

# Votes for women (1890-1918)



## Background:

From the 1860s onwards the issue of women's votes began growing. By the time 1897 came, the first coordinated group to pressure the government for women's votes was created—these were called the Suffragists. Their peaceful methods had limited success and, in 1903, a more violent group were created called the WSPU (later nicknamed the Suffragettes by the media).

## Different political parties had different opinions on the issue of votes for women by 1900:

**Conservatives opposed votes for women** and were led by Arthur Balfour (1906 onwards)

**Liberals had mixed opinions** and were led by Herbert Asquith (1908-1916), who was against women's votes

**Liberals began to move towards supporting women's votes after 1916** when David Lloyd George became Prime Minister. They also began to do this to gain votes in the 1918 election, as many men thought women had proved their worth in war

**Labour were wholeheartedly in support of votes for women** and were led by Keir Hardie (1900-1915)

## The different opinions on women's votes in the media (newspapers):

**The Times:** Against (A Conservative leaning paper)

**The Telegraph:** Against (A Conservative leaning paper)

**The Daily Chronicle:** Supported (A Liberal leaning paper which was the biggest selling newspaper before and during the war)

**The Guardian:** Supported (A Labour leaning newspaper)



## What do you need to know?

- **Social and legal position of women in 1890's**
- **Arguments for and against votes for women**
- **The Suffragists (dates/key women/beliefs)**
- **The Suffragettes (dates/key women/beliefs)**
- **Peaceful methods of winning the vote**
- **Violent methods of winning the vote (inc. death of Emily Davison)**
- **The reactions of the authorities/press/public (including force feeding/Black Friday/Cat and Mouse Act)**
- **Did the violent methods of the suffragettes help? Arguments yes and no**
- **The impact of WWI on gaining the vote (women's work during the War)**

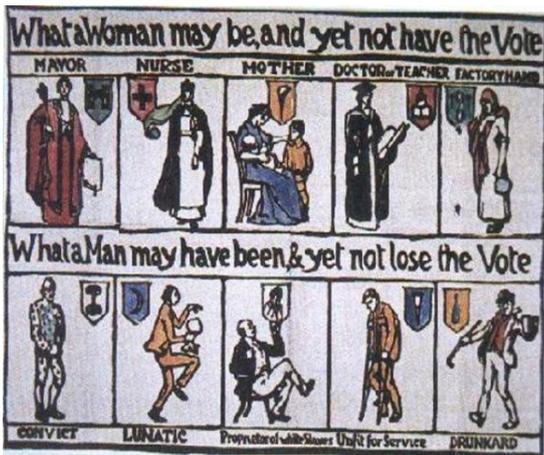


## 6. What was the social and legal position of many women in the 1890s?

ASPECT OF LIFE	Working class women	Middle and upper class women (the middle is upper-middle class as we would know it today!)												
<p><b>Education</b> (improved slightly by 1900)</p> <p>In 1880 it was compulsory for all children 5-10 to attend school. <b>By 1900 97 per cent of all children could read and write.</b></p>	<p>All girls received a basic education <b>between the ages of 5-10.</b></p> <p>Would be educated in reading, writing and a series of chores to prepare them to become housewives. Some of these included;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to make a bed</li> <li>• How to wash clothes</li> <li>• Management of the stove (cooking)</li> </ul> 	<p>Most rich families educated their children at home. In addition to the basic education working class parents, girls in rich families would be taught;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music, singing and drawing.</li> <li>• Taught to starve themselves and use corsets to achieve tiny waists to make them look feminine and attract a well off husband.</li> </ul> <p>Some women were allowed to study at university, but would not be awarded the qualification. An example of this is <b>Sophia Jex Blake</b>, who studied Medicine at Edinburgh. She was refused the qualification, but at least this demonstrated that women were capable. By 1900, universities in Manchester, London, Oxford and Cambridge allowed women to study, but <b>still didn't give them qualifications.</b></p>												
<p><b>Employment</b> (improved slightly by 1900)</p> 	<p>Nearly all working class married women would have to go out to work as they needed the money. <b>1 in 3 became a domestic servant</b> (a maid or house help) and many worked at home making matchboxes or candles, or in small factories which produced textiles. Even though women were doing the same jobs they often got <b>paid 50% less than men, or more!</b></p> <p>Most women took some time out to bring up children (if they had any).</p>	<p>Middle and upper class girls were given more freedom in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many became;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurses (trained by the Nightingale School for Nurses)</li> <li>• Teachers (if single)</li> <li>• Telephonists</li> <li>• Typists</li> </ul> <p>By 1900;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctors (without official degree)</li> <li>• Architects</li> </ul> <table border="1" data-bbox="901 1462 1453 1576"> <thead> <tr> <th>Occupation</th> <th>Men's wages</th> <th>Women's wages</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Carpet weavers</td> <td>35s a week</td> <td>20s a week</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Machinists in tailoring</td> <td>22s 6d a week</td> <td>11s a week</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Civil service typists</td> <td>£3 a week</td> <td>£1 a week</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>.....A comparison of men's and women's wages around 1900.</p>	Occupation	Men's wages	Women's wages	Carpet weavers	35s a week	20s a week	Machinists in tailoring	22s 6d a week	11s a week	Civil service typists	£3 a week	£1 a week
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<p><b>Marriage</b> (improved significantly, but still terribly unequal by 1900)</p> 	<p>Women were inferior within marriage. When they married their property was passed to their husbands, and they became the property of their husband. Husbands could rape and batter their wives and it was virtually impossible to gain a divorce. Also, the children would be left in the custody of the man if he were to divorce her!</p> <p>By 1900 there were improvements;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Women could bring divorce cases against their husbands</li> <li>2) Women were allowed to keep their own property after they married</li> <li>3) A woman no longer had to stay in her husband's home against her will</li> </ol> <p>HOWEVER wife-battery and marital rape were still legal. In the case of a divorce the woman lost all rights to her children.</p>													

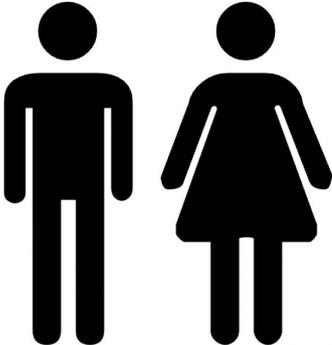
## 7. What were the arguments for and against votes for women?

For	Explanation
The vote is a way to get rid of other inequalities	By 1900 women were still unequal to men. Some women believed that the only way to change these inequalities was to get the vote. Once women had the vote they could put pressure on Parliament to change other laws.
The vote will improve men's moral and sexual behaviour	Some suffragettes like Christabel Pankhurst believed that giving women the vote would help improve men's sexual behaviour. They thought that making women equal to men would make men follow women's much higher moral standards.
Look at what was happening in other countries	By 1914 many women in the USA had the vote, as well as in New Zealand, parts of Australia and even the Isle of Man. Why not Britain?
Women are capable of being involved in politics	People were challenging the idea of separate spheres (women in the private sphere at home/men in the public sphere in society). Many women had become active in local elections and many campaigned to improve living conditions and to reform the workhouses, so they showed they were capable of understanding and being involved in politics.
There have been changes in women's roles	New jobs had been open to women, as well as the opportunity for university. Women were beginning to destroy the idea of 'separate spheres'. Some women saw the vote as the final way in which women had to achieve equality with men.
Voting is a 'right' to which women are entitled	Three times votes had been extended in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century to more and more men. This led women to ask when their time was. Some women owned more property than men, paid more in taxes and yet were not allowed to vote. Should an illiterate and uneducated farm labourer have the vote, when the educated female landowner did not?



Against	Explanation
Women and men have 'separate spheres'	Some believed women were suited for the private sphere (cooking, cleaning, raising children) and men were suited to the public sphere (work and politics). They believed this was ordained by god. They were based on scientific theories about the physical and psychological differences between men and women. Women were seen as childish, hysterical and fickle because of their reproductive system.
Women's role is in local affairs	Anti-suffragettes argued women's involvement should be on school boards and working with charities. Getting involved in national elections was a completely different matter,
Women are already represented by their husbands.	Women did not need the vote because their husbands already represented them when they voted. Women were expected to have the same political views as their husbands, which would mean men would just be given two votes.
It is dangerous to change a system that works.	'If it isn't broke then don't fix it'. Britain was one of the most powerful countries in the world, making as big a change as allowing women to vote could upset the stability of the system. It was a big risk to take.
Women do not fight to defend their country.	People earned their right to vote by being willing to fight to defend their country. As women did not fight in the army/navy then they did not deserve the right to vote (even though they weren't allowed to fight—say 'whuuut'?)

## 8. The Suffragists and the Suffragettes?

	Suffragists	Suffragettes
Name of group	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)	Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)
Founded by	Millicent Fawcett (elected) 	Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Sylvia and Christabel. They were permanent leaders, not elected. 
Founded when	1897 (although many strands had existed independently before this)	1903
Attitude to men	Men allowed 	No men allowed 
Social class of women	Middle and upper mostly. However, they had a large working class membership in the North-West (Manchester, Liverpool etc)	A mixture of all classes of women in the early days, however, after 1910 they made a push to recruit middle and upper class women. Despite this, they still had a huge working class following.
Location	All over Britain	All over Britain, headquarters in London
Violence?	Non - Violent 	Violent 
Method of gaining the vote	Peaceful marches/flyers/ speeches/ propaganda	Marches / demonstrations / hunger strikes / attacking property / attacking people / bombs / media stunts (they loved fire too!)

## 9a. What methods were used by the Suffragists and Suffragettes?

Method	Description of peaceful Suffragist and Suffragette actions
Propaganda	<p>The WSPU published their newspaper 'Votes for Women', by 1914 it had a circulation of <b>around 40,000</b>. Their slogan 'Votes for Women' was found everywhere, while they used their colours of purple, white and green to sell clothes, dolls, jewellery and other items. Particularly effective were the WSPU's propaganda posters, postcards and leaflets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sailing down the river Thames past the houses of Parliament in 1908 carrying banners reading 'Votes for Women', 'Hyde Park—Sunday June 21st' and 'Cabinet Ministers specially invited'.</b></li> </ul>
Meetings and demonstrations	<p>Both the NUWSS and the WSPU held many public meetings. Many huge and open air meetings were held all over Britain. Crowds of over 20,000 were not unusual. They kept the issue of Women's suffrage in the public eye.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Women's Sunday (21st June 1908) - 15000-20000 women attended in Hyde Park</b></li> <li>• <b>The NUWSS Women's Pilgrimage of 1913 was very successful.</b></li> </ul>
Putting pressure on Parliament	<p>Petitions were drawn up and sent to Parliament. Women met with MP's to try to persuade them to support votes for women.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The petition in 1910 in support of the Conciliation Bill contained over 250,000 signatures.</b></li> <li>• <b>Various petitions before 1914 were signed and presented to parliament regarding women's votes.</b></li> <li>• <b>Emily Davison's address is registered in the 1911 census as the Houses of Parliament.</b> She hid in a broom cupboard on census night and filled in the form required to be put on the census. A modern day politician, Tony Benn revealed a plaque next to the place where she stayed that night to commemorate her creative protest</li> </ul>
Civil disobedience	<p>Those who couldn't vote shouldn't have to pay taxes so women refused to pay. Some also boycotted the 1911 census. This caused endless complications with the police and legal system.</p>
Hunger strikes	<p>Started in 1909 as a way of forcing the authorities to recognise suffragette prisoners as political prisoners. Hunger strikes won sympathy for women. Posters and accounts were sent all over the country reporting harrowing accounts. The government responded by force feeding (next page)</p>

PEACEFUL

Method	Description of violent Suffragette actions
Attacking property	<p>Window smashing was the first type of violence used by suffragettes. Windows of government offices were the favourite targets, buildings of newspapers, clubs and shops were also targeted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>In 1913 Emily Davison planted a bomb at Lloyd George's house. He didn't live there at the time, so when the bomb went off it created national headlines, but no one was killed.</b></li> <li>• <b>Post was also targeted with bombs</b></li> <li>• <b>Chemicals were poured into letter boxes of politicians and other opposition.</b></li> <li>• <b>Famous works of art were slashed at museums.</b></li> <li>• <b>Telegraph wires were cut.</b></li> <li>• <b>Messages such as 'No votes, no golf' were burned into golf courses.</b></li> </ul>
Attacking people (particularly politicians)	<p>Individuals were also singled out, for example doctors who force fed were attacked. Women would interrupt meetings, hit and spit at police officers and attack politicians.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>An axe was once thrown at Herbert Asquith, narrowly missing him.</b></li> <li>• <b>In 1905, Emmeline Pankhurst interrupted Winston Churchill's meeting at the cloth hall in Manchester by screaming "Do you agree with votes for women?"</b></li> <li>• <b>When the police forcibly removed the Suffragettes from trying to enter Downing street in 1910, there was a riot and a lot of police brutality. This was covered up and eventually exposed. This became known as 'Black Friday'</b></li> </ul>

VIOLENCE

## 9b. How did the Government react to the actions of the Suffragettes?

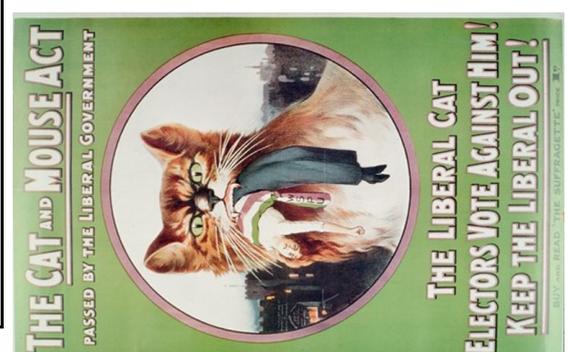
<p>The politicians in the Liberal Government</p> <p>MIXED OPINIONS</p>	<p>The Liberal Government did not have a clear position. <b>The P.M, Asquith was definitely AGAINST the idea.</b> Most Liberal MP's were probably in favour but many not strongly.</p> <p><b>The 'New Liberals' like David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill were in favour of votes for women,</b> but had been focussing on the Liberal Reforms due to DLG's position as Chancellor. The tone towards women changed during WWI when DLG became P.M in 1916.</p> <p>The government dealt harshly with protestors even before any violence was used, to try and stop things getting out of control, they failed.</p>
<p>Policing</p>	<p>The Suffragettes constantly scrapped with policemen and the policemen were in a difficult position of finding a balance between force and violence</p> <p>On <b>Black Friday in November 1910</b> - women protestors tried to enter Parliament to support the Conciliation Bill, the police reacted brutally. <b>The cover up was eventually found out by the media and the police were publicly shamed for their actions.</b></p>
<p>Force-feeding (1912)</p>	<p>To respond to hunger strikes the government began force-feeding. Famous suffragettes like <b>Emmeline Pankhurst, Christabel Pankhurst</b> and countless others suffered this horror! The government argued it was necessary to stop hunger-strikers from dying. However, the public saw it as cruel. <b>As soon as hunger - striking began in response to this, women were released from prison so force feeding was not used on all women.</b></p>
<p><b>The Cat and Mouse Act (1913)</b></p>	<p>This allowed hunger strikers to be released to recover their health. Once recovered they would be re-arrested and sent back to prison to serve the rest of their sentence. Some MP's criticised it as it punished women a few times over for one crime. However, it looked a LOT better on the government than using force feeding tactics. In summary, <b>release and recapture.</b></p>



**SOURCE 37**

*People were held down by force, flung on the floor, tied to chairs and iron bedsteads while the tube was forced up the nostrils. After each feeding the nasal pain gets worse. The wardress endeavoured to make one prisoner open her mouth by sawing the edge of a cup along her gums. The broken edge caused laceration and severe pain. Food into the lung of one unresisting prisoner immediately caused severe choking, vomiting and persistent coughing. She was hurriedly released next day suffering from pneumonia and pleurisy. We cannot believe that any of our colleagues will agree that this form of prison treatment is justly described in Mr McKenna's words as necessary medical treatment.*

..... From the medical journal *The Lancet*, August, 1912.



## 10. How effective were the methods used by the Suffragists and Suffragettes? Why?

The Suffragettes would have preferred it if they could have obtained the vote peacefully, however, they realised that peace wasn't going to work. Their violent actions were considered by the government and many men as terrorist actions, the first example of large scale terrorism which effected Britain. **Towards 1910 the Suffragettes stepped up their violence** and tried to get as many middle and upper class women involved as possible to give their actions credibility and make it more difficult for the government to blame a particular social class. They chose violent action because;

- 1) **They thought that peaceful methods were not having any success.**
- 2) **The Government banned them from meetings and so peaceful protest was denied.**
- 3) **The Government started to use violence against them.**

So, did the violent actions of the Suffragettes help the cause of 'Votes for women'?

Yes	No
<p><b>They made female suffrage front page news.</b> They brought it to the attention of the public and many women connected because they admired these women for risking so much to try and achieve the vote.</p>	<p>The violence played into the hands of the Government because <b>they could argue it was wrong and weak to give into violence</b>—think "we don't negotiate with terrorists" (but create more by not!)</p>
<p><b>The publicity meant the issue wouldn't go away</b> and kept on repeating after every sensational action, so sooner or later women would gain the vote.</p>	<p>There were times when the Government appeared to be close to agreeing to female suffrage, but it could not be seen to be giving in to violence, as many powerful men called for the government not to.</p>
<p><b>Their actions rammed the idea of 'Votes for women' down the throats</b> of all women and most men to the point where they gradually began to accept it and view it as an inevitability.</p>	<p>The violence turned many moderate men and MP's who were considering or did support the campaign against the idea of votes for women and <b>increased the membership of anti-suffrage movements like the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League,</b> formed in 1908 as a result of Suffragette actions.</p>
<p><b>Asquith's</b> views, and his Governments harsh treatment of the suffragettes, were not caused by the violence of the suffragettes, but by his old fashioned beliefs. Over time, <b>people began to disrespect his view point due to the cruel treatment of force feeding and police violence</b> (ie) Black Friday)</p>	<p>The violence supported the view that women were not responsible enough to have the vote. They were too emotional, hysterical and carried out actions without 'properly' assessing the consequences.</p>
	<p><b>In 1913 and 1914, the NUWSS (Suffragists) were growing in popularity at the expense of the WSPU. Even women were turning away from violence.</b></p>

**Conclusion:** The violence got the issue of women's votes to the front line of politics, however, the violence itself didn't help because it created opposition. That said, the actions of the Suffragettes boosted the membership of the Suffragists as anyone who believed in women's votes, but not violence, joined them. It gave the Suffrage movement the platform they didn't have before the violence AND prepared Britain for war by creating a network of women (without knowing it!)



## 11. How did WWI impact on women achieving the vote? Why?

**Suddenly in June 1914 everything changed as Britain was at war with Germany.** The Pankhursts had no hesitation in stopping the suffrage campaign and encouraging members to support the war effort. The NUWSS followed suit. It is thought that they did this both because they were patriotic and wanted Britain to win, but also because they knew it would benefit their cause.

WSPU (Suffragettes)	NUWSS (Suffragists)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The suffragettes and the Government worked amazingly together to encourage women to go out to work.</li> <li><b>In 1915 the WSPU organised the 'Women's Right to Serve' march.</b></li> <li>They renamed their paper Britannia and their organisation became the Women's Party instead of the WSPU.</li> <li><b>They demanded military conscription and gave white feathers (symbols of cowardice) to those men not in military uniforms.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Millicent Fawcett supported the war effort, declaring in Aug 1914 'Women, your country needs you.'</b> However she opposed conscription and giving men white feathers.</li> <li>The NUWSS set up an <b>employment register in 1915</b> and recruited many women to replace the men who had gone to fight. <b>It also organised hospital units on the front lines of the war.</b></li> <li>However, meetings were still held and petitions were still signed; this ensured that pressure was kept on the Parliament.</li> </ul>

### How was the vote won?

Preparations for change started under DLG in 1916, mainly because thousands of men lost their right to vote as the law said anyone away from home for more than a year lost this right. The government obviously had to change this and, due to pressure from the NUWSS the issue of women's votes was debated.

- In 1917, when the House of Commons voted on the issue, 385 MP's voted in favour, 55 against.**
- On 6<sup>th</sup> February 1918 the Representation of the People Act was given royal approval and became law.**
- Women over the age of 30 were given the vote and were allowed to become MP's**
- All men over the age of 18 were given the vote.**

This meant from 21 million people able to vote, 8 million of them were women.

Remember that women were **still NOT equal though, because:**

- Women over 18 did not have the right to vote until 1928!**
- When men returned from war, many women were removed from their jobs and replaced by men.**

### WHY DID WOMEN GET THE VOTE: SUMMARY

Government factor	Work of women	World War One factor
Lloyd George replaced Asquith as PM in 1916. he was more sympathetic to	Many men were genuinely impressed by women's contribution to the war effort. They had shown they were mature and sensible.	The need for reform was needed because so many soldiers lost their right to vote
Conservative MP's were happy that women under 30 would not get the vote, they were worried working class women would vote Labour.		The war gave MP's a convenient excuse to give up their opposition to votes for women. They could change their minds without looking stupid.
Liberal and Labour MP's were happy that all women over 30 were getting the vote. This meant it wasn't just upper class women who would vote (who would vote Conservative)		One argument against giving women the vote was that they didn't help defend their country - this excuse was no longer acceptable.
The Government were worried the suffragettes would restart their violent campaign after the war. how would it look if they locked up people who had tried to help the country win the war.		

# Votes for women: TOP 20 QUIZ

1. What was the weekly newspaper of the NUWSS called?

The common cause                  The Suffragette                  Votes for Women

2. Who became Prime Minister in 1916?

David Lloyd George                  David Asquith                  Winston Churchill

3. Which two industries accounted for the majority of female employment, even during WWII?

Munitions and office work                  Printing and mining                  Textiles and domestic service

4. Who became Liberal Prime Minister in 1908?

David Lloyd George                  David Asquith                  Winston Churchill

5. What was the series of meetings, organised by the NUWSS, known as that took place in summer 1913?

The Mud March    The Womens Right to Serve    The Womens Pilgrimage

6. Who tried to destroy a famous painting in the National Portrait Gallery in 1914?

Mary Richardon    Emily Davison                  Emmeline Pankhurst

7. When was the Conciliation Bill first presented?

1909                  1910                  1911

8. Which political tactic was adopted by the WSPU from 1909?

Hunger strikes    Bombing buildings    Window smashing

9. When was the Prisoners Temporary Discharge for Health Act introduced?

April 1911                  April 1913                  April 1914

10. Which political party did the NUWSS decide to support in the Parliament elections of 1912?

Liberals    Labour                  Conservative

11. Which leading newspaper remained totally opposed to Women's Suffrage?

The Times                  The Daily Mirror                  The Guardian

# Votes for women: TOP 20 QUIZ

**12. In which year did Emmeline Parkhurst form the Womens Social and Political Union?**

1901      1903      1905

**13. Who planted a bomb in Lloyd Georges house in 1913?**

Mary Richardson      Emily Davison      Emmeline Pankhurst

**14. Who were Emmeline Pankhurst's two children?**

Christine and Sylvia      Christabel and Sylvia      Christine and Susan

**15. When was Black Friday?**

18<sup>th</sup> November 1910      21<sup>st</sup> April 1911      4<sup>th</sup> January 1912

**16. Who established the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897?**

Emmeline Pankhurst      Millicent Fawcett      Emily Davison

**17. Who rushed onto the Derby racecourse in June 1913 and consequently died?**

Emily Davison      Millicent Fawcett      Emmeline Pankhurst

**18. When were women over 30 finally given the vote?**

1918      1919      1920

**19. What were the Womens Social and Political Union also known as?**

Suffragists      Crazy ladies      Suffragettes

**20. When was the NUWSS organised procession also known as the Mud March because of the bad weather?**

January 1907      February 1907      April 1907