

Deeds Not Words Towards Liberation



Deeds Not Words Towards Liberation - 100 Years of Women's Socio-Political Activism in Derbyshire

Background

On the 10th October 1903, Emmeline Pankhurst founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) at 62 Nelson Street, Manchester - now home of the Pankhurst Centre. It was an organisation which only women could join, with one aim - "Votes for Women" and with the motto "Deeds not Words." While we greatly value this history, which remain acutely aware that we experience it largely through Manchester-centric and notably London-centric narratives, when what we need to understand, document and share is what was happening in Derbyshire then and in the subsequent 100 years as the Votes for Women transformed into Liberation for Women.

The Project is an opportunity for unheard voices, memories and stories to be captured before they disappear. The stories of Derbyshire Suffragettes and Liberation Movement pioneers who struggled against the odds to bring about huge changes in society is not widely known outside academic/feminist circles. Deeds not Words will allow us to draw attention to this often overlooked history while it is still possible to uncover and preserve it. Pioneers of the 1970s movement for equality are ageing and in some notable instances have died without having the opportunity to tell us their stories, in their words. Others who were at the heart of the early activism have moved away or out of contact with the movement. We have managed to track some women down and now need to urgently record their stories while we still have time. We are already more than 20 years too late to capture the

stories of Derbyshire women who voted in the 1918 and 1928 elections but we want to seize this opportunity to capture the oral histories of their daughters and granddaughters.

Women's contribution to heritage in Derbyshire is celebrated by organisations like Soroptimist International, The WI and IWD, while other groups like Derby Women's History Group take great pride in highlighting key achievements. However, the memories and associated artefacts are scattered and have never been systematically researched, catalogued or interpreted. A grant from HLF will enable us to uncover undocumented Oral Histories and digitize archives to increase accessibility for everyone who wants to engage with and learn more about women's socio-political activism heritage in Derbyshire.

Deeds Not Words Towards Liberation tells the stories of Derbyshire women (working alone and in collectives) who have struggled to achieve equal socio-political and economic rights and benefits.

Aims

- To promote and encourage research, the collection and preservation of records and other artefacts of interest pertaining to Derbyshire women's activism heritage;
- To foster and promote public knowledge and interest in hidden local women's activism heritage.
- Use broader women's activism heritage to create a context in which the role and contribution of Derbyshire women to socio-political and economic change is better understood, visible and more accessible.
- To engage local communities in celebrations of women's contributions to life and community in Derbyshire, through connecting the past with the present.

Project Outputs will include:

'Shoulder to Shoulder with Women in Derbyshire' Blog - this curators blog will give updates and the inside story of the project throughout. This will become part of the Project Legacy.

A dedicated **Project Website** —platform to disseminate information and as an audience building tool towards 2018. The Website will later host virtual exhibitions and a new contextual timeline

One day mini **Community Heritage Conference**— main theme Sisterhood Then and Now
Submissions - papers, poster, panel and roundtable discussions lightening rounds and workshops

Strand themes:

- Writing women back into history
- HERitage intersections
- Voices at the grassroots
- Who is the We in 'Are We There Yet?'
- The state of womanhood
- Girl matters

The conference is an opportunity to bring under-represented, special interest, and general interest groups together.

Series of Lectures **Derbyshire Suffragettes and Women of Note** : -

Contributors tbc

A commemorative quilt - pieces contributed by women and groups all over Derbyshire depicting aspects of Derbyshire Heritage, triumphs and struggles through the ages. We chose a quilt because it is a traditional artform which for many generations, was one of the few avenues for personal and artistic expression allowed to women. As a narrative form, quilts are used to visualise family histories, anecdotes, celebrations, joys and sorrows, as well as portray political and social commentary. With unlimited possibilities of colour, shape, texture, and composition, quilts evoke the personal and private domain, combine craft and art, practical function and artistic appeal. In this instance the quilt will depict socio-political narratives of local women's heritage.

2 Exhibitions - ‘Deeds Not Words Towards Liberation’ and ‘Dressing for Resistance Fashioning Change’ The exhibitions will be condensed and incorporated with Vote 100’s Constituency Exhibition to create an exhibition to tour Derbyshire.

Votes for Women Commemorative Parade - working with K. Bednall who has organised similar parades in Matlock Bath.

Film Unfinished Histories 100 Acts in 100 Years: Women’s activism 1939-2005 based on archive film footage from Media Archive for Central England (MACE) together with filmed interviews and clips from our own filming and collected archives, memorabilia and art.

School Women History Poster Competition – invite schools and young people County-wide to design a poster which illustrates the challenges, struggles and triumphs women and girls have experienced in the last 100 years. Although references and symbolism from the wider Suffragette and Women’s Liberation Movements are permissible, the poster will be Derbyshire focused.

Singing for Sisterhood local choirs performing Suffragette Songs (Shoulder to Shoulder

March of the Women; Rise Up Women; The Women Marseillaise; The Women’s Battle Song; Sister Suffragette) and Women’s Liberation Chants

Oral Histories Women of Worth: Derbyshire Pioneers, Movers and Shakers - profiling 100 individual women (past and present) who have pioneered and contributed to life and community in the County. Pioneers include Dame Margaret Beckett MP – Derbyshire’s first woman MP, the first woman to lead the Labour Party, Britain’s first woman Foreign Secretary. She is the longest-serving female MP in the House of Commons, as well as being one of the longest-serving ministers in government history; Professor Kathryn Mitchell, the current and first female vice-chancellor of the University of Derby and Prof Cecile Wright Derby’s first African Caribbean Professor and Derbyshire pioneer campaigners like Jasvinder Sanghera. Alongside these stories of famous women will be the stories of women for example those who inspired the local Trade Union Movement and those whose activism is rather more individual and untold.

50 Learning Resource Packs for Schools - will include: Copy of Unfinished HERstories film with Q&A; Votes for Women Sash; Quilt Poster and instructions to make a classroom based paper quilt. Suffragette flag; Power Point Presentation; reproduction heritage documents; Derbyshire 100 Movers, Shakers and Pioneers; Biographies; Timeline illustrating the link between Derbyshire Women's Activism Heritage over the last 100 years and what was happening elsewhere; winning poster design. Relevant associated KS3 Curriculum based lesson plans.

The time is especially key as the 1918 marks the anniversary of several key developments including;

- February 2018 - 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which enabled all men and some women over the age of 30 to vote for the first time;
- April 2018 - 60th anniversary of the Life Peerages Act 1958, which allowed women to sit in the House of Lords;
- July 2018 - 90th anniversary of the Equal Franchise Act 1928, which gave women the right to vote at age 21 on the same terms as men;
- October 2018 - 60th anniversary of women sitting in the House of Lords for the first time;
- November 2018 - 100th anniversary of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918, allowing women to stand for election to the House of Commons;
- December 2018 - 100th anniversary of all men and some women voting for the first time, in the general election of December 1918.

We are working in partnership with Parliamentary Outreach Midlands and Derbyshire Records Office.