

FISHER, KITTY (born FISCHER, CATHERINE) c. 1741 - 1767

Born in London (probably Paddington) into a working class family of German emigrants, Kitty's beauty elevated her to the public eye by the age of seventeen. As a result, she caught the attention of some prominent figures of the day including the Prince of Wales and his brother, and – importantly - the portrait painter Sir Joshua Reynolds.

By the time she had her portrait painted (four times in all) by Sir Joshua between 1759 and 1766, she had already acquired a reputation as one of the top London courtesans. The paintings were reproduced as cheap prints for her fans to buy, some small enough to sit secretly inside a snuff box or pocket watch. From working in a milliners, she could soon afford to live in Mayfair.

Kitty's habit of riding at some speed in St. James's Park was frowned upon by some, and, following a fall which revealed her legs (a real shocker) and "disordered" attire, a satirical print appeared in print c. 1760 entitled "The merry accident"... Some think this could have been a publicity stunt, in line with another stunt when she sandwiched a £20 banknote between two slices of bread and actually ate it to show her disdain for such a paltry sum of money! [Some sources refer to £50 or even £100, a note first issued in 1725, but as even £20 is now worth thousands, this seems unlikely.] ...

WARRISTON, LADY JEAN 1579 – 1600

From a wealthy Stirlingshire family, Jean married the much older Laird of Warriston at a very young age (exact age unproven). If contemporary accounts are to be believed, the Laird treated his wife badly, and she may well have been a victim of domestic abuse. On the other hand, there were also rumours about her relationship with a groom of her father's, Robert Weir. Just one of many questions that linger is: who was the father of her baby, born in wedlock?

Jean's nurse was very supportive, and apparently encouraged her to "do" something about her abusive husband, and roped in Weir to "help". The three met up to discuss the situation and, the same night in July, Jean managed to ensure that her husband drank excessively. Weir hid in the cellar until she felt the time right to lead him to her husband, in his bed, although woken by their arrival. There is no doubt that Weir attacked the older man with some force, killing him, but it seems that he reassured Jean that he would take the blame if murder was the verdict, escaping by fleeing the country.

Next morning, the murder was, of course, discovered, and Weir did indeed flee; but this left Jean and her servants to face arrest. So not quite the outcome they had planned. ...

GRESE, IRMA 1923 – 1945

The women who adopted the Nazi creed were often more sadistic than the men. Irma Grese was a prime example: from joining the League of German Girls (the female version of Hitler Youth) to working in the concentration camps, she revelled in her role as, eventually, the 'beautiful beast of Belsen'.

From an unremarkable agricultural family in the village of Wrechen (North of Berlin), the attractive blonde Irma was actually sent to work at Ravensbruck camp at the age of 15 by her local Labour Exchange! Perhaps they had an insight into her personality, because she had found her calling. By 19, she was a Senior SS Supervisor there, and also worked at Auschwitz before ending up at Belsen.

In 1945, when Belsen was liberated by the British, she was one of the guards arrested. She tried pleading not guilty to the charges of murder and ill treatment of prisoners, but there was too much evidence and too many witnesses for this plea to be taken seriously. Witnesses spoke of Irma patrolling the camp with her German shepherds who were set on skeletal prisoners for any excuse and then kicked with her heavy boots until they were dead or dying. It seems she took a particular delight in whipping and slashing the breasts of women who were well-endowed, or whipping their faces if some beauty remained. Another of her pleasures was to send women on errands outside the barbed wire enclosure which meant they were shot down by guards. She claimed that the pistol she carried – in addition to the whip - was only for show, but she had been seen using it to shoot anyone who tried to escape the gas chamber lines. ...