



Newsletter Issue 14: Spring 2023

Happy Easter

from Sian Trafford
NWHG Chair

Hello and welcome to the 14th edition of Nottingham Women's History Group's newsletter. We've been keeping busy in the months since our last newsletter. We hit the ground running in January with Philip Jones giving a talk about Ethel Webb, the woman who designed and planted the Japanese Garden at Newstead Abbey. An appreciative audience of 20 heard how Ethel carefully researched the plants she wanted and even travelled to Japan to source them. Sadly, the Japanese garden has become overgrown and features such as the 'teahouse' have become damaged, but you can book a tour, led by Philip, to find out more about how the garden looked in Ethel's day.

<https://newsteadabbey.org.uk/garden-tours>

In February we were invited to Stanhope Primary School in Gedling to talk to Year 6 about the campaign for women's suffrage in Nottingham. The children had already learned about Emily Wilding Davison's death at the 1913 Epsom Derby for the suffrage cause and were pleased to hear about Nottingham's own suffragette Helen Kirkpatrick. They asked inspired questions and at the end of the lesson they performed *Derby Day*, a beautiful song by Maz O'Connor about Emily's sacrifice, so I learned something new too.

<https://www.folkradio.co.uk/2013/11/maz-oconnor-derby-day/>

At the end of February, 14 of us were privileged to have a Behind the Scenes tour of the textile collection at Newstead Abbey, with particular

emphasis on lace. The tour was expertly led by Judith Edgar and Deborah Dean and they had extracted some fascinating pieces from the collection for us: there was a hunting jacket complete with blood from some poor creature! Even though it was a purely functional garment it was beautifully made with gathers, pleats and self-covered buttons. We also saw a skillfully sewn dressing gown made from a service man's blanket during the Second World War. There were exquisite examples of both hand-made and machine-made lace garments from the 16th century, (an incredibly detailed man's cap from Wollaton Hall), to the mid 20th century, (a frothy lemon 1950s frock). We even learned about the two ways lace was painstakingly hand embroidered by lace finishers like Mary Bailey. But for me the most moving object was the self portrait of Amy Atkins, the first woman lace designer who was active between 1904 and 1914, because it appears so incredibly modern. It was a wonderful visit – and it was so good to know that all the items from the long defunct textile museum are being so expertly and lovingly cared for.



Self Portrait of Amy Atkins
© Miriam Jackson

On Sunday 5th March, Diana and I travelled to Chesterfield to see the play 'Stung', about the WASPI* Women's fight for compensation for the lack of notice about the change in the state pension age. This meant they had little or no time to plan ahead or save for the totally unexpected shortfall in their income, and it has led to poverty, hardship and mental health problems. Shockingly, over 200,000 women have died since 2015.



It was a community theatre event at Chesterfield College and it clearly attracted support from far and wide – the women in the seats next to us had come from Grimsby, and they were looking forward to the WASPI rally in London on the 8th March, fittingly International Women's Day. Written by Lynn Ludditt, the play is impassioned, poignant, inspirational, funny and informative and should have as wide an audience as possible. We wish them well in their fight for justice – support them if you can at <https://www.waspi.co.uk/> *Women Against State Pension Inequality.

Unfortunately, we haven't managed to do anything for International Women's Day this year. We were disappointed to be overlooked by Nottingham City Council for their IWD event,

even though we were heavily involved in their last event in March 2020 and were instrumental in getting the plaque celebrating 'women firsts' affixed to the Council House. They have assured us that we will be included in 2024 so watch this space.

And a final tip – if you can, check out the National Theatre play *Home I'm Darling*, a thought-provoking comedy and a timely analysis of the gender divide by Laura Wade. There's a brilliant speech in it by the main character's mother which is worth the ticket price on its own. It's on tour till 13th May, and in Birmingham 25-29 April, although you might also find yourself in Cambridge or Brighton with a spare evening on your hands.

<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/productions/home-im-darling/>

As ever, thank you for your support. We hope to see you at one or other of our events throughout the rest of the year – see Dates for your Diary section.

Spreading the Word

Women's Suffrage continues to be a popular subject and several of us go into schools and speak to all kinds of groups, especially local history groups. In March Rowena Edlin-White spoke at Edwinstowe Historical Society, a group who are keen to uncover suffrage connections in their own locality.



Ro speaking at Edwinstowe Historical Society
©Molly Wright

Please make contact with the society if you can help with any information about suffrage in their area.

If you can help us to spread the word about women's suffrage in Nottinghamshire, or would like to book a speaker for your own group on this subject, please contact Nottingham Women's History Group. You can find our contact details at the end of the newsletter.

Nottingham Feminist Archive Group Update 16/3/23

(and some reflections on archiving ...)

By Tina Pamplin

So, this whole project has been way more fun, interesting and absorbing than I would have ever imagined. Although I did use to collect stamps, I still have my postcard collection, my autograph books with The Kinks and a lock of Dave Davies' hair and 110 photo albums labelled and in chronological order, so maybe not so surprising.

We have finished sorting and cataloguing the huge collection of feminist magazines stored in the room beyond the lending library on the top floor of the Women's Centre on Chaucer Street. They are now safely stored in archive boxes out of reach of damaging sunlight and insects.

Duplicates have gone to Manuscripts and Special Collections at Nottingham University. There is a newly refurbished downstairs room at the Women's Centre which could become a more accessible reading room if a way of meshing accessibility and preservation could be worked out.



Archiving in the Women's Centre
©Tina Pamplin

We have almost finished cataloguing the first set of personal archives deposited at the university. Apparently, it's unusual to be archived while alive so 3 of our group, (for whom this is currently true), have spent many happy hours trying to work out what we were doing, where, why and when while knowing it's all there in print or pictures so must have happened.

Archiving is more technical than I had appreciated. I was ludicrously excited when an old friend finally brought round her papers, including a massive bundle of Spare Ribs tied up with string, literally in the nick of time.



©Tina Pamplin

Everything was damp bordering on wet, and showered me and my room with a dark miasma of powdery mould and rusted staples. The excitement was because the mercifully still legible papers and leaflets included material from 1969 onwards, including the Skegness Conference which we knew Nottingham women had been active in but had no evidence of. These soggy papers are now in the Isolation Room at the university, laid out on blotting paper to dry out before the Conservation Officer cleans off the mould spores. Only then can they go in the temperature-controlled manuscripts store, wrapped in acid free paper ready to be catalogued and accessed by researchers.

So, from someone with a typewriter and an ink duplicator maybe illicitly accessed at work, maybe a school staffroom as happened to one of our group, handing out copies at the first Women's Liberation Conference 27th or 28th February 1970 to contribute to a new, exciting and maybe lifechanging debate it has miraculously survived to make my week and become a precious historical artefact, safe and accessible now and in the future.

Another fascinating aspect of this accumulating archive has been the incredible range of titles and topics and target audiences covered by the magazines and newsletters produced. I was familiar with the locally produced Women Now and Socialist Woman and national publications like Spare Rib and Red Rag, but just looking at the array of artistically diverse covers is amazing before you even start on the contents.



Array of archived magazines
©University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections

This project started with the aim of interviewing local activists from the '70s for an oral history. We have completed over 25 interviews which have been professionally transcribed. We are now engaged in the legislative bureaucracy of checking, correcting and getting signed permission slips from participants so they can be placed in the archives and accessed by researchers. And there are still activists on the list to interview. Also in the pipeline is an exhibition and a (very, very short) book about the early days of the Women's movement in Nottingham.

While archiving we observed that many activists remained active in a variety of campaigns after the '70s, becoming involved in Women for Peace, Greenham peace camp, Equal Opportunities work in unions or professional roles etc. And they still are....



Pippa McKeith on XR protest.
©Julian Griffiths

More Notable Notts Women

From Miriam Jackson:

Dorothy Pullinger: (1894-1986) was a motor engineer who spent her later school years, 1904 – 1910, in Nottingham. She followed her father to become a motor engineer working for Arrol-Johnson Vickers in Scotland. In WW1 she was put in charge of a large munitions factory in Barrow on Furness for which she received an MBE. She also led a car company, Galloway Motors in Scotland which made a car – the Galloway - which was designed specifically for women. The Galloway was designed with women's average height, (5foot 4inches), in mind not men's taller average height. It was also lighter and smaller with gears and brakes in the middle of the car not on the outside. The seat was raised, there was more storage space and the steering wheel was smaller. It was also one of the first models to have a rearview mirror. I just love the car, which she drove around Guernsey after she retired there.



Dorothee Pullinger pictured with a Galloway car.

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Susannah Wright: On 16 November 1822 Nottingham's Susannah Wright was described in the *New Times*, a conservative paper, as "The She-Champion of Impiety" — she was a celebrated radical of her day.

I'd long been a fan of this strong woman but hadn't really thought just how brave and exceptional she was until I got a copy of "*The Speech of Mrs Susannah Wright before the Court of King's Bench.*" (£11 from World of Books) Susannah conducted her own defence, undeterred by the male dominated Court, speaking for some four hours, ignoring the Judge's interruptions and attempts to silence her, and ensuring she read the offending publication to the court, to show its innocence.

Her resulting imprisonment did not change her radical views and in 1826, when she returned to Nottingham, she opened a radical bookshop only to be faced with the town 'in an uproar'. The siege of her bookshop lasted for 4 weeks with her shop being broken into and attempts made to drag her out; but by September she was able to report that 'the victory is ours'.

I also read *The She Champion of Impiety: a case study of female radicalism* by Christina Parolin, which highlights how overlooked Susannah's radicalism has been, neglected as simply one of Richard Carlile's supporters. Parolin helped me to see how exceptional Susannah was, particularly in the 1820s where she acted with autonomy, embraced the public sphere, had little regard to contemporary attitudes to gender, was undeterred by the male establishment and by threats of violence. I can only admire her more.

Lady Plaques of Beeston: We recently met with some of the women from Beeston Civic Society who are working on installing some plaques to Beeston's women. A few years ago, there was a Blue Plaque project which highlighted various buildings and people in Beeston. However, no women were included

and the group aim to correct this. They are currently working on figures like Dr Winnifred Thompson, Beeston's first woman Doctor, and Jane Roadknight an early year's education specialist who lived for some time at 4 Station Villas.

There's a lovely street mural of the Chilwell Munitions workers, which commemorates the tragic Chilwell disaster.



©Miriam Jackson

I think Nottingham City centre needs more plaques to some of its amazing women and a mural to lace workers wouldn't go amiss too!

From Karen Winyard:

Marianne Harriet Mason: Born in London on 19 February 1845, Marianne's family returned to their native Nottinghamshire from Laugharne in Wales, renting Eaton Hall for eight years before building Morton Hall. Marianne was a 'pioneer' in many ways. In 1885 she became the first woman Poor Law Inspector with responsibility for inspecting children 'boarded out' under the Local Government Board's Boarding Out system. On her appointment she was told that she was a test case. If she failed, the Government would not appoint more women to Inspector roles. Marianne made sure she didn't fail, carrying out her duties in difficult circumstances and to the detriment of her health, to ensure future roles for women.

Her memoir, held at Nottinghamshire Archives, gives a wonderful account of her 25 years of service and the many instances of inequality and discrimination she overcame. When Marianne retired in 1910, there were women working as Factory Inspectors, for the Board of Trade and for the Board of Education. At her retirement, 72 women working in the various civil service departments presented her, as their pioneer, with a gold bracelet.



Marianne Harriet Mason by M Taylor
<http://www.kew.org/blogs/library-art-and-archives/the-marvellous-achievements-of-marianne-mason>, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=58139664>

Marianne was also a talented watercolour artist and had a passionate interest in botany. She was an expert on both Swiss Alpines and South African plants. Marianne retired to live in South Africa where she produced over 400 plant studies, now held as part of the Collection at Kew.



Erythrina by Marianne Harriet Mason
<http://www.kew.org/blogs/library-art-and-archives/the-marvellous-achievements-of-marianne-mason>

Her other passion was for music. She was known for her study of musical oral traditions and folk songs and published *Nursery Rhymes and Country Songs* in 1877.

Julia Bell -the mathematician from Sherwood

By Sara Porter

The brilliant Julia Bell was a mathematician and a Biologist who broke into new fields. She worked extensively on genetic conditions such as Fragile X syndrome and the consequences of Rubella during pregnancy. In 1937 she published a landmark paper on the link between colour-blindness and inheritance that was a major step toward the mapping of the human genome. This paper was written with eminent scientist J B S Haldane who has been described as the most brilliant scientist of his generation. Julia certainly walked amongst giants. (As a Biologist Haldane is the equivalent of Yeats in English – bold, brilliant and ground-breaking – terms I think could be applied to Julia).

Julia was not from an aristocratic or wealthy background. Julia was born in 1879 in Sherwood, the 10th child in a family of 14. Her father, James Bell, a self-made man originally from Scotland, ran a very successful printing shop in Nottingham. He was an accomplished cellist in the Nottingham and a devout Churchman. Julia's father believed passionately in female education and provide Julia with the support and money to pursue a career. He devoted himself to the family and Julia went to the prestigious Nottingham High school for girls. The school was a pioneer of female education and science which was just opening up to women within the turn of the century.



Nottingham Girls High School
©NGHSwiki CC BY-SA 3.0

The school also taught Maria Browning who went on to become the first woman to gain a doctorate in Physics. In 1898 Julia passed the entrance exam to Girton College, which had only just allowed female students to enter, though female students were not awarded degrees.



Girton College ©Detroit Publishing Co.
Under license from Photoglob
ZürichRestoration
By Adam Cuerden

Julia had to sail to Trinity college, Ireland to be awarded her master's in mathematics. These female students were labelled, rather fittingly, as the steam boat ladies due to their voyage overseas. Not content with just one degree, Julia also studied for her medical degree at the University College in London whilst working with Karl Pearson at the world-famous Galton college. The Galtons were descendants of Erasmus Darwin who was very connected to the East Midlands. One explanation for her choice to study medicine is that she felt that the biological knowledge within the department was lacking.

Julia with Karl helped produce "Treasury of Human Inheritance", a five-volume set of books that catalogued and analysed genetic disorders. Julia continued to work for several years on Biological and scientific research. She did not retire until she was 86 which is an incredible length of service. I would very much like to explore her work in far more detail. Her papers are very well written and her equations are, quite simply, breathtakingly beautiful. Her ability to link diseases, symptoms, and maths at a time when DNA did not exist and gene mapping for inheritable diseases was scientific fiction is phenomenal. Plus, I now have another woman to add to my research list: Martha Browning. You can find out more from the following: King, Jesse, "Julia Bell (1879-1979)". Embryo Project Encyclopaedia (2012-12-27). ISSN: 1940-5030

<http://embryo.asu.edu/handle/10776/4209>.

<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.1937.0046>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia_Bell

<https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/sage/julia-bell-mrcs-lrcp-frcp-1879-1979-steamboat-lady-statistician-and-NcrfE0Sb5H?key=sage>

Janice Elliott (1931 – 1995) another Great Nottingham Author

By Rowena Edlin-White author of *Exploring Nottinghamshire Writers* (Five Leaves)

It's always a great pleasure to find another Nottinghamshire author for my files and recently the name Janice Elliott popped up in an article on-line. I knew the name, her books were on the shelves of Aspley Library where I worked as a teenager in the sixties, and I remember reading *The Buttercup Chain*, hot off the press in 1967, the story of four young people in an intense but romantic quadrilateral relationship. It was made into a film in 1970 with Jane Asher and Hywel Bennett.

Janice Elliott was born in Derby but raised in Nottingham. She attended Nottingham High School for Girls before going to St Anne's College, Oxford. Her first novel, *Cave with Echoes*, was published in 1962 with good reviews. She worked as a journalist on several magazines whilst publishing a new novel almost every year until her death, all different. I've read four of her novels in the past few weeks and can't get enough of them. I began with *Life on the Nile* (1989), a mystery in which a young woman, Charlotte, joins a tour of Egypt, hoping to discover the circumstances of the death of her Great Aunt Phoebe there in 1925.

I gathered that Elliott had written a semi-autobiographical book based on her time at the Girl's High School. *Secret Places* is the story of a group of girls at 'Prince Albert School' during WW2 and the friendship of Patience Mackenzie with Laura Meister, an Anglo-German refugee, who comes to live with her glamorous, troubled, mother in Nottingham. Apart from the name of the school, everything else is recognisable: The Park, the Arboretum which has become an internment camp, and that particular area of Nottingham. Reviews were appreciative, e.g., "...a low-key novel ... cleverly worked in a variety of ways ... Miss Elliott evokes an atmosphere of the times you can almost breathe." (Richard Pearce in the *Evening Telegraph* 8.5.81) *Secret Places* was made into a film with Tara MacGowran and Marie-Therese Relin as Patience and Laura, and Jenny Agutter as Miss Lowrie, their favourite teacher. Interestingly, I couldn't find a review in the Nottingham newspapers when *Secret Places* was

published in 1981, but perhaps nobody made any connections with the local scenery and a real school as it might have been forty years previously.

Other comments about Elliott's writing include, "surreal" and "bizarre" - certainly appropriate in the case of *Dr Gruber's Daughter*, set in 1953 in Oxford in a boarding house populated with eccentric tenants thought to be illegal immigrants, living in a kind of purgatory - and who is the mysterious Dr Gruber, locked in the attic? No spoilers, you must read this often hilarious Gothic novel for yourself.

Sadly, Janice Elliott's books are all out of print; but they can be obtained cheaply on-line. If this situation goes on, we may have to do a Whipple on her - you know what I mean. As I sign off, I'm reading *The Madness of Witches*, set in Cornwall, where Elliott spent her later years. I love this author, and can't wait to get my hands on the other twenty-six of her books!

Sian Trafford has discovered this walk that you can take to follow in the footsteps of many of Nottingham's writers.

<http://nottslit.blogspot.com/2017/09/nottingham-women-of-words.html> **On the Trail of**

Dates for your Diary

Saturday 22 April - NWHG talk Sian Trafford: 'Some Nottingham Women Artists', 2pm ICC

Saturday 13 May - NWHG stall at the Great Nottinghamshire History Fair, Mansfield Library

Thursday 1 June - Jean Rhys: Miranda Seymour 1-2 pm at Djanogly Theatre, Lakeside Arts, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2 RD. Miranda Seymour talking about her latest book *I Used to Live Here Once*, a biography of Jean Rhys. £3, concessions free.

Wednesday 14 June - NWHG Walk - Nottingham Women Authors led by Ro. Meet at Right Lion 6.30 pm

Wednesday 12 July - NWHG Walk 'Nurses, Nuns and Notables' led by Mo. Meet at Nottingham Playhouse 6.30 pm

Saturday 14 October - NWHG AGM followed by NWHG talk Karen Winyard 'In & Out of Wedlock. 19th Century Women's Experience of Marriage'. ICC 2pm

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<http://www.nottinghamwomenshistory.org.uk/>

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