

THE 1866 SUFFRAGE PETITION IN THE SOUTH EAST

Although in small numbers, women from all areas of the country signed the 1866 suffrage petition. Out of approximately 1,500 women who signed, 132 were from the South East including 21 from Brighton, 12 from Hayward's Heath and three from Margate.

THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH EAST

During the 20th century, Brighton had an active suffrage movement with suffragettes in the city known for their parades on the seafront. After it was made difficult for known suffragettes to attend political meetings, two women hid overnight in the large organ at the Dome to protest at a meeting where Herbert Asquith, the Prime Minister, was speaking.

A Kent based suffragette, Laura Ainsworth, led a campaign in the town of Gillingham to boycott the 1911 Census (a population count). The suffragettes protested against being counted in the census because, as women, they had no vote and therefore did not count. On the evening of the census Laura hired a hall where she and 40 others spent the night so they would not be at home and therefore could not be counted.



132
women
signed
from the
south east



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



Source 3

A photograph taken at the Epsom Derby in Surrey in 1913. Emily Davison was killed while, it is believed, she attempted to attach a suffragette banner to the King's horse.



Q: Why might suffrage campaigners have been keen to focus their efforts at popular events such as the Epsom Derby?

ACTIVITY 2

Read the biography of Barbara Bodichon, one of the women who signed the petition in the South East. Then use the prompts to write a speech from Barbara's perspective, persuading others to help her start the 1866 petition.

Biography of Barbara Bodichon (1827-1891), Hastings – 1866 suffrage petition signee

Although Barbara Bodichon signed the petition in London, her early years were spent in Hastings and as an adult she lived near Robertsbridge in East Sussex.

In her twenties, Barbara set up a progressive school in London that taught a variety of subjects and made an effort to include pupils from a variety of backgrounds. Then during the 1850s Barbara campaigned on removing restrictions in the law that applied to women. She formed the first committee composed entirely of women to discuss their own rights,

taking a particular interest in the lack of control that married women had over their lives. At this time it was very difficult for a woman to obtain a divorce and married women had no control over their own property and had no rights of guardianship over their children.

Barbara was one of the leading members of the Kensington Society, a discussion group for women, named as such because they met in the London district of Kensington. In November 1865, Barbara submitted a paper to the group on why women should have the vote, and the discussion that followed led to the 1866 petition. Barbara was one of the key organisers of the petition. She helped start the debate that would lead to women's suffrage, some 52 years later.

Those of us in this room in Kensington are convinced women should have the vote and it is now time for us to act on what we believe. I think a petition, signed by women all over the United Kingdom, would...



I believe that a petition will be an effective method of communication for our cause because...



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 – (1912) 'Two Months' Hard Labour For Suffragette Who Broke Commons' Window', Dundee Evening Telegraph, 26 June

Source 3 – Emily Davison after being struck by King George's horse, Anmer, at the Epsom Derby in 1913 – Image courtesy of the London School of Economics.