**Audio Transcript – Francesca Wade on Square Haunting and Eileen Power**

N.B. There is some audio disruption and it is quieter in some places too.

Sue Donnelly (LSE Archivist):

00:00. . .her talk

Francesca Wade:

Thanks so much Sue. It’s so nice to be here, even if its’s not actually at the LSE

00:07 Even if it's actually not the LLC, where I did so much of the research for this book

00:14 On Eileen Power, whose life and work. It's been so much pleasure to spend the last five years researching

00:20 **And Power is one of the five women, as you say, whose stories I tell in my book and the women are drawn together by**

00:29 the coincidence, I guess, that at some point in the years between the wars they spent time living in Mecklenburg Square out the eastern edge of Bloomsbury. I'm going to share my screen and share a PowerPoint.

00:56 I begin Square Haunting in 2013 when I discovered that two of my favourite writers, HD and Virginia Woolf had lived in the same square during different world wars

01:03 writing about the horrors of air raids and the mundanity of waiting for an impending death separated by 20 years but only a few yards.

01:11 I was intrigued by the school instance. And the more I researched the more fascinating people I discovered her made their homes there, and in particular there seemed to be an abundance of pioneering women writers.

01:23 The more I researched the more I realized that this was partly an accident of geography.

01:28 Bloomsbury had been laid out by the Duke of Bedford over the early part of the 19th century intended as an upper middle-class suburb

01:35 with grand houses and allegedly squares intended for wealthy families.

01:38 But by the time these mansions, were ready to be lived in, these families who could afford them had moved out to fashionable West London.

01:45 These enormous houses at first languished empty and eventually were divided into flats

01:50 And this happened at a time of great social change and women's lives, in particular the campaign for the vote was gaining pace.

01:57 New universities that began to open up and women were entering the workforce in larger numbers than ever before.

02:03 Women were no longer wanting to move directly into marital homes, but were seeking places where they might live alone or with a friend and find a practical living space that would suit the professional ambitions they were starting to nurture.

02:16 And as I walked around Mecklenburg square I began to think about Virginia Woolf’s essay A Room of One's Own in which she argues that a woman needs money and a room of her own if she has to write.

02:26 That room is a very fertile metaphor for what for, and it became, in a way, at the central metaphor or sort of guiding principle for this book too.

02:34 It signifies first and foremost a physical space, a place within the house where a woman can work interrupted.

02:41 But it also contains within it the idea of finding a place in society where her work will be taken seriously.

02:47 where she'll be free to express ourselves as an individual, not constrained by expectations of feminine to not be excluded from education and from institutions

02:57 but where she will find a way of flourishing and fulfilling her potential doing the work she is best suited to do. And this what I think what each of these women in my book was hoping for when she arrived on Mecklenburg Square

03:11 There’s a painting of the square done by the artist Hercule du Plessis, that you see, in the 1930s.

03:19 Each of the women in my book came to Mecklenburg square. At a very different stage. Some were at the very beginning of their careers and others at the end of their lives. Some were at the height of their fame.

03:29 And others came there before they'd worked out who they really were.

03:32 But I realized that the each of them, however long they spent living in the square, was a time of transition and if redefinition

03:39 A chance for them to make a choice about the kind of life they wanted to lead and where they wanted to work, who they wanted to live with and what and how they wanted to write.

03:47 Their paths sometimes cross through mutual friends, literary influences or in one case doomed relationships with the same man.

03:54 But as I researched the back, I realized that what really brought these women together, beyond the coincidence of address, was their determination to find new forms of living,

04:03 to write about women as they had not been written about before to devote their own lives to work and finding a way of living that would enable them to do that, despite the challenges they continually faced as women wanting to be heard in the public world still geared towards men.

04:17 The American poet HD, Hilda Doolittle, arrived there during the First World War.

04:22 and spent decades of her life undangling this turbulent year in a series of letters and novels written at the encouragement of her psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud.

04:30 She began a series of poems, taking their voices from heroines in Greek mythology, allowing them to speak for themselves for the first time.

04:38 Dorothy L Sayers was one of the first women to graduate from Oxford, which opened its degrees to women in 1920, Cambridge didn't until 1948.

04:48 And she arrived there determined to write but unsure where to begin and it was in Mecklenburg Square that she wrote her first detective novel featuring the beloved detective Lord Peter Wimsey.

04:59 Jane Harrisso, the classist moved in in her seventies, after a long career at Cambridge, where she had made her name with the series of

05:05 The historical works which challenge the popular perception of Greek religion and suggested that behind the well-known male gods lay a forgotten history of Mother Goddess worship.

05:15 She arrived in Bloomsbury from Paris, where she'd absconded from the university determined for a fresh start, and spent her last few years living there with her partner Hope Merrlees translating Russian literature.

05:27 And Virginia Woolf moved in on the week that the second world war was declared and as bombs fell around her, she looked back on her own life working on a childhood memoir, a biography of her old friend Roger Fry and her final novel.

05:44 But tonight. I want to focus on Eileen Power, who is shown here in one of her amazing dresses, lecturing at Girton College in Cambridge.

05:55 She was the only one of my subjects to spend more than a few years and Mecklenburg Square, she was there from 1922 until her death in 1940 and it was from the square that she saw and helped to shape the dramatic political developments of the interwar years, both at home and internationally.

06:13 Power arrived in the square with a truly international outlook derived from an unconventional and really quite brave period of travel in her 20s.

06:21 She had studied medieval history at Girton College in Cambridge and then spent a year at the Sorbonne in Paris, and then she received an Albert Carne fellowship

06:31 Which gave applicants money and some of them around the world for the purposes of widening their minds and hoping that they would come back to

06:39 educate their compatriots on what they've seen. Power visited India where she met activists who are lacking to evolve British colonial rule, including Gandhi himself.

06:49 and China, which was in the grip of immense social change. The trip, not only gave her a deep and lasting appreciation of these cultures which fed into all of our subsequent work.

07:00 But made her aware of the human scale of the British Empire and have her own responsibilities as a historian and as a teacher

07:07 to write history with a firm awareness of its bearing on contemporary politics.

07:11 She wrote to her fellow medievalist George Coulton Cotton that the ‘aim of the fellowship has been my ruin for my heart will strife to climb outside it. I think I should have to compromise by looking at the trade between Europe and the East and in the Middle Ages.

07:28 While she was lecturing, she received a letter from the London School of Economics, offering her lectureship in economic history.

07:36 She didn't hesitate to take up the position she was frustrated at Cambridge’s reluctance to

07:41 Follow Oxford and offer women full membership of the University, which she'd been campaigning for for years.

07:47 And she was eager to live outside the increasingly narrow confines of women's college and she knew that working at the LSE would offer her a chance to be at the centre of London's left-wing intelligentia.

08:00 Power had already spent two years at the school as a doctoral student between 1911 and 1913 on a fellowship established in 1984 by Charlotte Payne Townsend, the wife of George Bernard Shaw.

08:13 Which is given specifically to support research into women's lives with the aim of producing a new canon of women's history.

08:20 When Power arrived. The school was young and vibrant if something of a building site. It had been founded by Fabian socialist with a mission to advance the socialist goals in Britain.

08:31 It was coeducational from its foundation and dedicated to social reform, with an emphasis on vocational training.

08:39 Power was taught by Lillian Knowles, the first woman in Britain to work as a full-time teacher of economic history.

08:45 And she worked there alongside a cohort of historians, including Vera Anstey Alice Clark and Ivy Finchback, who were all looking to the past for women’s models and alternatives out of frustration at women's present political disenfranchisement.

09:00 This emotion led to her study of medieval nunneries, which became her first published book and later, to her surprise bestseller, Medieval People,

09:09 Which is a pioneering work of social history which drew its material from the daily lives of ordinary people.

09:15 In this book, Power sets out challenge the view of history of as the public lives of great men and argues instead, as she puts it, ‘that the obscure lives and activities of the great mass of humanity were just as important to consider.’

09:30 History she argued is made not of one off events but of community activity and gradual change. She wrote, ‘not only great individuals, but people as a whole on named undistinguished masses of people now sleeping in unknown graves have also been concerned in the story.’

It's an idea that I think it's grown in popularity today, but in 1924 it was quite revolutionary.

09:55 When Power returned to the LSE in the autumn of 1921 she joined the faculty of radicals, whose collaboration will inspire many of her future projects.

10:06 School had developed apace under the directorship of William Beveridge and was now a leading modern university and over this year the LSE was the epicentre of what Beatrice Webb described as ‘a circle of rebellious spirits and idealist intellectuals.’

10:24 Powers’ colleagues included the economists Lionel Robbins and Friedrich Hayek, the anthropologist Bronislaw

10:32 Malinowski and Harold Laski, whose outspoken lectures led one Conservative MP to denounce the LSE publicly as a hotbed of communist teaching.

10:42 But it's staffs’ intimate involvement in politics, both British and international proved to be the greatest strength.

10:51 On Monday afternoons, staff, and students would convene for what we're going to be known as grand seminars, where issues of the day were discussed without hierarchy, with a sense of urgent practical purpose.

11:03 Power put this attitude into her own teaching and the seminars that she led with her colleague and neighbour on Mecklenburg Square R H Tawney

11:11 soon spilled into long evenings at Mecklenburg Square where students would discuss ideas with their professors as equals.

11:17 Many of these went on to become stalwarts of the Labour Party, including Evan Durbin and Hugh Dalton, and Hugh Gaitskell

11:25 And Power’s regular kitchen dances at 20 Mecklenberg Square were attended by economists, politicians and novelists, including Virginia Woolf, who records sharing a packet of chocolate creams there with the civil servant Humbert Woolf.

11:39 This is the invitation to one of her parties.

11:45 It was in these surroundings that Power realized the full political importance of her work.

11:52 Tawney wrote that economic history was the study, not of the series of past events but of the life of society.

11:58 And working with him and our other colleagues, she began to see parallels between the medieval period and the economics of Soviet Russia, the rising capitalism in Asia

12:08 and the increasing nationalism in Europe. Since a trip to China, Power had been eager to work on comparative history seeking to understand the activities that have brought the world together over time rather than the wars and conquest that had divided people.

12:23 ‘The main business of the historian whose work lies in the School of Social Studies’, she wrote in the lecture delivered at the LSE in 1933, ‘is to contribute as data and the assistance of his method to the general purpose of elucidating the present.’

12:37 And in tandem with the courses that she and Tawney ran within the university exploring the rise of modern industry and the evolution of capitalism,

12:45 Power began to look outside the academy wondering how, how, what could hold meaning in a world which looked increasingly like it was approaching a second World War.

12:55 ‘The only way’, she wrote, ‘to cure the evils, whichever is an out of purely nationalist history and to a lesser extent out of purely class solidarity, is to promote a strong sense of the solidarity of mankind as such, and how can this be better begun than by the teaching of a common history. The Heritage alike of all races and all classes.’

13:17 Over the 1930s Power began to put her energies into a series of broadcasts to children on the BBC focusing on International History designed to instil a sense of world citizenship in a future generation.

13:30 Power had been involved in the work of the League of Nations since her days at Girton and wrote that if the League of Nations is ever to become real children must leave school with some idea of the communities to which they belong. Mankind.

13:44 As well as the broadcast, which she designed along with her sister Rhoda who lived with her in Mecklenburg square and who created dramatic interludes while Power focused on the lessons.

13:55 She worked on a world history textbook to be disseminated in schools and numerous articles protesting against the teaching of purely nationalistic history.

14:04 Which would present other countries as enemies or allies. She urged instead a focus on the many activities which have connected nations such as trade, travel, agriculture, literature and religion.

14:16 Her aim, which she reiterated in articles and speeches throughout her career, was to teach history so as to widen instead of to narrow sympathies and instil in students an essential sense of community.

14:28 Her work stands in dialogue with historians like on Arnold Toynbee and H.G. Wells, whose comparative histories of the world published around this time, Power greatly admired.

14:38 In fact here is a photo of her with HG Wells, which strangely was published in an advertisement for cigars. Am not sure why by that's where I found it!

14:51 This work I think demonstrates Eileen Power’s commitment to a new sort of history and she was developing these ideas at the same time as she was really establishing a new idea of how a woman scholar might be.

15:03 She enjoyed surprising people who saw her fashionable clothes - you can see here - and her light-hearted demeanour as incompatible with their vision of a stale blue stocking.

15:14 Her students remember her unwavering support for their work and her determination to improve the conditions of her employment, especially her pay which she was painfully aware was always lower than her male contemporaries.

15:25 In order to create conditions for a new generation of women scholars to follow after her.

15:32 This sense of anger at the injustice of women's subordination and determination to change it characterizes all the women in this book, who were grappling with the question, as Dorothy Sayers puts it in her amazing novel Gaudy Night, of how women cursed with both hearts and brains might find

15:48 emotional fulfilment without sacrificing their intellectual ambitions. Jane Harrison argued in 1914 that the virtues supposed to be womanly are in the main the virtues generated by inferior social position.

16:02 This theme rebounded through A Room of One's Own were Wolof challenges women to find new ways to write about their own experiences and about women's history in order to create a tradition of subversive women's writing for the future generations to build on.

16:17 And the last year of her life, Woolf began work on a history of English literature told through the character of anonymous which she never finished that would have explored the ways women have been silenced and their work lost or never given a chance to flourish throughout history.

16:32 Now as she researched, she noted in her diary that she'd gone out to buy a packet of cigarettes and a copy of Medieval People seems like a lovely moment of solidarity between my subjects and an example of them reading each other's work and using it to fortify them.

16:49 Power had died earlier that year of a sudden heart attack and her work hasn't survived as frequently as it should.

16:56 I hope that this book and the work being done by other scholars, archivists at the LSE and beyond can restore Power to the collective memory as her work has so much to teach us today. And there she is.

17:17 And that's the talk, which is maybe a little shorter than expected. And I'm very happy to take as many questions as people have

**Susan Donnelly**

17:34 Anybody has got any questions.

17:38 I have one which I was thinking about earlier today. Well, perhaps, while other people get their questions together.

17:49 Which is that Jane Harrison moves to Mecklenburg square after a long kind of career at Cambridge and Eileen Power moves there, much younger,

18:03 Almost deciding that a career in Cambridge isn't feasible, I suppose.

18:08 How how important do you think is that that kind of radical that break because there's no doubt that I think it that Eileen Power was actually very attached to Cambridge

18:19 and I mean, in many ways, emotionally attached to it. And yet she makes this is quite strong radical break, you

18:28 know, both of them did. What did it mean for them walking away from that?

**Francesca Wade**

18:33 Well, I guess. Yeah, the end the contrast between Jane Harrison and Eileen Powers is in some ways a sort of generational one. I mean, Jane, Harrison,

18:42 Was born in 1850 so she's a generation older than Power and the other women in my book and she was one of the very first students

18:49 at Cambridge, where the women's colleges were were new and experimental and and as she, I think, found new and mentally important and supportive community at Newhnam.

19:01 But after she left college, she found it very difficult to be accepted in any other university and she

19:09 applied over and over again for lecture ships and was constantly rejected and ended up really forging a career for herself and about side the Academy. She she

19:20 took walking tours around museums, she lectured in schools and and working men's clubs and she traveled across Europe and the Middle East visiting archaeological digs,

19:30 Working on cutting edge material while, you know, her contemporaries are in their studies. And it wasn't until she came back

19:39 To Cambridge, though, when she was finally offered a job at Newnham, and that she really had the time and space to just settle down and work on

19:46 on the books that would kind of revolutionize and ideas around Greek religion, but I think in her 70s, Jane Harrison,

19:55 like Eileen Power was getting frustrated at the kind of intransigence of the

20:01 of the University. It's it's sense that these women's colleges, which were very supportive and themselves weren't properly considered part of the university, and the continual refusal to offer women degrees. I think for both of them

20:15 just made it made it impossible for them to sort of see themselves continuing to work there. And so for Jane Harrison, her, her response was to leave academia totally and go to Paris and sort of started fresh there at the age of 75 to turn her attention to Russian and live among a community of of emigres and work on literary magazines and doing very different things. But Power

20:46 took a different approach, which was to come to London to kind of forge a path for herself in a very different environment and and to work alongside her colleagues and her friends and her neighbours in a sort of egalitarian

21:03 situation of the of the LSE. I think there was a different response to to this and she worked both from the outside and from the inside. I guess to

21:15 to forge a career for herself as a kind of public intellectual which took a great deal of self-confidence and she often is she really enjoyed surprising people and and defying people's expectations. But did of course find it wearing as well.

**Susan Donnelly**

21:36 I just find it interesting, because I think the LSE in many ways, was founded by the Webbs to be

21:42 Absolutely radically different from places like Oxford, Cambridge, or even the older northern redbrick universities with

21:50 places where there was part time evening teaching people could still work and study at the same time.

21:57All those things. It made it quite, you know, it was, it was a conscious decision. I think even the fact that it's a school rather than a college is almost a conscious decision to be different.

**Francesca Wade**

22:09 Yeah. And so many of the faculty members were standing for Parliament, or were in a workplace involved with with politicians and the Labour Party, and I think her

22:18 Sort of network really expanded far beyond academia and it was a real chance to be in a really sort of

22:27 Modern and influential environment. And I think that's what's in it, what made her history work look outwards so much as well because it really did feel like it had a bearing land on the wider world.

**Susan Donnelly**

22:39 So we've got a nice list of questions for you now. So I'm going to ask if people would like to, if you can, when I introduce you. If you could unmute yourself, you want to

22:53 Deliver your own question. Otherwise, I will do it for you. So So Nicci, you're, you're there with a question. If you'd like to ask it.

23:13 Oh, maybe I'll, I'll kind of read it out then say, did you find other interesting subjects who lived in Mecklenburg Square and how did you actually

23:23 choose who to to kind of select. I know from having read the book, so . . .

**Francesca Wade**

23:30 Yes, there were there were other women who I decided to leave out, who would have been brilliant to include and I guess I left them out, partly when that seemed like there wasn't enough

23:46 archival material to give a kind of good chapter to each of them, when you've got to be sort of competing with someone like Virginia Woolf, who has left so much material. There was a urm

23:59 And I guess, also, I wanted to keep the focus on on writers and there was an amazing woman lawyer called Helena Normanton who was one of the very first women to practice at the bar, who

24:11 who lived in Mecklenburg square. She had qualified, but women weren't allowed to take up positions and and on the day that in 1919 when the Sex Disqualification Removal Act was passed, she apparently walked from Mecklenburg Square down

24:28 To the Inns of Courts to kind of a petition for for herself to be, you know, finally given her due.

24:36 In fact I think all her papers are in the Women’s Library at the LSE but it seems that she destroyed all the

24:43 personal papers so it would have been difficult, I think, to, to have given us a portrait of her in a life as well as

24:51 her achievements which was the problem I faced with Eileen Power of course as well. And in the archive is a huge amount of sort of personal material from her early years at Girton, but

25:03 much less after she came to the LSE, the papers become much more professional. And it's really a record of devotion to her students

25:13 and to her work, but much less of her personality. Although I got a sense in her early of positive sense of humuor and and indignation and justice. Yeah. There are lots of other people. And I kept coming across this amazing artists and

25:34 And suffragettes the Kenny sisters, I think lived in Mecklenberg Square, just before my sort of cut off time, which was the first world war because I wanted the book to cover the interwar period. But yeah, the more years of research in place more fascinating stories you uncover

**Susan Donnelly**

25:54 There are two slightly related questions that I'm going to kind of bring together here Alina Congreve has asked

26:04 Eileen Power does actually have a proper Wikipedia entry, unlike a lot of other women, but how well is she reflected in in web entries and textbooks and other sources.

26:14 And perhaps slightly related to that and Felicity Jones is asking, why do you think she's not been better known or been a subject of more extensive study, although there is a biography of her by Maxine Berg.

**Francesca Wade**

26:28 Yeah, Maxine Berg’s biography. I think it's published about 2000 was the first to have a full, full study of Power, which I guess was part of a sort of a, a move of historians and economic historians to

26:45 To really look back on this interwar period, particularly around LSE as a really exciting moment of activity, particularly among among women. Historians working in the same place and and doing work that that shouldn't be forgotten.

27:02 I think Power, a lot of a lot of Power’s work I guess survives in quite intangible forms. I mean, she dedicated so much energy to her teaching and to these

27:13 broadcasts and to and to articles and the popular press what which, you know, which do risk getting lost, or else their impressions are kind of intangible no effects on on people's lives, rather than on

27:29 Something that can be cited more easily. And a lot of our friends and colleagues were and they were standing in an

27:37 election and and publishing in a big books, but she she did a lot of collaborations, which I suppose is the kind of work that that often gets forgotten about and

27:49 her insistence on sort of looking outside of the academy and looking to children, as soon as the next generation. Whose, whose attitudes needed to be changed in order to ensure peace for the future and

28:03 It was, I guess it sort of selfless act in a way because it wasn't built it, you know, to ensuring her own name

28:10 and ensuring lasting fame. And after she died, she instructed her sister's Rhoda and Beryl to destroy her personal papers, which is why not so much of that survives so and so the portraits of her that have been written after

28:30 After need to fill in some gaps and, you know, and which is one reason why it did work to sort of include her in this form, where the method of putting place her life, alongside others could help to fill in some of those gaps for the other residences in the

28:49 In their work. What she was doing on on women's history could come out with by being read alongside Virginia Woolf, who knew who read and admired her work and

29:00 her Room of One’s Own

29:02 really speaks to so many of the same concerns as Power. It wasn't ever working in isolation.

**Susan Donnelly**

29:09 I know that in his address at her funeral Tawney said that she was her own greatest work rather than her acadmic. And it was actually her whole life, which was, you know, kind of demonstrated who she was. She wasn't somebody who sat down and [inaudible]

29:29 Lecturing and everything that she kind of who she was. Erm

29:38 Inaudible Taylor was asking about the connections with disseminating history to children through the medium of radio and the musical interludes and is asking, was it part of a series aimed at similar audiences such as Peter and Marjorie Quinnel.

**Francesca Wade**

29:58 It was, it was an ongoing long running series and she was one of the first

30:04 In the BBC’s schools broadcasts series, which was started by Hilda Matheson, who was the talks producer at the BBC, who was a close friend of Eileen Powers and persuaded several people on the several series of these talks.

30:23 Which which she and Rhoda did together. And it has some wonderful pictures in the BBC archives of people recording these these programs with with actors sort of sharing the sound effects and they were they were pioneering

30:42 projects. I mean, it was a new, the technology was was brand new, and the [inaudible]

30:47 Find them to produce these talks that could be broadcast across, across the country directly into schools and would be supplemented by sort of brochures and reading lists

30:59 to the teachers. And so I think they they kind of relished the democratic

31:05 aspect of it and the and the chance to speak directly to people. When Hilda Matheson desperately wanted HG Wells to broadcast on the BBC,

31:17 Eileen Power sort of arranged it by inviting them both over to to lunch on Mecklenburg Square so that

31:25 Hilda Matheson could sort of charm H G Wells, who had refused to broadcast, and she wrote him very persuasive letter afterwards saying how

31:32 How kind of exciting it is to be able to have a free hand and know that your words are going going straight into people's living rooms. There is amazing correspondence at the BBC BBC archives between her and the editors at the BBC.

31:50 asking her to include more images of the soldiers in her textbooks and to talk more about war. She wrote back very firmly to say that’s completely against my principles.

**Susan Donnelly**

32:07 And they also wrote a book together didn’t they? Boys and Girls of History, which was kind of a another kind of side

32:15 Connected to all this move. It's another example of how both places like LSE and the BBC at this time are really new, so they can kind of

32:24 do different things. They're not tied down by, you know, a tradition or this is the way you you should do things and you know Rhoda had quite an extensive career at the BBC working with children broadcasting.

Francesca: Yeah.

32:41I'm Bilaccah has asked them about her personal life - family, partners, whatever. So [inaudible] I suppose it is a fascinating story

**Francesca Wade**

32:59 Yeah. There’s some amazing letters from Girton, when she's just leaving University kind of railing against her her friends, who were Girton students together, but going straight off marrying and having children. And she thought they were wasting their potential. And she wrote to her friend.

33:23 Marjorie \* Rice that the cause that I care about most of all is the cause of women's rights and something like the ideal wife is modeled on this algebraic negative and you know, you and I have to make sure that we never fall into these traps.

33:41 Was briefly engaged to a man called Reginald JOHNSTON, who she met while she was in China. He was the

33:51 tutor to the last Emperor of China – there’s an amazing film about it which which he sort of has a starring role in.

33:59 And it's a bit unclear what sort of happened or why that relationship didn't work out. And my sort of speculation is really that

34:11 that she at this point in her career was was developing and she was being invited to to go and teach in America and to to travel the world. And I think it was a certain kind of ambivalence on both sides, about the prospect of settling down.

34:27 But she did get married and when she has a 47 to Michael Boston, who was one of her research assistants at the LSE and and I guess the theme across the whole book [some sound disturbance] relates to relationships and the sort of relationships all of these women were looking to form or avoid. Dorothy Sayers in

34:53 her time in Mecklenburg square

34:56 had a relationship with a kind of very condescending older writer who

35:01 who really didn't think much of her writing and and really ran down her confidence. And in her novel Gaudy Night, she creates a character Harriet Vane, who is

35:10 modelled on her, who she sort of manoeuvrers so that she can, without losing dignity, get married to the detective Lord Peter Whimsey. And it's an amazing, the whole book is an amazing kind of interrogation of

35:26 the way that a relationship can be established on the basis of equality.

35:33 And when Power announced her engagement Michael Poston to their colleague J H Clapton, apparently he and his family raised a toast to Harriet Vane and Lord Peter Lindsay,

35:44 which was sort of shorthand for for this is a kind of perfect match. And it seems from the small bits of correspondence that I've been able to see that this relationship was

35:57 one where they're sort of shared work really took precedence. They've worked together and written together for decades. And it was clear that

36:06 You know that that that was the basis of their partnership.

36:12 And the tragedy is that Power died, a few years later of a heart attack and

The relationship didn't have the longevity that that it would have otherwise would have had.

**Susan Donnelly**

36:29 I think I've always found her kind of her own family background actually fascinating that

36:37 She and her two sisters, were all. . . will I think have father actually was, he was in prison for fraud leaving her family and her effectively as a kind of orphan

36:52 with with her mother, and they went to live with grandparents. But interestingly, for the period. I think all three girls were brought up with the idea that they had to earn their own living.

37:04 And they went to live in Oxford so that they could go to Oxford High School and have a good education. Eileen and Beryl both went to Girton I think, and then

37:16 Rhoda became a leading civil servant and Rhoda of course then went to the BBC. And I always say to people, the thing that I always find amazing is these three women, they all have Oxford DNB entries which is is quite amazing for the period that they

37:35 achieved something that kind of merited that kind of recognition in quite different fields. But they're all quite clearly brought up with the idea that they were going to have to fend for themselves in some way and they all did you know so

37:49 That is also quite an interesting background.

[Inaudible] is asking if any of her books are still in print. I think Medieval Women is still available and

38:01 I do know that Medieval People and her book on nunneries is actually on Project Guttenberg if you wish to just download it, or read it on mine, so I'm

**Francesca Wade**

38:15 Posten edited medieval women death, which was a collection of pieces about the lives of individual medieval women, which which she has sort of had worked on around the same time as Medieval People and that was published. I think relatively recently.

Sue: 74 I think.

38:40 Yeah, and it's still in print it. Yeah, Medieval People is quite easy to get hold off but I don't think it is actually in print. It was one of the first Pelican books. So it was sort of mass produced and in paperback and very widely known at the time.

**Susan Donnelly**

39:00 The copy in our houses was actually a school prize from my relatives in the 1950s, so was obviously given to school children then ia something something to read.

Yeah, Oona Gay is asking whether LSE, was ever challenged about the lack of equal pay for women lectures like Power.

39:25 They were certainly challenged by the women lecturers. Speaking as the LSE archivist, certainly Lillian Knowles, who was Eileen Power’s predecessor, was very vocal and feisty about her desire to be paid the same as her contemporaries, and certainly there are letters in Eileen Powers personal file where she writes to the director, saying, don't you think it's time I'm paid such and such, rather than what I'm being paid now. And I suspect externally, no.

40:09 I don't think that there was that much pressure, but certainly internally there was, and indeed when Eileen Power was seeking to be paid the salary of reader as opposed to the lecturer

40:22 Lillian Knowles just turned around and said I thought she was already getting it and why not?! You know so so

40:29 they were very different characters in terms of politics, but they were both absolutely together on the need for for women to be equally recognized for the work tthat hey did so don't have you found anything else FRANCESCA?

**Francesca Wade**

40:44 No just that it was possible to trace in the archive her own sort of gradual incremental rise in salary and robust letters back when she was offered me no rise or a small rise and pointing out exactly how much work, she was doing more work than

41:04 than her colleagues. And how you know how she was covering all sorts of courses and editing the economic history review and, you know, running seminars and lectures and during the war, taking on Poston’s students as well as her own when he was sent off on diplomatic missions.

**Susan Donnelly**

41:22 Yeah.

41:25 Certainly Lillian Knowles and Eileen Power were very well known for the fact

41:33 they were not just doing research, the perennial question in academia, but I mean I think Lillian Knowles was one of the first people to actually have office hours for students and Eileen Powers also kind of prioritized that side of her work

**Francesca Wade**

41:49 The difference between her and Jane Harrison and actually when, because Jane Harrison had spent sort of 40 years without a kind of a

41:57 permanent paid job, and so when she arrived at Newnham, she insisted that she wasn't going to spend this time on teaching. She wanted it to be, you know, research and writing time only, and

42:09 and I think they were sort of slightly surprised, but sort of agreed. And I think her colleagues were pretty annoyed that she got away with it.

42:18 But yeah, I think for Power, you know, the kind of collaboration and community was, you know, personal as well as political as well and it seems that the energy she put into her students is enormous.

**Susan Donnelly**

42:32 Debbie, do you want to ask your question about Paul Robeson?

**Debbie Challis**

42:38 Hello. Yes, sorry. I won’t turn on my video. But just to say, I was really interested in the Soho Club and Paul

42:47 Paul Robeson was barred from and just her attitudes to race and segregation of the period anyway, given she's writing on International History.

42:55 I just wondered to, if you could say a little bit more about that.

**Francesca Wade**

42:58 Yeah, I wish I knew more about her connection with Paul Robeson, and I tried hard to sort of look into it but I there's just an anecdote of

43:07 Of her going to her club, The Gargoyle Club I think it was in Soho with Paul Robeson, the black American actor who was refused entry and she resigned her membership

43:22 on the spot is the story. And I think I did look into it, I think his wife Eslanda had a connection to the LSE and possibly . . .

43:33 that would be in my notes somewhere. I can't remember. But I was interested, especially because Paul Robeson in the 30s acted in a film alongside HD called borderline where

43:46 she played a very, very neurotic character and her partner Bryher I think provided the finance the film has an amazing cameo here in it. Um

43:59 Yeah, I don't know, Sue, have you come across Eslanda anywhere.

**Susan Donnelly**

44:04 Eslanda actually studied at LSE she studied anthropology under Malinowski and was there at the same time as people like Jomo Kenyatta and it's kind of part of her development into Pan Africanism and opposition in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. There is actually a

44:28 On the LSE History blog is actually an article about Eslanda

44:32 Robeson on there and it's possible that of course Eileen Power knew Eslanda Robeson, you know, in the LSE estate, as it were, um,

44:43 But yeah, Eslanda. She wasn't actually studying for a degree, but she was kind of with a lot of the kind of post-doctoral students going to anthropology seminars and things, was very much kind of around the school in the 1930s.

**Francesca Wade**

44:57 Well, the attitude would have been totally consistent with her politics. I mean, she was, she was always alert to racism and classism as well as to gender and her.

45:10 China was her real sort of passion and her ideas that the history, the history of the world should be taught in not as the gradual move from, you know, of power from east to west, but as you know, a

45:23 collaboration. And she was very, when Japan invaded China in the 30s, she was, she really campaigned for people and in Europe to take that sort of aggression seriously and, you know, not, not just

45:41 To see it as something happening far away that didn't have any bearing on them. But, you know, but to see it as an important new violation in its own sake.

**Susan Donnelly**

45:53 And Alice Autumn, do you want to ask your question. Can you take yourself off mute, I realize now that one person couldn't say their question.

**Alice Autumn**

46:09 Sorry. . . It was quite interesting what you said about her beautiful dresses and clothes I just wonder if there's any detail on that and like, where did she get them and much did she get a lot of pushback on kind of being an intellectual but having an interest in fashion.

**Francesca Wade**

46:27 Yeah, she apparently she flew to Paris, whenever she had an article published and bought a new dress there.

46:36 I wasn't able to find a complete source for that.

46:41 She had when she was in China. She bought a lot of kind of embroidered gowns, which she walked out of quite flamboyantly around London. In fact, she even lent them to a theatre on point for a performance.

46:55 And, yeah, I mean I think you know her love of fashion was, you know, was was a was an ongoing personal interest and she

47:05 Even when she was at Girton she wrote that she thought that the students and the fellow dons weren't taking her seriously because

47:12 and she was rather disparaging about how sort of unfashionable, the other, the other Girton women were. And I think increasingly, it was a kind of a performance to, you know, as a display of,

47:27 you know that the kind of traditional feminine, it needn't be incompatible with with the intellect.

47:34 And she, you know, she was very aware that that often, she would turn up at a dinner in her honour and people would assume she was someone's wife and I think she relished the chance to kind of prove them wrong, and she had total confidence in her ability to

47:52 you know, to have the chance to change their mind and I think she saw that as part of her her project I guess to to change perceptions of what women intellectuals might look like.

**Susan Donnelly**

48:08 When she talks about when she's studying at the Sorbonne as a kind of graduate, you know, graduate student. She does talk about going out and buying two wonderful hats and dresses and that she hasn't got the money for it, but, you know what the heck really.

Francesca: yeah she spent all of her stipend on what she wants

Sue:

48:33 I've always liked the fact that the beginning of her Will, it's all about giving away her earrings and her Chinese gowns and coats, but she gives to close for various bits of jewellery. She gives to her close friends and her sisters and particular embroidered gowns and things so

48:54 It's almost like they're the most important things that have to be, you know, they have to go to the right people. Yeah, cherish them and

49:03 I don't know. I've not seen much that’s overtly opposing how she dressed or whatever within the LSE context, but I do know that kind of the school secretary under Beveridge, Jesse Mair was really not very fond of of Eileen Power. I think they've really were the chalk and cheese and

49:27 I can imagine, Jesse Muir, was abit at times a slightly dour Scot, used to be a bit too stereotyping and would have found Eileen Power’s flamboyance rather difficult to to take and I think

49:43 That that may have been a bit of bit of credit criticism there but but not explicit. I didn't think at the time, I think, if anything, it was probably just a wonderful flush of colour in a set of buildings that were not always that bright and cheerful.

49:59 I'm hoping I'm not missing out too many questions.

50:11 There's one about Ailena again has asked whether there’s any moves within the history profession to rebalance the role of women historians . . .

50:26 Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Francesca Wade**

50:31 I’m not sure. I mean, I think, I think that there's definitely sort of moves within within biography and I guess in writing today, to recover voices that have been left out. And reconceive a history very much along the lines that that Power was suggesting.

50:50 And looking looking back through archives to, you know, to sort of uncover stories of people like the made the ordinary medieval people whose lives, she voiced so vividly. Often, you know, creating

51:05 Very sort of novelistic portraits out of, out of the detail that that exists and, you know, filling it in with, you know, with kind of expertly

51:13 informed speculation and it creates a very sort of modern texture, I think. And, you know, really sort of shook up the idea of what what history or

51:26 biography would be which Woolf, of course, writes a lot about as well. How in a biography, it's no longer to be, you know, just sort of straightforward

51:35 In a narrative linear tellings of you know public public deeds done by great men, but it needs to perhaps be impressionistic which a major focus on it kind of inner, inner life and not just be sort of, you know, be praiseworthy

51:51She writes a lot about the the history of London and the way the sort of history it tells through its statues and

51:58 I sort of start my book with this anonymous woman who's kind of outside the entrance to Mecklenburg Square and who sort of symbolizes for Woolf all of the kind of lost, lost histories that have that haven't been told.

52:14 I think Power is, you know, is very alive to that need and and now for sure, there's plenty of [\*] for London to tell different stories through statues. And I think, yeah, the same is definitely happening in history and I mean I hope in the university as well.

**Susan Donnelly**

52:35 Lise Butler, would you like to ask your question.

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**Lise Butler**

52:42 Sure. Hi, I am I'm dialing in from my kitchen. Well, cooking as one does on Zoom events these days. So my question was about history.

52:54 So Power as you acknowledge in the book was one of a group of

53:02 Quite professionally respected at the time very serious and freshly prominent women historians who were active in London and throughout the UK, but it seems to me that their legacy and subsequently been largely forgotten.

53:16 I wonder if you think that maybe their historical legacy and their, their contributions to social history and women's history

53:23 were obscured by later radical social stories of the 50s, 60s and 70s.

53:28 And and I'm thinking specifically of, you know, groups like the Communist Party Historians’ group or the new left there's sort of this wave of social history that that tends to define social history for historians um retrospectively

53:40 And it always seems to me like that amazing group of women historians like Eileen Power.

53:45 And others sort of get written out of the kind of story of women's history and social history in in Britain. And so I wonder if you know if there. I mean, there has been some resurrection of these people in the last decade or so amongst historians, but I'm wondering if you think that

54:03 that they've been unnecessarily obscured, and if there could be more work to do in that respect.

**Francesca Wade**

54:08 Yeah, I think, I think they could be. Yeah, I suppose it's it's interesting how cycle how history sort of guys and cycles. And I mean, a lot of the women of the spirit of the sort of 1920s, where kind of rediscovered in the

54:23 1970s as of out of a sort of impulse to . . . often and kind of led by publishers, sort of, you know, Virago and the women's press and places like that to

54:34 To bring back you know writers like like HD and even Virginia Woolf, who, who often in the 50s and after she died was

54:43 her sort of political work was really sidelined in favour of self portrait of power as this as this sort of

54:50 eccentric and and you know I think we reduce that of create history if in

54:57 in the image of our of our present and and I guess that's why you know these histories, need to be

55:03 continually retold and and reassessed. And I mean someone like it Eileen Powers’ work speaks so clearly to today. I mean, researching her for the last few years,

55:14 you know, thinking about Brexit, for example, and reading her, you know, her warnings against the dangers of thinking in isolation and, you know, and writing nationalist rather than internationalist history.

55:28 You know, makes makes it feel like a sort of timely reassessment and you know future generations will will come to her and others with different perspectives too.

**Susan Donnelly**

55:41 I think just one, just one final question, as we're hitting 7.30 now.

Oliver Baschiano is asking, having spent so long with the subjects of your book, did you find yourself liking some of your subjects, more than others?

**Francesca Wade**

55:59 I did.

**Susan Donnelly**

56:02 Of course you know, I'm going to really enjoy writing about, I don't know. HD, but actually finding it with someone else who you didn’t expect.

**Francesca Wade**

56:10 Yeah I think so. I think I mean honestly I think Eileen Power was my was my favorite, just because she was so

56: 20 unexpected and she was r definitely the one I knew least about before I started researching. And now just found her voice and her and her politics so appealing and

56:32 Ideas. I only wish that there could have been more of a, have more of her personality in it because I think she would have been a lot of fun to spend time with. I found an amazing

56:45 correspondence between Powers and Dorothy L. Sayers who just met each other once at a party and and Eileen Power ended up sending her a book, which she recommended. And I think those two, if they'd got to know each other better would have got on very well. There's a definitely, both had the best senses of humor.

57:06 of these five, I think. And then I guess I came to like them all in different ways and they're not at all, well some of them are sort of role models in some ways and some not very much at all.

57:17 But I think when reading them together and and in looking at the ways they all sort of dealt with, with the same kind of problems and questions which, you know, are just ones that we're still working out today was validating and fascinating.

**Susan Donnelly**

57:37 Well, thank you. FRANCESCA for a really fascinating talk on one that has prompted so many interesting questions as well. I think it's been a really interesting evening and

57:50 As people who know me know I can usually talk about Eileen Power for quite a long time because I just find her and Knowles such interesting

57:57 parallels but really interesting subjects. And thanks to everybody for your questions. And it was so, so good. Debbie, do you have anything you want to say before we finish.

**Debbie Challis**

58:13 About our next event which is 21st October, and it's actually about Borderline, which is the film that Francesca mentioned, which has HD in it. And if anybody wants to watch it beforehand it’s on You Tube. We're going to have a discussion about that and about Eslanda Robson’s politics.

58:29 So yeah, but I just wanted to say thank you and please to put any comments in the chat.

58:34 But thanks very much to Francesca, and I can't, there's lots of people saying, I really look forward to reading the book and I can honestly say get a physical copy because it looks gorgeous as well, doesn't it, so . . .

**Susan Donnelly**

58:47 Get a physical copy, which I sadly left in my office in March which I realized that I was doing this but anyway. Yeah, it's a great read and full of really, and just interesting to find out about so many of these these women and their places that link between people and place is so strong.

**Francesca Wade**

59:06 Oh, thank you. And it's a nice to be here, even if not in the actual LSE.

59:12 And thank you for again for your support and writing it and researching it, because they did lots of it at the at the women's library and there's lots of getting out the boxes of Eileen Powers and R. H. Tawney's files and finding gems within. So thank you again.

**Susan Donnelly**

59:27 Okay, well, thanks to everybody and have a good evening.

**Debbie Challis**

59:31 I'm going to end the event now, just so you know, everybody. Thank you.

**Francesca Wade**

59:35 Thank you.