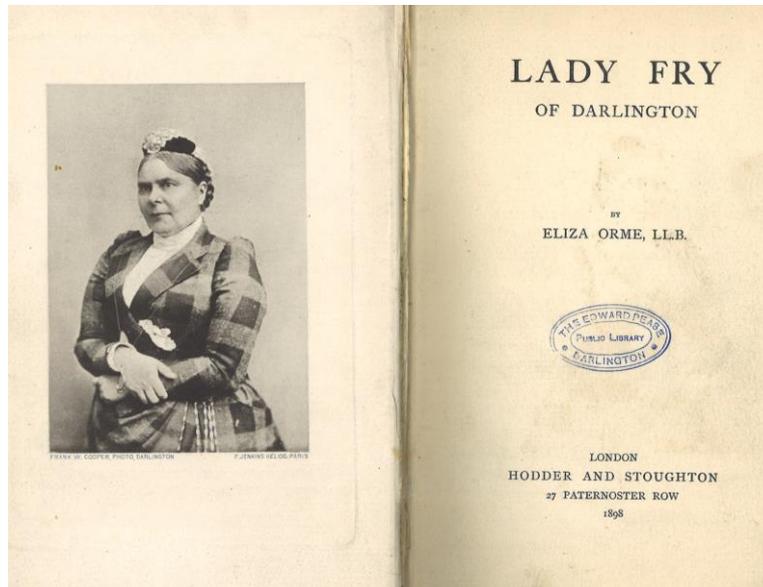
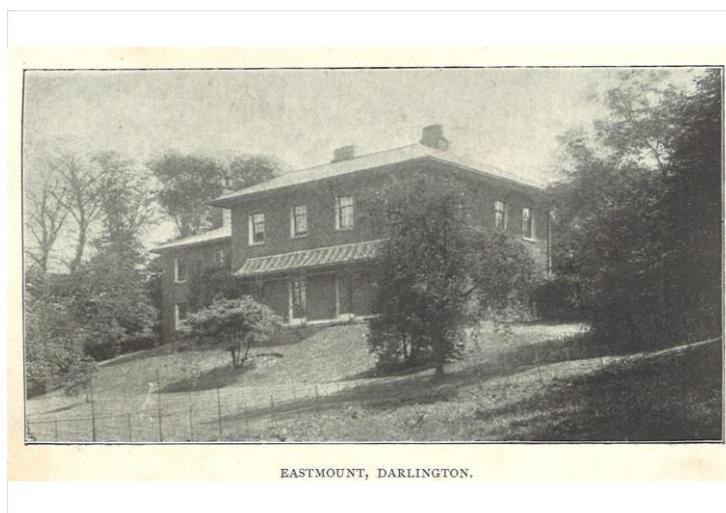


# Lady Fry of Darlington by Eliza Orme published 1898



In her introduction to this book the author writes that this book about Lady Fry 'may be useful to women desirous of following in her steps and unable now to obtain from her that hearty encouragement which she was always so ready to give to any who came to her with an earnest desire to do useful work.' It is an interesting and informative book about a Quaker woman 'who had lived so much within her own home, and who had never sought publicity for its own sake'. This maybe could be said of other Quaker women in Darlington too.

Sophia Fry was born at East Mount, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1837; she was the granddaughter of Edward (Father of the Railways) Pease. She was educated mostly at home, with tutors and accompanying her parents in their philanthropic work, apart from one year at a school in Bristol. She married Theodore Fry 1862 and they went on to have eight children of their own.



For many years Sophia Fry was to be seen driving a pair of fast ponies round Darlington. She would have needed them, being involved in so many different good works! Her personal interests were largely centred on education: she was pivotal in opening the Teacher Training

College in Darlington, and the High School for Girls; and instrumental in fundraising for a larger Hospital. She was fondly remembered for establishing a kitchen for those starving families who were suffering after the closure of a steel works – it was her initiative that the women cooked on weekdays, but on Sundays they were to rest while their husbands cooked for them. The work she was perhaps most proud of was the founding of ‘Mother’s Meetings’, eg the one at Hopetown Mission Hall, where women were encouraged to save money in particular clubs, eg for blankets, clothes, or funerals.

In 1880 her husband was elected as MP for Darlington, which meant that they spent more time in London, in a house in Queen Anne’s Gate, Westminster. She was inevitably drawn more into the political sphere herself. She seems to have two overriding missions, to show by example that it was possible to combine home duties with activism; and to foster the raising of a political conscience among women of all classes. Her main endeavours were with the Women’s Liberal Federation. One of the issues of the day that she involved herself with was around ‘the Irish Question’. Having made many visits to Ireland, she was able to say that, ‘Of one thing I am quite certain, that Irishmen and women are fully able to understand and govern their own people’.

It is over the question of women’s Suffrage that one gets an insight into how her Quakerism affected her approach to life in general. The issue was a divisive one and she had to tread a fine and careful line in order to hold the Federation together. Believing that change was inevitable she was patient enough to realise that the work in hand was more important, to educate ‘a class whom the Suffrage movement does not reach’, so that eventually, all would ‘look more favourably upon the capability of women to discharge the duty of voters.’