1918 - 2018 CELEBRATING Votes for Women

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Image: Girton College, University of Cambridge

Case Study:
Emily Davies

Born: 1830 Died: 1921 Occupation: Social campaigner, writer

Claim to fame:
Campaigner for the improvement of women's education.
She became one of the first mistresses of Girton College.

Early life

Originally from Southampton, Emily moved with her family to Gateshead in the north-east of England when she was young. There she established a Northumberland and Durham branch of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women. After her father's death in 1862, the family moved to London.

Suffrage activities

Emily played a key role in the 1866 women's suffrage petition to Parliament, helping to arrange its printing and delivery, including to newspapers. Emily handed the petition over to MP John Stuart Mill at Parliament. Drawing on her experience in 1866, Emily helped to arrange three further suffrage petitions and signed the Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage in 1889.

Emily joined several suffrage societies, including the law-abiding NUWSS led by Millicent Fawcett, and she took part in several marches wearing robes denoting her honorary degree (1901) from Glasgow University. In 1912 she joined the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA), becoming vice president. In 1918, and at 88 years old, Emily became one of the first women who qualified to vote in the general election.

Other activities

Perhaps the greatest passion of Emily's life was her commitment to improving women's and girls' education. It was in 1866, the same year as the women's suffrage petition, that she published her influential paper 'The Higher Education of Women', which promoted the idea of a residential college that would educate women to university level; this would become Girton College, Cambridge, in 1869. It ensured that female students could study the same curriculum as male university students at Cambridge, so that their achievements would be recognised as equal. However, male members of Cambridge University blocked the official awarding of degrees to women who had passed all the required examinations, and they were not recognised as university members. It was not until 1948 that Cambridge University finally granted women degrees on an equal basis to men.

Glossary

Franchise – the vote

Questions

1. How were women educated if they could not attend university?
2. Why was it important that Emily had the petition delivered to the newspapers as well as to Parliament?
3. What was the Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage in 1889?

Useful links/resources

- Emily Davies in 1908
- The Apple Seller by Bertha Newcombe, 1910
- Extract from the introduction to *The Higher Education of Women* (1866)
- Cambridge University and Women, *The Yorkshire Herald*, 24 Feb 1896
- Girton College, *The Graphic*, 17 Feb 1883
- Women in the Universities of England and Scotland, 1896 pamphlet