

# The Women's Timeline

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## 1860s to 1890s

- 1867 The London Society for Women's Suffrage is formed to campaign for female suffrage. ([www.learningcurve.gov.uk](http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk))
- 1870 The Married Women's Property Act allows married women to own their own property. Previously, when women married, their property transferred to their husbands. Divorce heavily favoured men, allowing property to remain in their possession. This act allows women to keep their property, married, divorced, single or widowed. ([www.channel4.com](http://www.channel4.com))
- 1883 The Cooperative Women's Guild is founded by Alice Acland and Mary Lawrenson. Its aim was to spread the knowledge of the benefits of co-operation and improve the conditions of women with the slogan "co-operation in poor neighbourhoods". ([www.lse.ac.uk](http://www.lse.ac.uk))
- 1888 Clementina Black, Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, secures the first successful equal pay resolution at Trades Union Congress ([www.unionhistory.info](http://www.unionhistory.info))
- 1,400 women at Bryant & May go on strike in protest of the poor wages and dangerous conditions in the matchstick factory. ([www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk))

## 1900 – 1910

- 1902 A delegation of women's textile workers from Northern England present a 37,000 signatory petition to Parliament demanding votes for women. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))
- 1903 The Women's Social and Political Union is founded in Manchester by Emmeline Pankhurst, her daughters Christabel and Sylvia, and Annie Kearney. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))
- 1905 Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kearney serve a prison sentence rather than pay a fine after being found guilty of disrupting an election rally. Their prison sentence brought the campaign for votes for women a great deal of publicity and it was soon after that the press coined the term 'suffragettes' to describe the more militant campaigners. ([www.her-stories.co.uk](http://www.her-stories.co.uk))
- 1906 The National Federation of Women Workers is set up by Mary MacArthur. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))
- 1907 Under the Qualification of Women Act, women can be elected onto borough and county councils and can also be elected mayor. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

- 1908 Two hundred and fifty thousand people gather in Hyde Park, London, in support of women's suffrage.  
(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)
- 1909 The National Federation of Women Workers, along with many of the other women's organisations, campaigned to expose the evils of the sweated trades. Their propaganda was very effective and played a major part in inducing the Liberal government to pass the Trade Boards Act which was an attempt to fix minimum wages in certain of the most exploitative trades, usually the ones in which women predominated.  
(www.unionhistory.info)

## 1910 – 1920

- 1911 British writer, feminist and composer Ethel Smyth composes the feminist anthem 'March of the Women' which is dedicated to Emmeline Pankhurst. (www.pcsproud.org.uk)
- 1912 The 'Cat and Mouse' Act is enacted in Britain, allowing the government to temporarily discharge women prisoners hunger striking for the vote – until they were fit enough to be imprisoned again.  
(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)
- 1913 A massive rally is held in Hyde Park for women's right to vote, with women travelling from all across the country.  
(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)
- 1915 The first Women's Institute in Britain is founded in North Wales at Llanfairpwll. (www.bbc.co.uk)
- Thousands of women march in Glasgow in response to the greedy rent increases faced by women whose husbands were at war. Out of this came the Rent Restriction Act which changed the housing system and benefited poor people across the country. (www.gcal.ac.uk)
- 1916 Mary Barbour founds the Women's Peace Crusade, an anti-war group which sought to create links with a range of women concerned about the war's effect on families, homes and jobs. (www.gcal.ac.uk)
- 1918 Women over 30 are granted the right to vote in Britain.  
(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)

The Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act is passed, enabling women to stand as MP. (www.bbc.co.uk)

Constance Markiewicz becomes the first woman elected to Westminster, representing Sinn Fein. She became involved in radical politics through the suffragette and Irish national movement. She is elected for constituency of Dublin St. Patrick's as one of 73 Sinn Fein MPs, but, following the line of Sinn Fein politics, declines the position while in prison. (www.wikipedia.com)

## 1920s

1920 The Sex Discrimination Removal Act allows women access to the legal profession and accountancy.  
(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)

1921 Unemployment benefits are extended to include allowances for wives.  
(www.bbc.co.uk)

An amendment is proposed to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act to make lesbianism an act of 'gross indecency', with the same punishments metered out to gay men. The proposal is defeated, the reason being that it was believed that few women could even comprehend that such acts existed and accepting the proposal would only draw attention to such acts and therefore open them up to a new 'audience'. (www.pcsproud.org.uk)

1922 The Law of Property Act allows both husband and wife to inherit property equally. (www.bbc.co.uk)

1923 The Matrimonial Causes Act makes grounds for divorce the same for women and men. Influential acts of 1857 paved the way for this act, which charted the advances of women to gain parity with men and contributed to the broader process of granting civil rights to women.  
(www.litency.com)

1928 All women in Britain gain equal voting rights with men.  
(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)

Virginia Woolf's novel 'Orlando' (written for Vita Sackville-West) is released and is probably the first English novel to deal with a transgender character. (www.pcsproud.org.uk)

1929 The first general election in which women are allowed to vote occurs. The election is sometimes referred to as the 'Flapper Election' due to the thousands of women turning out to vote. (www.bbc.co.uk)

Women become 'persons' in their own right, by order of the Privy Council. (www.bbc.co.uk)

## 1930s & 1940s

1941 The National Service Act is passed introducing conscription for women. All unmarried women between the ages of 20 and 30 are called up for war work. It is later extended to include women up to age 43 and married women, though pregnant women and those with young children can be exempt. (www.bbc.co.uk)

1948 The introduction of the National Health Service (NHS) gives everyone free access to health care. Previously, only the insured, usually men, benefited. (www.bbc.co.uk)

## 1950s

- 1956 In Britain, legal reforms say that women teachers and civil servants should receive equal pay. (Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)
- 1956 The Sexual Offences Act defines rape under specific criteria, such as incest, sex with a girl under 16, no consent, use of drugs, anal sex and impersonation. ([www.legalappeal.co.uk](http://www.legalappeal.co.uk))
- 1958 The Life Peerages Act entitles women to sit in the House of Lords for the first time. Baroness Swanborough, Lady Reading and Baroness Barbara Wooton are the first to take their seats. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

## 1960s

- 1964 The Married Women's Property Act entitles a woman to keep half of any savings she has made from the allowance she is given by her husband. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))
- 1965 Barbara Castle is appointed Minister of Transport, becoming the first female minister of state. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))
- 1967 Labour MP David Steel sponsors an Abortion Law Reform Bill, which becomes the Abortion Act. The Act decriminalises abortion in Britain on certain grounds. Originally, abortion was entirely illegal, but was changed to make it legal when the woman was in danger of dying. However, in 1938, Dr. Alex Bourne deliberately challenged the law to clarify what constituted legal practice in relation to abortions. He performed an abortion on a 14-year-old rape victim, though her life was not in danger. The doctor won and the 'Bourne Judgement' opened the way for other doctors to interpret the law more flexibly. ([www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk)) The Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign played a significant role in the passage of the act. ([www.prochoiceforum.org.uk](http://www.prochoiceforum.org.uk))

The contraceptive pill becomes available through Family Planning Clinics. (Greater London Authority (2003) capitalwoman, GLA: London) The NHS (Family Planning) Act permits health authorities to give contraceptive advice regardless of marital status and the Family Planning Association (FPA) follows suit. ([www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk))

- 1968 Women at the Ford car factory in Dagenham strike over equal pay, almost stopping production at all Ford UK plants. Their protest led directly to the passing of the Equal Pay Act. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

## 1970s

- 1970 Working women were refused mortgages in their own right as few women worked continuously. They were only granted mortgages if they could secure the signature of a male guarantor. ([www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk))

Britain's first national Women's Liberation Conference is held at Ruskin College. This is the first time women's groups from across Britain have met in a single place. The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), influential throughout the 1970s, develops from the conference. (www.channel4.com)

The Equal Pay Act makes it illegal to pay women lower rates than men for the same work. (Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London) The act covers indirect as well as direct sex discrimination. It is a direct result of women's strike action of Ford machinists and pressure from the women's movement. (www.eoc.org)

The Miss World Competition is interrupted by feminist protestors claiming the contest is a cattle market. They throw flour and smoke bombs, inaugurating the first protest event organised by the women's movement. (www.channel4.com)

1971 Over 4,000 women take part in the first Women's Liberation march in London. (www.woyla.co.uk)

1972 Erin Pizzey sets up the first women's refuge in Chiswick, London. (www.woyla.co.uk)

1974 The National Women's Aid Federation is set up to bring together nearly 40 refuge services across the country. (www.woyla.co.uk)

Contraception becomes available through the NHS. (Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London) This is also a direct result of pressure from the women's movement. (www.channel4.com)

1975 The Sex Discrimination Act makes it illegal to discriminate against women in work, education and training. This is another act pushed through by the women's movement. (www.channel4.com)

The Employment Protection Act introduces statutory maternity provision and makes it illegal to sack a woman because she is pregnant. (www.woyla.co.uk)

The National Abortion Campaign is formed in response to James White's Abortion (Amendment) Bill. It organises 20,000 people to create the largest women's rights demonstration since the suffragettes. (www.prochoiceforum.org.uk)

Welsh women drive to Brussels to deliver the first ever petition to the European Parliament calling for women's rights. (www.eoc.org.uk)

1976 The Equal Opportunities Commission comes into effect to oversee the Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act. (www.woyla.co.uk)

The Race Relations Act makes it illegal to discriminate on grounds of race in employment and education.

(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)

Lobbying by women's organisations ushers in the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act is introduced to protect women and children from domestic violence. The Act gives new rights to those at risk of violence through civil protection orders.

(Women's Aid (2004) Celebrating 30 years of Women's Aid, Women's Aid: Bristol)

1977 Women's Aid lobbies government to acknowledge women and children at risk of violence as homeless and introduce their right to state help with temporary accommodation.

(Women's Aid (2004) Celebrating 30 years of Women's Aid, Women's Aid: Bristol)

Mainly Asian women workers mount a year long strike at Grunwicks in London for equal pay and conditions.

(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)

International Women's Day is formalised as an annual event by the UN General Assembly. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

The first Rape Crisis Centre opens in London. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

1978 The Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland established. It went on to become the lead in the voluntary organisation challenging domestic violence in Northern Ireland and currently provides support to over 10,000 women every year. ([www.niwaf.org](http://www.niwaf.org))

The Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent is set up. It is the first black women's organisation in Britain to organise at a national level, bringing black women from across the country to form an umbrella group for black women's organisations.

(Mama, Amina (1996) The Hidden Struggle, Whiting & Birch: London)

1979 The feminist journal 'Feminist Review' is founded. It went on to play a crucial role in promoting contemporary feminist debate in the UK.

([www.feminist-review.com](http://www.feminist-review.com))

Margaret Thatcher becomes Britain's first female prime minister.

([www.timeline.info](http://www.timeline.info))

Six women are acquitted in the 'Reclaim the Night trials' in London.

(Spare Rib, No. 83, June 1979)

## 1980s

1980 Lesley Abdela forms the 300 Group to push for equal representation of women in the House of Commons. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

Women working at Hoover, Merthyr Tydfil, take strike action against 'women out first' redundancy plans. ([www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk))

Women can apply for a loan or credit in their own names. ([www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk))

1981 Baroness Young becomes the first woman leader of the House of Lords. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

The Welsh group Women for Life on Earth arrived on Greenham Common, Berkshire, England. They marched from Cardiff with the intention of challenging, by debate, the decision to site 96 Cruise nuclear missiles there. On arrival they delivered a letter to the Base Commander which among other things stated 'We fear for the future of all our children and for the future of the living world which is the basis of all life'. ([www.greenhamwpc.org.uk](http://www.greenhamwpc.org.uk))

1982 30,000 women gather at Greenham Common Peace Camp. The camp remained open for 19 years during which thousands of female protesters visited and lived in the camp. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>)

The Court of Appeal decides that bars and pubs are no longer able to refuse to service women at the bar as this constitutes sex discrimination. ([www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk))

1983 Lady Mary Donaldson becomes the first woman Lord Mayor of London. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

1984 The national Black Feminist Conference is held.  
(Mama, Amina (1996) *The Hidden Struggle*, Whiting & Birch: London)

During the Miners' Strike, wives of picketing miners organise themselves into a powerful women's group. At first, they supply the picketers with food and other supplies, but it soon becomes clear they want to be involved in the strike in their own right and not just be regarded as providing welfare support in the background. Women's support groups form in every mining village and a working class women's movement develops. Their organisation gives the women the means to participate in a common struggle with the men – a class struggle against their class enemies. The movement eventually becomes national with conferences and an elected leadership. It leaves a legacy of a common class struggle against sexism, women's oppression and against capitalism itself. ([www.fifthinternational.org](http://www.fifthinternational.org))

1985 The Equal Pay (Amendment) Act allows women to be paid the same as men for work of equal value.  
(Greater London Authority (2002) *capitalwoman*, GLA: London)

The first black lesbian conference is held in Britain. Over 200 women of African and Asian descent attend.

(Mama, Amina (1996) *The Hidden Struggle*, Whiting & Birch: London)

Campaigning against female genital mutilation by the Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development leads to the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act. ([www.forward.org.uk](http://www.forward.org.uk))

The Local Government Act is narrowly passed in Parliament. It signals the abolition of the Greater London Council. The GLC Women's Committee was a significant advocate of women's equality and funder of women's organisations. (<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

- 1986 The Sex Discrimination (Amendment) Act enables women to retire at the same age as men. It also lifts the legal restrictions which prevent women from working night shifts in factories. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

National demonstration of women against violence against women organised by Network of Women.

(Gupta, Rahila (ed) (2003) From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers, Southall Black Sisters: London)

- 1987 Diane Abbot becomes the first black woman member of the Westminster Parliament.  
(Greater London Authority (2002) *capitalwoman*, GLA: London)

- 1988 Julie Hayward, a canteen cook at a shipyard in Liverpool, is the first woman to win a case under the amended Equal Pay Act.  
([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

Section 28 of the Local Government Act made it illegal for any council or government body to 'intentionally promote homosexuality, or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality'. Massive demonstrations took place against Section 28 in London and Manchester, with high profile support from media stars and politicians. Lesbians invaded the House of Lords and even the BBC Six o'clock news in protest against the draconian and homophobic legislation.  
([www.pcsproud.org.uk](http://www.pcsproud.org.uk))

Elizabeth Butler-Sloss becomes the first woman Law Lord when she is appointed an Appeal Court Judge. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

## 1990s

- 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill makes provisions to license and monitor the performance of fertility treatment clinics, and any research using human embryos. ([www.wellcome.ac.uk](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk))

Independent taxation for women is introduced. For the first time, married women are taxed separately from their husbands.  
([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

- 1991 The 'composite tax system', whereby all banks and building societies deducted an average (or composite) rate of tax is abolished. The change to the tax regime allowed women more independence and freedom from their husbands or partners.  
(Halifax (2004) *Bridget Jones Effect Seen In The Housing Market*, Halifax: West Yorkshire)

Southall Black Sister launch of the 'Free Kiranjit Ahluwalia' campaign, a woman who was given a life sentence for murder for setting her violent husband on fire in a final act of survival.

(Gupta, Rahila (ed) (2003) From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers, Southall Black Sisters: London)

Opportunity 2000, strongly supported by the BBC, is launched to push for more women in commerce and public life. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk)) Initiated by Business in the Community, the campaign is set up to increase the quality and quantity of women's participation in the workforces of its member organisations at all levels. ([www.admin.com.ac.uk](http://www.admin.com.ac.uk))

1992 Kiranjit Ahluwalia is released and her original conviction is quashed and reduced to manslaughter.

(Gupta, Rahila (ed) (2003) From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers, Southall Black Sisters: London)

Betty Boothroyd becomes the first female Speaker in the House of Commons ([timeline.info](http://timeline.info)).

1993 With the help of lobbying by women's organisations around the world, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women affirms that violence against women violates their human rights.

(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)

1994 The UK starts its first 'Take Our Daughters to Work' Day.

([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

The government introduces 'Changing Childhood' to make maternity services more focused on the individual woman. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

1994 Rape in marriage is made a crime after 15 years of serious campaigning by women's organisations. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

A House of Lords ruling gives equal rights to part-time workers. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

1995 The Disability Discrimination Act gives some new rights for disabled people in employment and access to services.

(Greater London Authority (2002) capitalwoman, GLA: London)

1996 Northern Ireland's Women's Coalition was founded in an attempt to promote the inclusion of women in social and political life, on an equal footing to men. Establishing itself as a political party, it became an influential and liberalising force in Irish politics and helped elect two of its members, Monica McWilliams and Jane Morrice, to the Irish National Assembly. ([www.niwaf.org](http://www.niwaf.org))

Women's Aid successfully lobbies government for more effective civil remedies for protection from violent partners with automatic powers of arrest where violence has been used or threatened.

(Women's Aid (2004) Celebrating 30 years of Women's Aid, Women's Aid: Bristol)

- 1997 The general election sees 101 Labour women MPs elected.  
(Greater London Authority (2003) capitalwoman, GLA: London)

Southall Black Sisters secures a first ever conviction of a husband in a marital rape in the Asian community. Members of his family are also sentenced for abusing his wife.

(Gupta, Rahila (ed) (2003) From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers, Southall Black Sisters: London)

The Sexual Offenders Act requires sex offenders to notify police of personal details and any subsequent changes to them, resulting in a register of sexual offenders. ([www.cps.gov.uk](http://www.cps.gov.uk))

- 1998 The European Union passes the Human Rights Act, guaranteeing basic principles of life for everyone. ([www.accaglobal.com](http://www.accaglobal.com))

- 1999 The House of Lords delivers a historic judgement in the Shah and Islam case that women who fear gender persecution should be recognised as refugees.

(Gupta, Rahila (ed) (2003) From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers, Southall Black Sisters: London)

A new law on parental leave enables both men and women to take up to 13 weeks off to care for children under age five. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations, makes it illegal for employers to discriminate against trans people.

([www.pcsproud.org.uk](http://www.pcsproud.org.uk))

## **2000 to the present**

- 2000 After a long battle led by refugee women's groups in the UK to bring a gendered analysis to asylum claims, the UK's Immigration Appellate Authority (the immigration and asylum tribunal) launched its *Asylum Gender Guidelines* for use in the determination of asylum appeals. The guidelines note that the dominant view of what constitutes a 'real refugee' has been of a man and this has meant that women asylum seekers in the UK may not benefit equitably from the protection offered by the Refugee Convention. They aim to ensure that the gender of the asylum seeker does not prejudice their application.

(Women's Asylum News, Issue no. 41, March 2004)

- 2001 The Mayor of London launches the London Partnerships Register, allowing lesbians, gay men and unmarried heterosexual couples to register their partnerships. (Greater London Authority (2003) capitalwoman, GLA: London) Linda Wilkinson and Carol Budd, who have been together for 16 years, are the first lesbian couple to register their relationship.

([www.outuk.com](http://www.outuk.com))

2002 Parliament passes measures allowing lesbian and unmarried couples to adopt children. ([www.woyla.co.uk](http://www.woyla.co.uk))

2003 The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations are introduced to protect people against discrimination based on their sexual orientation. ([www.pcsproud.org.uk](http://www.pcsproud.org.uk))

The Female Genital Mutilation Act strengthens and amends the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act of 1985. For the first time, it is an offence for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to carry out female genital mutilation abroad, or to aid, abet, council, or procure the carrying out of female genital mutilation, even in countries where the practice is legal. ([www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk))

After years of lobbying by voluntary and community organisations, particularly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender organisations, Section 28 is repealed. ([www.pcsproud.org.uk](http://www.pcsproud.org.uk))

2004 Pauline Campbell organises protests outside HM Prisons Brockhill, Holloway and New Hall to raise public awareness about the alarming death toll of women in British prisons. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

Women march on Parliament in protest that one in four retired women live in poverty. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

Members of the disabled people's Direct Action Network block Westminster Bridge in protest of the Draft Disability Bill which they believe does not go far enough. ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

After years of campaigning by trans activists, the Gender Recognition Act allows trans people who have taken decisive steps to live fully and permanently in their acquired gender to gain legal recognition in that gender. ([www.abi.org.uk](http://www.abi.org.uk))

2005 The first civil registrations of same-sex couples takes place as a result of the long campaigned for Civil Partnerships Act. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>)

In Northern Ireland, women's voluntary and community organisations and their service users march to the headquarters of the Voluntary and Community Unit, Department of Social Development, to deliver a letter of protest about the funding crisis facing the Northern Ireland women's voluntary and community sector. As a result of the protest, emergency funding is allocated and mass closures of women's organisations are averted. ([www.womenssupportnetwork.org](http://www.womenssupportnetwork.org))