



# **The First Lady Of Fleet Street: The Life Of Rachel Beer: Crusading Heiress And Newspaper Pioneer**

*Eilat Negev , Yehuda Koren*

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A panoramic portrait of a remarkable woman and the tumultuous Victorian era on which she made her mark, *The First Lady of Fleet Street* chronicles the meteoric rise and tragic fall of Rachel Beer—indomitable heiress, social crusader, and newspaper pioneer.

Rich with period detail and drawing on a wealth of original material, this sweeping work of never-before-told history recounts the ascent of two of London's most prominent Jewish immigrant families—the Sassoons and the Beers. Born into one, Rachel married into the other, wedding newspaper proprietor Frederick Beer, the sole heir to his father's enormous fortune. Though she and Frederick became leading London socialites, Rachel was ambitious and unwilling to settle for a comfortable, idle life. She used her husband's platform to assume the editorship of not one but two venerable Sunday newspapers—the *Sunday Times* and *The Observer*—a stunning accomplishment at a time when women were denied the vote and allowed little access to education. Ninety years would pass before another woman would take the helm of a major newspaper on either side of the Atlantic.

It was an exhilarating period in London's history—fortunes were being amassed (and squandered), masterpieces were being created, and new technologies were revolutionizing daily life. But with scant access to politicians and press circles, most female journalists were restricted to issuing fashion reports and dispatches from the social whirl. Rachel refused to limit herself or her beliefs. In the pages of her newspapers, she opined on Whitehall politics and British imperial adventures abroad, campaigned for women's causes, and doggedly pursued the evidence that would exonerate an unjustly accused French military officer in the so-called Dreyfus Affair. But even as she successfully blazed a trail in her professional life, Rachel's personal travails were the stuff of tragedy. Her marriage to Frederick drove an insurmountable wedge between herself and her conservative family. Ultimately, she was forced to retreat from public life entirely, living out the rest of her days in stately isolation.

While the men of her era may have grabbed more headlines, Rachel Beer remains a pivotal figure in the annals of journalism—and the long march toward equality between the sexes. With *The First Lady of Fleet Street*, she finally gets the front page treatment she deserves.

## The First Lady Of Fleet Street: The Life Of Rachel Beer: Crusading Heiress And Newspaper Pioneer Details

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# **From Reader Review The First Lady Of Fleet Street: The Life Of Rachel Beer: Crusading Heiress And Newspaper Pioneer for online ebook**

## **Bethany McKay says**

This was a decent book. It isn't just about Rachel Beers, but her family tree and her husband's family tree. I was in a Victorian mood, so this book for good for that, especially after reading "Falling Angels."

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## **Judy Herrmann says**

An interesting account of the first woman to own a newspaper in Victorian England.

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## **Nancy says**

*Zzzzzzzz*. Not only was Rachel Beers a daring woman in Victorian England, there is great potential to write of the history and evolution of our modern media, and rich, extraordinary family histories from the middle east. Sadly this written like a very long entry in the encyclopedia. I skipped a lot of the middle to find out how her life ended.

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## **Nancy says**

While some aspects of this book were interesting and Rachel Beer was certainly an interesting lady, the book had trouble holding my attention. I was hoping for a Laura Hildebrandt or Erik Larson type read, it was less than riveting. That was also the conclusion of everyone in my book club.

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## **Deb says**

I can't say I found the book boring, but it did not provide the in-depth analysis of Rachel Beer's character that I was looking for. It seemed very superficial, especially the section about her role in the Dreyfus case, which was confusing. Lots of nuggets of interesting information, but in the end I didn't get a picture of the woman.

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## **Siria says**

The story of the first woman to own and edit a British newspaper—and an Indian-born Jewish woman in the nineteenth century, no less!—should have been a fascinating read. Sadly, Negev and Koren's biography never rises above the pedestrian, and I was deeply frustrated with how often the author's shifted the attention

of the book from Rachel Beer to the men around her. What a sad thing, that a woman should only make cameo appearances in her own biography until about halfway through! Perhaps this reflects scant surviving sources, particularly in her later years—her relatives had Beer declared insane after her husband's death, and confined to a country home under the care of nurses—but given that Beer was a newspaper writer who likely engaged in a voluminous correspondence, this seems unlikely. There must be letters out there which she wrote to others, more context which would help situate Rachel Beer more firmly within the political and social contexts of her time and place. As is, the Rachel Beer who comes across here is—perhaps unintentionally—a curiously isolated figure.

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### **SWC says**

This story tells the tale of Rachel Beer who was the first woman to be an editor of a British newspaper during a time in which women were expected to marry and did not have jobs. This is an interesting history lesson with background given to the Sassoon family, Rachel's ancestors, and the Beer family which produced Frederick her husband. In the early 1800s there was a sizable Jewish population in Baghdad. In the late 1800s even the rich were not immune to death from scarlet fever and tuberculosis.

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### **Kathleen Gibbs says**

Very good! An interesting insight into Jewish life in London during the Victorian era and the ins and outs of journalism in those days. Read this for my book group, who rarely go in for much other than simple fiction or mysteries.

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### **Beth says**

It should have been very interesting, but the info about Rachel came from quoting her editorials. Found the back stories of the rise of Jewish families in Victorian England much more interesting - and it seemed so did the authors!

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### **Kristjan Wager says**

Rachel Beer is clearly a fascinating woman, with a fascinating family background, marrying an equally fascinating man with an equally fascinating family background. Unfortunately, this book handles the subject poorly, and I was frankly bored to tears while reading the book.

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### **Kathleen says**

This is an interesting examination of the history of the Jewish Sassoon family from its start in the Middle East to life in India to life in London, with the focus on the life of Rachel Beer. While disowned by her Sassoon family for her choice in marriage, she lead an active life, running a London newspaper, even as her

husband is dying of tuberculosis. Upon his death, she is declared a "lunatic" by her family and her properties are sold and distributed to other family members. This story has many interesting details, but I feel it somewhat lost focus when covering the latter years of Rachel Beer.

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## **Gail says**

Having never heard of Rachel Beer, I was very interested in reading about her but after sloughing through 100 pages, I still didn't know anything about her. The first part of the book talks about two prominent Jewish families: Sassoons and Beers and Rachel is only mentioned as a child. I found the writing to be plodding, boring, and flat.

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## **Dawn says**

"Born with a silver spoon  
still unprotected  
from the forks of evil" (Haiku - copyright Ann Copland)

No words could be truer for Rachel Beer - this Haiku says it all.

The book exposes the folly of Victorian ideas, misbeliefs and misconceptions - particularly by so-called learned male practitioners and such like, but I was also shocked by how making vast wealth from the opium trade was not even considered inappropriate by a woman of Rachel's intelligence and intuition - she "had no moral fault with the export of opium" - or maybe she was just ignorant of the effects of narcotics, and kept her blinkers on by convincing herself of the therapeutic benefits of the drug (such as its use as a pain killer).

The book itself - though incredibly well researched and well written - I found extremely slow and boring. Large chunks I glossed over because my real interest was Rachel and although it was interesting to read the detail and history about her forebears, personally there were parts of the book which left me feeling "when am I ever going to read about Rachel?" It took me five months to get through this book it was so boring, but it cost me £20 so was determined to finish it.

I learned some interesting facts such as cremation was legislated in 1888, and I found some facts in the book hilariously funny such as the gem about Lord Belgrave who wanted to suppress printing papers on Sundays on the grounds that the Sunday Observer "was a weapon of infidels to deter Christians from decent Sunday observance" !!! .... and then ridiculous archaic laws that only milk could be sold on a Sunday (and that before nine o'clock) and mackerel!!

But some facts were unbelievably sad such as the lunacy laws and views such as the leading neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell advocating that any brain work for more than two hours a day were harmful to women, and female patients who suffered from their nerves were often kept in a dark room for weeks or months as a "rest cure".

The book also exposes the rampant anti-semitism around, yet also exposes how that the vast wealth (and therefore power) of Jewish families such as the Beer and Sassoon family did not help their cause.

Having suffered a breakdown myself, I can only say, thank God I live in this century, not in Victorian times. This book, despite the bits which bored me to tears, was a real eye opener, and it challenged my understanding about social, moral and ethical worldviews, both Victorian ones and contemporary.

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### **Charlotte says**

Fascinating and sweeping history of two Jewish families on the international stage around the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The Sassoons from Bagdad and the Beers from Frankfurt. Rachael Sassoon Beer is a high achieving modern woman who seems to have left a very small footprint in English history. She espoused many causes and as editor of The Observer and Sunday Times added her weight to seeing justice prevail in the Dreyfus affair. Her nephew Sigmund is a bit player in the story. He and his brothers inherited part of her enormous fortune.

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### **Juliahoney Kamenker says**

Very interesting history of Iraqi Indian Jews early journalism and a sad end to someone with lots of talent and money

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