

# Nottingham Women's History Group Newsletter

## Issue 10 Spring/Summer 2021



### Welcome to our Spring/Summer 2021 newsletter.



Hello again, NWHG members. Firstly, apologies for this newsletter being circulated rather late. We hope this photo of a post box dressed for Easter makes up for the delay. Plus, we should soon be able to meet family and friends indoors – just as well given the current outdoor temperatures.

We hope that most of you have had at least one vaccination and are feeling more positive and optimistic that this awful time is coming to an end. I was lucky enough to read a printer's proof of the Friends of Nottinghamshire Archives' book based on local people's experiences of the first lockdown (see below). It is funny, poignant, honest, resourceful, but, most of all, it demonstrates resilience in the face of a seriously tough year. Best of all, all but one of the contributors were women. I recommend getting hold of a copy, if only to see how your experiences chime with others'.

We at NWHG are so grateful for your support during the last year, and through all the previous years, and hope to meet

with you before too long – hopefully a walk in the summer and an indoor talk in the autumn, just like the good old days! Wouldn't that be marvellous?! We'll keep an eye on the 'Roadmap' and keep you posted about our plans, but fingers crossed.

Meanwhile, don't forget the Great Nottinghamshire Local History Fair which is online throughout May. Click the link to find out how to book for the interview with Lucy Worsley, plus talks and videos provided by various groups and organisations, including a video by your very own NWHG about all the plaques to women unveiled in 2020-21!

<https://www.inspireculture.org.uk/heritage/great-nottinghamshire-history-fair-2021/>

### Putting the Pandemic into Print



Lockdown and the subsequent Coronavirus restrictions brought my research projects pretty much to a halt. Nottinghamshire Archives were either

closed or visits were restricted to the reading room only. My plans to visit various other archives and places connected to the diarist I'm studying, Anne Cooke, were postponed. I missed it all terribly, particularly Anne herself. Anne's diaries give a vivid sense of who she was, her voice is strong and distinctive, and spending time working on her diaries feels like visiting Anne and taking tea with her. We both love a good gossip!

To fill this gap, I decided to keep a diary of my own. I also told FONA's chairwoman, Judith Mills, about it and suggested other FONA members might like to do the same. This was an opportunity to create a record of value for future social historians that could be deposited with Nottinghamshire Archives.

We had a tremendous response and were able to deposit 13 diaries with the Archives as part of the "100 days to save the World" project and they now form part of Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives' Lockdown Life collection.

That was only the beginning. FONA decided to produce a book, a compilation of extracts from the diaries, that would capture ordinary, everyday life in Nottinghamshire during the first Lockdown. There followed an intense 9 months during which Judith and I worked together to edit the diaries and structure the book.

The result is "*Lockdown 2020: the first 100 days*", which FONA is launching by video in May as part of the virtual Great Nottinghamshire History Fair.

It's been wonderful to work on this project. The diaries and the book both preserve local voices and help to add another perspective to the records and reports of the various governmental departments, institutions and news media. Voices which otherwise might never have been heard. Predominantly women's voices – there was only one male diarist.

*Karen Winyard*

"*Lockdown 2020: the first 100 days*" can be purchased for £4.50 (plus postage), by contacting Judith Mills on [chair@fona.org.uk](mailto:chair@fona.org.uk).

## FONA Newsletter

You are also welcome to dip into FONA's newsletter for May, which contains a link to the Virtual Book Launch video which is part of the Great Nottinghamshire History Fair this month, which you can see by clicking on this link (also given in the 'Welcome' above <https://www.inspireculture.org.uk/whats-on/events/friends-nottinghamshire-archives/>)

## The Broadmarsh Protesters Oh that they had been listened to!



Back in the 1960s a 'genteel group of little old ladies' was the loudest voice of protest against the building of the Broadmarsh Centre. According to this Archive article by Harry Martin it was their 'frail shoulders which bear [sic] the burden of the battle to preserve Nottingham's historic heritage'.

The Civic Society and the Local History Society had raised objections, but it was this group of women, some retired, whose sustained efforts over several years managed to slow things down but did not manage to stop what they saw as the destruction of historic parts of the City. The group leader, a Miss E M Palmer (seen left holding the plans), was a retired schoolteacher from Lenton and actively involved in all four public enquiries regarding Drury Hill, the proposed

Eastern Bypass, Fletcher Gate and the Broad Marsh.

Other members of the group were Miss A M Mills a local historian from Wollaton; Miss Eva Carmichael from Beeston Fields; Mrs H Johnson from Mapperley; Dr H M Browning, also from Mapperley; Mrs B D A Jackacz from West Bridgford; and Mrs Helen Crowder from Sherwood. The women felt the city planners and the Corporation were out of touch with what the people of Nottingham wanted. They circulated letters and maps, exhorting more people to object to the 'official vandals' and their plans. They also wrote many letters to the Ministry of the Environment and it was their objections which led to the public enquiry regarding the Broad Marsh.

On the day of that Inquiry, the women were at the Guildhall prepared to give their evidence and views. They objected to the sprawling development, saying it would be a great inconvenience to travellers and would impede access to and from the Midland station and the city centre. Of particular concern was the destruction of an ancient right of way. Miss Palmer took the stand and read a nine-page indictment of the scheme and those proposing it. The women did not expect to win, regarding the proposal as a 'fait accompli' – as with the other three schemes – but they were determined to speak up for the people of Nottingham.

Perhaps if a few more people had been willing to voice their feelings back then we would not find ourselves in the situation we are now. I do hope that their brave and spirited protest could be acknowledged in the new plans for a park, green space and more citizen friendly part of the city.

*Miriam Jackson*

### **Annie Started It!**

Annie Matheson (1853-1924) grew up in Nottingham, the daughter of James Matheson, minister of the Independent Chapel on Friar Lane. She was a poet, essayist and biographer and wrote the first life of Florence Nightingale. She's in

my book, *Exploring Nottinghamshire Writers (Five Leaves)* – just two pages, but she was one of those authors who stuck with me and, it's fair to say, I did much more research on her than was strictly necessary. I am still chasing her, and a couple of years ago I pursued her to Haslemere in Surrey, the home of the Peasant Arts Movement. Haslemere is not far from Woking where Annie lived in a labourer's cottage from around 1905 to 1920, and there was a family connection too, through the writer George Macdonald.



In the library at Haslemere Museum I searched copies of *The Vineyard*, the Peasant Arts journal and found two poems by Annie. Then a poem about spinning caught this spinster's eye, by Isabel Derby; her father was a curator at Kensington Museum and through *her* I discovered her friend, a forgotten artist called Frances Jennings (1885-1915) who simply fascinates me. Frances had a short and difficult life but her happiest times were spent travelling around the countryside in a donkey cart, bought from a costermonger in the East End of London; dressed in a hand-dyed blue linen smock, she camped out in barns and fields. My essay, "Frances Jennings, Artist and Traveller" is published in the latest *Journal of the Friends of the Dymock Poets*, because she made several visits to this legendary group in Gloucestershire between 1911 and 1913, staying with Lascelles and Catherine Abercrombie at Ryton. Her name was remembered, but they knew almost

nothing about her family background which I continue to explore.

Sometimes, as a researcher, you have to follow wherever your subject leads you and these artistic and literary women didn't often exist in solitary confinement, they were part of networks. Annie Matheson was an author, suffragist, and labour activist; who must have known the arty folks at Haslemere, who had similar political interests. My pursuit of Annie, Isabel and Frances has thrown up the names of people like suffragist Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, the folk-lorist Mary Neal, and a friendship circle of contemporary women artists, authors, weavers and activists. I'm still looking for some of the missing links – it's like a rich old tapestry with small patches of stitches missing and I long to fill in the gaps. Lock-down has given me the time and permission to simply wander where the trail leads, and it's been great! My pamphlet on Annie Matheson is available from the Lowdham Bookcase at [nottinghambooks.co.uk](http://nottinghambooks.co.uk) as well as several other authors who deserved more space than my book could spare.

*Rowena Edlin-White*

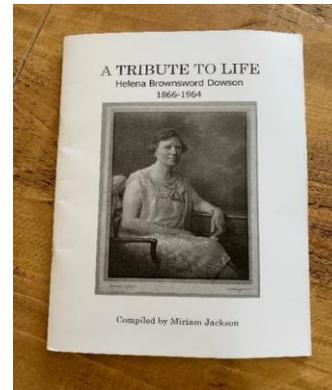
### **Plaque to Helena Brownsword Dowson 1866-1964**

Having unsuccessfully waited for some time for lockdown restrictions to be lifted to allow a public celebratory event, it was decided to go ahead and install the plaque on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 on International Women's Day.



Helena was a key suffragist for many years, and a City Councillor but, in

particular, as a JP she helped to set up the Magistrates Association nationally as well as working 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 e mail us at [nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com](mailto:nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com).

### **More Plaques for Women**

We've done well with Plaques for women recently and hope to keep up the momentum and work on others in 2021. The shortlist for new plaques include:

**Henrietta Carey** 1845-1920 of whom the Nottingham Guardian said 'She had done more than any other woman to improve the lot of her fellow citizens.' She was involved in social reform for over 50 years, founding the Town and Country Social Guild and many other charitable organisations.

**Evelyn Gibbs** 1905-1991– artist who was teaching art at Goldsmith's college, London, when it was evacuated to Nottingham in WW2; she painted a mural at St Martin's in Bilborough and was one of the most important artists of her day.

**Dr Sarah Gray** 1860-1941 – Nottingham's first woman GP and later consultant surgeon to the Women's Hospital

We will be working to get permission, support and funding for these and other plaques – watch this space and do feel free to suggest others.

### Lockdown Positives

There may not be a lot of positives but lockdown and Covid restrictions have certainly meant that the NWHG website now has more content with a variety of different research papers and approximately 50 biographies of particular women. Visit [www.nottinghamwomenshistory.org.uk](http://www.nottinghamwomenshistory.org.uk)

In addition, I was able to track down some things I'd not previously found the time for, and so was able to locate various tombstones such as that for Henrietta Carey in the family plot in the Rock cemetery; Mary Selina Curzon, who signed the 1866 first suffrage petition, in the extension cemetery of St Mary's at Bath Street/ St Ann's Well Road; and the Guilford sisters in the non-conformist part of the General Cemetery. I found the Lucy Derbyshire memorial homes in Wollaton and the roses planted for Jo Cox and Councillor Georgina Culley. I also found the 'murder stone' by the A60 between Papplewick and Mansfield to poor Bessie Sheppard who had been murdered aged only 17.

I have read Abigail Gawthorn's diary which, though not the most scintillating read, did nonetheless paint a picture of the times in which she lived 1757-1822, and it was good to realise that a street in New Basford had been named after her – albeit with the spelling Gawthorn Street – as she had owned the land on which it was built. I am also keen to join the queues now forming outside her house 26 Low Pavement (formerly Jamie's Italian) for the Secret Garden behind the house where in 1789 her husband demolished a building to give them a better view over the meadows.

In addition, I have learned a lot from other local history groups' Facebook pages - that Vesta Tilley used to live at Danmark House at 5 Tennyson Avenue in Gedling, supposedly built for her by the King of

Denmark with whom she was supposed to have had an affair. And that Nottingham-born Eleanor Wadsworth, who died in January 2021 after a short illness aged 103, delivered spitfires and hurricanes to the front lines during WW2, flying without instruments or radios, one of only 165 women pilots.

But I have to say that these positives aside I have missed our NWHG events and activities and am looking forward to meeting up again.

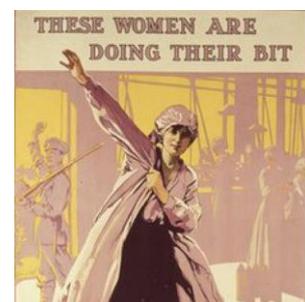
*Miriam Jackson*

### Nottingham Women's History Group is still hoping to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!!!



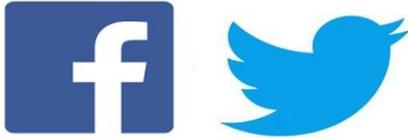
Nottingham Women's History Group achieved its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday last year but our plans for celebrations were scuppered, for obvious reasons. However, we still feel that tea and cake would be very appropriate, so we'll keep you informed about our thoughts and plans.

### BUT NWHG will always need YOU!



Just get in touch if you'd like to find out more about getting involved  
[nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:nottmwomenshistory@gmail.com)

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