

Surrey women who stood for Parliament 1918

2 December 2023



On 14th December 1918 women across the country turned out in their thousands to first vote in a General Election. In some areas they outnumbered men voters by 20 to 1.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 had been passed in February 1918, and widened the parliamentary electorate to women over the age of 30 (but still required a minimum property qualification).

Men over the age of 21, including the millions of soldiers returning from the First World War, were also able to vote for the first time. Due to wartime casualties women outnumbered men in the population as a whole, and under the new provision women would make up around 43% of the electorate. However, imposing a higher age qualification for women ensured that they did not become the majority in the electorate.

Whilst universal franchise for women would take another 10 years, the passing of this Act forever changed the established way that political parties campaigned and canvassed during elections.

Find out how Surrey women responded to their newly won voting rights with our Exploring Surrey's Past web page <https://bit.ly/2pqRC3c>.



The Emily Davison Memorial Statue in the Market Square Epsom. A suffragette who died in Epsom after a protest at the Derby for women's voting rights.

Top image: All three Surrey women fought for seats in the 1918 General Election but were unsuccessful. Credits: Postcard showing 'Mrs Despard, President, The Women's Freedom League (SHC ref 10065/1) Postcard of Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, 'Joint Editor of "Votes for Women" - Honorary Treasurer National Women's Social and Political Union. 4 Clement's Inn, W.C.' (SHC ref 10065/2; this postcard was originally from an album compiled by Women's Freedom League members, Edith, Florence and Grace Hodgson). Norah Dacre Fox in her youth.

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