



IN FOCUS: Catherine Pine

This exhibition was held at the Florence Nightingale Museum in 2026, and focused on Catherine Pine, the personal nurse of suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst.

Pine's long lost suffragette medal was displayed at this exhibition for the first time in its history.





Welcome to the Florence Nightingale Museum's 'In Focus' series of short exhibitions. This series aims to shine a light on lesser-known figures who have made a significant contribution to nursing and the medical world.

In this instalment, we look at Catherine Pine. Whilst Pine herself is relatively unknown, the women that she cared for were infamous in Britain in the early twentieth century – the suffragettes. Pine cared for the suffragettes during their most active years before the First World War, while they were fighting for women's right to vote in political elections.

The name 'suffragette' comes from the suffrage movement, which started in the 1860s in the United Kingdom. At that time the only people who could vote were middle- and upper-class men who owned property, leaving all women, and most men, without representation. A small group of women and sympathetic men began to discuss the changes they thought were needed, and they made a start with a petition to parliament, which was mostly ignored.

The National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS) was founded to make a more organised effort to win the right to vote. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) led by Millicent Fawcett, tried peaceful methods like protest marches. By the early 20th century some women were getting frustrated with the lack of progress and formed a new organisation called the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

The WSPU chose more radical and militant ways to campaign, and some were arrested for causing criminal damage and public nuisance, and later more serious offences such as arson. Even in prison they continued to protest through hunger strikes. The government responded by ordering force feeding, so the suffragettes needed sympathetic women to help them recover their health.

Catherine Pine was one of these sympathetic women. As a member of the WSPU, Pine used her skills as a nurse to aid those who were in the vicious cycle of the hunger strikes, without being actively involved in militant actions herself.



Early Life

Catherine Emily Pine was born on the 7th May 1864, in Maidstone, Kent. She was one of the five daughters of Annie and Robert Pine. Robert was a corn merchant and farmer. The family were wealthy enough to employ a cook, a housemaid and a governess for the children while they were young, which was usual for middle-class families of the time.

There is little known about Pine's life before she became a nurse in her thirties. She was educated until the age of sixteen. It was rare to have such an in depth education as a girl during this time. Census records show that she did not have an occupation at the age of 26.

Nurse Pine

After her mother's death, Catherine Pine left her family home in Trottiscliffe, Kent, at the age of 31. She moved to London, where she entered St Bartholomew's Hospital as a probationer nurse – later known as a trainee nurse. This began her lifelong commitment to healthcare.

Her training records describe her as 'punctual, very kind and attentive, very patient and even tempered, obedient, accurate, and clean and neat in person and work'. Her colleagues found her very sensible and expected her to be a very good nurse.

Pine failed her first-year examinations, but she passed them in October 1895 and was awarded her certificate in October 1896. She was appointed staff nurse the following year. Pine continued her career at St Bartholomew's Hospital, and was appointed House Sister to oversee the Nurse's Home in 1902.

In 1907, Pine and a fellow St Bartholomew's nurse, Gertrude Townend, opened a nursing home in Notting Hill, London. The British Journal of Nursing reported on the opening of the new nursing home, praising its high ceilings, large windows, tasteful yet practical decoration and furniture, and the light and airy environment. The location was convenient, with a tube station very close by. The surrounding area offered peaceful green spaces and little traffic,



making the place very suitable for the recovery of people suffering 'the pandemonium created by our uncontrolled motor traffic in the Cavendish Square'. In 1913, Pine and Townend tried out a shorter, 8-hour workday for nurses at the Pembridge Gardens Home. The British Journal of Nursing reported on the success. The health of the nursing staff improved, and the patients appreciated the improved attention and energy of their nurses. The article highlighted the increased staffing costs but reported that 'Miss Townend and Miss Pine are prepared to pay from a sense of duty.'

Pine retained a close interest in St Bartholomew's Hospital and the changes that were occurring there. In a strongly opinionated letter to the editor of The Standard in July 1910, she raised concerns over the appointment of a new matron, who had only received two years of training at the London Hospital, much less than the three-year training of nurses at St Bartholomew's Hospital.

In 1902 Pine became one of the earliest members of the Society for the State Registration of Nurses, which campaigned for training and registration for nurses. The Nurses Registration Act finally came into effect in 1919.



Catherine Pine with a group of nurses, 1905. Courtesy of Barts Health NHS Trust Archives



Women's Suffrage & The Suffragettes

The formal campaign for women's suffrage, or women's right to vote, in Britain, began as early as the 1860s when a small group of women started to debate political matters and women's suffrage. John Stewart Mill, Member of Parliament for Westminster, was one of the few men sympathetic to their ideas, and he presented the first petition for women's suffrage to parliament.

Founded in 1897, The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies was led by Millicent Fawcett. The group used peaceful methods to further their aims and became known as the 'suffragists' but gained little real progress. In 1903 some frustrated members formed a splinter group, the Women's Social and Political Union, led by Emmeline Pankhurst. They deployed more militant campaign methods. They became known as the 'suffragettes', with their slogan 'Deeds, not words' echoing their more forceful approach. While they also utilised non-violent means of campaigning, over a thousand suffragettes were imprisoned for violent protests, including smashing windows, bombing and arson attacks on public property.

In 1918 the Representation of the People Act was passed extending the vote to all men over the age of 21, and to women over 30 who met property ownership requirements. This marked the end of the main campaigns for suffrage. However, many women still could not vote until the Equal Franchise Act was passed in 1928. This allowed all men and women over 21 to vote, on equal terms. In 1969, the age limit was reduced to 18.

Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928)

Co-founder of the WSPU and widely credited as the face of the votes for women movement, although her militant tactics and their effectiveness are debated by scholars today.

Dame Christabel Pankhurst (1880-1958)

Political activist and co-founder of the WSPU alongside her mother, Emmeline Pankhurst.



Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929)

Sister of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the first female doctor in the UK. Fawcett set up the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), later known as the Suffragists, who chose a peaceful approach to protest.

Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960)

Feminist, socialist writer and core member of the WSPU with her mother. Sylvia fought for universal suffrage and continued to campaign long after the first women had the right to vote.

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Catherine Pine's Involvement in the Suffragette Movement

It is believed that by 1908, Pine was a member of the WSPU. While committed to the cause, Pine never took part in any militant action, refusing to break the law. Her involvement was mostly through donations of money and using her nursing skills to aid other members.

Fundraising was an essential element of the WSPU's work, as money was needed to fund their campaign. The January 1914 edition of *The Suffragette* shows Pine donating to their annual self-denial fund, which asked women to deny themselves luxuries and even necessities for a week to save money to donate to the WSPU.



The Cat and Mouse Act

The Suffragettes were regularly imprisoned for their militant tactics. Many continued their protests from inside prison, engaging in hunger, thirst and even sleep strikes.

In response, the government authorised the use of force feeding, a painful and traumatising procedure. A rubber tube was forcibly inserted into the woman's mouth or nose, through which a mixture of liquid foods was poured directly into her stomach. Force feeding carried the risk of serious harm, including bleeding, vomiting, choking, and even death in severe cases.

These drastic measures resulted in public outrage across the country, forcing the government to introduce The Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act in April 1913. The 'Cat and Mouse Act', as it was more commonly known, allowed suffragettes suffering from the ill effects of their strikes to be temporarily released from prison on licence, to recover. Once the women's temporary leave expired, they were expected to return to prison to finish the remainder of their sentence. In most cases the women did not voluntarily return. With the offending suffragettes at large, a cat-and-mouse chase ensued between the police and the women as they sought to re-arrest them.

9 Pembridge Gardens: A Refuge for Suffragettes

The nursing home at 9 Pembridge Gardens was frequently used as a refuge for suffragettes recuperating from the effects of their hunger strikes, following their release from prison under the 'Cat and Mouse Act'. Among the doctors tending to the sick were Dr Flora Murray, a WSPU member and Dr Herbert Mills, husband of fellow member Ernestine Mills.

Notable suffragette patients include Kitty Marion and Mary Richardson. Marion, actress-turned arsonist and bomber, was force fed over two hundred times while imprisoned. She fondly recalled her experience of being looked after by 'Piney' on many occasions. Richardson slashed Velazquez's *The Rokeby Venus* in The National Gallery, to protest the government's abuse of Mrs Pankhurst in 1914.



Back in 1911, Pine and the home participated in a boycott of the census. Suffrage organisations chose this way to protest as they believed that if the government refused to recognise women as citizens worthy of the vote, women should refuse to provide information for the government. Nurse Pine and others at Pembridge Gardens took part, as did many women across the country. The census form for 9 Pembridge Gardens shows the details of only four people and in Pine's writing, alongside her signature, it says:

"Above names at request. For the rest no votes no information"

The Hunger Strike Medal

The WSPU awarded military-style medals to members who engaged in hunger strikes during imprisonments. The medals were designed by Sylvia Pankhurst. From a silver bar inscribed with the phrase 'For Valour' hung a ribbon in the purple, white and green colours of the suffragettes. A silver coin bearing the inscription 'Hunger Strike' hung from the bottom of the ribbon. On the reverse of the coin, the recipients name would also be inscribed. Bars featuring individual dates of hunger strikes were also added to the ribbon.

There are less than one hundred medals known to have been awarded. One medal was encased in the plinth of Emmeline Pankhurst's statue.

Catherine Pine is the only known person to receive such a medal despite not taking part in the hunger strikes herself. Her medal was awarded for her nursing services to Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst following their hunger strikes. Pine's medal differs from others, as the top bar says



Courtesy of
<http://nursepinemedal.com>



'For Duty' and the silver coin is inscribed 'Nurse to Mrs Pankhurst' and each bar represents a key date she cared for members of the Pankhurst family.

Dr Flora Murray CBE (1869-1923)

Scottish medical pioneer and WSPU member, Dr Murray is notable for having established the Women's Hospital Corps with her partner Dr Louisa Garrett Anderson CBE at the beginning of World War I. Together they ran a hospital for wounded soldiers, staffed entirely by women.



Catherine Pine seated with a cat. Circa 1902-1907. Courtesy of Barts Health NHS Trust Archives



Nurse Pine and Emmeline Pankhurst: The Beginning of a Long Friendship

Nurse Pine and Pankhurst's friendship can be traced back to 1909, when Pankhurst's son Henry was seriously ill, and was taken to Pembridge Gardens to be examined by Dr Mills. To earn money to pay for his medical care, Pankhurst sailed to the United States on a lecture tour, leaving her son in the care of Dr Mills, Nurse Pine and Nurse Townend. Not long after her return, Henry died at the age of twenty in 1910. By this time the nursing home was providing care for suffragettes recuperating on release from prison.

In March 1913, Sylvia Pankhurst was released from prison to Pine's care. Sylvia had been force fed in prison, following her hunger strike. Pine's care for Sylvia is commemorated on the first bar of Pine's suffragette medal.

Pine then took responsibility for nursing Emmeline Pankhurst. Hunger striking had taken a severe toll on her health and she needed good care and a quiet space to recover. Although she was initially cared for at Pembridge Gardens, the constant presence of the press outside the home forced Pankhurst to relocate several times and even escape abroad. Pine travelled with her each time. The other ten bars on the medal all reflect times when Pankhurst was released from prison to Pine's care.

The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 brought a change in priorities, as a common threat emerged. On 13th August 1914, Pankhurst announced the end of the militant campaign in a WSPU letter.

Both during and after the war, Pine remained with Pankhurst. She accompanied Pankhurst on many of her travels during this time, including to the United States and Paris. We get a rare glimpse into their friendship when another friend noted during their visit that Pine appeared to be the most amusing person, making Pankhurst laugh a great deal.

Although clearly a friend, Pine's position in the household was somewhere between companion and servant, as shown in the 1919 New York bound passenger list of the Adriatic. The women's names appear next to each other, with Pine's occupation being listed as 'secretary'.



Pankhurst's private letters also reveal how integral Pine was in her private life, detailing her gratitude to "dear old Lady Pine" and reflecting "How lucky I am, to have such a faithful, devoted and useful friend to take care of me and be happy in doing it".

In 1921 they moved to Canada but the relationship between Pine and Pankhurst's daughter, Christabel, soon deteriorated. As a result of Christabel's constant interfering, Pine reached the end of her tether. One day in 1923, the Pankhursts woke up to find Pine gone.

After Pine's departure from Canada, she never saw Emmeline Pankhurst again. They did, however, continue to correspond until a few weeks before Pankhurst's death in 1928. Pine was present both at Emmeline Pankhurst's funeral and at the unveiling of her statue near the Houses of Parliament in 1930.



A police officer attempts to rearrest Emmeline Pankhurst. Pankhurst has partially collapsed onto Dr Flora Murray, while Catherine Pine (centre back) looks furious at her patients' situation. Courtesy of the London Museum.



War Babies and an 'Exile for Love's Sake'

Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, the British Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener called upon volunteers to join the armed forces. As the new recruits left for the front, they left behind thousands of pregnant, unmarried young women. The sudden large number of illegitimate births created a sense of shared responsibility in the British public to welcome and support the children as 'war babies', a patriotic contribution to the war effort.

Emmeline Pankhurst set out to raise funds for a large orphanage for war babies on the outskirts of London. Despite her efforts, she failed to raise enough, and the plan never materialised. Pankhurst adopted four girls herself: Mary Gordon (later Mary Hodgson), Kathleen King, Joan Pembridge and Elizabeth Tudor. Tudor was later adopted by Christabel Pankhurst.

The children lived with Emmeline Pankhurst and Pine, but Pankhurst found it increasingly difficult to fund the children's upbringing. She also had little interest in them and was often away from home, leaving the girls in Pine's care. Pankhurst's daughter Christabel also took an interest in the girls' upbringing, causing tensions between her and Pine. Christabel insisted that Pine apply the Montessori method of liberal childcare and brought in two Montessori trained women to help, but Pine did not agree with this approach. Tensions worsened after the move to Canada in 1921.

The adopted girls rarely had any visitors or went out. Later, Mary Hodgson reported not attending school until she was 13, being educated by a succession of governesses, with Pine giving them a few lessons, making them read and practise writing and drawing.

Pine put her nursing skills to use when the children were unwell. She used her own home remedies and even successfully carried out two tonsil removal operations for Kathleen and Joan at home on the kitchen table.

Pine appeared to have no private life, as her time was taken up by cooking and caring for the children and Pankhurst. She reportedly never went out or had visitors of her own and was usually not included when Pankhurst entertained guests.



In a 1976 interview, Mary Hodgson shared her memories of being raised by Pine. Hogdson recalled 'Auntie Kate' - as they called her - being extremely strict and old fashioned. She described Pine being the central figure in their life, although felt she was looking after them only out of a sense of duty to Pankhurst. Hodgson felt that they were an inconvenience to her, recalling that she was reluctant to comb their hair or supervise them brushing their teeth.

Christabel described Pine as being an 'exile for love's sake' as she longed to leave Canada and return to England, but her loyalty to Pankhurst kept her there for two more years.



Pine's Later Life

The British Journal of Nursing reported on the unveiling of a statue of Emmeline Pankhurst in London in 1930. Pine was present at the ceremony and shared her intention of leaving her suffragette medal to the British College of Nurses after her death. The Journal noted that it would be recognised as an heirloom of imperishable value.

By 1939, Pine had retired from nursing and lived with her widowed sister in Kent. There is little known about her life after she left Canada. In May 1941 she wrote a letter to suffragette Vera Holme, following Holme's appearance in a BBC radio broadcast discussing Elsie Inglis, a Scottish doctor and suffragette.

The warm tone of the letter suggests that Pine knew both Holme and Inglis well. She recalls the 'good old W.S.P.U. days' and the honour it was to carry out Inglis' wishes at the nursing home. Pine seems to have been in good spirits, writing 'I am now 78! able to enjoy life as far as The Old Age Pension allows!!!'. She signs the letter with her name and 'nurse to dear Mrs Pankhurst'.

Two months later, Pine wrote her will, leaving her gramophone and some stock holdings to fellow nurse and suffragette Gertrude Townend.

'My Suffrage books and photographs pertaining to the "Votes for Women" Campaign to the Women's Social and Political Club if they want these. My Suffragette medal to be sent to the History Section of the British College of Nursing from Sister C. E. Pine St. Bart's Hospital London.'

Just two weeks after she wrote her will, Catherine Pine died on the 14th August 1941, at her sister's home in Kent. Her funeral was held the following Monday at 2 o'clock.



The Mystery of Pine's Medal

In 2016 author and historian, Elizabeth Crawford OBE published an article titled 'Suffrage Stories: The Mystery of Nurse Pine's Medal' on her blog 'Woman and Her Sphere'. Crawford came across an article in the British Journal of Nursing in 1942, reporting on Pine's bequest of her 'priceless historic' suffragette medal to the British College of Nurses. Crawford found that the institution had closed in 1956 and while Pine's photographs safely made their way into the collection of the London Museum, all traces of her medal had vanished.

American philosopher and lawyer, Dr Hope Elizabeth May later read this and recalled seeing the medal in a 1990 newspaper article, advertised for sale at an auction. Dr May conducted further research and discovered that the medal had been sold at a later auction in 2008 in London. With the help of the auction house, she traced the buyer but was unable to make contact with them.

The medal once again came up for auction in 2024. Crawford and Dr May began researching the dissolution of the British College of Nurses, to try to construct a legal argument with the aim of stopping the auction. However, the research failed to yield a compelling legal argument. They contacted relevant UK institutions to seek an appropriate buyer for the medal, but none of them had the necessary funds available for the purchase.

Keen to honour Pine's wishes for her medal to be treasured for its historic significance, Dr Hope Elizabeth May acquired the medal in April 2024. The medal is now on display in the UK for the first known time in its history.

As a result of Dr Hope Elizabeth May and Elizabeth Crawford's hard work and tenacity in finding the medal, we are now able to commemorate the life and work of Nurse Catherine Pine by displaying the medal and honouring her final wishes for her medal to be used to educate and inspire.