

THE 1866 SUFFRAGE PETITION IN THE NORTH WEST

Although in small numbers, women from all areas of the country signed the 1866 suffrage petition. Out of approximately 1500 women who signed, 324 were from the North West, the highest number outside of London, including 167 from Manchester, 12 from Liverpool and nine from Southport.

THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN THE NORTH WEST

The North West played a huge part in the campaign for women's suffrage and Manchester in particular is often seen as the birthplace of the suffragette movement. The Pankhurst family were from Manchester and were prominent figures in the campaign for women to have the right to vote. They held the very first meeting of the Women's Social and Political Union, the group that deviated from the NUWSS (the suffragists) in Manchester.

The Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society was another influential group who were often able to sway elections to candidates in their favour. The group had links with a number of Liberal MPs but during the 1910 Kirkdale by-election, when there was no Liberal candidate, the society campaigned for Alexander Cameron, the Labour candidate and a longstanding supporter of women's suffrage.

Eleanor Rathbone, who fought tirelessly for equal citizenship for women, was Honorary Secretary of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society. Eleanor was later elected as an MP in 1929.

324
women
signed
from the
north west



ACTIVITY 1

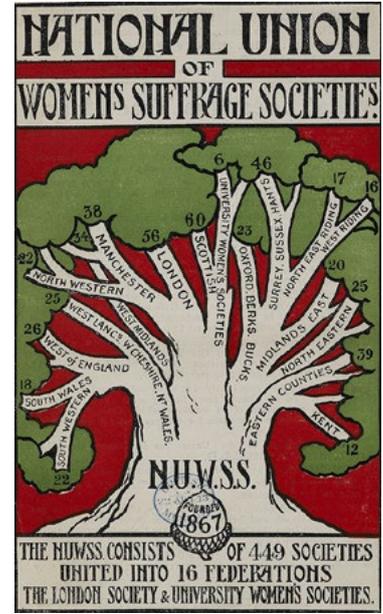
Use the sources and your own knowledge to answer the questions.

Source 1

A poster from 1913 promoting the suffragist campaign groups: The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

Q: Analyse the suffragist poster and describe three things it suggests about the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Source 2

Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society members outside a suffrage campaign shop, 1910.

Q: The banners in the photograph suggest the group were actively supporting election campaigns of the day. What do you think was the advantage of campaigning for parliamentary candidates?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Source 3

Emmeline Pankhurst meeting women at Manchester station, 1911.



Q: Source 3 shows Emmeline Pankhurst and other suffrage campaigners at Manchester station in 1910. What effect might the railways have had on the suffrage movement from 1866 to 1918?

Source 4

Emmeline Pankhurst speaking at a Suffragette meeting, 1912.



Q: What does source 4 tell you about the type of characteristics Emmeline would have had, enabling her to lead the suffragette movement?

ACTIVITY 2

News of the 1866 petition was spread through word of mouth. Social connections, whether through location or familial ties, had a significant impact on the number of signatures the petition received as women encouraged other women they knew to sign.

Catharine George was one of the women from Liverpool who signed the petition in 1866. Using the information about her and the prompts provided, write a letter from Catharine's perspective in response to the example letter from someone who does not support the cause.

Biography of Catharine George (1809-1891), Salford – 1866 suffrage petition signee

Born in the early nineteenth century, Catharine George grew up in Wales before meeting her husband, Hugh George, in Liverpool. They married in the early 1830s and moved to Salford, the borough of Manchester that became their home for the remainder of their lives. In 1861, Hugh recorded his occupation as a 'painter employing 12 men.'

Catharine was one of 63 women in Salford to add their name to the 1866 petition; she did so alongside her daughters Catharine and Jane. It is not clear how the petition came to Catharine.

Women of many different backgrounds signed the 1866 petition. The majority were not rich or famous and were not well known and as such, little is known about them. The organisers of the petition relied on ordinary women like Catharine to achieve their aims: to prove that women across the country wanted the vote.

Dear Catharine,

Thank you for your letter. The petition is intriguing but I will not be signing.

I believe the interests of women are already represented by our elected Members of Parliament. Years of laws prove that our MPs look out for the interests of both men and women without women having to be involved.

When our brothers, husbands and fathers vote, I believe that they take into consideration the view of their wives, daughters and sisters.

There are some things that men do better than women and some things women do better than men. We all have our own strengths and weaknesses and politics is the business of men.

Yours,

Anne

Dear Anne,

I am disappointed to hear that you will not be signing the petition. I believe it will be of historic importance and has already passed over a thousand names across the country.

For me, this is a question of fairness. I do not agree that....





I cannot agree that men are better suited to politics than women. If women were given the chance, we could...

I hope you will reconsider adding your name to the petition.

Catharine

List of sources

Source 1 – National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies Poster showing the reach of its organisation across the country – Image courtesy of the London School of Economics.

Source 2 – Liverpool Women’s Suffrage Society members outside a suffrage campaign shop, 1910 - Image courtesy of the University of Liverpool Library (Rathbone Papers RP XIV.3.101)

Source 3 – Emmeline Pankhurst, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and several other suffrage campaigners at a Manchester station, 1911 – Image courtesy of the London School of Economics.

Source 4 – Emmeline Pankhurst speaking at a suffragette meeting, 1912 – Image courtesy of the London School of Economics.