

WOMEN WHO MADE BRITAIN

ELIZABETH FRY

- born 21st May 1780 died 17th October 1845

She is listed as: QUAKER, CHRISTIAN AND PRISON REFORMER

She had 11 children - 5 sons and 6 daughters (one girl died at 5 years old).

After her first visit to Newgate Prison in 1812 she was appalled at the conditions and misery of the women and children confined there. She worked tirelessly for these women, despite having many pregnancies and babies to care for, and in 1817 she set up an association called the Improvement of Female Prisons.

At the same time she started to investigate the conditions in Mental Asylums, in fact she started a school which influenced Florence Nightingale who was a distant relative of Elizabeth's.

After she died in 1845 the Lord Mayor of London founded an Institute called the Elizabeth Fry Institute. In 1925 it became a Charitable Organisation and in 1940 was approved by the Home Office. It moved to Reading in 1962 and the work continues today.

It is worth noting that this is over 100 years since Elizabeth died, and became recognised by the Lord Mayor of London. Today they manage a hostel which is funded by the Ministry of Justice.

Some information about Elizabeth's background:-

- a. She was a very shy but strong minded and obstinate young girl
- b. She adored her mother and was afraid of losing her.
- c. She was not academic - disliked book learning but had a vivid imagination and liked collecting things.

Her 11 children and 25 grandchildren made a noisy but happy household despite bouts of ill health from Elizabeth.

In her busy and influential life , she had the support of Royalty - Queen Charlotte and a very young Victoria both showed an interest in her work and charities.

There is so much been written about Elizabeth Fry who made such an impression on the society of her day both in UK and in Europe. She

came from a wealthy background which no doubt helped her, but with such a vast family one wonders how she had the time, energy or inclination to spend on this work which was so much needed at the time and also still talked about today.

These are the reasons I feel Elizabeth Fry is worthy of a mention in Jenni Murray's book of History of 21 Women or perhaps an updated revised volume ?

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Ferndown U3A - 24th April 2020