

DAME ETHEL MARY SMYTH, DBE



In 1858, when Ethel Mary Smyth was born in London, Sidcup was a small place in a rural community but it was to become the home of a woman to whom the word "small" would only ever be appropriate to describe her stature. In every way, she was larger than life: an ardent suffragette, a female composer in a musical world dominated by men, a prolific writer and a true British eccentric. These are just some of the characteristics of Dame Ethel Smyth.

Almost unheard of for an upper class young lady in correct Victorian society, she fought for the opportunity to go to study music in Leipzig and became a highly acclaimed composer. Among her many admirers was Sir Thomas Beecham. In 1911, after meeting Emmeline Pankhurst, Ethel decided to abandon her musical studies and devote two years to the cause of women's suffrage which she wholeheartedly supported. A year later, having smashed windows in the Colonial Office, she was arrested and imprisoned. In 1915, she volunteered as a radiographer at a military hospital and remained there until the end of the war. She then began to write her memoirs.

She was without doubt a lady who cared passionately, amongst other things, about women's rights and music. Obviously eccentric, brilliantly intelligent she was a fighter against the prejudices of her time. Everything about her was larger than life.