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Recognising Dorothy Arzner, trailblazing producer and director

For Women's History Month, Jackie tells us the her-story of Dorothy Arzner, who played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of women's history in the film industry during Hollywood's "golden age".

My background is a bit of a mongrel: on the one side travellers and on the other side travelling actors. Perhaps because of this I have always loved theatre and films, in particular old films from the Hollywood golden era.

At first my interest probably was the films themselves, the actors and the stories. As a teenager though I became interested in the faceless (to me) behind the camera team such as directors, camera operators, producers. This era was unsurprisingly dominated by men, but then my love of Katherine Hepburn led me to Dorothy Arzner, a trailblazing producer and director.

Dorothy played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of women's history in the film industry. Born in 1897, she defied societal norms of her time, becoming a pioneering force in Hollywood during an era dominated by male filmmakers.

Arzner began her career as a film cutter (editor) in the silent era, swiftly climbing the ranks to become the first female director in the Hollywood studio system. Not only did she break through gender barriers, but she also shattered glass ceilings in 1929 by directing Clara Bow's first talkie in the film, "The Wild Party."

She became a producer and what I really like about her (as well as her wearing trousers to work) was her commitment to empowering women in the film world that went beyond her own success. She supported and nurtured female actors

such as Katherine Hepburn and actively promoted opportunities for female crew members, challenging the prevailing gender norms.

In an industry rife with gender bias, Arzner's impact on women's history is monumental. Her legacy is not merely a list of accomplishments but a testament to resilience and determination. Through her work, she paved the way for future generations of women in film, proving that talent knows no gender.

While her contributions might not be as widely recognised as some of her male counterparts, Dorothy Arzner's role in women's history is undeniable. She demonstrated, like we do in PCS, that women can be powerful decision-makers. In Dorothy's case it was the film industry, but it translates across to us as women today where we refuse to be relegated to supporting roles. Her journey stands as an inspiration and a reminder that women can, and should, be at the forefront of all endeavours, shaping narratives and influencing culture.