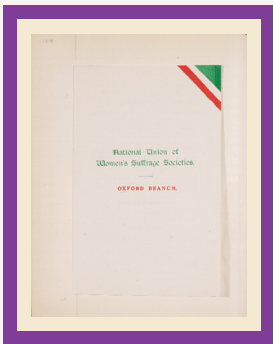
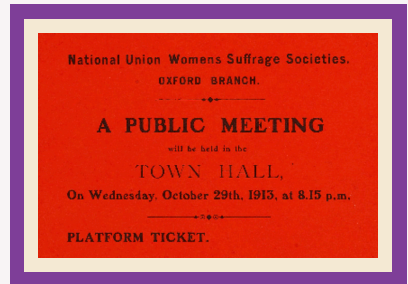


# THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN OXFORD

1873 - 1918

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the women's suffrage movement made a distinct and important impact on Oxford. The city and University were well used to debate about women's higher education, and both nurtured circles of suffrage activism.

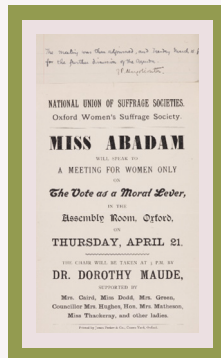
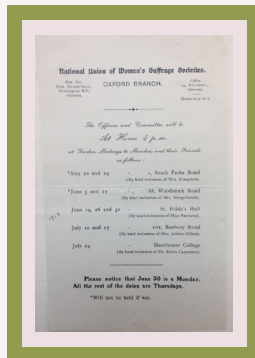
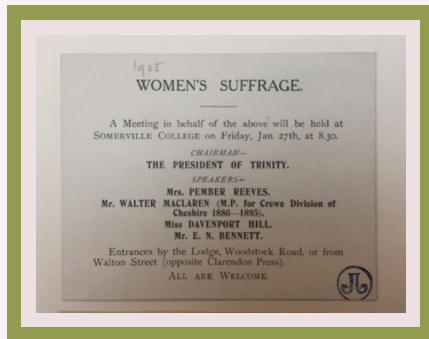


In 1873, Lydia Becker, a prominent suffragist, spoke at the Rector's lodgings in Lincoln College, establishing a tradition of liberal academic support for women's suffrage which endured into the twentieth century.

A number of societies including the Women's Emancipation Union and the Oxford Women's Liberal Association championed women's suffrage in the city, but a stronger foundation was laid in 1904 when the Oxford Women's Suffrage Society (OWSS) was founded.

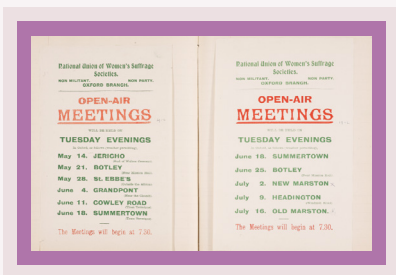
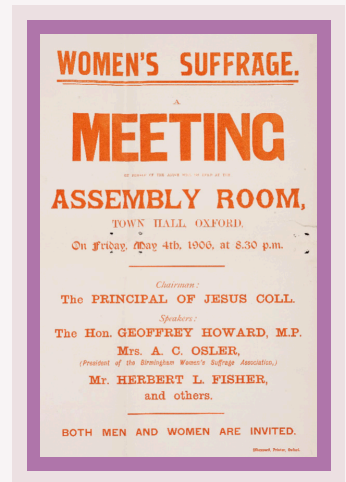


The OWSS was open to men and women and from the outset had strong connections with the University. Its first public meeting was held at Somerville which, in common with the other women's colleges, fostered a strong feminist culture.



Meetings were held at a variety of venues, depending on whether they were open to the public or restricted to members. These included Somerville, St Hilda's, St Hugh's, Manchester, and public spaces including the Town Hall.

A number of prominent suffrage families frequently hosted meetings and events in their homes. These included: the Rhys family whose home in Jesus College, where John Rhys was Principal, became a centre of suffrage activism; Winshields in Headington, the home of St Hugh's Maths tutor Winifred Haverfield and her husband Francis, Camden Professor of Ancient History; and 88 Woodstock Rd, the home of Jessie Margoliouth and her husband, David, the Laudian Professor of Arabic.



The OWSS was affiliated to the non-militant National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and conducted a campaign of constitutional activism. This included 'at homes', public meetings, and contributing to the local and national press. It attracted many prominent speakers including Millicent Fawcett, president of the NUWSS.



1907

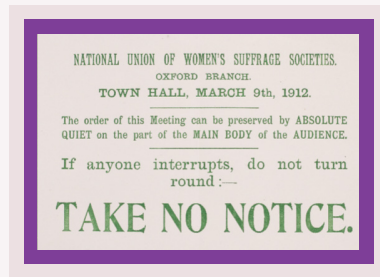
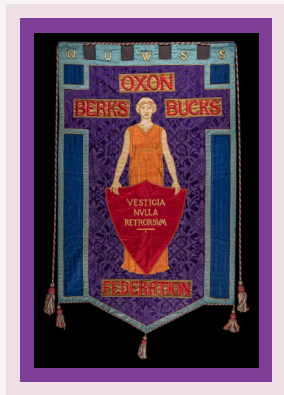


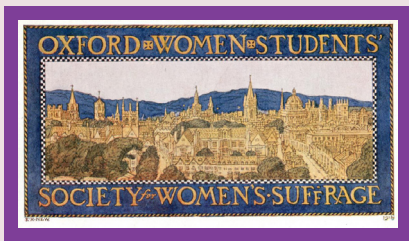
The OWSS also sent delegates to large suffrage processions in London from 1907, sometimes organising special trains to transport members and their banners.



The Oxford Society had an office in Holywell Street from 1911 which served as a venue for meetings as well as a small suffrage shop and library. It was raided by a male undergraduate in 1913.

The OWSS continued to grow and in 1910 joined the newly-formed Oxon, Berks and Bucks Federation of the NUWSS. It hosted its largest public meeting in 1912 and evidently knew its audience well as it prepared carefully by instructing attendees how to ignore hecklers.





In 1911 the suffrage societies at the women's colleges combined to form the Oxford Women Students' Society for Women's Suffrage (OWSSWS), also allied to the NUWSS.

The society catered for current and former students who joined it in demonstrations and processions in London, often carrying a beautiful banner which had been designed by Edmund New.

By this time a number of new branches of national suffrage societies had been formed in Oxford. The most conspicuous newcomer was the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) which held its first Oxford meeting in 1908.





The Oxford WSPU opened a shop in the High Street and attracted high profile speakers such as Emmeline Pankhurst to the city, but it was mainly run by professional organisers rather than Oxford residents.

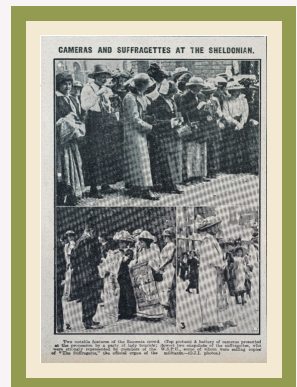
At first it hosted events in cooperation with the OWSS, but as hostility to militant suffrage grew, the OWSS distanced itself from the WSPU.

Oxfordshire experienced its first acts of militancy in 1912, when an attempt was made to burn down the home of the outspokenly anti-suffrage Colonial Secretary, Lewis Harcourt, in Nuneham Courtney.

In that same year Sylvia Pankhurst, Annie Kenney and other prominent suffragettes were heckled, pelted with sugar and their speeches drowned out by hostile undergraduates as they addressed an audience of close to 2,000 people near Martyrs' Memorial.

More direct attacks followed in 1913 when Oxford pillar boxes were damaged, the North Oxford Cricket and Bowling Club was vandalised and Rough's Boat Yard was burnt down.

Male militants organised in solidarity with their women colleagues, disrupting talks, canvassing and interrupting Eights Week in 1913 and 1914.



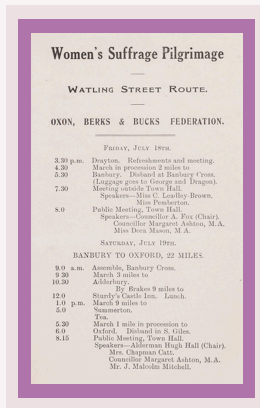
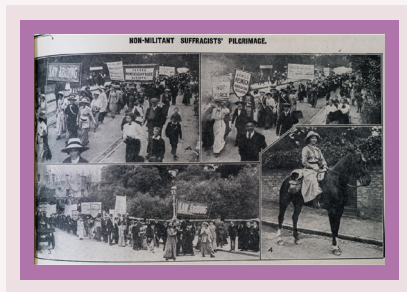
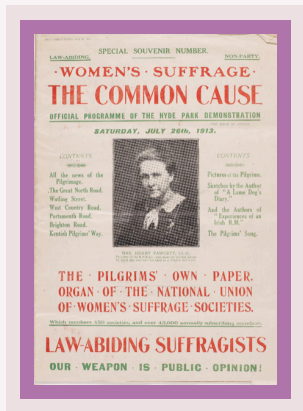




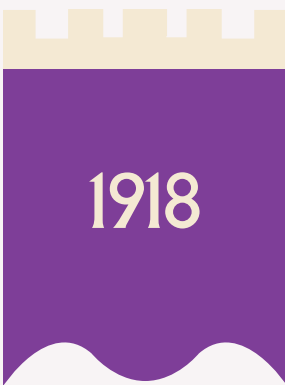


Both the OWSS and the Student Society were involved in many campaigns and processions, including the Great Pilgrimage of 1913, a six week national suffrage march which ended with a rally in Hyde Park.

Pilgrims marched through Oxford in July, joined in Summertown by local suffragists, two of whom carried the 'heavy magnificent' OWSSWS banner.



The Great War interrupted most suffrage activism in Oxford as it did around the country, but it did not cease altogether. In 1917, for example, thirty-seven men and women associated with the university and public service in Oxford signed an appeal in favour of women's suffrage. Signatories included all the principals of the women's colleges, the Bishop of Oxford and local politicians.



The Representation of the People Bill was passed in 1918, allowing some women over the age of 30 and all men over the age of 21 to vote. The Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act was also passed, enabling women to stand as MPs. Oxford Women voted in a national election for the first time in December, 1918.

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# VOTES <sup>FOR</sup> WOMEN 1918~2018



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