

Brave or What?

It all started on the bus tour around Newcastle City Centre the Friday before the NWR National Conference in 2022. Seven of us from our NWR group in Sheffield (Fulwood) were sharing student accommodation and a few of us had gone up the day early and booked the bus tour.

As we toured the city, I explained to Jan that we had been asked to consider hosting the NWR Conference in 2023. A few of us in our group still had fond memories of planning the 2009 NWR Conference in Leeds. Memories of the difficulties (had there been any?) had by now faded and a few of us were warming to the idea of running another Conference - this time in Sheffield.

By the time we got off the bus we had a number of the essentials sorted; the title of the Conference would be - **Women of Steel** (we decided that we would try for an all female line up); The programme cover - if we could get the right permissions would be the iconic statue outside the city hall of the two buffer girls called "Women of Steel".



Speakers came to mind quickly - Dame Julie Kenny was an obvious choice. Ellis and I had recently heard her talk at Wentworth Woodhouse where she had just become the Chair of the Trustees and was masterminding the amazing transformation of the building. Another choice - although Jan was too modest to suggest it herself - was also obvious - her daughter, Clare Nasir. Clare is a meteorologist who has had career in the media presenting the weather and has become an author and climate change communicator. We came up with various ideas for the third speaker but had no doubt that Rosemary, who had been i/c speakers in 2009 would come up with some brilliant ideas, which in fact she did.

Workshops were also given a kick start by the time we came off the bus. Helen, my choir leader, surely could be persuaded - she had done an excellent session for our NWR local group. Rachel, had run a drama workshop in at the Birmingham Conference - maybe she could be persuaded to repeat that triumph - the feedback had been great. Ann, one of our members had been awarded the Mary Stott Award at the Brighton Conference in 2018 for her walk around the South West Coast Path and we were positive that she could be persuaded to plan a local walk. Jan, an author herself, volunteered to run a creative writing workshop and she also suggested that we try a Bookgroup Workshop. I immediately thought that Christina would be a wonderful leader for this Workshop. Every session she had ever run for us before her move to London had been a 11 out of 10 score! We got off the bus thinking that we had the basis of a sound proposition - a recipe for success surely.

We were both relieved and disappointed to be told that the Trustees had already decided Nottingham as a good central venue for 2023. Ah well. Never mind - it had been fun to plan. Little did we know that due to unforeseen circumstances beyond anyone's control that the 2023 NWR Conference would not go ahead. This resulted with an email in the summer 2023 from Gill W explaining that she had heard that we were keen to consider running the next NWR Conference. Damn grapevine! We knew that Rosemary and Ellis were on board but neither Jan nor I quite predicted the rocky road our group would put us through before a final offer could be made. Quite rightly questions of

relevance, efficacy of a One Day Conference and, of course, budget liabilities were thoroughly questioned and needed to be investigated, which indeed they were. The offer of support from the next local NWR group in Sheffield Crookes came as a boost just at the right time, when the keen ones in the group wobbled at the scrutiny of others. Chris, the LO who responded to our email to local groups querying if anyone would be interested in backing this initiative was so supportive as were the whole group when Ellis and I joined them to explain plans so far. Their injection of enthusiasm lifted our spirits and the first meeting at the Crowne Plaza Hotel was held on 5th October 2023.

And the rest, as they say, is history as anyone who attended the on-line AGM last September will remember the great job that Ellis, Jan, Ann and Rosemary did of announcing the venue of the NWR 2024 National One Day Conference. **September 14th 2024.** One of our group's husband, John, introduced us to his U3A Video group and they did a marvellous job of producing a short video clip for the AGM at very short notice. [Shame about the lip sync - but that was one of those annoying techie glitches that suddenly hit at the wrong time.]

Brave or foolhardy? ; Inspired or daydreaming? ; Success or failure? The answer, as they say, is in the lap of the gods but it won't be for the want of trying - very hard - to deliver a Conference worthy of our members. As well as the amazing local groups in Crookes and Fulwood, there is a superb team at National Office providing vital back-up support and knowledge. We also have the treasured gift in Julia (import from the Newcastle and Harrogate National & Regional Conference Committee) who joined us with a wealth of tried and tested finance expertise. What else do we need? - ah well there is the small notion of the necessary number of bums on seats and that's where you come in. To regular NWR Conference goers we shall look forward to welcoming you to Sheffield - the city we love; but we would also like to coax Conference newbies to give it a go. The Booking forms have been out since March 8th - International Women's Day. Please read the detail and do come and join us and make the NWR National Conference 2024 a Triumph.

Maggie Rowlands

NWR - Sheffield (Fulwood)

Maggie is the Chair of the Planning Group for the NWR Conference in Sheffield in 2024 and was the Chair of the Planning Group for the NWR Conference in Leeds in 2009. She was the Secretary for both the Planning Group for the NWR Conference in Birmingham in 2020/21 and in Newcastle in 2022. This is her Swan-song.