

Mary Ann(e) Radcliffe nee Clayton 1746-1818

Writer

Mary Anne was born in Nottingham and baptised in St Nicholas' Church on 18th June 1746. Her father James Clayton was a wealthy merchant and an Anglican, while her mother Sarah Blatherwick was a Catholic. Her father was 70 when she was born and died when she was four, leaving Mary Ann as his heiress. She was raised a Catholic and received her education at the Bar Convent in York. In spite of this, she somehow managed to meet Joseph Radcliffe, a Yorkshireman, and she eloped with him at the age of 15. Although they were legally married by a Catholic priest, her guardians insisted she must also be married in the Church of England so she came back to Nottingham and they were married again here at St Nicholas' in May 1762. Mary Anne gave birth to eight children in quick succession and just as quickly her husband spent her considerable fortune; all the Clayton estates she had inherited had to be sold to pay off his debts. She lived in both London and Nottingham and from about 1803 in Edinburgh. At this point Mary Anne took the future into her own hands, finding work as a housekeeper, a governess, and running a millinery shop and a patisserie and selling patent medicines.

An admirer of Mary Wollstonecraft, whose manifesto had appeared a few years before in 1790, in 1799 Mary Ann wrote her first book, *The Female Advocate or an Attempt to Recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation*. It is a protest against "effeminate men" as she calls them, taking the jobs that could be done by women, for example, as shop assistants, milliners, hair dressers and so on, which forced women widowed or deserted by their husbands unable to find employment, and leaving them no alternative but to beg on the streets or work as prostitutes, both of which could land them in prison if arrested. Her husband, Joseph, who she had not seen for more than twenty years, died in 1804 and Mary Ann worked extremely hard to put her sons through university. In 1810, to raise some money, she published her second book: *The Memoirs of Mrs Mary Ann Radcliffe in Familiar Letters to Her Female Friend* (thought to be Lady Traquair, an old school-friend). She claimed she had wished to publish her memoirs anonymously but her publishers wanted to take advantage of the fact that her name-sake, Mary Ann Radcliffe, the Gothic novelist, was extremely popular at this time. This has led to some researchers mistakenly thinking they were one and the same. By this time our Mary Ann was in poor health and living in Edinburgh on the charity of her friend Mrs Ferrier. She died there of "a decline" in 1818 and is buried in an unmarked grave in the Old Calton Cemetery in Edinburgh.