



## **Lady Mary Wortley Montagu nee Pierrepont 1689-1762**

**Poet, letter and travel writer**

**Medical pioneer**

Mary, the eldest child of Evelyn Pierpont, lived in at both Thoresby Hall and Holme Pierrepont Hall as well as in Wiltshire. She had a governess but also used her father's library to educate herself including learning Latin- normally the preserve of men. By the age of 14/15 she had written 2 volumes of poetry and a novel.

Aged 23 she eloped with Edward Wortley Montagu to avoid her father's choice of husband and enjoyed life in London becoming a prominent figure at court. She published a satire on marriage in 'The Spectator' with advice about ethical ways to gain and use influence. She supported her husband's career and in 1715 he was appointed to the Treasury. She collaborated on 'The Town Eclogues' with Alexander Pope and the playwright, John Gay.

In 1716 her husband was appointed Ambassador to Istanbul and she accompanied him which she describes in 'Letters from Turkey' giving real insights about her travel to get there and about life there, particularly for women eg she disagrees with the confinement of women but recognises the freedom that comes from being able to roam veiled and the sociability of the women's bathhouse. She observed a harem party for inoculation, or '*variolation à la Turca*' and after looking into the practice with the Embassy's surgeon Charles Maitland she went on to have her own son inoculated and to champion inoculation and on her return to England, she obtained royal support to inoculate six prisoners, six orphans and, in 1722, George I's daughters.

*'The smallpox, so fatal and so general amongst us, is here entirely harmless by the invention of 'ingrating' which is the term they give it. I am patriot enough to bring this useful uinvention into fashion in England.'*

Her role in this is largely overlooked and Edward Jenner who at the end of the eighteenth century developed a vaccine from cow pox is given all of the credit.

There is an obelisk celebrating her pioneering medical work at Wentworth Castle in South Yorkshire, the home of Lord and Lady Stafford who were neighbours of Lady Mary in Twickenham and thought to have been early adopters and probably had all of their 4 children treated. The obelisk was put there by the youngest son William who was a great admirer of Lady Mary and indeed may have felt that he owed her his life.



Mary was 50 she later fell in love with Francesco Algarotti a poet, and left England and her husband in 1739 to live with him in Venice. Their relationship ended in 1741 but she continued to travel and live abroad only returning to England after her husband's death in 1761. Her extraordinary life ended in 1765 due to breast cancer. She produced an extensive body of writing and was an inspiration to other women writers and travellers. She has been the subject of books, talks and a play *The Lady in the Veil*.