

Female fortitude Karen Foy takes a look at

Although eight of Royal Mail's Eminent Britons are well-known and respected males, for this article I have decided to look at the two women featured in the set, and their admirable determination to overcome life's obstacles.

ON 8 October 2009, a new set of special stamps celebrated the lives of ten of Britain's remarkable individuals. Commemorating the anniversaries of their births or important achievements, this eclectic mix of campaigners, sports heroes, artists and record breakers is sure to be a hit with collectors. All stamps are 1st class values, are 35mm square, and are printed in litho on two sets of five se-tenant strips. The subtle greenish grey colour scheme gives these stamps a timeless elegance which is carried through onto the themed backgrounds of each image and also onto the interior of the presentation pack.



Pride and prejudice Born in Spitalfields, London in 1759, Mary Wollstonecraft began her life as the daughter of a handkerchief weaver. By the age of 25, together with her sister Eliza and friend Fanny Blood, she had opened a school in the small village of Newington Green near Hackney. Brought up in the Anglican faith, Mary started to attend the local Dissenting Chapel, and it was here that she met the minister Richard Price and his friend, clergyman and political theorist Joseph Priestley. Both of these men belonged to the group known as the Radical Dissenters, whose views included rejecting traditional Christian ideas of original sin and eternal punishment, and instead thought that reasoning and individual conscience should be paramount when making moral decisions. In fact, Richard Price's opinions on the subject were

so strong that he wrote a book entitled the *Review of the Principal Questions of Morals*, and although he encountered a great deal of hostility, his ideals and outlook were also considered very influential.

Mary was fascinated by their beliefs, which helped to form her own opinions of the world around her. In 1786, her book *Thoughts on the Education of Girls* was published, where she suggested different subjects which would interest and stimulate young women, and questioned the methods used to teach them. By 1792, she had written the classic *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* – controversially arguing that women were not naturally inferior to men, but only appear to be because of their lack of education. Despite opposition, she continued to champion the cause, with both the subject of her book and her unconventional love life – which included an ill-fated affair with a married man – bringing her much publicity.

In 1793 – one month before Louis XVI was guillotined – Mary moved to France. In the midst of the turbulent atmosphere of the French Revolution, she fell passionately in love with American writer Gilbert Imlay. For a time they were happy, and she soon gave birth to their daughter Fanny.

two stamps in the new Eminent Britons issue

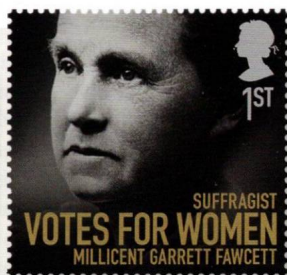
Mary took Imlay's name although the pair were never married. Imlay was not enamoured with a domestic life and, despite attempts to win back his affections, the pair split. A devastated Mary made an unsuccessful suicide attempt to no avail, and eventually returned to Britain as a single mother.

By throwing herself into her writing career, she gradually began to mix in literary circles once again, where she met philosopher and later founder of the Anarchist Movement, William Godwin. The affair resulted in Mary's pregnancy and the couple decided to marry to allow the child to be seen as legitimate. It was then discovered that Mary had not actually been married to Imlay, and the exposure lost her many of her friends.

On 30 August 1797, a daughter was born and, although the birth went well, complications arose which resulted in Mary developing fatal septicaemia from which she died several days later. Initially buried in Old Saint St Pancras Churchyard, her remains were later moved, with Godwin's, to Bournemouth where her tombstone reads: Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, / Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: / Born 27 April 1759: Died 10 September 1797.

Whilst Mary's legacy of freedom and rights for women lives on in the work of others, she is still regarded as one of the founders of the feminist movement. From a philatelic point of view, Great Britain was celebrating the achievements of women pioneers as early as 1968 by commemorating the 50th anniversary of votes for women, with a similar issue from the Isle of Man in 1981. The Eminent Britons set may be Mary's first outing as an image on our stamps, but she joins a dedicated band of feminists who later followed in her footsteps. In October 2008, Royal Mail issued a set of six stamps entitled Women of Distinction – this featured other notables such as the suffragette Millicent Garrett Fawcett, pioneer of birth control Marie Stopes, and the campaigner for equal pay, Barbara Castle. ▶

Below issues celebrating equal rights for women: 1981 Isle of Man Votes for Women; 1968 Anniversary of Votes for Women; and two of the 2008 Women of Distinction stamps. In the background is the first day cover for the 1981 Isle of Man issue.





Other issues, such as Australia's Votes for Women stamps of 1994 (see p67) and Canada's 1985 issue honouring feminist Emily Murphy and reformer Therese Casgrain (left), continue to mark the inroads made into equality for women worldwide.

Mary Wollstonecraft's second daughter was also named Mary. Through marriage, she went on to become Mary Shelley, wife of the radical poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and successful author in her own right of the classic gothic tale of *Frankenstein* which featured on one of the Horror Stories stamps in 1997.



Diligence and determination Acknowledged as a campaigner and founder of Mencap, Judy Fryd's life story brings us right up to date, as she fought over many years of the 20th century to achieve help and recognition for children with learning difficulties and a public voice for their parents. Born in Hornsey in London on 31 October 1909, Judy was the daughter of a Post Office sorter and spent her childhood in the area, at Minchenden School, before reading political science and economics at Ruskin College, Oxford. It was there that she met and married her husband John Fryd and later moved to Leeds.

Within two years, Judy had given birth to their first child, a daughter named Felicity, but it was not long before they realised that Felicity's development was not advancing as quickly as it should

have been. Although they sought help, the young family suffered numerous setbacks when Felicity was asked to be removed from various schools as her behaviour was too disruptive for the rest of the class.

It was the early 1940s, and Felicity's condition was diagnosed as juvenile schizophrenia, more commonly known today as autism. There was very little help for sufferers and their families, and even less understanding and support. At the end of her tether, Judy sent a letter to the magazine *Nursery World* suggesting that parents of children with challenging behaviour and learning difficulties should band together to raise awareness of their plight. To her surprise, she was contacted by 1000 mothers in the first month who wanted to join forces and find help.

For 25 years, Judy became the editor of a dedicated magazine called the *Parent's Voice*, and throughout the 1950s and 60s she campaigned for new developments and research into the difficulties experienced by the children and also for assistance and guidance for the families. It was previously thought that these children were uneducable and even if funding could be found to provide private schooling, they were denied free school milk and other post war vitamin supplements that were normally offered. If the fees proved too costly they were either looked after at home or sent to long stay

hospitals which did not cater for their needs. As a result, in 1971, Judy Fryd led a campaign which resulted in the Education (Handicapped Children) Act that overturned these earlier rulings and beliefs.

With a formidable force of supporters, Judy saw her little organisation grow into a massive UK charity with a turnover of £100 million per year, a staff of 5500 and over 20,000 dedicated volunteers. As a result, she received an MBE for her services in 1967 and, 29 years later, her work continued to be appreciated and admired when she was awarded a CBE in 1996.

Although Mencap as an organisation has not previously featured on a British stamp, they have encouraged people to collect and donate used stamps to raise money for the charity. This has not only helped to bring awareness to their work, but also provided a secondary use for the stamps of non-collectors which may otherwise have just been thrown away.

A quote of Dr Samuel Johnson, used as one of the first day of issue postmarks, reads 'Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance' and aptly describes the challenges faced by both Mary Wollstonecraft and Judy Fryd. Through their foresight, determination and strong beliefs, they paved the way for others to follow and rightly deserve their place alongside the other notable personalities who make up this philatelic tribute ●

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The coming of phosphor Richard West on the addition of phosphor to stamps in 1959

BEFORE ANY ITEM of mail can be cancelled or sorted, there is a basic requirement – that the envelope is facing the correct way, with the stamp in the top right corner (the practise established when the postage stamp was introduced), hopefully resulting in the address being upright. For years mail was sorted into this position manually but, as early as 1934 at the Post Office research facility at Dollis Hill in London, ways were being sought to undertake the task automatically. The basis has always been to detect the stamp, the initial attempts using photo-electric scanners proving unsuccessful. More successful was a machine developed in 1949-50, which relied on reflectivity to distinguish between the stamp and envelope. However, this did not meet the full requirements of the Post Office, wanting to go a step further, to distinguish mail at the cheaper 'printed paper' rate (later replaced by first and second class mail) from other letters.

The solution seemed to be adding something to the stamp to enable its detection. Ideas included strips of silver, or adding sodium chloride to the face of the stamp, but neither was thought practicable. Other ideas were using fluorescence (reference was made to optical brightening agents added to washing powder) and phosphorescence. The last of these was thought most satisfactory, equipment detecting the stamp by the afterglow resulting from being subjected to ultra-violet light. However, automated letter sorting (together with postal codes) using phosphor was being developed, and the fear was that the two would give conflicting signals. ►