



SHEFFIELD UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S CLUB



Wild in the Country Garden

NEWSLETTER No. 57

January 2021

www.sheffield.ac.uk/suwc

email: womensclub@sheffield.ac.

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the 2021 January Newsletter. The photo on the front cover is of the Wild in the Country garden which we plan to visit in July, along with a Sculpture garden. Both venues are situated in the Plague village of Eyam which seems very appropriate for our Summer Outing when we hope that the our current Coronavirus plague will allow us to make the trip out there. We are also keeping our fingers crossed that one of our most popular events, the Summer Garden Party.

In the meantime, as you will see from the reviews in the Newsletter, we've had a number of successful Zoom talks and have more lined up for the rest of the year including an insight into political sketch writing, a visit to the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia and the story of a Sheffield woman's pioneering work to preserve our local countryside. If you haven't already taken part in one of the talks, do it give it a try. And if you can't join any of the talks live, they are usually recorded so you have another opportunity to listen.

Alison Allen-Booth

From Jacinta Campbell, SUWC Chair

Dear Members and friends

Happy New Year!

I sincerely wish you health and happiness in 2021. I am sure this year will also present us all with challenges, however, the days are getting ever so slightly longer and those brave snowdrops are busy mobilising their energy supply to push green shoots upwards to greet us in the Spring. As you can see from the programme, we have lined up a number of interesting speakers for you. Our default setting will be to have these talks on Zoom but as soon as we can meet safely in a large number, we will hope to respond to that change and move to having live meetings. At the time of writing this, matters are still uncertain but we will keep in touch and keep you updated.

Looking forward to seeing you at Phil Khorassandjian's talk on January 28th 2021 when he shares with us his reasons for being a Beekeeper.

Very best wishes.

Jacinta

RECENT EVENTS

28th September: Coffee Morning

After six months during which all the Club's programmed activities had been cancelled or postponed, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the SUWC committee turned to modern technology to ensure that the annual Coffee Morning could go ahead, albeit in a modified form. So, rather than gathering in one of the lovely Tipton Hall lounges some thirty of us collected around our individual laptops, i-Pads or smart phones to tune in to Zoom under the direction of our meeting host, Rosemary. Our screens rapidly filled with a "Gallery View" of participating members, each in their own home – some with a coffee at hand, others more pre-occupied with mastering the demands of the Zoom system. From a member perspective, the Coffee Morning is more about catching up with old friends and exchanging news than it is about the business of paying subscriptions, or updating contact details.

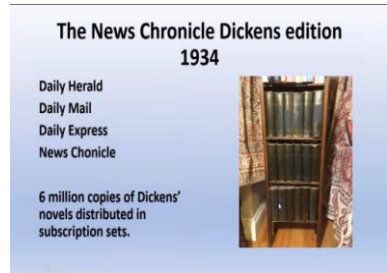
Happily, with subscription renewals having been deferred until we return to normal, this year's meeting was free to focus solely on its social element and, to facilitate this, Rosemary randomly divided us into small 'breakout' groups, allowing us to chat more easily. Getting to grips with new technology is, of course, challenging. Having divided us into groups, Rosemary admitted that she hadn't yet found a way of enabling us to move from one group to another. Never mind; from what I've heard, the separate groups all rose to the challenge of learning how to conduct an on-screen conversation, and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to share experiences of life in lockdown. So, certainly this year's Coffee Morning was unlike any other. It is sad that not all members have access to the technology, or the confidence or desire to use it. But, hopefully, as the year progresses, and while bans on large face-to-face meetings continue, we will find ways and means of bringing more members together in this way.

21st October: Reading Sheffield – Dickens in Twentieth Century Sheffield: cartoonist for the masses or literary genius?

On a rather damp October afternoon, pandemic or no, over 50 members gathered to hear a talk about Charles Dickens given by Mary Grover. Gathered virtually, that is, as this was the second meeting of SUWC to have taken place online, after the successful online coffee morning using Zoom a month earlier. The talk was recorded and so many members who did not attend will also have had the opportunity to hear it, so I will give only a brief resumé.

It was not a literary criticism of the work of the great author, but about a research project into the reading habits of Sheffield residents, with particular reference to Dickens. It all started with a chance conversation on a Number 120 bus some ten years ago. Reading Sheffield, the research project that ensued, was a study of the reading habits of 62 people living in the steel city. Mary's own reading habits had been influenced by her father, and she became a great lover of Dickens. She discovered that many of the people she interviewed for the project

enjoyed his work too. One reason for this popularity wasn't just the content of his books. During the 1930's his fiction became accessible to many families who hitherto were not able to buy such luxuries as books, being as "umble" as Uriah Heap. However, a means for them to begin to read avidly was provided by the tabloids. Salesmen were involved in a subscription war over the supply of a full set of volumes, housed within an oak bookcase, which were soon to grace many a front parlour. Many of those interviewed had benefitted from this.



They were weighty tomes and as such the sets of volumes were excellent value for money, providing many hours of reading. The variety of characters and situations, and the depiction of the vulnerable poor which were especially credible to those living in the harsh economic realities of Sheffield, proved to be irresistible. Often these books were the only form of education available after leaving school, and the historical details they contained were an education in themselves. Not everyone liked the books, some found them over long, lacking in a good story line, too detailed, too lightweight, but each person saw them differently in the light of their own experience. It was especially refreshing that those interviewed provided such frank and unbiased opinions about their personal literary habits.

A brief discussion followed about member's own experiences of reading Dickens. Some, like me, had been put off at an early age at school, whilst others were life-long addicts or had come to a love of Dickens through BBC dramatisations. I for one, who have never found them easy, am now half way through David Copperfield! Thank you, Mary!

The meeting would normally have been the occasion of the AGM, but only essential business could be carried out, including the handover of

the Chair from Rosemary Hannon to Jacinta Campbell. As the meeting drew to a close we could all see a very large, and definitely not virtual, bouquet of flowers being delivered to Rosemary, to thank her for all her work on behalf of the Club.

17th November: Desert Garden Project

The Desert Garden project arose out of the world-leading research into hydroponics by Duncan Cameron, Professor of Plant and Soil Biology, together with Tony Ryan, Professor of Physical Chemistry and Director of the Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures. In 2018, Sheffield scientists travelled to the world's largest refugee camp Zataari, in the desert of Jordan. The camp comprising 80,000 people - with more than half of them being children, provides safety for Syrians displaced by war.

The Garden project had both humanitarian and sustainability aims. The University team worked with the refugees to tackle the challenge of addressing the shortage of fresh food in the arid desert conditions. The initiative involved testing the viability of growing plants by hydroponic techniques using the discarded mattresses in the camp, instead of the high-tech polyurethane foam developed in the University's labs and which are widely used in the U.K. commercial agricultural sector. Traditionally, soil supports the roots of plants, but in a hydroponics system plants are supported artificially on a frame and suspended above the growing medium. The trial was highly successful and the ongoing initiative is now managed by Dr Moaed Al Meselmani, a Syrian refugee, working as a soil scientist at the University of Sheffield. In their desert landscape, a tennis court-sized garden is now alive with edible plants!

What was most moving in Tony's talk was the social impact that the partnership working has had. With war continuing, and no possibility of going home or moving home, the refugees find themselves in limbo depending upon humanitarian aid. But with the success of the project, quite besides enjoying fresh produce for the first time in many years,

families found a new sense of empowerment, purpose and wellbeing. Drawing on the farming expertise of many of the refugees, 1,000 people have now been up-skilled and a 'train the trainer' model has been adopted enabling the camp's desert garden to progressively become entirely self-sustaining.

This University of Sheffield funded initiative is now serving as a model for the work of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) whose predictions suggest that there may soon be millions more refugees, not only as a result of conflict, but also because of climate change.

If you would like to find out more about sustainability research at the University of Sheffield, you can google the website of the Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures to receive their newsletters.

9th December: Women of Steel

Forty one members and guests listened to Michelle Rawlins talk about her research on the women who worked in Sheffield steel mills in the First and Second World Wars. Michelle is a very busy journalist, university teacher, copywriter, author, blogger and ghostwriter. After a few IT niggles we settled down to an engrossing talk about the lives of women during WW2 and Michelle's work on her book titled 'Women of Steel'.

Michelle was made aware of the women who served along the River Don in both World Wars when one of the 'factory girls' became jealous of all the attention the 'land girls' got in Remembrance Day celebrations, and contacted the Sheffield Star to ask why the factory girls were forgotten. The Sheffield Star asked for the women to come forward, and Michelle interviewed many of these women and their families.

We heard about the four early campaigners for recognition, called the 'leading ladies', who went to Downing Street for official thanks in their own decorated railway carriage. The Sheffield Star launched a community fundraising scheme to erect a statue in their honour and

medals for the women or their families to keep. The sculptor, Martin Jennings, was chosen by the leading ladies. The statue outside the City Hall of two factory girls with linked arms was felt to be very apt.

Working in a steelmaking factory, in a job normally held by men, made huge changes to the lives of these protected young girls in times very different from now. The behaviour of the steel workers towards the girls was rough but the girls supported each other in what must have been dangerous and physically hard work. Of course, at the end of the war, they all had to leave their jobs.

Michelle also told the story of the Sheffield Blitz through their eyes. On Thursday 12 December 1940 the Luftwaffe bombed Sheffield. Two sisters, who were at a dance hall, thought they would go and watch the bombs fall until the horror of the incendiaries forced them to seek shelter with others under the Yorkshire Bank. They emerged to a landscape so changed they couldn't find their way home. The two teenage girls walked four miles to their home past bodies and wrecked train tracks in the early morning, and then one returned to do a full day's work in the steel mills. Not all of their friends and families were lucky, and families supported each other in a time when there was such a thing as society.

After the war many of the women's partners were traumatised and the women of steel spent the next part of their lives nursing them. It has been 80 years since the Blitz and of the twenty women of steel that Michelle researched for her book, only one is still alive. Michelle left us with the advice to listen to the stories of our relatives and make recordings, so that their stories are not lost forever.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, 28th January: "Why I am a beekeeper - environment, pollinators, flowers, food and science" by Phil Khorassandjian, Master Bee Keeper. 2.15pm via Zoom

Phil is a retired architect who worked with Housing Associations and the Council in Sheffield before setting up his own practice. The last 15 years of his architectural career were spent in developing countries concerned with housing, education and health buildings - quite often after natural disasters - in Africa, Asia and the Americas. He started keeping bees in Cameroon 25 years ago in top bar hives and took it up again after returning to Sheffield. He was one of the founding members of the re-launched Sheffield Beekeepers' Association in 2010 and has served variously as Chair, Secretary, Education Officer, and Editor. Together with his wife, he manages around 30 colonies of bees in various apiaries in and around Sheffield and the Peak District. He attained his Master Beekeeper qualifications in 2017 and has been working for the National Bee Unit as a Bee Inspector since 2018.

Please note - this a different talk from the one advertised in the September Newsletter.

Tuesday, 16th February: Talk - Ann Treneman - From Politics to Landscape Architecture. 2.15pm via Zoom

Ann Treneman is an award-winning journalist and author who has worked for many national newspapers, most notably 20 years at The Times which included a 12 year stint as the parliamentary sketchwriter and several years as their theatre critic. She grew up in America but has lived in the UK since 1984 and now resides in Bakewell. In 2019 she left full-time work to study for an MA in Landscape Architecture at the University of Sheffield but still contributes a weekly column to the



Times. In her talk she'll be giving us a journalist's look behind the scenes of the Westminster 'village' and also talking about what it's like to take her life in a totally different direction as a mature student.

Tuesday 16th March: Talk Dr John Williams, Ethiopia, An Antique Land. 2.15pm via Zoom.

John Williams was born and brought up in rural Wales before attending Manchester University where he studied for his BSc and PhD in physics.

In 1964 he moved to Sheffield to take up a lectureship at the University of Sheffield and ended up as head of the Department of Physics and Astronomy there. His research involved nuclear resonance fluorescence, a technique discovered by Professor Rudolph Mossbauer who received



the Nobel Prize for his discovery. During his time at Sheffield University John had the opportunity to spend a year's sabbatical working with Professor Mossbauer at the Technical University in Munich.

After retiring John has engaged in a number of challenges including a fund raising trek to the Annapurna region in Nepal. More recently he visited the Mountain kingdom of Lesotho to help with a charity project there and in 2019 visited the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia. This lavishly illustrated talk will take us around this ancient country taking in the source of the Blue Nile, Gondar with its fortress city, Axum, home of the legendary Arc of the Covenant, the Queen of Sheba's palace, and medieval rock-hewn churches.

Wednesday, 21st April: Talk - Jean Smart: Ethel Haythornthwaite - Her Legacy for Sheffield and the Peak District” 2.15pm via Zoom

The Green Belt, the Peak District National Park and planning legislation to protect the countryside are all things we take for granted today but their existence is in large part due to the pioneering work of Sheffield woman Ethel Haythornthwaite and her husband Gerald, which



they started during the 1920's. At the age of 19 Jean Smart answered an advertisement for a shorthand typist 'to assist with interesting and varied work regarding architecture and the countryside' at the Sheffield and Peak District Branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (now known as Friends of the Peak District) run by the Haythornthwaites. She'll

be telling the story of how Ethel became a countryside campaigner and of the many conservation successes achieved by the couple in and around the Sheffield area.

Wednesday 5th May Coffee morning and discussion- tbc

Thursday, 10th June: Garden Party tbc

Whatever the weather, the Garden Party is always a well attended event where you can meet new and old friends over a cup of tea and a variety of delicious homebaking. Contributions of cakes always welcome, as are Guests. Further details and how to book will be available nearer the time.

Wednesday, 7th July: Visit to Eyam - tbc

For our Summer outing this year we are visiting two gardens in the Derbyshire village of Eyam: “Wild in the Country” which is a Flower cutting garden and the Hannah Bennett Sculpture garden. We'll be

given a talk and tour at both venues. The provisional plan is to arrive Eyam at 10.30am or earlier to have coffee at a local café before the garden visits at 11.00am. There will be a limit of 30 for the outing and members will be split into two groups of 15 to visit the two gardens, switching over in the afternoon at 2.30pm to go to the second venue. Members will use their own transport. There is free parking and toilets in the village.

Provisional cost is £15-£20 to include the visits to the two gardens and possibly morning coffee. There are several cafes in the village for lunch or members may prefer to bring a packed lunch.

Booking forms and more details to follow depending on COVID 19 situation.

Monday 20th September: 10am to 12 noon. Coffee morning to be held in the Hunter Suite at Tapton Masonic Hall - tbc

Our autumn programmes start with an informal get together where members can meet up and exchange news after the summer. Guests are very welcome to join us and you undertake to pay £2 for each guest. As on previous occasions, we will have a stall for books in good condition.

OUR SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS:

Gardens Group: After our February snowdrop visit last year we were unable to carry on with the programme, which will be reinstated as soon as we are allowed to return to normal life, and details will be sent out by email.

The Walking Group: The walking group meets on the first Tuesday of every month, whenever virus-related regulations permit. Members take it in turns to lead a walk of about 4/5 miles or 2/3 hours (not a fast pace). The group is very friendly and someone can share your first walk with you if you feel uncertain about it. At present we are meeting at the walk starting point, and not sharing cars, nor taking lunch together. Visitors and new members are always welcome. Details are sent out a few days in advance.

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 when the situation allows. New members are always welcome and arrangements can be made for members to travel in a group if they prefer.

SUMMARY LIST OF FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thursday 28th January 2.15pm via Zoom

Talk: Phil Khorassandjian - 'Why I am a beekeeper'

Tuesday 16th February 2.15 pm via Zoom

Talk: Ann Treneman - 'From Parliament to Landscape Architecture'

Tuesday 16th March, 2.15pm via Zoom

Talk: John Williams, 'Ethiopia, An Antique Land.'

Wednesday 21st April, 2021, 2.15pm via Zoom

Talk, Jean Smart, 'Ethel Haythornthwaite – Her Legacy for Sheffield and the Peak District'

Wednesday 5th May Coffee Morning and discussion tbc

Thursday 10th June

Garden Party Details tbc

Wednesday 7th July

Summer Outing to Eyam Details tbc

Monday 20th September

Coffee Morning Details tbc



Michelle Rawlins and the "Women of Steel" sculpture