

## Introduction

Dorothy Buxton led an unusual and intense life. After an upbringing untypical for a girl in rural Victorian England, she found her voice and her vocation during the First World War, insisting people should be able to read a variety of voices on the conflict engulfing Europe. After the war ended, when hunger and deprivation were widespread in many countries, she blazed a trail as a campaigner for the underprivileged. She was the instigator of the Save the Children Fund in 1919 and became a tireless campaigner for refugees and the oppressed wherever she saw them during the following decades.

Her life was led during times of social and political upheaval. After the relative calm of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, she lived through two world wars and the economic depression between them; the rise of communism, fascism and Nazism; the attack on the class divisions in British society; and the change in the status and rights of women. In these momentous times, Dorothy was a radical voice, refusing to be silenced when she saw injustice. Married to a politician, she at first saw her role in the world of Westminster politics, but as she grew in confidence she became a vociferous and effective campaigner in her own right in a wider social sense.

Hers is an exciting story. The archive of her life is rich and varied, although not complete, as at various times material has been destroyed, both by her own decision towards the end of her life and by the decision of family members after her death. Yet a sufficient number of letters and papers have survived so that her story can be told partly using her own words. This biography relates the story of a woman's journey, her family and personal life. Yet it is also a paradigm of the journey many of her contemporaries took.

We see in her story how those fighting for better conditions for the poor moved from Victorian paternalism to socialism, from charity to legislation.

We also see how Dorothy, and her husband Charlie, lost confidence in the power of individual action as a way of achieving change. As it was for many others in the ruling class, that belief melted away as institutional and group violence began to dominate European politics in the twentieth century, made possible by the frightening developments in weaponry.

In matters of faith, Dorothy's spiritual beliefs changed and her path represented that of many contemporaries who side-lined dogmatic religion, embracing psychology and individual belief to enlighten their spiritual development. Dorothy's view of God changed over the decades, although her faith never disappeared, but instead transmuted into a variety of expressions.

She would not consciously have called herself a feminist, but in how she led her life she was one of those who forged a space in public life for the voice of women in the twentieth century.

Of all her achievements, Dorothy's most lasting legacy has been Save the Children, of which she was the instigator in April/May 1919. Her sister, Eglantyne Jebb, became a co-founder and in the early 1920s emerged as the charity's public face and several books have been written about her contribution. For reasons explored in this book, however, Dorothy's crucial part in launching Save the Children has been neglected and so in the time of Save the Children's centenary, it needs to be rediscovered and acknowledged.

Dorothy was a complex and compelling character, somewhat of an enigma even to her family. Her son, David, who I was privileged to call a friend in his last years, once wistfully in conversation wondered aloud if anyone could 'explain' his mother to him. Sadly, he is no longer with us to read this book, but my hope is that many others will find answers here to the questions he asked.