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Swansea plaque to honour leading suffragette

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A blue plaque is to be unveiled in Swansea to celebrate the life and achievements of a vigorous campaigner for women's suffrage, Emily Phipps.

The plaque, to be installed outside the Orchard Centre on Orchard Street, will mark the place where Phipps used to teach.

Phipps, born in 1865, joined the Women's Freedom League in 1908, outraged by Lloyd George's anti-suffrage behaviour at a meeting she had attended in Swansea. Along with her lifelong friend, Clara Neal, she established a local branch and regularly spoke in public for the cause.

On census night in 1911, she was involved in a suffrage boycott by sleeping overnight with friends in a cave on the Gower coast. In 1918, she was one of 17 women parliamentary candidates in the first General Election where women could stand.

Having won a first class external degree in Latin and Greek from London University, Phipps was appointed head teacher of Swansea Municipal Secondary Girls School, which she succeeded in transforming into one of the best in Wales. She was president of the NFWT (National Federation of Women Teachers) for three successive years and a member of its central council from 1913 to 1937.

Swansea Council will install the blue plaque in the next fortnight, although a day and time have yet to be confirmed.

Cllr Nick Bradley, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, said: "The blue plaque scheme is all about recalling people like Emily Phipps and celebrating the contributions they've made to putting Swansea on the map over the years.

"Phipps was not only a standard bearer for women's rights – she was also a hugely intelligent women and a terrific teacher who placed particular emphasis on achievement for girls.

"All her work about 100 years or so ago helped pave the way for equal rights and this is why she's so richly deserving of recognition here in Swansea."

While still a head teacher, Phipps also studied in the evenings to become a barrister. She was admitted to the bar in 1925 when she was nearly 60, resigned her headship and moved to London to become the standing counsel for the NUWT (National Union of Women Teachers). Phipps died in 1943.

Phipps will be the third recipient of a blue plaque in Swansea since April. Blue plaques have already been put up to recognise Pete Ham, founder of 1970s rock group Badfinger, and Griffith John, a Swansea missionary who was the first man of his kind to step foot in China.

It is hoped another blue plaque will also be unveiled before Christmas to celebrate the life and achievements of William Grove, a pioneer of fuel cell technology.

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