Connecting, Sharing, Learning: Women, War and Peace

Timeline 1900 - 2000

This Timeline looks at the ways in which women stood up to have their voices heard, in the 20th Century. It is designed to be used alongside the other resources in this pack, to provide more information about key names, places and events.
Before 1914: Campaigning for women’s right to vote

Words highlighted in Green are explained in the Glossary

Before the First World War, British women did not have the right to vote. Suffrage movements across Britain mobilised and demonstrated in the years running up to the First World War. The deeds and actions carried out by various groups ranged from processions, demonstrations and refusal to pay taxes, to violent actions such as chaining themselves to railings and damaging property.

Some of the earliest organisations committed to fighting for women’s right to vote included the Manchester National Society for Women’s Suffrage (NMSWS) and The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies. In 1903 Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Cristabel and Sylvia founded the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Manchester.

Women from different backgrounds played an important role in the suffrage movement. Figures like Princess Sophia Duleep Singh and Sushama Sen, both from India, took part in WSPU protest action. Sushama Sen went on to become a politician in India in the 1950s.
In August 1914 the First World War broke out and the women’s suffrage movement responded in two distinct ways. Some women took a pacifist standpoint and were known as the Peacettes, and others, like the WSPU, suspended their protests and demonstrations to support Britain in the war.

*If the country is to be saved, women must be allowed to help.* In July 1915 the Women’s Great Procession, or the War Service Procession, marched through London. This action demanded that women be allowed to contribute to munitions work while many men went to serve in the war. During the war, women supported the war effort in roles ranging from nursing to factory work, and the auxiliary services to farming.

It is often argued that because of women’s contribution to the war effort, they were ‘rewarded’ with the vote in 1918. Women over 30 who were married or owned property, and men over the age of 21, were given the right to vote under the Representation of The People Act 1918. However, it was not until 1928 that women over the age of 21 were allowed to vote.
1919 – 1939: Between the Two World Wars

'The Pacifists’ task today is to find a method of helping and healing which provides a revolutionary constructive substitute for war’ - Vera Brittain

Vera Brittain was a nurse during the First World War, and after the war campaigned for peace women’s rights. She was one of many women who spoke out at this time, and joined the Peace Pledge Union.

Other peace organisations included the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and Kindred of the Kibbo Kift. In May 1926 many women took part in The Women’s Peacemaker Pilgrimage. The Pilgrimage was modelled on suffrage processions, and ended in Hyde Park where 10,000 protestors from all over Britain congregated.

Many women had to give up their jobs to returning servicemen after the First World War. However, throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s new opportunities opened up in education, medicine and the civil service. Organisations like the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, The London and National Society for Women’s Service and the Women’s Freedom League campaigned for equal pay for women.
In September 1939 the Second World War began and women were once again called upon for roles such as factory work, farming and transportation. They were urged by groups like the Six Point Group and the National Council for Women to demand equal pay for their work. It was not until 10 June 1948, after many years of campaigning through wartime, that equal pay for equal work in all government and public employment was implemented.

Though the pacifist movement fell out of favour during the Second World War, many women continued to campaign for peace. Vera Brittain sustained her pacifist stance throughout the war by campaigning and openly criticising the British allied strategic bombing campaign against Germany.

In August 1945 the United States dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, becoming the first and only country to use atomic weapons in war. Soon after, the Second World War came to an end and a new, Cold War began.
1945 – 1990: The Cold War

So we have before us the prospect of two or three monstrous super-states, each possessed of a weapon by which millions of people can be wiped out in a few seconds, dividing the world between them.

George Orwell, *You and the Atom Bomb*, 1945

In the years after the Second World War, nations including Britain began developing and testing nuclear bombs, to try to deter other countries from launching a nuclear attack. Whilst some people supported this action, others became worried about the threat of total destruction. Anti-nuclear marches took place throughout this period.

During this time, women also campaigned for equal pay and work opportunities, the freedom to control their own bodies and express their sexuality, and to stop violence against women. Many people supporting these causes were also linked to peace campaigns, and protests for civil rights.
In 1980 it was announced that 160 American Cruise Missiles would be based at Greenham Common, an air base in Berkshire. Thousands of women marched from Cardiff, Wales to Greenham Common in September 1981, to show their opposition to the military plans.

“We fear for the future of all our children and for the future of the living world, which is the basis of all life”
Women for Life on Earth, September 1981

Upon their arrival at the base, the group set up what would come to be known as Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp, which remained in place until the year 2000.

Activities at the Peace Camp included singing protest songs, holding hands to surround the base and in some cases cutting down parts of the fence and breaking in. In 1991, ten years after the camp was established, the last missiles left the base. Some women remained at the site to continue to promote their anti-war cause.
Glossary of key words

**Auxiliary Services** – Auxiliaries are personnel that assist the military in non-fighting roles, such as in transport and catering.

**Civil rights** – A movement popular in the 1950s and 1960s to support equality for all people, regardless of background, race, gender or religion. It is especially linked to ending discrimination against black people in the USA.

**Cold War** – A term used to describe the political tension between the Soviet Union and the USA, and their allies, between 1945 and 1990. As well as the build-up of nuclear weapons, there were several conflicts during this period where the two sides fought each other, including in Korea (1950 – 1953) and Vietnam (1961 – 1975).

**Cruise Missiles** – A guided missile used against a terrestrial target. They travel through the atmosphere at a constant speed. They are designed to travel long distances with high precision.

**Pacifist** – An individual who opposes war, conflict and violence to settle disputes.

**Suffrage** – The right to vote in public, political elections. In this context it refers specifically to the movement fighting for the right of women to vote in British elections before 1918.
List of Images Used
(in order of appearance)

Before 1914: Campaigning for women’s right to vote
• IWM ©, Q 81486 Emmeline Pankhurst being arrested outside of Buckingham palace in May 1914. She had been trying to present a petition to HM King George V.

• IWM ©, Q 81490 Leader of the Women’s Suffragette movement, Emmeline Pankhurst (left) and her daughters Christabel (centre) and Sylvia (right), 1911.

• IWM ©, Q 107125 Women’s rights activist standing on a soap box and making a speech whilst holding a copy of the Suffragette newspaper on 25 April 1915.

1914 – 1918: The First World War
• IWM ©, Q 69129 Mabel St Clair Stobart, founder of the Women’s Sick and Wounded Convoy Corps (1912) and the Women’s National Service League (1914).

• IWM ©, Q 107082 Advertisement published 14 July 1915 in the Daily Mail, for a ‘War Service Procession’ through London to appeal for a women’s workforce during wartime.

• © Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums 2005.4617 Seven women workers in a munitions factory during World War I. They are at 43 shop in Scotswood Works, Newcastle.

1919 – 1939: Between the Two World Wars
• IWM © EPH 2284 Peace Poppy issued by the Peace Pledge Union.


• Working Class Movement Library, Women’s Freedom League armband from the 1926 Peace Pilgrimage.
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(in order of appearance)

1939 – 1945: The Second World War
• IWM © LD 1530 Demolition: Sorting and Chipping Bricks, Ethel Leontine Gabain. A group of women clearing and cleaning bricks from a bomb damaged building in London.

• IWM © LD 5569 Tapping, Ethel Leontine Gabain. Female Munitions worker making 2-pounder pom-pom gun shell cases at a machine.

• IWM ©, TR 65682B Large mushroom cloud from a British nuclear weapon test near Christmas Island (Kiritimati), in the central pacific, late 1950s.

1945 – 1990 The Cold War
• IWM © LBY K. 41488 Civil Defence: Is it Any Use in the Nuclear Age? Published by Central Office of Information.

• IWM © PST 9153 Live in a Nuclear-Free Zone, 1983, Peter Kennard. Anti-nuclear poster, UK.


• IWM ©, PST 9149 Just Cruising, Peter Kennard. Anti-nuclear poster referring to the basing of Cruise Missiles at Greenham Common, UK.

• IWM ©, EPH 3264 I'd Rather be at Greenham badge showing a white dove of peace holding the women’s symbol in its beak. Made to raise money for the camp.

• IWM ©, EPH10267 Hohner Arietta IM accordion with a leather strap in its original case. It belonged to Debbie Handy, a British anti-nuclear campaigner and activist who stayed at Greenham Common between 1982-1984.