vein of imperialist enthusiasm in the anti-suffrage movement; [Clementina Fessenden](#), founder of Empire Day and propagandist, is one of the few people in *Who Was Who* to list her membership of the Anti-Suffrage League in her entry.

Bell’s friend [Violet Markham](#) was another supporter of the Anti-Suffrage League. Her main field of interest as a social reformer was in the alleviation of poverty and unemployment, particularly for women. She advanced a belief in the importance of women’s work, whilst maintaining the Victorian ideology of ‘separate spheres’ for the sexes, believing that women could contribute politically by participating in local government. She explained this in at an anti-suffrage rally on 28 February 1912, at the Albert Hall:

“We believe that men and women are different — not similar — beings, with talents that are complementary, not identical, and that they therefore ought to have different shares in the management of the State, that they severally compose. We do not depreciate by one jot or tittle women’s work and mission. We are concerned to find proper channels of expression for that work. We seek a fruitful diversity of political function, not a stultifying uniformity.”

The changes in women’s lives brought about by the First World War moderated Markham’s beliefs, and by the 1918 general election, she was prepared to stand, albeit unsuccessfully, as an Independent Liberal parliamentary candidate.

Laura Dawkins is a Development Editor for Scholarly Reference at Oxford University Press.

[Who’s Who](#) is the essential directory of the noteworthy and influential in every area of public life, published worldwide, and written by the entrants themselves. [Who’s Who 2013](#) includes autobiographical information on over 33,000 influential people from all walks of life. The 165th edition includes a [foreword by Arianna Huffington](#) on ways technology is rapidly transforming the media. Please note that the Who’s Who articles in this blog post will be freely accessible for a month from 27 March 2013, after which you can access through subscription.

Subscribe to the OUPblog via [email](#) or [RSS](#).

Subscribe to only British history articles on the OUPblog via [email](#) or [RSS](#).

Image credit: Library of Congress (LC-DIG-ggbain-13078)

SHARE:

View more about this product on the

[UK Website](#)

Related posts:

Thursday
Jun 14th, 2012

[Norway gives women partial suffrage](#)

.....

Thursday
Feb 24th, 2011

['Women do not count, neither shall they be counted'](#)

.....

Thursday
Mar 15th, 2007

[Women's History Month: Feminism and Art](#)

.....

Wednesday
Aug 18th, 2010

[Suffering for Suffrage, 90 Years Since](#)

.....

- [Trackback](#)
- Discussion Feed: [RSS 2.0](#)
- Categories: [History](#), [UK](#)

Leave a Reply

Name (required) Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

- [Explore OUP](#)

Select a Site

- [Archives](#)

Select Month

- **Blogroll**

Select a Blog

- **Links**

Select a Link

- **[FOLLOW US!](#)**



- **Reviews and Interviews**

- [“Exhilarating... There’s no doubting the honesty and intellectual courage—the free thinking and ennobling good faith—that shine through \[Mind and Cosmos\].”](#)Mind and Cosmos reviewed in the Weekly Standard

.....

- [“Hawthorne will remain a mystery. Yet, thanks to Milder’s careful handling of Hawthorne’s notebooks and fiction, the outline of his face is almost visible through the otherwise dark and impenetrable veil of time and personal reserve.”](#)Hawthorne’s Habitations reviewed in the Weekly Standard

.....

- [What does it take to be a successful diplomat?](#)Jorge Heine, author of The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy, speaks to the Centre for International Governance Innovation

.....

-
- [About](#)
 - [Contact](#)
 - [Follow](#)
 - [Legal](#)