

Nottingham Women's History Group Newsletter

Issue 8 Spring / Summer 2020



Here we are in Spring 2020 – ironically the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife - but I don't think any of us could have envisaged the situation we find ourselves in due to Covid-19.

We were naturally disappointed that we had to cancel our main Spring event, the visit to the Florence Nightingale exhibition at Manuscripts and Special Collections, but it was the only thing to do to help the efforts to overcome this invidious infection.

We hope this Spring/Summer edition of our newsletter will while away a few minutes of your enforced isolation, and we hope to see you when we all emerge from the other end of this surreal situation. Look after yourselves and keep safe.

Nottingham Castle Hard-Hat Preview

On a wild, wet and windy Tuesday in November, Miriam, Ro and Sian were treated to a behind-the-scenes, hard-hat tour of Nottingham Castle. We had been invited for a sneak peek of the alterations by

Gareth Morgan, Learning Development Office of Nottingham Castle Trust, and to discuss the inclusion of women in the newly refurbished exhibits.



The extent of the work was truly astonishing. After pointing out the new visitor centre in the grounds, Gareth showed us around the site, starting with (what else) the section that will become the Robin Hood Gallery which will be accommodated in an area which was previously an open-air space not open to the public. There will be video projections, virtual archery and lots more exciting experiences bringing the legend of Robin Hood to life. We then moved inside the castle, now unrecognisable from its former incarnation. Spaces have been stripped back and opened up

in preparation for the proposed new galleries: Rebellion, featuring Nottingham's history of protest and activism, taking in the Luddites and the burning of the castle; Art and Making which will showcase Nottingham's creative history, including its famous lace industry as well as earlier specialities of alabaster and salt-glaze pottery; and, of course, objects and paintings from the Castle's fine and decorative arts collection. With the galleries and rooms empty and gutted, I was amazed at the truly breath-taking scale of the indoor spaces. It will be a tremendous transformation and I look forward to its re-opening, hopefully in 2021, and sampling the pleasures in store – artistic as well as culinary!

Nottinghamshire Archives visit Tuesday 12 November



A select group of NWHG members was treated to a fantastic session at the Nottinghamshire Archives on Tuesday November 12th by County Archivist Ruth Imeson. Ruth gave us an engaging and informative talk about the Archives before taking us on a tour of the different sections. We heard about the kinds of items that find their way into the Archives, and how and why they end up there, much of them being bequeathed or donated. We also learned about the different restoration techniques necessary to stabilise and repair them, including some horror stories about precious material rotting away due to being

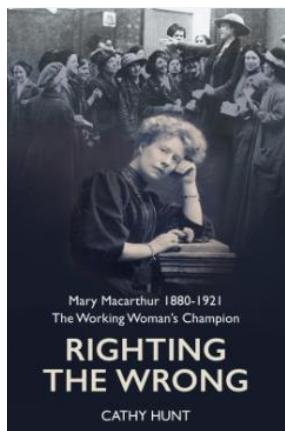
stored in damp conditions or being eaten by rodents (before they reached the safety of the Archives, obviously!)

We then had a tour of the building, including the rooms where restoration and repair takes place and the meticulously organised storerooms. The final part of the evening was the chance to see, and even handle, some wonderful letters, documents, diaries and books, dating back to the 18th century in the case of Abigail Gawthern's diary. This is a lovely, gossipy diary of day to day life, featuring tea parties, walks, balls, births, marriages, and deaths which allows us to glimpse what life was like for a wealthy woman in Nottingham between the 1750s-1800s. Particularly thrilling for me were the items relating to the fight for women's suffrage in Nottinghamshire. There were copies of the material found in Helen Kirkpatrick Watts' trunk. Helen was Nottingham's most celebrated suffragette and her cabin trunk turned up at Avonmouth docks in the 1970s. Sadly, the trunk, along with all the original material, later disappeared, but at least we still have access to the copies of the precious letters, press cuttings and other documents thanks to Nottinghamshire Archives. There was also a defaced poster from the 1910s, pointing out that men who were fighting for Irish independence and employing similar tactics to the suffragettes were allowed to go free while the suffragettes were being imprisoned.

There was so much more for us to see and handle; indeed, there was more than we had dared to hope for – I think all of us could have spent at least another hour there, but we were merciful and eventually allowed Ruth to lock up and go

home! So thank you, Ruth, for giving up your time to provide us with such a wonderful evening. It was very much appreciated by us all.

**Mary Macarthur,
Working Women's Champion
Saturday 11th January 2020**



On Saturday 11th January 2020, Nottingham Women's History Group joined forces with the Labour History Group to host a talk by Cathy Hunt about Mary Macarthur at the Nottingham Mechanics. Cathy has written a carefully researched biography of Mary Macarthur '*Righting the Wrong – the working woman's champion*', providing a portrait of Mary as a woman, as well as a socially committed activist. Cathy gave an informative and, at times, emotional talk to a packed, indeed overflowing, room about this inspirational, charismatic woman who died far too young aged only 40 in 1921.

Mary Macarthur was born in Glasgow in 1880 to a middle-class Conservative family and, indeed, she was a member of The Primrose League for a while. However, at 21 she became aware of the poor working conditions endured by women after attending a local

political meeting. She was so incensed at what she heard at that meeting that she was soon Chair of the newly-formed Ayr branch of the Shop Assistant's Union.

Mary had an incisive understanding of the issues facing women workers and she worked tirelessly, helping women to combat and overcome these issues while encouraging them to speak out against injustice and inequality. From her beginnings in the Shop Assistant's Union, by 1906 Mary was involved in founding the Anti-Sweating League, as well as the Federation of Women Workers. However, it was for her work with the women chain makers of Cradley Heath for which she is best remembered. Her support and encouragement helped them to achieve the country's first minimum wage after their two month strike in 1910.

Following this success, Mary took the brave step (as a single woman) of relocating to London, where her skills as a communicator and organiser helped women factory hands in Bermondsey to secure wage increases. At the same time, a long-time admirer and friend, W C Anderson, a fellow member of the Independent Labour Party, had followed her to London and she eventually agreed to marry him in September 1911. Their marriage was a period of happiness and sorrow, because their first child died at birth in 1913, a sorrow only lessened by the birth of their daughter in 1915.

Sadly, the family was only to have a short time together as Will died in the flu pandemic of 1918-1921, and Mary herself died of cancer in 1921 aged only 40. Her work as a trade union activist was unstinting and achieved so much for the women she worked with. There is no telling

how much more she could have achieved had she lived. She had already stood as a Labour candidate for Stourbridge and, although that had been unsuccessful, she would doubtless have stood again.

Mary is remembered in Cradley Heath where a park named after her contains a statue of her and the women chain makers, who are also commemorated in the annual Chain makers festival. She is also represented on the plinth of the Millicent Fawcett statue in Parliament Square, quite rightly marking her as one of the most influential figures in women's history.

International Women's Day and A New Plaque Celebrating Nottingham Women



We were very pleased to work with many other women's organisations and the City Council, led by Councillor Rebecca Langton, to plan this event.

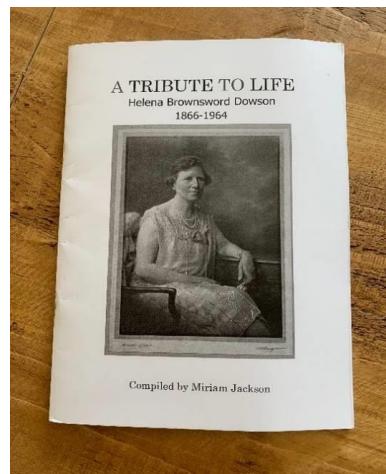
As part of the initiative – and in particular to celebrate 100 years since the first women city councillors, Helena Brownsword Dowson and Caroline Harper; were elected in 1920 – NWHG suggested a plaque be installed to celebrate

this. The unveiling took place on Friday 6 March ready for the IWD event on Sunday 8 March.

It was good to see Nadia Whittome MP proudly photographed by the plaque which celebrates her being the first BAME woman MP elected in 2019.

The event itself attracted over 500 women who visited the various stalls, saw the Mayor's parlour and toured the building before enjoying free coffee and cake. NWHG's display highlighted the women who were firsts in political offices, but also trailblazers in other fields such as medicine, science, computer programming, art and writing. It was a great day and hopefully one which will become an annual event.

Helena Brownsword Dowson



Helena, or Nellie as she was affectionately known, was the key suffragist figure in Nottingham for many years.

After some women got the vote in 1918 she continued her public service, being elected as a Liberal City Councillor in 1920 and being appointed that year as a Magistrate.

NWHG have spent the last few months researching her life and learning more about her. We have produced a short booklet capturing what we found out. If you would like a copy, price £3.00 (including postage), please e mail us at nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com.

Nellie features on the new plaque attached to the Council House celebrating her role as City Councillor. We are currently pursuing in association with the Nottingham Justice Centre a plaque to celebrate the first three women appointed as Justices of the Peace.

Remembering Florence Nightingale



Sadly, our planned events in conjunction with the Nightingale Bi-Centenary Exhibition at Lakeside Arts have had to be postponed. D'you think she would have understood? One can almost imagine her bustling in to take charge of an international pandemic!

What was she really like? An ancestor of mine met her in January 1886. Grace Dexter, a twenty-year-old teacher at Lea School, was summoned to London to meet Miss Nightingale, who still took a keen interest in what went on in her home village. She was also interested in the young women serving their apprenticeships as pupil-teachers, and it was Grace's turn.

Grace recorded the experience in her diary: "How am I to describe her? I had not formed a very favourable impression of her appearance by report; but found her a lady most *charmane*. Such a beautiful, subdued face and voice. She talked to me so easily & pleasantly that I was not constrained in my own manner but felt that I could speak to her as freely as possible, I believe her to be a true Christian lady by her conversation with me..... A picture hanging before us turned the subject to the Crimean War. Miss Nightingale then read me a poem by Tennyson on 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. She read it with great expression, every phase of their movement being portrayed by the inflections of her voice. I think the interview was – taking it as a whole – the most pleasant I have ever spent in my life, interspersed as it was by these (to me) delightful references."

Florence kept in touch with Grace for several years as she moved from one school to another, sending her pictures and other materials for use in her classrooms and giving her good advice. Grace never forgot her: in 1930 she wrote that she had been to London and had stood in front of Miss Nightingale's house at 10, South Street, Park Lane, "which was empty and going to be demolished with many others... How well I remember going thro' that

door 40 years ago to see that illustrious woman!"

The book shops are all closed for business just now, but *Grace's Diary (1884-1893)* can be obtained at a special national-crisis cost of £5 inc. postage from me, Rowena Edlin-White. Email for further details: ro@edlin-white.net

Two New Members for NWHG



Hi, my name is **Karen Winyard** and I joined NWHG just before we all had to self-isolate! I was a volunteer at The Workhouse in Southwell for many years, both as a researcher and storyteller, so I'm interested in women and the Poor Laws in the 19th century.

My second passion is the history of witchcraft and witch hunts in England, particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries, a cultural phenomenon that has women at its centre. I first began to look at this when researching a novel; the novel is still unfinished as the historian in me took over, but perhaps I'll dust it off in my period of self-isolation.

My priority, though, is a diary I found in Nottinghamshire Archives kept by a woman named Anne Cooke (see also piece below). Only

2 volumes survive, covering the period 1835 to 1839, whilst Anne was living in the Southwell area. They have bewitched me, partly due to their 'Jane Austen' style, and partly because they reveal so much about life in Southwell, especially for women. I'm looking forward to the day when NWHG can resume its activities and I can learn more from you all about women's history in this fascinating county.



Hi everyone, my name is **Tina Pamplin**. I joined the committee just before the lockdown and look forward to meeting you all in the not too distant future.

I did a lot of Russian and Soviet history as part of my degree but little remains in my brain apart from the obvious dates and a fondness for Valentina Tereshkova.

A few years ago I was introduced to Val Wood because she was researching a 1970's Nurseries and Childcare Campaign and someone told her I might remember it. Somehow she lured me into a project to interview women who were involved in the Women's Liberation Movement in Nottingham in the 1970's. The first few women had documents, leaflets and, occasionally and miraculously, photographs. Did we want them?

Definitely! Where would we keep them? Clearly not in my attic which had recently been excavated to save the contents because of a leak in an old tank.

Many chats, meetings and negotiations later the Midlands Feminist Archive was due to be launched at the Nottingham University Archive on the first Tuesday of what turned out to be the first week of lockdown. Historic but not in the way we had imagined. Our little project has grown to involve a core group of five women. We've done our basic training at the archive and had a room booked every Tuesday and crates of materials ready to transport to the university but not yet...Meanwhile the oral histories have been fascinating, amusing, moving and sometimes breathtaking in the way an individual woman's story encapsulates a moment when the world changed. (a bit like this virus but in a good way). We have lots of plans so when we're all allowed out again – the Peak District, the seaside, digital recorders and the launch of the archive all beckon.

BUT NWHG still needs YOU!



Just get in touch if you'd like to find out more about getting involved like Karen and Tina.

nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com

A Plaque For Dorothy Whipple

Helen Lewis, an avid Dorothy Whipple fan, with the help of Bromley House Library Director, Mel Duffill-Jeffs, launched a crowdfunding appeal in early March for a plaque to celebrate her to be attached to her Nottingham home in Ebers Road.

We were very pleased to support this and circulated the appeal to NWHG members, some of whom I know made donations. Within only 12 days the target of £800 had been reached. We will meet soon to agree the wording and commission the plaque. We have in mind an unveiling event at the house on 19th September if coronavirus restrictions allow. We will, of course, keep people up to date with plans.

Mapping Women's Suffrage

This is a new national project involving academics and local history groups which aims to map and record the everyday locations and lives of as many 'Votes for Women' campaigners as possible at the height of the 1911 suffrage movement. The aim is to create a legacy of data about Votes for Women campaigners to mark the 2028 centenary – commemorating 100 years since women got the vote on the same terms as men. We aim to get involved and upload various Nottingham suffrage stories to ensure that Nottingham is part of this national overview and have been contacted Tara Morton, Project Officer, about contributing this content. Visit its website at www.mappingwomenssuffrage.org.uk for more details

Miner2Major

This five-year landscape partnership scheme is seeking to reconnect local communities with the heritage of the real Sherwood Forest.

NWHG met with the scheme back in 2019 to make sure a woman's perspective wasn't overlooked. This year we met up again to see how the project was progressing. It will focus on 1850-1950, a century of change and will use the stories of 10 key individuals who lived in or had an impact on Sherwood Forest.

The five women's stories will be those of Ada Lovelace, Nell Gwyn, Gertrude Saville, Emma Wilmot and Helen Cresswell. They will all feature in the project's work, displays and presentations. The project, based at Rufford Country Park, is also keen for volunteers to help with its work and is also making available a community grants scheme to local groups or individuals who might wish to contribute to the project. See www.Miner2Major.Nottinghamshire.gov.uk

Castle Update

After our exciting behind the scenes hard-hat visit in the autumn, we met up with the volunteer co-ordinator Pippa Davies to learn that renovation is on target, with the Castle planned to open early in 2021, coronavirus restrictions notwithstanding.

The new visitor centre, and various galleries, will feature various women from Queen Isabella and Lucy Hutchinson in the Historical Galleries through to women lace-makers in the Lace gallery. In the Rebellion Gallery the independent

suffragette Eileen Casey will be profiled – and we were happy to loan the Castle Sarah Laughton's self-published book *The Woman with the Suitcase* to help create the content.

In addition, the Castle is seeking volunteers should any of you wish to get involved in behind the scenes research and cataloguing, conservation work, guiding or role-playing.

A further exciting project underway as part of the renovation is an attempt to re-establish a rare wildflower – the Nottingham Catchfly. This was first found on the walls of Nottingham Castle but was sadly lost during work done in the nineteenth century. Take a look at <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/plant-fungi-species/nottingham-catchfly>.

Anne Cooke's Books

I'd never heard of Dorothy Whipple until NWHG helped raise her profile; I've now bought *The Priory* and *They Were Sisters*. I take books and their availability for granted along with the fact that many successful and popular writers are women. It was different for Anne Cooke in the 1830's. Receiving a book was noteworthy and she makes a point of describing her reading material in her diary. I was surprised to find that, out of the 37 books mentioned, 13 were written by women, most of whom I'd never heard of. Julia Pardoe, Mary Boddington, Katherine Thomson, Catherine Sinclair, Amelia Bristow and Anna Brownell Jameson were all writers of note. Many of their books are available on books.google.co.uk and I find it thrilling to be able to follow in

Anne's footsteps and read along with her.

Anne never mentions buying books herself, most are lent to her by family and friends. When she visits the new home of her sister, Elizabeth Reynolds, she writes: "Mr. R. shewed me all the premises inside and out . . . the library is now the morning room, a great privilege, there are books to suit every taste, and no restrictions."

Anne has a penchant for travel writing and adventure, but doesn't like social realism. She comments on Frances Trollope's *Factory Boy*: "Took up and laid it down many times but could not get through it, the characters and scenes so repugnant to one's feelings, which are, it is to be feared, too near truth." I often wonder what Anne would have made of Elizabeth Gaskell.

Chronicling Covid-19 and the Lockdown

Friends of Nottingham Archives (FONA) has suggested it would be a good idea to record the radical changes we are currently experiencing in our day-to-day lives with a view to compiling our writings into a single document to be deposited in Nottinghamshire Archives as a resource for future researchers – something akin to the WW2 Mass Observation Diaries.

It does not have to be a day-by-day record (though it could be if you wanted it to be); maybe write something a couple of times a week. And contributions don't have to be anything fancy – just a simple, factual reflection of YOUR life at the moment; what you're doing, what you're thinking and how you're feeling. Maybe you're self-isolating

or perhaps you've volunteered to support your local community, or taken up a new hobby, or finished that piece of work that's been hanging around for years, or something else completely different. If you wanted to include photos or a drawing or other illustration, then feel free.

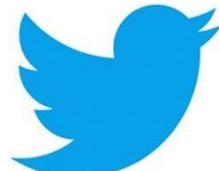
If you think you'd like to contribute, get in touch and I will collect NWHG contributions and pass them on to Judith at FONA. Of course, some of you might well know Judith, so just get in touch with her directly. It's probably best to wait until your diary is finished before submitting it, rather than sending it in dribs and drabs - that might get very complicated!

I think this is a great idea and will ensure that this period will be recorded at a grass roots level, and by women too!

NWHG celebrates 10 years!

The group was formed back in 2010 and this year celebrates its tenth year. We hope to get in touch with some of those who set up the group and others active over the years and have a celebratory event. We had thought to do this in the summer but given the current situation, let's hope we can plan something for the autumn.

Website, Digital and Social Media



Don't forget our website where you can find links to items such as our list of Notable Women in Nottingham and also a self-guided suffrage walk around the city centre. Follow the link to check it out for yourself.

www.nottinghamwomenshistory.org.uk

You will also be able to download several interesting documents including *1866 Petition: Nottingham Signatories, Shoulder to Shoulder: Nottinghamshire Women make their mark*, written to commemorate Vote 100 and much more.

Thank you to everyone who continues to follow us on social media. As always, if you have any ideas for posts, events to share then please get in contact.

Dates for your diary

NB: may be subject to cancellation:

- Thursday 25th June: Women Writers' Walk, 7pm, meet at the Right Lion
- Saturday 19th September: unveiling of Dorothy Whipple plaque at Ebers Road
- .6-17 October 2020: Red Ellen at Nottingham Playhouse, telling the remarkable story of Ellen Wilkinson, Labour MP for Jarrow

Contact us:

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