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## Plans for statue of women's rights heroine



*Muriel Matters, suffragette*

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A PIONEER in the fight for women's rights could be immortalised in a statue.

The Muriel Matters Society is launching a major fundraising drive to pay for two identical statues of the suffragette, one in her birthplace in Adelaide, Australia, and one here in Hastings.

Frances Bedford, Adelaide MP, and secretary of The Muriel Matters Society, was in Hastings last week and voiced the idea of a statue to Hastings Mayor, Kim Forward and council leader Jeremy Birch.

She said: "We have just begun discussions about a statue in Adelaide as there is a re-development in the suburb of Bowden, Muriel's birthplace and it is necessary to make sure an appropriate location can be identified.

"The artist with whom we have had preliminary discussions has special rates for more than one pouring, which led to the suggestion of a statue being made available as a gift to Hastings.

"When Hastings Borough Council has had the opportunity to discuss the offer and identify a site with a connection to Muriel, we will take steps to create a budget and begin identifying funding sources. The project is very much in the initial stages but should be achievable within a realistic time frame."

Miss Matters, pictured above, became one of the leading lights in the suffragette movement after moving to Hastings from Adelaide in 1905. In 1908 she became the first woman to speak in the House of Commons after chaining herself to the grille of the Ladies' Gallery. In the time it took the authorities to cut her loose, Miss Matters voiced her disgust at the archaic use of the iron screen to obscure women's view of the floor.

Another high profile stunt was her air balloon trip in 1909. Miss Matters set off on board a blimp emblazoned with the phrase Votes for Women.

She was planning to shower Edward VII with pro-women's rights leaflets but the wind blew her off course so Miss Matters did not get near enough to Buckingham Palace. But news of her daring exploits spread around the world.

Miss Matters stood for election in Hastings in 1924. She ran as the Labour candidate but did not win enough votes to unseat Lord Eustace Percy. Miss Matters remained in Hastings until her death in 1969, aged 92. Two years ago the suffragette was finally recognised in her adopted home town when a blue plaque was unveiled at her former home in Pelham Crescent.

Cllr Birch said: "I'm very excited by the idea of a statue. Frances told us of the idea of a statue and explained that Muriel had addressed outdoor suffragette rallies in Wellington Square and so thought that would be the ideal place for it to stand."

Those with ideas where the statue should be can contact Cllr Birch c/o the Town Hall, Queens Road, TN34 1QR.

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