

DEBATE 5 - VOTES FOR WOMEN

- Women were given the vote on the Isle of Man in 1881 and were the first in the world to be given the vote in national elections
- The first attempt by the House of Keys to give women the vote in 1878 was stopped by the Governor and the U.K. Government.
- The Keys tried to abolish the death penalty at the same time, but this was also stopped by the U.K. Government.
- If Mrs Pankhurst had not married Dr. Pankhurst and gone to live in Manchester instead of staying with the rest of her family in the Isle of Man, she could have had the vote.



In the United Kingdom the property qualification for the franchise was being reduced, but in the Isle of Man, from 1867 only 4333 males of a total population of some 53,000 had the right to vote. Public opinion on the Island and in the rest of Britain, urged on by Reform groups, campaigned for a wider franchise and the Election Bill, drafted in 1880, was designed to give the vote to 'every male person who is of full age and not subject to any legal incapacity', subject to a greatly reduced property qualification.

The wording of the Bill was noted by members of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage who sent their secretary, Lydia Becker and her colleague, Mrs. Oliver Scatcherd to the Island to give lectures and attend public meetings on the issue of women's voting rights. They attracted considerable support, not only from women property owners who felt they should be treated on equal terms with their male counterparts, but from press, public and some M.H.K.s who felt that the issue also raised other questions, such as the Island's relationship with the United Kingdom and the desire for greater independence for the Island's legislature.

When the Election Bill was introduced into the Keys in November 1880, the proceedings were opened by the Speaker who noted that the Bill still restricted the vote to male persons. Richard Sherwood, M.H.K. moved that the word 'male' be removed, to the delight of his supporters who claimed that '*justice, taxation and representation go together*'. When the Bill moved to the Legislative Council, the Upper House of Tynwald, although its members agreed to the principle of women's right to vote, they amended the Bill so that only women property owners, who were usually unmarried women or widows, not women occupiers (married women or women still living with their families) could vote. The Keys reluctantly accepted this amendment and in 1881 700 women in the Isle of Man received the vote.



Richard Sherwood, M.H.K.



Lydia Becker



- Images of Lydia Becker speaking at a public meeting

- Debate between the Speaker and M.H.K.s over votes for women.
- Image of the Lieutenant Governor, Henry Loch explaining the English Government's position.
- Vote on the motion that the Election Bill be '*amended to remove the word 'male', making the Isle of Man the first country in the world to give women the vote*'.
- Voting results



Video Loop



Key Points



Background Info



Look out for