

# HELEN TAYLOR (1831 - 1907)

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Helen Taylor and John Stuart Mill. Image from Wikipedia (Public Domain).

Helen Taylor was born in 1831 and was a feminist activist and a school reformer. She also opposed the Government's anti-Irish policies. She spent the last years of her life in Torquay where she died in 1907.

She was also a campaigner for the reform of Industrial Schools. In 1882 she brought to public notice St. Paul's Industrial School after a series of scandals. The Home Secretary ordered an enquiry which resulted in the school being closed. However, the chairman of the Schools Sub-Committee, Thomas Scrutton, took her to court for her actions. On the fourth day of the hearing she broke down and later paid the plaintiff £1000. Nonetheless the judge Sir Henry Hawkins acknowledged her public spirit and acquitted her from any personal malice. Her actions brought drastic reform of London Industrial Schools.

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She was also active in opposing the Liberal Government's Irish Coercion Policy and was one of the most active supporters of the English branch of the Irish Ladies Land League. She often presided at the meetings in both England and Ireland. She particularly supported the causes of land nationalisation and the taxation of land values. She was a leading member of the Land Reform Union and the League for Taxing Land Values. She represented them in England and Ireland, where she spoke to large audiences of working men.

### Emily Hobhouse

She was a strong supporter of women's suffrage and tried to stand as an MP when women could not even vote. In 1885 Mr W A Coote, Secretary of the Vigilance Association (which Taylor strongly believed in) was set aside by the Liberal Party organisers after he sought nomination to be their parliamentary candidate for Camberwell North, and Taylor took his place. Her election promise included better laws for women, prevention of war and better pay for the working class. She was even supported by a few men such as the secularist George Jacob Holyoke. On the nomination day the returning officer refused to take the nomination papers or the cash deposit for his expenses. Nevertheless, through this action she tried to do what no woman had done before.

Not long after this she gave up public work and retired for a time to Avignon where

Researched and written by Elizabeth Strange, Curatorial Research Volunteer.

#### Bibliography

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