

WILPF and The Clapham Film Unit present

These Dangerous Women

A Heritage Lottery Funded project

Mrs Harold W Hills (born Maragret Robertson)
1882-1967

By Pat Pleasance

“Secretary to the original organising committee for the 1915 Congress”

Mrs. Hills was Secretary to the original organising committee for the 1915 Congress at The Hague, and continued to work for the new Women’s International League until 1916. As was the social custom, she is referred to in the WILPF records by her husband’s name, but she was born Margaret Robertson. Her father, Henry Robert Robertson was an artist, working both as a painter and a sculptor. His paintings were in a traditional realistic style and are still selling well at auction to-day.

This was a very talented family. The eldest daughter, Agnes, who married Edward Arber in 1909, was the first woman botanist to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and the first woman to receive the gold medal of the Linnaean Society. Her father’s art lessons enabled her to illustrate her scientific publications herself. Jannette (or Janet) followed in her father’s footsteps and became an artist, designer and sculptor, specialising in portrait painting. Margaret’s younger brother, Donald Struan Robertson, became Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge University.

Margaret herself studied under Dr. de Selincourt, at that time University Lecturer in Modern English Literature at Oxford. 1909 saw the publication of *“Keats Poems Published in 1820”*, edited with introduction and notes by M. Robertson.

The 1911 Census details show that she was Organising Secretary of the Manchester and District Federation of Women’s Suffrage Societies.

At the outbreak of the war in 1914, Margaret married Harold William Hills. He and his brothers and sisters were born in Samoa, and Harold had been sent back to England with his younger brother Frederick, for education as a boarder at a Mission School in London. Perhaps his religious upbringing made him wish to save life rather than kill, and during the war he served in a non-combatant unit, the Royal Army Medical Corps.

A leading group amongst the pacifists who refused to fight in the war was the “No-Conscription Fellowship”, and they objected to the Royal Army Medical Corps on the



grounds that this was part of the war machine. However, others did see this as a way of serving but avoiding actual combat.

The contribution Mrs Hills made to the work of the Women's International League was clearly much appreciated, and the 1915-16 Annual Report refers to this: "Mrs. Harold Hills, who in the first months was particularly helpful in the Literature Department, has been obliged to give up public work temporarily, but we know that she will always be in the movement for liberty and peace...."

She gave birth to her first baby in February 1917: a daughter, Margaret Clara.

