

CONSOLIDATING LEADERSHIP OF THE SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN

In the 1880s, in preparation for the introduction of a new reform bill, the suffrage campaigners mounted 'Grand Demonstrations' in cities around Britain to show that women were in earnest in wanting the vote.

On 6 May 1880 Millicent Fawcett was a speaker at a large London meeting and mentioned that when she and her husband were making their wills it was brought home to her in a very personal way how unjust the law was. She realised that if her husband died she could not become their daughter's guardian unless he had appointed her, and:

'Having written a book some years ago from which she derived annually a small income, she asked the lawyer whether that book was her own property and whether she could will it to anyone after her death. The lawyer's answer was, "I am ashamed to say that even that book is not your own property to do with as you wish. It belongs to your husband.'

The Merthyr Telegraph, 14 May 1880

It was to change such laws that women needed the vote. However, after several years of such campaigning, an amendment to include women in the 1884 Reform Bill was defeated.

Millicent Fawcett retired for a time from public life after Henry Fawcett's death in 1884 but by 1886 had resumed her position as a touring suffrage speaker. In 1888 she became honorary secretary of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage.

In the 19th century there were suffrage societies in most of Britain's main cities. For many years the most important societies were in London and Manchester. Although they had the same goal, they did not always agree on methods of campaigning and other aspects of politics impinged on the suffrage campaign. These differences were overcome with the formation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897, as a central organisation to which all other societies could federate.

In 1896 Millicent Fawcett presided at an important meeting that led to the formation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897. She became its president in 1907, a position she held until successfully negotiating votes for some women (over 30 years of age) in 1918.



NUWSS pin badge c.1908
© Parliamentary Art Collection, WOA S745.

Guest Display Curator: Elizabeth Crawford

www.parliament.uk/millicentfawcett
www.parliament.uk/vote100

VOTE100

Cover image: Millicent Garrett Fawcett, studio photograph by W. & D. Downey, c. 1880.

© Parliamentary Art Collection, WOA Reference Collection

OCTOBER 2016



**MILLICENT GARRETT FAWCETT:
AND THE EARLY WOMEN'S
SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT,
1867-1897**

VOTE100

THE MAKING OF A POLITICIAN

DEFYING PREJUDICE

SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGNER

Millicent Garrett (1847-1929) was born at Aldeburgh, Suffolk, one of ten children of Louisa and Newson Garrett, a prosperous maltster. In April 1867 Millicent married Henry Fawcett, radical Liberal MP for Brighton and professor of political economy at the University of Cambridge. A year later she gave birth to their only child, Philippa and in the same month published her first article, *The education of women in the middle and upper classes*. Acting as secretary to her blind husband she quickly gained an education in economics and in politics, both theoretical and practical, and in 1870 published *Political Economy for Beginners*.

On 20 May 1867, shortly after her marriage, Millicent Fawcett was present in the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons when John Stuart Mill MP moved his amendment to the *Representation of the People Bill*. The amendment, to replace the word 'man' with the word 'person', allowing women to be included on an expanded electoral register, was defeated by 81 votes.

On 10 May 1872 Millicent was a speaker, with her cousin Rhoda Garrett, at a packed central London suffrage meeting. This was, in effect, a protest against the speeches delivered in the House of Commons on 1 May against the Second Reading of the Bill for the Removal of the Electoral Disabilities of Women. During the course of her speech Millicent Fawcett declared that:

'The cause of Women's Suffrage has no more active, judicious and useful friends than Mr and Mrs Henry Fawcett.'

'The real protection women needed was the power to protect themselves.'

John Stuart Mill

In July 1869 Millicent Fawcett was one of the speakers at the first public meeting held by the London Society for Women's Suffrage. At this time it was still remarkable for a woman – particularly one as young as Millicent – to speak on a public platform but from the first she made a favourable impression. When she spoke in her husband's constituency the local paper commented:

'She is a lady of small stature, and of fragile but very pleasing appearance; perfectly collected in her manner, and with a very clear, distinct, emphatic delivery, not at times without a sense of humour.'

Brighton Herald, 1870

Such praise was necessary in overcoming prejudice, a very necessary step in the campaign for the vote.



Millicent Garrett Fawcett's bookplate. Courtesy of Elizabeth Crawford

'My husband took care that I should hear important debates in the House of Commons, and the Speaker and Serjeant-At-Arms were very kind in frequently offering me a seat in that portion of the ladies' galleries which they controlled.'



Suffrage meeting at the Hanover Square Rooms, London, 10 May 1872. The meeting was chaired by Lyon Playfair MP with Lydia Becker sitting next to him. Rhoda Garrett is speaking and Millicent Fawcett is sitting at the far left of the platform party.

The Graphic, 25 May 1872.