



**Bloody Brilliant Women: The Pioneers,  
Revolutionaries and Geniuses Your History  
Teacher Forgot to Mention**

*Cathy Newman*

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‘A litany of fresh heroes to make the embattled heart sing’ Caitlin Moran

**A fresh, opinionated history of all the brilliant women you should have learned about in school but didn’t.**

In this freewheeling history of modern Britain, Cathy Newman writes about the pioneering women who defied the odds to make careers for themselves and alter the course of modern history; women who achieved what they achieved while dismantling hostile, entrenched views about their place in society. Their role in transforming Britain is fundamental, far greater than has generally been acknowledged, and not just in the arts or education but in fields like medicine, politics, law, engineering and the military.

While a few of the women in this book are now household names, many have faded into oblivion, their personal and collective achievements mere footnotes in history. We know of Emmeline Pankhurst, Vera Brittain, Marie Stopes and Beatrice Webb. But who remembers engineer and motorbike racer Beatrice Shilling, whose ingenious device for the Spitfires’ Rolls-Royce Merlin fixed an often-fatal flaw, allowing the RAF’s planes to beat the German in the Battle of Britain? Or Dorothy Lawrence, the journalist who achieved her ambition to become a WW1 correspondent by pretending to be a man? And developmental biologist Anne McLaren, whose work in genetics paved the way for in vitro fertilisation?

Were it not for women, significant features of modern Britain like council housing, municipal swimming pools and humane laws relating to property ownership, child custody and divorce wouldn’t exist in quite the same way. Women’s drive and talent for utopian thinking created new social and legislative agendas. The women in these pages blazed a trail from the 1918 Representation of the People Act – which allowed some women to vote – through to Margaret Thatcher’s ousting from Downing Street.

Blending meticulous research with information gleaned from memoirs, diaries, letters, novels and other secondary sources, *Bloody Brilliant Women* uses the stories of some extraordinary lives to tell the tale of 20th and 21st century Britain. It is a history for women and men. A history for our times.

**Bloody Brilliant Women: The Pioneers, Revolutionaries and Geniuses Your History Teacher Forgot to Mention Details**

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Author : Cathy Newman

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# **From Reader Review Bloody Brilliant Women: The Pioneers, Revolutionaries and Geniuses Your History Teacher Forgot to Mention for online ebook**

## **Imi says**

Cathy Newman will be well known to any Brit as a presenter on Channel 4 News. She's a wonderful storyteller, knows how to present a lot of information in an engaging manner, and you can feel her enthusiasm for the topic, women across British history, buzzing through the pages.

For an in depth analysis of history and the lives of these women, this is not your book. The book is structured with fairly long chapters, but within in theses chapters names fly by and are mentioned, perhaps, only in passing, and no more than a few paragraphs are dedicated to a single woman. At times it felt like a long list of anecdotes, rather than anything building to a larger conclusion. That's not to say that Newman bring up any of her own opinions or build any conclusions (the section on Thatcher was particularly good and well argued, as well as the discussion of the wars' impact, or lack thereof, on women's role in society, the links between historical events and today's headlines on the gender pay gap, and I was pleased to see intersectionality discussed, however briefly), but as a starting point to inspire and direct readers into learning more about many fascinating historical figures this book does remarkably well. Personally, I am excited to learn more about these fabulous women I was introduced to reading this book:

- Cicely Saunders, a nurse best known for her role in the 1960s improving palliative and hospice care, who "tore up existing rules dictating the frequency with which patients could be given painkillers. Her mantra was: 'Constant pain needs constant control.'" (p.265).
- Dina St Johnston, a computer programmer who in the 1950s noted the computing industry was limiting their potential customers of computers by going along with the assumption that "no one but a science department or a technical firm employing their own programs would want one." (p.228)
- Stella Browne, who campaigned for the access to safe abortion in the early 20th century.
- Flora Sandes, who became a soldier in the Serbian army and was "promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major and awarded one of Serbias highest military honours" (p.85), when she was wounded by a grenade in 1916.
- Mary Seacole, a contemporary of Florence Nightengale, but far less known.

Recommended for an accessible and enjoyable overview of a massive topic.

The publisher gets -1000 points for including a comment from Piers Morgan on the blurb, however.

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## **Athena\_reads says**

Until 1948, women who graduated from Cambridge University were denied the honour of graduating with a full degree that would make them members of the university. Their name were not on the degree ceremony list. Women graduates should be satisfied with mailed university certificates, a titular degree.

70 years on, and women are shattering one glass ceiling after another. There are still obstacles to overcome but there is a lot to celebrate and reflect on. Breaking the silences surrounding patriarchy, women all around are continually shaking rules and values that specify how men and women should act in order to be safe and protected. "We are going through a feminist revival. By reclaiming our fears, we found our true and honest

voices. This tremendous need to communicate our own feelings became the seed for resistance and transformation.

We have come a long way in the past 100 years. We owe a lot to the suffrage pioneers that took their courage in their own hands, refusing a destiny that subordinated them. Journalist and presenter Cathy Newman writes about these talented women and their accomplishments, their hard-won fight to vote, to win the right to say how they wanted to be governed, to be included. She tells the story of these bloody brilliant women who put their lives and freedom at risk to secure the basic democratic rights, at a time when women had few legal rights. In the process, they raised issues that have had a profound impact in our lives, they changed laws and social norms, indeed, they transform Britain. These women were writers, artists, human rights activists, political thinkers, scientists, and pioneers of cultural change.

Emmeline Pankhurst, Vera Brittain, Marie Stopes, Beatrice Shilling, women who worked at Bletchley, Rosalind Franklin, Bell Burnell, Margaret Thatcher, and female MPs of today, are some of the well-known and less well-known women covered in this fascinating and well-researched book.

A bloody brilliant book, a recognition for all these intelligent, fearless and inspirational women who have been largely forgotten in history. Read this book and then give it to your daughters and granddaughters, to your sons and grandsons.

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### **Liz says**

Bloody Brilliant Women took a couple of pages to get into, then I couldn't put it down. I loved the way it was packed full of information and it felt like it was well structured, but one minute you are reading about one woman, then a paragraph on your have seamlessly skipped to another amazing story about someone completely different, so I needed to warm up to that. I feel so much of history focuses on women who, from their born or married status, were in the position to do something notable so I very much liked the way it almost felt classless, talking about working class women as much as the upper classes. I have no idea how Cathy Newman managed to fit in all the information, she could have written a set of encyclopedias about the women featured. Do give it a read, I very much enjoyed it and learnt lots.

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### **Sarah says**

Thanks to Netgalley for the advance copy.

This book certainly delivered on the promise it made on the cover to highlight the "bloody brilliant women: the pioneers, revolutionaries and geniuses your history teacher forgot to mention." Indeed the scale of female involvement in many great moments and inventions of the past 200 years that have been brushed over is quite staggering. I applaud Newman for her extensive research and her obvious passion for this project which is displayed throughout the book.

This is a book which should be made a compulsory text not only for young women to read but all young people to show how far we have come, but also how far we still need to go. I must admit the later chapters made me a little depressed as Newman explored the struggles that women still face for equality in this era and also shared her own experiences. At times it was not easy reading and I found myself questioning my own thought processes in relation to how I view other women, it was an illuminating and worrying moment I

can assure you.

My only criticism would be that I would have liked her to explain early on how the book would be structured and that she was going to explore the history of women from the early nineteenth century onwards, interweaving different fields and discussing the achievements of women set against a broader exploration of the history of the times. I thought she would offer a basic introduction then explore the life and impact of different individual women. I was about 25% into the book before I realised that it would be a chronological exploration, This was fine but until I realised that it felt a little listless like a very long introduction that just kept on going.

Regardless, this did not detract overall from my impression of the book which is that it is a smart, well-written and much needed exploration of the women that history has not exactly forgotten, but was never going to remember in the first place.

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## **Angelnet says**

UK readers may be familiar with Cathy Newman from her role as journalist and presenter on Channel Four's nightly news programme. She has a very direct but completely amicable style that often disarms the people that she interviews. This easygoing style translates into her written prose and what could be a dull and dry subject is a lively journey through the ages.

My only real gripe with this book celebrating great women in history is the cover. A terribly misleading choice of artwork that has more akin with a Jacqueline Wilson tweenies novel than a celebration of female pioneers. That's not to say that it shouldn't be given to older teenagers to read, as a sixteen year old I would have devoured a book like this and been inspired to step away from the norm.

Reading this book over the weekend of the centennial commemorations of the ending of the first world war has been particularly poignant. Reading about the struggles of early pioneers in education, nursing, science and literature has been especially interesting in the context of the work that these women undertook in the absence of the men during the war years.

One of the biggest surprises for me was learning more about Scottish family planning pioneer Marie Stopes. Famous for her campaigning for women's rights and a woman's right to birth control she was also a devout advocate of eugenics and the purification of the race. So much so that when her only son married a woman who wore glasses she cut him out of her will. Horrified that he would even consider having children with someone who was genetically faulty.

Bloody Brilliant Women should be an addition to every A Level History reading list so that everyone can appreciate the strength and depth that women have brought – and continue to bring – to society, politics, literature, science, medicine. Indeed every aspect of life. Brava Cathy Newman!

Provided by Net Galley and William Collins in exchange for an honest review.

UK Publication Date: Oct 4 2018. 336 pages.

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## **Molly says**

A well researched and fairly extensive overview of “Bloody brilliant women. Pioneers, revolutionaries and geniuses your history teacher forgot to mention”, Cathy Newman touches upon various women and the ways they contributed to British history.

This is not a small book as Newman breaks 300+ pages into just 8 chapters, covering 1880 to 2017. I would have liked the chapters to be broken up a little more, and there were a few times where I lost the thread when Newman talks about several women in quick succession in some parts.

There are so many great women to cover that it must have been difficult to fit them all in, and hard to choose who gets cut out. It is also worth bearing in mind that most of the great women featured are white, and especially at the beginning the women are also mostly middle to upper class, though BAME women are mentioned a little more later on. Where were they, what were they doing? Were BAME women in Britain not being pioneers, revolutionaries and geniuses, or were they overlooked? I would have liked to read more on that aspect of our society.

While I personally knew of the majority of the women mentioned I agree that they were not necessarily a feature of my history education at school. This is a great starting point and could be a useful tool to inspire others to do further research themselves. I am sure that some will find this book insightful and I hope it proves to be a starting point for them in further exploring women's history.

Newman had an engaging and conversational tone, as if you were talking to a friend about these amazing women. Her excitement for the subject matter is palpable and rubs off on the reader.

I received a limited edition advanced reading copy from Harper so my version may be a little different to the final product.

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### **Michael Huang says**

A history of women obtaining equal rights in Britain. Women started as property of men. A 1798 novel depicting a woman unjustly locked up in a mental asylum and losing custody of her child is an all-too-true account of women's fate back then. It took a law in 1884 to explicitly forbid a husband from locking his wife up at home for punishment for refusing sex. By WWI, women were needed to work in factories and even in the battlefield as nurses. One such nurse died under German firing squad and became a martyr. This played a large part in getting voting rights for (certain) women. In the early 20th century, a sequence of laws were passed to “un-forbid” women to work after marriage, to be able to file for divorce, and be recognized as suffering from postpartum depression in infanticide cases. WWII increased Britain's need for women. Contraception pills help give women sexual freedom in the 1950s and 60s. Even though Margaret Thatcher became the first female head of government, she did nothing to help women's advancement. In fact, she “hated those strident tones” of feminist. She believes if she could do it, others could too, forgetting the uniqueness of her case: she married into wealth and the husband was very supportive of her political career and hired nannies to help.

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### **Tara says**

4.5 stars.

My husband recently bought my daughter the children's book, *Fantastically Great Women Who Made History*, written by Kate Pankhurst.

After reading it with her I remember thinking two things 'yay for my husband' and 'I wish there was something like this for adults'.

BEHOLD, Bloody Brilliant Women.

Journalist and presenter Cathy Newman has plugged a gap in the market and I, for one, am incredibly grateful.

I can't remember learning about any women in my humanities lessons, although I'm sure there were some - it was 30ish years ago and my memory isn't what it was.

This book goes further, though, not just highlighting already well known women but "...the pioneers, revolutionaries and geniuses your history teacher forgot to mention".

It's a lively book that isn't just readable but relatable. It's also funny in places and definitely makes you think.

Suggesting the Bayeux Tapestry could be a precursor to the Daily Mail's side bar of shame is just one example.

It reminds me of a book version of the fantastic programmes by Lucy Worsley or Kate Williams which are as engrossing as they are engaging. In fact, I hope it can somehow be made into a tele series. We need it.

Maybe, because I had been reading my daughter's book, I assumed it would take a similar format; an extended look at one woman at a time. That's not the case. The eight chapters are on broad themes such as education, women between the wars and a final one bringing things up to the present.

Once I had worked out that I wasn't just reading a really long introduction, it was fine, possibly even better because it features many, many more bloody brilliant women - although it did require a certain level of concentration.

After reading this book, I felt the might of their collective power behind me and, as a result, I felt empowered.

I definitely think this should be required reading for high school students, of both sexes.

I will be getting a paper copy for my daughter's book shelf.

Even if history lessons have improved since my day, I think it will be essential reading when she's older.

With thanks to Harper Collins UK/William Collins for the ARC (via NetGalley) in return for my honest review.

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## **Lou says**

Women have been forced to live with being made to feel like the inferior sex for centuries, but boy am I glad that people are now attempting to set the record straight. I am a huge proponent of equality whether that be surrounding gender, race, religion, or anything else for that matter, so this book was right up my street and we certainly need many more like it! Intelligence and achievement are not reliant on being a particular gender, and although we have made some consistent progress, there is still a long way to go to accomplish gender equality. It's a cause that is very close to my heart as I have campaigned for many years on this issue. Unfortunately, with those such as Toddler Trump in power, we most likely will not make any more progress around this for some time, and we have to hope that those with dangerous ideologies don't manage to turn the clock back on what has rightly become a matter of priority.

Reading this book and familiarising ourselves with the women who sing from its pages is the first step we can make to have our often momentous achievements celebrated alongside those of men. Not only are these women truly inspirational, but they also took charge of their lives and some of them broke down barriers to



do what they wished, no matter the consequences. Some of their accomplishments are made all the more incredible by the times in which some of these women lived - when the world appeared to belong to men. This book charts women who did great things from the 1880s right through to 2017 - Featured are strong women, fearless women and pioneering women, with each of them showing that they're just as entitled as men to be recognised for their feats.

One of the books core strengths is that it brings to attention some of the lesser-known women from historical periods who deserve the spotlight to be shone on them. It shouldn't have taken this long for that to happen, but better late than never, to coin an old adage. It looks at each of the women in depth and in the context of the political and social climate of the times in which they lived. Detailed, accessible and chock full of useful and interesting information on a plethora of wonderful women, all of whom added something important to British history. Newman's writing is beautifully flowing, although I felt the book could have been better structured as each of the women's stories seemed to run into one another with no discernible sign that we had moved on to the next study.

Not only will you enjoy this if you're an advocate for women's rights, but feminists and history buffs will also appreciate the information in this book (and yes, there is a difference between those who fight for the rights of women and a feminist.) I know I'll return to it again and again. Highly recommended.

Many thanks to William Collins for an ARC. I was not required to post a review, and all thoughts and opinions expressed are my own.

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### **Shalini | Book Rambler says**

This is a bloody brilliant book that I would recommend and could gift to anybody. This book gives an account of some women and the ways in which they contributed to British history.

I was a bit confused in the beginning. I did not understand how the book was structured. In the end, I would say that I liked reading about the women and their involvements because they are so overlooked in history books.

Thanks to NetGalley, the publisher for providing me with an ARC

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### **Stacey Bookerworm says**

Bloody Brilliant Women: The Pioneers, Revolutionaries and Geniuses Your History Teacher Forgot to Mention by Cathy Newman is thoroughly researched and incredibly interesting.

Read more of this review here: <http://www.bookerworm.com/reviews/461...>

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### **Jemima Pett says**

If your history is occasionally a bit wonky, then you may have trouble placing the events and people in context in this book. Some of the older historical accounts of women you really should know more about are

well framed. Later it becomes somewhat confusing, and is more an account of what women did in the two world wars than about individuals. The author uses these events to talk about the trends in feminism and progress towards equality than specific achievements by pioneers and geniuses.

Most of the writing is engaging. I thoroughly enjoyed the first half, although it is hard to put down partly because it is a large book divided into very few (8) chapters. The post-war descriptions seemed to develop more into a rant on the theme of feminist emancipation. Some sections seem like anecdotes illustrating some point without really explaining anything about the women involved (Harold Wilson's secretary being a prime case in point).

However, the author develops our understanding of the prevailing arguments over the role of women by explaining 'what women want' from the several perspectives. Paternalistic politicians, strong-minded well-educated mostly white women, factory workers and miners' wives, and second generation immigrants. Well, not so much the last, but she does point out that there is a further racial barrier to be overcome. I want to follow-up references to understand this better. The extensive bibliography will help me look up some of the names that interest me.

The further I read, the more sections I highlighted. Most are in the section on Thatcher. This seemed to be well analysed, or at least it chimes with my own beliefs and understanding. But then, as she cites from some surveys (MORI): 'throughout her term as prime minister, middle-aged and older women especially stuck with her, though over time younger women swerved to the left.' I'll buy that.

After that I particularly highlighted names I'd like to know more about.

Ms Newman finishes with a run-down of women of our current era who are doing great things, whether in business, politics, social and health welfare, science and technology, arts, architecture, writing... I was pleased she included astronomer Maggie Aderin-Pocock, who was warned off studying science at school...

I think it is an important book, of interest not only to British women, but women in other countries too. It may even be important enough for me to buy a fully formatted paper based book to keep on my shelf for reference.

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### **Lucy Reynolds says**

An excellent book covering the achievements of so many women I didn't have a clue about. I was incensed after just a few pages, which continued up till the end of the book (taking us up to early 2018). However, as Newman concludes, as she mentions just some of the awesome women in so many areas of our lives today, that there is hope for even more Bloody Brilliant Women, thanks to the work of the Bloody Brilliant Women described in this book. An essential read.

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### **Jo-anne Atkinson says**

Over the past one hundred and fifty years there have been women at the forefront of all major events in history and promoting social change in the UK. Unfortunately history has tended to have a male-centric view of events and therefore the contribution of women has not really been emphasised. In this polemic Cathy

Newman gives the reader a taste of some of these groundbreakers and influencers. It's a fast-paced book and leaves the reader wanting to know a lot more about some!

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## **Gayle Noble says**

Sometimes it can feel as if women have been airbrushed out of history, and this book is an excellent start for anyone wishing to remedy the lack of focus on female achievement. From some of the less well-known suffragettes, through the lives of the women who worked at Bletchley, to the female MPs of today, the author looks at the changing life of women since the Enlightenment.

Many things have changed of course, but it is disheartening to see how some things have stayed the same; women facing misogyny, threats and abuse for daring to want a life outside the home and family. This book shows us that there is still a lot of work to be done before there is true equality. I liked that the author highlighted the importance of intersectional feminism and that she discusses some figures who are controversial (Margaret Thatcher, anyone?). It is definitely worth wondering why female figures can never be fallible in the same way as men, and why they are judged as representing all women whilst men are individuals. Overall, a fascinating look at what women have actually achieved and I definitely learned something new.

Thanks to NetGalley and publishers, HarperCollins UK, for the opportunity to review an ARC.

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