

The Legacy of Margery Fry



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By Dr Chris Handy, Chief Executive

Last week whilst I was driving to Nottingham for a meeting I was listening to the radio. A programme came on about the history of sewing, opening with a story about our very own Margery Fry introducing sewing kits for female prisoners back in the 1920s and 1930s. She felt that not giving female prisoners anything to do failed to aid their rehabilitation. As a result the programme whetted my appetite and I did a little further research into Margery Fry.

A memorial fund was set up in 1959 following her death at the age of 84 and of course it is therefore the 60th anniversary this year of the Margery Fry Memorial Trust. Described by Lord Templewood at the time of her death as "an entrancing figure" and a "pervasive influence for good", she was clearly a remarkable woman. She was known primarily as a penal reformer but was also an educator (she was Principal of Summerville College Oxford and also held a position at the University of Birmingham) and a policy maker particularly being strongly involved in the post-suffrage political culture of the time. She was an important early feminist heavily involved in female rights and humanitarian issues. During the 40s and 50s she was admired as a public intellectual and a member of the BBC discussion programme the *Brains Trust*. Also connected to the Bloomsbury Group through her brother Roger, the Quakers through her sisters Joan and Ruth she was highly influential and described as a "power in the shadows".

Margery Fry pioneered, radically for her time, the view that prisoners should be rehabilitated as well as punished and that they should be supported when released from prison in order to help them to live honest lives. Fry Housing Trust, as the Memorial Trust later became known, joined Accord Housing Association some 8 years ago and we still carry on the important work in the spirit of her vocation, resettling offenders and supporting them not to reoffend. Her legacy lives on.

We will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of Margery Fry's work at a guest lecture later this year by her latest

biographer, Professor Anne Logan from the University of Kent.
