

### **What motivated you to visit the exhibit?**

JAMIE-LEIGH: Personally, the title of the exhibit is what caught my attention. I've studied and learned about other famous and iconic Manchester historical figures such as Alan Turing and Karl Marx. However, I often thought it was strange that I barely knew of any female figures other than the Pankhurst family. Even so, I didn't know much about them either. When our group first sat down to discuss what research we could begin to do, the *Women Who Shaped Manchester* exhibit seemed like a natural first port of call, as strangely enough it was being advertised in the room we were in!

MAISIE: We initially formed a group based on our shared interest in creating a podcast about Victorian women. Megan informed us about the exhibition at the John Rylands Library at our first meeting and it was also advertised widely around campus, so we all thought it would be a perfect fit for our podcast and we arranged a visit. We identified from early on we wanted to look at Victorian women who had great influence on the University of Manchester as an institution in its own right, and so we thought the John Rylands exhibition would have a wealth of information they could share with us on this subject.

### **What was your initial reaction to the exhibit?**

CLARE: I was surprised at how many of the women featured in the exhibit were unknown to me at the time. I've lived in Manchester all my life, and we all attend the university, yet I'd never heard of women such as Mabel Tylecote and Catherine Chisholm before despite their amazing role in the history of the city and university. It goes to show how women's roles in history are often overlooked, and why exhibits such as this one that educate people about women's achievements and struggles are so important.

MAISIE: I was really impressed by the amount of archival material the John Rylands included in their exhibition displays because I thought it really helped to bring the history to life so to speak. The curators also advertised that you could contact them for access to any of the photographic material they included in the exhibit which I thought was really useful to anyone wanting to extensively research Victorian women in Manchester. The exhibition offered such a great insight into the work of women in the late Victorian period and so I knew we would have more than enough material to incorporate into our podcast. We met in the café of the library afterwards to share our ideas and we found we were chatting for ages because we had so much to speak about in relation to our podcast!

### Did anything specifically inspire you or connect with you?

MEGAN: I've always been interested in the lives of women – I'm interested in what we're achieving now and in what women have achieved. Ever since I could remember I've always tried to seek out women in history – I've always been surrounded by fabulous strong female role models in my life and wondered where these similar role models were in the history books – because there seemed to be a lot of men! Of course we all knew about Queen Elizabeth I, but there are so many more women who have paved the way for our lives now who have almost been forgotten. The *Women Who Shaped Manchester* exhibition has worked to unearth these historical figures and their achievements and bring them to light. Seeing what young children had written about the exhibition showed the power of revealing these important figures.



### What did you enjoy about creating the podcast?

JAMIE-LEIGH: I really enjoyed the creative freedom and the research involved. It was exciting to have a direct line of communication with the John Rylands Library. Though the podcast's production is not perfect, it felt almost professional researching and recording it. It was riveting to learn about women who were extremely influential and important in shaping not only Manchester, but society as we know it. It was exciting to learn the names of women who we would most likely not have learnt about if we were not researching Victorian women in relation to education.

MAISIE: I found it really empowering researching the women we selected from the John Rylands exhibition (and beyond) who made our modern student experience at Manchester possible. I felt a really strong connection to the history of the University of Manchester by researching women who were very instrumental in different fields of research and university departments in the late nineteenth century. Working on a group podcast rather than a traditional essay assignment was a welcome change and required me to use my time and work environments in such a different way. We made use of group study rooms to record the podcast and for our ideas sessions which I found really useful, and we had weekly meetings to discuss our research which was such a contrast to the individual study required for an essay.

**Why are exhibits such as *Women Who Shaped Manchester* important?**



CLARE: I think exhibits like this one are important because they bring into focus often ignored aspects of our history. By showcasing that history they can inspire new generations. I think that is highlighted by the section of the exhibit that had messages from visitors, especially children, describing how the exhibit impacted them. It was amazing to see so many messages from young girls and boys inspired by the women featured in the exhibit.

MAISIE: I strongly believe exhibitions like the *Women Who Shaped Manchester* are important because they highlight the incredible legacy of women from the past. In particular the John Rylands showcased women with strong Manchester connections whose work has shaped the society we live in today and the university we attend. Feminist movements can narrowly focus on contemporary women who are making a difference in the world, but looking back to history and the amazing women we researched has really shown me the extent to which we continue to be in debt to women from the past who fought for our educational, reproductive, and healthcare rights.

(Images taken by Megan Cronin of publicised feedback on the exhibit)