



## Mary Bailey 1786-1828

### Poet and Lace Runner

Mary was a poor working woman who lived with eight or nine children of the eleven she had given birth to in Kingston Place, Sneinton with her husband, a tailor. She was a lace embroiderer or 'lace runner' and is a unique voice being also as a published poet as in 1826 she published by subscription '*Poems, Humorous and Sentimental*' a 26-page, 13 poem publication which went in to a second edition. This publication can be seen in the Local History Library and Nottingham University Manuscripts and Special Collection also has an edition. She was witty but also political, addressing the fine ladies who adorn themselves with lace, to think about the hard working poorly paid lace workers. She wrote of her hard life as an outworker and mother. She was dead by 1828 aged only 42, with her health shattered by the demands of her work and her domestic life and she was buried at St Mary's. Her poems reflect the lives of hundreds of women who played such an important role in the lace industry.

Five Leaves published a new edition in 2022 with an introduction by John Goodridge, the list of predominantly female subscribers and her obituary from the Nottingham Review in August 28 1828, which gives some detail of her life.

Recent research by Karen Winyard has revealed that Mary was born Mary Thornevell and she married William Bailey at St Margaret's, Leicester on 2 January 1814. William came from Hints in Staffordshire, but the couple had moved to Nottingham by 1824, as they christened their daughter Ellen at Salem Chapel in Nottingham on 23 May 1824. William was a tailor and Mary worked as a lace runner. She also bought and sold old and cast-off clothes. Mary was an exceptional woman as despite the demands of being a wife to a husband in poor health and mother to nine surviving children and the long and arduous hours she spent making lace, Mary found the time, inspiration and energy to write poetry. She published only the one collection in order to raise sorely needed money for her family. Sadly, Mary died two years later, in August 1828, just six weeks after the birth of her youngest child, a

daughter she christened Emma who died aged 3 months. The obituary notice in the *Nottingham Review* 29 August 1828 related that she died after catching cold, that developed into an inflammation on her lungs, but she could not afford a doctor to attend her. She had contracted the cold when she went out to help a poor woman to write a letter. At the time of her death, she was living on New Charles Street. The obituary also tells us that Mary herself told people that she had been a ladies' maid in a family of rank and title, certainly she was educated and could write. She was just 42 when she died and she is buried at St Mary's.

### **Petition to the British Fair**

You ladies of Britain, we most humbly address,  
And hope you will take it in hand,  
And at once condescend on poor RUNNERS to think,  
When dress'd at your glasses you stand.  
How little you think of that lily white veil  
That shields you from gazers and sun:  
How hard have we worked, and our eyes how we've strain'd,  
When those beautiful flowers we run.  
View the ball-room, where beauty beams round,  
And shines with such elegant grace,  
And think you in no ways indebted to us,  
— The RUNNERS of NOTTINGHAM LACE.