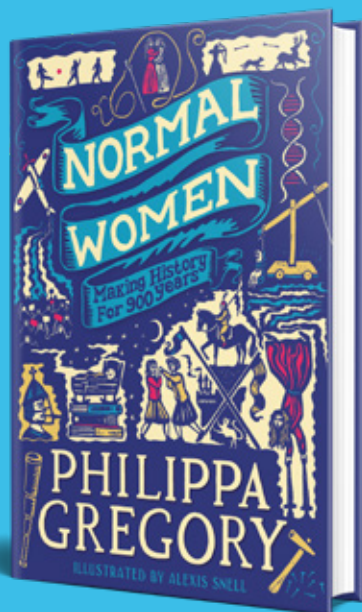


NORMAL WOMEN

Written by

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AND ILLUSTRATED BY ALEXIS SNELL



SCHOOL PACK

CONTENTS

Page 1Why This Book Is Important

Page 2What Is History Anyway?

Page 3Women's History

Page 4Women In Sport

Page 8Women And Money

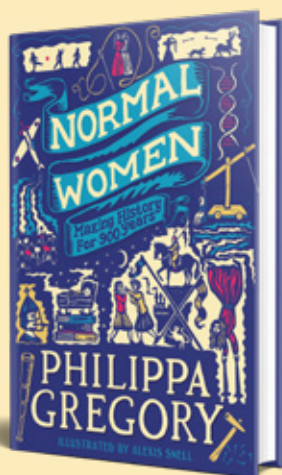
Page 11 Missing Women

Page 12*Normal Women* Discussion Points

Page 13 About the Author and Illustrator



WHY THIS BOOK IS IMPORTANT



For centuries, history was written by men for men. And they'd already decided that women were weak and frail. That they couldn't do maths or write music, paint or park cars (without ANY evidence!).

They created a record of England which did not contain any normal women. Where women were statistically invisible. A national record that suggests women did . . . well . . . nothing, really.

So today, when we think of women of the past, we often think of the 1800s and 1900s – crinolines and stagecoaches, bonnets and balls – a time when women's lives were the MOST limited, when women were the MOST inactive and – since they had to give all their wealth to husbands on marriage – the POOREST.



But normal women have been doing extraordinary things FOREVER. The real history is a story of 'normal women' going to war, women workers, musicians, farmers, protestors, scientists, soldiers, sailors, criminals and athletes. Women who rode chargers in jousts, flew Spitfire aeroplanes, issued their own currency and built ships, corn mills and houses as part of their everyday lives.

By restoring them to the historical record, we can show that women have done everything in the past – and therefore women can do anything in the future. It turns out there are millions of ways that women behave – and there are millions of ways to be a woman.

What is 'normal' for boys and men also changes over time. Once we drop the idea that men are the opposite of women, then men too can be anything they like! They can be fearful and quiet if they want. Not every story has to start with a prince riding out to the rescue.

PRAISE FOR *NORMAL WOMEN*

"Impressively researched, by turns inspiring and chilling... brilliantly told"

Cressida Cowell

"This celebration of women is a triumph of popular history"

Spectator

"A lasting work of social history"

The Times

"A genuinely new history of our nation"

Dan Jones

"This book is redemption for unsung female heroes. Prepare to feel aghast, proud and inspired"

Geri Halliwell



**NORMAL
WOMEN**

WHAT IS HISTORY ANYWAY?

Some subjects, like maths, poetry and art, have been around since ancient times. But you couldn't study history until the 1800s. And then there were only a handful of histories surviving from the early medieval period to refer to.

All of the earliest histories were written by the only people who knew how to read, the ones who had the time to write, and those who could make their own parchment from the skin of animals, trim their own quills from birds' feathers, and even make their own inks in beautiful colours including blue, red and even gold.

These people were all men. And they were all monks. Men like St Bede who wrote the *History of the English People* in AD 731. Bede left his mother when he was a little boy of seven and went to live in a monastery where he was never alone with a woman. No wonder there are only the names of eighteen women in his 'History'! It started a tradition. A *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* by Winston Churchill in the 1950s is a huge book – four volumes! But he only mentions ninety-eight women (compared to 1,413 men).

When women began to read and write, they began to ask themselves, '**How is a woman different to a man?**' In about 1860, they asked, '**Why can't we get a divorce on the same grounds as men?**' Around 1890, they started to ask, '**Why can't we vote?**' And around 1950, they asked, '**Why are we not in history?**' – and women's history began.



WOMEN'S HISTORY

When women were finally allowed to graduate from university (Oxford in 1920, and Cambridge in 1948), they began the process of re-reading the historical records to find out what women were doing in their dark and silent past while men were shining a spotlight and amplifying themselves. Women were there, of course, making fortunes and losing them, breaking the law and enforcing it, defending their castles in sieges and setting off on crusades. Some women did make the record, usually when the record keepers complained about them: when they are accused in the church courts of adultery or promiscuity, or when they are named as gossips. When they appear in the criminal courts charged with thieving or fraud, when they are registered as prostitutes or kidnapped. They're often named as rioters: women in England broke fences, trespassed, poached and stole.



Early students of women's history produced some brilliant work – the first great histories of women. They were succeeded by biographers of heroines and then came family historians. We then began to look at specific groups like witches or the suffragettes in detail, or specific industries or individual towns. More recently we have lists of ten memorable women and top twenty names. All these publications help put women into history but most of them emphasise exceptional individuals, not the normality of women's lives, and the shortlists of women are too short – only twenty women in history? Even Winston Churchill counted ninety-eight!



KEY THEME: WOMEN IN SPORT

Girls in the past centuries were not only good at sports, they were thought to naturally run faster, jump higher and fight harder than men. Women were at the top of most sports until about the 1800s – when long dresses and tight corsets made running impossible and doctors told parents that their daughters would be ill if they did not rest.

“HAPPILY, THE ATHLETIC TEMPERAMENT DOES NOT OCCUR IN WOMEN”

said physiologist Alexander Walker in 1892.

Nineteenth-century doctors loved nothing more than to tell women they were delicate, fragile and weak. Yet from as early as the Middle Ages, women were making time for recreation: wrestling, running and playing ball games.

Women trained as acrobats, dancers, jugglers and fire walkers. Entertainers travelled the country. Milkmaids had their own ball game called ‘stool ball’, where they used their three-legged milking stool as a wicket. In another game, club ball, mixed teams bowled and hit the ball. Rich women rode horses and hunted with bow and arrows. The first person ever to write about the sport of fly fishing was a woman, a nun called Juliana Berners in the 1400s.

In the 1300s ladies were so brave that a Leicester man complained that they were riding in jousting competitions. One of them was Agnes Hotot (born 1378) who took her father’s place in a joust against his enemy. Only when she knocked her opponent off his horse did she remove her helmet, let down her hair, and take off her breastplate to prove that he had been defeated by a young woman. Women were runners, dancers and they played village football, until almost all sports were banned when Parliament took over the running of the country from the king in the 1640s.

Nobody played anything for about twenty years. But when King Charles II was invited to take the throne again, he encouraged sports and there were public games with women running races, pitching the bar, playing football and cricket, and even fighting and boxing in public competitions with prize money and gambling.

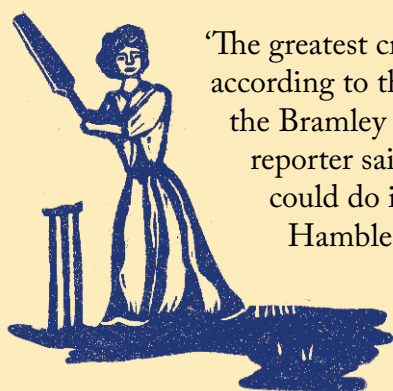


By the middle of the 1700s, women-only running races were important national sporting events, and fast women runners became famous, challenging each other to races and exhibitions. Many races offered dresses or petticoats for the women winners who raced naked and barefoot, running faster and longer distances than the men. In 1712, 'the Flying Milk Woman of Ormond-Street' ran against 'the Mad Bess of Southwark' for five guineas a side on Hounslow Heath. Another, Hannah Williams, raced for a fine Holland smock in front of record crowds. She won, but her husband made her sell her prize and buy two ordinary smocks in its place.

The champion boxer of the eighteenth century was Elizabeth Wilkinson Stokes. She challenged Hannah Highfield. Hannah agreed and said Elizabeth should 'expect a good thrumping'. Elizabeth Wilkinson introduced rules and a dress code to women's matches and was famous as the greatest English fighter, but she was forgotten in the 1900s when boxing became known as a male sport.



'The greatest cricket match that was played in this part of England', according to the *Reading Mercury* newspaper of 1745, was between the Bramley maids in blue ribbons and the Hambledon maids in red. The sports reporter said that both teams of girls bowled, batted and ran as well as most men could do in that game. The score was 119 to the Bramley girls and 127 to the Hambledon girls.



In 1804, when women were not allowed to be jockeys in official horse races, horserider Alicia Meynel challenged the most successful jockey in England to a race and won – even though she was riding side-saddle. English rower Ann Glanville achieved national fame in 1842, becoming known as the champion female rower of the world, beating the ten best male crews in France.

But in the middle of the 1800s, these records of brave, sporty winning women start to die out. People started to say that women should be quiet, calm, gentle, and not compete against men. Even the women prize fighters were arrested for being 'disorderly'. Eight of them were so strong and so fit that they fought with the policemen who tried to arrest them and ran away!

Lottie Dod

Charlotte 'Lottie' Dod (1871–1960) was the youngest of four children. Lottie started playing tennis with her siblings aged nine and soon started winning. She was nicknamed the 'Little Wonder' and won the Wimbledon title in 1887 aged fifteen years and ten months – beating Blanche Bingley. Lottie continued playing tennis and won four more Wimbledon championships but also took up other sports. She began

playing golf and became the British National Golf champion in 1904. She joined the hockey team and made two appearances in the national squad. Then she turned to archery and won a silver medal in the 1908 Olympics. She must be counted as one of the most remarkable female athletes of all time.





Golf was another sport that women could safely do at walking pace but doctors in 1899 advised women only to putt, like mini golf, and if they insisted on driving, to take only a half or three-quarter swing. Golf was considered an acceptable sport for women, as long as it was not too energetic. Despite this advice, thousands of ladies played, they built and managed their own clubs (they had to – they were given limited access to the men's courses). One champion player, Issette Pearson, invented the handicapping system, which was adopted by the men's game and is standard today.

In 1884, Wimbledon added a Ladies Singles Championship. Maud Watson took the title after beating her sister Lilian.

The invention of the bicycle created a dilemma for doctors. Some doctors thought that cycling would make women more healthy and make women's nerves more steady. But others said that women would overstrain their hearts and twist their spine into deformity. Too much pedalling could move women's organs out of place, and one American doctor even warned of 'bicycle-face', when pedalling moved all the features into the middle of the face. (NOTE to cyclists – this is ridiculous and does not happen!!)

Despite the medical advice, women did cycle, they formed cricket, hockey and football teams. Even with restricted access to training facilities, women also learned to dive. Belle White from London became the first British diver to win an Olympic medal in 1912, while in 1902, Madge Sayers found a loophole allowing her to compete as an ice skater at the World Championships. When women's football was selling out stadiums everywhere, the Football Association declared that the game was 'not fitted to females' and banned them for fifty years.

Normal Women tells the stories missing from the record. The truth is that **MILLIONS** of normal women have been doing extraordinary things **FOREVER** and one of them is succeeding in sport.



ACTIVITY

Design a poster for the eighteenth-century boxing match between Elizabeth Wilkinson Stokes and Hannah Highfield.

- What information would you include?
- How would it compare to the promotion for big boxing matches (both men's and women's) today?
- How would the poster look different if produced in the eighteenth century compared to the twenty-first century?



DISCUSSION

Equestrian is the **ONLY** Olympic sport in which men and women compete equally. Can you think of more sports that could work the same way?

KEY THEME: WOMEN AND MONEY

Can it really be true that women's work is only three quarters as good as men's and so only worth eighty per cent of the male rate of pay? Is it true that housework is completely without value? Are women's bodies and minds really only capable of certain types of work?

Surprisingly, it didn't start this way. In the medieval world people knew that women's work was essential to the survival of the family. Everything that a man did, his wife did alongside him.

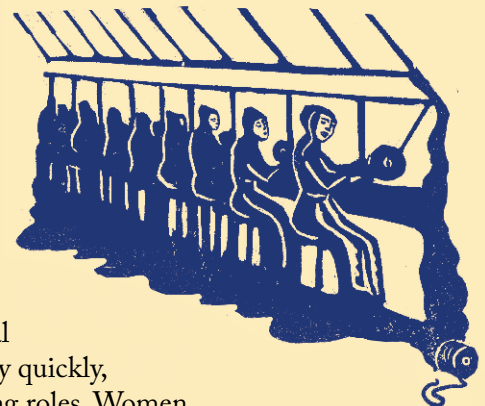
There's an amazing moment in history in the 1300s. Huge labour shortages after the Black Death (an epidemic plague that caused the death of millions) meant that – for the first and last time in English history – women and men got equal pay. Employers paying for the skill, not the sex of the worker. Women stepped into businesses, took on tenancies and trained as apprentices for higher-skilled jobs. Cities invited women entrepreneurs to bring their businesses. Master weaver Isabella Nonhouse was given freewoman status in York in 1441. Isabella de Copgrave was a brickmaker. Margery Moniers, a widow, inherited the family property development business and owned an entire street of houses.



It didn't last long. Women landowners were squeezed out and when medicine started to become lucrative, women were pushed out of healing, apothecary, herbalism and surgery. But Queen Elizabeth I brought in 'Poor Laws' from 1598 to keep down all wages – and women's wages were set lower than men's. Women were banned from looking for work, and sheepshearers, pedlars, travelling merchants and entertainers had to have a licence. Women had to take local work – however bad the pay. Women were excluded from education or apprenticeships *so women became less skilled*.

Always looking for new opportunities, women started their own businesses in brewing, baking, weaving and retail, and during the 1600s some businesses were booming. Half of the businesses in new shopping centres, like the Royal Exchange in London, were owned by women and staffed by women assistants. They were haberdashers, girdlers (makers of girdles for underwear), drapers and mercers (sellers of cloth), embroiderers, milliners, grocers and clothworkers, paint-stainers (portrait painters), leather sellers and tailors. Some women-owned shops were so successful that they issued their own coins – trade tokens to use as small change because there were not enough official coins in circulation.

The tide turned in the 1700s, when the invention of the spinning jenny pushed the textile industry, which had been dominated by women, into the ownership of men. The professional guilds that had once welcomed women became men-only, and very quickly, all trades were 'manned', and women were demoted into supporting roles. Women were left with the low-paid work that nobody else wanted.



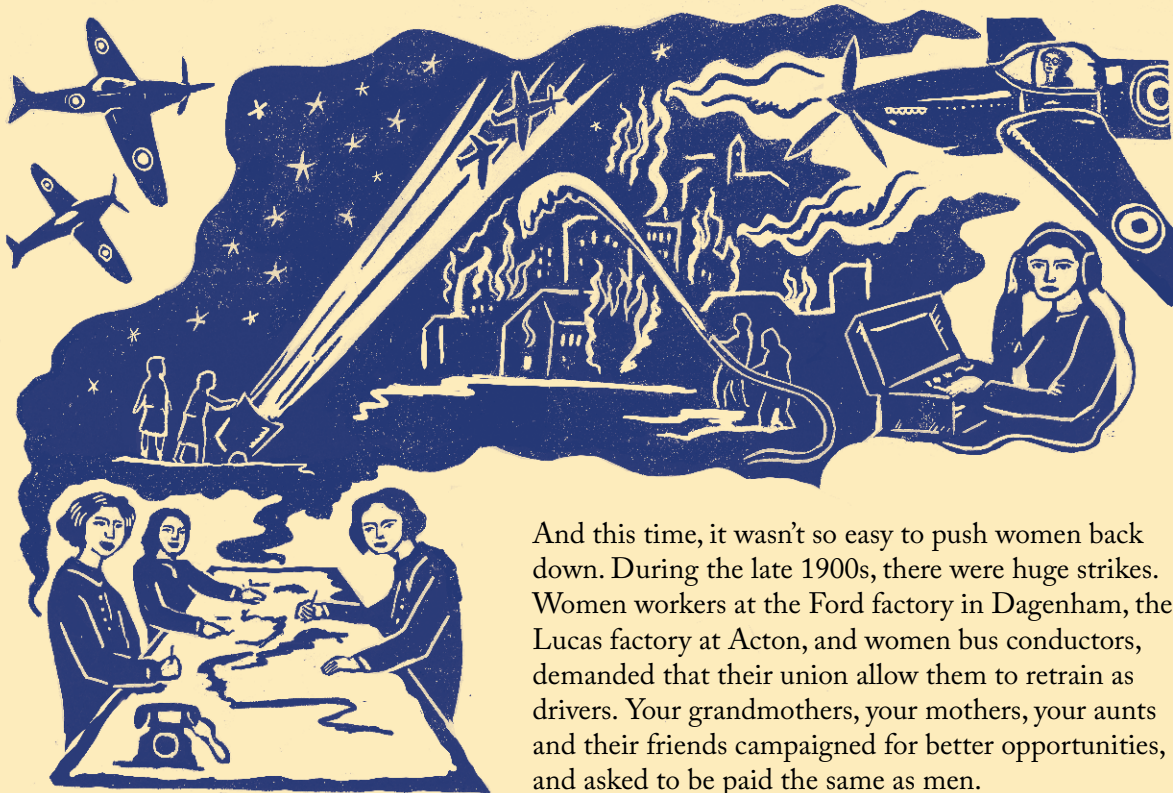
Soon work for working women was hard and dirty work anywhere, in any industry. They worked on leather – hauling hides out of toxic chemicals; they shovelled dirt in the streets; they worked on the

land and in coal mines, carrying or dragging the coal on sledges through the low tunnels and sometimes all the way to the surface. They worked in domestic service, for less than half the wage of a man servant. Most women's work was almost unseen, in terrible 'sweated' conditions.



From 1821, the phrase 'breadwinner wage' meant a wage big enough to keep a family from starving. But it was paid to all men, even single men without a family to keep, not to women – even single women who did have a family. Women's wages settled at about half the breadwinner wage. 'Breadwinner wage' was code: it meant a good wage for men.

Eventually women began to protest, and started working together in newly formed unions to insist on better pay and safer working conditions. Women began entering office roles around 1900 – but strictly typing and secretarial work. Almost all posts in industries, government and educational institutions had a 'marriage bar' – women had to leave work after their wedding. During the war years, women workers rose again, taking on essential jobs in heavy industries like engineering, metals, chemicals, vehicles, transport, energy and shipbuilding. Or they chose to go into the armed forces.



And this time, it wasn't so easy to push women back down. During the late 1900s, there were huge strikes. Women workers at the Ford factory in Dagenham, the Lucas factory at Acton, and women bus conductors, demanded that their union allow them to retrain as drivers. Your grandmothers, your mothers, your aunts and their friends campaigned for better opportunities, and asked to be paid the same as men.

But even today, despite the Equal Pay Act of 1970, women are paid between eighty and ninety per cent of a man's wage and, at the current rate, it's predicted it will be another twenty-eight years before they get it.

Normal Women tells the stories missing from the record. The truth is that MILLIONS of normal women have been doing extraordinary things FOREVER and one of them is working.

ACTIVITY

Write a manifesto outlining why women deserve to be paid the same as men.

- How would you research and decide which key points to include?
- What language would you use to persuade people?
- How would you promote your manifesto?



DISCUSSION

When women take on more paid work, their unpaid work at home is not adjusted. In fact when women earn more, they do more unpaid work at home. What could we do to make this fairer?

KEY THEME: MISSING WOMEN

Why do we accept a history of England where women are invisible? Were fifty per cent of the population really not doing ... anything ...? Why do some women make the record and others don't?

We know about **Florence Nightingale** but we know less about **Mary Seacole**, a heroine of nursing who was working in Crimea at the same time, but was rejected by both the government and Nightingale herself because of the colour of her skin.

The pro-suffrage campaigner **Emmeline Pankhurst** makes it into the record but her adversary, **Etta Lemon**, does not, despite the anti-suffrage campaign having many thousands more members.

The persecuted wife and marriage reformer **Caroline Norton** is well-known but **Mary Edwards**, who declares herself single and throws her husband out, is forgotten.

The legend of **Lady Godiva** survives from the eleventh century, but **Richenda de Longchamp** who commanded her army to drag her brother's enemy, the Archbishop of Canterbury, out of sanctuary and into in her castle vault is barely recorded.

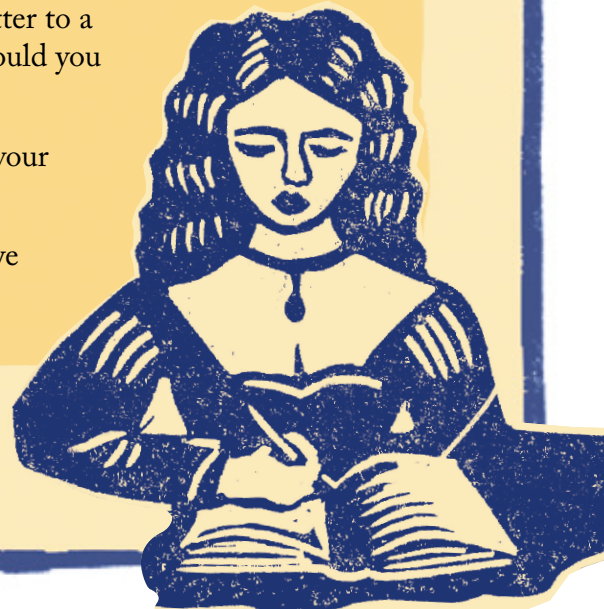
Normal Women tells the stories missing from the record. The truth is that MILLIONS of normal women have been doing extraordinary things FOREVER and this time, they're on the record.



ACTIVITY

Some of the most interesting women from history are less well known. With a partner, choose a lesser-known female figure from *Normal Women* (who you had not heard of before) that you found inspiring.

- Imagine you are the woman you have chosen. Write a letter to a young person living in the twenty-first century. What would you say to them and why?
- Read your letters out to the rest of the class and discuss your choices.
- Now that you have researched them, why do you think we don't hear more about them?



NORMAL WOMEN

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. In the past, men have controlled the stories we tell about society through various media, including books and newspapers. Discuss how this may have shaped people's views of society and culture. How did it make women and men think and feel?

- In the past, what might have affected the decisions about what is recorded, and whose stories are included?
- Who made the decision about whose stories are told? Who makes those decisions today?
- How does technology today change how we view history, and what is recorded as fact?
- Are there still constraints today on who gets to tell their story?



2. What would we learn from history if historical records and narratives had always been written by women?

- Who decides what is important enough to record?
- Do you think there are differences in the ways women's stories and men's stories are recorded/kept?

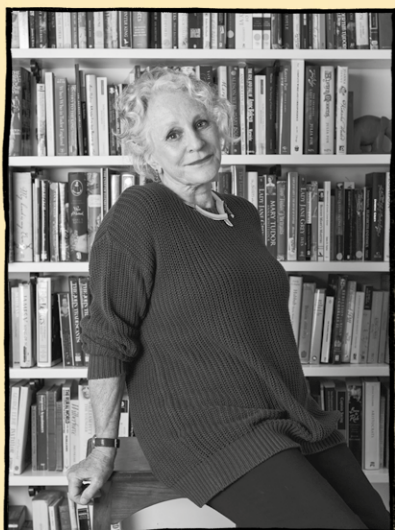
3. How and where do you think we can uncover the stories that haven't been included in the history books?

4. Think about your family, friends, your local community - are there stories that should be more widely known?

- Are there family lore/legends/stories about achievements, and interesting moments that could make for an interesting historical record?
- How might you record these and pass them on, or make them more widely known?



NORMAL
WOMEN



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PHILIPPA GREGORY



Good news if you struggle with history at school – Philippa Gregory, the author of this book and more than forty historical novels, hated history and got an E at A level!

She began her working life as a journalist but decided at twenty-one to enrol at the University of Sussex to study English Literature as she loved reading fiction. At university she had to take a compulsory Introduction to History course by a brilliant lecturer – and she fell in love with the study of history and has never recovered.

She went on to do a PhD in eighteenth-century literature at the University of Edinburgh, and became a full-time writer. Now she is a fellow of the Universities of Sussex and Cardiff, an honorary research fellow at Birkbeck University of London and she was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for her services to literature and to charity.

Philippa is famous worldwide for her historical novels like *The Other Boleyn Girl*, which was made into a movie, and *The White Queen*, which was adapted for television. She wrote The Princess Rules series for younger readers, and she has published a Young Adult series called Order of Darkness. Philippa lives in the Midlands with her family and her beloved Irish setter called Butter.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

ALEXIS SNELL

Alexis takes inspiration from everything from old matchbox covers and record sleeves, to postcards and vintage circus posters to create her distinctive and characterful artwork. She works using traditional linocut printing – her hands, and her clothing, are often covered in ink!

Alexis is the author-illustrator of *The Bear in the Stars*, a picture book for younger readers, and the illustrator of several other books, including two Dr Who story collections. Her beautiful designs can be found on packaging, stationery, wallpaper, textiles and furniture – including a bronze 'cabinet of curiosities' that is displayed in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Alexis lives in West Yorkshire with her family.

