Alice Hawkins and Votes for Women

**One hundred years since Representation of the people Act gave some women and all men the right to vote.**

Alice was born in 1863 in Stafford of a working class background, Alice left school at thirteen to spend her working life as a shoe machinist, in the ‘boot and shoes’.

From her early teens Alice realised that the working conditions and pay for women in industry were inferior to that of their male colleagues and so began a lifetime work of participation in the boot and shoe trade union to try to improve this. Alice was lucky in her early twenties, for she joined the Equity Shoe factory which had been newly formed as a worker’s co-operative. The Equity actively encouraged workers to participate in political organisations and allowed time off when necessary.

But by the early 1900s Alice became increasing disillusioned with what could be achieved through the trade union movement, as the main focus lay in improving the conditions for male workers who were seen as the ‘breadwinners’ of the family.

Change came for Alice in February 1907 when she attended her first meeting of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Hyde Park, followed by a march the same day to the House of Commons to demand the vote for women. That afternoon mounted police charged down the women and Alice was arrested and imprisoned for the first time in her life. In the following seven years she was to be arrested and jailed a total of five times, with terms of imprisonment in Leicester and Holloway jails.

The suffragette activity continued up to 1914 when the Great War broke out. The call came from the national leaders to cease all militant activities and support the nation through the War.

And so ended Alice’s time as a suffragette. Never one to speak publicly of her achievements, she continued after the war to support the local trade union and the labour movement up to the time of her death in 1946, at the age of eighty-three.



**Questions:**

1. How old was Alice when she left school to work as a shoe machinist in the ‘boot and shoes’?
2. Which company did Alice work for, which actively encouraged workers to participate in political organisations?
3. Which movement in the 1900s had its main focus on improving the conditions for male workers?
4. What month and year did Alice march to the House of Commons to demand the vote for women, and which union did Alice attend that inspired this march?
5. Which jails was Alice imprisoned over the period of seven years?
6. What year did suffragette activity cease and why?
7. How old was Alice when she died?
8. What year were some women given the right to vote?