

WOMEN WHO MADE BRITAIN

This is the little talk I had put together about Marie Stopes

Anyone who knows me well would be surprised that I would choose Marie Stopes as my subject. I am against abortion, but I am in favour of birth control. Although during her life time the clinics that were to bear her name didn't offer abortion.

Born in 1880 in Edinburgh to academic and presumably well off parents. She was educated well beyond other girls of her era gaining degrees from both the University of London and Munich. She became a lecturer at Manchester University from 1904-1910, the first female academic at that university.

She married after a very short courtship in 1911. This was obviously not a great union as she attempted to get a divorce or annulment in 1913. At this time she started to write her book on how she thought marriage should work and following a meeting with Margaret Sanger who advocated birth control, a chapter was added on this controversial subject. Stopes sent this book to several publishers but failed to secure a publisher. Her marriage was annulled in 1914.

In 1917 she met the man who was to become her second husband. He was a philanthropist who was very keen to start a birth control clinic. He paid to have Marie's book published. Married Love was finally published in 1918 and it was reprinted 5 times in the first year. She then published Wise Parenthood and a leaflet on birth control.

Her books had been aimed at the middle classes and in order to reach working class women she published a 16 page pamphlet to be distributed free "a letter to working mothers on how to have healthy babies and avoid weakening pregnancies. She tried to distribute this to women in the slums of the East End of London, but was met with distrust.

Finally in 1921 she and her husband opened the Mother's Clinic in Holloway north London. This free clinic was for mothers which gave advice on birth control and reproductive health. It was run by midwives and doctors. In 1925 the clinic moved to central London and in the 1930s and 40s she opened up a small network of clinic across the country.

Marie Stopes-Roe died in Dorking in Surrey in 1958. I was brought up in Dorking and she was one of my father's clients at his hairdressers.

So what can we say about Marie? She was before her time in her academic achievements. She was driven to try and help women be healthier, produce healthy wanted children. A lady born in the reign of Queen Victoria who helped women be in control of their fertility and reach their full potential. Truly a woman who deserved a place in the women who made Britain