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Research Project for the Newnham College 2018 Millicent Fawcett Project:

‘Vote 100 Pathways to Humanities & Social Sciences’

September 2018

Abstract

For my project I decided to write a letter to a Suffragette from my perspective in 2018. I chose to parallel it with the #MeToo movement which is taking place today, 100 years on, and to explore the similarities and differences with the Suffragette movement.

I chose to focus on this topic because it would help me research and evaluate how the Suffragette movement has and still is affecting us today. It also helped me understand how much has changed for women in 2018, but also how much still needs to be changed. I chose to present my work in a letter format because I wanted to address my thoughts directly to a Suffragette.

For research I interviewed the great niece of Laura Ainsworth, which was really fascinating and insightful. I also read, watched and looked up information about the Women’s Rights Movement in 1918 and #MeToo. My favourite method of research was the interview as it was more personal to me so I could ask specific questions.

What I learnt the most about was how frustrating it must have been for women with no rights, and how it left them with very little choice but to resort to violence. I discovered some real similarities between the #MeToo campaign, and the correlations it has back to 1918.

Overall, I concluded that the Women’s Rights Movement in 1918 was an amazing and inspiring starting point for true gender equality. However, there are still many issues regarding women’s rights in 2018 and there is still a very long way to go in the future.

18th August 2018

Dear Miss Ainsworth,

I am writing to you because this year marks one hundred years since you and many others won partial female suffrage in this country. I thought you might like to know how things stand for woman now at the beginning of the new century.

I have been learning about how you bravely fought for the female vote. Fortunately, we are lucky enough that we now have the exact same voting rights as men; a female Prime Minister and a lot more overall support for women across the globe than one hundred years ago. There are female priests and bishops in the Church of England and many women hold positions of influence and importance in significant roles and are respected in these. Provision is made to secure women their job and allow them to work after childbirth. In addition, women and men now have equal rights in marriage and divorce. As a 21st century teenager, it's hard to imagine how infuriating it must have been to have been a woman before 1918 when all these equalities were denied to us.

However, although there have been many improvements, we still have a long way to go to achieve total gender equality. There is a huge issue with pay inequality between men and women as there are many instances when men are being paid much more than women for doing the same job and it is harder for women to break into senior positions. This is, in part, due to factors such as maternity leave but also still a persisting ingrained belief in society, as demonstrated by the poster of a woman's brain (Appendix 4) from the early twentieth century, that women aren't as suited to certain career paths such as engineering and computing. I believe that the Suffragists and Suffragettes began a campaign for women's rights and it is our duty today to carry on this important work until your dream – and ours – comes true.

From today's perspective, unlike when you were working for female suffrage, there is a lot more widespread support for women's rights movements. This is partly thanks to the crucial work you did which was the catalyst to set the ball rolling and is now accelerating due to social media and easier means of communication and acceptance from men and women. I think you would be proud to learn that now there is a new campaign for women's rights surrounding sexual harassment and treatment of women by men, called #MeToo. It all began with a tweet by Alyssa Milano, which read "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." (Twitter, 15.10.2017). She had had, like many women, to accept sexual harassment in order to keep her job. The tweet received millions of replies and other women began to stand up to and put right the damage done by the men who had treated them so awfully. Gradually, the movement has become a worldwide issue, and today it is used to empower all women to speak out unashamedly about their experiences - although there is still a way to go. Thanks to

your work obtaining female suffrage, there are now many women in Parliament, and this has led to laws being passed to help women in situations like these which may well have been blocked before.

The Suffragette and Suffragist movement has many similarities to the #MeToo movement. In my opinion, you and your co-protesters set the foundations for women's rights and have enabled women to speak up, be heard and to be listened to in a way you had to fight for. Both movements conducted marches with banners to make a public point and used significant places and events for maximum impact. For example, one #MeToo march was held on the first anniversary of the American President's inauguration and many famous celebrities wore black instead of ball gowns at the recent Oscars and Golden Globes awards ceremonies. Joanna Lumley even introduced the 2018 Baftas with a direct comparison between the Suffragist and Suffragette movements and the #MeToo campaign today – I think you would be pleased by how much your work is appreciated and remembered 100 years on.

However, I was interested to read about the lengths you had to go to just to be heard. As Emmeline Pankhurst said, 'You have to make more noise than anybody else, you have to make yourself more obtrusive than anybody else, you have to fill all the papers more than anybody else....' (speech delivered in Hartford, Connecticut on November 13 1913). I have seen the medals and brooch you got for your hunger strike in 1909 (Appendix 3) and I thought it was disgusting that they force-fed you. You showed so much courage and determination to do that. With the #MeToo movement no violence has been used so far, but I think, due to our resources, it hasn't actually been necessary. Many people today disapprove of the means of violence used by you and other Suffragettes - some people even compare your tactics to those of terrorists. Due, I believe, to modern technology, it is a lot easier for women today to be heard without using violence. Now, the internet provides a global and very public platform for us to voice our views and gather support. It allows us to be taken more seriously as it permits a more progressive and thoughtful route to changing public opinion than the Suffragette movement which used controversial violent means of action. Do you think the violence you used was justified? In the modern day world, many people don't. However, I can't help thinking how, without social media and the internet, women involved with #MeToo would have effectively been able to spread awareness, and maybe this is why the Suffragettes had to resort to violent means. Today I think that using any violence would lose all respect for the #MeToo campaign, as it would become a threat and give it very legitimate reasons to be criticised, but maybe this is because it is already being heard? If it was being swept under the carpet like the Suffragist movement was being before the Suffragettes branched off, would violence have been the only choice? In my opinion, quite possibly. To be heard, you need to make an impact, and if worldwide online support isn't an option, violence is a very viable way to grab headlines and be noticed. After all, you shouldn't even have had to resort to violence if your rights

weren't being violated already, so although I don't totally agree with the use of it, it's not entirely your fault.

The best news for us now – and perhaps something which will shock you - is that it is actually illegal for people to behave in a degrading way to a whole range of people who have been suppressed in the past, whether due to gender, sexuality, race or many more reasons, and it has led to universal suffrage in the UK for everybody over the age of 18 (and maybe 16 in the future). Sadly though, many people take this for granted, forgetting how hard so many people fought for their suffrage, and even the people who are still fighting for it today in some countries. In a recent referendum two years ago only 72% of the population with the right to vote actually voted, despite the matter having a serious impact on everybody's lives, and local election turnout is often even lower. Where I live in South Cambridgeshire less than 40% of people eligible actually bothered to use their vote in the most recent council election. I think this is so disappointing, as the right to vote is a privilege so many people do not yet have, and to make a difference it is crucial to voice your opinion, no matter how small the issue.

If you were still alive today, what do you think you would change? What would you tell people about your time as a Suffragette? If I were you, I think I would work hard to demonstrate how precious each individual vote is, and how much it meant for people 100 years ago, and how much it still means to people now, in 2018. I also think I would speak out about how hard it was to be a Suffragette, and how badly you were treated and the reasons why you resorted to the violence, as often the bad stories come before the empathy and understanding. With the #MeToo movement, acceptance is more expected due to the open-mindedness now more ingrained in society, which fortunately is so different to the conditions you were treated with. Learning of your story makes me so grateful for all the work you have done and I would like to use this an opportunity to say thank you, on behalf of all the women whose lives you've changed and all the women who you are inspiring to change their lives today. Your work is resonating in our society even now and I believe it will echo far into the future as women everywhere continue to work for what is fair.

Yours Sincerely,

Miss I Roberts

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Interview:

18th August 2018 - Interview with Pat Stevens, great niece of Laura Ainsworth.

Interview with Pat Stevens – great niece of Laura Ainsworth (18th August 2018)

Interview conducted by Izzy Roberts

Pat began our afternoon by providing some context about Laura Ainsworth and her work as a suffragette, summarised below:

- Laura Ainsworth was the great aunt of Pat Stevens – although she hadn't known that until relatively recently. When Pat's father died, they found a suffragette medal (Appendix 3) amongst his things, which prompted them to investigate. A living aunt had only found out about Laura when she herself was in her 20s so that it is thought the family may have been a little ashamed of Laura's actions – and criminal record.
- Laura Ainsworth was a teacher before she left the profession in 1908 to join the WSPU. She travelled around the country campaigning for women's rights.
- Laura was imprisoned for 3 weeks for causing criminal damage by throwing roof tiles onto the roof of the Prime Minister's car (Herbert Asquith) when he was in a meeting about whether women should have the vote at Bingley Hall. The suffragettes were angry because no women were allowed into the meeting.
- Laura Ainsworth was one of the first 4 women to be force fed in 1909. She gained a medal and brooch in recognition of this.
- Laura Ainsworth is mentioned in Winston Churchill's memoirs because there was an incident on a train where he passed through the carriage where she was sitting with her friend Hugh Franklin. Franklin hit Churchill with a dog whip and shouted at him because of his views on the rights of women.
- Laura Ainsworth stayed at Eagle House in Batheaston – owned by the Blathwayt family. They opened the house as a refuge for suffragettes who had been in prison. Whilst there, Laura planted a tree in a special 'suffragette' orchard. There were approximately 60 trees in total at the time, but now the orchard is gone. A tree in Victoria Park Botanical Gardens in Bath now commemorates the suffragettes.
- In 1911, Laura held party in Gillingham to boycott the census. The slogan was 'If we don't count, we are not going to be counted'.
- Another tactic used by the suffragettes was to disrupt church services by walking in singing marching songs.
- Laura Ainsworth left the suffragettes in 1912 because they were becoming too violent and aggressive – they were starting to burn down buildings and put bombs in letter boxes. She continued her work through the National Political League and then the British Legion and League of Nations.
- In 1914 the suffragettes suspended their actions because of the outbreak of WW1.
- In 1918 women with property who were 30 years old or older got the vote. It may be that they didn't all get the vote because then they would have outnumbered the male vote (opinion of the speaker).
- When Laura Ainsworth died in 1958 her coffin was draped with the Union Flag.

1) What do you think your great aunt would make or women's rights today?

She was one of 9 children – 3 boys and 6 girls - and so would have felt she should have been on a par with her brothers. She worked for the right for women to vote and they achieved that but I think she would think there was still quite a way to go – for example the disparity about the way men and women get remunerated and how men get more opportunities. I'm not sure how I feel about all that because if women take time off to have a family, then they don't have the same career experience or years of service as men.

2) Do you think she would appreciate the impact the movement had in her own lifetime and was it the impact she was hoping for?

I think the fact that she continued working in a political way all her life and didn't marry shows that she felt that there was still ongoing work to be done. For example, when she left the suffragettes she joined the National Political League and then she was the Vice Chairman of the British Legion in Newcastle and worked for the League of Nations – which went on to inspire the United Nations.

3) Do you think the suffragette movement would be different in the way it acted if taken place today?

I think it might be more aggressive because people are generally more aggressive today. I also think that they are more aware of their rights – women are more empowered than they were. Social media is huge today so this would help gather support, with bigger protests. I think they would have been ruder – more vocal.

4) What's the closest event these days to the suffragist/suffragette movement 100 years ago?

I think it would be the '#Me Too' campaign because it is about women being more aware of their rights and not putting up with certain behaviours.

5) The suffragists didn't employ the degree of violence the suffragettes did. Do you think the violence was necessary for getting the results?

I suspect they wouldn't have got so far without the violence as it would have been too easy to push them away and forget about them.

6) It had taken a long time for all men to get suffrage, even by not employing much violence. Why was the women's movement so forceful and angry?

I guess partly because women were owned by men so they were fighting as well for their own personal rights which most men already had. Women were fighting for more than just the vote (as demonstrated by the poster of the perception of a woman's brain in appendix 4)

7) Do you think women's work in WW1 was the greatest catalyst in achieving female suffrage?
Was it a turning point?

Yes – I think it made the government recognise that women were capable of so many things. They basically ran [were the workforce of] the country whilst the men were away. This started the recognition of the quality of women.

8) Your ancestor committed a great deal of energy and personal suffering to the cause, but today the right to vote is taken for granted by many people, often with a low turn-out. How do you think your great aunt would have felt about this?

I think Laura would be very disappointed when so many people fought for the right to vote that some people don't respect it. In Australia people are legally required to vote – but I'm not sure I agree totally with that. In Zimbabwe people are queuing at 6.00am to vote but you wouldn't see that here. People think their vote doesn't make a difference, but every vote makes a difference.

Laura Ainsworth





PRESENTED TO

LAURA AINSWORTH

THE WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNION
IN RECOGNITION OF A GALLANT ACTION,
WHEREBY THROUGH ENDURANCE
TO THE LAST EXTREMITY
OF HUNGER, HARDSHIP AND PAIN,
A GREAT PRINCIPLE OF POLITICAL JUSTICE
WAS VINDICATED.



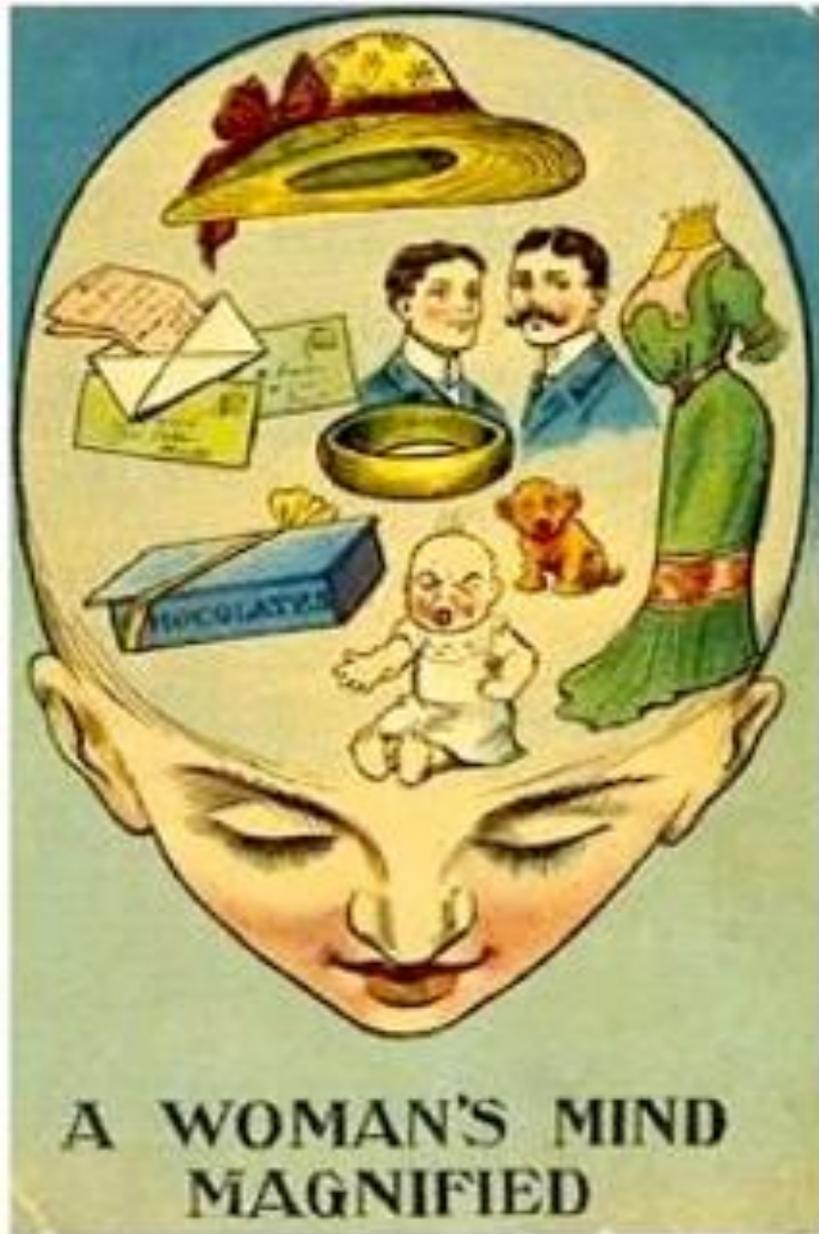
Front inscription
FOR VALOUR
HUNGER STRIKE



Back inscription
FED BY FORCE
SEP 17TH 1909
LAURA AINSWORTH

APPENDIX 4

An early 20th Century anti-suffrage poster:



Bristol Old Vic Young Company 'Make More Noise' Programme

In Our Hands

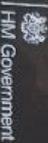
Before each performance of *Make More Noise* we will be screening a short film produced by Rite Magazine in partnership with Watershed and Bristol Women's Voice. Featuring a poem by Malika Koppole, the film reflects the diverse experiences of young people and asks what women and girls are still fighting for.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR
By Lisa Oragon

We are standing on the shoulders of giants. It has been very humbling to realise how many incredible women have come before us and given us the right to choose. This creative process has been a joy, we have danced, laughed, cried and gotten very angry. We have been part of our very own theatrical girl gang.

In the rehearsal room there was a real sense of empowerment and a determination to change the world, because the world still needs to change. The stories we shared are testament to this. Stories of sexual aggression, being treated differently to male counterparts, being told we could not do something because of our gender. The power of seeing these strong, wonderful, creative women on stage together is awe-inspiring and I am grateful to have played a small part in that. If you are ever in doubt about what a feminist looks like, then look no further. The future of equality is in safe hands.

Make More Noise is for everyone fighting for equality in all its forms.

 HM Government

2-4 Aug
Theatre
7:30pm / 2:30pm (SAT MAT)
Tickets: £14/£10 conc.
@BristolOldVic #MakeMoreNoise

A NOTE FROM THE CAST
By Kira McGeinness, aged 13

I think the show is something amazing. The way that the influence of women from so many different eras contributed to it makes it feel like we're honouring them in our own little way. Working with people from the Young Company and Adult Company was extremely fun because we got to see so many different views on the subjects covered due to the diversity of age groups. This meant that I could learn from everyone and help others to learn as well. Coming in not knowing the majority of the cast was interesting. I was quite nervous at the start but we have grown so much as a group and we definitely have built a strong bond over the process of creating this show together. To me, *Make More Noise* is a tribute to all the struggles and successes of women all around the world and a way of explaining to people what feminism is.

*Additional performed material from the article '100 easy ways to make women's lives more bearable' by Dani Beckert and text from 'The witch doesn't burn in this one' by Amanda Lovelace.

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Cover Photography: Mark Dwyer, Clarity No. 2829



BRISTOL OLDVIC YOUNG COMPANY

2-4 Aug

*You have to make more noise than anybody else.
You have to make yourself more obtrusive than anybody else.
You have to fill all the papers more than anybody else.
In fact, you have to see that they do not know you under*

— Dorothea Parkhurst

February 2018 marked 100 years since the Representation of the People Act was passed in Britain, giving some women the right to vote.

In honour of this historic milestone, Bristol Old Vic Young Company present their love letter to the women and girls who fought and campaigned to get us to where we are today.

Exploring the stories of women's suffrage, alongside experiences of being female today, Bristol Old Vic Young Company and Adult Company present *Make More Noise*, a play which celebrates just how far we have come, whilst protesting what still needs to be done.

CREATIVES

Lisa Gregan

Director

Maisie Newman

Associate and Movement Director

Anna Orton

Designer

Emily Leonard

Design Assistant

Lizzy Friend

Young Company Design Assistant

Lexi King

Sound Designer

Maddie Mahoney

Young Company Sound Assistant

Tim Streeder

Lighting Designer

Carloia Matos

Young Company Lighting Assistant

Holly Tilt

Stage Manager

Imogen Senter & Jim Molyneux

Production Managers

Nell O'Hara

Workshop Assistant

Hattie De Santis

Producer

CAST

Alaya Brown

Amy Gribben

Amy Smith

Ella Khanna

Holly Gifford

Kira McGilchrist

Lila Stewart

Louisa Fearnley

Monika Aakrvaag

Nicola Raub

Peggy Edwards

Poppy Costello-Roberts

Rosie Harre

Tarusha Mureidini

MANY THANKS TO

Lucy Hunt, Charlotte Fort, Richard Brett,

Alice Wheeler, Nina Raines, Sam Mallinson,

Jana Rumley, Rowan Evans, Ruth Prier,

Róisín Martindale, Eliza Newman, Keziah

Spaine, Róisín Martindale, Stephanie

Kempson, Carol Fairham, Bristol Old Vic

Theatre Club, Bristol Women's Voice and Rite

Magazine. And a huge thank you to Joanna

Cross who has been unable to perform with us

but was integral to the making of the piece.

BRISTOL OLD VIC YOUNG COMPANY

Bristol Old Vic Young Company is home to over 350 young people, aged 5-25, from all across the city who take part in weekly sessions, individual masterclasses and full scale, professional standard performances. Bristol Old Vic Young Company is accessible to young people from any background, with no previous experience required and there is financial support available for those who may need help with fees.

BRISTOL OLD VIC ADULT COMPANY

Bristol Old Vic Adult Company is a termly participatory theatre class that explores a variety of theatre making skills and themes such as ensemble storytelling, Shakespeare, contemporary plays and political theatre. Sessions run after work hours during term time at Bristol Old Vic.



Production Photography: Jana Rumley