

August 2022



Dear Club Members,

For a brief while this person featured as the inspiration for a hand dyed fibre pack. . . that's now discontinued, but the occasion of the 260th anniversary of her death made me decide to revisit it in Time Travellers form. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was born Mary Pierrepont on 15th May 1689. As the oldest child of the Duke of Kingston-upon-Hull she was born to a life of privilege, but one in which women had to fight to be allowed to study, and her expectation of life was to marry, have children and run the house for her aristocratic husband.

When she did marry, in August 1712 it was as the result of an elopement. Edward Wortley Montagu was not her father's choice of husband, despite him being from a wealthy family, and a grandson of the Earl of Sandwich her father wanted someone with greater wealth. In order to escape marriage to her father's choice, Clotworthy Skeffington, she arranged to meet with Edward at the house of a friend where they spent the night together and married the next day.

Edward took a post as Junior Commissioner of the Treasury, and Mary set about charming the social scene in London. George I and the Prince of Wales were amongst her social circle as were the wife of the Prime Minister Lady Warpole and Alexander Pope.

In 1716 Edward Montagu was appointed as Ambassador at Constantinople, now Istanbul in Turkey. Mary joined him together with their two sons, and whilst away she also gave birth to a daughter. It was during this time that she wrote the story of her travels and life in Turkey, these were circulated around London society and became very popular, together with additional writings they were published as books after her death. They are credited with inspiring many subsequent female travel writers, and provide a unique inside to female life in the Ottoman Empire, Mary gained access to parts of life that would have been off-limits to male writers.

Her integration in the social life of the segregated zenanas also showed her the practise of inoculation against smallpox. This was commonly done in the Ottoman Empire, but unknown in Western Europe. Mary had smallpox in 1715 and was left with scarring, and her brother died of the disease in 1713. It's hard to understate the impact of smallpox on people of that era. One in four who contracted the disease died, and those that survived were often left with significant scarring. No one was exempt from its horrors. When in Turkey one of the things that Mary noticed was how few of the population had smallpox scarring.

Inoculation is more dangerous than vaccination, in that it introduces the live virus to the body by taking some pus from a mild smallpox blister and introducing it via a scratch to the healthy person. This usually resulted in a milder dose of the disease.

Mary was eager to spare her children the horrors of a full blown smallpox infection. and in 1718 she had her 5 year old son inoculated by the Embassy surgeon. Shortly after the family returned to England, but in 1721 when a smallpox epidemic was raging through Britain she inoculated her daughter and publicised the event. Caroline, Princess of Wales was amongst Mary's social circle, and was convinced by Mary's arguments that inoculation could save lives. With her influence seven prisoners at Newgate Prison were offered the chance to undergo inoculation rather than execution, all survived and were released. A further test was done on 11 orphan children. The

Princess of Wales then inoculated her two daughters, but was not allowed to do the procedure on her sons. Other royal families in Europe were more convinced, notably Catherine the Great of Russia who had the treatment herself, and also inoculated her son, future Tsar Paul.

This idea of treatment as prevention of serious disease became widely accepted thanks to Mary's social standing and eloquence. It no doubt led to a greater willingness to accept vaccination when it was developed by Edward Jenner, which used Cowpox instead of Smallpox, the virus being close enough to allow the body to develop immunity.

In later life Mary left England without her husband, she travelled through Europe, eventually ending up in Venice in 1739 where she lived with the polymath Francesco Algarotti, with whom she had previously had a long literary correspondence. Two years later the relationship was over, but she remained in Europe, travelling further. In 1761 Edward died, and Mary, ill herself, began the return journey to England. She died on August 21st 1762 in London.

It's a sign of her influence and importance that her Wikipedia page is significantly longer than that of her husband. . . not something you can say about many 18th century aristocratic wives.

Your colour inspiration comes from Turkey Red. This process of dyeing fabric using Madder was brought to Europe in the 1740's. The process had been developed in India or Turkey and was a 17 step process that produced a strong vibrant red colour. Mary carried on wearing modified Turkish dress on her return to England, and portraits of her show her wearing a clothing that may well have been dyed using the process.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

62.5% Merino

25% Manx Loagthan

12.5% Eri Silk

Further Reading-

<https://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/about/museums-sheffield-from-home/exhibition-lady-mary-wortley-montagu>

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/who-was-lady-mary-wortley-montagu>

<https://time.com/5542895/mary-montagu-smallpox/>

<https://theconversation.com/lady-mary-wortley-montagu-the-forgotten-immunisation-pioneer-164256>

Her letters-

<https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:raw722aux>

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/17520>

Her poetry-

<https://mypoeticside.com/poets/lady-mary-wortley-montagu-poems>