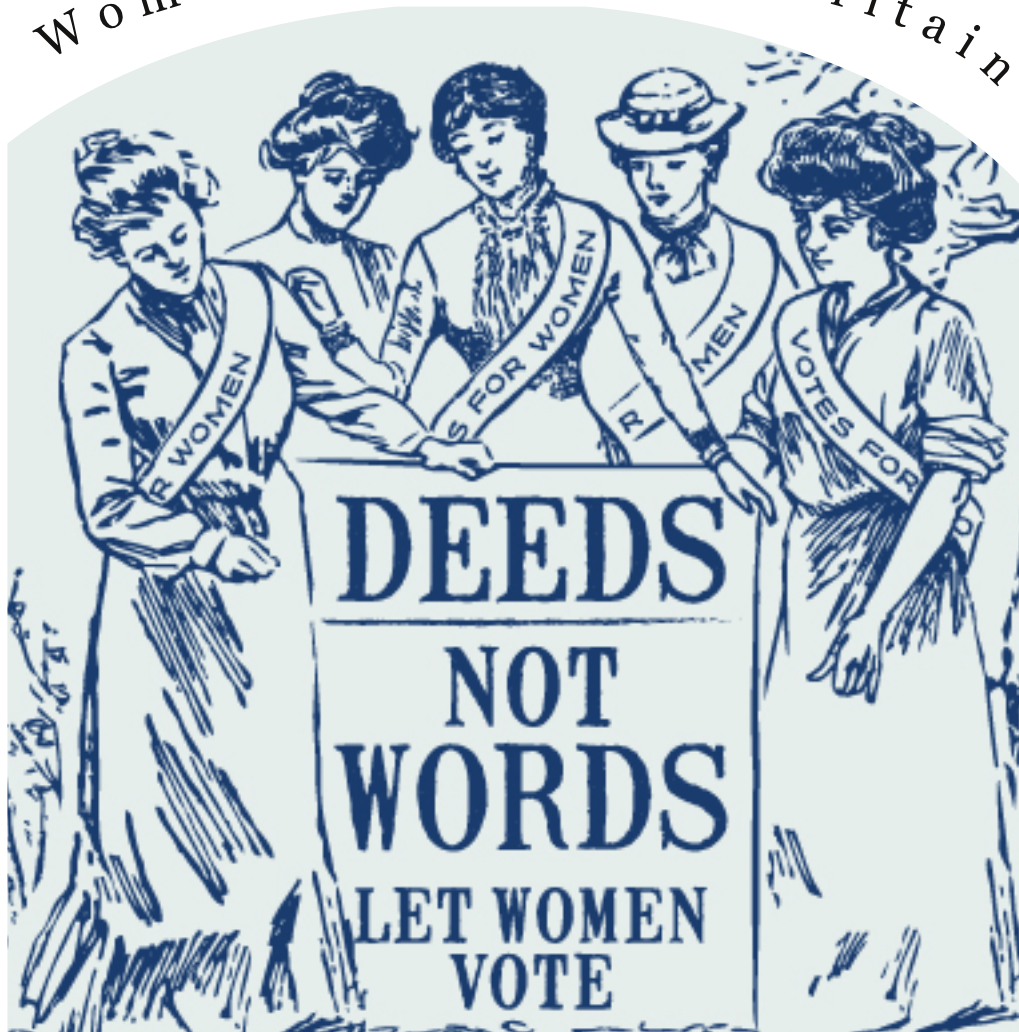


Deeds not Words

Women's Suffrage in Britain



by Heather McKendry

Member - ADFAS Pokolbin

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Deeds Not Words: Women's Suffrage in Britain is a current exhibition at the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

I attended the opening dinner 'Sister Suffragettes' in early February, 2018, a celebration of both the exhibition and the 100th anniversary of 8 million women being granted the right to vote in the United Kingdom.

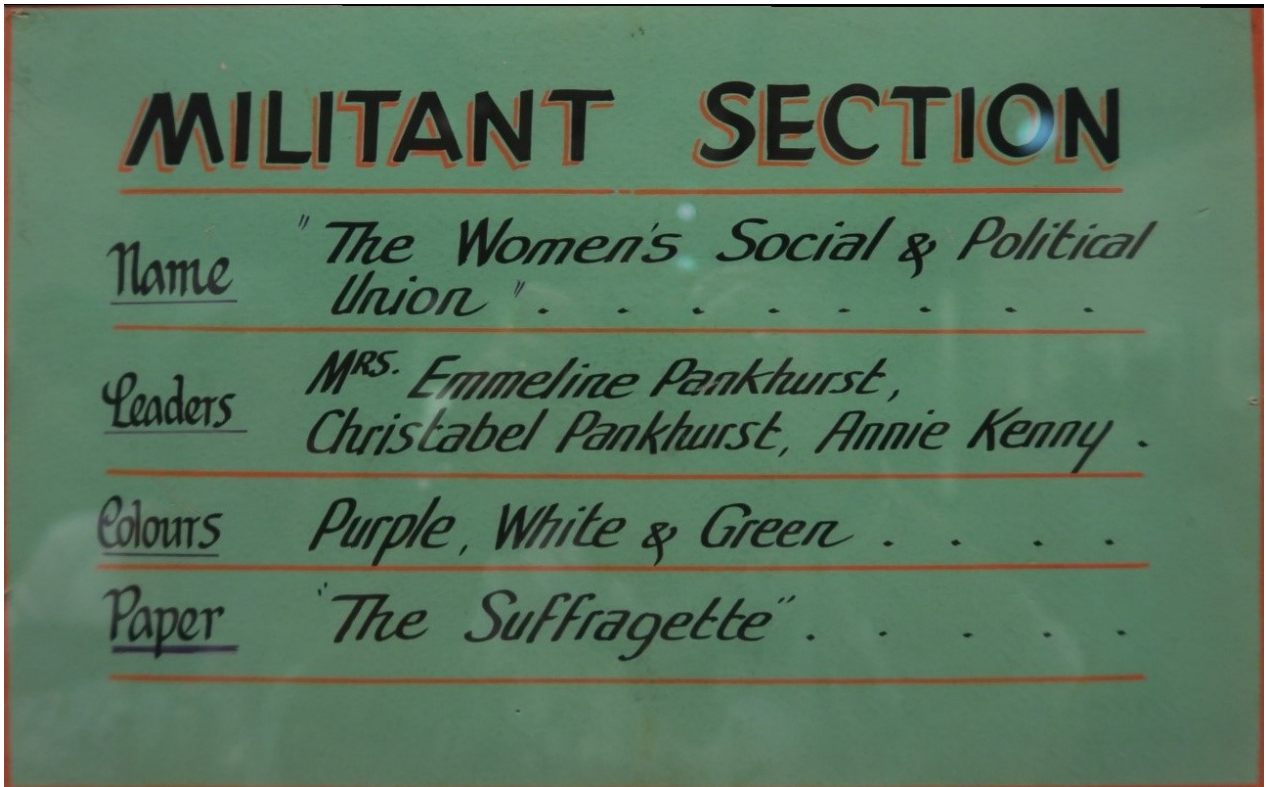
The exhibition draws from the inspiring collection of Bessie Rischbieth, an Australian feminist who witnessed the struggle for suffrage in the UK in the early 1900s and amassed a collection of photographs, archives and ephemera. She bequeathed this 'living memorial' to the National Library of Australia.



During her stay in England, from May to July 1913, Bessie witnessed the whirlwind of the suffragettes' struggle for the vote, which was then at its height. She was not an activist, but attended meetings and heard the rousing speeches of suffrage leaders like Emmeline Pankhurst and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

DEEDS NOT WORDS was adopted in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst as the slogan of the new Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Their primary aim was to secure

the vote for women, using violence against property and risking imprisonment.



The Pankhursts – Christabel, Emmeline and Sylvia – lead a suffragette parade through the streets of London in 1911

In 1918, the UK Parliament finally passed an act granting the vote to women over the age of 30 years who were householders, the wives of householders, or occupiers of a property with an annual rent of more than 5 pounds, and also to graduates of British Universities.

It was the first act to include all men over 21 years of age in the political system.

South Australia granted women the right to vote in 1894, Western Australia in 1899, and NSW in 1902, when women Australia-wide were granted suffrage in Commonwealth elections. Women in Australia were also granted the right to be elected to Parliament on a national basis.

Of course, New Zealand granted women the right to vote in 1893, the first country in the world to do so.



FRY'S COCOA, THE LADIES' DRINK.

THE
Woman Voter
The Monthly Letter of the Women's Political Association.
(Registered at the General Post Office, Melbourne, for Transmission by Post as a Newspaper.)

No. 16. Melbourne, February 7, 1911. One Penny.

MISS VIDA GOLDSTEIN GOES TO HELP ENGLISH SUFFRAGISTS.

On 14th January Miss Vida Goldstein received a further cable message from the Women's Social and Political Union, inviting her to take part in this year's suffrage campaign, which will open on 23rd March with a meeting in the Albert Hall. A special meeting of the Council of the W.P.A. was convened for 16th January by Misses Smart and Rede, to consider the invitation, and the Council subsequently waited on Miss Goldstein at "Whitehall." On behalf of the Council, Mrs. Davidson, vice-president, presented the following resolution to Miss Goldstein:—

"That, in the opinion of the members of the W.P.A. Council now present, it is desirable that Miss Goldstein should accept the invitation of the Women's Social and Political Union to address the meeting in the Albert Hall on the occasion of the opening of the campaign beginning 23rd March; because it is a privilege that an Australian woman, and president of this association, should be needed to help the women of England in their fight for freedom, and the work of this association will be given an impetus in the future by the fact of our president taking part in such history-making events. The Council feels that our temporary loss will be compensated for by the after-gain to the association's work and to the Cause in Victoria generally, and that, under the circumstances, to ask Miss Goldstein to remain would be selfishness. We are resolved to use our best limited efforts to carry on the various activities of this association and club so that we shall not be ashamed to render an account of our stewardship to our beloved president when we welcome her back."

— Miss Goldstein thanked the Council most cordially for the resolution and for the kind terms in which members spoke to it. She said she felt the time had

Mrs. T. B. GREIG.

Mrs. Teresa Billington Greig is one of the most forceful figures in the English Militant Suffrage Movement, of which she was one of the originators. She is an able speaker and writer, and, with Mrs. Despard, has controlled the Women's Freedom League. A few days ago the cables announced Mrs. Greig's secession from the League, apparently from the movement generally, and quoted her as denouncing its latest developments as reactionary, but we await authentic news before commenting on the situation.

The early enfranchisement of New Zealand and Australian women meant that those feminists who visited London in the course of the suffragette militant campaign, between 1905 and 1914, already enjoyed the rights and privileges of citizens at home.

The suffrage struggles in Britain had a very special meaning for Australian women, allowing them to "turn the Imperial tables" and offer their unfortunate British sisters help, guidance and advice.

Vida Goldstein visited England in 1911 as a guest of the WSPU. She was described in the paper

"The Woman Voter "as "the woman who has not only helped carry the fight for the vote in her own state, but as one of the foremost leaders of the Australian women's movement, who is now helping her sisters in England to win their freedom".

Other Australian women found themselves in England between 1902 and 1914 – Alice Henry, Dora Montefiore, Nellie Martel and Muriel Matters joined in the Great Suffrage Procession of 17 June 1911.



Margaret Fisher and Vida Goldstein carried a banner instructing England to "Trust the Women Mother As I Have Done". This banner is a proud part of the Parliament House Art Collection.

Deeds Not Words continues at the National Library until August this year, and is well worth a side visit when you are next in the Australian Capital.