

LECTURE

Schoolgirls and Women's Suffrage in Late Victorian and Edwardian England

20 September 2024

17:00 hours s.t.

Centre for British Studies

Mohrenstr. 60, 10117 Berlin, Room 105

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Schools are surprisingly absent from histories of women's suffrage in Britain, which locate teachers' suffragism beyond the classroom and treat suffragist schoolgirls as amusing exceptions. This talk draws from teachers' magazines, school magazines, and autobiographies to show how girls engaged with both suffragist and anti-suffragist politics at school. In classroom lessons and debates, schoolgirls were encouraged to intellectualise the 'votes for women' question. Schoolgirls also satirised the militant suffrage movement, reflecting popular anti-suffragette sentiment in their own writing and dramatic performances.

However, women's suffrage was never a straightforward enabler of schoolgirls' political participation. The suffrage debate was only one and never the primary route to political experience for schoolgirls in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Drawing from a wider book project on schoolgirls' politics from 1870 to 1918, this lecture uncovers girls' selective engagement with the women's suffrage movement. Schoolgirls could make powerful political claims without invoking women's suffrage. The discourse of women's suffrage was therefore a flexible tool which schoolgirls could deploy to their advantage, but they were also aware of its limits.

The lecture is free and open to all.

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