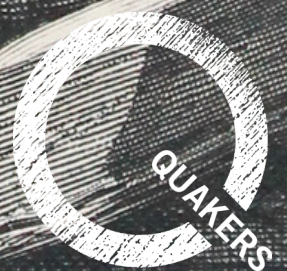


# Elizabeth Fry

Subject guide





# Who was Elizabeth Fry?

Elizabeth was born in Norwich, the daughter of Quaker banker John Gurney and his wife Catherine Barclay. Catherine died when Elizabeth was only 12, and she and her two older sisters became partially responsible for their 8 younger siblings.

Elizabeth married Joseph Fry, banker and nephew of the confectioner J. S. Fry, in 1800. They moved to London and had 11 children together over the course of 20 years.

In 1813 she visited Newgate prison. Conditions there were terrible. It was overcrowded, the women and children were subject to abuse by male prisoners and wardens, and there was insufficient food, clothing and bedding. She began to frequently visit Newgate and other prisons and draw attention to the need for reform.

She spent years protecting and helping female prisoners, providing them with education and training. She also worked with those being transported to Australia, ensuring their transportation was carried out with dignity and providing sewing and educational materials so that they could make a living when they arrived.

Her other philanthropic works included: running a "nightly shelter for the houseless" over the winter of 1819 to 1820, furnishing coast guards and their families with libraries and establishing one of the the first training systems for professional nurses. She also travelled extensively, working alongside local people to establish similar works.

Elizabeth Fry left an extraordinary legacy in the fields of social work, nursing and prison reform. She was recognised by the powerful and famous people of her day, and more recently as the portrait on the £5 note from 2002 to 2016.

1780

Elizabeth Gurney born on 21st May

1813

Visits Newgate Prison for the first time

1817

Founds the Association for the Reformation of Female Prisoners in Newgate

1818

Becomes the first woman to present evidence in the House of Commons

1820

Opens a shelter for the homeless in London

1821

Founds the British Ladies' Society for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners

1823

Gaol Act is passed, mandating better conditions for prisoners, although it is largely ineffective

1835

Gives evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee leading to the passing of the Prisons Act

1840

Opens a training school for nurses

1845

Dies of a stroke at Ramsgate on October 12th and is buried in the Friends' burial ground at Barking

# Elizabeth Fry in the Library's collections

## Getting started

Fry, E et al (1848) *Memoir of the life of Elizabeth Fry with extracts from her journal and letters*. London: J. Hatchard & Son. [092.4 FRY]  
2nd edition, revised and enlarged. Edited by two of her daughters.  
Freely available on [archive.org](#)

Fry, E (1827) *Observations on the visiting, superintendence, and government of female prisoners*. London: John and Arthur Arch. [SR 063.3 FRY]  
Freely available on [Google Books](#).

Whitney, Janet (1936) *Elizabeth Fry: Quaker heroine*. Boston: Little, Brown. [092.4 FRY WHI]  
A very readable biography. Freely available via the [Hathi Trust](#).

Huntsman, R G et al (2002) "Twixt Candle and Lamp: The Contribution of Elizabeth Fry and the Institution of Nursing Sisters to Nursing Reform" *Medical History* 46 pp.351-380. [Box L 151/10]  
Freely available [online](#).

## On the catalogue

To find out what resources the Library holds on Elizabeth Fry and her work, you can search for the following subject headings in our catalogue:

- Fry, Elizabeth, 1780-1845
- Prison reform
- Newgate Prison

<http://quaker.adlibhosting.com/search/simple>

## Archive collections

The Library houses a significant collection of archive resources relating to Elizabeth Fry, including her diaries and many items of her correspondence. We also have numerous items relating to her close family members, particularly her brother Joseph John Gurney.

Collections of particular interest include:

- MS Vol S 255-272 — Elizabeth's personal diaries from 1797 to 1855
- Temp MSS 434 — The Gurney Manuscripts (see handlist in reading room)

Search the online catalogue and look through our card index and finding aids to find more. Unfortunately some of our Elizabeth Fry collections are currently

closed to researchers for preservation reasons. These are marked on the catalogue.

## Images and special collections

The Library has a collection of objects relating to Elizabeth Fry, primarily items of clothing that were given by her as gifts and a brooch made with her hair. We also have a collection of images of her, including several prints and a photograph of her with her family.

## Other Collections

### The Norfolk Record Office

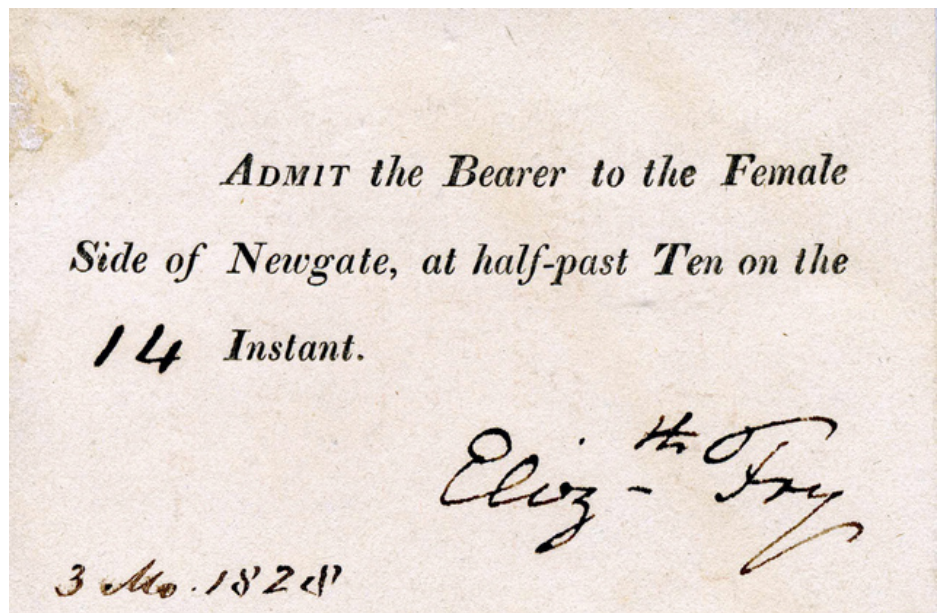
Elizabeth Fry grew up in Norfolk, and the county archives hold a number of her letters and notebooks.  
[archives.norfolk.gov.uk](http://archives.norfolk.gov.uk)

### Hackney Archives

Holds the archives of the British Ladies' Society for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners and the Elizabeth Fry Refuge.  
[hackney.gov.uk/archives](http://hackney.gov.uk/archives)

### The Bodleian, Oxford

Holds Elizabeth Fry's correspondence with her brother-in-law, the abolitionist MP Thomas Fowell-Buxton, as well as that with her sister and nieces.  
[bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections-and-resources/special-collections](http://bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections-and-resources/special-collections)



**The Library of the  
Society of Friends**

Friends House

173–177 Euston Road

London

NW1 2BJ

020 7663 1135

[library@quaker.org.uk](mailto:library@quaker.org.uk)

Twitter: [@libsocfriends](https://twitter.com/libsocfriends)

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