

Midland's Region

Women's History Network Conference  
9:30-1:30 on Saturday 21 November 2009

## Women's Life and Leisure in the Twentieth Century



To be held at the Stoke on Trent Campus of Staffordshire University

Faculty of Arts, Media and Design, College Road, Stoke on Trent, ST4 2XW

Conference fee - £8 Concessions - £4 - Staffordshire University and local school students  
free Sandwich lunch package £4 available - please pre-book

For further details and to book a place - please contact  
Dr Maggie Andrews [m.r.andrews@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.andrews@staffs.ac.uk) Tel 01782 294523

## **9-9:30 Registration and Coffee**

9:30 Dr Carole O'Reilly - University of Salford

### **Women in Manchester's Edwardian Parks**

This paper will examine women's use of public parks in Edwardian Manchester. It will address both leisure and non-leisure activities. Like many cities at this time, Manchester City Council was investing in municipal public parks, the high point of which was the purchase of the 650-acre Heaton Park in 1902.

Evidence demonstrates that women were some of the earliest users of the new park – both as leisure visitors with or without children, but also as political activists such as suffragettes and members of the temperance movement. The availability of large, open spaces resulted in a reconfiguring of the lives of Edwardian women. The restrictive atmosphere of many Victorian parks with their improving and didactic agendas had begun to ease in the Edwardian period; consequently, the opportunities for women to become active (in the leisure and non-leisure sense) in parks increased also.

While the development of sporting amenities such as golf and tennis in public parks often reinforced gender segregation, parks also offered an opportunity for the private female and the public male worlds to interact. Contemporary photographs enable us to make inferences about the kinds of women who visited public parks and for what purpose. The flowering of the municipal public park in Manchester in the Edwardian era complemented the gradual increase in the opportunities for women to liberate themselves from the domestic sphere and to develop new roles as users of social spaces.

10:05 Dr. Bob Snape - University of Bolton

### **Women, leisure identity and the English Country Dance 1918-1940**

The popularisation of dancing in the inter-war years was driven by an expansion in the number of dance halls and the advent of jazz music and dance. Commercial dance halls provided leisure spaces in which women could engage in social leisure with other women and could enjoy the relaxed social conventions of the post-war period. They were also venues within which men and women could seek marriage partners. However, not all women felt comfortable in commercial dance halls, some of which had questionable reputations, nor did all women seek romantic encounters. For such women, the English Country Dance, offered not only an alternative leisure experience but opportunities to assume positions of responsibility in the management of folk dance societies.

This paper explores the ways in which the performative and spatial aspects of the English country dance enabled women to create their own leisure identities. It investigates the representational content of folk dance in the inter-war period and suggests that its appeal was based upon its cultural differentiation from commercial dance rather than an authentic folk tradition. It draws from the archive of the Manchester Branch of the English Folk Dance Society and from Mass Observation material on dancing.

10 :40 Professor Mick Wallis - University of Leeds

**Performing the WI:  
Theatre and performance in the Women's Institutes in interwar England**

Amateur theatre was a significant area of activity in the Women's Institutes between the wars, and was vigorously promoted at both national and county levels. In this area, the WI participated in a national amateur theatre movement both encouraged by government and enthusiastically embraced by a burgeoning rank and file. Leaving aside singing – important in itself but outside the scope of this paper – other modes of performance also played a key role in maintaining community and developing individuals: entertainments and games in the social half hour; festive outings; ritual thanksgivings.

Working from a survey of county and national records, the paper will consider theatre and performance in the WI through two frames: following MacAloon, the economies of the performance genres theatre, festival, ritual, spectacle and play/game; and following Caillois, the economies of the play categories agon (competition); alea (chance); mimicry (illusion); and ilinx (vertigo), articulated along a continuum from paidia (free play) to ludus (rule-bound play).

**11:15-11-45 Coffee break**

11:45 Dr Susan Cohen - University of Southampton

**Eleanor Rathbone: a Case study of C20 work, life and leisure**

*The proposed* paper would consider the working life of the British politician, Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946) who was variously a philosopher, suffragist, pacifist, feminist, politician, social and welfare reformer and finally 'MP for Refugees.' The question to be discussed is whether these campaigns, some of which dealt with domestic issues, and others which were international, were mutually exclusive, or whether there was, as I believe, a unifying factor. In support of the case that Eleanor was prima facie a humanitarian activist, I will consider the aspects of her upbringing which influenced and informed the decisions she made and the causes she championed. Additionally, I shall consider the impact that her working life had upon her private life and leisure.

12:20 Dr Jean Williams - Manchester Metropolitan University

**Frisky and Bitchy: unlikely Olympic heroines?**

Erika [Rixi] Markus [nee Scharfstein], (1910-1992), bridge player and writer, was born on 27 June 1910 in Gura Humora, then in the Austro-Hungarian empire. Rixi married Salomon Markus in 1928, and had a daughter, Margo, in 1929. She became a wealthy and acclaimed professional bridge player. Naturalized in 1950, Rixi played for Britain, partnering Doris Rhodes in the ladies' team which won the European championship in 1951. Her partnership with Fritzi Gordon which led to the nicknames 'Frisky' and 'Bitchy' began in 1951 and the pair won, among many other titles, the women's team Olympiad (1964). Rixi was to go on to win four gold medals in so-called Olympiads at Bridge. In the recent special edition of *Sport in History* on the upper classes, not a single female example was included. Yet, for the affluent and well-connected 'exceptions' like Rixi and Fritzi, class enabled them to negotiate entrees

to social circles, even while ambivalence over their Jewish background and Zionist sympathies prevented them from being fully accepted. To what extent can we consider the two British sportswomen? How do their professional careers sit, in terms of the gradual move to professionalism in the wider Olympic movement post-war? Was Rixi ultimately, a more well known writer than a bridge-player?

12:55 Valerie Wood - University of Derby

### **Women and Work in Nottingham in the post war period (1945-1955)**

This paper is about women workers in Nottingham during the period 1945-1955. Drawing upon oral testimonies of women to illustrate many of the issues which confronted women at work, and the ways in which employment began to open possibilities in both leisure and occupational choice.

Women formed a significant proportion of Nottingham's workforce in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A tradition arising from the thousands of women employed in the lace trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As lace manufacturing faded after the First World War, the hosiery and knitwear industry absorbed women and girls into local factories. Additional opportunities for women to work were provided by the further growth of three companies in Nottingham from the 1930s onwards, the Boots Pure Drug Co, Imperial Tobacco (Players) and the Raleigh Cycle Co.

This paper considers three main aspects, the position of Nottingham women workers in the post war economy, an exploration of women's experiences of paid work and the ways in which women's leisure became intrinsically linked to the workplace in the post war period.

### **1:30 Lunch**

**To book :** Please either return the form below with a cheque made out to the Women's History Network Midlands Region to Faculty of Arts, Media and Design, College Road, Stoke on Trent, ST4 2XW or email [m.r.andrews@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.andrews@staffs.ac.uk) (tel 01782 294523) and pay by cheque or cash on the day.

Name	
Address	
Email Address	
Do you require lunch	

Conference fee £8, Concessions £4 Staffordshire University and local school students free