Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE

Issue Thirty-four
Winter 2021

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editor@heredit.co.uk www.heredit.co.uk
@her_edit

editorial team
Jayne Phenton
Ann Clark

our contributors
Dr Cynthia Hammond

thank you
Brenda Boardman
Natalie Brett
Annie Nicolson
Ruth Wainwright
Leyla Werleigh

Karen McDonald
Sarah Williams

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Welcome to Her Edit

I hope that by the time you read this you'll have had an opportunity to spend time with friends, family and loved-ones, something many of us were unable to do over the Christmas holidays last year. Living with Covid has come to feel like taking a step or two forward and then one - or several - steps back. It can be difficult to embrace a new year when there is so much uncertainty about what lies ahead.

If anyone knows about living in turmultuous times, then it must be Leyla Werleigh, who features on this issue's cover. Growing up under the infamous dictatorship of Papa Doc has shaped her politics, her activisim and her humanity and I feel hugely inspired by her story which she shares with Ann Clark.

There is much strength and courage in all our features this month. From the delightful unfolding of Cynthia Hammond's discovery of the suffragette's arboretum to Brenda Boardman taking an unconventional path into academia and becoming an advocate against fuel poverty; Annie Nicolson has channelled her grief into creativity and helping others to come to terms with their loss and Ruth Wainwright establishing the wonderful Feminist Bookshop in Brighton.

It was an absolute joy to swap stories about art school with Natalie Brett, the powerhouse behind the transformation of the London College of Communications and a champion for diversity and inclusion in arts education.

As ever, our mission is to shine a spotlight on women's lives and the wonderful things they do that enrich our world. Please send your stories and ideas to us at editor@heredit.co.uk, share your thoughts on our website heredit.co.uk and keep in touch on Twitter.

We wish you a safe and peaceful year and hope that you get everything you wish for in 2022, and flourish and thrive in everything you do.

Her Issue Thirty-four








A 1909 photograph of Annie Kenney and Rose Lamartine Yates planting an Austrian Pine in Batheaston, Somerset, in honour of Lamartine Yates' time in prison and her efforts on behalf of women's suffrage ©Bath in Time

Dr Cynthia Hammond is an artist and Professor of Art History at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Her work focuses on women and the history of the built environment, urban landscapes, research-creation, and oral history. She has published on the spatial history of the suffrage movement, public art, gardens, and the politics of urban change.

Pictured above, Dr Cynthia Hammondk

CYNTHIA HAMMOND

The historian and the Suffragette garden

When I first visited the World Heritage City of Bath as a young feminist in 1992, I did not notice that this lovely city's public celebration of its architectural heritage focused only on male figures: political leaders, architects, and town planners. When I returned to Canada, however, the city haunted me, or rather, a specific question did: how had women shaped this architecturally significant city?

A few years later, I began my postgraduate work far from Bath, at Concordia University in Montreal. My feminist professors taught me that accepted versions of architectural history, with their systemic exclusion of women and people of colour, are not good enough. We need to ask different questions in order to discover how women have produced space throughout history. We must be attentive to how women of different classes and backgrounds may have left traces.

Through this guidance, I saw Bath's archival record in a new light. I studied the city through the movements and spatial impact of domestic labourers and sex workers, middle-class philanthropists, and elite women with the power and means to build. An artist by training, I used performance art to bring my discoveries into Bath's public realm, performing parts of the archive for curious tourists and residents.

Only after completing my doctorate in 2008 did I discover a cache of incredible historic photographs. These images, part of the "Bath in Time" online collection, depict Edwardian suffragettes planting evergreen trees on a private property at the edge of Bath. Eagle House was home to the pro-suffrage Blathwayt family, who arranged and paid for 70 trees and shrubs to be planted in a carefully-designed, commemorative landscape. The digitised images include many tree "portraits" and show how each tree had a lead plaque installed in front of it, providing the name of the tree, the suffragette for whom it had been planted, and a date.

By this time I was teaching full-time in Concordia University's Department of Art History but I found myself once again thinking about Bath from a distance. I pored over the 300 photographs, as well as contemporary satellite images of the property. About thirty bungalows now sat where the trees once grew. Alas, the arboretum had not survived. Or had it? There was one huge tree that, even in satellite images, clearly towered above the rest.

It was this tree, and the general lack of information about the suffragettes' activity in Bath, that propelled me to visit in 2008. My training as an artist taught me that it would be essential to go to the site itself and ask what local people knew. I approached each house in the development with a hand-printed bag, which held a tiny evergreen plant, a pamphlet about the suffragettes' arboretum, as well as my contact information. I asked recipients to plant these tiny shrubs on behalf of the missing landscape.

While not all residents knew about the history of the land on which their houses sat, some did. Doors opened, boxes of newspaper clippings were brought out, and – as this was England – tea was served. I learned that the enormous tree that I'd seen in satellite photos was indeed a "suffragette tree" but whose was unclear.

I was put in touch with an 89-year old woman, Mary Fraying, who lived near the development and had a living memory of the arboretum. She and her brother had played among the trees as children and had rushed in ahead of the bulldozers to save as many lead plaques as they could.

Mary's family had found the glass plate negatives of the suffragettes' planting ceremonies in the attic of Eagle House, which the Frayling family bought in the 1960s. The family had hung on to the negatives and plaques over the years. Finally, Mary had given the founder of Bath in Time, Dan Brown, permission to scan the plates and put them online. A private person who was aware of the history in her care, she did not want her name to be public. But I found her through my art project.

My collaboration with Mary included several interviews about her memories of the arboretum and of the Blathwayt family, who had owned Eagle House and welcomed visiting suffragettes. Mary's memories guided me in my subsequent archival research, which allowed me to confirm that the one surviving tree, a gorgeous Austrian Pine, was planted for Rose Lamartine Yates (1875-1954), who founded what would become the Suffrage Collection in the Museum of London.

IMAGES

Left to right: Cynthia Hammond with Rose Lamartine Yates' Austrian Pine in the garden of Eileen Paddock, Batheston, photographed by Tom Stickland, 2011
Cynthia Hammond, Rose Lamartine Yates' Austrian Pine, watercolour on paper
Rose Lamartine Yates' Austrian Pine in Batheaston

‘...the young trees were intended to grow into a future when women would have the right to vote...’

My archival research also confirmed that the young trees were intended to grow into a future when women would have the right to vote, and to provide a place where women of the future could come to celebrate this history.

Mary Frayling’s collection of negatives and plaques became the basis for an exhibition that Dan Brown and I curated in 2011 at the Bath Podium Library, which received over 300 visitors per day. Our three print runs of the catalogue sold out each time. Historians Dr Elaine Chalus and Dr Bobby Anderson, both then at Bath Spa University, organized a series of events in parallel with the exhibition, in which evergreens were planted in public parks across Bath, commemorating the suffragettes’ lost trees. I planted a secret evergreen as close to the suffragettes’ landscape as I could. The following year, my book on Bath, Architects, Angels, Activists, came out. The last third of this publication is dedicated to the arboretum as the only known work of pro-suffrage landscape design in England.

Over the years I’ve been contacted by women, mainly feminist historians and social workers, who have visited the trees in Bath in exactly the way the Blathwayt family had hoped that future women would visit the arboretum. But the surviving Austrian Pine is not publicly accessible. Eileen Paddock, in whose garden the tree still grows, has been a worthy guardian, fighting for the tree to be recognized as collective heritage and as important as all the listed bricks and mortar in the city of Bath. So I was thrilled when the Walking Forest collective contacted me in 2018 to say that they had found my work, and thus the tree, in their own search for connections between art, feminism, and suffrage history. Interdisciplinary artists/educators/activists, Ruth Ben-Tovim, Shelley Castle, Anne-Marie Culhane, and Lucy Neale are doing astonishing work with Lamartine-Yate’s Austrian Pine, treating it as a full collaborator in their efforts to cull and propagate seeds, which they then present as awards of courage to individuals that they see as leaders in the urgent fight against climate change.

The group recently undertook a major protest/performance work as part of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in fall 2021. Working with 20 women co-performers, they carried the body of a birch that was felled to make way for the HS2 high-speed rail link that is destroying thousands of trees and ancient woodlands. Aligning their “creative disruptions” with the actions of ordinary women worldwide and throughout history who have fought for the rights of humans and non-humans alike, Walking Forest is very much the living legacy of the suffragettes, as are the seeds that they are cultivating with such care and consideration for our planet. I am deeply honoured to be part of the genealogy that links the beautiful Austrian Pine in Bath to the bravery of the suffragettes over a century ago, and the courage of Walking Forest and their many collaborators today.

Follow Cynthia’s work @_CynthiaHammond

IMAGE

Right: The cover of Suffragettes in Bath: Activism in an Edwardian Arboretum by Cynthia Hammond with Dan Brown, published by Bath in Time, 2011


THE FEMINIST BOOKSHOP
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Ruth Wainwright is the owner of The Feminist Bookshop which she opened in November 2019. Prior to running the bookshop she studied economics and worked in the private and public sectors as an economic consultant.

Ruth, pictured right, with Caroline Lucas at one of the first events in the shop and an image of the bookshop interior.
Images courtesy Ruth Wainwright.

RUTH WAINWRIGHT

Founder of the Feminist Bookshop

What inspired you to set up a feminist bookshop and why?

When I first moved down to Brighton I started running a feminist book club in living rooms all over the city. I was really just looking to make some new friends and talk about feminism, but it was such a lovely group and so inspiring, that I wanted to take it further. I realised that as the ground floor of my house used to be a shop it could probably be converted back and it just seemed obvious – it had to be a feminist bookshop! After a successful crowdfunding campaign I was finally able to put ideas into plans, and the rest is history.

Why did you call your shop feminist and what does feminism mean to you?

We went back and forth with lots of different names, but ultimately it just made sense to call it exactly what it was, "The Feminist Bookshop". We felt part of a long line of feminist bookshops that have existed across the UK and US (such as Silver Moon in London) and we wanted to honour that history. In terms of what feminism means to me, I wholeheartedly stand with Bell Hooks who states simply: "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression."

How do you select your books?

It is really a mixture of different things. For example I choose books I've read or been recommended by customers or publishers. I also keep an ear and eye out when listening to podcasts or reading blogs to see if anything sparks my interest and the whole team pitches in with ideas and recommendations too.

What is your vision for the future of the Feminist Bookshop?

We first opened our doors at the end of 2019 so our first couple of years have definitely taught us to prepare for the unexpected, and not to get disheartened if things don't work out as planned! So the vision for The Feminist Bookshop at the moment is to continue to keep our doors open (fingers crossed), to get more people engaged in feminist literature and to keep amplifying the voices of women and non-binary authors and artists.

Have you encountered any prejudices so far?

Unfortunately, and not surprisingly, the answer is yes. We often get the classic line "isn't it sexist to have a bookshop filled with books only by women" or we sometimes get retaliation by some customers if we choose not to stock certain books (that we might find exclusive to certain members of communities). This comes with the territory though and we are always so heartened by the many customers that enter the shop and are so excited to see the shelves packed with books by women and non-binary authors.

Are you only aiming for female customers? How do you attract customers?

Absolutely not. The aim for the bookshop is to build a community space which is open to everyone and encourages ALL people to come together in a fun, inclusive and safe space. A lot of our customers tend to be local to Brighton and have heard about us either through Instagram or Facebook. We also put on events which attract people to the bookshop. Recently we've even joined TikTok which has been very funny and is another great way to connect with others.

What's the most satisfying part of the job?

It would have to be the customers. The genuine support and love we receive from them and the thought-provoking conversations we have everyday are absolutely the main motivation to keep going. We are incredibly lucky to have such a wonderful customer base and all of this would not have been possible without them.

Visit the Feminist Bookshop at
https://thefeministbookshop.com/

Leyla Werleigh is Programme Coordinator and Resource Mobilisation Specialist and Programme Officer in Lao People's Democratic Republic for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. She is the focal person for the Hand-in-Hand Initiative which is FAO's evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development. A key aspect of this has been raising awareness and fostering partnerships nationally and internationally of the socio-economic opportunity of the Lao-China Railway as a Green Growth Economic Corridor for women and girls as well as many other minority groups.
Leyla spoke to Ann about growing up in Haiti and the influence this has had on her life choices.

LEYLA WERLEIGH

Growing up in Haiti - activism and politics

I met Leyla on a fine day when we were running along the Darent Valley in Kent. She exuded a captivating free spirit and I wanted to know her better. I was disappointed to learn that she was about to leave the country and live in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, but I instinctively knew Leyla had a story to tell, so with the help of the internet I found her.

Leyla's parents were Haitians who lived under the notorious Papa Doc tyranny, renowned as one of the most violent and repressive regimes characterised by death squads and an intolerance of dissent. Like many of their generation, Leyla's parents studied abroad and were in Switzerland when her mother found she was pregnant with Leyla and decided to return home. By then Papa Doc was dead and had been succeeded by his son Baby Doc, for whom there was hope of a slightly less despotic presidency than his father's.

'Both my parents were committed to do their utmost to improve living conditions in Haiti, especially for Haitian smallholder farmers who make up most of the population. When I was about six months old, my mum took a course specialising in Adult Education, recognising this as an empowering path to address some of the root causes of poverty in Haiti. She got a scholarship to study in Mexico and made the brave decision to leave me with trusted friends.

'After qualifying she returned to Haiti and, along with my dad - a rural economist-, and some friends, set up the Institute of Technology and Animation (ITECA) to help educate young women and men agricultural workers and community leaders on their rights as citizens and labourers, and extend their expertise to improve and diversify harvest in order to bolster their livelihoods. Mum also took a law degree which enabled her to give targeted advice to the rural agricultural communities on their human rights, and their rights as tenants and employees'.

This kind of activism was bound to attract attention from the repressive authorities. Leyla's family's worst fears were realised in 1980 as

the regime was clamping down on persons labelled “political dissidents”. Many people were murdered and disappeared and the culture of fear meant you could never tell who might be an ally or an enemy. Then, in the middle of one night when her dad was in the Dominican Republic and her mum was at a meeting, Leyla, now aged six, her two-year-old sister, and their nanny were forced into hiding in a convent.

‘I remember having to hide in the car footwell. One of the nuns there was a Baby Doc sympathiser. She recognised me from the school attached to the convent, so we quickly made a more remote and secure move to a friend of my dad’s sister who was not politically active. I am still haunted by my sister crying and the scared nanny losing self-control and beating her for potty training accidents. When I became a parent, I naturally mistrusted passing the care of my children to others.

‘This first period of going into hiding also marks a strong memory of an encounter with modern technology. My mum sent us a message on audio cassette and I remember being totally confused and couldn’t understand why mum wouldn’t answer when I was interjecting and asking when I’d see her again!’

The threats diminished and the family were reunited again, but close friends had been killed and many went into exile; no one was brought to justice. Little was normal about Leyla’s childhood. ‘I was only allowed sleep-overs with one close friend whose family were trusted. Otherwise, it was impossible to know who to trust. My socialising was restricted because any inadvertent comment I made could easily put mine and other entire families at risk of imprisonment or execution.’

From 1984 ‘political dissidents’ frequently rallied to overthrow Baby Doc and a popular uprising was finally successful in February 1986. Leyla, then aged 12, has vivid memories of this.

‘My dad wanted me to witness the end of this repressive regime which had lasted over 30 years, celebrate with the people and taste the hopes of new beginnings and the triumph of democracy. He took me downtown with him: strangers were dancing, hugging each other and we joined protests asking for the release of political prisoners.

‘But by midday, the atmosphere had changed; the military started shooting at crowds. and an immediate curfew was imposed. Some people died in front of me. There was a stampede outside the prison where political prisoners were held as people were clamouring for their release. Dad was injured, but a complete stranger scooped me up to help me to safety. Dad caught up and we went to a bar to buy the guy a drink and thank him for saving my life. I wanted to follow this man who had saved my life, but there was more shooting ahead of us and bodies littered the streets. I remember very distinctly that Dad pulled me away very forcefully from a crowd of people. Up until then he’d not shielded me.

‘Weeks later, Paris Match covered the events in Haiti and I saw a picture of the guy who had rescued me. He’d been shot dead. He was one of the first casualties from that day and I always felt I would have died had it not been for him or if I had followed him out of that bar and not waited for my dad. These were the vengeful actions of the Tonton Makoutes, Duvalier’s (Baby Doc) militia, trying to take control again.’

Leyla’s dad took her on his visits around the country where she witnessed the deprivation of the impoverished farming communities. Home-life was imbued not only with domestic Haitian concerns of education and political activism, but also life though a global lens as a result of her

parents' international journalist friends and her mother's work for Caritas on humanitarian aid for crises.

After the military take-over, a civilian government was instated and Leyla's mum was asked to be part of the new government as Minister for Social Affairs, serving under the first woman president, Ertha Pascal-Trouillot. A long period of political instability ensued, there was one military coup after another.

'At the beginning of 1990, Dad was arrested and severely beaten for attending a political meeting. Upon his release later that night, under curfew and black out, my mum and I walked to a doctor and friend of the right persuasion to treat his injuries. I held a torch so the doctor could clean Dad's head wounds and do the stitches. Days later, Mum sent me and my sister to different friends' houses so she could look after Dad.

'That summer my sister and I took our usual holiday staying with relatives in the United States. Given the situation at home and my approaching university age, we had already discussed the possibility of me studying there. I stayed, but my sister returned home.'

Later that year Haiti held its first democratic elections. Jean-Bertrand Aristide became President and Leyla's mum led the private cabinet of the Prime Minister. However, in September 1991 there was a coup against Aristide and the whole family was again under threat. Leyla was safe in the US, but unable to speak to any of her family. Eventually she found out from a cousin that they were in hiding.

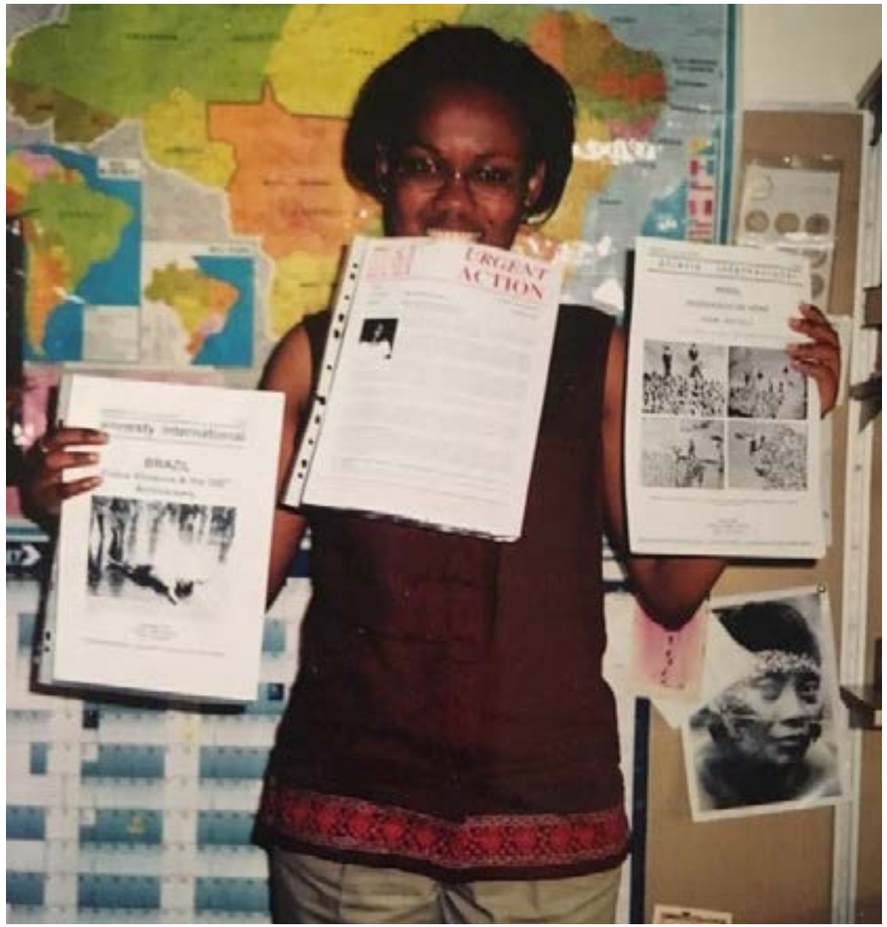
'I was brought up to dedicate my life to Haiti and I wanted to go home to help, but I'd been warned off politics because of its inherent dangers. After I graduated, I returned home hoping to help the causes my parents pursued, but they were keen that I should continue in higher education. I was fortunate to win a scholarship to study diplomacy at Itamaraty, the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Brazil. I met my future husband, John, and became fluent in Portuguese and acquired first-hand knowledge of the country.'

Speaking Portuguese gave Leyla the opportunity to work in Human Rights, in Brazil and Lusophone, Africa, at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International. Leyla then moved to Sweden and worked in Conflict Transformation; to the UK and Ghana to work on Early Warning and Response to stop the recurrence of violent conflict and to Mexico working in Disaster Relief Response and Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Leyla's career in humanitarian-centred work may have taken her across the globe, but she has not been able to work in Haiti. She currently works for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation in Lao PDR helping to support smallholder farmers like those in Haiti.

'It has taken me many years to reconcile myself to not being able to work with and for Haiti and give something back to my country of birth. Here I am in Lao People's Democratic Republic, the spouse of a diplomat, reflecting on the influence of that very personal history – its activism, humanitarianism and politics. On a personal level, my experience means I cherish keeping my own family, my three sons and my husband, together. Professionally, I am open to taking whichever opportunities present themselves to help make a difference, wherever I may be.'

Follow Leyla @LCWerleigh



IMAGES

Page 15/16: Leyla with President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former President of Brazil, to her right. Her husband John, who she met at the Diplomatic Academy at Itamaraty, is far left.
Page 18: Leyla with an Oma woman wearing traditional Oma dress
Page 20: Wearing co-designed Oma jacket to promote Lao Ethnic Diversity and highlight Max Mara appropriation
Page 22: Leyla at Amnesty International

NATALIE BRETT

A graphic designer, Natalie Brett has been Head of London College of Communication and Pro Vice-Chancellor of University of the Arts London since January 2013. Previously she was Dean of College at Camberwell College of Arts and Head of Foundation at Chelsea College of Art. Natalie spoke to Jayne Phenton about her remarkable career, leadership and putting students first.

©University of the Arts London

Leader in arts education

When Natalie Brett was appointed Head of London College of Communication (LCC) it was said: “LCC needs someone who is not afraid to say, ‘no we’re doing it this way’, and she is that person.”

Natalie cuts a commanding figure with her dark Louise Brooks bob and determined slash of red lipstick - her ‘warpaint’ as I learn later - but I wonder if if she feels it is an accurate assessment of her leadership style?

“That absolutely is me. I try to make sure we can all be the best we can be, because we’re in our lives for too short a time and we’re at work for much of that. In academia, you have to be really clear what your values are. My role is to push everyone else. I’m democratic, but wherever I’ve been I’ve not been very good at obeying. I didn’t do it as a kid and I’ve not done it as a grown-up.”

It’s her ability to identify and solve problems, develop her team and carry them with her which has characterised Natalie Brett’s 20+ year career in the Higher Education sector at both national and international level. She has developed new approaches to learning and teaching, led widening participation activities and supported diversity and inclusion amongst both her students and staff.

Before becoming Head of LCC and Pro Vice-Chancellor of University of the Arts London (UAL) in 2013, she was Dean of College at Camberwell College of Arts and before that, ran courses at Chelsea College of Art. It was while running the Foundation course at Chelsea, that she was invited to work as a consultant on the 12-week BBC2 series Art School, developing a curriculum to coach, and in some cases, cajole, celebrities into producing a body of artwork for exhibition and critique.

While the celebrity cast list gives away the programme’s age, it’s an entertaining watch as art critic Sasha Craddock teases artistic sensibility from the sometimes slightly curmudgeonly or plain recalcitrant celebrities and viewers’ sympathies are drawn towards the participants. Posing the age-old question, ‘how do you teach people creativity?’,

“You put them through a series of exercises to give them the confidence to do it; it’s all about how to get people to see things in a different way. Within the first hour of day one, Ulrike (Johnson) and Clarissa (Dixon Wright) were asking, ‘have you done this before?’. I ran a course for 600 students! Standing up in front of people was what I was used to.”

Natalie has all the style of a media veteran, but there is little profile for her online. The long-heralded redevelopment of the infamous Elephant and Castle shopping centre has been contentious and divisive locally as existing traders are priced out of the area and the regeneration of the wider area has driven the scope of social housing down and house prices up.

The development includes a new building for LCC upgrading the facilities in its current modernist block. As the public face of LCC, Natalie was subject to personal abuse online prompting her decision to step back from social media. Nevertheless, it is a project Natalie is proud to have led.

“I totally get the arguments about the need for social housing and the fears about what would happen to the traders but the third part of that discussion, which had equal weight as far as I was concerned, was the role of LCC at Elephant and Castle. I had to stand for that and take the flak for it. That’s my job, but that level of personal abuse is frustrating; they assume somebody like me is from a middle-class privileged background, which isn’t the case.”

Natalie is one of four born in Sheffield into a “quite disruptive” household. Her electrician dad and her mum, a life model at Sheffield Hallam University, separated when Natalie was young.


‘I’ve not been very good at obeying. I didn’t do it as a kid and I’ve not done it as a grown up.’

‘I’ve experienced being patronised, being paid less or not getting the same degree of recognition because I’m a woman, so I’ve always been determined to make sure that it won’t be like that for me or for anyone else.’

Natalie with the broadcaster John Humphries in a still from BBC Art School, broadcast on BBC2 in 2005 ©BBC

She left home at 16 and because her mum had moved to Eastbourne enrolled on an art foundation course in Brighton aged just 17. A natural rebel, Natalie was a punk and used KY jelly to spike up her hair although she says she didn’t know what it was! Not having the same ‘back-up’ at home as her peers, she believes made her more focused and resilient.

Attracted by the fantastic facilities, an impressive list of alumni and the advantage of being within easy reach of London, Natalie studied graphic design at Wolverhampton. She secured freelance illustration work even before she’d finished her course and quickly built a successful career which led to her being invited to teach. A day a week became full-time and Natalie’s natural instinct to ‘just sort things out and make them better’ and her leadership skills meant she was soon running a course.

“I’ve experienced being patronised, being paid less or not getting the same degree of recognition because I’m a woman, so I’ve always been determined to make sure that it won’t be like that for me or for anyone else.

“The big thing is finding out what motivates people to make up the bigger picture. You can pretty much lead them or take them with you if you have a clear vision. I’m there for one reason, our students. What I’m really interested in is making sure they have got what they’ve come for and giving them an equal playing field because they’re coming from very diverse backgrounds.”

Natalie’s career is characterised by a commitment to diversity and inclusion and widening participation and support for disabled students and staff. A big challenge is making sure the staff are representative of the students’ identities “so they don’t think this isn’t the place for me, because I can’t see anyone who looks like me.”

Forty per cent of the students at LCC come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and, especially with the disruption wrought by the pandemic in the last 18 months, Natalie’s focus is on ensuring those students have the same opportunities and quality of experience as those who might have more support at home or access to networks.

“The likes of you and me know what it’s like not being able to afford to go on an international exchange or a trip. I got a full grant and housing benefit in the holidays, but my students have to work 30 hours a week to live in London. We’ve got students going into their final year now and they’ve had two disrupted years. So we’re dealing with a lot of mental health stuff.

‘[When I was at art college] I don’t remember anyone talking to me about fees or money or well-being or mental health or even support for dyslexia, but if you’re paying £9.5k a year and you’ve got dyslexia, I have to make sure you’re getting the support you need to make sure you’re getting the best of it.”

Charmingly self-effacing, Natalie jokes the thing she is most proud of in her distinguished career is “keeping a job”, but from driving up enrolment at LCC to building a portfolio of subjects that equip students with the skills to move into the creative industries worth around £13 billion to the British economy, she clearly leaves a legacy behind her. Natalie has driven a programme of working partnerships for its students with local businesses and projects placing it very much at the heart of its community, alongside setting the foundations for the new building.

“What I’m proudest of is the people I’ve worked with. I can walk around that college and I know everybody’s name. Whether you’re a student or member of staff, someone we work with or one of our alumni giving money for bursaries, we’ve really built it together.”

Natalie retires from LCC at the end of this year and says she is looking forward to not having a timetabled life, have a free brain to ‘do a bit of stuff with my hands again’ and being able to contribute in a different way by sharing everything she’s learned in over 20 years.

Given the fees and the different education landscape, if she were 16 now, would she go to art college?

“Yes! I often say that because of my background, I wouldn’t be able to go now, but I hope to God I’d have a found a way to get there. I was determined.”

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Accidentally missing an A-level exam led Brenda Boardman to become a secretary. She travelled for a while and then in her 30s found a passion for academia and became a fuel poverty expert.

Brenda is an Emeritus Fellow at the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, the former head of the Lower Carbon Futures team and a co-director of the UK Energy Research Centre. In 1998, she was awarded an MBE for her work on energy efficiency and the same year received the Energy Institute's Melchett Medal.

She has published two books: Fixing Fuel Poverty: Challenges and Solutions in 2010 and Fuel Poverty: From cold homes to affordable warmth in 1991.

Brenda spoke to Ann about her unconventional route into academia and why she is passionate about understanding the issues for those who are unable to keep warm in their own homes and what can be done to help them.

BRENDA BOARDMAN

The fuel poverty champion

How did your interest in fuel poverty develop?

I had a rather unorthodox route into academia, only starting at the Open University (OU) aged 31, after working at a housing co-operative and while bringing up a family. The OU enabled me to study a wide range of sociology and technology modules with a fantastic fourth level module in which you could decide what you wanted to study. They found me a brilliant supervisor, a trained architect and civil servant, and this became a dummy run for my eventual doctorate. In two years, because our children were autumn births, the OU even enabled my exams to be invigilated at home. The OU degree gave me training for my interdisciplinary mind and an interest in fuel poverty.

After graduating I was fortunate that my local university, Sussex, was the home to the interdisciplinary Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU). I wanted to continue to study fuel poverty, but could only do this by studying for a doctorate. From my undergraduate training I knew that I wanted to study ALL aspects or the problem, which I did. The thesis encompassed technology, sociology, economics and policy, so it took me five years. I wrote the thesis in the form of themed topics, so it translated fairly easily into my first book: Fuel poverty: From cold homes to affordable warmth, published by Belhaven originally in 1991.

My definition of fuel poverty - where a household needs to spend more than 10% of its income on

‘Most people recycle, but now we need to make more impactful changes in our lives.’

fuel - is still the basis of the definition used in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and was in use in England until 2013.

In 1991, after being a consultant and campaigner for fuel poverty, I was appointed the first Senior Research Fellow in Energy Efficiency at St Hilda’s College, Oxford. The post was endowed by the electricity company, PowerGen. I gradually built up a team, obtained funding from several sources, including the UK’s Research Councils and the EU, and so the Lower Carbon Futures Group of the Environmental Change Institute (ECI) was born.

Early on it became very clear that it was important to work on electrical appliances, because they consume a large proportion of residential electricity and, at the time, so little was understood about this major sector. The project Domestic Equipment and Carbon Dioxide Emissions (DECADE), eventually lasted ten years; coordinating with the EU and the other member states meant that UK scientists and researchers were involved in informing policy, for the first time. The research established how much electricity was being used in the home by the individual appliances and, from the retailers, what was being sold.

When the first energy label was introduced in 1995 on cold appliances (fridges and freezers), we looked at its impact across the EU member states through working with consumer groups and energy agencies. The second policy in this market transformation was to introduce minimum standards, so that the least efficient appliances were phased out. This dual process of first labelling, then cutting off the lowest bands on the A-G scale, continues today as more and more products are affected: doors, windows, boilers, lights and houses are all included.

The Lower Carbon Futures group became responsible for Demand Reduction in the UK Energy Research Centre. We looked at options to reduce residential energy use and in 2005 presented our report on the 40% House at the Royal Society. This ambitious plan demonstrated how there could be a 60% reduction in energy consumption in the home, without a drop in the standard of living. This proved an important contributor to the debate that resulted in the 2008 Climate Change Act.

However, the British Government has not done the things needed to implement the legislation. It has not provided adequate financial incentives nor introduced regulation. The latter is the cheaper option, but may not be popular: wearing seat belts in cars was originally voluntary and only became effective when it was made compulsory. These are difficult political decisions, but essential if there is to be a real change in behaviour and the way we use energy in the home.

The A-G rating on a home is provided by an Energy Performance Certificate. Although this has not been as influential in transforming our homes as policies on appliances have been, there are now regulations so that no property can be rented out privately if it is in the F or G category. Soon this will also apply to categories D and E. Clearly, tackling these problems requires political leadership, clear policies and strong enforcement.

COP 26 has made most of us think about climate change, especially because of the energetic protests by young people and those ethnic populations most affected. The decision to focus on methane is good. This is a powerful, but short-lived gas, often produced by grass-eating animals as they burp, such as cows. We have to eat less beef.

The Government often makes climate-unfriendly decisions, for instance, Rishi Sunak reducing air passenger duty for internal flights. We should be lowering the price of train travel and increasing the cost of flying. Clearly the Government has not got the message, but there are signs that the public and businesses have.

Most people recycle, but now we need to make more impactful changes in our lives. I am currently involved in talking to groups about the 15 Minute Neighbourhood, which aims to have all basic amenities e.g. school, shop, pub within a 15 minute walk of your house. I am doing a survey for Oxfordshire which will help smaller communities, such as villages, establish what amenities they want to encourage, so people do not need to get into their cars.

What have the personal challenges been?

I am fortunate that my upbringing and going to an all-girls school made me a confident person. I was in my early twenties before I realised that some people think a female brain is inferior to a male one. Becoming the leader of a team was a challenge. Then, at Oxford University, no-one gave us any guidance on effective people management. Outside of academia, gaining status by being made an MBE, then in my own field by being awarded the Melchett Medal and becoming a Fellow of the Energy Institute in the same year certainly helped.

What can we do to support the sustainable energy agenda?

What we do today influences future generations, whether here in the developed world or elsewhere. In particular, rich people and rich countries should be reducing their impact. For instance, pre-pandemic 70% of flights were taken by 15% of the population, largely for business. I think the pandemic has taught us the importance of doing things for the benefit of wider society, and we need to apply this to tackling the climate crisis.

I think women have a special role: the issues of how we protect the environment and manage climate change seem to have a particular resonance for women.

Print artist Annie Nicholson goes by the moniker Fandangoe Kid. In 2011 she tragically lost several family members. In working through her own grief, she has emerged to create platforms in public spaces for dialogues on mental health, loss and grief, to break the barriers of taboos on these subjects.

Her work includes 'Staircase of Dreams' at the London Design Festival in 2020, nominated for 2021 Dezeen Awards, and redesigning nurses' scrubs for the NHS and Marie Curie, which featured on Channel 4. She created works for World Mental Health Day and Sadiq Khan's Thrive. Annie has also designed a capsule clothing label featured in Vogue Italia.

Annie's book, Tender Hearted Bold Moves, is available from Rough Trade Books and you can listen to her Grief Mixtape every month on Soho Radio.

Ann spoke to Fandangoe Kid about her Ice-Cream Van for Mental Health which toured around London this summer.

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ANNIE NICHOLSON

The Fandangoe Kid

Who couldn't be fascinated by someone with the pseudonym Fandangoe Kid and a project called Fandangoe Whip? The brainchild of artist Annie Nicholson, Fandango Whip provides a safe place for people to find an expression for their grief and trauma together with the nostalgic delight of an ice-cream van. As Annie describes it, 'a truck for mental health which is half art, half mental health' with the magical appeal of 'joyful, ageless, classless ice cream made by Portuguese Love Affair'.

The project was born of Annie's own grief when she lost her sister and parents in 2011. After years of therapy, she was struck by the lack of opportunity for dialogue about grief, loss and trauma and all the taboos which surround the subject. Annie takes up the story.

'The project has been planned over the last decade and the original concept was a static installation, but crowdfunding enabled us to buy and paint a van. The pandemic restrictions forced it into being a touring, mobile and outdoors project. Over the summer Fandangoe Whip's team of five secured several commissions in collaboration with events run by various museums and galleries, mostly in London.

'At each venue participants were encouraged to respond to broad questions relating to the pandemic by posting Post-it notes and then they were invited, if they wished, to a workshop to create a visual, creative response. The workshops included an introductory session in which the flexibility of a creative response to their grief or sense of loss was discussed and signposts of where to go for further support were given. Materials were provided and, afterwards, the participant had a personal tangible reminder of the session to take away.

'The workshops themselves varied according to the budget available for each commission. At Tate Britain, Fandangoe Whip was part of an outreach programme for young people in local communities. Canary Wharf was unique and very different as all passers-by from different business communities and residents were encouraged to respond. Fandangoe Whip reached some 40,000 individuals who were invited into artistic spaces to express their grief, loss and trauma.

'The feedback we have ranges from the sometimes very poignant Post-it note responses which show a coming out into the world post lockdown, people who are desperate to talk and share, to expressions of major loss. It's been instructive to see what art can achieve apart from a catharsis. Often those who say they don't want to do anything and are the most reluctant are the ones who, with a little encouragement to recognise there is no pressure, end up staying the longest.

'Our van has now been donated to a school where it has become a static venue for mental health.

So what next for Fandangoe Whip? 'We've just completed a first phase of fund-raising to take a similar, but more environmentally-friendly project to New York. This has benefitted from our experience in London and we will have therapists on board too.'


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MINI MILKS
99 + A FLAKE
GRIEF WALLOPS
CHOC ICES
+++
EXISTENTIAL DESPAIR
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SERVING UP
TABOO EMOTIONS
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