

## **Background Information – objects linked to Women’s Suffrage in MoAD’s collection**

The issue of female suffrage was one of the major unresolved questions in western democracies in the early decades of the twentieth century. Many activists looked to Australia as the exemplar of progressive democratic leadership, because Australian women had won both the vote and the right to stand for parliament at a national level in 1903. Australians were also active in suffrage campaigns overseas, particularly in the United Kingdom, in the years just prior to the First World War.

The formation of the Women s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903 marked a break from the politics of demure persuasion that characterised the earlier period of the suffrage campaign.

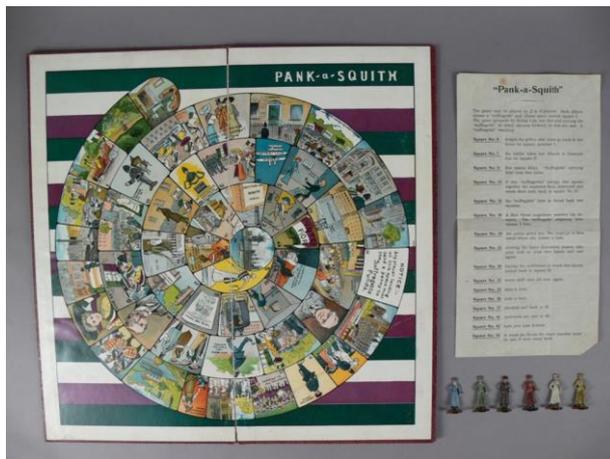
Frustrated at the lack of progress from years of moderate speeches and promises about women's suffrage from members of parliament, Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the WSPU, and several colleagues decided to abandon these patient tactics in favour of more militant ones. Emmeline later wrote that Deeds, not words, was to be our permanent motto. (E. Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 1914, p.38). Over several years the actions of WPSU members became increasingly physical and violent.

Emmeline herself was jailed several times for her actions, the first time in 1908 when she tried to enter Parliament to deliver a protest resolution to Prime Minister Asquith. She spoke out against the conditions of her first incarceration, protesting at the tiny amounts of food she received, the vermin, and the hardship of solitary confinement. In 1908 two WSPU members, Edith New and Mary Leigy, threw rocks at the windows of the Prime Minister s home at 10 Downing Street. Emmeline Pankhurst expressed her approval of the action. In 1909 the WSPU added hunger strikes to their list of resistance tactics. As various members were jailed they expressed their horror at the conditions by refusing food, thus helping to publicise their cause. Prison authorities often forced the women through tubes inserted in their nose or mouth, a painful technique that

was condemned by both suffragists and medical professionals. Pankhurst went on many hunger strikes and wrote of the ordeal:

Holloway became a place of horror and torment. Sickening scenes of violence took place almost every hour of the day, as the doctors went from cell to cell performing their hideous office. (E.Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, 1931, pp.251-2).

### Pank-a-Squith Board Game



*Pank-a-Squith board game, comprising game board, instruction leaflet, and six lead suffragette tokens in cardboard box.*

The Women's Press was founded as the WSPU's publishing arm, producing the weekly newspaper *Votes for Women*

from 1907. From 1908 The Women's Press stocked various purple, white and green products and novelties such as brooches and badges, scarves, ties, hatpins, flags and so on. The colour scheme had been devised by the co-editor of *Votes for Women*, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, who wanted suffragists to cover themselves in the colours which, she said, represented purple...for the royal blood that flows in the veins of every suffragette...white stands for purity in private and public life...green is the colour of hope and the emblem of spring. (D. Atkinson, *The Purple, White & Green*, p.15). The WSPU shops also stocked various games, created by several London manufacturers. Amongst these was Pank-a-Squith which was first advertised in *Votes for Women* in October 1909 for one shilling and sixpence. The pictures on the 50 squares of the Pank-a-Squith game depict the events and issues that concerned the WSPU at the time. The 10 Downing Street stone throwing incident is shown, as are the arrests of Emmeline Pankhurst and the hunger strikes and force feeding of jailed suffragettes. Although there is no solid evidence that games such as Pank-a-Squith raised much money for the suffrage cause, there is no doubt that it is an example of some of the earliest political

merchandise relating to suffrage. It is also a highly significant reminder of the radicalism espoused by suffragettes in this era, and relates directly to the suffrage movement in Australia

This is a very well-preserved example of a political board game produced in limited numbers in England in the early 1900s. The game, Pank-a-Squith, was named after Emmeline Pankhurst (1858- 1928), the suffragette leader, and Herbert Asquith (1852- 1928), British Prime Minister from 1908 to 1916 and a strong opponent of women s suffrage. The colours of the militant suffragette movement, green, white and purple, are prominent on the 50 squares of the game which are arranged in a spiral. The aim of the game is to reach the central square which represents universal suffrage. A number of political events are represented, including suffragettes throwing stones through a window of the Home Office, as occurred in 1908, and Emmeline Pankhurst slapping a policeman on the face in 1909 to ensure that she was arrested. On square 16 a notice says that any player landing on this space must send a penny to Suffragette Funds.

The game was produced in 1909 in Germany for the Women s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Britain as a fund-raising item. The WSPU, formed by Pankhurst and others in 1903 to use direct action to obtain the vote, sold this game and other items in a number of shops that they ran. The number of games produced is unknown, however auction company Bonhams, which has sold the game before, estimates that it was only produced in the hundreds, rather than thousands. Certainly only a very limited number of sets of the game exist now, and they come up for sale very rarely.

There appear to be no other examples of this game held in Australia. There are some sets held in Museum collections in the United Kingdom and the US, but they are limited in number. The production and use of the game, and the stories it conveys, are highly significant in the story of women s suffrage in the UK. Particularly significant is its relevance for the story of the WSPU, a group which influenced generations of Australian suffragettes.

### Embroidered 'Votes for Women' stockings

*Pair of black cotton stockings embroidered with 'Votes for Women' in white twice on each stocking; with flags and bows in the militant suffrage colours of green, white and purple.*



The positioning of the embroidery on the lower part of these stockings indicates the rise in hemlines that often accompanied women activists' ambitions and their desire for more physical freedom. It also drew attention to the feet of the wearer. It has been argued that the high-

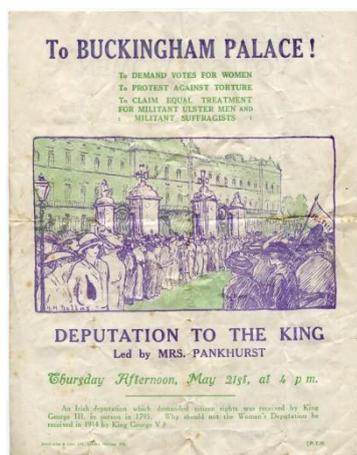
heeled shoes worn by many suffragists (still sometimes known as suffragette shoes in the northern hemisphere) were designed to reassure viewers of their wearer's femininity, despite their progressive views. Others have argued the heel was itself a political statement, bringing women up to equal height with men.

Distinctively branded items of clothing such as these stockings were worn by adherents of the Women's Social and Political Union to publicly declare their support for the cause of women's suffrage in Britain in the years before World War I. Being both fragile textiles and items of personal wear, they are rare survivals from a campaign in which women had won a space in which they could openly declare their political views at least about their own persons, through the use of clothes and personal adornment, but when more militant actions might well lead to arrest and imprisonment. Australia's lead in enfranchising women of European descent helped create this moment in British history, at a time when Australia was still very much part of the British Empire, and was seen widely as the most progressive part of it. Provenance to a known person, a Yorkshire Suffragette called Elizabeth Wright (1868-1955) adds to their significance, which is also drawn from the strong aesthetic values embraced by the WSPU in much of its products and evident in this stylish pair of stockings. While not directly Australian in association or manufacture, the widespread involvement of Australians in the campaign in Britain, and the frequent reference to Australia made by both militant and law-abiding or constitutional suffragists, gives this item significance as a reflection of the values and

achievements of Australian democracy at a time when most Australians fully accepted their place as British subjects within the larger British Empire , and understood themselves to derive their political freedoms from the Westminster parliamentary tradition .

### To Buckingham Palace!

*Flyer printed in green and purple ink and featuring a drawing of a demonstration outside the gates of Buckingham Palace.*



Australia's early granting of the franchise to women, the second country in the world to do so, was held up by women in the United Kingdom as an example of what could be achieved. They campaigned hard for the same right through the years of the late 19th and early 20th century, supported by Australian women such as Margaret Fisher (then wife of Prime Minister Andrew Fisher), Vida Goldstein and Muriel Matters.

In 1914 Emmeline Pankhurst, one of the main organisers in the suffragette movement, requested an Audience with King George V to protest against the treatment of suffragette prisoners . He refused to see her. She then wrote to him, saying that his refusal to meet with her was unacceptable, and she would organise a deputation to Buckingham Palace, and expect to see him. On 21 May 1914, a large group of women marched to Buckingham Palace. This leaflet publicises the march and encourages attendees to:

- Come and see that the Women's Deputation is not assaulted by the police on approaching Buckingham Palace.
- REMEMBER BLACK FRIDAY when the members of the Women's Deputation were by Government orders assaulted in Parliament Square
- Come and see that these violent and brutal attacks upon women are not repeated on May 21st!

However, the 21 May protest became notorious when Pankhurst was arrested outside the gates, shouting “That’s right! Arrested at the gates of the Palace! Tell the King!”

Photos of the arrest were circulated around the world and remain iconic images of the suffragette movement. A newspaper report describes the march:

“100 women marched through Grosvenor Street and hurled themselves against the closed gates. Many scuffles took place, but the police readily repelled the more serious disorders Mrs Pankhurst was very weak, and was a pitiable object as she was carried struggling to a motor car in the arms of a burly inspector.”

(Article The suffragettes: Buckingham Palace raid in the Brisbane Courier, 23 May 1914)

Emmeline Pankhurst’s daughter Sylvia was also arrested at the march and taken to Holloway Prison. In all, 42 women and 3 men were arrested.

The suffragettes struggle to obtain the vote was soon overtaken by the First World War, putting their cause back years. In 1918, the vote was granted to a limited number of women over the age of 30, but the franchise was not extended to all women in the United Kingdom until 1928.

This leaflet is historically and socially significant because of its direct relevance to the women’s suffrage story, both in Britain and in Australia. Australian women frequently took part in British marches such as this one, and they were hailed as trailblazers because South Australian women had received the vote so early, with other colonies soon following.

This march, which took place in London on 21 May 1914, was one in a series of marches undertaken by British suffragists in support of votes for British women. The marches usually attracted large crowds and in this case they were led by one of the leaders of the suffragist movement, Emmeline Pankhurst. The leaflet is not believed to be held in any public collection in Australia, and is therefore of additional significance as a rare

example of ephemera related to the efforts of British men and women, supported by Australian women, to obtain the vote in the months prior to the outbreak of the First World War. It also has historical and social significance because it was at this march that a photo, later to become iconic, was taken of Emmeline Pankhurst being arrested.

### 'Women's Suffrage' Badge

*Original circular five petalled 'red rose' badge, enamelled in green around the edge, with 'Women's Suffrage' appearing in a circle of white enamel within, and inside that a red rose, with green leaves in the intersections between its petals.*



This badge belonged to British woman Selina Brown, who was born in the 1890s and lived all of her life in the town of Coventry. Her first husband was killed in World War One, and she later married Reg Cottle.

Her working life was spent at the 'British Thomson and Houston' factory in Coventry, making Bakelite fittings for the electrical industry. She died in the early 1970s. It is not known why she bought this suffrage badge however she was a young woman during the struggle for women's votes in England and probably identified with the cause.

This badge was produced by one of the main British women's suffrage groups of the early twentieth Century, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The NUWSS was a non-militant group, which formed in Birmingham in 1896, bringing together a number of different organisations devoted to obtaining women's suffrage. Its goal was to work for women's suffrage on a nonpartisan basis, although it steered away from challenging the state's authority in pursuit of rights for women. Under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett, the NUWSS engaged in educational and electoral activities: founding journals, petitioning, lobbying, raising funds through the sale of items such as badges and jewellery, holding meetings, writing pamphlets, and establishing a network of local branches. The NUWSS was the largest organisation working for women's suffrage in Britain, and its executive committee included some of

the most distinguished women in England; mainly middle- class, middle-aged and non-conformist. Their tactics were too passive for some women, however, and it was Emmeline Pankhurst, previously a member, who broke away in 1903 to help form the militant suffragette group the Women s Social and Political Union. By 1914 the NUWSS had over 500 branches throughout the country, with over 100,000 members.

The colours of the badge are those adopted by the NUWSS in 1909 and were commonly used in their Fund raising items. The colour scheme distinguished this group from the more militant suffrage group, the Women s Social and Political Union, which used the colours purple, white and green in its merchandising.

This badge has historical significance as a rare and well preserved badge produced by one of the main British women s suffrage groups of the early twentieth century. This and many other badges of the same type were manufactured as fund-raising items, and worn by women to indicate their support for the suffrage movement in Britain, as well as to indicate their support for this particular group. This item, together with others on women s suffrage owned by the museum, allow it to tell the story of the struggle for women’s votes in Britain, together with the associated story of Australian women’s support of their British sisters during the early 1900s.

### Suffragette hunger strike medal

In recent months the museum has acquired a rare and important new suffragette item: a hunger strike medal belonging to British woman Charlotte Blacklock. In early March 1912 Charlotte was fifty-six years old when she joined dozens of other suffragettes in the streets of London for a brick-throwing raid on some of the city’s smartest shops. The women smashed shop windows and were arrested in large numbers, prompting outrage and publicity for their cause, which was to gain the vote for women. Charlotte, like many of the



women involved, was sent to prison for her efforts and went on a hunger strike. Prison authorities' response to this action was force-feeding, with Charlotte being physically restrained while a large feeding tube was forced down her throat, a painful and dangerous practice. She was released four months later and given the medal pictured here by the militant suffragette group, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), in recognition of her efforts.

By the early 1900s many women in the United Kingdom were becoming frustrated at the reluctance of their government to give women the vote. The WSPU was formed in 1903, principally by Emmeline Pankhurst, with militant action and violent protest its main forms of operation. Women would deliberately flout the law in order to be sent to prison, drawing attention to themselves and forcing members of parliament to address their concerns over the vote. Initially women who went on hunger strike in prison were immediately released, so that they would not become martyrs to their cause. By the time of Charlotte Blacklock's arrest, however, force feeding had become standard practice. Many women who received this treatment were permanently injured and some died. The WSPU began to award hunger strike medals in 1909 in recognition of the hardship these women were subjected to.

It is estimated that only one hundred hunger strike medals were made and awarded to suffragettes. The fact that the WSPU treated their cause for women's suffrage like a military campaign is reflected in the words 'For Valour', which are inscribed on the ribbon bar of the medal. These words, of course, are the same as those inscribed on the Commonwealth's highest award for military bravery, the Victoria Cross. Most women who were force-fed had the dates of their arrest inscribed on bars on their medal, with Charlotte's arrest date of 1 March 1912 indicated on hers. Only two other hunger strike medals are known to be held in Australian institutions, while there is a handful on public display in the United Kingdom. The medals are a potent symbol of the efforts women in Britain were prepared to go to in order to obtain the vote, and are a valuable addition to the museum's collection of suffragette items.



*Want to learn more?* Here are some blog posts about these objects:

<https://www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/woman-wrecker-a-suffragette-s-story/>

<https://www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/what-does-it-take-to-get-the-vote/>

<https://www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/votes-for-women-suffragette-stockings/>

<https://www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/the-pank-a-squith-board-game/>