

Nottingham Women's History Group Newsletter

Issue 9 Autumn / Winter 2020



Welcome to our Autumn – Winter 2020 newsletter, a little later than usual but also a little longer!

We've missed being out and about and being able to meet and chat with you, and hope to be able to do so as soon as it is possible and safe. I have to say I thought back in March that we would already have reached that point but, sadly, we are all still having to be vigilant and keep our distance. On the plus side, I have at long last mastered several electronic forms of communication and am quite the Zoom quiz whizz!

Anyway, despite the whole Covid 19 crisis, we've still got lots to tell you! Read on for news of new plaques to women in the city, women's experiences in Southwell Workhouse, The Feminist Archive Midlands, NWHG's 10th Anniversary and much more.

Archiving in the time of Corona – Report from the Feminist Archive Midlands

Pretty much everyone reading this will know that the November 1970 Miss World pageant at the Royal Albert Hall was disrupted by protesters from the Women's Liberation Movement throwing flour bombs and heckling. Less well known is a demonstration at a beauty contest at the Nottingham Palais at the end of March 1971. Two students from Trent Poly

entered and got through to the final whereupon one of them ripped open a wrap around skirt to display a women's liberation banner. They both ran through the hall shouting 'Women's liberation' while supporters threw leaflets from the balcony.

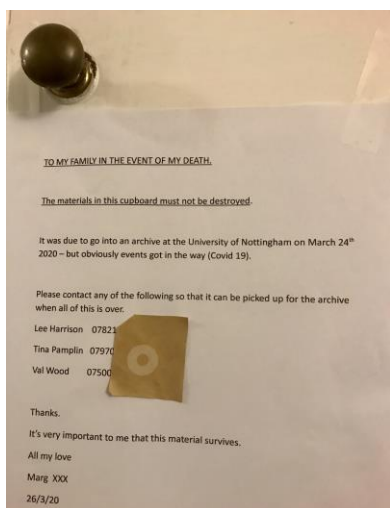


Over the past few years a group of us have been enjoying hearing fascinating stories like this while interviewing local women activists from the 1970's onwards and recording their memories of the activities and campaigns they were involved with. There were consciousness raising groups, Women's refuges, demonstrations, conferences, theatre

groups, campaigns, newsletters, 4 different Women's Centres, festivals, life changing energy and enthusiasm.



Many interviewees produced folders of old leaflets or newsletters or bemoaned precious papers that had gone mouldy in the cellar or been mislaid during a house move. Some documents so rare and precious that the impending pandemic led to a precautionary notice on a cupboard door:



A leak emanating from an old water tank in my attic narrowly missed a massive hoard of papers and led to an exploration of aspects of my past and many trivial mysteries: I have no idea why I had in my possession a 1977/8 rent book from the Newcastle Chambers Women's centre or a Minutes Book from the Thursday evening meetings in the same centre where entries were largely undated but seemed to relate to 1974.

These oral histories and proffered papers led inexorably to the need for permanent, accessible storage safe from leaking pipes, house moves, (and death from Covid) . After many meetings, negotiations, a visit to the Feminist Archive North in Leeds, and a training session at the Nottingham University archive we were ready to transport our precious files and folders to the university and start cataloguing. We had a regular Tuesday slot in our diaries. The start date was March 24th....with exquisite timing this turned out to be the day after Lockdown started.

In the second 'looser' phase of lockdown we managed some socially distanced meetings and spent happy afternoons extracting rusty staples and replacing them with brass paper clips. We sorted papers into topics in archive boxes from the university and heard that we were one of a few successful bids to the National Archive for a 'Scoping Grant' for a consultant to look at the potential extent, viability and value of the Feminist Archive Midlands. Katy Thornton from Leeds managed to start this work just before we went into Tier 3 in Nottingham.

We were also successful in obtaining a grant to go towards publicity for the archive. A banner is being professionally produced using illustrations from Women Now, a magazine first produced by the Nottingham W.L.M. In 1971.



We will be using Lockdown 2 to transcribe the interviews and maybe start to plan future talks, exhibitions, publications, those everyday activities of history groups

which seem from a different, pre-covid era. And one day we may actually load the boxes into our cars and claim our space in the archive and start work.



If you were involved in any aspects of the Women's Movement in Nottingham and would like to get in touch to be interviewed or clear your attic we'd love to hear from you. Email: tinapamplin@ntlworld.com

Tina Pamplin

Paying the Price



The 19th century Poor Laws and Workhouses reveal much about both society and the lives of the people who were affected; either as officers of the poor law or recipients of its charity. Inevitably, the laws were created and designed by men and formed a male-centric approach to the problem of poverty and the rising costs of the poor rates; rates predominantly paid by men.

Women are frequently overlooked, or they are represented through the accounts of male poor law officers. Effectively their voices are silenced and lost.

The new Poor Laws were designed to “encourage” paupers to end their dependence on poor relief, (help from their parish), and become self-reliant. The easy access to parish aid was believed to have created the social evil of an idle and profligate class who had no incentive to support themselves. Although women were as likely to claim relief as men, the new system targeted male paupers, often at the expense of women.

This is particularly clear from the debate over the bastardy laws. The old law sought to reduce the cost to the parish of supporting single mothers by penalising the fathers. A woman could name the father of her child before two magistrates who would order payment of a weekly sum of maintenance. This sum would be paid to the mother by the parish, which would then seek reimbursement from the putative father. He had three options: marry the woman, pay the maintenance or go to gaol.

As the parish was frequently unsuccessful in obtaining reimbursement, the mother and child were, in practice, supported by the parish. It was a particular bone of contention that the awards made to single mothers were usually more generous than those given to widows for the support of their legitimate families.

One concern was that a woman could falsely accuse a man of fathering her child. A second concern was that the law encouraged “vice” because a woman was more easily seduced when she knew that the law would either compel her partner to marry her or provide her with monetary support. It also encouraged women to seek a “career” as unwed mothers; a woman with more than one child might receive a higher income than a labourer. The wages of sin were not to be sniffed at!

The Poor Law Report of 1834 sets out these fears in some detail. Again, it’s a male-centric assessment. Such widespread abuse of the system is unlikely, especially given the legal recourse open to parishes to punish single mothers. Any woman who had a bastard child chargeable to the parish

could, and often was, sentenced to the House of Correction.

The new Poor Law reversed the situation, making the woman solely responsible for herself and her child and allowing the father to escape any form of punitive consequences. If a woman applied for relief, the only support offered her under the new law was to enter the Workhouse with her child.

The issue was not a moral one. The law sought to reduce the cost to the poor rates of supporting single mothers. The Poor Law did not concern itself with unmarried women who had children but were able to support themselves without making a claim upon their parish. The workhouses in Nottinghamshire became home to many single mothers, but we do not hear their voices or learn their stories. They are merely statistics with price tags attached.

The bastardy laws are not the only example of women suffering the consequences of men's actions under the new Poor Law. Abandoned wives are similarly penalised for their husbands' neglect, being offered the Workhouse or nothing in the way of support. It was argued that, to provide these women with financial support from the parish funds was to "*place a premium upon such abandonment*". The belief was that men would be deterred from abandoning their wives if they knew their actions would result in their family entering the Workhouse. The numbers of deserted wives in the Nottinghamshire workhouses indicates this belief was unduly optimistic.

The law concerning the relief of widows was also harsh and resulted in many falling through the net of the poor laws and having no option other than to enter the Workhouse, where they were separated from their children under the rules of segregation.

The Poor Laws applied the same principle to women as they did to men, requiring the able bodied to support themselves where possible rather than demanding relief from their parish as a "right". The law ignored the fact that women were

constrained to rely on men, be they husbands, fathers or brothers, because there were limited options open to them to enable them to support themselves. Even where work was available, there was no equality of pay and women's wages were not sufficient to live upon. The Poor Law made women pay the price of men's actions, sacrificing their welfare to save money.

I am beginning to uncover the stories of many of the women found in the Poor Law records, with a view to telling the story of the Southwell Workhouse from the female perspective. Understanding the context of a woman's poverty, the events that led her to the Workhouse, provides a valuable insight into the lives of women in the 19th century and the impact of the new Poor Laws and the Workhouse System upon them.

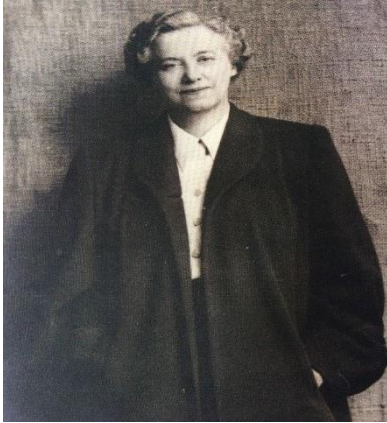
It is not only the stories of the paupers that I am researching. Women were not always victims of the system. The Workhouses also afforded women career opportunities and the chance to make an independent living. The positions of Matron, Schoolmistress and Nurse were filled by women who were able to support themselves without relying on husbands or fathers. Their stories and voices are just as important in providing a rounded and complete understanding of women's social history in this period.

It is time to let these women speak for themselves.

Karen Winyard

DOROTHY WHIPPLE IN BLACKBURN

We are thrilled to be able to include this piece from Mary West, who got in touch with us having read about the Dorothy Whipple Crowdfunding campaign*. Mary's mother Mildred knew Dorothy, and Mary herself is still in touch with members of the Whipple family, so it is wonderful to have this direct link to one of our favourite writers.



My mother was born in Blackburn in August 1890 and Dorothy Stirrup was born in Blackburn in February 1893. Dorothy's father, Walter Stirrup, was a leading architect in the town while my grandfather was a shuttle manufacturer. My mother was the youngest of 10 children and they lived on the steep Shear Bank Road, in a house called 'Merlewood'.

Across the road from them was a house called 'West View' where the Whipple family lived. They were close neighbours and both families attended St. Peter's church. My mother's brother, Harry Duckworth, a solicitor in the town, had been courting Henry Whipple's sister Winifred Whipple from across the road at West View, and they married in June 1912. Sadly, Harry died in 1915 from natural causes, leaving Winifred a widow with one daughter and another about to be born. This sad event must have brought the two families closer together.

Henry Whipple was born in 1869 and, being much older, he was known to my mother as "Uncle Whipple". He had done well for himself and at the start of the First World War was working at the Town Hall as the Chief Education Officer for Blackburn. Dorothy Stirrup was his secretary. Sadly, they had both suffered grief, Dorothy having lost her fiancé in the first week of the War, and Henry Whipple was a widower, having lost his wife, probably in childbirth. Henry was 24 years older than Dorothy and would have been too old to be recruited into the War. In spite of the age difference, they married at Gisburn church in 1917, the village where the Stirrup family had a country cottage. The rest is history. Their

move to Nottingham saw Dorothy blossom as a popular and talented novelist. Their friends and family in Blackburn must have been amazed when a photo appeared in one of the daily papers of Dorothy with J.B. Priestly (who had come to stay at Ebers Road for Goose Fair), under the headlines 'The Good Companions'!

It was at the family gatherings that my mother had met Dorothy and they became friends. It is interesting to find that in Dorothy's first novel "Young Anne" we find that the Yates family lived at a house called 'Merlewood' and their daughter was named Mildred, as was my mother! Dorothy and my mother lost touch after the move to Nottingham but the family still keep in touch with Winnifred Whipple's grandsons and their families. We are all delighted about the plaque at Ebers Road where Dorothy will always be remembered.

Mary West October 2020

*The Dorothy Whipple Crowdfunding campaign successfully raised money to fund a plaque to the writer at her previous home in Ebers Road in Carrington

Mapping Women's Suffrage



Screenshot of <https://www.mappingwomensuffrage.org.uk/>

The Mapping Women's Suffrage website identifies, records and plots the everyday locations and lives of as many Votes for Women campaigners as possible across England at the height of the suffrage movement in 1911. NWHG has submitted various campaigners' biographies, including the houses they were living in, when the April 2nd 1911 Census took place and so Nottingham is now on the map!

With the 2028 centenary of women getting the vote on the same terms as men in mind, this national project involving both academics and local history groups is aiming to map the height of the 1911 suffrage movement using the census night as a particular focus. Tara Morton, the project officer, is keen to record the everyday locations and lives of as many 'Votes for Women' campaigners as possible.

Visit the website and go to 'Suffrage Map and Biographies'; a map will come up and on the right a list of the various suffrage organisations; at the right of each organisation header there is a drop down arrow which, when clicked, will show all the known members. You can search by name and that will route you into their position on the map and their biography. So far, from the Nottingham area, you can find Dr Sarah Gray, Alice Dowson, Nelly Crocker, Alice Dax, Sarah Merrick, Edith Lees, Hilda Dowson Alice Watts, Muriel Wallis but some still need to be added eg Helen Watts, Helena Brownsword Dowson and Maud Dowson.

Visit the website to search for a particular campaigner or click the website to find biographies, photographs and even archived documents

www.mappingwomensuffrage.org.uk

Miriam Jackson

Plaque to the First Three Nottingham Women Magistrates

On July 4th 2020, and despite Covid restrictions, a new plaque was installed at the Nottingham Justice Centre giving details of the first three women to be appointed to the Nottingham City Bench of Magistrates in July 1920.

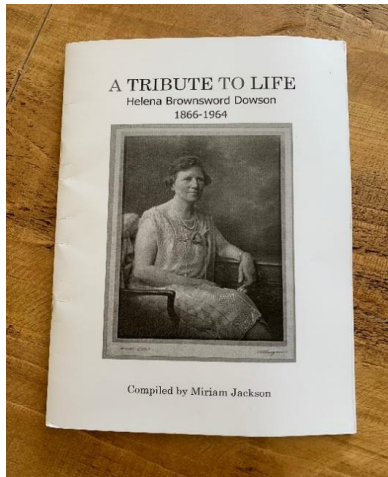


NWHG member and JP, Miriam Jackson (above right) had worked closely with the Bench Chair Of Nottingham Magistrates, Cheryl Lacey JP (above left) who was delighted to celebrate the centenary of women first becoming Magistrates and to raise awareness of the first three appointed – Helena Brownsword Dowson, Caroline Harper and Mary Ball.



Later in November a blue plaque will be installed alongside to mark Helena Brownsword Dowson's specific achievements and contribution to the Magistracy. She was a key suffragist for many years and a City Councillor, but in particular as a JP helped set up the Magistrates Association and worked to improve the conditions at Nottingham Prison by establishing a League of Honour.

NWHG's booklet about Helena Brownsword Dowson is available from Five Leaves bookshop or from NWHG £3 including postage – please email us at nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com



Miriam Jackson

At last – a plaque to Dorothy Whipple!



Photo courtesy R Edlin-White

A splendid plaque to Dorothy Whipple was unveiled on 26th September at her former home at 35 Ebers Road in Nottingham. Unfortunately, it was not possible to hold the large celebratory event we were hoping for. Instead, there was an invited audience of 6, including Bromley House Library member Helen Lewis, Mel Duffill Jeffs, Library Director at Bromley House, David Belbin, Chair of Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature, and our own Rowena Edlin-White, who has talked and written extensively about Dorothy. Bromley House had been instrumental in the Crowdfunding campaign, thanks to Helen's enthusiasm

and passion for Dorothy's writings, and we discovered at the unveiling that Rowena had unwittingly set the whole thing in motion as far back as 2012, when she attached a NWHG 'blue plaque' to a lamp post in Ebers Road. The owners of Number 35 spotted it and were thrilled and fascinated by the light it shed on the history of their house. They then serendipitously met Helen Lewis at a local event, and the rest is history! We are delighted to have had a hand in finally getting recognition for one of our favourite writers. If you haven't read any of her work yet, now is the time to start - you're in for a treat.

Sensation and Sentiment * Rhoda Broughton



This may be an unorthodox means of doing historical research, but I like to delve into vintage fiction when working on a particular period: for example, I am currently reading early 20th century Anglo-German fiction, as I approach the final stages of my latest book about Nottingham women working in Hamburg in the 1900s.

Whilst referencing an article about the American travel writer Helen Hunt Jackson (1830-1885) recently, I came across the phrase, "You are red as a rose is she by the author of *Cometh Up as the Flower!*" Hunt was writing around 1870, and obviously referring to at least one book title. A quick Google brought up two early novels by Rhoda Broughton, which she published anonymously. Hunt must have read them hot off the press and is rather daringly admitting this to her own

readers, because Broughton's novels were branded 'sensation' novels from the first, *rather risqué*, with heroines who would have been considered 'unwomanly' and 'fast' by her fellow Victorians!

Where does one go in Nottingham to access this kind of dangerous fiction? Why, Bromley House Library, of course. The Library houses probably the largest collection of Victorian and Edwardian fiction in Nottingham, shelves and shelves of it. It still owns twelve of Broughton's forty-odd novels – rather dilapidated now, fingered by many an avid reader – I even found ancient pencilled comments in the margins of *Red as a Rose is She*, which I confess, I devoured in a very short time. Having done so, I turned to another and another....

Broughton's fiction is about class and manners. Her heroines are feisty, they tackle the usual disadvantages of poverty and abandonment head-on, but they keep their self-respect and triumph in the end. Style-wise, think Jane Austen with more jokes and innuendos. And, because Broughton wrote steadily for nigh on sixty years, her heroines pass through the New Woman phase and finish up around the time of the first Vote for (some) women. How I wish I had the time to read all her novels chronologically.

So, if you like period fiction, Bromley House Library is the place for you – see their website for more details; and also, I should mention, they have every book by Dorothy Whipple!

***Rhoda Broughton** was born in Denbigh, North Wales, in 1840, youngest of three daughters of a clergyman. She appears to have been largely self-educated, but once on the literary path received encouragement from her uncle, the Gothic novelist Sheridan le Fanu (she wrote ghost stories, too). She died at Headington Hill, Oxfordshire in 1920.

Rowena Edlin-White

Joan Lamb Pioneering Lace Designer

In February 2020, just weeks before the lockdown, I was lucky enough to interview one of the first women lace designers in her home here in Nottingham. It was fascinating speaking to her – here is her story.

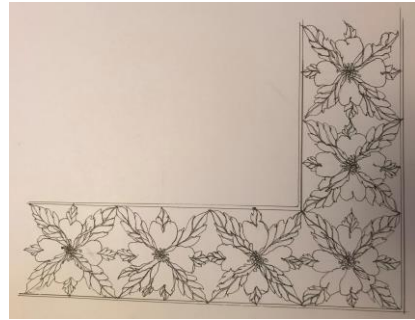


Photo courtesy of Nichola Burton

Joan Lamb (nee Hardy) was born in 1928 in Hucknall where her father ran a knitwear factory with his brother and their father. Both the maternal and paternal sides of her family lived there, and Joan lived there till she was 10, when the family relocated to Burton Joyce, shortly before the start of WW2. Her widowed maternal grandmother worked as a companion to a wealthy widow, whose sons were jewellers. They had a large house at Harby and took in the daughters and granddaughters of local women during the war. Joan loved it there and asked to stay on, so she remained there for two years. However, she wasn't allowed to go to the local secondary school so she was only receiving education from the local village school, which concerned her parents.

Joan had successfully taken the equivalent of the 11 plus examination and so she was able to gain entry to a convent school in Mapperley, where she stayed till she was 16. After leaving school, and having decided that she didn't want to be a typist (seemingly her only career choice), Joan elected to follow her passion and her talent. She had been a keen artist as a child and so went to the art college on Shakespeare Street in Nottingham where she spent 2 years studying art under both male and female tutors, drawing from nature with plants from the nearby Arboretum, life drawing

and still lifes. Joan would dearly have liked to join her friend who had gone to study art at the Royal College of Art in, but her father refused his permission, wanting her to study locally.

In 1944, her uncle, who was in the lace trade, suggested that she take the exam to qualify for one of the first scholarships to study lace design. She passed the exam and started the course, along with 7 others. There were 5 men and 3 women: Joan Hardy herself, Josephine Bonington, Isabel Stevens, Peter Cox, Peter Ledger, Maurice Clark, David Hatchet and Johnny Eaton (*not entirely sure of any of these spellings*). Previously, women had not been able to study lace design because it was assumed they would leave to get married, or leave the firm to move elsewhere, taking their skills with them.

Joan said they had great fun on the course and she has fond memories of the work and of her fellow students. They had to learn how to design using graph paper so that the design could be transferred to the punched cards which worked the lace machines. They also had to thread up the machines – the college had a half size machine to practise on. (This machine is now in the basement of *Paris* restaurant in Low Pavement but it is no longer visible to the public). At the same time, ever hungry for new artistic experiences, Joan was studying book illustration at night school.

In the second year of the course, the students spent a day a week in a lace factory, and Joan went to Birkin's on Broadway in the Lace Market area of Nottingham. The final exams were over two days and Joan's father had to give his permission by signing for her to take each day's exam. There was an academic paper and also an art exam where she had to produce a design as well as draw from life, from nature and a still life. In 1945 Joan won the Cheshire prize, coming second in her class after Isabel Stevens.

After successfully completing the course and passing the exams, Joan was interviewed and secured a job at Birkin's. However, although she greatly enjoyed

the work and the people, she only stayed there for 2 years because the pay was abysmal – she was paid the same as the lace finishers* which, although a skilled job in itself, was arguably not as complex as lace design. Additionally, the working conditions were poor, with everyone in the same room, and it was very cold in winter. There were no social events or union activity.

Joan met her future husband, Larry, while still at Birkin's. They married in August 1949, and Joan left Birkin's to work in the picture restoration section at Boots, which she had heard of through Larry who worked in the advertising section. Thankfully, however, there are examples of Joan's designs in the Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive, allowing current researchers to see the intricacy and creativity of her work.

Joan worked at Boots for 4 or 5 years until she became pregnant with their first child, but that just signalled a new phase of her creative life. She volunteered at the Leonard Cheshire home in West Bridgford, training to nurse there before becoming the arts and crafts teacher when the post became vacant. She worked around her children's schooling and continued to learn new skills. For example, if the Leonard Cheshire residents asked for an activity she was unfamiliar with, such as pottery, she taught herself how to do it and introduced it when she felt confident enough to do so. She also worked at John E Wright's, the printers on Huntingdon Street, and at a flower shop in Nottingham, delivering bouquets and floral tributes around the city in the late 1960s, having learned to drive in 1958 - yet another skill mastered.



Photo courtesy of Nichola Burton

Throughout her life, Joan has continually sought and embraced new opportunities, usually learning new skills to accomplish them. Her home is testament to her creativity, with exquisite embroideries and delicate, incredibly detailed drawings and paintings. At 92, her vivacity and can-do attitude continues to shine through, and she is still producing intricate designs and drawings for friends and for her own amusement, from line drawings to a delightful version of Robert Burns' poem *Tam O'Shanter*, which she has illustrated with exuberant water colours of the various characters. Joan clearly demonstrated that a positive mind set can help us to achieve so much – meeting her was a truly inspirational experience.

*Splitters, who divided the broad widths of lace into narrower panels, and Jennying – which involved winding narrow widths of lace around cards.

Sian Trafford

Nottingham Women's History Group celebrates its 10th Anniversary



Nottingham Women's History Group, in its present form, is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year! However, it seems the group actually began around 1990, thanks to Derrica (Derry) Hodgson, Jenny Swindells and Suella Postles who collaborated on the early programmes of events. The group met at Brewhouse Yard Museum, and Derry and Jenny created the first women's walk in the city, written by Derry herself, which formed the basis for most of NWHG's later walks.

Following a hiatus of a few years, Mo Cooper and Val Wood rejuvenated the group in 2010, and this is the first year since then when there has been so little activity. Covid 19 has meant that we have been unable to provide our usual

talks, both for our own meetings and for other organisations, and we have also felt unable to carry out our walks.

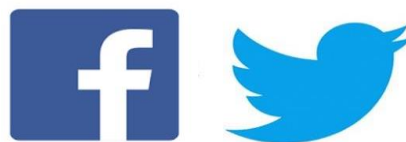
The good news is that NWHG is still very much alive and kicking, mostly online this year thanks to the current situation, but our members have also been instrumental in the installation of no less than four plaques to women in the city in 2020, which might never have happened without the existence of NWHG. We're proud to still be around and would like to thank you all for your interest and support over the years. We had been hoping to invite some of the founding and current members along to a celebratory afternoon cream tea ... but like so much else this has had to wait. We very much hope to meet with them and you in 2021 and celebrate properly.

BUT NWHG will always need YOU!



Just get in touch if you'd like to find out more about getting involved
nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com

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, or events to share then please get in touch.

Contact us:

Email: nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com

Website:

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