



Trailblazing Women: Zoe Ball



TRAILBLAZERS: World War One's Inspirational Women

Location: Hove

Occupation: Radio and TV presenter

Why are they a Trailblazer?

Long-time Hove resident Zoe Ball first came to prominence presenting children's Saturday morning TV programme 'Live & Kicking' on the BBC. In 1997 she became the first woman to front the BBC Radio 1 Breakfast Show and in 2019 the first woman to front BBC Radio 2 Breakfast Show, the most listened-to slot on the UK airwaves. She also presents on Radio 2 every Saturday 3pm to 6pm and anchors It Takes Two on BBC2 during the annual run of Strictly Come Dancing. A popular figure, she is liked for her warm, down-to-earth style and human touch. In 2018 she undertook a gruelling cycling challenge to raise money for Sport Relief.

What impact have they made on their community?

Until Zoe Ball started to present the BBC Radio One flagship Breakfast Show in 1997, it was thought that a woman would not have the appeal to take on the responsibility of fronting one of the country's most popular radio shows. Her popularity amongst listeners paved the way for other female radio presenters, such as Sara Cox and Edith Bowman. In 2018 Zoe raised £1,198,012 for sport relief by undertaking a 350-mile bike ride from Blackpool to Brighton. During the ride she raised awareness of mental health issues and the effects of suicide on family and friends in memory of her partner Billy Yates, who took his own life in 2017.

What connections are there between Zoe and the Trailblazers of World War One?

As a female presenter of the Radio One Breakfast Show, Zoe Ball was a first. Another woman occupying a traditionally male position for the first time was Victoria Drummond (1894 – 1978). Born in Perthshire to aristocratic parents, Victoria could have had a life of leisure. Instead she became interested in engineering and, after attending an evening course, became Britain's first female marine engineer, and the first woman to become a member of the Institute of Marine Engineers.

During the First World War she worked as an apprentice in Perth and then at the ship works in Dundee until 1922. During the Second World War she initially worked as an air raid warden in London. The outbreak of hostilities made her determined to return to sea. On the Panama-registered SS Bonita in 1940 the ship was attacked by enemy aircraft in the mid-Atlantic. Victoria took control of the engine room and kept the ship moving despite suffering injuries. She was later commended for her bravery and leadership, receiving an MBE for devotion to duty and a Lloyd's medal for bravery at sea.

How do they inspire your class to be Trailblazers of the future?

Being the first to do something is very hard and no one likes the fear of failure. Zoe Ball showed courage twice by being the first woman to front two hugely popular breakfast time radio shows. She inspires people to have courage to do new things. Zoe's popularity is based on her being down-to-earth and normal. It's very easy to relate to her. She shows that you can be yourself and reach out to people. Her charity bike ride in aid of a cause that was linked to the death of her partner showed that she was open and willing to share even personal things for the benefit of others. It shows that it can pay to be kind.



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