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Edna Healey

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In 1837, at the age of 23, Angela Burdett-Coutts inherited a vast fortune from her banker grandfather, making her one of the richest and thus potentially powerful women in Victorian England. She moved in the highest social circles: entertaining the rising stars of the political scene, Disraeli and Gladstone; attending scientific lectures with Faraday; pursuing her philanthropic work with Dickens; and falling in love with the aged Duke of Wellington. Her acts of charity were enormous and wide-ranging-establishing a home for 'fallen women', pioneering model housing, battling for sanitary reform, supporting the NSPCC and the RSPCA, and promoting technical education and domestic science. A devout Anglican, she built churches, founded colonial bishoprics and encouraged the missionary work of

Livingstone and others. Despite all this activity, Angela remained throughout her life a shy and supremely private person. The full range of her charity will probably never be known, for she often acted through intermediaries such as Dickens, describing herself only as 'lady unknown'. And a 'lady unknown' she has largely remained, her role in Victorian England strangely overlooked or forgotten. Edna Healey has uncovered much new material, including unpublished correspondence from Dickens, Livingstone, Gladstone, Wellington, Faraday and Henry Irving, to provide a fascinating insight into this most remarkable lady. Edna May Edmunds was born in the Forest of Dean and educated at Bell's Grammar School, Coleford, Gloucestershire, where she was the first pupil to gain a place at Oxford University. While studying English at St Hugh's College she met Denis Healey, who was studying at Balliol College. She then trained as a teacher and married Healey in 1945 after his military service in World War II. She became Baroness Healey in 1992 when her husband received a life peerage. Though she began her writing career relatively late in life, her books were critically acclaimed and sometimes bestsellers. She wrote non-fiction books, often biographies of successful women in powerful positions. Lady Healey also made two award-winning television documentaries. She was elected in 1993 a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

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