**BATH ROYAL LITERARY & SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTION**

**Tuesday 13 March 2018 ● 7. 30 pm**

**Slide 1: Holding slide BBWA logo**

**Just before starting …**

**Slide 2 on screen – Suffragettes/BBWA ladies**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen and thank you for inviting me to speak to you this evening. I am delighted to be here - if a little daunted by such an auspicious audience!

When Andreas asked me way back in September of last year to come along tonight and speak on behalf of the BBWA I quite readily said yes. It was only in the weeks that followed I began to wonder what I had said yes too! Womens networking, and the opportunities it brings for business is a vast and varied subject.

‘Networking’ is a word that we hear, or, get an invitation to do, almost every working day! But what exactly is it |and how does it work today, | indeed how has it worked throughout the past century. I thought a little literal definition of the word might help!

**Slide 3- What is networking?**

The OED says it is a:

1. ‘supportive system of sharing information and services amongst individuals and groups having a common interest, - i.e. *working mothers in the community use networking to help themselves manage successfully*. –
2. ‘The design, establishment, or utilisation of a computer network
3. Of or relating to a network or networking system

**Slide 4 – Associated words**

There were some lovely and amusing words to depict networking:

* Associate
* Circulate
* Hobnob
* Meet
* Mingle
* Schmooze
* make contact
* rub elbows
* meet and greet - *the one word not there was communication!!*

Networking has been happening for centuries in one form or other. From the hoards in ancient times, fighting for land and riches, to the network of those who favoured Oliver Cromwell and brought down a King: From the network of spies and code breakers in the 1940s who helped win a world war to those that march for causes, be it CNDs Ban the Bomb campaign in the 60s and 70s, to the marches of today against government policies and the topic of the moment - equality! A topic that has never really gone away!

Having read all these definitions it seemed only logical to find out where women’s networking in particular has taken us over the last few decades, and how it aides us today.

As any successful business person will tell you - business and life are ultimately about the relationships you forge. Networking is about making connections and building enduring, mutually beneficial relationships

**Slide 5- BBWA networking slide**

Bath Business Women’s Association has been in existence for nearly 22 years, having been founded in 1996 by a one woman business, working from home. Founder Debbie Hobbs found herself isolated and lacking support from anyone else. At that point she decided to set up a contact point for other women in the same situation, hence, two or three ladies started meeting over a coffee and discussing their businesses, and the problems they had to overcome as working mothers. The rest as they say is history! A much quieter revolution, but one that evolved to where the BBWA is today.

As I speak, the BBWA boasts nearly 600 ladies, either working in their own business, or working as an employee, director or partner, in a wide variety of professions.

Today the possibilities for women are seemingly endless, although it hasn’t always been that way.

**6. Suffragette slide**

I am reminded that 2018 is the centenary of the time when the Suffragette movement was eventually given the right to vote, (although a woman had to be 30 years old) so on reflection it seemed a timely moment to go back in time a little, to when one specific female networking group started to make in-roads into what we have today.

On the 6th February I was privileged to be part of the Suffragette Centenary celebrations at St Michaels Church in Bath, where the Bath Soroptimists hosted a service with many women’s groups across Bath. It involved stories set to music and in particular one local resident Pat Stevens, talking about her great aunt Laura Ashworth, who was an active suffragette. She never related her story to her family and Pat had pages of her diary that came to light after her death. It was only listening to her story you begin to realise how brave these women were, particularly at the start of the last century when women still counted for very little.

But organised feminism, did not really kick off until the first Women's Conference held in Seneca Falls, America, in **1848**. To begin with, the Women's Movement evolved out of social reform groups such as the Abolition of Slavery and the Social Purity and Temperance movements.

**7. Slide of women in 1800s**

In the early **1800s**, - in fact for most of the 19th Century, **women were** second-class citizens. ... **Women were** not encouraged to obtain a real education, or pursue a professional career. After marriage, **women** did not have the right to own their own property, keep their own wages, or sign a contract. In addition, all **women were** denied the right to vote. Imagine trying to invoke that today!

But by the close of the century the issue of the vote had become the focus of women's struggle for equality – a struggle that amazingly still goes on today. The **movement** to gain votes for women had two wings, the suffragists and the **suffragettes**. The suffragists had their origins in the mid nineteenth century, while the **suffragettes** came into being early in the 20th century.

**8. Slide: Votes for women & Millicent Fawcett**

The **Suffragettes** pursued the right for women to vote. Although the move for women to have the vote had really **started** in 1897 when Millicent Fawcett founded the National Union of Women's Suffrage. “Suffrage” means the right to vote – hence its inclusion in Fawcett's title.

The suffragette network came of age as the 20th century dawned. The Women's Social and Political Union – founded by Emmeline Pankhurst.

**9. Slide of Emmeline Pankhurst**

Emmeline was born on Moss side, Manchester in 1858 and was introduced at the age of 14 to the women’s suffrage movement. In 1879 she married Barrister Richard Pankhurst, known for supporting the women’s cause. She was always politically motivated and persuaded her daughters to join the cause, although some of her militant tactics caused a rift in the family that was never healed. But her work for those in the Manchester slums went on throughout her life.

The WSPU held its inaugural meeting in 1903 and began a campaign of civil disobedience to force government to grant women the right to vote. Emmeline believed that in order to be effective, the movement would have to become radical and militant. The Daily Mail gave them the name "Suffragettes".

What began with women chaining themselves to railings, escalated to smashing windows, arson and hunger strikes. Not something one would normally advocate, but at that point it was the only thing they realised would work. They needed to make the government take them seriously. Like many suffragettes, Pankhurst was arrested many times. She went on hunger strike herself, during which she was subjected to violent force-feeding. However, the authorities were terrified that one of them would die in prison, therefore affording them martyrdom. So if they went on hunger strike, they were allowed home until they recovered their health and then re-arrested.

**10. Slide of the Hyde Park mass**

As early as 1908, 250,000 women gathered in Hyde Park, London in support of women’s suffrage.

**11. Slide of Emily Davidson.**

Women fought and died, for the cause. We all know the story of suffragette Emily Davison who was killed, when she threw herself under the King's horse at the Derby in 1913. This was a protest at the government’s refusal to enfranchise women. Her funeral was attended by several thousand people and certainly gave the cause a greater awareness. Government officials realised this was not going to go away, however much they wanted it to.

**12/13. Women working in 1916-18**

The First World War proved to be a turning point. Pankhurst put the campaign of civil disobedience on hold, while women worked on farms and in armament factories and generally supported the men at the front. **(Discuss slides)**

WW1 ended in 1918, and Lloyd George's government finally gave in. They really didn’t want to go back to violence and civil disobedience after so many years of fighting, - and allowed women aged 30+ to vote. But it took another decade to put male and female voters on an equal footing.

The 1918 Parliamentary Act granted the vote to women over the age of 30 who were householders; the wives of householders; occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5, and graduates of British universities.

Not all activists were women of course! The suffrage campaign and particularly militancy, is almost always presented as a protest by women only. However, this is untrue, as many men were committed to the suffrage cause.

**14. SLIDE of Keir Hardie and George Lansbury**

Keir Hardie MP regularly raised questions in the House of Commons, and George Lansbury MP resigned his seat over the issue. Lansbury was also arrested at a suffrage rally in 1913 after speaking in support of the campaign of arson attacks.

Pankhurst continued in politics all her life and worked tirelessly for improvements in the Manchester Workhouses. She was selected as the Conservative candidate for [Whitechapel and St Georges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitechapel_and_St_Georges_%28UK_Parliament_constituency%29) in 1927, but died in June 1928, only weeks before the Conservative government's [Representation of the People Act (1928)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representation_of_the_People_Act_1928) |extended the vote to all women over 21 years of age, on 2 July 1928. Emmeline, was commemorated two years later with a statue in London's [Victoria Tower Gardens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_Tower_Gardens).

It’s worth mentioning that in 1999 Time magazine named Pankhurst as one of the most important people of the 20th Century, stating; “she shaped an idea of women for our time; she shook society into a new pattern from which there could be no going back’. She was of course, widely criticised for her militant tactics, and historians are still divided about their effectiveness, but it recognised that the work she did was crucial to the future.

Ultimately, this long, hard fought battle only won out only because a network of women who believed in equality, were willing to keep on battling for their rights.

But by the end of the Great War in 1918, the world was a changed place. Women had been working in men’s jobs for the duration and did not want to give up that new found freedom in order to go back to the kitchen or indeed the drawing room! But their new found freedom was to prove difficult to retain and therefore, a new network of women took on the mantle of reform and equality – some of which are still being fought for today.

There were so many differing causes for women to fight for in the 20th century, I would be here all night if I were to sight them all. In each case they involve a network of women. However, some of them are extremely interesting and worthy of repeating.

I have been a military wife for nearly 45 years, and over the years have become used to moving around the country and adapting to change. This meant changing jobs and not always being able to continue with the same thing and sometimes not being able to work at all. Therefore, I have worked in many fields; events, secretarial, in fact there’s not much I haven’t turned my hand to, and I currently work with the Army Parachute Association as their Marketing and Media Manager.

**15. Parachute**

As well as teaching the three services and members of the public to learn to jump out of a perfectly serviceable aircraft, every year we have a large majority of skydivers jumping for a variety of reasons; charity; birthdays, anniversaries, the ultimate bucket list, pure fun and even wedding proposals!  I mention all of this simply because, whilst speaking to one group of experienced jumpers who came up last autumn, I discovered that they were all FANYs!  The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (Princess Royal’s Volunteer Corps).

**16. Slide of FANY**

The FANY were founded in 1907 as an all-female voluntary organisation which deployed multi-faceted, rapid response teams, to support civil and military authorities in times of crisis.  Today, their aims remain the same and they are the world’s longest established, uniformed **‘military’** voluntary organisation for women – and presently, the only all-women unit left in the UK.

This made me curious about their background, and what a history they have!  Over the last century they have been involved in so much, for instance, the Corps’ strength in WW2 was 6,000, of which 2,000 were in the Special Operations Executive (SOE). One major contribution by the FANY to the work of the SOE was in Communications, in both Signals and Cipher departments.

Another major contribution was the FANY agents in the field, working mainly in France. Thirty-nine of the network of fifty women sent into France with SOE were FANYs. Some were members before the war, others joined direct, while some were seconded from the other Women’s Services, due to the restriction on bearing arms that applied to those Services.

**Thirteen of the thirty-nine were captured and murdered by the Gestapo.**

Last September they commemorated the 75th anniversary of the first FANYs to parachute into France with SOE, on 24/25 September 1942. Hence, the reason for their commemorative skydives that weekend at Netheravon.

**17. SOE agents**

Two stories in particular regarding this network are worthy of note. The first two FANYs parachuted into France were Lise de Baissac and Andrée Borrel, landing near the town of Mer. Lise’s main role was to be a courier and liaison officer in the Scientist network. According to Lise, on one occasion, and I quote - "the Germans arrived and threw me out of my room. I arrived to take my clothes and found they had opened up the parachute I had made into a sleeping bag and were sitting on it. Fortunately, they had no idea what it was. She continued her activities until the liberation, organising several groups and providing the Allied forces with information.

Andrée’s assignment was to serve as courier to the Prosper network. In the spring of 1943, she was made second in command of the entire Prosper network. During her time there she took part in sabotage, including raiding a power station and supervising weapon drops. Unfortunately, they proved too successful.  The amount of activity over the skies of northern France, the sheer number of men and women involved inevitably lead to their activities coming to official notice.

On 23 June 1943 Andrée was arrested by the Gestapo; interrogated and tortured in the Gestapo’s Paris headquarters. On 6 July 1944 she was executed at the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp.   Just one story of immense bravery in the face of adversity!

 FANYs were awarded 17 Military Medals; 27 Croix de Guerre; one Legion d’Honneur, and 11 Mentions in Despatches. Quite a network!

**18. When a threat becomes reality….**

Today’s network of FANYs train every week in order to be on call 24/7, so that they can offer assistance to the civil and military authorities in times of crisis.  However, in reality, members have not been activated for an emergency since the 7/7 London bombings in 2005 - (although they have supported several, less prominent, operations in the meantime).

Last year alone, they were deployed four times in three months; following the recent terrorist attacks in Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and the major fire in Kensington. In each case members responded brilliantly to the call-out, stepping up at short notice, enabling them to meet all the requests for support without any difficulty.

**FANY  volunteers  have, between them, provided over 1,800 hours of their time to support the City of London Police, HQ London District, the Westminster Coroner, the London Resilience Group and the GOLD Commander over a period of just three months.  Whilst the incidents were tragic, the events during this time proved that their network of volunteers are efficient, effective, highly capable and adaptable and are ready to commit when the need arises.**

As an aside to their story:

**19. Today ...**

The Corps is on the Army list, but not part of the Army. They use the Army Rank structure, and are an officer Corps, but they neither train at Sandhurst, nor hold the Queen's Commission. Although, they do have the Princess Royal as their Commander in Chief:

They work with the Army Reserve, but they also have a civilian role with the City of London and Metropolitan Police. Unlike the Army Reserve, they are unpaid; in fact, they pay an annual subscription.

A dedicated network of women working for the greater good, both in the past and the present day can only be applauded.

The end of the WWII saw similar resistance to that at the end of the Great War. Women had once again been working in jobs vacated by men who had been fighting, and were even more reluctant to give up the freedom to earn their own money. But with the country needing to be re-built and still in a state of austerity; with ration coupons still in existence until the mid 50s, there was not enough paid work for both sexes. It wasn’t until the 60’s that things started to look up and the second half of the 20th century saw changes the previous generation would have deemed impossible to conceive!

**20. Slide of the 1960s**

The economy began to recover and as we all know the 60’s saw the start of a completely different era. Fashion; music; technology and the pill became the staple diet of the 1960s. It also became the era of new networks of people fighting for different causes.

In 1957 Bertrant Russell had founded CND, (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). It was a movement which took off like a rocket -excuse the pun! During the 60s and 70s, the Cuban missile crisis, American missiles at Greenham Common, Polaris and a wide variety of other would be threats to the planet meant that networks of men and women marched on American bases, | Parliament |and many naval bases, as well as setting up Peace Camps in strategic areas. At one point in the 70’s, membership of CND rose to nearly 500,000. The movement went through the next three decades and still exists today. I mention this simply because the amount of people involved in this movement meant that networking became a very necessary part of the organisation!

So much has happened since the end of WW11 –th e world moved much faster than in the years prior to 1939. Technology in particular changed people’s outlook on lives, even on the domestic front. Women that had jobs, found ways of working, looking after a home and having children, families became a shared responsibility, although it sometimes wasn’t that easy.

When you look back at women in the 20th century there were so many prominent females that made a difference. Will any of our generation be talked about as a major achiever by the end of the 21st century I wonder?

Before moving on I thought it would be good to look at just a few of note, - although there are literally hundreds!

**21. Slide – Women of the 20th Century**

**Nancy Astor**

Politician, 1879-1964

Born in the United States, but deserves a place here simply because in 1919 she became the first woman to take up a seat in House of Commons. Renowned for her acerbic wit and right-wing views, she was, however, criticised for refusing to join the suffragette movement

**Helen Bamber**

Campaigner

**Born** 1925

At the tender age of20, at the end of the Second World War, she entered the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp to help victims. After the war, she worked with child survivors of the Holocaust. Her life has been dedicated to human rights and opposing torture. She was the first chairman of Amnesty International in Britain and at the age of 80, she set up the Helen Bamber Foundation solely to provide care, safety and dignity to those who had no one else to turn to. She died in 2014 but her legacy lives on with the Foundation.

**22. Slide – Angela Berners-Wilson etc**

**Angela Berners-Wilson**

Priest

**Born** 1955

After devoting almost two decades to the Church of England as a deacon, |Berners-Wilson proved she was more than capable of full ministry. | In 1994, when the Synod finally allowed women to join the priesthood, she was the first to be ordained, and paved the way for hundreds of other women to do the same. |She is currently the Chaplain to the University of Bath.

**Margaret Damer Dawson**

Police officer, 1875-1920

Margaret founded the Women's Police Service with a group of volunteers in London in 1915 | after being shocked at witnessing British men recruit Belgian refugees as prostitutes. Her network soon spread nationwide, and established the groundwork for integrating women into policing. She was also an animal welfare activist.

**Barbara Castle**

Politician, 1910-2002

A Labour MP from 1945 until 1979, dubbed the "Red Queen" of British politics she held two Cabinet jobs in Harold Wilson's government. Her white paper on union reform, foundered, yet she was admired across the Labour movement, fighting, for example, Gordon Brown |over pensions until she died.

**Brenda Dean**

Trade unionist

**Born** 1943

First female General Secretary of a British trade union.|Dean took on Rupert Murdoch | as head of the SOGAT print union |when the News International owner moved the operation to Wapping. Now a Labour peer she sits on the Lords' appointments commission.

**23. Slide – Caroline Harriet-Haslett etc**

**Caroline Harriet Haslett**

Electrical engineer, 1895-1957

A pioneer of electricity in the home, Haslett helped to free women from household drudgery. An electrical engineer and campaigner, she was the first Secretary of the Women's Engineering Society as well as first Director of the Electrical Association for Women. Her dying wish was that she be cremated by electricity!

**Daphne Jackson**

Physicist, 1936-1991

Britain's first female physics professor. She had a distinguished career in nuclear, medical and radiation physics at the University of Surrey. Later she worked to promote science careers to women and set up a scheme to help women return to science after childbirth.

**Stella Rimington**

Head of MI5

**Born** 1935

As well as being a *"first woman"*. She served as director-general of the Security Service (MI5) between 1992 and 1996, she was also the first head, whose name was made public. As deputy director-general in 1991, after the collapse of communism in Russia, she made the first friendly contact between British intelligence and the KGB.

**24. Slide – Jo Salter etc**

**Jo Salter**

Pilot

**Born** 1968

The world of jet fighter pilots is a particularly testosterone fuelled affair, which is why Britain's first female top gun was so highly revered. As a Flight Lieutenant, she was the first woman to fly the Tornado strike jet operationally. She had to give it all up because the RAF failed to help her combine flying and motherhood.

**Margaret Thatcher**

Politician

**Born** 1925

A controversial entry on the list of women who altered our lives: She was the first woman to lead the country and took the UK economy from basket-case to world leader. Yes, there was the poll tax and lack of investment in public services, but she defined British politics long after she left office.

**Alison Hargreaves**

Mountaineer, 1963-1995

The first woman to climb Everest alone and without oxygen, Hargreaves was killed attempting to climb K2, one of the world's most inhospitable mountains. By facing down criticism from those who said ’a mother should not put herself in danger’, she made it easier for the next generation of women explorers.

**Violette Szabo**

Spy, 1921-1945

Code named "Louise", Szabo was a secret agent in the Second World War, leading a French resistance network to sabotage bridges and communication lines ahead of the D-Day landings. She was caught, sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp, and executed. Szabo was posthumously awarded the George Cross. Her daughter who was still a small child accepted her medal from the King. You won’t be surprised to learn she was an operative working with FANY.

**25. Slide – Queen etc ..**

**Elizabeth II**

Queen **Born** 1926

It would be remiss of me not to include this lady in the list of impressive women. There are not many women of 91 years, who could hold the same job for over 60 years, always on public show, in the face of criticism, rumblings of republicanism from some, and not be able to answer her critics or voice her opinion in public. Whether you are a royalist or not Queen Elizabeth has done more than her share for Great Britain. She is a major player on the world stage of diplomacy, dealing with crusty politicians and enhancing tourism for this country many times over, and her loyalty can only be applauded.

**Professor Wangari Maatai**

Wangari Muta Maathai was born on Kenya in 1940.

The first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a Docterate in Bilogical Sciences. She went on to get a Phd and a Professorship. She was active in the National Council of Women of Kenya and founded the Pan African Green Belt Movement assisting women in planting 20M trees to conserve the environment. She campaigned against land grabbing and destruction of forests and is widely recognised for her persistent struggle for democracy, human rights and environmental conservation. In 1998 she was elected to parliament with an overwhelming 98% of the vote.

**Dany Cotton**

Fire fighter

**Born** 1969

England's highest ranking operational fire fighter and the first (and only) woman to get the Queen's Fire Service medal. Just five months after finishing her training, she was integral to the team that responded to the Clapham rail crash in 1988 and she also helped to put out the fire on the *Cutty Sark* in 2007. Dany is now London Fire Brigade Commissioner |and managed the rescue operation of the recent Grenfell Tower tragedy in charge of 250 fire fighters that night; she looks after 5,500 firefighters throughout the Greater London area. Dany is a fierce fighter for mental health and the wellbeing of the men and women who fight fires on a daily basis.

**Helen Sharman**

Engineer and chemist

**Born** 1963

Sharman was chosen as the first Briton to go into space |after beating 13,000 rivals who responded to a radio advert looking for astronauts. She had previously worked as a chemist experimenting with chocolate for Mars confectionery, her work on the Mir space station included medical and agricultural tests.

.......

I will stop there as we could go on forever. There were so many women over the last century that deserve a place in history and I’m sure you could all add to that list.

Despite the dreadful things that humans seem to do to one another, we have been blessed, in Europe at least, with a long period of peace. Today’s generation of women are equally as bold but have different goals. Since the start of the 21st century, women have been making a name for themselves in every walk of life – whilst it may not be quite the same as previous generations it can still be ‘on the edge stuff’.

**26. Slide of 21st Century Women**

However, if women are to go forward in business in the 21stcentury then there are still a multitude of barriers to surmount. What do we need to do to enable us to still be in a man’s world? Here it’s difficult not to run into the realms of politics again!

Every day in the UK women face inequality at home, at work, in politics and in public life. That makes the UK a worse place to live for everybody. The number of women in top jobs seems to be an ever higher mountain to climb.

The headline topic even after 100 years still seems to be Equality – pay, equal pay for the same job.

Willie Hamilton sponsored the Equal Pay for Equal Work Bill in the early 1970s this stated that women must receive the same pay and conditions of work as their male counterparts. Whilst some companies have long since applied this to their employees, - we still have a long way to go ...

Some countries took radical moves to achieve this. In 1975, 90% of the women of Iceland refused to go to work or run their homes. Men had to take children to school or even to work with them. | They closed factories and shops and brought the country to a standstill. The following year the Icelandic government granted equal pay for men and women.

But it should not take a woman quitting, and men agreeing to a pay cut for the BBC to take equal pay seriously. The pay gap will not be closed by individuals, we need to not just stand up and voice our opinions, but to garner support from those who feel the same, and make businesses and governments act fairly and responsibly.

Equality is not just a female problem, both sexes deserve parity - it is a problem for everyone! When women fulfil their potential everyone benefits.

Although women make up 51 per cent of the population, they are only 29 per cent of MPs, 25 per cent of judges and 24 per cent of FTSE 100 directors. |This means that in politics, |the law and in business, |women's voices are not getting heard.

Women still occupy the lowest-paid jobs - three-quarters of the people who've done minimum wage jobs in the last 10 years are women. Working women earn 81p for every pound a man earns - and at the current rate it will be 70 years before that gap eventually closes.

**27. Slide of Trudeau**

Canadian Premier Justin Trudeau gave a surprising |and impassioned speech recently at the World Economic Forum in Davos, in which he said …

*It’s time to put women first.*

*"I’m talking about hiring, promoting and retaining more women,” he said. "Not because it’s the right thing to do, or the nice thing to do, but because it’s the smart thing to do."*

*There’s firm evidence that women make companies – and countries – more profitable. A recent McKinsey report estimates that narrowing the gender gap in Canada could add $150 billion to the economy by 2026.*

*To the CEOs present in Davos |who may have already made equal pay a company policy, |he offered a note of caution. |Removing barriers for women in the workplace is not an easy fix; it’s something that takes “effort, leadership and a willingness to change the nature of work as we know it”.*

*And ultimately the imbalance goes beyond the workplace. |“Women do more part-time work, and more unpaid work, than men,” he said. “How do we address that?"*

*Luckily, he had a few suggestions which I won’t repeat here but I would urge you to read a copy of his speech of makes interesting reading. I think the words which stuck with me though were encouraging leadership to have a ‘Willingness to change’. This is the cruxt of making equality work.:*

### Just a few key facts you might find interesting. UK Female Entrepreneurship: key facts

* Women account for under a third of those in self-employment, |but over half the increase in self-employment since the recession started in 2008. Between 2008 and 2011 women accounted for an unprecedented 80% of the new self-employed.
* There are now almost 1.5 million women self-employed which represents an increase of around 300,000 since before the economic downturn.*.*
* Women account for 17% of business owners, ie. owners/ managers/ employers *(Labour Force Survey 2008, in*[*Women in Enterprise: A Different Perspective, RBS Group*](http://www.inspiringenterprise.rbs.com/women-enterprise-different-perspective) )

These are just some of the facts used in the equality debate. However, I am a firm believer that like men, women are capable of working towards whatever goal they set themselves but when problems arise they will shout about it. As we have already seen here, there are women in top jobs, but not enough. We need more engineers, chemists’ mathematicians etc – how do we persuade women to go into these professions? Should we be asking schools to encourage more girls to study in these areas - there is no easy answer, except that there has to be a ‘willingness to help and encourage’

However, having achieved our goal to be in a top job, we need to be careful not to shoot ourselves in the foot; once given a position at the table, we have a responsibility not to abuse it. I am reminded of the first female Cdr of one of the navy’s war ships who managed to have an affair with a junior officer – stupid, reckless; arrogant, irresponsible; dangerous. Women can’t afford to behave in that way no matter what happens. If we want to keep a position at the table we have to behave accordingly, we can’t take a position of that stature and mess with it. It is easier to lose a position than to obtain it in the first place. Women should not be complacent once they have gained that footing ….

Women of every generation, past, present and future, will always have their own fight; cause to battle – the same as men. I am hoping we don’t have to be imprisoned or force fed to achieve the things we need!

So today there is a new sort of Suffragette ....

**28. Slide of 21st Century Suffragette**

There are already women across the world making a name for themselves in quiet unassuming ways, but making a huge different to their communities, I’ve just chosen four as an example:

**Muzoon Almellehan, Syrian, age 17**Muzoon left Syria in 2013 to live in the refugee camp Za’atari in Jordan. She spent her time there persuading families to educate their daughters. She now lives in the UK and campaigns for girl’s education.

**Kiran Bedi, Social Activist, 63**Kiran was India’s first female police officer. She stepped beyond the traditional role assigned to women, and took a stand against corruption which put her at the forefront of the neo-nationalist, anti-corruption movement in 2011. Her view of successful living is: “Convictions, beliefs, value for time and for personal growth and constant contribution for others. These things drive and sustain me.” She said. She outraged politicians with her public enactment of their hypocrisy. “I did not apologise for my actions. I believed in them.” says Kiran.

**Tegla Loroupe**Tegla was the first African woman to win the New York marathon. She set up a school and orphanage in Kenya, is a UN ambassador for sports and in 2003 created a number of Peace Marathons sponsored by the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation. She got presidents, prime ministers, ambassadors and government officials to run with warriors | and nomadic groups in Kenya, Uganda and Sudan, |to bring peace to an area plagued by raiding warriors from battling tribes. |In 2010 the Kenyan government celebrated her, as hundreds of warriors have laid down their weapons as a result of her peace marathons.

**Val Huxley – CEO People Against Poverty – BBWA**

After a life changing visit to Romania in 2004 Val left her family and friends back in Kent to support the then fledgling charity. Few would argue that since joining the charity she has been the main stay, whilst going through many changes over the years and improving lives for many. Respected by project leaders and loved by hundreds of the children and families within their projects, Val is fired up for the charity’s objectives in helping to relieve communities from poverty. Val is a member if BBWA, many of whom have been to Romania with her to see what she does with the orphanages and many have since joined the charity because of the work she does.

**Four modern day suffragettes!**

The Women’s Equality Party is a new collaborative force in British politics uniting people of all genders, ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, beliefs and experiences in the shared determination to see women enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men - so that all can flourish. It will be interesting to see how this network progresses in its quest. Can they achieve something without playing dirty ... I certainly hope so.

So whilst 2018 marks the centenary of a small, but determined, group of women winning the right to vote,| it should also mark the year when all women, no matter what their background or their diversity, could finally vote for their equality. It’s the only way business in this country can grow, and help the economy.

Networking brings people together |makes them stronger. A louder voice so to speak - and not just women but men as well.

Over the years I have been involved with BBWA we have had to weather the same difficulties that many other businesses have had to go through. The recent recession of 2008 saw numbers drop considerably – however, we countered that by dropping the membership fee. We actively try and showcase local businesses, which gives them a chance to make others more aware of what they do. We have also had to compete with a wide variety of women’s groups that have been set up either on line or as franchisees.

Each group has its place, and appeals to different women. We like to feel that those who join us each month can dip in and out when they want. We very much feel we are not just a networking group but a means of support to each other, building not only business contacts but sustained friendships. I am pleased to say that we have nearly 600 women on our books at the moment with at least four or five new faces each month. So we must be doing something right. In fact last month I had to cap numbers as the Bath Priory only had room for 50 of us and we reached that number!

We try and involve ourselves in as much of the city’s life as we can. Our networking is diverse, and we endeavour to use a different venue each month so that we can showcase Bath’s wide variety of businesses. We have fun too, learning to be Baristas or, netwalking with one of Bath’s Blue Badge Guides, wine tasting with GWW and even a very amusing visit to Love Honey – entrepreneurship at its best!

One evening that we all love is our bi-annual networking with sixth formers at the Royal High School. We feel it is essential for us to give something back and to get their views on how they see themselves as future business women. Last November we spent the evening with nearly 60 of the school’s 6th formers, encouraging them to talk to us, tell us about themselves and their aspirations, asking questions of us and hopefully giving them the confidence to walk into a room full of adult strangers and strike up a conversation! Not an easy task when you are a 17 year old.

Not an easy task if you are older either, maybe new to an area, particularly if you have been used to knowing everyone and suddenly you go to knowing no one. I’ve learned that from past experience myself.

We have sponsored a Boules team for over five years now |and we play during the season just across the road in Queen Square. You’ll be delighted to know that we are quite a strong team and normally we can be found keeping the other teams up! Win or lose, the most important point is that we are a team and are there to support BBWA, and if we can win a few, all the better!

Each year we also try and raise money for a local charity. Whilst we may not raise thousands, we do try to not just help with cash| but also to raise the awareness of the charity itself, some of whom may not be as well-known as others. This year have been raising money for the Bath branch of Marie Curie:

In a world where we are constantly bombarded with advertisements, emails, status updates, special offers, and sales pitches creating a cluttered message. Personal relationships enable you and your business to stand out, rise above the noise and remain top in someone’s mind. People buy people of that there is no doubt.

Today’s networking constitutes supporting each other, helping sort out problems, interpreting new business directives, but above all turning contacts into business relationships and friendships. It means sharing experiences, making life better for each other and above all sharing laughter and stress.

Everyone is capable of ensuring change. The influential power of change that our current generation holds is unlimited. We are the future and therefore, are in control of what we want the future to look like. We should not squander this ‘power’ by nitpicking, but by using our intelligence and initiative in the right way.

Issues concerning gender and race, inequality, discrimination, and terrorism are some of the current problems that are still affecting our world today and we need to bring that to an end. Don’t underestimate yourself: Amelia Earhart once said, “the most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity.”

***NETWORKING is the single most powerful marketing tactic to accelerate and sustain success for any individual or business -* Ultimately, it’s not about who you know ... but WHO KNOWS YOU!!**

The future is what we make it and I hope BBWA will still be networking in another twenty years and I hope women (and men as well) will continue to fight to make the world a better place to live in and do business in. We cannot afford to rest on our laurels and let others do it for us. Our children and grandchildren are depending on us.

I think I have waffled long enough, and I hope you’ve found some of this interesting. Thank you for listening and I’m looking forward to ‘rubbing a few elbows’ with you later in the evening! Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.