



Margaret Cavendish 1623-

Writer – poems and novels

Margaret was born in Essex and was Maid of Honour to Queen Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles 1. As a Royalist she moved to France after the Civil War. In 1645 married William Cavendish, Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire and owner of Bolsover Castle and Welbeck Abbey – who was 30 years her senior.

She published the **first** English book of poetry by a woman '**Poems and Fancies**' in 1653 and dealt with 'masculine' subjects eg religion, law and philosophy and even challenged the notion of male supremacy. Inevitably she was met with negative criticism and dismissed but she continued to write and published 2 more books. '**The Blazing World**' published in 1666 and considered by many to be the first science fiction novel; it is a highly original work part, part Utopian fiction, part feminist text, it tells of a lady shipwrecked on the Blazing World where she is made Empress. She also designed her own clothing to reflect her individuality. She was the subject of Radio 4's Science Stories in September 2020 describing her as a celebrity of the day and of her being the first woman to go to the Royal Society. Samuel Pepys came to see her in 1667 but described her as that 'mad, conceited, ridiculous woman' nonetheless she did try to challenge norms and change perceptions and opinions. Her reputation earned her the name 'Mad Madge.' She is mentioned in Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of one's own'. A novel 'Margaret the First' about her was published in 2016 by Danielle Dutton and she is the subject of years of study by Dr of York University