

# The women's rights movement

## activity

Look at sources 23 and 24 and the information in the text and at the sources and information on page 103. Write what you think Harriet Taylor Mill might have written about the idea of the 'perfect lady'

From about 1850 some educated middle-class women began to argue against the idea that a woman should be a 'perfect lady' (see page 103). They thought all women should be allowed to work, and to have the same legal and voting rights as men.

In 1847 Anne Knight joined with seven Chartist women in Sheffield to form the first 'Female Political Association' to campaign for women to have the vote. In the 1850s Harriet Taylor Mill wrote essays arguing for women's rights. She attacked the view of women as people too special to be allowed to take part in the hurly-burly of the real world:

### SOURCE 23

*What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges . . .*

Harriet Taylor Mill, *Enfranchisement of Women*, 1851

She compared men to slave-owners and women to slaves:

### SOURCE 24

*The real question is whether it is right and expedient [useful] that one-half of the human race should pass through life in an enforced subordination [controlled by] to the other half.*

Harriet Taylor Mill, *Enfranchisement of Women*, 1851

The law said that when a woman married she lost all rights to her own money and property. As a result of women's campaigns, Parliament passed new laws allowing married women to do what they liked with the money they earned (1878), and to keep control of their own property (1882).

Women also campaigned for the right to study for and take exams at universities. They founded women's colleges at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London. In 1866 Elizabeth Garrett Anderson became the first British woman to qualify as a doctor.

In 1865 the first organisation to campaign for women to have the right to vote was formed. The next year 80 MPs voted in favour of women having the vote, but the majority of the Liberal Party, which women hoped would support them, continued to oppose the idea.

In 1897 all the various women's rights societies formed into the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. This was led by Millicent Fawcett, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's sister. From this