

Early WILPF Women

Name: Emily Hobhouse

Dates: 9 April 1860 – 8 June 1926

Education: Educated at home by mother & governesses; one term at school in London in 1876.

Profession: Parish work, Campaigning and Anti-militarism.

Honours:

German Red Cross, second class decoration.

Ashes buried at Bloemfontein war memorial

After her father's death Emily was free from the life of dutiful daughter and spent 1895-1898 working in the USA and Mexico among the Cornish miners who had emigrated. Upon her return she was elected to the Women's Industrial Council and produced reports on child labour. In 1900 she participated in a scheme to set up housing for educated working women in London. Emily supported the women's suffrage movement but was not a militant suffragette.



In 1899, as a result of the Boer War, Emily became a member of the South African Conciliation Committee, was honorary secretary of the women's branch and organised protests. She set up a philanthropic committee, the 'South African Women and Children Distress Fund' to aid Boer women and children interned in refugee (concentration) camps.

From December 1900 to May 1901 Emily travelled to South Africa to visit the internment camps in the Orange River and Cape colonies in order to investigate conditions and distribute funds. In June 1901 she published her report, revealing conditions so bad that it prompted the Liberal leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, to ask "When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa". The government of the day responded by sending a committee of inquiry, headed by Millicent Fawcett, to investigate conditions in the camps. Their report published in 1902 made similar recommendations to Emily's the year before.

Seeking to return to South Africa in 1901 Emily was refused entry by the British Government. Emily did return to South Africa after the war, setting up resettlement, rehabilitation and industrial projects.

In December 1914 Emily published an Open Christmas Letter to the Women of Germany and Austria, signed by 101 women. In the letter she acknowledges that modern war falls disproportionately on non-combatants, a message still voiced by WILPF today.

Emily was not included on Reginald McKenna's (Home Secretary) 1915 list of women permitted passports to attend the Women's International Congress in The Hague. After the Hague Congress Emily worked for its International Committee of Women for a Permanent Peace in Amsterdam for several months.

Later in 1915 Emily applied for a visa to Italy, giving an undertaking to the British Government, to not indulge in peace propaganda there. On her return journey, she attended the International Women's Socialist Conference in Berne. She then travelled through Germany and Belgium, including the devastated city of Leuven (Belgium), and investigated conditions for refugees, interned civilians and prisoners of war at Ruhleben.

After the 1919 Armistice Emily set up or participated in various relief organisations:

Co-founding the Swiss Relief Fund to aid children coming from Vienna, then later, from Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

She was Chairwoman of the Russian Babies' Fund set up to send desperately needed supplies to Russia.

In September 1919, she reported back from Vienna and Leipzig on conditions there and set up a relief fund. She was honoured in the city of Leipzig and received the German Red Cross second class decoration.

Emily Hobhouse died from pleurisy on 8 June 1926. A memorial service was held for her in Kensington but her ashes were buried at the Bloemfontein war memorial, South Africa. The war memorial commemorates the 26,000 women and children who died in the Boer War. Only Emily Hobhouse, President Steyn and General de Wet have the honour of being buried there.

Published:

War without Glamour, or, Women's war Experiences Written by Themselves, 1899–1902 (1924).

The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell (1902).

Tant'Alie of Transvaal (A.M. Badenhorst): her diary, 1880–1902 (1923) translation of the diary of Alida M Badenhorst.

Sources and further reading

Harrison, Elaine in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2004-2014; online edition
Oldfield, Sybil (2001). *Women Humanitarians" A Biographical Dictionary of British Women Active Between 1900 and 1950*. London, New York, Continuum

"Death of Miss Emily Hobhouse." *Times* [London, England] 10 June 1926: p. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 13 Sept. 2014

"Women's Congress." *Times* [London, England] 22 Apr. 1915: 7. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 3 Oct. 2014.