

**Excerpts taken from BBC, "The Campaign for Women's Suffrage" (2016).**

### **Life for women at the start of the 19th century**

Women and men were not equal in the 19th century. Women were seen as 'the weaker sex'. This particularly affected middle class women because they had no reason to leave the home or go to work. The middle classes took the role of women very seriously because they did not have to worry about things like poverty. The ideal woman was to be 'the angel in the house' and support her husband.

### **Rights for married women**

At the beginning of the century, women had very few rights of their own, particularly once they were married. Upon marriage, women became the property of their husband. A remnant of this can still be seen today with married women taking their husband's surname. It was never the other way round.

Whilst divorce was very unfashionable in general, it was possible for men to divorce their wives for a variety of reasons, like them failing to look after their needs properly or committing adultery. It wasn't until half way through the century (1857) that women could divorce an abusive husband.

### **Working women**

There was a view that women should not work. However, in industries such as textiles whole branches of an industry were reliant upon the labour of women. Even after 1842, women were still

involved in coal mining, but only above ground. In agriculture and domestic service women were an essential part of the workforce. A few middle class women worked before they got married. However, once married, whatever they had earned became the property of their husband, just like them.

Politics and government were matters for men. Women supposedly did not have the brain capacity to understand such things and so they were entirely excluded from the process. Women could not vote, no matter who they were and there were certainly no women in Parliament.

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