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.
The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain

Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women’s Rights

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