

THE 1866 SUFFRAGE PETITION IN YORKSHIRE

Although in small numbers, women from all areas of the country signed the 1866 suffrage petition. Out of approximately 1,500 who signed, 134 were from the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire region. 104 of those were from Leeds, a growing industrial town in the heart of the North of England.

THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN YORKSHIRE

York and Hull were involved in the suffrage campaign after 1866 and in the early 20th century also had active suffragette societies. Women from Yorkshire and Lincolnshire often travelled down to London to meet other suffrage campaigners and take part in protests and demonstrations.

One such woman was Dora Thewlis who journeyed to London in 1907 and was arrested for trying to break into Parliament. The image of her being arrested, in source 4 of this worksheet, made the front cover of the Daily Mirror. She was ridiculed and labelled the 'baby suffragette' for being only 16 years old.

134
women
signed
from
Yorkshire



ACTIVITY 1

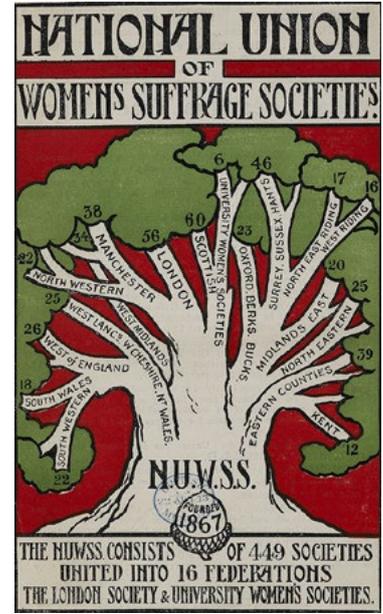
Use the sources and your own knowledge to answer the questions.

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

Victorian train, 1890

Q: Source 2 shows a typical Victorian train. York station was opened in 1839 and helped to connect cities across the north of the country. How do you think the railways impacted the campaign for women's suffrage?



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Source 3

"Dora at once said: 'Let me go, Mother. I am quite capable. I understand what I am fighting for, and am prepared to go to prison for the cause. I feel that women ought to have their rights, and it will be an honour to go to prison.'"

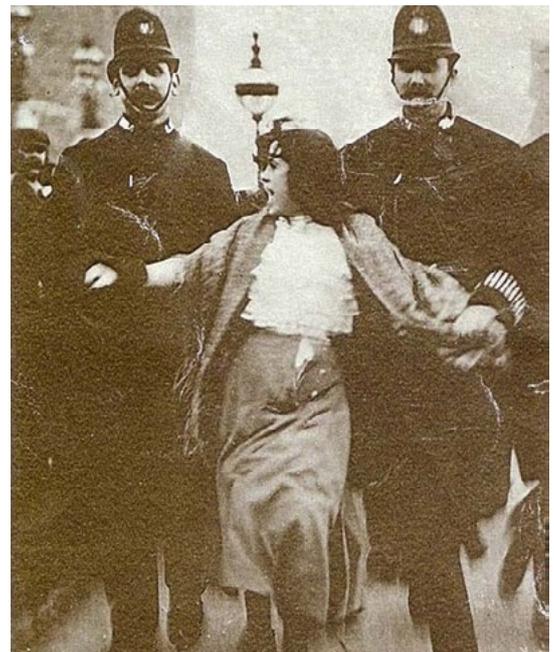
Extract from an interview with Dora Thewlis' mother.

Q: Dora told her mother that she was prepared to go to prison for the cause. Why do you think this was the case for so many suffrage campaigners?

Source 4

Photograph of Dora Thewlis being arrested in 1907 which made the front page of the Daily Mirror.

Q: How do you think front page images like the one shown in source 4 would have affected public opinion of the women's suffrage cause?



ACTIVITY 2

News of the 1866 petition was spread through word of mouth. Social connections whether through location or familial ties were hugely significant as women encouraged other women they knew to sign.

Charlotte Alderson was one of the women from Yorkshire who signed the petition. Using the information about her and the prompts provided, write a letter from Charlotte's perspective in response to a friend who does not intend to sign the petition in 1866.

Biography of Charlotte Alderson (1816-1875), Leeds – petition signee

Charlotte Alderson was born in Yorkshire. Her life of loss and hardship was in many ways characteristic of the life of women in Victorian Britain. She was still a teenager when she married George Ward in 1832. At this stage of her life she could not write her name, making only an 'x' on her marriage certificate.

George was a wheelwright, someone who made wooden wheels, and he and Charlotte lived together in Leeds.

Sometime between the 1841 census and the 1851 census, George Ward most likely died. Charlotte remarried after meeting George Alderson, a 23 year old cow-keeper, also from Leeds. The 1851 census notes that the newly married couple were living in the Headingley area of the city along with two of Charlotte's children from her first marriage, John and Thomas.

George Alderson's modest farm prospered in the 1860s and 1870s. It totalled 17 acres and George had the money to employ one boy, James Baker, as a farmer's assistant. He and Charlotte had a daughter of their own, Ellen, while also raising the children from Charlotte's first marriage.

Charlotte died less than ten years after signing the petition, in 1875.

Dear Charlotte,

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 in consideration the view of their wives, daughters and sisters.

I believe that there are 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,

Elizabeth

Dear Elizabeth,

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 from 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.

Charlotte

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 – Victorian train, 1890 – Image courtesy of the National Archives.

Source 3 – Dora Thewlis’ mother, Eliza, in an interview about Dora for the Huddersfield Weekly Express 30/03/1907.

Source 4 – 17 year old Dora Thewlis being arrested in 1907, the photo made the front cover of the Daily Mirror (28/03/1907) – Image courtesy of Huddersfield Exposed.