

Thank you very much for inviting me to come along today. So my name is Fran Baseby, and I am the Research Services Manager at the Central Research Collections. My team provides access to our collections across multiple sites, including the Central Research Collections, School of Scottish Studies Archives and also St. Cecilia's Hall and Museum. My background is in textiles and craft. I've worked in galleries, and my PhD was on Dovecot Tapestry Studio.

So today I'm going to talk about something that's kind of adjacent to those interests, about an item that came into our collections at the university relatively recently just a few years ago, and talk a little bit about it in the context of the theme of the exhibition and the, I think that this idea of voices is obviously, it's always going to be an interesting topic. Women's voices in particular have often been marginalised in histories. The voices of people of colour, the voices of queer or gender nonconforming individuals as well. One of the really interesting things about this object, and I'm going to talk a little bit in a moment, about, a little bit of the silence around it in terms of its provenance. I'm just going to change my slides here. A lot of us are obviously familiar with the Suffragette movement in the UK. Women's Suffrage groups had really gotten started in the 1860s. In 1897 you had the founding of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies by Millicent Fawcett. Which was seen, very much as too much for polite society. And in 1903 the Pankhurst family created the Women's Social and Political Union, the WSPU. And this was a much more militant organisation, a proactive organisation, a confrontational organisation as well. We have other items in the collections that are relevant for any kind of investigation into women's suffrage in the UK. We have this letter here from Christabel Pankhurst, Emmaline Pankhurst's daughter, and it's a letter to a lady called Mrs. Morrow. It's actually asking for funds, so the letter talks about the terrible experiences of women that are in prison, and also about.... She says, at one point, "we can count upon you to give what you can ". So she's really encouraging people to donate money to the cause to support them. This is a really good example of how, in our archives and collections, we have very explicit voices and voices of named individuals captured through this slightly ephemeral documents like letters. And this letter was actually just found inside a book about the Suffragette movement that we acquired in the collection. And the use of by the Suffragettes of dress and textile and jewellery has been really heavily investigated over the years, and researched a lot. This is a really great quote from Eileen Wheeler about "In using silk and velvet associated with the drawing room and working in embroidery and applique associated with the feminine, they succeeded in using amateur craft identified with a chaste and domestic femininity to mount a political challenge that sought short term political gain and long term social change". I think that's a really great how in just one sentence we are kind of brought together so the key idea behind using dress and textiles in particular. And if we think about Suffragette's jewellery, in particular, it was really mass produced. It was created at all sorts of price points as well, so it was pretty mass produced in a way that could be affordable to women, but it was also homemade. And then you also had much more specialist items made by skilled craftspeople as well. The three-colour colour scheme of purple, sort of white ivory, and green was devised by Pethick Lawrence, who was the honorary treasurer of the WSPU. And this became that really emblematic colour scheme and actually if you go into Google now and search Suffragette jewellery you will find endless websites today who sell Suffragette colourful jewellery in particular. And I'm talking about jewellery because when I get to talk about the belt, although it is about, it's got a lot of enamel on it and it's got gilt metal work on it as well. It's got a lot in common. But one of the things that I find really interesting about this though, is that one of the arguments that the WSPU made was that earlier people fighting for Suffrage hadn't been militant enough, they

hadn't been forceful enough, and you get this really interesting contrast in objects, and that's why I've selected these two, to show you before I move on to the belt.

So here we have a really, really beautiful, and I would expect quite expensive necklace that's in the collection of the National Museum of Scotland. It contains white enamel, amethyst, obviously purple and green enamel as well. And it was created by Arthur and Georgie Gaskin. So this is a really, a statement piece, and expensive piece, and also something that is not necessarily going to be suitable form if you think about working class women going to work, this is not the thing that they might be wearing, but if you think about more sort of Upper Middle Class ladies then thus is the kind of thing they might wear. But it shows this idea of using jewellery to directly represent what it is that you stand for. And one researcher has connected this back to, in fact, Wendy Parkins she's connected it back, right back to the French Revolution where people used their dress and their clothes to indicate their political allegiance at the time. So it's not a new idea, but it's certainly brought together in a really, it's been thought out, planned, and then sort of put into action. And it becomes really, really effective. It's also effective because women can do these things themselves. They can make these things themselves, basic kind of like sewing skills, or embroidery skills, or craft skills were something that many many women had access to. They had the skills to do knitting, for example, and so, and it was something that, in the terms of making things yourself, was quite accessible for people. But, I mentioned that to me this brings up a real contrast between things, and so this is a very beautiful necklace, quite delicate, I'd expect relatively expensive as well and on the right we have this embroidered panel, and on the right... we have this embroidered panel. Now the panel in itself and its presentation is really, very attractive. It's quite pretty, it's got the lovely border on it and this is on display at the Museum of London, but this was embroidered in Holloway prison, by women who were kept in Holloway Prison, who were imprisoned there. And it in some ways it makes it quite easy for us to forget the really violent experiences that women had when they were imprisoned during the Suffragette movement. The forceful feeding, the torture that they endured, and I think it's really important that when we work with heritage collections it's very easy sometimes to become so sidetracked by the visual beauty of something that we don't really necessarily think about what it's telling us. So this embroidery panel has a really really strong message, and it's a message of perseverance and survival, and also coming together, women coming together and working together.

So Elizabeth Goring has done quite a bit of research on suffrage and jewellery, and she and I had a chat last year about the belt in particular. And it really is, she talks in particular about how, jewellery, they might seem frivolous. And I think to a lot of particularly in politics men, it's important for this way to be protesting and defining your allegiance to the cause. But actually it was serious in its purpose, that it may come across as frivolous, but it wasn't in its intention. I mentioned that with different craft you could adapt the colour to kind of the craft that you could do at home. So this is a beaded necklace and this method of creating jewellery using a bead loom was incredibly popular at the time. And this one from 1909, again it's in the Museum of London, and this is something that somebody had and made for themselves. So that takes me onto the Suffragette belt then, and one of the things that Elizabeth and I discussed when we were talking about this belt was its provenance. And it has very vague provenance, and this is what I mean about how some of these stories and voices can be silenced in a lot of ways. So we acquired this through a, actually from a book dealer, and they weren't able to provide the name of who may have had it at a time, it was acquired from the family based in Scotland but they didn't know if it had been in their family back in the early

twentieth century, So it's already got a bit of a vague provenance. It's an incredibly beautiful item, so here we have the clasp. It is a gilt medal clasp, and it's had these white and purple enamel leaves and motifs added onto it. Here you can see along the belt itself that it's had more added on, these little green enamel leaves. And instantly you see these colour and you think that is the colours of the Suffragette movement. And as Liz said though, as Elizabeth Goring said, if you don't have a clear provenance, then a lot of this is kind of a suggestion. So we think it was probably, it's certainly got the right motifs from the right time period for the Suffragette because.

You can see where the white thread shows up, that is where repairs have been done not by us but by the family, over the years that they've made repairs and it's obviously a really well loved and used item. So there are further repairs that we can see on the back. Now with this kind of item we would've expected... Sorry the cat has come to say hello. We would have expected that this band that's on the other side of the belt would be hiding the original stitchwork to add on those enamel pieces, but in this case, you can see that the repairs have just been stitched right over the top. And I think that, part of me, I suppose one question might be, well what would we acquire this if we don't necessarily if we don't have that solid provenance, what is the purpose of us acquiring this. And I think that there are, there are multiple things that I still think this belt hold a lot of value, even though we don't have a clear provenance and original owner, it's got value in the terms of increasing the kind of presence of women in our collections. It's got value to me in the, inconclusiveness of it. I don't think objects need to have a clear and solid and perfectly defined history to them. I think we want to be able to ask about them and consider them, but I don't think that objects and collections have to be defined so strongly in that way, and I also think it's a really interesting example of an item that's been cared for and kept mended over time as well, and that the mending itself is visible. So, we still refer to it as the Suffragette belt. I think it's very, very likely that it was created to reflect the Suffragette movement. It's absolutely the kind of thing that people would be doing. But the actual person who wore it, the person who was supporting the women's suffrage is sort of invisible and unknown to us, but to me that is part of what's really special about collection. Is that, there are lots of opportunities, where we do have those voices, but there are also opportunities, where those voices are hidden. And even if we don't know the name of this woman, the fact that we have the belt to me, is enabling her to and still have a presence as well move forward. She still has a presence, and she still has a voice to some extent, even if we're not able to ascribe it individually to her. So thank you that was a quick overview of that item in the collection. It is available to see and it's also available to the look at online.