RAISING THE PORTCULLIS

Supporting New Dawn’s glass scrolls is a metal framework resembling a portcullis, the symbol of Parliament. Sited above the entrance to St Stephen’s Hall – an area associated with suffrage campaigning and protests – this raised portcullis symbolises the opening of the democratic process to women. The combination of circular glass scrolls and metal crosses on the Portcullis framework form the symbol for women known as the ‘Venus symbol’.

THE TIDE OF CHANGE

The votes for women movement was often represented as a ‘tide of change’ sweeping the nation. To reflect this, New Dawn’s lighting is linked to the tidal River Thames. It builds from low tide, where only one disc is lit, to high tide, where the whole sculpture is illuminated.

New Dawn’s dynamic lighting also brings the contemporary world into Parliament, signifying that campaigns for equality continue today.
New Dawn is a contemporary artwork by Mary Branson commemorating the long campaign that led to some women gaining the vote in 1918, and all women in 1928. Unveiled in 2016, it resulted from a six-month residency in the Houses of Parliament followed by over a year of design and construction.

The design of the metal and illuminated glass sculpture draws on concepts and imagery connected with Parliament and campaign for women’s suffrage (the right to vote). Permanently sited on the public route through the Palace of Westminster, it is designed to be seen by the hundreds of thousands of people who visit Parliament each year.

Appointed Artist-in-Residence to Women’s Suffrage in April 2014, Branson was tasked with developing a proposal for a site-specific artwork celebrating the votes for women movement in Parliament.

During her residency the artist spoke to people inside and outside Parliament, and explored records held in the Parliamentary Archives. This research inspired her to create a work of art commemorating all those who fought for votes for women, not just a single figure or organisation.

The overall shape of New Dawn suggests the rising sun. This mirrors a common image in women’s suffrage campaigning, which represented gaining the vote as a ‘new dawn’ for gender equality.