

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain

This groundbreaking history of Victorian politics, feminism and parliamentary reform challenges traditional assumptions about the development of British democracy and the struggle for women's rights, and demonstrates how political activity has been shaped by changes in the history of masculinity. From the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain's all-male parliament began to transform the legal position of women as it reformed laws that had upheld male authority for centuries. To explain these revolutionary changes, Ben Griffin looks beyond the actions of the women's movement alone and shows how the behaviour and ideologies of male politicians were fundamentally shaped by their gender. He argues that changes to women's rights were the result not simply of changing ideas about women but also of changing beliefs about masculinity, religion and the nature of the constitution, and, in doing so, demonstrates how gender inequality can be created and reproduced by the state.

BEN GRIFFIN is a Fellow and lecturer in History at Girton College, University of Cambridge. His doctoral thesis was awarded the Prince Consort and Thirlwall Prize, and the Seeley Historical Medal, in 2005, and his previous publications include *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (2009), co-edited with Lucy Delap and Abi Wills.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture
and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture
and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain

*Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle
for Women's Rights*

Ben Griffin



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by

Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107015074

© Ben Griffin 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Griffin, Ben.

The politics of gender in Victorian Britain : masculinity, political culture and the struggle for women's rights / Ben Griffin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01507-4 (Hardback)

1. Women's rights--Great Britain--History. 2. Masculinity--Great Britain--History. 3. Feminism--Great Britain--History. 4. Great Britain--Politics and government--1837--1901. I. Title.

HQ1236.5.G7G75 2012

305.420941--dc23

2011030489

ISBN 978-1-107-01507-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture
and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For my parents, David and Meegan, for all their
love and support.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture
and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting than the story of that emancipation itself. An amusing book might be made of it if some young student at Girton or Newnham would collect examples and deduce a theory, – but she would need thick gloves on her hands, and bars to protect her of solid gold.

Virginia Woolf, *A room of one's own*.

Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
Part I Introduction	1
1 ‘Feminism’ and the history of women’s rights	3
The legal position of women	9
‘Feminism’ and ‘anti-feminism’	14
Beyond separate spheres: an alternative framework	21
A note on sources	33
Part II Masculinity and the struggle for women’s rights	35
2 The domestic ideology of Victorian patriarchy	37
The creation of Victorian domestic ideology	38
The religious basis of Victorian patriarchy	51
The political thought of John Stuart Mill in context	59
The collapse of Victorian domestic ideology	63
3 Class, liberalism and the erosion of Victorian domestic ideology	65
Domestic violence in the public sphere	68
Class, moral reform and Liberal politics	73
Domestic authority and property rights among the wealthy	82
Drafting the Married Women’s Property Act	87
The failure of the 1870 settlement	93
The failure of class legislation: the 1886 Guardianship of Infants Act	96
Sexual purity and late Victorian masculinity	99
Conclusion	109
4 Religious change and the transformation of domestic ideology	111
Textual criticism and the interpretation of scripture	113
The historical turn and biblical criticism	115
Biblical criticism and support for women’s rights	120
The ethical revolt, F. D. Maurice and scripture	122
Incarnationalism and the reformation of masculinity	126
Conclusion	134
	vii

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture
 and the Struggle for Women's Rights
 Ben Griffin
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

viii	Contents	
5	The politics of paternity	137
	The Infants Act	138
	The changing status of mothers	140
	Guardianship and religious education	143
	Defining the best interests of a child	150
	Paternity and parliamentary identity politics	159
	Conclusion	162
6	Performing masculinities in the House of Commons	164
	In search of upper-class masculinities	168
	The politics of complicity	175
	Anxious masculinities and the politics of complicity	184
	Performing parliamentary masculinities	188
	Women in parliament	196
	Conclusion	200
	Part III Political culture and the struggle for women's rights	201
7	Classes, interests and parliamentary reform	203
	The theory of class representation	204
	Women's suffrage as class representation	215
8	The instability of the 1867 settlement, the secret ballot and women's suffrage	229
	Making sense of the Second Reform Act	229
	The secret ballot, electoral violence and women's suffrage	234
	The end of group representation and the rise of the individual voter	244
	Conclusion	249
9	Redefining 'fitness': from the educated voter to household suffrage	250
	Biological determinism and anti-suffragism	251
	Defining political education	253
	Gendering political education	261
	The return of household suffrage	268
	Women's suffrage as household suffrage	270
	Household suffrage, women's suffrage and the Third Reform Act	276
	Conclusion	281
10	The road to democracy, 1885–1906	283
	Residence and rating	287
	Residence, plural voting and the representation of localities	290
	Interests and communities	298
	Redefining fitness	300
	The transformation of Conservatism	302
	The contradictions of anti-suffragism	305
11	Conclusion	309
	Fin de siècle	313
	<i>Appendix</i>	320
	<i>Select bibliography</i>	323
	<i>Index</i>	340

Tables

1	Distribution of votes on women’s rights, 1868–82	<i>page</i> 16
2	Party affiliations of MPs voting on women’s rights, 1868–82	26
3	Changes in MPs’ voting patterns on women’s suffrage bills, 1870–9	240

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

This book has been an unusually long time in gestation, and in the course of writing it I have accumulated a large number of personal and intellectual debts. These begin with my debt to the three exceptional teachers who first kindled my interest in history at school: Jonathan Davies, Ed Milton and Philip Lambie. Since I began my career at Cambridge I have much appreciated Peter Clarke's encouragement, and I am also very grateful to Jonathan Riley-Smith for a characteristically generous gesture of support in the early days. I have particularly enjoyed discussing some of the ideas in this book with Lucy Delap, Abi Wills, Deborah Thom, Julia Laite, Siân Pooley and Christina de Bellaigue, all of whom have taught me a lot about gender history. Eugenio Biagini, Peter Mandler and Martin Daunton provided valuable comments on earlier drafts of parts of the book, while Cambridge University Press's anonymous readers made helpful comments that have much improved a later version of the text. My Ph.D. examiners, Jonathan Parry and John Tosh, not only forced me to refine my ideas, but also helped to guide me towards new lines of inquiry that have proved most important. Jon's advice and encouragement have been particularly important to someone who came to political history relatively late in the day. Gillian Sutherland read the manuscript in its entirety and once more proved herself to be not only the most rigorous critic that one could wish for, but also the most generous. Andrew Jones has placed me in his debt by compiling the index with an attention to detail that has added significantly to the quality of the book. Throughout my research career, and often from the other side of the world, Cam Grey has been an intellectual brother in arms, constantly reminding me why I wanted to become a historian in the first place. My most important academic debt is to Simon Szreter, who has been a model supervisor and friend. Without him this book would never have been written.

I am extremely fortunate to have been elected to a research fellowship and then a college lectureship at Girton College. I am immensely

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

xi

grateful to the Mistress, Fellows and staff for creating the most stimulating and supportive environment for teaching and research that one could wish for. The college is one of the greatest achievements of the nineteenth-century women's movement and my work has benefited enormously from having been conducted under the critical gaze of Emily Davies, Barbara Bodichon and the other extraordinary pioneers whose portraits line the walls. I also wish to thank the Master and Fellows of Fitzwilliam College for appointing me to a college lectureship during the writing of this book. At these institutions I have been very lucky to benefit from the wisdom, patience and friendship of Alastair Reid, Hazel Mills, Samantha Williams and Rosemary Horrox. More recently, my connection with another great Cambridge institution, Cambridge University Press, has been facilitated by Michael Watson, who has been a tremendously supportive editor.

I would like to extend my thanks to all of the librarians and archivists who have made this book possible, especially at the University Library and the Squire Law Library in Cambridge. Special thanks are due to Frances Gandy, Jenny Blackhurst, Kate Perry and Hannah Westall at the Girton College library and archive. I am particularly grateful to those who have granted permission to quote from archival material: the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the Harcourt family, Hereford County Record Office, the House of Lords Record Office, Lambeth Palace Library and Warwickshire County Record Office. I should also like to thank Susan Woodall for granting me access to William Woodall's papers.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council, St John's College, Cambridge, and the Cambridge Centre for Research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences all provided funding for research that went into this book, for which I wish to record my gratitude. I also wish to thank the editors of the *Historical Journal* for permission to reproduce parts of Chapter 3 that previously appeared as 'Class, gender and Liberalism in parliament, 1868–1882: the case of the Married Women's Property Acts', *Historical Journal* 46 (2003), pp. 59–87.

While writing about the relationship between men and their families I have been continually reminded of how grateful I am to my own family. I owe more to my wife, Sally Brierley, than I can say; not least because without her love and support writing this book would have been nowhere near as much fun. My sister Laura has been the ideal non-specialist reader, always ready to discuss ideas and to tell me when I'm barking up the wrong tree. This book is dedicated to my parents with love. As a gesture of recognition for all that they have done for me, it is wholly inadequate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01507-4 - The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture
and the Struggle for Women's Rights

Ben Griffin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii Acknowledgements

Excerpt from *A room of one's own* by Virginia Woolf reproduced by permission of the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf. In the USA copyright 1929 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Copyright © renewed 1957 by Leonard Woolf. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.