

# A Selection of Elections

Votes, Suffrage and Reform



Cartoon by George Cruikshank: 'The rights of women  
– or the effects of female enfranchisement', 1853  
The Fagan Collection of Political Prints and Caricatures, Pol P 57



## A Selection of Elections

The year 2018 marks the centenary of the first UK general election in which some women were entitled to vote. We celebrate that fact by looking back at some memorable elections and exploring how electioneering has changed over the years.

Before 1832 few people could vote, and powerful aristocrats could sway the results by influencing their tenants to vote for their preferred candidate. The three great Reform Acts of the 19th-century (in 1832, 1867 and 1884) extended the franchise, but by the turn of the 20th-century around one in three men still did not qualify to vote in general elections. The Representation of the People Act 1918 finally gave all British men a vote, regardless of wealth.

Serious agitation for women to get the vote began in the 1860s. Campaigners submitted around 16,000 suffrage petitions and saw numerous bills defeated or talked out in Parliament before a limited number of women were finally given the vote in 1918. The colourful print shown here gives one satirical 19th-century view of female fitness to choose a suitable representative.

Elections in previous centuries were quite different to modern campaigns. However, the energy and enthusiasm of political campaigning did not change. 18th-century printed broadsides and sung ballads can be seen as the forerunners of today's party political broadcasts and social

media campaigns, and the papers of the 20th-century Communist candidate Fred Westacott show the dedication and organisational skills required to persuade a person to cast their vote.



Photograph of the General Election candidates at Mansfield in 1970, probably taken by the photographer for the *Mansfield Chronicle and Advertiser*  
Fred Westacott Collection, FWC 4/15/21

This exhibition has been curated by staff from Manuscripts and Special Collections at the University of Nottingham. We acknowledge the assistance provided by University members Professor Andrew Harrison, Dr Richard Gaunt and Hannah Nicholson.