1918 - 2018 CELEBRATING Votes for Women

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Case Study:
The Priestman sisters

Anna 1828–1914 Mary 1830–1914
Occupation: social campaigners

Claims to fame:
formed the WLA in Bristol

In the north-east of England

Sisters Anna and Mary Priestman were born in Newcastle. Their family were *Quakers* and active in social reform, such as anti-slavery movements. As girls, they helped their mother by sewing items to sell at campaign fundraising events. They signed the 1866 women's suffrage petition before moving to Bristol in 1870. There they joined the committee of the West of England branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage.

In the south-west of England

Anna and Mary believed in 'passive resistance', refusing to pay their taxes as a protest against women's exclusion from the franchise. They were fined and had some property seized. This form of protest would be used again 40 years later by the Women's Tax Resistance League. In 1881, Anna and Mary formed the Women's Liberal Association of Bristol, the first to 'test' Liberal Party candidates on their support for women's suffrage. Liberal candidates relied on WLAs to help get them elected, through leafleting or holding events. The Priestman sisters questioned why women should help Liberal candidates who were not prepared to support votes for women, and believed that poverty was a direct result of not being allowed to vote. Anna formed the Union of Practical Suffragists in 1896. They supported the WSPU, but stopped when its methods became violent. Anna and Mary remained close and died in 1914, just five days apart.

Useful links/resources:

- **https://alfredgilletttrust.org/2018/02/06/interesting-conversations/**
- **Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: a reference guide, 1866–1928***
  (Routledge, 1999)
- **E. Malos, *Bristol's Other History***
  (Bristol Broadsides, 1983)
- **Special message from Miss Anna Priestman, *Votes for Women*,**
  17 June 1910
- **Anna Priestman, 'Bristol's Bastard Liberals', *The Cambrian News and Welsh Farmers Gazette*,**
  6 October 1905

Glossary

Quaker – a branch of Christianity that often believes in social justice and pacifism

Political candidates – people trying to be elected to positions of power, such as councillors and MPs

Questions

1. **Why was passive resistance important to the suffrage cause?**
2. **Was their active questioning of people's actions helpful to the suffrage cause?**
3. **Do you think that their religious beliefs made a difference to the type of suffragists that they were?**