

EMILY HOBHOUSE (1860 - 1926)

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Image from Wikipedia

Emily Hobhouse was born in Liskeard in 1860 and campaigned for better treatment of Civilians in the Second Boer War Concentration Camps at a time when this was frowned upon.

Her main work as a campaigner began when she became secretary of the Women's Branch of the South African Conciliation Committee. Through this she founded a distress fund for South African women and children and set out to the Cape to help those in the camps. Lord Kitchener, as the army commander responsible for the Concentration Camps found out and only allowed her to visit Bloemfontein Concentration Camp.

Nonetheless she did not follow his orders and visited many others, but most of her important work was done in Bloemfontein Camp. It was rife with diseases such as dysentery and typhoid, but she was most distressed by the sufferings of children.

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Hobhouse called for soap to be given but she was told that it was seen as a luxury. Nonetheless she insisted. She also distributed clothes and mattresses to pregnant women who had to lie on the ground. She was disgusted by what she saw as “crass male ignorance, helplessness and muddling.” (1)

When she returned to England she received a backlash from most of the press and Parliament. She did however have supporters such as David Lloyd George. She managed to get Parliament to set up the Fawcett Commission, led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett, to investigate the camps. It confirmed everything she reported but she thought what they concluded was “fairly superficial” (2) as they spent no more than two days at each camp. She then decided to visit Cape Town but was not allowed to leave her ship.

As a result of her work she became an honorary citizen of South Africa and funds were collected from South Africa by Mrs R I Steyn, who was a friend of hers, so that she could buy a house in Cornwall. With the money she brought settled in St. Ives, where she lived until her death in 1926.

In 2018, Emily was nominated by Tehmina Goskar of the Hypatia Trust to feature as a Suffrage Pioneer, and the nomination was accepted. Find out more here: www.suffrage-pioneers.net.

Researched and written by Elizabeth Strange, Curatorial Research Volunteer.
References

(1) Hobhouse Emily, 1902. *The Brunt of War and Where it Fell*. Methuen and Company

(2) <http://zar.co.za/hobhouse.htm>

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