

# Exploring the Collection

## Alys Russell and M. Carey Thomas

A significant feature of the collection is the window it opens on significant individuals and their times. Here professors Joyce Goodman and Stephanie Spencer give a taster of their research plans.

Vivienne Rubinstein's lecture about the establishment of the Sybil Campbell Library at Crosby Hall, the British Federation of University Women's Hall of Residence, highlights Alys Russell's important role in the acquisition of books for the Library. Vivienne Rubinstein writes that Alys Russell was 'indefatigable' in approaching people who became supporters and donors. These included Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas, Desmond MacCarthy, Eileen Power, Lytton Strachey and Logan Pearsall Smith, her own brother (1). Alys Russell and her activities appear regularly in the annual reports of the British Federation of University Women and of the International Federation of University Women.

Her obituary notes a speech that Alys Russell made at Crosby Hall at a dinner given in honour of her eightieth birthday where she 'emphasized that the old must encourage the young, who had to carry on the world's tasks and who would do so much better if they had the approval and encouragement of the old' (2). Her letters to *The Times* on a range of subjects including suffrage and the St Pancras School for Mothers offer an insight into her many interests. Reports on the Court pages reveal a woman with extensive influential networks that combined with the networks of her cousin M Carey Thomas, founding Dean of Bryn Mawr College, USA, demonstrate the role that individual women played in furthering the cause of international friendship. Her publications illustrate her interests in education, women's work and social democracy (3). M. Carey Thomas also figures in IFUW reports and her papers at Bryn Mawr illustrate her support for the founding of Reid Hall, the women's hall of residence in Paris. Alys and Bertrand

Russell visited Bryn Mawr, where their views on birth control caused consternation. Alys Russell and M. Carey Thomas corresponded as young women and also travelled together in later life.

While M. Carey Thomas has been a focus of scholarly literature, Alys Russell is a much more shadowy figure. Future plans involve looking at Alys Russell's publications and activities and at the Alys Russell-Carey Thomas correspondence (200 letters in the Bryn Mawr archive written between 1880 and 1934 that include discussion of IFUW matters), their involvement in Crosby Hall and Reid Hall, and at their travels together in later life.

- (1) Vivienne Rubinstein, 'The Story of the Sybil Campbell Library Collection'
- (2) *The Times* 29/1/1951.
- (3) Marion Kearns, 'Alys Russell: A Bibliography' in *Russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, no 10 (1973)

Joyce Goodman • Stephanie Spencer

## 2016 Sybil Campbell lecture at the University Women's Club

An enthusiastic audience enjoyed Dr Sian Roberts lecture titled Encounter, exchange and inscription: the educational activism of Geraldine Cadbury and Margaret Backhouse 1910-39. The lecture was drawn from Sian's article in *History of Education* 42 (6): 783-802.

## Sybil Campbell Lecture 2017

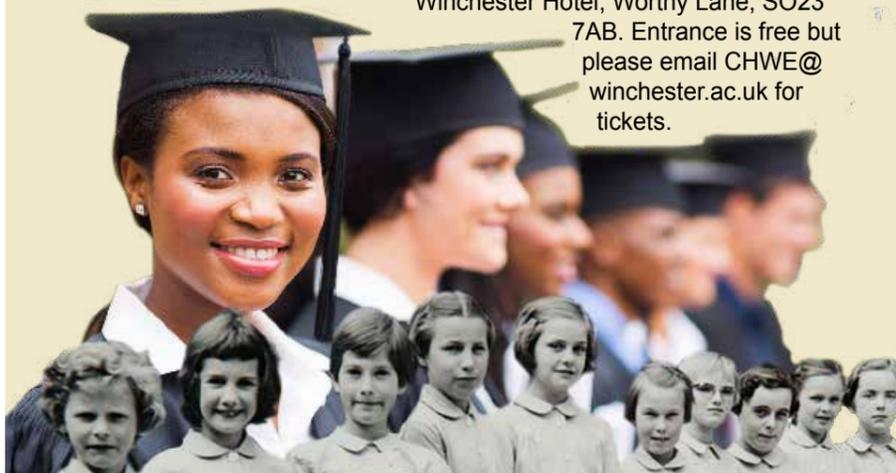
Due to an increase in costs the University Women's Club has become unsustainable as a venue so there will be no lecture this autumn. However possibilities for alternative venues and events are being explored for events in 2018.

## History of Education Society 50th Anniversary

**The Centre for the History of Women's Education will be hosting the fiftieth anniversary of the History of Education Society in November 2017**

In 2017 as the History of Education Society (UK) celebrates 50 years of scholarship and international collaboration, we look forward to welcoming colleagues, friends, and those new to the field, to historic Winchester. It is time for celebration to recognise the distance travelled in the development of ideas, theories and practice in the history of education. It is also a time for looking forward to what the next fifty years may hold.

There will be a Sunday morning Public Lecture on Historical Pageants on Sunday November 12th from 11.30 to 12.30 at the Winchester Hotel, Worthy Lane, SO23 7AB. Entrance is free but please email [CHWE@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:CHWE@winchester.ac.uk) for tickets.



Details: [CHWE@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:CHWE@winchester.ac.uk)

or: <http://historyofeducation.org.uk>

# The Sybil Campbell Collection at the University of Winchester

Newsletter for friends of the Collection Issue number 24 Summer 2017



This year our seminar was very special. It was given by Zainab Husseni an Afghan national who has spent some time living in exile. Zainab shared the research that she is doing for her PhD at Chester, study enabled by the BFWG's international scholarship programme. Zainab's moving and inspiring talk engendered much food for thought amongst the audience of friends of the collection, BFWG members, academics and undergraduate members of the Centre for the History of Women's Education.

Zainab writes: "I have chosen to take a deeper look at Afghan women's lives through their professional journey via a post-colonial feminist phenomenological lens. After my repatriation to Afghanistan, I had the opportunity to work with different national and international organizations as a researcher. Prior to returning to Afghanistan as an Afghan refugee born and raised in Iran, I found it easier to call myself an "Afghan", due to discriminatory policies and attitudes in Iran. However, upon my arrival in Afghanistan, the notion of my being an "Afghan" was challenged upon exposure to the tendency towards ethnic exclusion in there, especially in the workplace. Through this experience, I was becoming increasingly alarmed by the patriarchy and ethnicisation of the professional environment in Afghanistan. During my time in Afghanistan, it was distressing for me to see Afghan women starving, fighting for their rights to education, and addressing

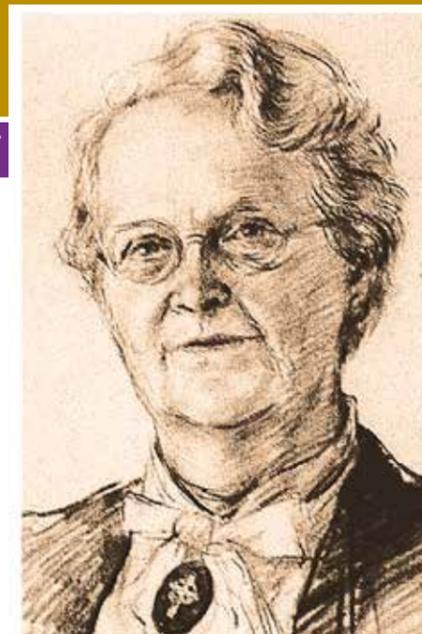
## The Sybil Campbell Seminar

new challenges in the workplace after graduation, due to overlapping oppressions against them. In a country where gender segregation is a norm, workplaces can be considered one of the most important places for both genders from different educational, ethnic, language and cultural backgrounds to come together to work, socialize and practice the notion of equality."

"My immediate results show that all Afghan women who were interviewed experienced oppression and discrimination in one way or another to a greater or lesser extent."

"The sample group varied in ethnic, religious and language backgrounds and consequentially, they experienced inequality and oppression differently. The following factors have all been identified as the main barriers for career advancement of educated Afghan women: A lack of an effective gender policy in organizations; patriarchy and ethnicized nature of the workplace; extreme religious interpretations; constant political conflict; gender, ethnic and language-based discrimination; corruption and kinship in the system; cultural norms and harassment."

"In this research, I will also investigate and discuss the type of institutional policies and strategies which can empower women in the workplace and increase their resilience to achieve gender and ethnic-based equality over the long-term."



The Library was founded at Crosby Hall in 1928 by the British Federation of University Women, now the British Federation of Women Graduates.

The Sybil Campbell Collection at the University of Winchester

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# The Sybil Campbell Book Group Little Women By Louisa M Alcott

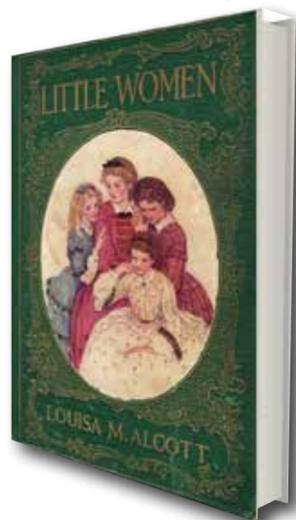
Our first book discussion tackled Little Women for many of us it was a reencounter with a story first experienced as a 'children's classic' in abridged versions or in film. Several of the group found reading the unabridged version from the perspective of adult feminists a little hard to stomach. The religious message and close relationship to pilgrim's progress had certainly escaped this reader the first time around. It was a disappointment too that Jo the rebel heroine munching apples in her attic comes to conform to more lady like behaviours. However reading Little Women with an historical sensibility indicates its significance in illustrating the negotiation of women's agency and constraint in the context of the period. Georgette Miller has researched the family circumstances and intellectual milieu that informed Alcott's writing. The following is an edited extract from her findings.

Louisa's father Amos Bronson Alcott was born in 1799 to an illiterate Connecticut flax farmer. With the encouragement of his mother, he taught himself to read and was profoundly influenced by John Bunyan's book, Pilgrim's Progress'. At seventeen he left home to become a peddler. On his travels Alcott encountered Pestalozzi's innovative child-centred educational ideas and was inspired become an educator.

In the 1830's after meeting Ralph Waldo Emerson Alcott became associated with the Transcendentalists a group of intellectuals and philosophers concerned with investigation of the inner world and an attempt to relate this world to nature, history and the divine. Based in Concord Massachusetts, the original group included, Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody, an exponent of the Froebel approach to education. These two women were also later involved in Alcott's schools. Alcott's ideas were instrumental in forming Emerson's thought as recorded in the transcendental seminal work, Nature. Composer Charles Ives was also

amongst the Alcott's circle. His piano sonata no.2-Concord, Massachusetts included a sketch in which he imagines one of the Alcott's playing on the spinet-piano that Sophia, the sister of Thoreau, gave to the Alcott children.

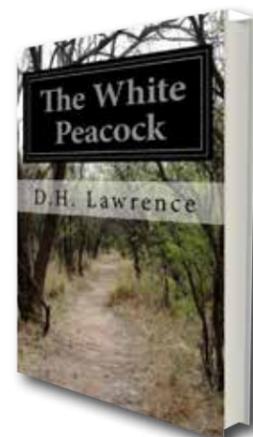
After a rather ineffective period of farming, lecturing and writing to try to support his family Alcott, founded the short-lived experimental Utopian community, Fruitlands. In later years Alcott travelled throughout the Midwest on lecture tours, where he finally achieved recognition for his ideas on education and transcendentalism. In 1879, thanks to the financial support of his admirers, he founded the Concord School of Philosophy.



In Little Women Louisa made women's rights integral to the novel and her fiction may be seen as the most important of the efforts she made to help facilitate women's rights. She had read the 'Declaration of Sentiments' published by the Seneca Falls Convention on women's rights, advocating for women's suffrage and became the first

woman to register to vote in Concord, Massachusetts in a school board election. Her early education included lessons from family friends Thoreau, Emerson and Margaret Fuller. The latter's, feminist classic Woman in the Nineteenth Century had been published, and an active social reformer, she travelled for 'The Tribune' in Europe and was widely regarded as a serious intellectual.

Louisa never seemed to question the value of domesticity and perhaps by not doing so she kept her popular audience responsive to change as this was shown within the familiar construct of domesticity, but she did challenge the social constructs that made, for example spinsters obscure and fringe members of society solely because they were not married. This novel had wide appeal with the primary heroine, Jo March, becoming a favourite of many different women, including several educated women writers through the 20th century.



# The White Peacock

The second title tackled by the book group was D.H Lawrence's White Peacock. Discussion focussed on Lawrence's preoccupation with the promlematisation of class and gender relations especially in relation to affluent women of intellect attracted to rugged rural masculinity. Discussion also drew parallels with the treatment of nature in Precious Bane and Gilbert

White's Natural History of Selborne previous titles explored by the group. Once again Georgette has contributed notes and reflections.

Lawrence was always aware even as a small child as he walked over the surface of England's green and pleasant land, that his father toiled in the darkness hundreds of feet below.

He would have been acquainted with transcendentalism and the work of Emerson in his essay 'Nature'. Most of the human actions in The White Peacock take place against a

backdrop of nature. Often Lawrence draws a parallel between the mood of nature and human events, never simply describing them for their own sake. His treatment of nature is also used to evoke sensuousness. In his writing of nature Lawrence recorded his identification with the natural world and at the same time his moral judgement on contemporary human society and found some consolation in the force of nature from the hypocrisy and false values of the world of business and industrialized civilization that was desecrating the countryside and thwarting his spirit.

# Jane Austen in situ at Chawton House Library

The book group ended the year with a celebration of Jane Austen in situ at Chawton House Library. A diverse group of Friends of the collection, BFWG members and members of CHWE enjoyed a guided tour, talk and informal chat on the theme of favourite Austen titles in the 'big house' the setting of the kind of social encounters so pithily encapsulated in Jane's dialogue. Tea and halcyon weather contributed to a highly enjoyable 'English idyll' and thanks are due to Georgette Miller for organising the

event. Chawton House library was founded by American entrepreneur and philanthropist Sandy Lerner as a centre for study and research in to literature produced by women with a focus on the long eighteenth century.

The Library Reading Room is open to members of the public who would like to consult the library collections of women's writing, free of charge. The collection can be explored using an online catalogue. <https://chawtonhouse.org>

Chawton House



# Now read on... Book Group 2017/8

The Book Group theme for 2017/18 is 'A Woman's Place'. We will focus on the rich biographical range of the Collection in discussing how women established themselves within places and spaces that moved beyond traditional boundaries of women's role.

The first title up for discussion is the Tamarisk Tree by Dora Russell on Tuesday 10th October at 6.00 pm and we hope to end the year with a visit.



Zainab Husseni at this year's seminar with members of CHWE