

# Women's Suffragettes Community Project

## Character study: **John Stuart Mill**

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*Mill was a philosopher, political economist and social reformer who had a huge impact on 19th century thought.*



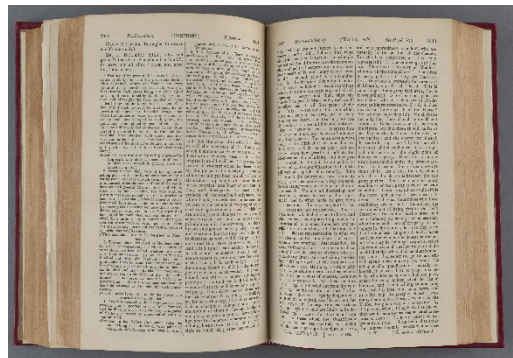
John Stuart Mill was born in London on 20 May 1806. His father was James Mill, a Scottish philosopher who gave his son an intensive education, beginning with the study of Greek at the age of three. His father was friendly with Jeremy Bentham, whose utilitarian philosophy was a huge influence on Mill.

In 1822, Mill was given a job in the examiner's office of the East India Company, where his father also worked. He was employed by the company for more than 30 years, eventually becoming head of his department, but his job allowed him plenty of time for writing.

At the age of 21, Mill suffered a nervous breakdown. He turned to poetry for consolation, particularly that of William Wordsworth. He also began to shape his own philosophical views. In his writing, Mill championed individual liberty against the authority of the state. He believed that an action was right provided it maximised the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

In 1851, Mill married Harriet Taylor. They had been close friends for 20 years but were only able to marry when her first husband died. She was a great influence on his work, particularly in the area of women's rights, of which she was an early advocate. She died in 1858 and the following year he published 'On Liberty', his most famous work, which they had written together and which he dedicated to her.

In 1866 John Stuart Mill presented a petition to the House of Commons of over 1500 signatures which had been collected by the Women's Suffrage Committee in favour for women's suffrage. Mill used the Second Reform Bill as an opportunity to introduce equal voting rights. He tabled an amendment asking for the enfranchisement of all households, regardless of sex. The Amendment was defeated by 194 votes to 73. Despite this initial defeat, John Stuart Mill's amendment sparked a continuous political campaign for female enfranchisement. Bills in favour of women and the vote were presented on an almost annual basis to Parliament from 1870 onwards and by 1928 all women were given the legal power to vote.



In 1865 when he was elected as member of parliament for Westminster. He was considered a radical in parliament because of his support for equality for women, compulsory education, birth control and land reform in Ireland. Mill was not re-elected in the general election of 1868, so he returned to France. He divided his time between Avignon and London, studying and writing. He died on 7 May 1873