

Break the bias all year round

Every year on March 8 International Women's Day (IWD) is commemorated worldwide in a variety of ways with the aim to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

It is also a prime focus in the women's rights movement, bringing attention to issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights and violence and abuse against women.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, women activists fought for equality.

The focus was largely on securing the right to vote and equal pay for equal work.

These two issues - women's voice and participation in government and the gender pay gap remain key priorities to this day.

If we fast forward, the 1970s saw women rallying, protesting and lobbying hard for inclusion, influence and equality.

Feminists faced challenges not only from opposing men, but also from other women.

During the 1980s there was a variety of 'Fix the Women' programs many of which

Veronika Valigurská from Torquay Museum

reinforced a notion that women needed to 'act like men' while still being superwomen at home.

Many of you surely remember that shoulder pads, power suits, high heels and a loud voice were in fashion.

The 1990s and noughties focused on organisational development including diverse recruiting with attention not only on gender but also race.

In more recent years, we have witnessed movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp and the significant global increase in International Women's Day activity along with the many female-focused days and initiatives around the world.

Each year there is a different theme for IWD and in 2022 it's #BreakTheBias.

Some researchers believe gender inequality arose 8,000 years ago



Princess Winnaretta de Polignac - use the code PR13975 to buy a copy from Torquay Museum Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM



Angela Georgina Burdett-Coutts Picture: COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG

and it's still with us in the 21st century.

There have been a fair number of women in Torbay's history who broke the bias and challenged their place in society.

At the time when the women's 'dominant function' was to bear and raise children, several women stood out and one of them was Winnaretta Singer, an heiress to the Singer sewing machine fortune.

Thanks to her generous inheritance she was able to support artists, public initiatives and research.

Her strength, resilience, and ingenuity paved the way for many others.

In the time when public debate over sexuality and gender identity was stirred up by scandals, campaigns and scientific studies,

Winnaretta was open about her sexual orientation and maintained romantic relationships with married women.

Another independent, strong-minded woman who chose to challenge society was Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts.

She also was lucky to be born into a wealthy family but spent the majority of her inheritance on scholarships, endowments and a remarkable range of philanthropic causes.

At the age of 67, she shocked polite society by marrying her 29-year-old secretary, the American-born William A. Bartlett.

Because of this marriage she had to give up much of her fortune.

Many of history's most innovative and celebrated

botanists were women, often defying convention and sexist laws in the pursuit of knowledge.

One of them was 'the Queen of Seaweed' Amelia Griffiths, an early 19th century pioneer of marine botany.

Amelia as a skilled seaweed collector and scholar greatly influenced many male botanists despite not getting the recognition she deserved because science at her time was an exclusively male profession.

We are moving to a very exciting time in history where the world expects diversity, equality and inclusion.

Knowing that bias exists isn't enough and we all must step up and be aware of the significant impact that bias (deliberate or unconscious) has on women's equality. #BreakTheBias.

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