

THE 1866 SUFFRAGE PETITION IN SCOTLAND

Although in small numbers, women signed the 1866 petition for women's suffrage from all areas of the country. Out of approximately 1,500 women who signed, 70 were from Scotland including 58 from Edinburgh and one as far north as Lerwick on the Shetland Islands.

THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN SCOTLAND

The Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage was founded in 1867 by petition signee Priscilla McLaren. The Edinburgh society was one of the largest suffrage groups in the country and was active in Scotland for several decades. By 1906 the first Scottish suffragette groups, the more militant side of the movement, began to emerge. In 1907 the first suffrage procession was held in Scotland as women marched in the centre of Edinburgh.

**70
women
signed
from
Scotland**



ACTIVITY 1

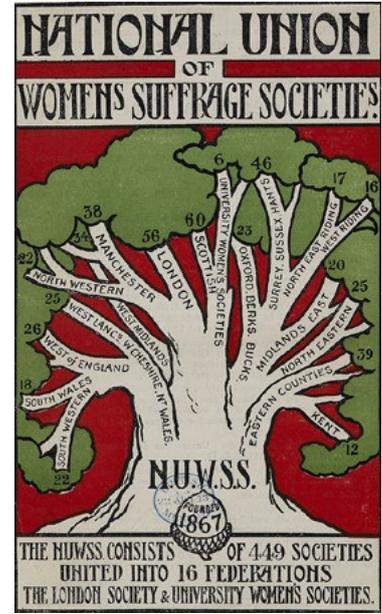
Use the sources and your own knowledge to answer the questions.

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

'There was a perfect forest of bannerettes... All were in the suffragist colours – people, white and green. The triple tints were everywhere. Many of the women wore purple hats, with green or purple dresses, and white sashes with the inscribed words 'Votes for women.'

Extract from an article in The Scotsman newspaper, describing a suffragette parade, 1909.

Q: What role do you think the print media played throughout the campaign for women's suffrage?

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Source 3

Photograph of a procession of suffragettes led by a woman in a tartan dress, a small girl and three men in kilts all playing bagpipes.



Q: Why might it have been important from a campaigning perspective to have these people leading the procession?

What else can source 3 tell us about the suffrage campaign at the time?

ACTIVITY 2

The 1866 suffrage petition moved around the country, predominantly through family circles and friendship networks. Read the biography of Agnes McLaren, one of the women who signed the petition in Scotland, then use the prompts to write a letter in response to a friend of hers.

Biography of Agnes McLaren (1837-1913), Edinburgh – 1866 suffrage petition signee

Agnes McLaren was raised by her father, a wealthy Edinburgh merchant, and her step-mother Priscilla. Priscilla spent much of her life campaigning for women's suffrage and is very likely to have been influential in encouraging Agnes' sympathies to the cause. Both Agnes and Priscilla signed the suffrage petition in 1866 and in 1871 Agnes embarked on a suffrage speaking tour of the Highlands.

Agnes was also influenced by her friend Sophia Jex-Blake, who was leading the campaign for women to have access to a university medical education. The idea of women studying medicine was controversial in nineteenth-century Britain and even Agnes' father, who had

been supportive of her involvement in the suffrage campaign, opposed her when she too decided to become a doctor.

Despite the reservations of her family, Agnes enrolled in the school of medicine at the University of Montpellier in France. By the time she was 40 she had become the tenth woman in Britain to qualify as a doctor.

Agnes McLaren and Sophia Jex-Blake were pioneers of their time and, as women, they fought hard to receive the education they wanted and the career they aspired to.

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 Agnes,

Thank you for bringing the petition to my attention 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 views of their wives, daughters and sisters.

In my opinion there are some things that men do better than women and some things women do better than men, and I feel that politics is the business of men.

Yours,

Elizabeth

Dear Elizabeth,

I am disappointed that you do not feel women should have the vote. For me, it is a question of equality. I believe





I cannot agree that men are better suited to politics than women. Women have never had the chance to be involved in the political process so they have not had the opportunity to show skills such as...

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

Agnes

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 – Newspaper extract (1909) The Scotsman, 9 Oct

Source 3 – A procession of suffragettes led by a woman in a tartan dress, a small girl and three men in kilts all playing bagpipes, 1906-1914 – Image courtesy of the London School of Economics.