

New acquisitions from the Women Writers Fund help redress imbalance in the State Collection

In December 2022, State Library Victoria celebrates the first year of the Women Writers Fund. The pioneering fund seeks to redress the historical gender bias in the Library's collection by acquiring works by under-represented women writers. It is helping the Library to fill gaps in all genres and to acquire works that have previously been unattainable due to budget limitations. Generous donations made to the fund have ensured the Library can build its collection into an important resource for all Library users seeking to learn about the impact of women's writing in this era and on contemporary society.

The fund was founded by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Helen Sykes. Their generosity enabled the Library to make significant purchases, including first edition copies of works by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM also donated a bound volume of *Votes for Women* for the years 1907–08, the official newspaper of the Women's Social and Political Union, the leading British suffragette organisation of the period. This important newspaper strengthens the Library's holdings of material relating to women's rights in the early part of the 20th century, which also include Vida Goldstein's newspaper *The Woman Voter*, published in Melbourne in the same period.

Anna Welch, Senior Librarian, History of the Book and Arts, tells us about two of the newest acquisitions from the fund.



Women Writers Fund founders. From left: Helen Sykes; Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM; Senior Librarian, History of the Book and Arts, Dr Anna Welch; and Library Board of Victoria President Christine Christian AO looking at items acquired from the Women Writers Fund. Photograph by Jim Arneman

Giacomo Filippo Forèsti da Bergamo, *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus* (On famous women), edited by Albertus de Placentia and Augustinus de Casali Maiori, Ferrara: Lorenzo Rossi, 29 April 1497

In the introduction to his 1361–62 text *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus*, usually rendered in English as ‘On famous women’, the Florentine humanist scholar and poet Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75) proudly defined it as the first work in history solely about women. The popular text, which survives in over 100 manuscript copies, is composed of the biographies of 106 historical and mythological women, ranging from the biblical Eve to Boccaccio’s contemporaries. Boccaccio selected both praiseworthy and ‘bad’ women, to encourage virtue and condemn vice in his audience.

The work exerted a huge influence on other writers – notably, Venetian poet and French court writer Christine de Pizan (1364 – c. 1430). By 1405 she had completed two of her most renowned works and dedicated them to Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy: *Le livre de la cité des dames* (The book of the city of ladies) and *Le trésor de la cité des dames* (The treasure of the city of ladies). Both texts are a passionate defence of the intellectual and moral equality of women.

Another author influenced by Boccaccio, writing in the wake of Christine de Pizan, was the Italian Augustinian monk and scholar Giacomo Filippo



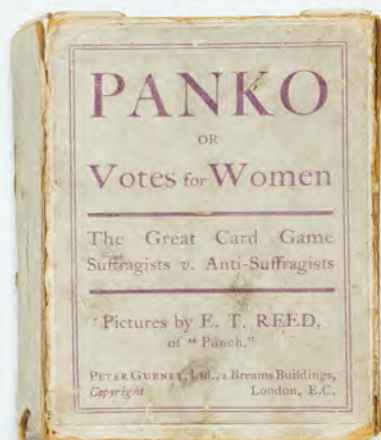
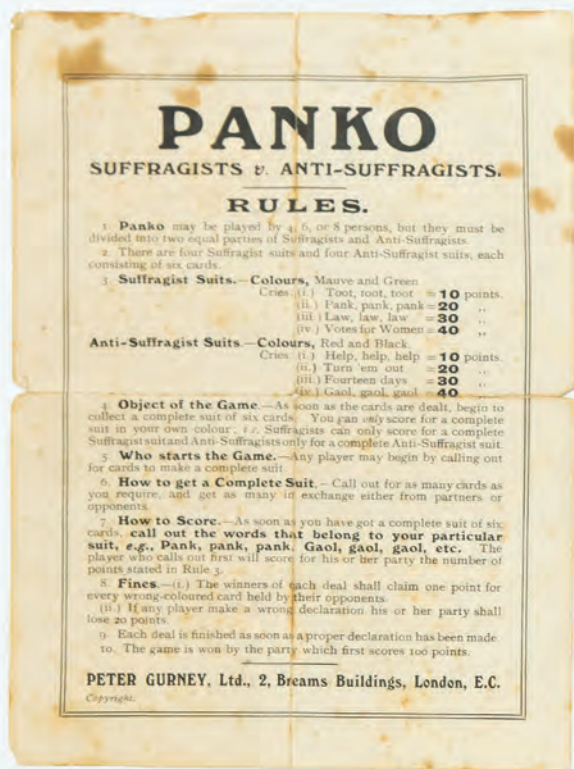
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Forèsti da Bergamo (1434–1520). In 1497 his updated version of Boccaccio's text was published in Ferrara, with the same title. Through the Women Writers Fund and the special support of founding donor Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM, the Library has acquired a first edition copy of this significant text. The work is renowned as one of the most beautifully illustrated early printed books and includes 172 portraits (created from 56 woodblocks) of women, along with their biographies. The last seven women – Bona of Lombardy, Bianca Maria of Milan, Catherine of Imola, Leonora of Ferrara, Bianca Mirandula, Genevra Sforza and Damisella Trivulzia – were Forèsti's contemporaries, and the illustrations of them are thought to be based on actual portraits.

This acquisition underscores the important purpose of the Women Writers Fund in bringing women out of the shadows of history.

Panko; or, Votes for women: the great card game; Suffragists v. Anti-Suffragists, London: Peter Gurney Ltd, c. 1909

Named after the matriarch of the English women's suffrage movement, Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928), this card game is an iconic piece of pro-suffrage propaganda. In 1903, Pankhurst and her supporters founded the Women's Social and Political Union in the Pankhurst family home.



Panko; or, Votes for women: the great card game; Suffragists v. Anti-Suffragists, London: Peter Gurney Ltd, c. 1909

Membership was open only to women, and it was not affiliated with a political party, reflecting the disenchantment these campaigners felt with mainstream politics, which had done little to address the inequalities women suffered. Although women elsewhere in the world had achieved the vote by the early 20th century, Britain lagged behind. Under the slogan 'Votes for women', the union campaigned with radical tactics of civil disobedience and direct action and reclaimed the derisive term 'suffragette' as a proud identity.

The card game *Panko*, printed in the suffragette colours of purple, white and green, was distributed by the union to promote its cause within the home. It was a cleverly light-hearted companion to the union's newspaper, *Votes for Women*, which presented its agenda in a non-threatening fashion. The 48-card deck comprises 8 suits of 6 cards each; 4 suits are Suffragists and 4 are Anti-Suffragists. The aim of the game is to collect a full suit through swapping cards, like gin rummy. The artwork, by ET Reed of *Punch* magazine – caricatures of major political figures, including Pankhurst herself and politicians David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill – lent the game a familiar satirical tone.

Acquired by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM for the Women Writers Fund and including the rarely surviving original sheet of rules, *Panko* is an exciting addition to the Library's representation of this seminal movement for women's rights.



To support the Women Writers Fund, visit www.slv.vic.gov.au/get-involved/support-our-programs/women-writers-fund or contact Philanthropy Manager Judy Buchan (jbuchan@slv.vic.gov.au).