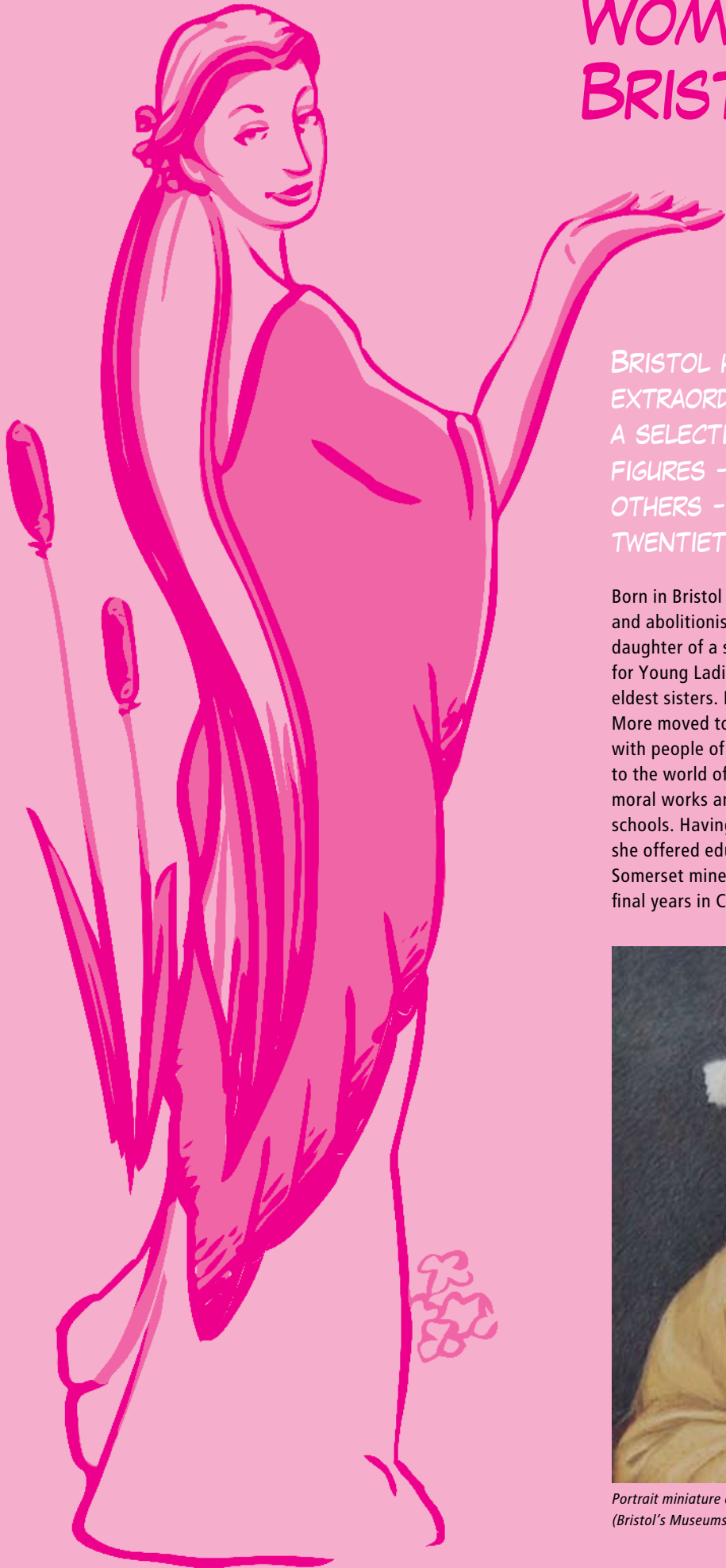


WOMEN IN BRISTOL'S HISTORY



BRISTOL HAS BEEN HOME TO SOME EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN. HERE IS A SELECTION OF NOTABLE FEMALE FIGURES - SOME MORE FAMOUS THAN OTHERS - FROM THE SEVENTEENTH TO TWENTIETH CENTURIES.

Born in Bristol in 1745, Hannah More was an evangelist and abolitionist known for her charitable work. The daughter of a schoolmaster, she taught at the Academy for Young Ladies in Park Street, which was run by her eldest sisters. Keen to establish herself as a playwright, More moved to London in the 1770s and at first mixed with people of the theatre but she was increasingly drawn to the world of Evangelical Christians, writing her own moral works and encouraging the establishment of Sunday schools. Having settled with her sisters in the Mendip Hills, she offered educational, spiritual and financial help to Somerset miners and agricultural workers. She spent her final years in Clifton and died in 1833.



*Portrait miniature of Hannah More
(Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).*



Far left: Mary Robinson as Perdita (Bristol Libraries).

Left: Self-portrait of Rolinda Sharples (1814) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).

Below: The Cloak-Room, Clifton (c1817-18) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives). This was Rolinda Sharples first multi-figure painting.



Other women associated with religious work in the city include the Baptist leader Dorothy Hazzard who, in 1640, founded Bristol's first dissenting church. In 1643, during the Civil War, she took part in the defence of Frome Gate when 200 women prevented Prince Rupert's troops entering the city. She later testified at the trial of Nathaniel Fiennes, Bristol's Governor, who had surrendered Bristol to the Royalists despite the women's efforts. A near contemporary of Hannah More was the religious author Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck (1778-1856), whose memorial stone in Bristol Cathedral praises her 'rich gifts of genius and acquisitions of study consecrated to the service of God'. Like Hannah More she spent her final years in Clifton.

The actress Mary Robinson was born in Bristol in 1758 and attended the school run by Hannah More's sisters in Park Street. She appeared at the Theatre Royal and was nicknamed Perdita after playing that role to great acclaim in *The Winter's Tale*. She was known as a free-spirited woman, a single parent who became mistress of the Prince Regent and enjoyed being part of fashionable society. When the affair ended in 1780 she earned money as an author, writing poems, pamphlets, plays, journalism and novels. She died in 1800.

Other women associated with the theatre in Bristol include the comedienne Jane Green (1720-1791), Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821), who became Britain's first female professional theatre critic, Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), the Muse of Tragedy, Sarah Macready (c1789-1853), who managed the Theatre Royal theatres in Bristol and Bath, Ellen Terry (1848-1928), Britain's leading Shakespearean actress, along with her sister Kate (1844-1924), and Peggy Ann Wood (1912-1998), who ran the Little Theatre for 30 years.

Inventor Sarah Guppy (1770-1852), mother of the Bristol businessman and engineer Thomas Guppy, took out a number of patents during her lifetime including a method of keeping ships free of barnacles that led to a government contract. In 1811 she patented a suspension bridge, and is thought to have advised Isambard Kingdom Brunel, a family friend, on his bridge at Clifton. Other inventions included a tea or coffee urn that also cooked eggs and kept toast warm, and a bed with built-in exercise equipment. Her final patent, registered at the age of 74, was a method of making ships waterproof. A plaque to Sarah, erected by the Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society, was unveiled at her former home, 7 Richmond Hill, Clifton in 2006.

Rolinda Sharples (1793-1838) was a member of the Bristol school of artists which was particularly active during the period 1810-1840. Her colleagues included Edward Bird, Francis Danby, Samuel Jackson and William Müller. Her mother Ellen (1769-1849) earned a living by copying her late husband James' pastel portraits of eminent people. She helped finance the founding of the Royal West of England Academy in the 1840s. It is from Ellen's diary that we are able to trace Rolinda's progress as an artist and her social life in Regency Bristol. Ellen had advanced views on female education for the time and always encouraged her daughter in her work. Rolinda was one of the first British women artists to tackle multi-figure compositions. These included local crowd scenes such as the races at Durdham Downs and the cloakroom at the Clifton Assembly Rooms.

Other women artists associated with Bristol include Marjorie Watson-Williams (1892-1984) who moved to Paris to paint abstract art in the 1920s, changing her name to Paule Vézelay. She returned to her home in Clifton at the outbreak of the Second World War and drew scenes of bomb damage during the Bristol Blitz. Born in 1816 and spending much of her life in Clifton, artist and tutor Philippa Bethell regularly exhibited at the Royal West of England Academy between 1856 and 1883. First President of the New Bristol Art Club, Bristol-born Gwendoline Cross (1896-1966) was a painter, printmaker, jeweller, illustrator, etcher and sculptor.

For a few months in 1817 a Devonshire cobbler's daughter, Mary Baker (1791-1864) captivated Bristol society in the guise of the exotic Princess Caraboo of Javasou. Found wandering the roads of Almondsbury and speaking a strange language, she managed to convey that she had been kidnapped from her island home in the Indian Ocean and jumped ship in the Bristol Channel. She was eventually exposed as an impostor and banished to America. She later returned to Bristol and settled in Bedminster as a leech breeder.

Mary Carpenter (1807-1877) opened a series of schools for girls and poor children in Bristol including the pioneering Reformatory School for Girls in the Red Lodge. The building later became home to the Bristol Savages, an artists' club, and is currently run as a museum by the City Council. Carpenter also campaigned for women's education and was a nationally recognised figure at the time of her death as a result of her philanthropic work. Her memorial stone in Bristol Cathedral refers to her as 'foremost among the founders of reformatory and industrial schools in this city and the realm'. The inscription also commends her for 'taking... to heart the grievous lot of oriental women'. It says 'in the last decade of her life she four times went to India and awakened an active interest in their education and training for serious duties'. The great Indian reformer Rajah Rammohun Roy admired the work of Mary's father, Lant Carpenter, a Unitarian minister, and died in Bristol during a visit to the city to see him.

Among those who worked with Mary Carpenter in Bristol were Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904), who first visited Bristol from her native Ireland in 1836, Agnes Beddoe (c1832-1914), who was involved in the campaign for women's suffrage, and the social reformer Elizabeth Sturge (1849-1944). Others associated with education in Bristol include Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), a champion of education for women, Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878), who advocated for women's higher education, Emily Sturge (1847-1892), who was involved with education for women and the poor, and Catherine Grace (1907-1986), who founded a school for children with learning difficulties. Other Bristol social reformers include Mary Estlin (c1820-1902), who was secretary of the Bristol and Clifton Anti-Slavery Society.



Princess Caraboo, Edward Bird (1817) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).

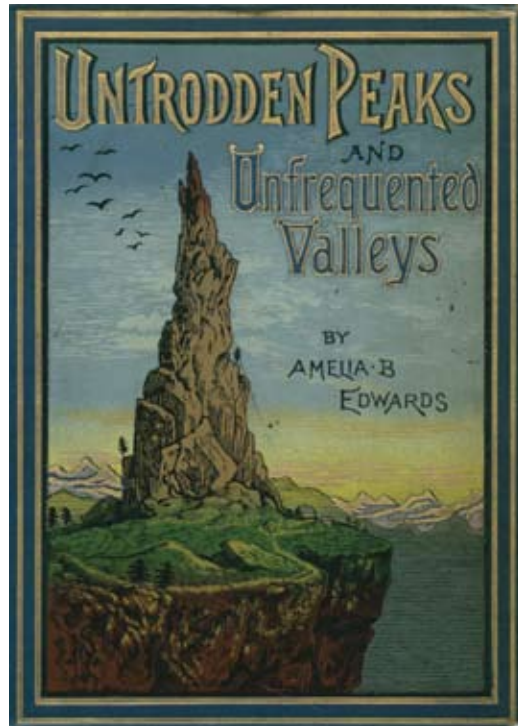
Painting by G E Butler showing Mary Carpenter welcoming Annie Woolman, her first pupil, to Red Lodge on 10 October 1854 (1922) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).

Painting by Samuel Jackson of the Red Lodge viewed from Lodge Street (1824) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives). At the time this painting was made the lodge was occupied by a boarding school run by the Misses Twigg and Kift.

Author Amelia Blandford Edwards (1831-1892), who lived for a time in Westbury-on-Trym, wrote novels, Christmas stories and tales of her travels. Her travel books included *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1877), which featured her own hand-drawn illustrations. An Egyptologist, she co-founded the Egypt Exploration Fund in 1882 with the aim of researching and preserving ancient monuments, and her grave at St Mary's Church in Henbury is marked with an Egyptian-style memorial. Her collection of Egyptian artefacts is held by Bristol's City Museum and Art Gallery. Amelia was at one-time Vice-President of the Society for Promoting Women's Suffrage and she held honorary degrees from US colleges. Another Bristol-linked travel writer was Lizzie Tuckett (1837-1872) from Frenchay who wrote of her trips to the Alps accompanying her brother Francis. She was also a successful illustrator and published children's stories.



Eliza Walker Dunbar (1845-1925) was Bristol's first resident female house surgeon. She had had to take her medical degree in Zurich as at that time medical schools in England were for men only. She was based at St Michael's Hospital, St Michael's Hill and founded a private hospital in Clifton. She also sponsored the city's women's suffrage movement. Other women associated with medicine from Bristol include Bristol-born Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910), the first woman in modern times to qualify as a doctor, Catherine Woollam (1830-1909), head of the Clifton District Nurses' Society, Marion Grace Ormerod (1872-1946), who was awarded the OBE for her services to the Red Cross during World War One, Elizabeth Casson (1881-1954), champion of an holistic approach to mental illness, and Charlotte Minnie Keel (c1886-1955) who, as a councillor and alderman, worked to improve community health services.



Contralto Clara Butt (1872-1936) moved with her family to Bristol in 1880 and took singing lessons with local teacher Daniel Rootham. Her marriage to baritone Robert Kennerley Rumford took place in Bristol Cathedral in 1900. She was the first British female musician to become an honorary Dame (in 1920) and Elgar's song cycle *Sea Pictures* was specially created for her. Other singers associated with Bristol include 'The Lady Tenor' Ruby Helder (1890-1938), the soprano Eva Turner (1892-1990) and the music-hall performer Irene Rose (1883-1965).



For further details of Bristol women in history, read the booklet *100 Women of Bristol*, published by Bristol City Council, researched by Dawn Dyer at Bristol Central Library and written by Shirley Brown.

Sketch of the Estlin family (Bristol Libraries).

Cover of Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys: a midsummer ramble in the Dolomites by Amelia B Edwards (first edition 1873) (Bristol Libraries).

Photograph and cover from printed programme for Bristol concert by Dame Clara Butt (Bristol Libraries).