

LEARNING

Suffro

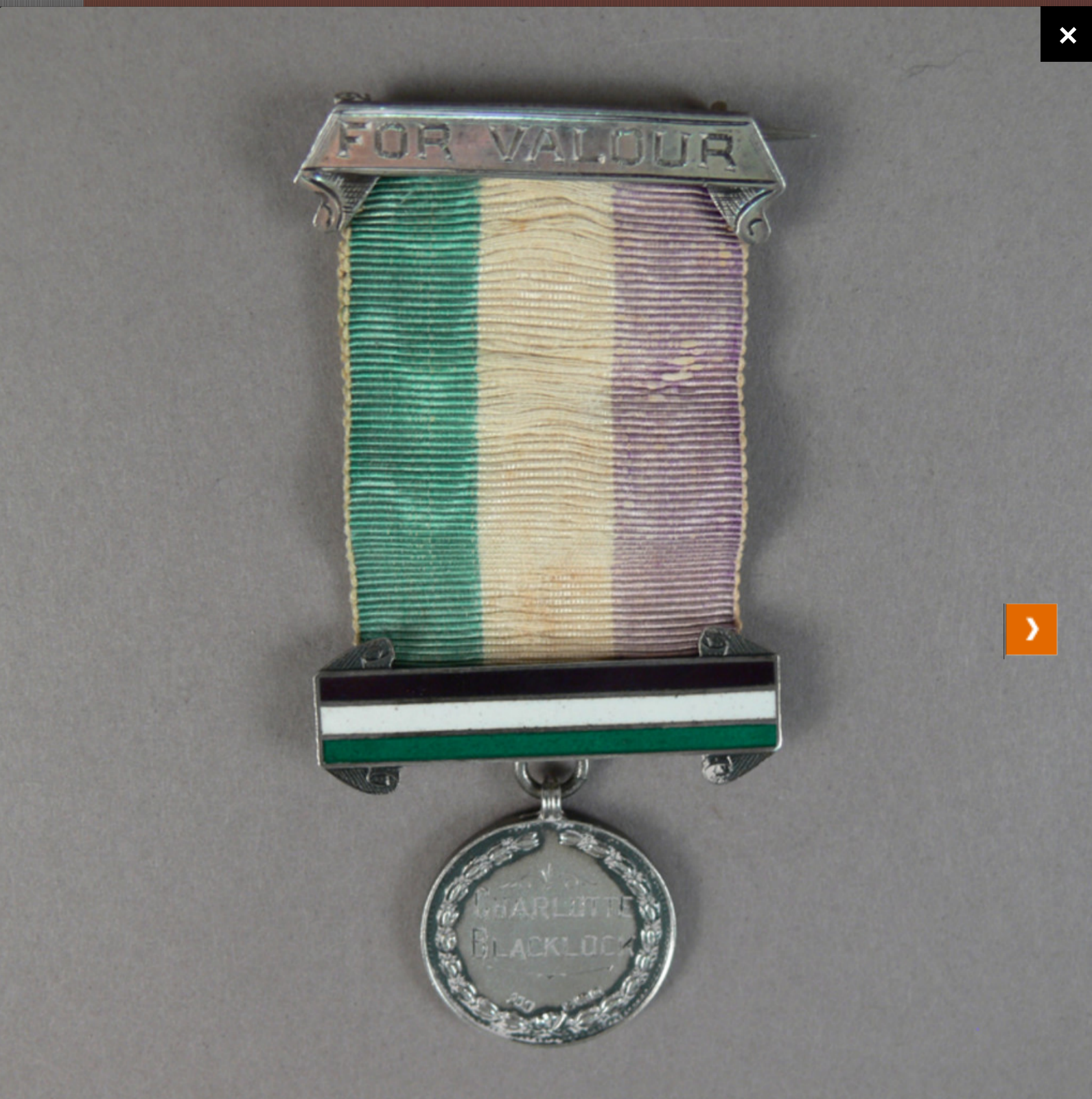
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main forms of operation. Women would deliberately flout the law in order to be sent to prison, drawing attention to themselves and forcing members of parliament to address their concerns over the vote. Initially women who went on hunger strike in prison were immediately released, so that they would not become martyrs to their cause. By the time of Charlotte Blacklock's arrest, however, force feeding had become standard practice. Many women who received this treatment were permanently injured and some died. The WSPU began to award hunger strike medals in 1909 in recognition of the hardship these women were subjected to.

It is estimated that only one hundred hunger strike medals were made and awarded to suffragettes. The fact that the WSPU treated their cause for women's suffrage like a military campaign is reflected in the words 'For Valour', which are inscribed on the ribbon bar of the medal. These words, of course, are the same as those inscribed on the Commonwealth's highest award for military bravery, the Victoria Cross. Most women who were force-fed had the dates of their arrest inscribed on bars on their medal, with Charlotte's arrest date of 1 March 1912 indicated on hers. Only two other hunger strike medals are known to be held in Australian institutions, while there is a handful on public display in the United Kingdom. The medals are a potent symbol of the efforts women in Britain were prepared to go to in order to obtain the vote, and are a valuable addition to the museum's collection of suffragette items.

The museum will have the Charlotte Blacklock hunger strike medal on display during its conference [Women, Leadership and Democracy in Australia](#), being held at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House this December.



Hunger strike medal awarded to suffragette Charlotte Blacklock after her arrest on 1 March 1912. Museum of Australian Democracy collection.

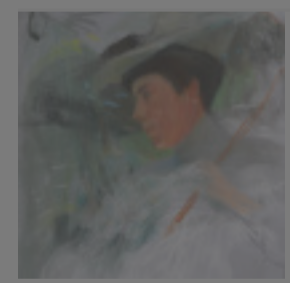


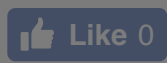
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Wed 7 Sep 2011 by
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Hunger strike medal awarded to suffragette Charlotte Blacklock after her arrest on March 1912. Museum of Australian Democracy collection.





Libby Stewart is the Senior Historian at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, Canberra. She was previously a historian at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. She has curated exhibitions and published in the areas of the representation of women leaders in museums, Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, and Australian nurses in the First World War.



