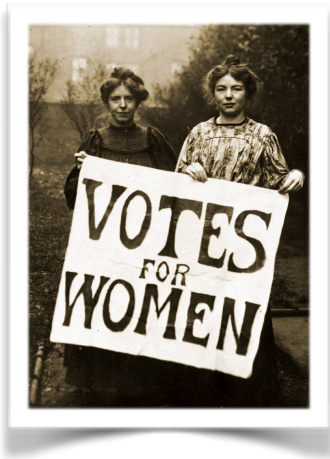


Electrifying Women 5 Key Themes: Further Information

ACTIVISM



The founding of the [Women's Engineering Society \(WES\) in 1919](#) was rooted in the [women's suffrage movement](#), which had been campaigning for women's right to vote since the 1880s. For women to be liberated they needed to be able to be politically active and have the right to work in whatever career they wanted to.

There was still much work to be done; when WES was founded in 1919, [it would still be 9 years until the entire adult population could vote](#). Although [The Sex Disqualification \(Removal\) Act \(1919\) meant women could work as professionals](#), the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act (1919) prevented women working in factories, which was a problem for women engineers.

Many of the founders and early members of WES had suffragist links. [Lady Katharine Parsons](#) was connected to the conservative suffragist movement and WES's first secretary [Caroline Haslett](#) had joined in suffragette activities with her mother, to her father's disapproval.

WES's activism led to the overturning of an International Labour Convention on women working alone in factories after hours, a campaign led by [Margaret Partridge](#), after her employee [Beatrice Shilling](#) was found working at night.

No where is the activism at the heart of WES more apparent than in founder [Laura Annie Willson \(1877-1942\)](#), an engineer, suffragette and house-builder.

She came from a humble background and started work in a textile factory in Halifax when she was only 10 years old. Suffragette activities in her early life led to her being arrested twice and once imprisoned. After World War One, she was awarded an MBE for her services to munitions work.

Willson came from a very different background from the other WES founders, but they were all united in their belief in women's rights and they were all prepared to fight to obtain them.

