

BRENDA BALDRY : GLENDA JACKSON

GLENDA JACKSON CBE

I chose Glenda Jackson but in researching her life I doubt she did make history, except in so far as she is in the mould of some of the strong women we have already studied. She has also portrayed strong women in literature as well as female frailties.

I saw her play Ophelia at Stratford when I was a sixth former at school studying Hamlet for A level. It was my first real experience of professional theatre and made a big impression on me.

I still have the programme! One critic at the time said "Jackson was the only Ophelia she had seen who was ready to take on the role of the Prince himself".

As you no doubt know she had a very impressive acting career. Her professional career began in 1957 whilst still at RADA, performing in Terence Rattigan's "Separate Tables". She won many awards and accolades over the next 35 years. In 1992 she retired from acting to fight as Labour candidate for Hampstead and Highgate in the General Election. She remained an MP until 2015, before returning to acting in her eighties.

Glenda Jackson CBE was born in Birkenhead, Cheshire on the 9th May 1936 under the star sign Taurus like myself. She was a Northerner and from a respectable working class family also like myself. But sadly I was not born with her talents!!

Her father was a builder and her mother worked in shops or as a cleaner. She was educated at West Kirby County Grammar School and performed at the Townswomens Guild drama group during her teens. On leaving school at 16 she worked in Boots chemist for two years before obtaining a scholarship in 1964 to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art(RADA).

She was married in 1958 and divorced in 1976. Her only child was born in 1969. He is a newspaper columnist and former Labour Party Advisor and Commentator.

Her acting career is prolific and her performances too numerous to list here. Suffice it to say she has appeared in 32 films, 21 Television productions, 2 Radio plays and 22 Theatre productions (spanning the years 1957-1992 and 2017-2020).

She has been nominated for 37 awards over her illustrious career winning on 12 occasions.

Glenda Jackson was awarded a CBE in 1978 and has been awarded Honorary Doctorates from four British Universities, a Honorary Fellow from another and Doctorate from one American university.

In 1992 she retired from acting to become Labour MP for Hampstead and Highgate. She felt Britain was being destroyed by Thatcher's policies and would do anything legal to

oppose her. I was delighted to hear this, hoping we had the makings of a future female Labour Prime Minister who would put the needs of ALL citizens at the heart of government. I was to be disappointed but she never compromised her beliefs and indeed became equally critical of Tony Blair and his gang as she was of Maggie Thatcher -maybe why she never made PM!

She held the post of Shadow Minister for Transport and was appointed a junior Minister In Tony Blair's government in 1997, resigning this post to make an unsuccessful attempt to be nominated as the Labour candidate for election of the first Mayor of London.

She was a high profile back bencher - critical of higher education fees and questioned the reasons for going to War in Iraq (calling for Blair's resignation following the death of Dr. David Kelly)

Her disagreements with Blair's leadership led her to offer a challenge as a stalking horse candidate in a leadership contest in October 2005. She was one of the twelve Labour MPs to back the call for an enquiry into the Iraq War.

Her constituency boundaries changed in 2010 and she won her seat with the second smallest majority of 42 votes. The following year she announced that she did not intend to stand at the next election due to her age, saying it would be time for someone else to have a turn. She was two days away from her 79th birthday when that election took place in 2015.

Glenda Jackson was not a woman to shy away from contentious opinions. She is notable for at least two speeches in parliament;

In 2013 on Thatcher's death she accused her of treating "vices as virtues" and as a result of Thatcherism the UK was susceptible to unprecedented employment rates and homelessness.

In 2014 her assessment of Iain Duncan Smith's tenure as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions was that he was responsible for "the destruction of the welfare state and the total and utter incompetence of his department".

Well, she is still going strong at 85 yrs and choosing challenging acting roles. How can we not view her role with some trepidation in the TV drama in 2019 as Elizabeth in the TV production of "Elizabeth is missing" where she portrays an elderly grandmother struggling with dementia?