

Illuminated Letters

Inspirational Women to write to at Glasgow Women's Library

Agnes Dollan

1887 – 1966

At a young age Agnes became involved with the Women's Labour League, which sought to improve female working conditions and wages.



Rachel Hamilton (nee Johnston)

aka 'Big Rachel'

Born 1829 – Died 1899

Worked as a labourer in Tod and McGregor's shipyards and as a forewoman navy in the Jordanhill Brickworks where she had a reputation as a keeper of the peace and enforcer of order in the workplace. She was sworn in as a special constable during the Partick Riots of 1875.

Catherine Cranston

1849 – 1934

Widely known as Kate Cranston or Miss Cranston, she was a leading figure in the development of the social phenomenon of tea rooms .

Dorothee Pullinger

1894 – 1986

A groundbreaking figure in the world of engineering and Scotland's only woman motor manufacturer.

Flora Drummond

Nicknamed 'The General' or 'Bluebell'

1878 - 1949

She joined the Women's Social and Political Union in 1905. A skilled political organizer, she moved to Manchester and led marches and walks in London and Glasgow. In and out of prison 9 times for her beliefs she taught fellow inmates Morse code so they could communicate from cell to cell.



Helen Crawford

1877 – 1954

In 1912 she broke the windows of the Liberal Minister of Education's residence in central London, for which she was arrested and sentenced to one month's imprisonment in Holloway Prison. This episode proved to be the beginning of Helen's career as a militant suffragette.

Isabella Elder

1828 – 1905

Philanthropist and supporter and promoter of opportunities for women in higher education. In 1885 she provided the money for a school of domestic economy for the training of young girls in Govan.



Jessie Stephen

Born 1893 – Died 1979

As a working class Suffragette, in 1912 she dropped acid in pillar boxes.

Dr Marion Gilchrist**1864 – 1952**

First woman to graduate from Glasgow University in 1894 and the first woman to receive a medical degree in Scotland.

Maggie Keswick Jencks**1941 - 1995**

Founded Maggie's Centres across Scotland, helping thousands of people affected by cancer.

Margaret MacDonald Mackintosh**1865–1933**

A Scottish artist whose design work became one of the defining features of the “Glasgow Style” during the 1890s.

Margaret McPhun**1876-1960**

Margaret and her sister Francis were two of the most active Scottish suffragettes of the early 20th century.

**Mary Barbour****1875 - 1958**

Mary was an active member in the International Labour Party and was instrumental in opposing the rent increases in Govan. She organised women's committees who met in kitchens and closes to gather information on impending evictions. Thousands of women – known as Mrs Barbour's Army - supported by engineers and shipyard workers, marched to the sheriff court.

Marbai Ardesir Vakil**1868- c.1948**

Marbai Ardesir Vakil (MBCM 1897) was the first female Asian graduate.

Joan Eardley**1921 – 1963**

An artist whose street scenes and seascapes communicate the rawer elements and emotions of the environment she took inspiration from.

Ethel McDonald**1909 – 1960**

A Scottish activist and anarchist who travelled to Barcelona to show the support of the Scottish Anarchist movement for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. While she was there she broadcasted regular English language war reports on anarchist radio and assisted fellow anarchists however she could.

Carrie Nation**1846 –1911**

A radical member of the Temperance movement in America, she campaigned all over the US, paying her way by selling little pins shaped like hatchets, symbolizing her struggle.

**Madeleine Hamilton Smith****1835–1928**

Tried for poisoning her lover, the jury found the case 'not proven'.

Ellen King
1909 - 1994

Olympic swimmer who won two silver medals at the 1928 games in Amsterdam (100 yards backstroke and 100 yards freestyle relay).

Marie Curie
1867 –1934

She started studying x-rays as part of her doctoral thesis, leading to her identification of radioactivity and the discovery of two new elements, polonium and radium. She received two Nobel Prizes.

Agnes Hardie (née Pettigrew)
1874 - 1951

She was a member of the Independent Labour Party and pioneered a path for women as a political organiser and elected representative.

Wangari Maathai
1940 - 2011

Kenyan environmental and political activist. In 2004, she became the first African Woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize, which was for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.



Rosa Parks
1913 - 2005

An African-American civil rights activist whom the U.S. Congress called "the first lady of civil rights" and "the mother of the freedom movement". Refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in 1955, when segregation was still in place.

Margaret Sanger
1879-1966

A pioneering nurse who promoted birth control as a means by which a woman could exercise control over her life and health.



Amy Johnson
1903-1941

English aviator who, in May 1930 made the first woman's solo flight from London to Australia in 17 days. Made further solos flights and was the first woman to fly the Atlantic from east to west. In World War 2, volunteered for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force ferrying planes and dispatches around England. Disappeared over the Thames Estuary and is thought to have drowned when bad weather forced her down.

Dr Elsie Inglis
1864 - 1917

Was a pioneering doctor who broke into the male dominated world of medicine. Was also prominent in Liberal politics and in the campaign for female suffrage.

Harriet Tubman
1820 - 1913

She conducted upward of 300 fugitive slaves to freedom in the north along the Underground Railroad – an elaborate secret network of safe houses.

Khadijah
555 - 619

The first wife of the Prophet Muhammad (the founder of Islam), whom she met when she was the widow of a wealthy merchant and had become prosperous in the management of her own commercial dealings.

Ada King, countess of Lovelace
original name Augusta Ada Byron, Lady Byron
1815 -1852

English mathematician, and an associate of Charles Babbage, for whose prototype of a digital computer she created a program. She has been called the first computer programmer.



Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi
1828 – 1858

One of the leading figures of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. For Indian nationalists she was a symbol of resistance to the rule of the British Empire.

Jane Rae
1872 - 1959

Politically active in many fields including the anti-war campaign in 1914, the Cooperative movement, the temperance movement and she once chaired an Emily Pankhurst meeting in Clydebank Town Hall.

Isabella Bishop (née Bird)
1831-1904

Nineteenth century explorer, writer and natural historian who was made fellow of the Scottish Geographical Society in 1891 and the Royal Geographic Society in 1892, to which no woman had previously been admitted.

Lena Zavaroni
1963-1999

Singer and entertainer who was the youngest artist to appear on the TV programme Top of the Pops.

(Helen) Nora Wilson Lowe (aka Lorna Moon)
1886-1930

Novelist and short story writer who moved to Hollywood, where she came to be regarded as one of the top screenwriters.



Jessie Grant Kesson (née Macdonald)
1916-1994

Scottish novelist, playwright, radio producer and journalist who was born in a workhouse. Her fiction and her plays often drew on her unhappy childhood experiences.

Kathleen Jessie Raine
1908-2003

Kathleen Raine was a British poet, critic and scholar. She read natural sciences, including botany and zoology, at Cambridge and received her Masters degree in 1929.



Mairi Lambert Gooden Chisholm
1896-1981

A Scottish nurse and ambulance driver in WWI who photographed and documented the war.

Dorothy Dunnett
1923-2001

A novelist and professional portrait painter who exhibited at the RSA and was awarded the OBE for services to literature in 1992.

Agnes Finnie
Died 1645. Date of birth unknown

Businesswoman and alleged witch who was arrested in 1644 and tried for witchcraft.



Maggie McIver (aka 'The Barras Queen')

1879-1958

Founded the Barras market and the Barrowlands Ballroom.

Ingrid McClements

1948 – 2008

A lifelong feminist and socialist activist, a violence against women campaigner and a leading figure in voluntary sector development.

Frida Kahlo

1907-1954

Mexican surrealist painter who originally studied medicine.

Bessie Coleman

1892-1926

The first African American aviator, 'Brave Bessie' Coleman let nothing stop her from getting into the air and became a beacon of inspiration to countless others in her brief but meteoric career as a barnstormer.

Emma Goldman

1869-1940

Lifelong anarchist and agitator and an early advocate of free speech, birth control, women's equality and independence, and union organisation. Her criticism of mandatory conscription of young men into the military during World War I led to a two-year imprisonment, followed by her deportation from the US in 1919.

Zora Neale Hurston

1891-1960

One of the pre-eminent writers of 20th century African-American literature who died penniless and was buried in an unmarked grave in a segregated cemetery in 1960.



Dolly Shepherd

1886-1983

In 1904, after 30 minutes training, 17 year old Dolly Shepherd made her first parachute jump 2,000 feet through the air from a trapeze bar suspended from a gas-filled balloon.

Jackie Forster

1926 – 1998

LGBT rights activist, 'first' Archivist of the Lesbian Archive

Josephine Butler

1828 – 1906

Social activist and feminist who was especially concerned with the welfare of prostitutes



Katharine McCormick

1875 - 1967

Suffragist, biologist and funded the development of the contraceptive pill

Dora Carrington
1893-1932

Painter and decorative artist associated with the Bloomsbury Group (Article and beautifully illustrated letter to her partner, Lyton Strachey in Spare Rib, Jan 1975, No. 31)



Mary Brunton
1778 – 1818

Scottish novelist and contemporary of Jane Austen.

Julia Margaret Cameron
1815 - 1879

Photographer and great-aunt of Virginia Woolf.

Paula Modersohn-Becker
1876-1907

German artist and one of the most important representatives of German Expressionism.



Dora Russell
1894-1986

Socialist involved in The World League for Sexual Reform and the Workers Birth Control Group.

Isabella Todd
1836-1896

Scottish suffragist who campaigned for votes for women, published articles and campaigned against the Contagious Diseases Act, and supported higher education for women.

Clara Zetkin
1857-1933

German Socialist who campaigned for women's rights and universal suffrage. Organised the first International Women's Day in 1915.

Rosika Schwimmer
1877 – 1948

Hungarian born pacifist, feminist and suffragette, who was the founding member of the Women's Peace Party in 1915.

Carrie Chapman Catt
1859 – 1947

American who was one of the leaders of the women's suffrage movement. Campaigned for the 19th amendment in the United States.

Bertha Von Suttner
1843 – 1914

Austrian novelist, radical pacifist and the first woman to be nobel peace prize laureate



Martina G. Kramers

1863-1935

A seasoned multilingual activist in the international movement for women's suffrage and organizer of the "International Correspondence."

Vida Goldstein

1869 – 1949

Early Australian feminist politician who campaigned for women's suffrage and social reform.

Dame Millicent Fawcett

1847 – 1929

Fawcett was an early feminist, suffragist, intellectual and writer and is considered instrumental in gaining the vote for British women over 30-years-old in 1918.



Aletta Jacobs

1854 - 1929

First woman to complete a university course in the Netherlands and first female physician

Mary Brooksbank

1897-1980

Communist revolutionary poet and songwriter who formed the Working Women's Guild.

Ethel Baxter

1883-1963

Nurse turned businesswoman who helped to transform Baxters Food Group.

Margaret Herbison

1907-1996

Teacher who became a Labour MP. In Government from 1964-67, as Minister of Pensions and National Insurance, she was responsible for setting up the Ministry of Social Security under Harold Wilson.

Jennie Lee

1904-1988

The daughter of a Fife miner who she was Labour M.P. for North Lanark from 1929-1931. She was a Minister in the Labour Government from 1964-1970 and was made a life peeress in 1970.

Mary McArthur

1880-1921

A well educated journalist who worked for a Conservative newspaper before becoming involved in the Labour Movement. From 1903-1921 she was secretary of the Women's Trade Union League and a founder member and secretary from 1906-1921 of the National Federation of Women Workers.



Anne Louise McIlroy

1878-1968

Graduated as a doctor in 1899 from Glasgow University and after further study she became a gynaecological surgeon at the Victoria Infirmary from 1906-1910. During WWI she was in command of a unit of the Scottish Women's Hospital, first in France then in Salonica.

Margaret Fairlie

1891-1963

At the age of 49 she became the first woman professor to hold the chair of midwifery at St. Andrews University from 1940-1956.

Rebecca Strong**1843-1944**

Pioneer of nurse training in Glasgow.

Mary Lily Walker**1863-1918**

Early social worker. Set up a house which included a clinic and small hospital for women. Educated the public on diet, hygiene and common sense.

Jane Haining**1897-1944,**

A missionary who worked in Budapest and was arrested by the Nazis in 1944.

Sandie Craigie**1964 – 2005**

A performance poet who wrote poems in Scots, often fiercely political and “a wee bit swearsy”

Maud Sulter**1960 – 2008**

Fine artist, photographer, poet and playwright and writer of Ghanaian and Scottish heritage.

Hannah Frank**1928 – 1952**

Artist and sculptor whose work was exhibited in the Royal Glasgow Institute, the Royal Academy, and the Royal Scottish Academy.

**Gunnie Moberg****1941 – 2007**

A photographer of down-to-earth authenticity who was a pictorial chronicler of the island groups in the north Atlantic, their landscapes, seascapes and their inhabitants.

Margaret Tait**1918 – 1999**

A film maker, writer and poet who was born and raised in Orkney. She made 32 short films and one full length feature.

Helen MacFarlane**1842 – 1860**A journalist, socialist and feminist of nineteenth century Britain. She wrote for the Democratic Review and translated Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*.**Ena Lamont Stewart****1912 – 2006**

Scottish playwright who wrote about class and gender issues.

**Cicely Hamilton****1872 – 1952**

Actor, writer, journalist, suffragist, feminist and lesbian. Co-founder of the Women Writers' Suffrage League.

Mary Astell**1666 – 1731**

A feminist writer and rhetorician. Her advocacy of equal educational opportunities for women earned her the title "the first English feminist."

Ann Lee (Known as Mother Ann)

1736 – 1784

Born to a poor working-class family in 1736 in Manchester, she later became the spiritual leader of the “Shakers”, a religious group that had previously broken off from the Quakers and had no other form of worship than the confession of sins.

Dame Anne Maxwell Macdonald

1906-2011

Gifted Pollok House to the City of Glasgow. One of very few women – and the only Scot to be given the freedom of the city.