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THE WOMEN OF MUMBLES HEAD

The Swansea Blue Plaque scheme is now in its third year and once again local AMC/WAW members have succeeded in getting one of the three plaques dedicated to a woman (two, this time).

The sisters (Jessie Ace b.1861 and Margaret Wright née Ace b.1854) were the daughters of Mumbles lighthouse keeper, Abraham Ace. They risked their lives in attempting to save members of the crew of the Mumbles lifeboat, *Wolverhampton*. The lifeboat had gone out during the Great Storm of January 27th 1883 to assist the 885 ton barque, *Admiral Prinz Adalbert* of Danzig, Germany, when she drifted onto the outer island of Mumbles Head, and struck rock below the lighthouse.

An eye-witness statement published in the local paper recounted: 'Two daughters of Mr Ace went to where I saw the men in the water. I was told that Mr Ace seemed afraid lest his daughters should get drowned. Maggie cried out, "I will lose my life rather than let these men drown" and she and her sister tied two shawls together and both of them threw them into the water. By this means they saved two men, William Rosser and John Thomas. Rosser testified how "Mr Ace's daughters hauled me up". He refers to a soldier (Gunner Hutchings) and the sisters throwing him a rope.' (Quoted in Carl Smith *The Men of Mumbles Head*, Gomer Press, 1977.)

The two women became known and admired worldwide when a dramatic sketch ('From a drawing made with the help of Mr Ace, the Lighthouse Keeper') appeared on the front of the weekly illustrated newspaper *The Graphic* 24th Feb 1883 (above).

Their bravery became the inspiration for the epic, if not totally accurate, poem '*The Women of Mumbles Head*' by the *Daily Telegraph* theatre critic, Clement Scott.. The original poem was recited by generations of children in Mumbles, Swansea and further afield. 'My grandmother and her two sisters, along with most other Swansea schoolchildren of their generation, were made to learn the poem by heart. Well into old age, they could still reel off formidable chunks of it. One of them would start the ball rolling:

*"Bring, novelists, your notebook! Bring, dramatists, your pen!
And I'll tell you a simple story of what women do for men..."*

And away they'd go, passing the baton of the stirring narrative - fudging the odd line, skipping the odd verse - until one of them would be left to deliver the resounding conclusion:

*"Well, many a heart beat stronger, and many a tear was shed,
And many a glass was tossed right off to the Women of Mumbles Head!"*

(Nigel Jenkins *Real Swansea 2*, Seren Books, 2012).

The National Library of Wales holds a set of seven hand-coloured 'Magic Lantern' slides featuring the Ace sisters, used to accompany public recitations of the poem.

Carl Smith, whose grandmother had been with villagers watching the tragedy unfold, confirms that 'The RNLI reports did not mention the actions of the women'. Another local historian has written:

'The coxswain received a silver medal from the RNLI and £50: Gunner Hutchings received its thanks on vellum. The action of the two women was not recognised by the RNLI, but both received gold brooches from the Empress of Germany for looking after the barque's crew.' (Carol Powell, Oystermouth Historical Association). On the 15th March 2014, the spectacular new Mumbles Boathouse was officially opened. Information panels mention the tragedy of January 1883, but there is no mention of the Ace sisters' heroic



From left: Cllr Robert Francis Davies, Mrs Joyce Peek née Ace, Paulette Pelosi, Jenny Sabine
25 Februarv 2016



actions. These two brave women deserve more recognition than their reference in a poem, 'epic' as it is. Mumbles Head should be nationally known ... for far more than a much mentioned location in the Shipping Forecast.

Paulette Pelosi



Eisteddfod 2016

Many congratulations to Dr Elin Jones, who has been announced as the Honorary President of this year's National Eisteddfod to be held in Abergavenny, the first woman to hold this post. Elin was admitted to the Gorsedd of Bards last year, in recognition of her work as a historian and mental health campaigner. She is also a lively and much respected member of the WAW Committee.

More information on the National Eisteddfod in June's Newsletter.

Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales is also delighted to welcome Catrin Pascoe, the first woman editor of the Western Mail, who took up her post this St David's Day

Voices from the Factory Floor continues to generate new events:

Making It!

The highly successful Women's Archive of Wales oral history project Voices From the Factory Floor has found a new lease of life providing the starting point and raw material for Making It!, an exciting new scripting workshop for women over the age of 55.

The workshop participants will benefit from the opportunity to develop drama based on the lives of ordinary women, as characterisation using improvisation, hot seating and other theatre techniques is explored and analysed in a safe and nurturing environment and under the leadership of Parama 2, veteran theatre practitioners Valmai Jones (actor and writer)

and Catrin Edwards (director and musician). The workshops are designed to fulfil the needs of those who are interested in writing strong creative scripts as well as experiencing (and optionally participating in) a public performance of their work by experienced professional actors. Every woman will have the opportunity to create theatre based on real people that places women of a certain age centre stage.

The free Making It! workshops supported by Age Cymru's Gwanwyn Festival (funded by Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales) and in partnership with the Wales Millennium Centre will be held weekly at the Centre during March April and May. To register your interest and for more information, ring Catrin on 07803161388 or email parama2@yahoo.co.uk.



Ffatri Vox

"Expect aural magic as Inge Thomson premieres her new work Ffatri Vox exclusively at Festival of Voice."

In yet another incarnation of the Women's Archive of Wales' oral history project 'Voices From the Factory Floor', Inge Thompson the innovative composer and multi-instrumentalist from the Fair Isle, has been commissioned to compose Ffatri Vox for the 2016 Festival. Inge's new bi-lingual Welsh and English work, is influenced by and includes some of the 200 'Voices' that were recorded for the original project by volunteers and members of the Women's Archive.

Inge's recent project 'Da Fishing Hands' earned her a composer of the year nomination in the BBC MGAlba Scots Trad Music Awards: "... intoxicating, unusual, moving and beautiful, just as I would expect from such a profound talent" Martin Simpson.

On June 10th Inge will be performing 'Ffatri Vox' in Cardiff. Joining Inge on stage will be West Wales folk singer Julie Murphy, along with her regular musical partner, Fraser Fifield (whistles, kaval, sax and effects) and Tom Cook (electronics and live manipulation).

The piece will be premiered at the Reardon Smith Theatre, CF10 3NP on June 10th @ 6.00pm



Tickets will be available from <https://festivalofvoice.wales/whats-on/inge-thomsons-ffatri-vox/>

Women in a garden

The National Botanical Garden of Wales, at Llanarthne near Carmarthen, is the latest incarnation of the Middleton Estate. The land was bought in the 17th century by the Middleton family, who made their fortune in the spice trade, specifically nutmegs. By the early 19th century it was owned by Sir William Paxton, under whom the house was remodelled and the grounds laid out as a splendid landscape garden and water park. This was its heyday and by the early 20th century both house and gardens were in a sad state. In 1931 the house burned down. The estate was acquired by Carmarthen County Council who converted the remaining buildings into council housing and the gardens into farmland. In the 1980s the estate was chosen as the site for the National Botanic Gardens and the tenants moved elsewhere.

The Gardens have recently received HLF funding for their Regency Restoration project to research and restore some of Paxton's landscape features. Alongside this runs a project to research the lives of people who have been associated with the estate over the years.

Louise Austin, the Heritage Co-ordinator of the project, has contacted us:

'... we know a little about some of the women who have been involved with this landscape. Of particular note are Alice Abadam who was active in the women's suffrage movement, and her cousin Vernon Lee, writer. We have also been collecting accounts from the ex-residents of the Middleton Estate when it was managed by the county council as starter farms. We are very keen to further explore the women of this landscape and celebrate their lives as part of a celebration of the centenary of Women's Suffrage in 2018. It would be wonderful if members of Women's Archive Wales would be interested in ... researching our history here.'

Do let me know if you would like to do this. There's a library in the Gardens, but other libraries and archives probably have nuggets of information, and of course there's also the internet, so this needn't be restricted to people living within reach of Carmarthen. Do let me know, and I'll reply to Louise. I think it sounds a fascinating project.

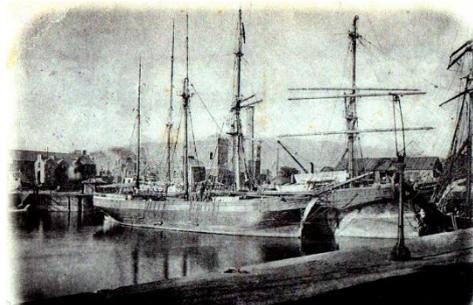
Jenny Sabine info@womensarchivewales.org

Swansea's 'Bad Girls': *Crime and Prostitution, 1870s-1914*,

A forthcoming book by Elizabeth Belcham outlines the stories of the seamier side of Swansea that history tends to ignore. The port of Swansea provided a haven for shipping and their crews, from all over the world. For rest and entertainment these crewmen would seek out the nearest public house or inn on the dockside. The Strand or High Street had pubs on nearly every street corner. It was here that the prostitutes plied their trade, inviting sailors back to rooms in the backstreets, or to the back-alleys. If they could not persuade or cajole a drink from the seamen, then the girls frequently found other ways of depriving them of their wages, and there are many newspaper reports of planned robberies or theft from the sailors. For many women, prostitution was their only means of earning a living, but the lifestyle brought with it inherent risks – addiction to drink, violence, homelessness and disease.

This book explores the crimes of theft and of violence through drink or other social causes which filled the police courts, in Swansea to which all these girls were brought - from Merthyr, Aberavon and Neath - and imprisoned, although not all were originally from any of these districts.

Although social reform in the late Victorian period was underway, Swansea's 'Bad Girls', as those from all over Britain, were at the bottom of a very deep pile, and their lot would not be instantly bettered, during which times they had to survive. Theirs are stories of grit, and also bravado, of girls damaged by



South Docks, Swansea, mid 19th Century

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome from all members. If you are able to submit your contribution bilingually this would be greatly appreciated. Please send your contributions to:

newsletter@womensarchivewales.org

**Copy date for next issue
Friday 27th May**

If you would like a large print copy of this Newsletter, in either Welsh or English, please contact Caroline at the email address above, or phone 01873 890540.

This Newsletter was edited by Caroline Fairclough, and translated by Catrin Stevens,

circumstances, whose daily life was inhabited by drink, violence, crime, hunger and disease, to the extent that many in their day tried to commit suicide, to rid themselves of the misery of their lives. Alcohol was also their only solace, but it also brought them sorrow.

With photographs, mugshots, and full of contemporary newspapers accounts, often sympathetic or amusing which were then read as we would watch 'soap operas' today, the book tells the stories of the lives of extraordinary women - they were feisty, gutsy and brave to survive through many an adversity. It was a tough life they were living, and it was often survival of the fittest – in all its meanings.

Elizabeth F Belcham.

This edition has been a very South Wales, Swansea-centric edition. Please help to rectify this in the next edition or two by sending me articles or items of news from Wrexham, Llandudno, Rhyl, Caernarfon, Machynlleth and so on round and up the middle of Wales!

Women in World War I: Many thanks for your contributions, but keep them coming

Our HLF funded project is now drawing towards its official conclusion, and our website is due to go live on 14th March! This won't be the end though, as we will continue to record and load material until 2019, at the least.

We have found that we over-budgeted in some areas of our HLF application. We have been given permission to use this money to produce four bilingual posters illustrating aspects of the lives of women during World War I, and these will be sent to secondary schools in Wales. Many thanks are due to the Heritage Lottery Fund.



Here are some examples of the materials collected so far. Some of these are already on the website, and some will be loaded soon. From left to right, Violet Annie Davies, a heroic teenager; Charlotte (Lottie) Roberts, who married in her VAD uniform; (above) Munitions workers including Sybil Seabourne (3rd left with arm band) and, (below) Mair Jenkins, Swansea, aged about 8 and wearing nurse's uniform.

If you have any similar photographs, or any documents that you are prepared to share, please contact me

caroline_fairclough@yahoo.co.uk or info@womensarchive.org.

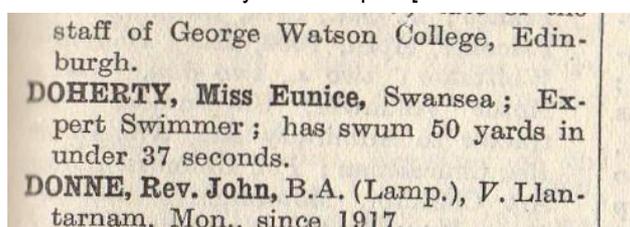
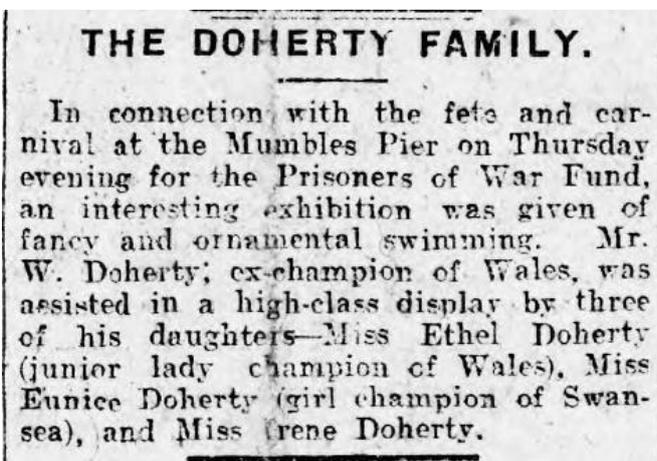


We still need some photographs of memorials.

If anyone is looking for a spring outing, and is heading towards Tywyn in the Mawddach estuary, we need a photograph of the memorial in the church porch to Jane Roberts, who died when her hospital ship HMHS Salta was sunk off Le Havre in 1917. We also need Jane E Jones a QMAAC whose name appears on Cynwed War Memorial, Bala.

Who's Who in Wales 1921 – update

Attentive readers will be glad to know that I have tracked down Miss Eunice Doherty – the 'expert [not 'excellent' as I



thought] swimmer' in Who's Who in Wales, 1921. She was one of three swimming daughters of the ex-champion swimmer and entrepreneur W Doherty.

The Doherty sisters also seem to have sung and danced at fundraising events in and around Swansea. It is not clear why Eunice made it to the pages of Who's Who in Wales, but not her sisters. .

Cambria Daily Leader 28th June 1918. Here is one of their many press cuttings, courtesy of Welsh Newspapers Online.