

# EMBSAY-WITH-EASTBY and WORLD WAR ONE

## Franchise Before the War – Women

**Some women had the right to vote in LOCAL elections.**

Women had for a long time been allowed to vote for parish officials (such as overseers, churchwardens and members of the church vestry) but the right to vote in town council elections had been taken away in 1835.

That municipal vote was returned to women in 1869 – provided they were ratepayers in their own right (ie. single or widowed).

In 1888 the County Councils Act gave women the right to vote in county and borough elections (provided they fulfilled certain property qualifications – which varied according to local by-laws).

By 1907, women could even be elected as local councillors, and it was not unusual for women to become Poor Law Guardians (*although not in Craven!*)

## Franchise Before the War – Men

**A large proportion of men did not have the right to vote before 1918.**

**The Parliamentary vote** was restricted to:

(a) Householders - where the freehold was worth at least 40/- p.a. or where a leasehold property was worth at least £5 p.a. or £50 p.a. (depending on length of the lease)

(b) Rent-paying tenants had to be in property which was deemed by the Registration Officer to be worth at least £10 p.a.

(c) All voters had to be resident in their property for at least a year

This meant that only 58% of adult men (aged 21 and over) were entitled to vote in Parliamentary elections.

5,774,892 voters were registered in England in 1910.

(Across the UK as a whole, 7,709,981 men were registered to vote. )

Representation of the People Act 1918

**The Male Franchise** was granted to all adult males aged 21 and over, plus 19-20 year olds who had or were still serving in the armed forces.

The residency qualification was reduced to 6 months, and conscientious objectors were excluded for five years.

Plural voters (who had property in more than one constituency) were restricted to 2 votes only – they now formed 7% of the electorate.

The Act added over 5 million men to the electorate:

16,021,600 in England [across the UK – 21,392,322]

But only 12,913,166 actually registered themselves to vote.



The House of Commons finally voted by 385 to 55 in favour of women's suffrage.

**BUT the Female franchise was still not available to all women in 1918.**

The number of **female LOCAL voters** rose from 1 million to 8.5 million. Although they had to be at least 30 years old, the property qualifications were now the same for men and women in elections for local government.

With the **PARLIAMENTARY vote**, however, not only did the female voter have to be at least 30 years of age – she also had to be an eligible local voter (or married to one), a university graduate, or be a tenant of property worth at least £5 per annum (or married to a man who was). Thus, 22% of women aged 30+ were excluded (ie. women living with their parents, domestic servants, or lodgers).

**Overall the total electorate (male and female) was tripled** by the 1918 Act – from 7.7 million to 21.4 million.

8,479,156 women now had the Parliamentary vote – forming 43% of the electorate.

## WOMEN and THE VOTE

### Why was Female Suffrage restricted?

It could be argued that the 1918 Act was purely for political expediency : Sceptical historians argue the MPs were fearful of a resurgence of suffragette militancy. Certainly some MPs voiced the opinion that the more mature woman, with a stake in property and family, would be more “sensible” voters.

### Disappointment or triumph?

The franchise was far more generous than most suffragettes would have hoped for in 1914 – but by 1918 expectations had been raised, so for many the restrictions were a disappointment, while others accepted it as a triumphant first step – a compromise that would inevitably lead to universal suffrage in time.

**A decade later women gained equality of the vote** with men in 1928, when the property qualification and 30-year age barrier were both removed in 1928. Women now formed 53% of the electorate.

## HOW DID THE PRESS RESPOND?

### How would women Vote?

One of the reasons the franchise was limited was because politicians were so unsure which way women would vote. They were soon to find out that women vote like men – not as a homogenous group, but each according to her own individual opinions, political views, interests and personal concerns.

**National Newspapers**, even though those that had vehemently opposed female suffrage before the war, now enthused about the impact women could have on the reconstruction of post-war British society, and devoted a large proportion of their column space to urging women to vote, publishing articles full of advice, and discussing “women's issues.”

**The Craven Herald: 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1918**

*“Women have now obtained the great privilege of taking part in the government of the country; it is for them to show that they realise the responsibility.”*



*Some prejudices were still apparent –  
The Bystander magazine, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1918*

## THE “KHAKI ELECTION”

### The Issues

The 1918 General Election was often referred to as the “Khaki” Election, suggesting that the emergence of first-time women voters was less of a concern than that of issues to do with the end of the war, and giving a voice to soldiers who were still overseas.

**The most prominent campaign issues**, however, were not so much how women would cope with being first-time voters, as about demands for rapid demobilisation, improved welfare for returning ex-servicemen, and deciding how to deal with Germany during negotiations over the Peace Treaty.

**The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act** which allowed women to become MPs was rushed through on 21 November 1918. This gave women just three weeks to obtain sponsors, receive a nomination from local political party branches to stand, and to conduct their election campaigns. Unsurprisingly therefore, only 17 female candidates stood. The only woman elected was Constance Markievicz – but as she represented Sinn Fein, she refused to sit in the House at Westminster.

## CRAVEN'S CANDIDATES

**William Anderton Brigg**, for Asquith’s breakaway Liberal party, lost by 2,281 votes (10%). In Embsay and Eastby he was publicly supported by Rawleigh Humphries of Bridgend, Eastby, & Fred Hargreaves, of Embsay, quarry manager.



**Lt.-Col. Richard Roundell**, (Northumberland Fusiliers), won 55% of the votes and became MP for the Skipton constituency, in the Coalition government.

The election manifestos of the two men were very

similar, but Roundell was the more experienced (having previously campaigned – and lost - 3 elections). He also benefited from the popularity of Coalition leader, Lloyd-George, who was supported by many women for his advocacy of equal rights.







*The election campaign at Smethwick where Christabel Pankhurst was a candidate.*

## The ELECTION RESULTS

The General Election took place on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December 1918, and the results were declared in the New Year, 1919.

**The National Turn-Out** was disappointing at about 60% of the electorate.

**In Craven**, where the electorate had increased from 13,000 to 34,723, the turn-out was 66%.

Despite the poor overall turnout at the polls, it was acknowledged that **a far greater proportion of the female electorate** had placed their vote than the male.

The result was **a landslide victory for Lloyd George**, but as a Liberal Prime Minister, he now headed a coalition government dominated by Tories. Furthermore his own party had split, with Herbert Asquith (who was still unconvinced that women should have the vote) leading the break-away Liberals who were now in opposition. Meanwhile the Labour Party, although small, was beginning to make a real impact.

## ANALYSIS

**National politics had long been regarded as a male preserve**, concerned primarily with defence and trade. But even anti-suffragists had long supported the role of women in local politics, arguing that local government was concerned more with “women’s issues” (housing, public health, education, child welfare). However, after the War only a few die-hards could use the old arguments against women in national politics, as the welfare state developed.

### **Did women’s war effort or suffragette militancy win women the vote?**

This debate will rumble on a long while yet! There were genuine fears that militancy would be revived, which may have influenced some MPs. However, there can be no doubt that women’s war effort had transformed public opinion about women’s capabilities and their contribution to national life as thoughts turned to further development of the Welfare State and post-war reconstruction. It would be a mistake to think that only “middle-class women were rewarded” – many of the new voters were working class householders or rent-paying tenants.



Box 21

# The Need for Women Members of Parliament.



VISCOUNTESS ASTOR, M.P.  
*(Photo: Olive Edis.)*



MRS. WINTRINGHAM, M.P.  
*(Photo: Herbert Lancaster.)*

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County Councillor for Middlesex, 1919-1922.

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WOMEN'S ELECTION COMMITTEE  
29, Gordon Square, London, W.C. 1

*At the General Election of November 1919, Nancy Astor became the first woman M.P. to take her seat. By 1923 there were 6 female MPs.*