



Newsletter Issue 13: Autumn/Winter 2022 - 2023

News in Brief

Update on Oban House – home and practice base of Dr Winifred Alice Melland Thompson 1898-1990. By all accounts this has been saved from the developers ---at least for the moment. It would be good to see a plaque on the house celebrating Beeston's first woman GP.

Castle Museum – Sadly Nottingham Castle Trust has gone into liquidation and the Castle with its Galleries and Museum is closed to visitors. The site re-opened 18 months ago after a £30m revamp. Nottingham City Council will resume control and responsibility for the Castle.

Dates For Your 2023 Diary

Saturday 28 January: a talk by Philip Jones on **Ethel Webb**, the woman who planned and planted the Japanese Garden at Newstead Abbey.

Tuesday 28 February: a visit to Newstead Lace Archive at 10.15am, with potential for an extra tour at 11.30 if there is sufficient demand.

Friday 19 May: NWHG are giving a talk on **Florence Boot** for the Nottingham Mechanics.

In the pipeline:

A talk on the Feminist Archive at Nottingham University's Manuscripts and Special Collections.

A tour of the Castle Museum collection stores

A reading event at Bromley House Library

A talk on 19th century Nottinghamshire Women's experiences In & Out of Wedlock



Plaque to Dorothy Whipple

We continued the first half of the year with a celebration of Dorothy Whipple's 129th birthday at Bromley House Library; jointly presenting a talk on Florence Boot with Jersey Heritage for International Women's Day; and working with Friends of Nottinghamshire Archives to help in producing their first podcast "Our Green & Pleasant Town". This is an audio drama in 4 episodes that brings the stories and accounts of Nottinghamshire's Victorian residents and the creation of the town's green spaces to life. You can listen for free on FONAs website - www.fona.org.uk – by clicking the YouTube icon.

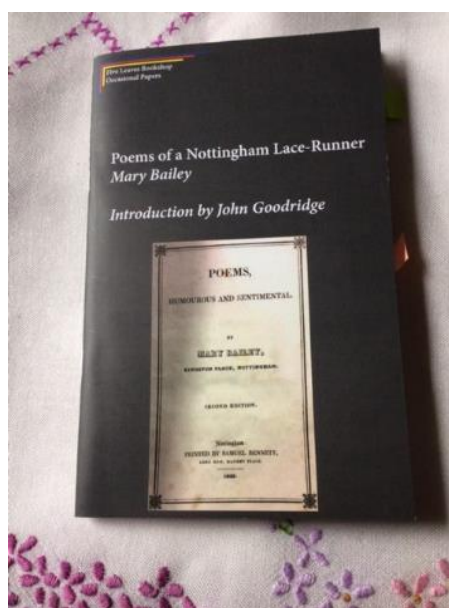
Full accounts of all of these events (and more) can be found in NWHG's Spring/Summer 2022 issue of our newsletter.

We were delighted when two different primary schools invited us to give a session about suffragettes and the fight for the vote. The children were all enthusiastic and very knowledgeable. We thoroughly enjoyed our time at Sneinton C of E Primary in June 2022 and Robert Shaw Primary in September 2022.

We've also welcomed a new member to the group, Diana Meale who, it turns out,

had a bona fide suffragette ancestor. Her great aunt Norah Balls was a leading member of the Women's Social and Political Union in the North East and a lifelong active campaigner and organiser. Diana attended the unveiling of a blue plaque to Norah on the family home in North Shields.

On Sunday 15th May NWHG were thrilled to be taking part in the Great Nottinghamshire Local History Fair at Mansfield Library. It was lovely to be back face to face again after last year's virtual event. There was lots of interest in our stand and we had a great day meeting lots of new people.



**Poems of a Nottingham Lace Runner
By Mary Bailey**

At the end of August, NWHG was invited to participate in the launch of a republication of Mary Bailey's poems at 5 Leaves Bookshop. Mary was a 19th century lace runner who documented her life in poetry, ranging from the difficulty of the work and the toll it took on her health to her joy in her children. The event was introduced by John Goodridge, who also

wrote the introduction to the new pamphlet and read some of the poems at the event. NWHG contributed readings from contemporary and later sources which also documented the poorly paid and hazardous conditions women workers had to endure.

NWHG ran four well attended walks from May to August covering women's suffrage in Nottingham, plaques to women in Nottingham City centre, Nottingham women authors and Ladies, Lace and Lawbreakers. It was so good to get back to our usual activities and, as a result of the latter walk, sculptor Rachel Carter invited us to record a podcast to complement her work on enslaved workers and working mill women. Click on this link for episode 10 Parts 1 & 2:

<https://www.rachelcarter.co.uk/sitppodcasts>

Our AGM on the 15th October was again held at the ICC on Mansfield Road. Once we got the technology sorted, the audience enjoyed a talk about Florence Boot, an expanded version of the talk given in March for International Women's Day.

We rounded up the year with a talk at Nottinghamshire Local History Association's Day School Forum at Ravenshead on 29th October. The talk featured the plaques for women that can be found in and around the city centre; there are a pleasing number but not enough! The audience was very complimentary and several women asked to join the NWHG mailing list.

Looking forward to 2023, we already have a number of events planned for the New Year, (see the front page) and we hope to see many of you there, so keep an eye on your NWHG emails!

Thank you for your continuing interest and support for what we do. We couldn't exist without you.

Best wishes
Sian for NWHG

Nottingham University Local History Seminars

The Department of History organises local history seminars on Saturdays between October and March, 10am – 12.30pm. They are open to all with an interest in local and regional history. Booking is not necessary and the entry fee of £5 includes refreshments. They are held in Lenton Grove on Beeston Lane, accessed via the West Entrance of the University Park campus - building no.5 on the campus map - you can find [directions to campus and a PDF map here](#). For more information email [Dr Richard Gaunt](#).

On October 8th **Professor Matthew Roberts** spoke about "**Feminist Pioneers? Nottingham Women in Protest and Politics, c.1789-1848**" and a number of NWHG members made it to his interesting and informative talk. Unfortunately, I couldn't make it but contacted Matthew afterwards and now have a lengthy list of working-class women who subscribed to the Chartist Land Plan, arguably evidencing their involvement in their own right in political activity. While very little is known about these women, nonetheless Matthew's work and talk illustrated the long tradition of female political activism in the town. I will add these names to our database of Nottingham Notable Women with their brief biographical details and will see if we can find out any more about these pioneers.

The next seminar is on **Saturday 10 December** when **Dr Helen Foster** will speak on: ***'It were only one thing in Nottingham in them days, lace, Nottingham Lace': exploring the public history of Nottingham's Machine-Lace Industry***"

How is the heritage of Nottingham Lace remembered at local level? What can we learn from the 'hidden' stories of lace, the oral history records of lace workers? Foster will consider recent renovations in lace galleries at the city's Castle Museum and the Industrial Museum at Wollaton Hall and the Lace Market as a heritage site. *Miriam Jackson*

IDA HACKETT A TRIBUTE

Ida Hackett was one of the most effective organisers, tireless campaigners and fearsome debaters I have known.

Nottingham Women's History Group has acknowledged her in the 'Notable Women' section of our web site especially for the leading role she took as Chair of Women Against Pit Closures during the 1984/85 Miners' strike and the subsequent opposition to the closure of collieries.

A member of the Communist Party from 1938 to her death in 2012, aged 98, she worked closely within the Trade Union movement and members of the Labour Party always with a clear mission of what was to be achieved. Always pushing at the boundaries of accepted policy.

She was an active trade unionist, recruiting members and arguing for improved terms and conditions of employment while working at the Coop before the war and then in hosiery factories after the war. A



Ida Hackett

factory colleague called her a "firebrand". According to the stories of her negotiating she must have made life difficult for managers as well as male trade unionists who failed to support equal pay for women. She paid for her activism with sackings and victimisation.

She lived all her life in Mansfield. Her father was a collier, active in the union and both parents were founder members of the Mansfield Woodhouse Labour Party. She married Ernest Hackett in 1939, forming a strong political and personal partnership up until his death in 1985.

After the war she and Ernest, who had served in the Navy, lived in a newly built council house at 28 Wainwright Avenue from where she Chaired the Tenants Associations in Ladybrook and Mansfield. She came to prominence in the region's tenant's movement, through amongst other campaigns, opposition to the 1972 Housing Finance Act that reduced council house subsidies and replaced controlled rents with 'fair' rents – in effect increasing rents for tenants.



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Whether or not you agree with her politics, she should be admired for holding to her views despite circumstances and criticism. It must have been difficult to be a communist during the cold war but she stood for election to the local council in 1958 and 1961. And in subsequent years she was Agent for the Communist parliamentary candidate, Fred Westacott. Their intention was not to win but to have the opportunity to communicate to the electorate. I think Ida enjoyed the fight.



Ida campaigning in 1961 local elections Mansfield

Source: University of Nottingham, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Ref FWC 3/1/2/15/2

In her 1961 election leaflet she articulated her position:

“The Conservatives talk about prosperity in Britain, but all the time are waging a campaign to lower our living standards. The increased health charges, the efforts to force up rents and the scandalous treatment of old folk – these are some of the most flagrant examples”.



Ida at pensioners rally, Blackpool September 1989

Source: University of Nottingham, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Ref FCW 3/1/1/2/1/5

I knew her when she was in her 80s and 90s, spearheading the Pensioners movement in the East Midlands, rallying activists, and lobbying MPs for improved conditions. A typical contribution was recorded in the Chad local newspaper in 2002 under the headline “OAP Leader to fight on for earning link”. Ida dismissed the proposals for pensions from the then Chancellor, Gordon Brown with the typically pointed comment “While we welcome these crumbs, it does not go anywhere near what pensioners are entitled to and what pensioners need”.

She was well known and respected in Mansfield for her dedication to improving standards and received many awards in her later life.



*Recognition from Mansfield Council in 1995
For work representing housing tenants*

I feel that too little is known about Ida and her work is too infrequently acknowledged and celebrated. She and others like her helped gain improvements in living standards, especially for women. And so, I am doing some research to gain a more complete understanding of this remarkable woman and would love to hear from anyone who has a story to tell about Ida.
Diana Meale

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED ... ABOUT CONSTANCE SHACKLOCK?

Constance's plaque is in the foyer of the Theatre Royal in Nottingham. Thanks to research by Mo Cooper, I can tell you a bit more about her!



Constance Bertha Shacklock was a mezzo soprano who lived at 2 Lexington Gardens in Sherwood in the 1930s, although she had been born at nearby Woodthorpe Grange Farm on 16th April 1913. Her father Frederick Randolph Shacklock (b1886) worked on the family farm, having moved from a farm in Lambley in the late nineteenth century.

Frederick and his wife Hilda married in 1911 with Constance arriving in 1913, and sister Rosamond in 1919. After the war the family moved to Bestwood for a time, and moved to the Sherwood estate in 1938. By 1939 they are at 2 Lexington Gardens, where they remained until Hilda's death in 1978. Frederick worked at the Royal Ordnance Factory, while Hilda was a housewife and Rosamond worked at Imperial Tobacco.

Constance showed promise as a singer from an early age. According to her obituary she was singing in a local church at the age of 9 (1922), produced religious plays for a dramatic group, joined a local Gilbert and Sullivan group and performed in the local Methodist churches, WI events and Raleigh.

In 1936 she won the Nottingham Radio Exhibition, and in 1937 she is described as being a member of the Nottingham Operatic Society. Also in 1937 she passed an associated board examination with distinction, under the tutorage of Maud Clements. She also studied with baritone Roy Galbraith Henderson (1899-2000), whom she met via the [Nottingham Oriana Choir](#).

By 1939 Constance was settled in digs in Paddington with other artists and attended the [Royal Academy of Music](#), but continued to appear in Nottingham venues. Her career took off after she was recruited in 1946 to the new [Covent Garden Opera Company](#) where she sang the roles of Carmen, Amneris in Aida, Marina in Boris Godunov, Herodias in Salome, Brangane in Tristan and Isolde and Octavian in Der Rosenkavalier.



In 1947 she married music tutor and pianist [Eric George Mitchell](#) (1909-1965) at Kensington and they settled in Surrey. She continued singing with Covent Garden

Opera Company until 1956, and continued as a guest artist up to 1960, performing 632 times, both at home and internationally. Her accomplished and exuberant rendition of *Rule Britannia* became quite a fixture at the Proms.

Then, from 1961 to 1967 she played the role of the mother abbess in [The Sound of Music](#) at London's Palace Theatre, appearing in over 200 performances. She then taught singing at the [Royal Academy of Music](#) from 1968 to 1978.

Constance was awarded the [OBE](#) in 1971 and became president of the Association of Teachers of Singing in 1995. She died in 1999 at the age of 86 and Constance Close was created on the site of her residence in her memory
Sian Trafford

Affordable Suffrage Ephemera

We are still receiving requests for talks and workshops about Women's Suffrage in general and Women's Suffrage in Nottinghamshire particularly – there is no doubt it catches peoples' imagination, and many of us long to discover a suffragist or suffragette in our family tree. Next best thing for the historian is a piece of original material from that era, but at what price! A cup and saucer bearing the famous trumpeting angel designed by Sylvia Pankhurst will cost you hundreds of pounds; an original suffrage badge will too; and medals go for thousands at Sotheby's – don't even *think* about those! Even a humble postcard bearing the portrait of a well-known suffragette is worth £20 - £180 on the open market.

But Suffrage history isn't just about the Pankhursts, and the WSPU. There were many groups involved in the campaign for votes for women. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) drew many different groups under its umbrella, and there was the Church League for Women's Suffrage which was very popular locally. Then there were the groups who provided the banners and costumes and floats for processions, the Artists' Suffrage League, and their sister-group, the Actresses' Franchise League who were ever in the public eye, often performing in plays with a suffrage message written by the likes of Cicely Hamilton, creator of *A Pageant of Great Women* and Elizabeth Robins, author of *Votes for Women*.

This is where I noticed an opportunity: my great aunts and grannies sent many postcards to one another, often adorned with photos of their favourite actresses, sometimes shown in a scene from their latest play. I have frequented postcard fairs for years, looking for images for my books and odd bits of ephemera, so I made a list of names and plays to look out for. Some dealers have hundreds of theatre postcards for sale for as little as £1. It takes patience to trawl through the boxes, which don't tend to be in alphabetical order, but I usually find something and I now have a nice little collection of actresses and scenes from plays relevant to suffrage history.

Want to know who and what to look for? Two useful books are: for actresses, *Art, Theatre and Women's Suffrage* by Irene Cockcroft & Susan Croft (Aurora Metro

Publications 2010); and for plays, *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist playwrights of the suffrage era* by Sheila Stowell (Manchester University Press 1992). You may have to forage on-line to obtain copies.

The next couple of Nottingham postcard fairs, put on by Reflections of a Bygone Age, are on Sat 4th Feb 2023 and Sat 13th May 2023, both at King's Meadow Campus 10am – 4pm. There is a small entrance fee and parking is free. Give it a try, you never know what you may find!
Rowena Edlin-White

PS I confess I do own a signed copy of Cicely Hamilton's *Pageant of Great Women*, but that was a very special birthday present!



Gertrude Elliott in 'Mice and Men' by suffragist Madelaine Lucette Ryley (1858-1934)

Emma Mundella

1858-1896

Composer, hymn writer, music teacher, choir conductor

It was exciting to be alerted to Emma's existence via www.multitudeofvoices.co.uk – as one of only a few women composers. In response to the post on FB we also received additional information about her from a NWHG member who had been involved in Mundella school. This has enabled a profile to be written about Emma and added to our website under *Notable Women*.

Miriam Jackson

A Generous Gift From Ross Bradshaw at Five Leaves Bookshop

We were thrilled when Ross Bradshaw responded to our Facebook post about pioneering vet and poet, Connie Ford with the offer to donate to NWHG his copy of *Walking My Tightrope. The Life of Connie Ford*.

This book, compiled by Cathy Grindrod, celebrates Connie's life through a selection of her poetry. Connie Ford (1912 – 1998) was a feminist, a communist, a sailor, and a bird lover. Her poems are remarkably prescient and resonate today.

Many thanks to Ross for this generous gift and to Miriam Jackson for highlighting Connie's life and work on our FB page. I, for one, will be reading more by Connie Ford.

Karen Winyard