

## Lecture Reports

*Brian Little*

### Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2010

#### *Women workers in war and peace: the General Post Office, 1914-1939*

Dr Helen Gow

Despite the time boundaries in her title, Dr Gow began with some consideration of the position of women workers during the nineteenth century. In particular they had been letter carriers from the mid-century and had achieved much greater acceptance in rural areas than in urban districts. Although there was an increased take-up of women workers in London from 1871, there were issues of segregation as well as job exclusion (mostly from better paid work). Marriage was perceived as a barrier to employment and certainly to job progression.

Coming on to World War I, Helen Gow stressed male dominance in some job areas and also deplored the trend for employment of women in positions involving unsociable hours. Often these posts carried lower payments than those made to men in similar situations. These inequalities resulted in a long campaign against the *status quo*, led especially by the Federation of Women Civil Servants. This was featured in the work of some cartoonists and reflected in a growing spirit of camaraderie amongst women workers.

In the subsequent question session many members reflected on issues of inequality.

### Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010

#### *Oxford's Historic Waterways: the River Thames and the Oxford Canal*

Mark Davies

A tour of waterway-related buildings quickly expanded into a consideration of Town *versus* Gown issues. Clearly the identification of Oxford as a watery city soon led to the conclusion that river and canal impacted more on the former than the latter. Despite admitting a gravel river terrace location for many of the university buildings, the commercial lifeline provided by the Oxford Canal was an overriding factor in relation to the town. This was reflected not only in commodities, notably coal, but also in employment, with working families concentrated in the St Thomas Parish and especially Fisher Row.

Mark Davies then focussed on key people such as Daniel Harris, the brains behind early lock construction, and also the designer of the Oxford Canal Company house, whose logo sign was one of the few that combined the symbols of both town and gown.

A part of his talk of special interest was that devoted to Jericho and the battle for control of the boatyard and the site of the Worcester Street canal basin.