

WOMEN *from*
HACKNEY'S
HISTORY

THE HACKNEY SOCIETY
HACKNEY HISTORY

PREVIEW
hackney.hk/women

Introduction

Women from Hackney's History

Published 2021 by

The Hackney Society

The Round Chapel
1d Glenarm Road
London E5 0LY
www.hackneysociety.org

Hackney History

(Friends of Hackney Archives)
c/o Hackney Archives,
Dalston CLR James Library and
Hackney Archives,
Dalston Square,
London E8 3BQ
www.hackneyhistory.org

ISBN 9781800492103

First published in March 2021 by the Hackney Society and Hackney History (Friends of Hackney Archives)

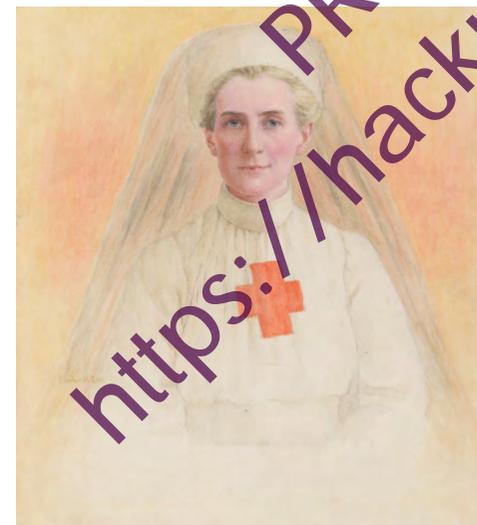
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The **Hackney Society** promotes the highest standards in design and protects Hackney's unique heritage. The Hackney Society has encouraged positive development of the borough's built and natural environments, through engagement with a broad cross-section of local people and experts. We encourage exemplary new design, regeneration and conservation of our rich heritage through Spaces (our newsletter), our publications, walks, talks, meetings, website and social media.



Hackney History (Friends of Hackney Archives) encourages and supports interest in Hackney's fascinating past, particularly through the use of Hackney's 700 years of Archives. Hackney's history is extensive and varied. It has been home to the poor and rich, and many notable figures, from politics, science, and religion. A wealth of migrants have passed through and contributed to the modern borough and there are many stories to be discovered. Notable businesses were formed here and pioneering technological developments, particularly in the Lea Valley. Hackney also saw groundbreaking experiments in public services, especially schools and hospitals, and gives an insight into the growth of the modern state.



Here are 113 women from Hackney's history. All lived or worked, were born or buried in today's borough. Just four, each of whose Hackney legacy is a loved legend or institution, break that rule. Other sorts of rule breakers abound.

You will know some of these women but many are not famous. Some achieved against all odds, some hit the heights then crashed, some lived apparently ordinary lives, a few had royal blood. Several shifted the possibilities for women through personal breakthroughs, others through collective action. Many show us how narrow those possibilities were. A couple were simply bad: women can achieve infamy too.

These are women from wildly different backgrounds although a fair few are dissenters, suffrage campaigners or stars of the stage. None of these women is still with us. Their stories cover five centuries and show us how times have changed for women and for Hackney. But things move fast here and they cannot represent the Hackney of today.

We hope this is an interesting collection. It is not offered as definitive or exhaustive. There will be important gaps but these can be filled. We plan future updates and will be very glad to receive suggestions for inclusion at historywomen@hackneysociety.org.

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This book was written and produced entirely by volunteers. All the writers and designers are themselves Hackney women.

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We are also grateful for particular support from these organisations:

Abney Park Trust
 Ayahs' Home
 East End Women's Museum
 Hackney Archives
 Matchgirls Memorial
 PEER Gallery

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Minnie Green

c1870-?

Minnie Green, a young Indian nanny or ayah, successfully used the British judicial system to bring a case against the violent employers who had withheld her wages.

During the British Raj the children of British colonial administrators and plantation owners in India were normally entrusted from birth to the care of ayahs such as Minnie.

Despite the heavy reliance on ayahs and the fond attachments which grew up between them and the children they cared for, the behaviour of most colonials towards their servants was patronising and often abusive. Anglicised names, such as Minnie, were just one indication of the disdainful attitude of colonial employers. Minnie's real identity has been lost.

In Britain the class system was the dominant influence on the relationship between employers and domestic servants. In India religion, race and the indigenous languages added special complications to the power structure. The reminiscences of writers who were boys in India – including William Makepeace Thackeray, Rudyard Kipling, George Orwell and Gerald Durrell – show

that ayahs were remembered with great affection. But these sentimental recollections belie the harsh reality of life for most of the women who undertook this work.

Ayahs often travelled back and forth to England, caring for children on the long sea voyage home. Arriving in Britain they hoped to get a passage back to India with another family, but when their services were no longer required they sometimes found themselves stranded. Towards the end of the 19th century there was a growing willingness on the part of Indians to assert their rights, linked to increasing nationalist political activism at this time. This perhaps encouraged Minnie Green to seek redress in the courts.

Lloyds Weekly Newspaper of 4 September 1892 carried a report of Minnie's case in which she was described as '*an intelligent Hindostani wearing pearls either side of the nose*'. Minnie had been employed by coffee planter Harold Denton and his wife Grace to look after their baby during the sea voyage from Bangalore to London. It was reported that:

Arriving at the docks [the Dentons] proceeded to the South of London in search of some friends and then got drunk on the way, she taking charge of the baby. In the Borough they quarrelled and Mrs Denton turned around and struck her on the face. On the voyage, the poor woman added, she had suffered from the violent conduct of the prisoners. Southwark court restored the three shillings wage Minnie Green was still owed for which she appeared very grateful and turning to the Bench said 'I have much to thank you for – you gentleman'.

Minnie was referred to the Salvation Army by the magistrate following the conclusion of the court case and she stayed in their Receiving Home at 27-29 Devonshire Road Hackney before being referred on to the Ayahs' Home at 26 King Edward's Road. The Ayahs' Home had been set up by missionaries aware of the numbers of young women abandoned by their employers. They offered shelter with a heavy dose of Christian practice such as hymn singing. Eventually Minnie found employment with a Mr and Mrs Rose with whom she travelled back to India.



Alma Hitchcock

1899–1982

Alma Hitchcock was a gifted and astute screenwriter and filmmaker whose talents were essential to the creation of the Hitchcock legend.

Alma Reville, future wife of director Alfred Hitchcock, was born in Nottingham on 14 August 1889, one day after her husband. She grew up to be a prolific screenwriter and film editor, who collaborated on numerous film scripts with her husband.

After her father started working at Twickenham Film Studios in London, his position opened the door for Alma to work there. At 16 she was already assisting directors with film editing.

Progressing to become a script writer and director's assistant in an era of filmmaking where it was rare for a woman to be in these roles, Alma moved to Paramount's Famous Players-Lasky, in Poole Street, on the border of Hackney and Islington, in 1919. The studio was later taken over by Michael Balcon and became Gainsborough Film Studios. Here, she met Alfred Hitchcock, then working at the studio as a graphic designer before he became an art editor, and a partnership for life was formed.

Alma and Alfred were married on 2 December 1926, and soon after their daughter Patricia was born. Becoming a mother did not stop Alma from work, and she gained her first screenwriting credit when she co-wrote *The Ring* with her husband in 1927.

The next couple of decades were filled with numerous screenwriting projects for Alma, not just for 'Hitch', but with other directors. But after a move to Hollywood, Alma focused primarily on preparing and adapting her husband's scripts, including *Rebecca* (1940), *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), *Suspicion* (1941) and *Saboteur* (1942).

Alma's sharp eye for detail sealed her reputation as an editor: her observations often picked up continuity flaws which had escaped the notice of the director. On one occasion Alma and her husband were watching a cut of the famous fatal shower scene in *Psycho* (1960), when Alma noticed that Janet Leigh swallowed once when she was meant to be 'dead' in the bathroom. The negative was altered.



Without Alma, Hitchcock's body of work would not have been the same. Film critic Charles Champlin wrote in 1982: *'The Hitchcock touch had four hands, and two were Alma's'*. When Hitchcock picked up his AFI Achievement Award in 1979, he said he wanted to thank: *'our people who have given me the most affection, appreciation and encouragement, and constant collaboration. The first of the four is a film editor, the second is a scriptwriter, the third is the mother of my daughter, Pat, and the fourth is as fine a cook as ever performed miracles in a domestic kitchen. And their names are Alma Reville'*.

Alma died at the age of 82, two years after her husband. As well as leaving behind a canon of screen classics which are considered works of genius by many, Alma's strength of personality is still remembered: in 2012 Imelda Staunton and Helen Mirren were both award-nominated for their portrayals of Alma in *The Girl* and in *Hitchcock*.

Verena Holmes

1889–1964

Verena Holmes was a brilliant engineer and inventor who dedicated much of her time to encouraging the development of women engineers.

Born in Ashford, in Kent, Verena was the daughter of the chief inspector of elementary schools for England. As a child she was fascinated by simple concepts of engineering, and would even take her dolls apart to see how they worked.

After leaving school Verena worked as a photographer. But with the outbreak of World War I many women were employed in engineering to replace men called to the front and Verena started working on the manufacture of wooden propellers at the Integral Propeller Company in Hendon. It was to be the introduction to a career she would continue for life, and she built upon it straight away with night classes at Shoreditch Technical Institute on Pitfield Street, Hoxton.

After a move to Lincoln to become engine manufacturer Ruston and Hornsby's supervisor for the female employees, Verena completed an apprenticeship at the company, and by 1919 she was working in the drawing office. The same year she became one of the founding members of the Women's Engineering Society (WES), later becoming its President.

In 1922 Verena entered Loughborough Technical College to complete her degree in engineering, then during the late 1920s and 1930s she worked for a number of companies including North British Locomotive Works and Research Engineers Limited. It was during this time that she achieved notable firsts for a woman in her field: awarded membership of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, the Institution of Marine Engineers and the Institution of Locomotive Engineers. Each of these professional organisations had previously only admitted men.

Verena took on an influential role during World War II when she was appointed headquarters technical officer for the Ministry of Labour, setting up the Women's Technical Services Register and a training course for women munitions workers.



Dorothy Coke 1941, Imperial War Museum

In 1946 Verena co-founded her own engineering firm, Holmes and Leather, which employed only women. Using Verena's own design, the firm created the first safety guillotine for tape, suitable for use in schools. By the end of her life, Verena also held patents for 12 inventions, including a pneumotax apparatus for tuberculosis patients, the surgeon's headlamp, a poppet valve for steam trains, and rotary valves for internal combustion engines.

In 1955 Verena compiled the *Training and Opportunities for Women in Engineering* booklet for the Women's Engineering Society, and when she died in 1964 her legacy continued, with WES 'Verena Holmes' annual lectures taking place in schools across Britain for the next 40 years. A Verena Winifred Holmes Award has been issued by The Institute of Mechanical Engineers since 2015.

Brilliant in her field, Verena Holmes worked tirelessly throughout her life to support and promote women in engineering. Every year, her birthday of 23 June coincides with International Women in Engineering Day and she is commemorated as part of its celebration.

Elsie Hooper

1879–1969

Elsie Hooper was a pioneering pharmacist, active suffragist, businesswoman and lecturer.

Elsie, born at 174 Amhurst Road and one of five children, was educated at Pond House, Clapton, and the North London Collegiate School. She enrolled as a student at the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (PSGB) in Bloomsbury Square and in 1901 passed the Minor PSGB examination registering as a chemist and a druggist and in 1904 the PSGB Major examination registering as a pharmaceutical chemist. She was one of the first women to qualify as a pharmacist.

She also became the first Joint Secretary of the National Association of Women Pharmacists, founded to further women's employment within the profession. At this time she was living at 52, Clapton Common.

In 1905, after working during the day and studying at night, she graduated from London University (Birkbeck) with a degree in botany and chemistry. The next year she studied for her Institute of Chemistry qualification which she passed and in 1909 became a Fellow of the Institute.

Truly a pioneer, Elsie was also the first female recipient of two major PSGB scholarships. She became one of the most prominent women researchers and analysts, working for the *British Medical Journal*, King's College and the first British Pharmaceutical Codex before joining Portsmouth Municipal College as a lecturer where she set up and led the pharmacy course. She held this post between 1910 and 1914.

During World War I Elsie worked in Cheltenham as an analyst. After the war ended, she opened a retail chemist shop in the same town called Ladies Chemists Ltd.

In 1920 she returned to London to teach at her former tutor Margaret Buchanan's, School of Pharmacy for Women, in Gordon Square. She married the same year, aged 40. In 1925 she took over the running of the school alongside her colleague Kathleen King and remained there until 1942.

Recognising the continued prejudice against women in pharmacy, she opened two pharmacies in London: at 12a Belsize Terrace and at 1 Flask Walk Hampstead, specifically to provide women with work experience.

While working in Portsmouth she took part in one of the most important marches in the women's campaign for suffrage. The event that became known as the Coronation March took place just before the coronation of George V and demanded women's suffrage in the coronation year.

An estimated 40,000 people joined the March from Westminster to the Albert Hall and it drew together all of the suffrage organisations. It was the largest march of the campaign. There were 700 women dressed in white to represent those who had been sent to prison for the cause, and one leading suffragette dressed as Joan of Arc.

Elsie and other members of the National Association of Women Pharmacists joined the March. The profession's main journal covered the event and carried photos, saying that Elsie was in the Science section and that she and 'several other' women pharmacists completed the two and a half hour walk.

From 1920 until 1942 Elsie (now Higgon) worked at the Gordon Hall School of Pharmacy, Gordon Square, London, first as a lecturer and then as proprietor, changing its name to the College of Pharmacy for Ladies in Gordon Square.

Elsie died in a nursing home in Paignton, Devon in May 1969.



Chemist, Clifford Rowe, People's History Museum

Chronology

by date of birth

Jane Shore <i>mistress</i>	c1445	Elizabeth Wilks <i>suffragette</i>	1861
Cecily Heron <i>courtier</i>	1507	Harriet Delph and Frances Garlick <i>educators</i>	1862
Helen Sadler <i>housekeeper</i>	c1510	Clara Ludski <i>cinema pioneer</i>	c1862
Margaret Douglas <i>Countess of Lennox</i>	1515	Carrie Maude Eve <i>politician</i>	1863
Lucy Somerset <i>Lady Latimer</i>	c1524	Louisa Masset <i>murderer</i>	1863
Jane Daniell <i>blackmailer</i>	c1550	Edith Cavell <i>nurse</i>	1865
Elizabeth de Vere <i>courtier</i>	c1559	Mina Turner <i>baby farmer</i>	c1865
Arbella Stuart <i>courtier</i>	1575	Susannah Bostock <i>circus proprietor</i>	1866
Elizabeth Stuart <i>Queen of Bohemia</i>	1596	Elizabeth Weaver <i>shopkeeper</i>	1867
Hannah Wolley <i>writer</i>	c1622	Nettie Adler <i>politician</i>	1868
Elizabeth Cresswell <i>brothel keeper</i>	c1625	Minnie Green <i>ayah</i>	c1870
Katherine Milton <i>muse</i>	c1628	Marie Lloyd <i>music hall artiste</i>	1870
Mary Dering <i>composer</i>	c1629	Askew Eliza <i>trade matchgirl</i>	1872
Anna Trapnel <i>visionary</i>	c1630	Edith Garrud <i>jui-jitsu suffragette</i>	1872
Katherine Philips <i>poet</i>	1632	Belle Davis <i>singer</i>	c1873
Susannah Perwich <i>musician</i>	1636	Olive Christian Malvery <i>journalist</i>	1876
Celia Fiennes <i>traveller</i>	1662	Phoebe Radley <i>rower</i>	1876
Elizabeth Chivers <i>murderer</i>	1682	Hilda Trevelyan <i>actor</i>	1877
Hannah Snell <i>adventurer</i>	1723	Beatrice Hastings <i>writer</i>	1879
Louisa Courtauld <i>silversmith</i>	1729	Elsie Hooper <i>chemist</i>	1879
Eleanor Coade <i>entrepreneur</i>	1733	Syrie Maugham <i>interior decorator</i>	1879
Anna Letitia Barbauld <i>poet</i>	1743	Ethel Haslam <i>suffragette</i>	1881
Mary Hays <i>writer</i>	1759	Dorothy Levitt <i>racing driver</i>	1882
Mary Wollstonecraft <i>writer</i>	1759	Hetty King <i>music hall artiste</i>	1883
Margaretta Beaufoy <i>mathematician</i>	c1763	Edith Watson <i>suffragist</i>	1888
Mary Lamb <i>writer</i>	1764	Verena Holmes <i>engineer</i>	1889
Mary Lister <i>philanthropist</i>	1766	Athene Seyler <i>actress</i>	1889
Elizabeth Fry <i>reformer</i>	1780	Dorothy Thurtell <i>politician</i>	1890
Susanna Corder <i>educator</i>	1787	Helen Mackay <i>paediatrician</i>	1891
Betsi Cadwaladr <i>nurse</i>	1789	Alma Hitchcock <i>screenwriter and film producer</i>	1899
Isabella Massie <i>abolitionist</i>	1795	Sarah Wesker <i>trade unionist</i>	c1902
Joanna Vassa <i>abolitionist</i>	1795	Bower Hetty <i>pacifist</i>	1905
Elizabeth Neesom <i>Chartist</i>	1797	Doll Hainsby <i>factory worker</i>	1905
Mary Howitt <i>poet</i>	1799	Eileen Hiscock <i>olympic runner</i>	1909
Mary Hennell <i>writer</i>	1802	Lotte Moos <i>writer</i>	1909
Elizabeth (Sharples) Carlile <i>radical</i>	1803	Jessica Tandy <i>actor</i>	1909
Margaret Graham <i>aeronaut</i>	1804	Alicia Markova <i>ballet dancer</i>	1910
Sarah Flower Adams <i>hymn writer</i>	1805	Betty Box <i>film producer</i>	1915
Emily Bowes Gosse <i>religious writer</i>	1806	Claudia Jones <i>journalist and activist</i>	1915
Emma Wallington <i>inmate and emigrant</i>	1809	May Scott <i>community organiser</i>	c1920
Grace Aguilar <i>writer</i>	1816	Rosamind Julius <i>furniture entrepreneur</i>	1923
Augusta Johnstone <i>music hall artiste</i>	1819	Helen Bamber <i>human rights activist</i>	1925
Anna Sewell <i>writer</i>	1820	Sandra Blow <i>artist</i>	1925
Sara Lane <i>actor and theatre manager</i>	c1822	Phyllis Dalton <i>costume designer</i>	1925
Alice Marriott <i>actor and theatre manager</i>	1824	Jo Spence <i>photographer</i>	1934
Catherine Booth <i>salvationist</i>	1829	Barbara Windsor <i>actor</i>	1937
Helen Taylor <i>writer and actor</i>	1831	Barbara Burford <i>policy maker and poet</i>	1944
Mary Ann Plummer <i>suffragist</i>	1838	Carol Adams <i>educator</i>	1948
Carey Rosa <i>journalist</i>	1840	Mo Mowlam <i>politician</i>	1949
Kate Greenaway <i>illustrator</i>	1846	Helen Chadwick <i>artist</i>	1953
Rebecca Jarrett <i>child abuse campaigner</i>	1846	Siobhan Dowd <i>writer</i>	1960
Laura Ormiston Chant <i>purity campaigner</i>	1848	Tricia Okoruwa <i>educator</i>	1964
Katty King <i>music hall artiste</i>	1851	Andrea Enisuooh <i>community activist</i>	1970
Amelia Kennedy <i>hero</i>	1852	Mona Mahmood <i>interpreter and activist</i>	1977
Nelly Power <i>music hall artiste</i>	1854	Khadija Saye <i>artist</i>	1992
Hypatia Bonner <i>secularist</i>	1858		
Mary Brodrick <i>archaeologist</i>	1858		

What Next?

If you've enjoyed this book and would like to explore further, you may be interested in:

Walks

Walks related to women in the book, and more, are offered by contributors to Women from Hackney's History:

Sue Doe and **Daniella King** at

www.eastlondononfoot.com

Lucy Madison at www.bringyourbaby.org

Publications

From the **Hackney Society**

Hackney: Portrait of a Community 1967–2017, 2017

Hackney: Modern, Restored, Forgotten, Ignored,

Lisa Rigg (2nd ed), 2013

Hackney: An Uncommon History in Five Parts,

Margaret Willes (ed), 2012

Twentieth Century Buildings in Hackney,

Elizabeth Robinson, 1999

Loddiges of Hackney, David Solman, 1995

Buildings at Risk in Hackney, 1987

Hackney Houses, 1987

From Tower to Tower Block, 1984

From **Hackney History (Friends of Hackney Archives)**

Hackney History journal

Discover Stoke Newington – a Walk through

History, 2006

Discover De Beauvoir and Environs, 2003

Historic Hackney – a circular walk through the

heart of Hackney

Membership

Membership of the Hackney Society includes

the *Spaces* newsletter.

Further details www.hackneysociety.org

Membership of Hackney History (Friends of Hackney Archives) includes the *Hackney History journal* and *The Terrier* newsletter.

Further details www.hackneyhistory.org

Events

Both the Hackney Society and Hackney History

(Friends of Hackney Archives) offer regular

events, often in collaboration, and details are

published on their websites.



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