

## VOTES FOR WOMEN

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*The suffragette movement, which campaigned for votes for women in the early twentieth century, is most commonly associated with the Pankhurst family and militant acts of varying degrees of violence. The Museum of London has drawn on its archive collection to convey a fresh picture with its exhibition. [The Purple, White and Green: Suffragettes in London 1906 – 14]*

The name is a reference to the colour scheme that the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) created to give the movement a uniform, nationwide image. By doing so, it became one of the first groups to project a corporate identity, and it is this advanced marketing strategy, along with the other organisational and commercial achievements of the WSPU, to which the exhibition is devoted.



Formed in 1903 by the political campaigner Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia, the WSPU began

an educated campaign to put women's suffrage on the political agenda. New Zealand, Australia and parts of the United States had already enfranchised women, and growing numbers of their British counterparts wanted the same opportunity.

With their slogan 'Deeds not words', and the introduction of the colour scheme, the WSPU soon brought the movement the cohesion and focus it had previously lacked. Membership grew rapidly as women deserted the many other, less directed, groups and joined it. By 1906 the WSPU headquarters, called the Women's Press Shop, had been established in Charing Cross Road and in spite of limited communications (no radio or television, and minimal use of the telephone) the message had spread around the country, with members and branch officers stretching to as far away as Scotland.

The newspapers produced by the WSPU, first Votes for Women and later The Suffragette, played a vital role in this communication. Both were sold throughout the country and proved an invaluable way of informing members of meetings, marches, fund-raising events and the latest news and views on the movement.

Equally importantly for a rising political group, the newspaper returned a profit. This was partly because advertising space was bought in the paper by large department stores such as Selfridges, and jewellers such as Mappin & Webb. These two, together with other like-minded commercial enterprises sympathetic to the cause, had quickly identified a direct way to reach a huge market of women, many with money to spend.

The creation of the colour scheme provided another money-making opportunity which the WSPU was quick to exploit. The group began to sell playing cards, board games, Christmas and greeting cards, and countless other goods, all in the purple, white and green colours. In 1906 such merchandising of a corporate identity was a new marketing concept.

But the paper and merchandising activities alone did not provide sufficient funds for the WSPU to meet organisational costs, so numerous other fund-raising activities combined to fill the coffers of the 'war chest'. The most notable of these was the Woman's Exhibition, which took place in 1909 in a Knightsbridge ice-skating rink, and in 10 days raised the equivalent of £250,000 today.

The Museum of London's exhibition is largely visual, with a huge number of items on show. Against a quiet background hum of street sounds, copies of *The Suffragette*, campaign banners and photographs are all on display, together with one of Mrs Pankhurst's shoes and a number of purple, white and green trinkets.

Photographs depict vivid scenes of a suffragette's life: WSPU members on a self-proclaimed 'monster' march, wearing their official uniforms of a white frock decorated with purple, white and green accessories; women selling *The Suffragette* at street corners, or chalking up pavements with details of a forthcoming meeting.

Windows display postcards and greeting cards designed by women artists for the movement, and the quality of the artwork indicates the wealth of resources the WSPU could call on from its talented members.

Visitors can watch a short film made up of old newsreels and cinema material which clearly reveals the political mood of the day towards the suffragettes. The programme begins with a short film devised by the 'antis' - those opposed to women having the vote - depicting a suffragette as a fierce harridan bullying her poor, abused husband. Original newsreel footage shows the suffragette Emily Wilding Davison throwing herself under King George V's horse at a famous race.

Although the exhibition officially charts the years 1906 to 1914, graphic display boards outlining the bills of the enfranchisement of 1918 and 1928, which gave the adult female populace of Britain the vote, show what was achieved. It demonstrates how advanced the suffragettes were in their thinking, in the marketing of their campaign, and in their work as shrewd and skilful image-builders. It also conveys a sense of the energy and ability the suffragettes brought to their fight for freedom and equality. And it illustrates the intelligence employed by women who were at that time deemed by several politicians to have 'brains too small to know how to vote'.

Questions 14 and 15

Choose the appropriate letters A-D and write them in boxes 14 and 15 on your answer sheet.

**14. What is the main aspect of the suffragette movement's work to which the exhibition at the Museum of London is devoted?**

- A. the role of the Pankhurst family in the suffrage movement**
- B. the violence of the movement's political campaign**
- C. the success of the movement's corporate image**
- D. the movement's co-operation with suffrage groups overseas**

**15. Why was the WSPU more successful than other suffrage groups?**

- A. Its leaders were much better educated.**
- B. It received funding from movements abroad.**
- C. It had access to new technology.**
- D. It had a clear purpose and direction.**

**Question 16**

Choose TWO letters A-E and write them in boxes 16 on your answer sheet.

In which TWO of the following years were laws passed allowing British women to vote?

A 1906

B 1909

C 1914

D 1918

E 1928

Questions 17-19

Complete the notes below.

Choose NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from Reading Passage for each answer.

write the answers in boxes 17-19 on your answer sheet.

Three ways in which the WSPU raised money:

- the newspapers: mainly through selling .....17.....
- merchandising activities: selling a large variety of goods produced in their .....18.....
- additional fund-raising activities: for example, .....19.....

## **Questions 20-26**

**Do the following statements reflect the situation as described by the writer in Reading Passage?**

**Write:**

**YES if the statement reflects the situation as described by the writer**

**NO if the statement contradicts the writer**

**NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to know what the situation is from the passage**

**20 In 1903 women in Australia were still not allowed to vote.**

**21 The main organs of communication for the WSPU were its two newspapers.**

**22 The work of the WSPU was mainly confined to London and the south.**

**23 The WSPU's newspapers were mainly devoted to society news and gossip.**

**24 The Woman's Exhibition in 1909 met with great opposition from Parliament.**

**25 The Museum of London exhibition includes some of the goods sold by the movement.**

**26 The opponents of the suffragettes made films opposing the movement.**

**Question 27**

**Choose the appropriate letter, A-D and write it in boxes 27 on your answer sheet.**

**The writer of the article finds the exhibition to be**

**A misleading.**

**B exceptional.**

**C disappointing.**

**D informative.**



<b>ANSWER</b>
<p>14. C 15. D 16. D and E 17. (selling) advertising (space) 18. colour scheme // (three) colours // purple, white (and) green 19. (the) Woman's Exhibition 20. NO 21. YES 22. NO 23. NO 24. NOT GIVEN 25. YES 26. YES 27. D</p>