



SHEFFIELD UNIVERSITY

WOMEN'S CLUB NEWSLETTER No. 56 September 2020



SUWC Garden Party 2020!

**www.sheffield.ac.uk/suwc
email: womensclub@sheffield.ac.uk**

Dear Members and Friends

When the previous Newsletter was published in January, none of us could have imagined how life would change so much and so quickly. Like most other groups, we had to put our activities on hold. We did, however manage to hold three events before lockdown - two talks and a theatre visit - and you can read reviews of them in the Newsletter.

As we are unlikely to be able to meet as normal for the present, the Committee has decided to hold talks for the rest of the year via Zoom. We appreciate that not of all you will wish or be able to take part in these but feel that this is the best way to keep the club active. We will start with our virtual Coffee Morning in September which will provide an opportunity to try out a SUWC Zoom session. Then in October and November you can find out why Charles Dickens was the favourite author of Sheffield readers in the 1930s and 40s, how old mattresses are helping to grow food in the desert and the story of a very special group of Sheffield women. We are not asking you to book for these talks but full details of how to take part will be emailed ahead of these events.

As you will see from the Chair's farewell below, we are not holding an AGM this year and we are also not asking you to pay a subscription for 2020/21. So there will be no membership cards, but the provisional programme for the year is included with your Newsletter. All events will of course be dependent on the Covid-19 situation. .

As you see below, Rosemary is standing down as Chair after three years and I'm sure you would join me in thanking her for the outstanding job she's done in that time. She's been a very hardworking and inspirational Chair, always concerned to do the very best for SUWC, especially during this difficult year.

Farewell from the Chair

It is hard to believe that it is three years since I became Chair of the Women's Club, after a couple of years as Treasurer. The saying goes that time flies when you are having a good time and I have certainly enjoyed every minute (well almost every minute!) of my time in the Chair. We have had some fascinating talks and amazing outings ranging from forensic anatomy to making textiles. I think the ones which stand out for me are the wonderful talk from Tim Birkhead on birds' eggs and the great outing to Manchester to the Elizabeth Gaskell House and the Victoria Baths. The most important thing I will take with me when I stand down in October is all the new friendships I have made with members of the club and especially with the members of the committee. The support I have had from all the committee members has been amazing. We have also had a lot of fun together. It is very hackneyed to say that I couldn't have done it without them but it is absolutely true.

In normal circumstances I would have handed over to the new Chair at the AGM but this has been postponed until we can meet in person. The constitution states that the officers of the club are selected by the committee therefore we do not require an AGM to change officers. The officers who are standing down in October, apart from myself, are Eve Fawcett, Membership Secretary, who will be succeeded by Belinda Barber and Gail Freeman, Treasurer, who will be succeeded by Brenda Zinober. My thanks to Eve for always keeping the membership record up to date, keeping in contact with members and going out of her way to welcome new members to the club and to Gail for her meticulous keeping of the finances.

Jacinta Campbell will be taking over the Chair in October. I am sure that many of you already know Jacinta and those who don't will soon get to know her. Jacinta, who originally hails from Doncaster, has been a member of the Women's Club since she came to Sheffield with her family over 20 years ago when her husband Mike was appointed to the Chair of Medical Statistics with an interest in Primary care.

Jacinta did a degree in Biology with Chemistry at York University, followed by a PGCE at Liverpool and actually did a probationary year teaching here in Sheffield in 1973. When she came back in 1998 she initially worked as a research assistant in ScHARR working on asthma which involved her going to different clinics in the city working with asthma nurse specialists and patients. This helped her get to know the city, although, in those early days, she says she always found the ‘University roundabout’ and the sequence of roundabouts on the Ecclesall Road challenging. Later she went back to teaching at All Saints Catholic comprehensive, where she happily taught A level biology for 8 years and established links between the University and the school.

Jacinta has numerous pastimes including watercolour painting, flower arranging, wool spinning, patchwork and textiles.

She was initially introduced to the Women’s Club by Sheena Ritchie who kindly arranged for Angela Titman to give her a lift to the September coffee morning. She subsequently served on the committee with Jo Steiner and Barbara Guest. Having worked with Jacinta on the committee for the last two years I know that the wellbeing of the Women’s Club is very important to her and that she will be an excellent Chair of the Club.

RECENT EVENTS

9th January: Talk – Mysterious Terrors: The Female Gothic by Dr. Helena Ifill

Dr. Ifill is no stranger to Sheffield, having completed her MA on Victorian popular fiction and then a PhD on the novelist Wilkie Collins at Sheffield University. In addition to her Victorian specialism she also lectures in women’s writing and the engagements between science, medicine and literature at the University of Aberdeen.

In a fascinating and engaging talk Dr Ifill took us back to the haunted, blood-curdling world of 18th century gothic literature, through the novels of the Victorian writer Ann Radcliffe, 1764 –

1823. Ann Radcliffe was part of the late 18th century radical dissenting circle of writers who wrote in the gothic manner. She called her six novels Romances, basically they were 'escapist' fiction set in mediaeval times. They were very popular and she became the highest paid writer of her day. Such was her fame and popularity she had many, mostly inferior, imitators but was well regarded by esteemed writers such as Keats and Scott.

The key features of the gothic style were the clever use of fear, terror and darkness, stories mainly set in the distant past in Mediterranean Europe with themes of family and inheritance, contested wills, tension between the generations and tyrannical patriarchy. Powerful male characters threatened vulnerable, but sparky heroines with sexual predation, greed and financial ruin, while minor male characters were mostly ineffectual. The settings were romantic ruins such as crumbling mansions, castles, or nunneries in which there were often supernatural occurrences, and evil doings in the name of Catholicism, with vampires and other living dead.

A sub genre of the gothic style was female gothic, and in these we see the difference between male and female writers, as in the stories of Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft. We still have vulnerable young women who must preserve life and honour but we see the stories from the female perspective, what it is like to be a woman in society and be a member of the female rebellion within patriarchal structures.

Dr Ifill read passages from 'The Monk' by a contemporary male writer, Matthew Lewis and then from Ann Radcliffe's 'The Mysteries of Udolpho' to illustrate an essential difference in the writing style between the sexes - the use of horror versus terror. 'The Monk' (1794) is very graphic and violent, invoking horror through excessively gory and explicit images and language. In contrast Radcliffe's writing is full of short, sharp phrases building up tension, using anti-climax and then more suggestion of terror. Dr Ifill compared the classic horror film 'Nightmare on Elm Street' and 'Paranormal Activity', which builds up tension and terror in a more

subtle way, to show how the different styles are used in modern cinema.

In Radcliffe's novel, 'A Sicilian Romance' (1790) the female perspective is illustrated in the story of Julia, forced to marry against her will, imprisoned in an asylum, escaping and recaptured, threatened with rape and eventually gaining the strength to stand up to patriarchal abuse and find her own salvation, without recourse to an ineffectual lover and brother.

The female gothic style also sought to explain the supernatural in the Age of Enlightenment showing that the real fear was human cruelty. This was also used by Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre* when mysterious goings on were revealed to be Mr Rochester's wife, the mad woman in the attic.

Radcliffe had her critics and the female gothic was parodied by Jane Austen in her 1817 novel 'Northanger Abbey'. In fact some of us may have encountered 'The Mysteries of Udolpho' while studying Jane Austen for 'O' Level,

We were reminded that the female perspective is alive and well in modern literature as we see in novels such as Daphne du Maurier's 'Rebecca', (1938), 'The Bloody Chamber' (1979) by Angela Carter and 'Beloved' (1987) by Toni Morrison, and Dr Ifill ended by revealing her love of the genre as seen in the series 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'.

26th February 2020: Death, Sex and Statistics, and Women's Health, by Professor Michael Campbell

When congregating for the talk on the 26th February little did we know that statistical analysis of death rates, and the reasons for their diversity between genders, sex, socio-economic, and ethnic background, was to become of such interest and discussion in the forthcoming months. Covid-19 was something only recently raising its head on the other side of the world but since its arrival in the UK and the subsequent lockdown, much has been written, speculated, and propounded to explain the varying death rates within the population.

Professor Michael Campbell, Emeritus Professor of Medical Statistics (University of Sheffield), presented a fascinating talk on the use, trials and tribulations of medical statistics, based on the concept of the measurement of risk, and illustrated with humorous cartoons, startling graphs, and interesting reminiscences from his long career. His wide-ranging talk focussed on issues associated with women's health and covered the contraceptive pill; hormone replacement therapy; the cost-effectiveness of screening for different diseases; sexual attitudes and lifestyles between the 1940s and the 1980s; heart disease; and how statisticians help the medical world in assessing the predicted risk of disease against the estimated value and costs of medication emerging from clinical drug trials, and the possible social and economic consequences of non-prescribing.

A general misunderstanding of the concept of statistical risk was illustrated through the public reaction to earlier research indicating a link between some contraceptive pills and deep vein thrombosis. The advice to women to discuss the risks with their GP was perceived as a signal that it should not be taken, with the inevitable consequence of a rise in abortions and unwanted pregnancies. However the risk of damage to women's health inherent in both of these far outweighs that associated with the pill.

Screening can be mistakenly viewed as a means of curtailing the incidence of various diseases, whereas it has no effect whatsoever on the incidence but rather on the rapidity of medical intervention. Statistical analysis of successful treatment for breast cancer, babies' hearing, bowel disorders, and blood pressure show a positive outcome for screening procedures in reducing the suffering, but indicate an unproven result for the use of screening for prostate problems and aortic aneurysms for men. Screening is only undertaken in the UK if the medical world thinks it has the means to intervene positively if the disease is identified, the test is reliably accurate and affordable, and the consequences of non-intervention at an early stage would be serious. So some conditions for which there

is currently no effective medical intervention are simply not screened for, e.g. Huntingdon's Disease.

As a result of statistical medical analysis of swathes of the population, GPs can now employ a useful tool, called a QRISK score, which enables them to estimate the extent of future risk to patients of their experiencing conditions such a stroke or heart attack. However, while some risk factors can be mitigated, not all of them are modifiable, e.g. genetics, so any subsequent treatment has to be tempered with what is possible and practicable, and the patient's own attitude to the risk factors, medication, and side effects when weighed against lifestyle.

While statistical research results can throw up some interesting, and sometimes startling information, Professor Campbell pointed out that further in-depth consideration of any statistical conclusion was essential. The results from certain enquiries into the sexual habits of men and women at various stages of their lives could only be understood if one came to the conclusion that the men were boasting or the women were under-reporting their number of partners, with a third possibility of a respondent bias in the samples questioned.

The talk elicited a number of eager questions, one of which touched on the evidence which had recently come to light that life expectancy, having risen inexorably for a century or more, was now beginning to decline in certain parts of the country, including Sheffield. The explanation for this is multi-variable, including geographical, social and economic factors; but the cheering news for those of us in the audience was that while the general life expectancy from birth for women is 80, if we managed to reach 70 we were likely to survive until the age of 90.

Professor Campbell was most warmly thanked by an appreciative audience for his enthralling talk. We went away with a clear view of the valuable contribution which statistical analysis has made in the 20th and 21st centuries to helping both doctors and patients make informed choices about future medical treatment,

4th March: Theatre Visit - The Last Temptation of Boris Johnson, at the The Lowry Theatre, Salford

In the lockdown it is poignant to remember this play. It was the last live theatre we saw. I wistfully recall the buzz of the audience before the play began, and the skills put to use on stage and behind the scenes. It was wonderful.

So, to the play. It was hugely enjoyable, - many laughs, well written, sparky dialogue and based at first on a 'true' story – real events, but imagined dialogue, and apparitions...

The play started with an interview by Hew Edwards. Boris is seen looking very smart in the wings. He musses up his hair, untucks his shirt, loosens his tie and shrugs his jacket, and strides onto the studio looking boyishly unkempt. He is flippant in his responses, caught off guard by a tricky question, makes sure to deliver his own message and shambles off muttering 'ar---ole.

Immediately we are in his dining kitchen, he is hosting a dinner party. Present are Michael Gove and his wife Sarah Vine - a columnist for The Daily Mail, and Evgeny Lebedev the proprietor of The Daily Telegraph, with his wife Caitlin. They are discussing Brexit, cynically choosing which side Boris should be on, using the referendum as a way to draw attention to himself as a big player in opposition to the mainstream.

The acting was brilliant, with a cast of only five playing thirteen characters. Will Barton playing Mr Johnson was on stage non-stop and captured the body language and speech patterns of our Prime Minister very well. The pace was fast, with minimum distractions from scenery or 'business'. There was repartee as witty and cutting as you would expect between high powered and articulate people. Two of the jokes: 'Tell me, how are the tech lessons going Boris? To which Boris replies 'Oh swimmingly, but I'm not learning much about technology...' and... 'Hey Boris, I haven't seen him around for a bit, what's happened to Dominic?' 'Oh, he's gone to work for Kim Yong Ung' (not so many laughs at this one, it's too believable.)

Boris is apparently not a good cook or attentive host, the guests have to help themselves, but all seem more interested in the wine than in the food. During the course of the dinner Prime Ministers of the past make their unexpected appearance. Winston Churchill appears as a floating mirage, just his head. Boris is perhaps 'daydreaming' at this point. Churchill sonorously reminds Boris that 'the unification of Europe is the only way of preserving peace'. Tony Blair is in the broom cupboard and appears when a spillage has to be cleaned up. Mrs Thatcher is in the oven; when it is opened she exhorts Boris to campaign for Brexit – 'it's gone too far, I signed only for a trade agreement'.

In the second part of the play we realise Boris has been Prime Minister and 'got Brexit done', but after a short time in office, is now a backbencher again. Labour is in power. The last temptation of Boris Johnson is brought to him by various friends, well wishers and those who would fly on his coattails. They want him to campaign to rejoin Europe and hopefully return to Number Ten. He succumbs to temptation with characteristically huge self confidence and energy - but will he or won he succeed?

My strap line was going to be 'I laughed till I cried'. But now I am reserving judgement about Boris Johnson. In due course there may be a play about his role in the Covid9 crisis – hero or bluffer.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Monday, 28th September: 10.00am-12 noon Coffee Morning

We will be meeting via Zoom and splitting up into breakout groups to allow us to chat together.

Wednesday, 21st October: 2.15pm. Talk - Reading Sheffield - Dickens in twentieth century Sheffield: cartoonist for the masses or literary genius? - Mary Grover via Zoom

Mary was a teacher of English in secondary schools, Further Education colleges and finally in Sheffield Hallam University. There

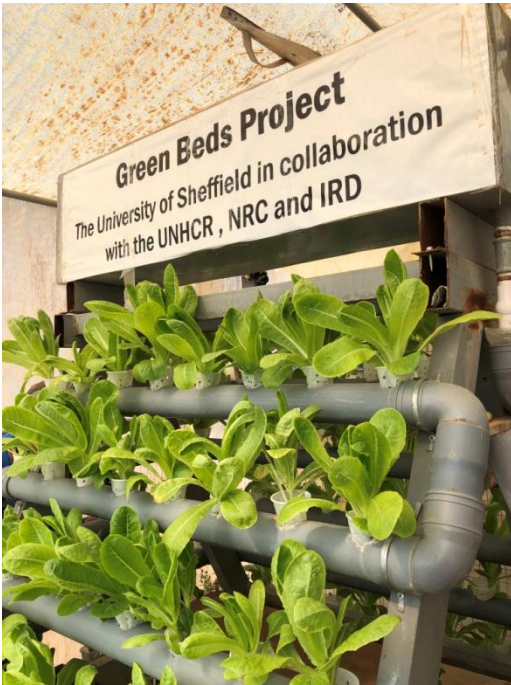
she taught twentieth century literature and wrote on cultural history with an emphasis on attitudes to popular fiction. When she retired, she founded the Reading Sheffield project which collected the reading experiences of Sheffield readers, most of whom came to adulthood in the Thirties and Forties. This project has been the basis of the book she has just completed: 'Steel City Readers: reading in an industrial city 1930-1955'.

Of all the nineteenth century novelists, Dickens was by far the most widely read amongst the Sheffield men and women interviewed by Reading Sheffield. Though contemporary undergraduates often struggle with Dickens, it is striking that in the 1930s and 40s Dickens was frequently read compulsively by readers with access to few books and no education beyond the age of fourteen. Mary's talk will look at the sources of his popularity in mid-twentieth century Sheffield and the different kinds of snobbery his works provoked. She will use the responses of the men and women she and her team have interviewed and put these responses in the context of the newspaper, radio and academic cultures of the 1930s.

Tuesday 17th November: 2.15pm Talk – Desert Garden Project by Tony Ryan

The Desert Garden project is a unique project born out of innovative science and is giving families displaced by war the opportunity to grow fresh food in the desert using discarded mattresses. In 2018, Sheffield scientists travelled more than 3,000 miles – to the world's largest Syrian refugee camp – to put their pioneering research into solving the issue of food shortages for thousands of people, living in the desert in Jordan. The technique used to grow food in the desert has been developed in their Sheffield labs for many years. As world-leading experts in hydroponics systems, the team has been using foam from discarded mattresses found in the refugee camp, as a growing medium for the crops in a hydroponic system. In normal agricultural processes, soil supports a plant's roots, but in a

hydroponics system plants are supported artificially and suspended away from the ground.



Professor Tony Ryan, OBE, FRSC leads the research team working on the Desert Garden project. He's a polymer chemist and sustainability leader at the University of Sheffield. He was Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University's Faculty of Science from 2008 until 2016, and is currently Director of the Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures. He delivered the 2002 Royal Institution Christmas Lectures and has appeared on programmes including the BBC Radio 4 comedy and popular

science series *The Infinite Monkey Cage*.

Wednesday 9th December: 2.15pm Talk - The Women of Steel by Michelle Rawlins via Zoom

Many of you will have seen the "Women of Steel" bronze sculpture that stands outside the City Hall, in Barkers Pool. The sculpture commemorates the women of Sheffield who worked in the city's steel industry during the First and Second World Wars. Sheffield steel is famous across the world and its factories were key to wartime success during World War 2. When the men of Sheffield were called up to fight, it fell to the women of the city to keep the steel mills working and during the course of the conflict, thousands juggled family life with the demands of heavy industry. They kept British

forces armed, endured gruelling shifts, looked after young families and worked on as bombers targeted the city. If they hadn't been drafted in to do these jobs the British Forces would not have had aircraft or bullets. When peacetime came the Women of Steel returned to 'normal' life and their story was largely forgotten for sixty years until a campaign by the four of the women workers led to public recognition of their role during Britain's darkest hour and the commissioning of the sculpture.

Michelle is an award-winning journalist, author, ghostwriter and copywriter with 25 years' experience working for national newspapers, magazines and online and lectures in the Department of Journalism at Sheffield University. Her book "Women of Steel", published this year, tells the fascinating stories of some of these formidable women.

Thursday 28th January 2021: 2.15pm Talk – A Close Look at Nature by Bob Russon. Format and venue tbc.

In this illustrated talk we look at a variety of images of the wildlife found in the countryside around Sheffield and further afield. Birds, butterflies, beasts, landscape and even the weather will appear on screen with tips on where to find and how to photograph our local wildlife. Bob Russon started bird and wildlife watching as a young teenager and has spent 60 years wandering the countryside clutching a pair of binoculars and a camera. After 30 years teaching in Special Education in Lichfield, he moved to Sheffield 5 years ago. He's a committee member of Sheffield RSPB with responsibility for organising our annual programme of speakers.



OUR SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Gardens Group: Sadly we only had one visit this year before lockdown. We hope to be able to resume our visits in 2021 and will be planning a programme early in the New Year and that will be e-mailed to you in good time to get the dates in your diary. We meet to share lifts at the lower end of Snaithing Lane and ideas for visits from members are very welcome.

Walking Group: The walking group meets on the first Tuesday of each month. They general walk for about 2 hours at a pace suitable for those taking part. Occasionally after the walk some or all of the group retire to a nearby pub or café for lunch. All walks start at 10.00 am. Currently the number of walkers taking part in each walk is limited to 6 and members must get to the start of the walk using their own transport. There is no car sharing.

Theatregoers group: Twice a year in Spring and Autumn members of SUWC travel to another city to enjoy a matinee performance of an interesting or amusing play. At present we are not able to plan any visits but hope to resume the visits when the situation allows. New members are always welcome and arrangements can be made for members to travel in a group if they prefer.