

Newsletter – July 2008

Sue's Roadshow Diary



Gail Allen and visitor at Swansea Roadshow

Here's a cheery image from the Swansea 'leg' of our journey as the Project busily strides on. We've now had two more shows – Newport and Dolgellau but I'm going to leave Rhiannon and Justine to fill in on those.

These Roadshows certainly are showing me bits of Wales I didn't know existed; on my way to Caernarfon I stayed in Corris – with Gill 'n' Gill, 31 guinea pigs, 3 dogs and a rabbit. I had a fabulous welcome and stayed in an amazingly pretty tiny hamlet that would be ideal as a set for a television programme if they were to make a Welsh twee Sunday evening-gentle folksy sort of show. I also drove through some seriously gorgeous countryside. The Caernarfon Roadshow was another exciting show – with the additional bonus of Rhiannon having had the foresight to organise lunch. At the Roadshow we also tried out our new agreement with CultureNetCymru who are now scanning and photographing all materials shown

– professionally and, very impressive the results are too. Have a look at their website for further information. www.culturenetcymru.com

One very exciting, and daunting, development that is currently the main focus of my life is the fact that we have been given the opportunity to mount a mid-Project Exhibition at The National Waterfront Museum in Swansea. Whereas this is a very prestigious organisation it is also a bit scary!

Edwina Hart AM will open the Exhibition on 11th August at 10am so please do try and come along. I will be inviting some of the people who have kindly brought items along to Roadshows and I know that my heroine, Marjorie Edmunds, now aged 86 and former aircraft engineer, as featured in the last newsletter, will be attending so – come and meet her.

Plans are well under way for the Haverfordwest Roadshow – September 13th 2008 and Debra Griffiths of 'The Coal House' fame is coming along to open it. Keep your eyes on the website for further details. I have been really lucky to have done quite a few radio broadcasts recently. The longest but least celebrated was one I did with Roy Noble – bless 'im. On the day of the broadcast he had, what we call, a bad chest and was a bit wheezy. I was very concerned that the listening public would hear his poorly health and so I went into verbal overdrive resulting in Roy saying about 12 words in all. I felt I did him a real favour- imagine, then my face, when I met up with his producer who said to me, "Ah, so you are Sue Hamill – you're at the top of our leader board" Slight pride swelled in my bosom – was I that interesting? Why am I not working on the radio? Telly even? I momentarily flirted with images of me being the new female Parky. "Yes," he raved, "You are on the top of the board for the person who can out talk Roy – you ought to be proud, you know-not a lot of people have managed that!" Instant red face and deflation.

Over the course of the Roadshows we have collected – largely thanks to Paulette Pelosi – a catalogue of ‘interesting’ photos, like the one at the start of this piece of Gail Allen, and so I have decided to set a monthly caption competition – here’s the image and the prize is seriously priceless – but you have to enter and win to find out !!!!



Competition photo – What is being said to who?

Entries to me at sue.hamill@womensarchivewales.org and the winner will be paraded and celebrated in the next Newsletter. Cheers,
Sue Hamill
Development Officer

Newport Roadshow

Newport Museum hosted a successful Roadshow on 16th May. The Roadshow was opened by Jessica Morden MP and Rosemary Butler AM, who added a personal touch by bringing along some photographs of her own family.

The Museum was a great venue to hold the Roadshow and the archive’s own specialists were joined by Rachel Anderton (Newport Museum curator) and Emily Price (curator at Tredegar House). Frances Younson, from the Gwent Record Office, was also on hand to give tips on looking after material, and staff from the Coalfields Collection brought a book stall, which proved to be very popular.

Rachel Lock-Lewis, Senior Lecturer in History at the School of Education, University of Wales, Newport, gave an interesting talk on the recent history of women in the Newport area.

As with previous Roadshows, the public brought some very interesting items for us to see, including:

- An extensive collection of medals, certificates, postcards, photographs etc., connected to Annie Elizabeth Brewer, who qualified as a nurse in 1903 and was awarded a number of medals for her work in World War I.
- A photo of Blodwyn Mutton, who worked in Curren’s Cardiff Ammunitions, and a letter of thanks for her work in the protection of this country from Edward Curren, Director.
- Original minute books of Malpas Townswomen’s Guild, starting in May 1961, which detail the activities of drama groups, choir and social studies groups.

Justine Hankin

Caernarfon Roadshow

The Record Office on Victoria Dock in Caernarfon, the compact but busy county town situated on the North West coast of Wales, was the venue for the second of the North Wales Roadshows on 28 June. Victoria Dock is the part of the town which is at present being developed with its new restaurants, housing and entertainment venue. The Roadshow provided a drop-in experience between 11 am and 3pm, and attracted over 40 people from the locality, and from as far as Pwllheli on the Llŷn Peninsula and Llanuwchllyn in Meirionnydd.

Our specialists from WAW were Professor Deirdre Beddoe and Catrin Stevens, both experienced and knowledgeable historians, ably assisted by our technical partners Culturenet Cymru, and the archival and technical staff of the Record Office, including the Conservator and his assistant. Annie Williams, historian and expert on women and the peace movement gave our other specialists a welcome break. As organiser, I was pleased to be given the support and backing of three volunteers from amongst the WAW membership – Luned Meredith, Trish Reid and Lindy Moore. They helped with meeting and greeting, and plying our guests with tea and conversation while waiting their turn. Jenny

Sabine, the WAW museums specialist was assisted by Esther Roberts from the Museum at Bangor in examining and referencing items other than documentation for deposit. Sue Hamill gave me invaluable help in keeping things moving smoothly.

Caernarfon sometimes likes to style itself Royal Caernarfon, and we indeed had a royal flush when the Women's History Roadshow hit the town. Our experts were gratified by the range and historical significance of the items that were brought before them, and also by the number of items deposited as part of the WAW collection at the Record Office and Museum. Some of the highlights include:

- A collection of Welsh language account books diligently kept by Angharad Tomos's mother from the year of her marriage in 1951 until today, detailing the price of staple commodities such as bread, butter and her weekly grocery outlay. As she had five daughters she also kept a record of the make and price of shoes, and the uniform she had to buy the eldest when she started secondary school. There are notes about her preferences in books with quotations from them, and notes from her evening classes - all in all, a wonderful portrayal of life as a woman and as a mother over the decades.
- The Bangor branch Minute book of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom between March 1955 and April 1957 and there's also a photograph of the North Wales Peacemaker's Pilgrimage of 1926 (shown here). The League was founded in 1915 to work towards world disarmament and rights for women.
- Silver attendance medals from Tywyn, Meirionnydd presented to schoolchildren per complete year of attendance without any absences, and at the completion of 7 years, pupils received a solid gold medal and a watch pendant and a photograph showing the visitor's aunts and uncles wearing these medals.

- A series of letters from the famous Welsh author Marion Eames as a young woman in the 1940's to a friend, which reveal the seeds of her pacifism and Welsh Nationalism, and the ups and downs of life for a young working woman in that period just after the Second World War.
- A large collection of documents relating to the life and work of Sister Katie Jones (1885-c1975) from Bangor, who was a member of the Forward Movement of Calvinist Methodists, including posters of a Sisterhood event in 1941, and a Band of Hope Certificate awarded to her in 1898 (shown here).



A Poster for the Annual Meetings of the Sisterhood in 1941 where Kate Jones was a Speaker.

Rhiannon Gomer
North and West Wales Field Worker

An interesting collection

The day before the launch of the Wales Women's History Roadshows on 29th January, Sue (Development Worker) and our president, Deirdre Beddoe, appeared on Woman's Hour to talk about the project. As a result, we received many emails and phone calls from people who had heard the programme telling us of material which might be of interest to us.

One of these was from someone living in Rhayader, Mrs. Joan James, who had a lot of material in her attic which related to her late husband's step-mother, Agnes Irene James (known as Renee), formerly

Macdonald, who was the daughter of Scottish migrants to Merthyr. She was born in 1898 and went to Merthyr Intermediate School. In 1916 she was admitted to Cardiff University lived in Aberdare Hall, the first all-female hall of residence for Cardiff University (which still admits women students only), took a BSc in Biology and Botany, followed by an MSc at Swansea and a PhD in Geology and Palaeontology at Imperial College, London.

Renee Macdonald lectured for a while at Bedford College, then a women's college and part of London University, before returning to Wales and teaching biology, becoming senior mistress (which effectively meant head of girls, a situation common in mixed grammar schools during the 1950s and 60s) at Merthyr County Grammar School.

Much of this history is documented in the collection, which includes a copy of her admission form for Aberdare Hall, a photograph of women students at Cardiff 'Old Hall, 1917', certificates including those for her BSc and PhD and copies of correspondence relating to her application to Swansea University to do her MSc and to Bedford College. There is also a photograph which is probably of the staff at Merthyr County Grammar School though like so many photographs, no details are given on the back.

After her retirement Renee Macdonald lived for some time in an artist's colony in Gloucestershire where her sister was head of a primary school. The collection given to us by Mrs James includes a number of her sketches and watercolours and she was clearly a gifted amateur artist.

In 1966 she married the former Head Postmaster of Llandrindod Wells, Tom James and around that time began to keep a diary; these are included in the collection together with copies of family photographs of her wedding, and her step-family. Following her husband's death in 1973, she continued to live in Brecon until her death in August 1992.

Perhaps the most ironic item in the collection is a copy of the *Brecon and Radnor Times*, 1st October 1992 which contains her obituary. It is headed 'Postmaster's widow dies, aged 94'.

I found this collection particularly interesting since when I attended grammar school in the late 1950s, our senior mistress was also a geologist, with both a PhD and DSc. In spite of this, her professional career

was spent teaching school children, though she inspired many pupils to study geology seriously. Undoubtedly, there are many other women of this period who were highly qualified but who did not pursue high profile academic careers.

Much more than a 'postmaster's widow', Renee (Macdonald) James clearly had an interesting and varied life, glimpses of which can be seen in this collection.



Women students, Cardiff University, Inscription on back – 'Old College, 1917'

Avril Rolph

Annual Conference and AGM 2008.
PUT THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARY: 11 & 12
OCTOBER

Canolfan y Morlan, Aberystwyth

This year we are joining forces with the Ceredigion Local History Forum in an exciting programme on the theme of *Women in 19th & 20th century Wales*. On the Saturday and Sunday mornings there will be a variety of talks and on Saturday afternoon you are invited to participate in one of the HLF-funded *Women's History Roadshows*. On Saturday evening there will be an opportunity to socialise over dinner at Tides Restaurant. We also plan some informal sessions and, of course, the AMC/WAW Annual General Meeting, which is the opportunity to have your say in the running of the Archive.

Full details of the Conference and a booking form will be posted on our website (www.womensarchivewales.org) as soon as the programme is finalised, and will also be mailed to all members. A list of overnight accommodation in Aberystwyth is available from the Aberystwyth Tourist Information Centre (aberystwythTIC@ceredigion.gov.uk)

Jane Aaron and Ursula Masson, eds., *The Very Salt of Life. Welsh Women's Political Writings from Chartism to Suffrage* Dinas Powys: Honno Press, 2007.

Honno has come up trumps again! This anthology of Welsh women's writings spanning a century from the 1830s to the 1930s is another welcome addition to the reasonably priced and neatly sized paperbacks that distinguish Honno Classics. Divided into four parts, the documents in the first two sections are introduced by Jane Aaron. They cover Chartism, nationalism and the politics of language, the articulation of feminist dissent in religious circles and concerns of educational and temperance reformers. The latter parts have introductions by Ursula Masson, writing about topics in which she was such an expert: women's Liberal and Labour politics and women's suffrage. The result shows how interdisciplinary collaboration enhances literary and historical understandings.

This anthology makes available valuable documents about women's aspirations, grievances, toils and triumphs which would not otherwise be easily accessible. Alongside the better-known figures such as Lady Llanover and Viscountess Rhondda, are Chartist protesters (the Blackwood Female Patriotic Association) and Gwladys Perrie Williams who declared in the Welsh Outlook in 1919 that 'The future definition of the term Wales depends on the attitude of Welsh women today'.

This book is important for two other reasons. It provides us with documents in English and Welsh within one volume. It shows Welsh readers how the language was used by, for example, the Calvinist Methodist, Margaret Evans Roberts in the leading US weekly 'Y Drych' to complain about the fact that women could not preach in Welsh pulpits.

Translations into English also enable non-Welsh readers to appreciate her sentiments and those of the better known Cranogwen (Sarah Jane Rees), another outspoken figure on this subject and much else.

The editors also wisely refuse to bow to the sound bite. For once we get reproduced whole documents or sizeable portions of them. We can thus engage with debates about, for example, the higher education of girls in Wales. Many different kinds of sources have been used, including the fragment of unpublished autobiography by the suffragette organiser, Rachel Barrett, one of a number of women featured here who, this reviewer noted with pleasure, came from west Wales!

Angela V. John, University of Aberystwyth

URSULA'S BEQUEST, AND HER BOOKS

Ursula Masson left her personal papers to the Women's Archive of Wales. This is a remarkable collection recording the life and work of an active woman deeply committed to her interests and convictions. The collection has been deposited in the Glamorgan Record Office in Cardiff, where it will be sorted, catalogued and made available to researchers.

In addition, Ursula's family has most generously given her large collection of books to the Archive. Again, this represents her interests, and in particular her life-long study of women's history. Ursula's particular research interests were the suffrage campaign of the early 20th century and women's political activities. The books range from academic texts on feminism and gender studies, through women's and Welsh history and politics to novels, poetry and travel. We are currently sorting the books: most of them will be held in our office in Loughor, pending a more permanent home. We hope that they will eventually form the core of a Wales women's history resource collection.

A plea for help

An important project is to list all the books. The list will be included with her papers as a record of Ursula's research and recreational interests, and will also form a catalogue of the collection. We have created a simple database and have started to enter each book on it. We would be really grateful for help with this mammoth task so, if you can type, live in the Swansea area and could spare a few hours, please get in touch with one of us.

Jenny Sabine and Avril Rolph.

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Dates for your Diary

Women Artists Exhibition - Swansea

From 5 July to 14 September there is an exhibition in Swansea of the work of some women artists from the collections of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and the National Museum of Wales.

The exhibition is called *On Reflection*.

There is a link to the exhibition on

www.glynnviviangallery.org

Some of you from further afield may come to the Swansea area on your holidays and need something to do indoors on a rainy day.....

Gail Allen,

Treasurer and temporary Membership Secretary

Date	Town	Venue	Time
24 July 2008	Blaenavon	Workingmen's Hall	3pm – 7pm
13 September 2008	Haverfordwest	Public Library	To be confirmed
11 October 2008	Aberystwyth (in connection with our AGM, and Annual Conference on 12.10.08)	Canolfan y Morlan	2pm – 5pm
1 November 2008	Llandrindod Wells	Radnorshire Museum	10.30am – 1pm
29 November 2008	Carmarthen	St Peter's Hall	To be confirmed
January 2009	Flintshire	To be confirmed	
28 February 2009	Pontypridd	Pontypridd Museum	To be confirmed
28 March 2009	Wrexham	Museum & Record Office	12pm – 3.30pm
25 April 2009	Llangefni	Oriel Ynys Môn	To be confirmed
13 June 2009	Merthyr Tydfil	Cyfarthfa Castle Museum	To be confirmed

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Llafur: The Welsh People's History website -
www.llafur.org

Contributions to the Newsletter on aspects of Welsh women's history are welcome from all members. Please send items for consideration to Pat Widger at patriciawidger@aol.com. It would be appreciated where possible if contributions could be submitted bilingually.

Copy date for the next issue will be: 1st September 2008

If you would like to have a copy of this Newsletter in large print either in Welsh or English please contact Pat on 01446 735260 or on email.

This Newsletter was edited by Pat Widger and translated by Catrin Stevens.

Photographs by Paulette Pelosi.