

NORTH EAST POPULAR POLITICS PROJECT

Newsletter 5

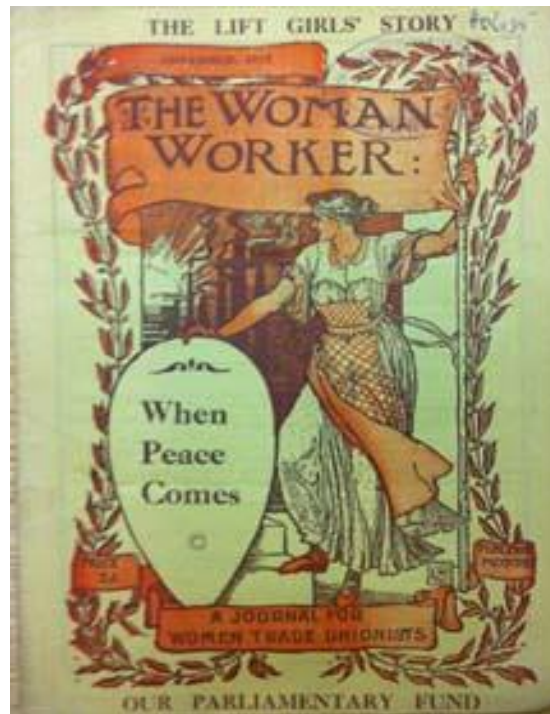
November 2011

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The Woman Worker - TUC Library (see Two London Library Visits below)

From TUC Library, see

DIARY

Friday, 25 November. 6pm. Project Social. 46 West Lane, Forest Hill. Please bring some food and drink. Please contact John Charlton to let him know you are coming.

Wednesday, 30 November. TUC march and rally. 10.30am. Assemble Gateshead Civic Centre, march to rally at Spillers Wharf, Newcastle from 12pm. (Modern PP in action; a Newcastle University contingent was at that student fee demo in London on 9 November; while the Jarrow March ended at Trafalgar Square <http://socialiststudents.org.uk/wp/?p=226#more-226>).

Tuesday 6 December. Project Panel. Four project members will introduce their work followed by a discussion. All Project members are urged to attend and contribute if they wish. NELH First Tuesday meeting. 7pm. Irish Centre, Gallowgate.

Tuesday, 17 January. The Jarrow Crusade: Protest & Legend. Dr Matt Perry, University of Newcastle. Historical Association Branch event. St Giles' Church Hall, St. Giles' Church, Gilesgate, Durham. For further

EDITORIAL

The general conclusion of those involved in the Project has been that it is progressing well. The number of volunteers had exceeded expectations and groups were beginning to coalesce and work together. New people were applying to join all the time. The project has now moved from concentrating on catalogue listing to the parallel development of individual and group projects on special themes or topics. A Co-ordinating Community has been set up to share tasks. The members are those who are taking responsibility for co-ordinating teams at the different archives and libraries, and special groups within the Project (Co-op and the Left in the 1970s). It met on 14 October prior to the social event. Oral history work was concentrating of the Left in the 1970s (see below), the co-operative movement, including the Women's Guild, trade union activism (see John Stirling's piece below), anti-apartheid activism, and immigration. A publicity sub-group has been formed including Elizabeth Burn, Peter Nicklin, John Stirling, Peter Brabban and John Charlton. It has also been decided to plan for one or more end of project events. Suggestions include a Christmas social, a mobile exhibition resource, a spring river trip and a major one off event. Elizabeth Burn, Kath Connolly & Patrick Candon are looking into these ideas. Others are welcome to join them. There is also a fund-raising group (John Stirling and Kath Connolly) with several others with experience being asked to join. Following the Co-ordinating Committee meeting a social networking event for the wider group of Project members took place attended by 27 people with food and drink contributions provided by all. The evening included a series of lively vignettes of work in progress and John Charlton gave a short report on recruitment of volunteers and opportunities for networking. Joan Nicklin was particular thanked for the excellent brochure she had designed which was now being turned into a poster. The Co-ordinating Group is meeting again on Friday, 25 November at 46 West Lane, Forest Hall to be followed provisionally by another social networking gathering.

WHY THE PROJECT IS IMPORTANT

John Stirling writes:

I've been an active trade unionist all my life and when I picked up the Popular Politics Project Leaflet at Newcastle Central Library I thought - that looks interesting. To me, trade unions and trade union members particularly, are at the heart of a popular politics that represents and reflects the views of working men and women who would not otherwise have a voice. I decided that 'oral history' was my best approach and, knowing only a little about it I was pleased to see there was a training day in Newcastle. It was great, and gave me a lot of confidence, as well as introducing me to some of the other volunteers and getting to know the exciting things that PPP is organising. I've now done two (lengthy!) interviews with a male and female union activist. Not only has it been fascinating but it has also taken me back to my own involvement. Reminders of demonstrations that we had both been on or strike action or just about anything that trade unions were involved with. It's hard to take a back seat in an interview when you want to say - 'I was there too'. One unintended consequence is now meeting one of my 'respondents' for a beer in the local pub where I hope to get a word in edgeways too. It would be great to hear from other people working with trade unions and maybe meet up sometime.

ORAL HISTORY UPDATE



An Oral History Training Session

Quite a lot has been happening since the last newsletter. Seventeen people have now attended meetings for training or refresher sessions and six have actually recorded interviews - at least a dozen in total - with another handful on the point of getting started. Peter Brabban's 1970s Left project (see below) has been particularly prolific, but we also have interviews from Co-operative members, community activists and trade unionists. All the people living within easy travelling distance of the WEA office in Newcastle who expressed an interest in this strand of the project have been contacted, inviting them to attend the sessions, and there have been efforts, unsuccessful so far, to get a group going in north Northumberland. I am well aware that people living in the south of the region have not yet had the opportunity to take part and am currently seeking (free) venues where meetings can be held. Several people have also been unable to come along during the day, which is another issue that needs to be addressed.

However, I feel that we have made good progress since the end of the summer and look forward to receiving many more interviews before the end of the year. Some volunteers have come along with the names of people they plan to record, others have shown interest in particular themes, while others would simply like to get involved with the interviewing process but have no-one particular in mind. If anyone knows of someone they think ought to be interviewed for the project but are not inclined to carry this out themselves, I would be very pleased to receive contact details (after you have warned the person they may be approached and got their permission!) so that I can match up potential interviewers with relevant interviewees.

Contact details: Liz O'Donnell, 2 Post Office Farm, Middleton, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 4RE Tel: 01670 772486; liz.odonnell2@btinternet.com.

TOPIC THEMES

Sean Creighton writes:

As explained at the discussion session at the Project Social so far a lot of the emphasis in the archive work has been catalogue listing. The listing is crucial because without this we cannot see what material can be consulted in relation to developing topic work within the broad span of 'Popular Politics'.

The definition is not restricted to left politics, but includes the concept of 'social movements', 'radicalism', 'faith social action', charity and mutuality, popular Conservatism and Liberalism, and even what most of us would regard as 'reactionary' including Empire jingoism and pro-war fever. And then there is the conflict, the tensions and the contradictions between all of these. Religion plays a key role.

It was in the faith driven disputes during the English Civil War/Revolution that the ideas of democracy were developed and the emergence of the Non-Conformist denominations, later joined by the Methodists, which operated forms of 'democratic centralism' and often split because of differences about the issue of internal democracy.

Labour's breakthrough in the North East was a long road largely influenced by the powerful working class support for the Liberals, with Non-Conformists playing an important role in both parties.

Some of you are working on topics already: e.g. working class education (Plebs League & National Council of Labour Politics), 1970s Tyneside Left, the co-operative movement, environmental action 1950s/60s. The plan is now to expand the work being undertaken on topics.

John and I realise that many of you are not keen on being involved in catalogue work, but with the listing already carried out, and with continuing listing, we are now in a better position to advise on topic work and hope that you will wish to become involved in it. We have drawn up the following list of potential topics:

The struggle for political reform - 1820-1884

Women's suffrage 1834-1928

Co-operation, friendly society and mutual history

Worlds of work: trade unions, railwaymen, shop workers, domestic service, building trades, engineers, seafarers, shipyard workers, miners, chemical workers, on the land, iron and steel, building ships etc

Rise of socialism from the early 1880s; popular political interplay between Liberals, rising Labour and Unionism in each community

Anti-war & peace movements from the Boer War to 'Stop the War' (2003)

The fight against the new Poor Law 1934-1911, inc within this broad topic 1905 to the introduction of the National Insurance Act 1911

The new women's movement from the 1960s

In our times: 1960-2000, politics & campaigns (inc. the 1970s Left project)

Anti-racism, anti-apartheid, asylum seeker & traveller defence

Migrants & NE England: arrivals & departures

The Irish in the North East

People's education

The Housing question

Popular culture: music, the arts, sport

Environmental campaigns

Workers and the Law

Working class women and political campaigns

This list is not exhaustive. There may be smaller topics or shorter time periods within the larger ones which you would wish to concentrate on. There may be additional topics you would like to suggest.

Another approach is to look at the whole range of popular politics in particular villages and small towns across the region.

Please give the matter some consideration and let me know which topics you would like to get involved in. It is hoped that we can develop topic groups among you for mutual support, sharing information and ideas, etc.

NEWS

From coal to cod - a proud history of a proud people. This HLF funded project run by the Northumberland County Scout Council looked at the last 100 years of the coal mining and fishing industries in Blyth. Young people from Excelsior Academy and Northumberland Adult Learning Service researched this history, in partnership with Woodhorn Museum and Archives, and then went on to record the memories of older members of the community through oral history sessions. In order to record this history for future generations they developed a display, DVD and education pack of their findings. The young people also went on to produce heritage trail walks, a website and to share their project with the wider community through a programme of talks and visits. The project involved 11 volunteers, 22 schoolchildren and 30 trainees. They worked with 27 local organisations and community groups. The project culminated in a celebratory event in August at Seaton Delaval Hall where Ronnie Campbell MP, a former miner at Bates Colliery, recounted some of his mining experiences. **Note:** I cannot find the website.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor 100th Anniversary of Death 2012. Next year sees the 100th Anniversary of the death of the Black British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Sean is a member of the SC-T Network and the Croydon SC-T Festival Committee, both of which are planning a full programme of events in Croydon and encouraging others to out on events elsewhere in the country especially in areas where the composer conducted and adjudicated and had his music played. His connections in the North East are mainly known to have been with Nicholas Kilburn in Sunderland - see North East Slavery & Abolition Group newsletter No 2, August 2008 (www.twmuseums.org.uk/userfiles/NESAG%20Newsletter%202.pdf) . However, Jarrow has a particular connection as the first town in the region to perform his A Tale of Old Japan. Reporting the composer's death the Newcastle Daily Courant stated: 'British music is vastly the poorer by the death of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor who had been cut off at the height of his artistic power, News of his removal, which came with almost tragic suddenness, would be received with genuine regret by every music lover, for there is not one who has not felt admiration for his expressive compositions. It is true that he owed his popularity to his "Hiawatha" trilogy, yet he wrote other works distinguished for their beauty and sincerity. of these his most recent cantata, "A Tale of Old Japan," which owed its introduction to the north last season through the enterprise of Mr George Dodds and the Jarrow Philharmonic Society, will probably take the highest place in the estimation of the musical public, for it is a charming work, at once picturesque and dignified in sentiment and style.' Coleridge-Taylor attended the Pan -African Conference in Westminster in 1900 and was a member of the Executive Committee of the short-lived Pan African Association set up at it to promote black rights.

'Capability' Brown Honoured with Blue Plaque. The famous landscape gardener Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, who was in Kirkharle, and who began working for the local landowner Sir William Lorraine, has been commemorated by English Heritage with a blue plaque placed on 9 November on his London

home Wilderness House, Hampton Court Palace (1764-1783.) Comment: The English Heritage website states: 'Although Brown's work was criticised after his death, both for laying waste to the formal gardens of his predecessors and for suppressing nature's wildness, his designs have come to epitomise the well-ordered English landscape. As one obituarist wrote of him, 'so closely did he copy nature that his works will be mistaken'. (<http://relaunch.english-heritage.org.uk/about/news/blue-plaque-for-capability-brown>) Comment: There is a very narrow obsession in the long 18thC and Garden History studies on the creation of individual landscapes around the great country houses, the owners and the gardeners, without any in depth analysis of their social, economic and environmental impacts on the wider area in which they were located. Demolished and deserted villages, displaced populations, were among the consequences. The creation of the artificial landscapes were financed in various proportions by the rental exploitation of farmers and peasantry, the profits of involvement in the slavery business and industrial exploitation. Earthly paradises may have been created in some parts of the country while in others industry created environmental degradation and pollution, adversely affecting the health not just on the industrial and rural workers, but also all classes in towns and cities where industry often clustered. In terms of the Popular Politics Project this means that we should be looking for material that shows popular opposition to enclosure (not just the Town Moor), the social consequences of enclosure, landscape and the exploitation of rural workers, popular views on landscapes (think of the work of Thomas Bewick and John Martin), industrial pollution and its effects on health, and of course Thomas Spence and land reform. Note. A exhibition about Brown and the Landscapes of Middle England was on at Compton Verney until 2 October. A book *Capability Brown and the English Landscape Garden* by Laura Mayer was published by Shire ISBN 13: 9780747810490. £6.99) to coincide with the exhibition. A more substantial book *The Omnipotent Magician: Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, 1716-1783* by Jane Brown was published in March by Chatto & Windus (£20) - see reviews on: www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/8343313/The-Omnipotent-Magician-Lancelot-Capability-Brown-1716-1783-by-Jane-Brown-review.html & <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/mar/26/omnipotent-magician-jane-brown-review>.

TWO LONDON LIBRARY VISITS

If you should get to London and are able to spend some time on project activity it is certainly worth visiting two 'independent archives.' John and Sean visited them recently.

Bishopsgate Institute. 230 Bishopsgate, City of London, EC2M 4QH. 020 7392 9200.

www.bishopsgate.org.uk. Bishopsgate has a large collection of runs of left wing newspapers and magazines right back into the 19th Century and are worth trawling for North East material. There are some important papers there too including the extensive ones of the radical trades union activist, George Howell. He was involved in the Reform League the organisation at the centre of the agitation for reform in the mid-19th century.

The TUC Library. Trades Union Congress Library Collections. Holloway Road Learning Centre, 236-250, Holloway Road, London N7 6PP. 020 7133 3726. tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk. The TUC Library/Archive has an unrivalled collection of material pertaining to the trade union and labour movement. It includes literally masses of material on the North East including a terrific file of local material on the General Strike of 1926. From the first large box looked at were letters from the local Councils of Action. This is from Darlington.



It is one of many which record enormous turnouts at mass meetings and complete solidarity across the districts. By the last day reports indicated that more and more workers (in non-union shops) were joining the strike and that impressive organisation was in place to regulate food supply and transport as well as peace keeping. It is astonishing that the TUC should have completely surrendered on the ninth day leaving the miners to starve! (Important lessons here for today perhaps?).

Also in the collection is a lot of material on the women's movement. Prominent here is a complete run of *The Woman Worker* which includes regular reports from the regions including the North East.

TYNESIDE IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTION 1760-1815

John Charlton gave an insightful review of Tyneside in the Age of Revolution to the London Socialist Historians group which holds seminars at London University's Institute of Historical Research.

Slave Revolts. He started with a Tardis journey to Wallington Hall in 1795 where the Trevelyans had slave plantation interests in Grenada when the news would have arrived of the rebellion in which Ninian Home who owned the Paxton House estate on the Scottish banks of the weed was killed. He contrasted this immersion with in the slavery business with the left reputation of Sir Charles Trevelyan who died in 1958. He suggested that in 1795 the Trevelyans would have worried about the potential loss of funds, had a sense of terror as the revolt followed on the St Domingo events, and that something grotesque was happening in the world to disrupt the world of the English landed estates. Earlier that year George III's coach had been stoned by the London 'mob'.

The North East and the World. The North East was not an isolated place. It was 2-3 days away from London. Newcastle was a world port. 500 collier ships were located on the Tyne, going to London, St. Petersburg, the Mediterranean, Boston, New York, Charleston and Jamaica. British seamen were regarded as Citizens of the World. The North East elite was immersed in British class and empire affairs from the Americas to the Indies. When Sir John Trevelyan, the 5th baronet, married Mary Wilson, she brought with her the china that is on display, collected by her East India Company father.

New Assembly Rooms. The power and confidence of the elite was represented in the building of the New Assembly Rooms (1774-6), a monument to luxury with shares costing £500, to create an exclusive club. The 40 newly made card tables were made using hardwoods from Honduras. Among the subscribers were Ridley of Blagdon who owned Blyth, and John Graham-Clarke, the 4th Baronet Trevelyan, Eldon, later Solicitor-General, John Erasmus Blackett. Some families like the Riddles remain influential today. The building of the New Assembly Rooms was attacked by Rev James Murray, a Presbyterian Scots, based at the High Bridge Chapel. His sermons were very political - 'Them and Us'.

Spence and Bewick. Among the radicals around Murray was Thomas Spence, an extreme democrat ('Property in Land. Every One's Right'). A difficult man he even had a fight with his radical friend Thomas Bewick. John suggests that Bewick was representative of late 18thC radicalism. He supported all democratic campaigns and was a member of several groups, a member of an urban network out of which Corresponding and debate societies were formed.

The Town Moor Campaign. When the campaign to prevent enclosure and development of the Town Moor was underway in 1774, the campaigners to keep it as open land hired John Glynn to help prepare a petition. Glynn was a national figure who had been a leading supporter of John Wilkes, whose cause included the issue of free speech, had attracted support in the North East. John suggests that although we do not have enough concrete detail on earlier radicalism it is clear that things were happening below the surface, that ideas were travelling around Britain. Elsewhere the Wilkes agitation had radicalised young men in craft societies.

The American Revolution. There was wide support for the American Revolution. The Newcastle petition in support was signed by 7780 people while the one in support of the King only attracted 64 signatories. Only electors were eligible to sign that edition, and there were about 2,000 electors. By 1820 this number had risen to about 3,000. John assumes that the 64 were members of the elite, while the 780 were craftsmen members of the guilds and freemen.

The importance of Craft and Church Politics. Craft values included personal creativity, pride, involvement in local politics but deprived of the same political rights as the elite. Newcastle had four papers for a population of c. 30,000. Newcastle was divided into 4 parishes each with a select vestry for local government functions controlled by the Church of England. The Church itself was under assault from the Methodists and the Evangelicals and Non-Conformists. There were 13 Presbyterian chapels. There were disputes with the Non-Conformist churches about such issues as internal governance and organisation, issues not that dissimilar to those about the governance and organisation of the town.

The 1780s. The 1780s sees the stirrings of demand for Parliamentary form e.g. through the debating clubs mentioned by Bewick, and from 1788 the anti-slavery campaign.

The French Revolution. Then in 1789 the storming of the Bastille started the French Revolution. After the Bastille fell there were celebrations in Newcastle and surrounding towns in support of the British constitution but welcoming the Revolution. We know a lot about radicalism in the 1790s because of the Home Office material at The National Archives. Newcastle however does seem relatively quiet apart from seamen's strikes.

1815 Seamen's Strike. The seamen were not political in their 1815 demands. In the 1815 strike there does seem to have been antagonism against the nouveau riche (coal merchants and ship owners) by the elite because they saw them screwing the seamen down. Of course the repressive Acts of the Pitt Government were used by the local elite.

Was Tyneside Radicalism Also Conservative? John suggests that Tyneside radicalism had a conservative streak because it was based among the craftsmen who felt they had a degree of citizenship. In the 1830s a new generation of radicals emerged with a sharper class politics.

Splits in the Elite. He suggested that Charles Grey and Eldon were on opposite sides of the elite's views on the lessons of the French Revolution. Grey felt some reform was needed and there should not be recourse to repression, while Eldon was against reform and a supporter of repression.

Other points of note. John said that in the period the big population growth was in the pit villages, and that George Stephenson was involved in de-skilling labour e.g. with his railway to North Shields in order to cut out the Tyne keelmen, whose power rested on carrying coal under the Newcastle Bridge because the sea-going colliers could not go underneath.

Note: you can find out more about Ninian Home on:
www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/berwick/paxtonhouse/index.html.

RADICAL POLITICS OF THE LEFT IN THE NORTH EAST IN THE 1970'S

Peter Brabban writes about the Left in the 1970s special project within NEPPP.

Time period to be covered: 1968 - 1979. The cut off period to be the General Election of 1979. While we recognise 1968 as a good starting point it will not be a fixed starting point, instead we will allow participants to define the start of their own political development.

Geographical area. The North East of England; from the border to North Yorkshire (Northumberland, County Durham, Tyneside, Wearside and Teesside. Experiences outside of the region (Demos, Pickets, Conferences, etc) will not be excluded if the participant resides in the North East. Experiences of participants residing in the region for a part of the period (i.e. as a student) can also be accepted.

Range of topics. We will explore the experience of being an active part of left politics in the defined period. Because of our limited resources, two interviewers and our own background and experience we will limit the project to this area. In particular we will explore three areas:

- The impact of left politics in an industrial environment. With much of the emphasis of socialist politics focused on the workplace in the early 70s it is relevant to ask how effective were left activists in shaping industrial relations.
- The cultural impact of left politics. Examining the part played by left politics in defining attitudes to racism and fascism through initiatives such as Rock against Racism and the Anti Nazi League and other offshoots. It will be interesting to explore the impact of left politics on vocabulary.
- The impact of left groupings on the Labour Party. Many members of so called 'ultra left' groups and parties went on to join the Labour Party. It will be interesting to explore how subjects experiences in these groups informed their participation in the Labour Party.

We will consider taking up other areas (International issues, Women's movement, Gay politics, Green politics, etc) only if we can secure other project members to take on these areas.

Political range of subjects

To include subjects from the entire range of socialist politics. We will not seek subjects from outside this catchment.

Methodology

Recorded interviews with subjects.
Outputs
Inclusion of recorded interviews in the NEPPP archive
Article in the NELHS Journal
Presentation to NEHLS
Publication

Peter Brabban can be contact on peterbrabban@blueyonder.co.uk; 0191 240 1143.

HAVE YOU READ LISBETH SIMM (1870-1952)?

Elizabeth Burns writes:

If you want to find out more about an amazing woman, born in Cramlington, who spent her life campaigning for Social Justice, then do read Dave Neville's excellent paper in NE History. Vol.38.2007. Inspired by Neville's well-researched account, I then read 'The Northern Democrat' in Newcastle central library on micro-fish. The first edition, of this paper was published on 1st August 1906. Lisbeth's husband, Matt Simm, was the editor of this monthly paper, published on behalf of the Independent Labour Party. There on page 7 of the very first edition you will find Lisbeth's 'Woman's Page', written under the nom-de-plume of 'Ledron'.

I strongly recommend a reading her numerous Women's Pages, with her focus on fair wages, decent houses and women being seen as 'more than the tea ladies' at political meetings! Many of the issues she deals with are still so relevant today. Here are just a couple of excerpts, from The Northern Democrat. June 1912. Page 4:

"The life of the working woman! No, you cannot understand it unless you've lived it!"

"One of the most serious problems of our time is that of life on an insufficient wage."

I have now written a play about the life and times of Lisbeth Simm (please contact me if it is of any interest) as she so deserves to be known and celebrated as a pioneering North East woman to be proud of! Also if you have found any information about her and her campaigns whilst carrying out your own research, I would be delighted to hear from you. Lisbeth's story is powerful evidence of a long tradition of working class women, not only being interested in politics, but also actively doing something about it e.g. as well as looking after her family, in 1908, Lisbeth had spoken at 25 open air meetings and 7 indoor ones in a few weeks. She also was involved in the setting up of Cinderella Breakfasts in the West end of Newcastle, to feed poor children. Whilst, in 1919 Lisbeth made the first of two visits to Australia, as a delegate for the Overseas Settlement Committee, to ensure that workers were not being exploited.

So, please read Lisbeth's Women's Pages and gain a fascinating glimpse into the many activities and campaigns that Lisbeth took part in!

Thanks for your interest,

Dr Elizabeth Burn. clarissacrow@yahoo.ie tel: 0191 252 1441.

Lisbeth Simm (1870-1952): biographical details:

Here is Elizabeth's summary of Lisbeth Simm's life drawn from Dave Neville's account *The Life of Labour Pioneer Lisbeth Simm.* (2007). *North East History*. Vol. 38. p. 43-66.

1870 Lisbeth Dodds is born in Cramlington, a village in Northumberland, that was suffering from the effects of a strike in 1865, when the pit owners brought in blackleg miners to break the strike and evicted the union leaders. Lisbeth became a schoolteacher via the pupil teacher route.

1895 Lisbeth marries Matt Simm, who is from the same village in Cramlington and they move to Middlesbrough, where Matt works as a draper in the Co-operative Society. Both are active politically, supporting the Independent Labour Party.

Lisbeth and Matt have two children, Edna and Ronnie.

1906 Matt is appointed full time organiser for the North East Independent Labour Party, they move to Newcastle upon Tyne and Matt launches the Northern Democrat. Lisbeth writes her first women's page*, under the nom-de-plume 'Ledron' in August.

Lisbeth starts campaigning for the newly formed Women's Labour League and visits many places setting up groups and addressing meetings in support of women's rights and fair working conditions. She writes

leaflets, arranges social events and with her friends Ethel Bentham, Ethel Williams (2 doctors), and Florence Harrison Bell (another teacher), sets up the 'Drawing Room Café' meetings at Fenwicks, where women listen to speakers and discuss politics. Cinderella Breakfasts are set up for children of the poor and Lisbeth continues active campaigning e.g. in 1908, Lisbeth had spoken at 25 open air meetings and 7 indoor ones, in a few weeks. She speaks at many of the rallies held for Votes for Women on the Town Moor and she travels around the country campaigning.

1913 A Great Women's Meeting is held in Gateshead, aimed at making the council provide breakfasts for poor children.

1918 Matt is elected as MP for Wallsend, representing the National Democratic Party. Their daughter, Edna dies.

1919 Lisbeth makes the first of two visits to Australia as one of two delegates for the Overseas Settlement Committee, set up by the government to investigate employment opportunities for emigrants. She works to ensure women are not being exploited.

1928 Matt, aged 59, dies and Lisbeth becomes the warden of Orchard House, a residential training centre for domestic service in Newcastle.

1946 Lisbeth, aged 76, moves to America to live with her son.

1952. Lisbeth dies in Los Angeles, aged 82.

***Excerpts from Lisbeth's Women's Page:** *Northern Democrat*. June 1912. Page 4:

"The life of the working woman! No, you cannot understand it unless you've lived it!"

"One of the most serious problems of our time is that of family life on an insufficient wage."

See Elizabeth's summary of suffrage campaigning in the North East below.

THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE NORTH EAST 1896-1914

By the end of the 19th century most men in the North East of England could vote; yet woman's suffrage was still to be achieved. Meetings were being held and campaigns started "in favour of the political, social and industrial freedom of women" (Nield Chew 1982:21):

- 31st August 1896, a large crowd in the Bigg Market, Newcastle, despite the rain, enthusiastically listened to Ada Nield Chew* and other 'Vanners' campaigning for women's rights and socialism, by the light of an electric lamp. Successful meetings were also held in Jarrow, South Shields and Sunderland, where there was an 'immense gathering' opposite the Red Lion Hotel.
- In 1900, Mona Taylor of Chipchase Castle formed the 'Newcastle and District Women's Suffrage Society' and was soon joined by other campaigning women. One group met in the Drawing Room Café in Fenwick's Newcastle. This group consisted of Ethel Williams and Ethel Bentham who were doctors, sharing the same practice; and two school teachers, Lisbeth Simm* and Florence Harrison Bell. Ethel Bentham later became a Labour MP, whilst Lisbeth started the Women's page in the ILP monthly newspaper *The Northern Democrat* (1906).
- In 1908, the suffragette group split and while some women joined the 'Women's Social and Political Union' (WSPU) headed nationally by Emmeline Pankhurst; others joined the more peaceable 'National Union of Woman's Suffrage' (NUWSS) headed nationally by Millicent Fawcett and locally by Mona Taylor.
- In 1908, a public rally on the Town Moor (Newcastle) was attended by 3,000 women. Carrying banners, they marched to the Central Station to meet 2 suffragettes who had already served a spell in prison for their campaigning.
- Nationally the movement was dominated by 'genteel' women, who had the time and money to attend meetings; in the North East, the NUWSS supported miners, such as John Johnson, a committed suffragist and official of the Durham Miners Association. In 1911, an article in *The Common Cause* (the weekly paper of the suffragist National Union), suggested that the North East was leading the way. In 1912 *The Common Cause* decided to support the Labour party, since unlike the Conservatives and Liberals, they openly supported women's suffrage.

- As the movement grew so did militancy and direct action: the pavilion in Heaton Park was burnt down; windows were smashed at the Globe Theatre in Gosforth; incendiary devices were set off at Kenton Railway Station, Gosforth Golf Course and Newcastle Post Office.
- In July 1909, Kathleen Brown, a militant, was released from prison and again met at the Central Station by a very large crowd with banners and vehicles decked in the suffragette colours of white, green and purple. A celebration tea was held at the Turks Head Hotel, after which Kathleen addressed an enthusiastic crowd at the Haymarket. The movement was growing and new campaigning groups were opening up in places such as Hexham, Spennymoor and Morpeth.
- In October 1909, the Chancellor, Lloyd George, visited Newcastle. Twelve activists, including Kathleen Brown and Emily Wilding Davison, threw stones and broke windows in the Liberal Club on Pilgrim Street. Four women were arrested and sentenced to 14 days hard labour. The others continued to protest and were supported by some men in the audience, heckling Lloyd George. Two further arrests were made, including Emily Davison.
- In 1913, the Lord Mayor called a Town Meeting, for the public to vote on women's suffrage. Campaigns for and against were active, but the resolution, proposed by Ethel Williams, was carried by a 3 to 1 majority!
- In June 1913 Emily Davison was killed at the Derby; trampled by the king's horse. It is thought that she was attempting to attach a WSPU flag to the horse and evidence, such as a return ticket and a marked race card, suggests this was a tragic accident rather than suicide. Emily had been active in the suffrage movement for years; set fire to letter boxes, had 7 periods in jail, been on hunger strike and endured being forcibly fed. Emily previously argued that the movement was in need of a martyr. Her funeral procession was attended by thousands in London. Although she was bought up in London, after her mother returned to her home outside Morpeth, Emily would regularly return to the North East for periods of convalescence and worked with the Newcastle WSPU. She is buried at Morpeth.
- In 1914 Elizabeth Simm (who was born in Cramlington in 1870) published a pamphlet *The Working Woman in Politics*, based on her paper presented to the Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, Glasgow, 1914. As an active member of the Women's Labour League (WLL), founded in 1906, Lisbeth came to believe that "the parliamentary vote could only be part of a campaign for the liberation of working class women" (Neville 2007: 61).
- In 1914, the Bishop of Durham received a deputation, from the Newcastle WPSU, protesting against the forcible feeding of women on hunger strike and 8 days later a protesting suffragette interrupted the morning service! There was also an attempt to burn down Cocken Hall, a building owned by the Earl of Durham.
- The outbreak of the First World War I in 1914 resulted in a suspension of the suffrage campaigns. In July 1918 women aged over 30 were given the vote. In September 1918 women were allowed to stand for election to parliament and finally in 1928 women over the age of 21 were given the right to vote.

**Ada Nield Chew* (presented by Doris Nield Chew 1982) Virago Press, London.

The Life of Labour Pioneer Lisbeth Simm. Neville, D. (2007) North East History. Vol.38.

Notes:

North East History 2007 (and other back issues) can be purchased from the People's Bookshop - see below).

David Neville also published *To Make Their Mark. The Women's Suffrage Movement in the North East of England 1900-1914*. History Workshop Trust/North East Labour History/Centre for Northern Studies. 1997. ISBN 0-9511472-3-4.

POLICE SPIES

The recent revelations about the activities of undercover police officers in dissident groups is nothing new. Peter Livsey has been looking at the papers of John Brown, the Clerk to the Newcastle Magistrates in Tyne & Wear Archives (DF.JB). *They contain notes taken by police constables in disguise at Chartist meetings. Often it was Ralph Snowden Leconby, who later wrote a widely used guide to police procedure. He is Peter's summary of one of Leconby's notes dated 5 November 1839: Dr. John Taylor at the Lecture Rooms, Nelson Street: Some of your leaders have let you down. The Government can place its people in office and over newspapers, for example the renegade Mitchell of the Tyne Mercury, and Mayor Fife, who has called me a "low blackguard," although I never did him injury. I am a Republican and say "down with the government" - some of your leaders had not made up their minds. Ownership of small properties should go to those who rent them. The Government has shown you the use of gunpowder [in controlled explosions earlier in 1839 to break up the wreck of the Royal George, sunk off Portsmouth in 1783]. Reorganise your Unions and await the signal from Yorkshire. (JB/7/1) On 20 December Snowden swore that on 1 December Edward Charlton, mason and more than 100 others "unlawfully and seditiously assembled," and he excited them to an insurrection and "discontent with their condition." (JB/6/3)*

THE CHURCH AND POLITICS

As the official state church the Church of England has special privileges and is a major institutional investor. Well into the 19thC the Non-Conformist groups had to campaign to obtain greater rights for their own members and organisations. By 1885 the Government was considering disestablishing the Church. Sue King has looked at a tract by Joseph Barber Lightfoot (Bishop of Durham) being the text of his speech to Diocese of Durham Church conference. Lightfoot argues that disestablishment would involve:

- The government recognising only individual congregations in the hope that by this process the church would be 'dissolved into her component atoms'.
- The Church of England would be 'maimed and crippled' for spiritual purposes but its political power 'of untold magnitude' would have to be reckoned with.

All parliamentary candidates should be asked to speak out for or against disestablishment. They should be reminded that the church is vigorous. It offers a spiritual and religious life, education, philanthropy, art, endowments and voluntarily aided new churches. For all these things disestablishment would be 'a great act of national unrighteousness'. Without the Church of England non-conformists would struggle to maintain institutions such as hospitals abandoned by the C of E. Irreligion and atheism would follow. At present, the Church of England is 'a bulwark against atheism in this land' but it is in need of reform. There is irregularity in the system of patronage, unfairness in the remuneration of the clergy. Bishops' stipends should be reduced in order to raise the stipends of ordinary clergy, a need for 'the voice of the laity to be heard', and a need for a superannuation scheme for elderly or incompetent clergy.

The clergy can face up to the threat of disestablishment by informing people of the good work of the church which would go undone after disestablishment. They need to resist the temptation to denigrate non-conformists who have done much for England. At present, non-conformists can not fund all their work and in Sunderland alone six chapels have been purchased by the C of E to run as C of E churches. The clergy should also avoid involvement in religious polemics and immerse themselves in practical parochial work.

Quite a progressive manifesto even by today's standards.

PIT DISASTERS

There is a growing amount of material being found on pit disasters, collapse, explosion, deaths and on the terrible impact on mining communities. Among the tracts Myra Macdonald has looked at is an account by John Sykes 'An Account of the Dreadful Explosion in Wallsend Colliery 18 June 1835'. (Dy.22)

The tract is dedicated to John Buddle, the principal viewer of Wallsend mine since 1806 (praised for his scientific knowledge and philanthropy), and absolves him of any responsibility for explosion which killed 102 men and boys (72 aged under 20 and 32 under 15, youngest 9). Buddle invented a system of mine ventilation in operation at Wallsend some 20/30 years earlier. Reports in testimony reveal that men work in whole coal shafts with candles, in broken coal shafts with Davy lamps. Doors separate 2 areas. After a break in the Coroner's enquiry, Buddle is distressed that reports in village indicate that he has confirmed safety of mine, whereas he has only confirmed adequacy of ventilation: overmen (daily inspectors) will give their own testimony. He confirms that the Bensham seam was already known to be dangerous since the earlier explosion in 1821, and great care was taken in working it; regular daily inspections are carried out. John Atkinson, an under-viewer, claims 'None of the men had ever stated to him lately that the mine was dangerous'. John Bell, hewer, comments that the mine is in such a dangerous state following a stone fall on 17th (day before explosion) that miners had to leave, but better on morning of explosion although some evidence of Davy lamps firing. The Coroner's address to jury absolves supervisors of blame but - although no evidence of pipes being smoked - suggests ban on smoking anywhere in mines would be advisable. He asks jury to consider whether any negligence on part of employers or miners. The jury finds the explosion to be an accident, with no blame attaching to owners/supervisors. The mine owners provided coffins for funerals, and contributed £1 for the interment of each body.

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY WORK HISTORY

Durham University based Tony Jeffs and Jean Spence, and Ruth Gilchrist, who works for Newcastle YMCA, are leading lights behind the promotion of community and youth work history. They produce the journal *Youth and Policy*, organise a bi-annual history Conferences and edit volumes of essays on the history.

Tony and Ruth's study *Newcastle YMCA. 150 years* was published in 2005.

Youth & Policy:

www.youthandpolicy.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&layout=blog&id=8&Itemid=60

They are also involved in the In Defence of Youth Work Campaign.

www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk/wordpress/?tag=the-big-society

Jean Spence particularly writes on aspects of the history of youth work in Sunderland and on women in the Miners' Strike. Here are some of her writings.

Sunderland:

Club, Class and Clothes: The Origins of Scouting in Sunderland. In *Essays in the History of Youth and Community Work: Discovering the past.* Gilchrist, R., Jeffs, T., Spence, J. & Walker, J. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing. 2009. P. 275-301.

Frank Caws and the Development of Work with Boys in Sunderland. In *Architects of Change: Studies in the History of Community and Youth Work.* Gilchrist, R. Jeffs, T. & Spence, J. Leicester: National Youth Agency. 2003. P. 101-116.

Edwardian Boys and Labour in the East End of Sunderland: Welfare and work. In *Essays in the History of Community and Youth Work.* Gilchrist, R. Jeffs, T. & Spence, J. Leicester: Youth Work Press, NYA. 2001. P. 77-94.

The Impact of the First World War on the Development of Youth Work: The case of the Sunderland Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club. In *Essays in the History of Community and Youth Work.* Gilchrist, R. Jeffs, T. & Spence, J. Leicester.: Youth Work Press. 2001. P.111-113

Girl's Youth Work & Feminism:

The Girls' Own Paper and Social Welfare (1880-1920). In *Architects of Change: Studies in the History of Community and Youth Work.* Gilchrist, R. Jeffs, T. & Spence, J. Leicester: National Youth Agency. 2003. P. 19-40.

Collecting Women's Lives: the challenge of feminism in UK youth work in the 1970s and 80s. *Women's History Review* 19(1). 2010. 159 - 176

With M. Butterfield. *The transition from Girls' Clubs to Girls' Clubs and Mixed Clubs: UK Youth 1934-1944.* In *Essays in the History of Youth and Community Work: Discovering the past.* Gilchrist, R., Jeffs, T., Spence, J. & Walker, J. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing. 2009. P. 69-92.

With Tony Jeffs. *The Development of Youth Work with Girls and Young Women in the Nineteenth Century.* In *Reflecting on the past. Essays in the history of youth and community work.* Ed. R. Gilchrist, T. Hodgson, T. Jeffs, J. Spence, N. Stanton & J. Walker. Russell House Publishing. 2011

Women & the Miners' Strike - with C. Stephenson:

Side by side with our men? Women's activism, community and gender in the 1984-5 British Miners' strike. International Labour and Working Class History 75(1). 2009. P. 68-84.

[Female Involvement in the Miners' Strike 1984-1985: Trajectories of Activism](#). *Sociological Research Online* 12(1). 2007

The politics of the doorstep: Female survival strategies and the legacy of the miners' strike 1984-85. Community Work and Family 10(3). 2007. P.307-325

BOOKS OF INTEREST

Belford's History. The latest book published by the Belford & District Local History Society is *Further Aspects of Belford*. Ed Jane Bowen (ISBN 978-0-9569909-1-4). Its topics cover: roads, posts and coaches; Belford Hall, public and private education, the railway, the quarries, the impact of the First World War, the evacuation story and particularly relevant to the Project Valerie Glass's 'Anxiously Desirous to Shaw their Abhorrence of this Abominable Trade' about the anti-slavery petition from Belford in 1792, being the outcome of Valerie's continuing work on it since she was a volunteer in the Tyne & Wear Remembering Slavery project in 2007. To order send cheque for £14 (inc. p&p) to Valerie at 64 West St, Belford, NE7 7QF (cheque payable to Belford and District Local History Society).

Remainder Books

Naval Wives & Mistresses. Margarette Lincoln. (National Maritime Museum, 2007). £6.95. This book may include information about the wives of North East naval officers. A review of it in the Guardian in 2008 can be seen at www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/may/17/society.

Newcastle Ragged and Industrial School. Wendy Prahms. (2006). £4.95.

Both available from Academic Book Collection. 0845 658 0088. abc@bebc.co.uk.

www.academicbookcollection.com

Ashgate Books:

Nicole Robertson. *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain 1914-1960*. Robertson works at Northumbria University. (May 2010)

Robert Saunders. *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867*. (Feb 2011)

Catherine Mills. *Regulating Health and Safety in the British Mining Industries 1800-1914*. (Feb 2010)

Robert Lee (ed). *Commerce and Culture. Nineteenth Century Business Elites* (Dec 2011)

Roger Lloyd-Jones and others. *Personal Capitalism and Corporate Governance. British Manufacturing in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*. (Feb 2011)

These books are all published by Ashgate. They are very expensive so if you want to read them please order them from your local Library. If several of you order them at Newcastle Central Library and Lit & Phil they are more likely to buy a copy. If you do read them, or any other book with material relevant, please do an item about it for future newsletters.

The Pitmen's Requiem. See Harry Barnes's review in his blog

<http://threescoreyearsandten.blogspot.com/2011/08/perhaps-as-you-get-older-your-total.html>. Harry

Barnes was Labour MP for North East Derbyshire 1987-2005. He is active on local history in Easington and is linking in with the Project. To order a copy of the book please support Project member Ben Sellers of the People's Bookshop in Durham. (order form below) See Harry's excellent article in the current *North East History* 2011. (See web-site www.nelh.org) NEH can also be ordered from the People's Bookshop - see below.

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