

The 1918 election

MISS VIOLET MARKHAM.

Liberty of Independence First Essentials.

I HOPE the Mansfield Division tomorrow will maintain its old tradition of political independence at the poll. It is on those grounds that I appeal for the support of the men and women of the constituency. I am prepared to support the Coalition Government in carrying out that strong and clean peace which will set the seal on the splendid victory won by our



indomitable soldiers and sailors, and also all measures of Reconstruction so long as they are broadly conceived and carried out in a democratic spirit. But I could not stand before you as my brother's sister, a pledged candidate bound to follow blindly the dictates not of my conscience but of the party Whip. To do so would be to forswear every principle Arthur Markham made respected in this place. The task of reconstruction calls for the best brains and best services of all men and women at this time. Opposition for the sake of opposition would be little short of criminal at so grave a moment in our national destinies. But to carry out the task of Reconstruction, liberty and independence of thought are the first essentials in the House of Commons, and the best support which can be given to the Government is the return of members who will support them, not as puppets and coupon-holders, but as thinking and conscientious citizens.

VIOLET MARKHAM.

The 1918 election was the first to be fought following the Representation of the People Act and the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act. In 1917 less than 8 million men could vote; in 1918 the electorate tripled to over 21 million men and women.

Newspaper coverage focused on the remarkable novelty of female suffrage, and devoted acres of coverage to speculation on how around 8.5 million women would vote. It was less common to read comment about the possible repercussions of over 5 million working class men voting for the first time.

In the event, the election was a victory for the governing Coalition led by David Lloyd George. Although women were now allowed to stand for Parliament, only one, Constance Markievicz of Sinn Fein, was elected.

Around two-thirds of women met the criteria for voting in 1918. The other third – mostly those under 30 – had to wait until the 1929 general election in order to cast their vote for the first time.

However, some voters were still more equal than others: University graduates and some business owners could claim a second vote in another constituency until 1948.

Report of a speech by Violet Markham, from the *Nottingham Journal and Express*, 13 December 1918
East Midlands Special Collection, Periodicals: Not

Violet Markham was the only female candidate in the East Midlands. She stood for Mansfield as an Independent Liberal, having not received a 'Coalition Coupon' (the backing of the government). In 1912 she had given a rousing speech for the Anti-Suffrage League against giving the vote to women, although she was in favour of them being active citizens. However, by 1918 she had changed her mind. Although she lost the election, she was as good as her word in terms of citizenship, becoming the first female Mayor of Chesterfield in 1927.

SOME AMUSING INCIDENTS AT POLLING BOOTHS.

For the most part the women electors polled exceedingly well on Saturday. Whatever politicians may have thought by the sparse attendances of women at meetings, or the enigmatical replies their canvassers received, their own minds with regard to the apathy of women were entirely disabused, especially during the morning. On previous occasions men have vied with each other in being the first to register their votes, but women on Saturday displaced them in their eagerness to be the first to poll. Window cleaning and doorstep cleaning were abandoned, and the women left no doubt as to their views upon the importance of the matters before the country.

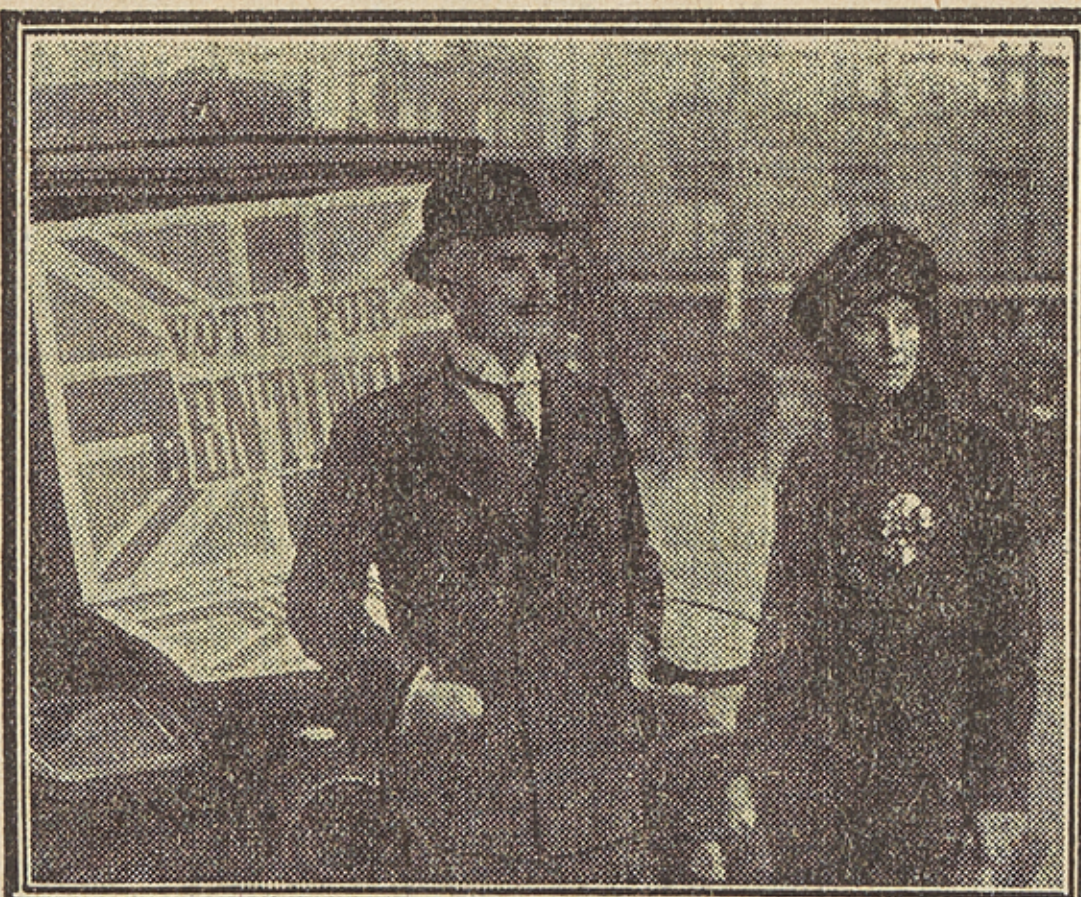
In one division the proportion of women to men voting up to noon was ten to one, and it was reported that few were in doubt as to their duties, and that those who showed any slight ignorance on any point made up for that deficiency by their eagerness to grasp the directions given them as to the method of voting. The fact that there was a record vote in all the Camberwell divisions, was due, it is stated, to the predominance of women voters. A candidate in South Hammersmith said the surprising thing about the election there was that 50 women had gone to the poll to every man.

That the women were polling well on Saturday morning was due to two things, in the opinion of one official, namely: "They are proud of the fact that it is the first time they have had the opportunity of voting at Parliamentary elections, and they are always out early on Saturday mornings shopping. Thus, where the polling booths are near the principal business thoroughfares, they are, so to speak, killing two birds with one stone."

"Women's New Experience": leader column from the *Nottingham Guardian*, 16 December 1918
East Midlands Special Collection, Periodicals: Not

Photographs of polling day, from the *Nottingham Guardian*, 16 December 1918
East Midlands Special Collection, Periodicals: Not

NOTTINGHAM ELECTIONS: WOMEN EXERCISE THE FRANCHISE.



Lord and Lady Henry Bentinck made a tour of the polling booths.



Mr. and Mrs. Atkey with their decorated "Victory Car."



Ald. E. Huntsman and his agent, Mr. F. Jackson.



Women voters at the polling station in Raleigh Street.