

[www.womansarchivewales.org](http://www.womansarchivewales.org)

### 'Voices from the Factory Floor' at the Carmarthenshire National Eisteddfod

Following our successful events at the Vale of Glamorgan and Denbigh eisteddfodau in 2012 and 2013, the Women's Archive of Wales talk at the Carmarthenshire National Eisteddfod was eagerly anticipated this year. The eisteddfod sub-committee of four: Siân Rhiannon Williams, Rosanne Reeves, Luned Meredith and I, had little hesitation in choosing the theme for the 2014 session. After all, with the 'Voices from the Factory Floor' project reaching its climax, and over 60 interviews recorded within the catchment area of the eisteddfod in Llanelli, there was plenty of new material to interest and engage the public.

It was edifying indeed to see a respectable audience of about 70 – among the largest audience of the week in the Societies' Tents it seems, and including twelve former factory girls from the locality, gathered for our session on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> August. Siân Rhiannon Williams welcomed everybody and introduced the session. The Project Co-ordinator, Catrin Stevens, talked about the work completed to date in south-west Wales, based upon field work carried out by Susan Roberts, the Field Officer for the region. Photographs collected through the project illustrated work on the factory floor, e.g. at the Chloride Factory in Ponthenri and the Felin Fach Creamery, Ceredigion, and a range of pictures illuminated the social lives of the factory workers when the factories were in their heyday. The women's voices were heard, through quotations from interviews and through the actual recordings describing the unequal working conditions and pay between men and women workers; the hard, monotonous labour; attitudes towards factory girls and the lack of regard for health and safety. During the second half of the session two former factory girls – Eirlys Lewis, who had worked in several factories, including Vandervill Products, Cardiff and Enid Davies who worked in Croydon Asbestos and Deva Dogware factories – were invited to the stage to relate their experiences of factory life. Eirlys explained how, back in the 1960s, she refused to allow a contribution from her union fee to be paid to the Labour Party, as she was a member of Plaid Cymru, and Enid described how she was expected to reach a target of stitching 3,200 leather gloves a week at the Croydon Asbestos Factory, where there was, incidentally, little understanding of health and safety issues. Jaci Gruffudd joined them on stage to discuss her role as a volunteer with the project, interviewing former workers at Mettoy's toy factory in Swansea. She felt that it had been a privilege to contribute to the project, and that the women themselves truly appreciated that their contributions to the Welsh economy after the Second World War was receiving due attention at last.



Members of the packing department Mettoy's, Fforestfach, Swansea, 1960s



Jaci Gruffudd, Eirlys Lewis and Enid Davies, the panel at the 'Voices from the Factory Floor' presentation

To conclude, Rosanne Reeves thanked everyone who had participated in the session. We look forward now to hearing about the experiences of the north Wales factory girls, e.g. at Ackroyd Pyjamas in Bala and Courtaulds, Flint, from the north Wales Field Officer, Kate Sullivan, at our Annual Conference at Bangor in the autumn.

Catrin Stevens (Project Co-ordinator)

VFF blog <http://womensarchivewalesblog.wordpress.com/>

## The Dictionary of Welsh Biography

The Archive would like to congratulate Elin Jones, a member of our Committee, on her recent appointment to the Advisory Panel of the Dictionary of Welsh Biography. One of the reasons for inviting her to join the panel was the need to increase the attention paid by the Dictionary to the contribution of educationalists – and of women. The lack of references to women in the Dictionary has been a matter of concern for a long time, but we can hope that things will begin to improve now, since another member of the Archive, Emeritus Professor Angela John, is also a member of this panel.



You can also help in the task of increasing the number of women commemorated in the Dictionary by sending the names and details of women who deserve to be included to Elin – [elinphillips3@btinternet.com](mailto:elinphillips3@btinternet.com). She would be particularly grateful to start with if you could send her names of outstanding sportswomen.

*What about Miriam Kate Williams, stage name Vulcana, [left] born in Abergavenny in 1875, a professional strongwoman? She won 100 medals during her career (she retired in 1932), and was especially popular in France.*

*Caroline Fairclough*

### ... And More Congratulations

Elin has also been nominated for a Breakthrough Award in the British Academy Cymru Awards (The Welsh Baftas) for her presentation of the documentary *Cofio Senghennydd*, commemorating the centenary of the pit disaster in 1913. The film was produced and directed by Catrin Edwards, our South East Wales field officer in the Voices from the Factory Floor project, who is nominated for the Gwyn Alf Williams Award. Many congratulations to both of them.

### Annual Conference and AGM 2014: Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October

The annual conference this year celebrates the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the MA in Women's Studies course in Bangor University and commemorates the centenary of the start of World War I. Many of the speakers are current or recent students in the department, and there are a wide and interesting range of topics.

The Conference Dinner will take place on the Saturday evening, in the Bangor University Management Centre. More information and booking forms are available on the Events page of the Website.

Also available on the same page is the proposed new AMC/WAW Constitution. The changes to the Constitution, which are not great, have been made necessary by the change of the Archive from being a Charity to being a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This change, to be voted on at the AGM, has involved a vast degree of work by Avril Rolph, but should lead to simpler administration. The Annual Report is also there. Please take time to look at the papers before the AGM.

Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome from all members. If you are able to submit your contribution bilingually this would be greatly appreciated. Please send your contributions to: [newsletter@womensarchivewales.org](mailto:newsletter@womensarchivewales.org)

**Copy date for next issue  
Friday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2014**

If you would like a large print copy of this Newsletter, in either Welsh or English, please contact Caroline at the email address above, or phone 01873 890540.

This Newsletter was edited by Caroline Fairclough, and translated by Catrin Stevens and Elin Jones.

## Women recorded on WWI Memorials

For the last few months various members of WAW have been collecting the names of women on WWI (and WW2) war memorials, and sometimes graves and other monuments. Catrin Stevens has been the most active contributor (including spotting one in a church during a wedding, and commandeering the photographer to record it), but we have half a dozen or more spotters. Most of the recorded names are known locally, but we are trying to get as full a list of names across Wales as possible.

Many of the names are of nurses, mostly VADs. One of them was Ella Richards of Lampeter, a VAD from the start of the War who worked in England and Egypt before being posted to Salonika where she died of pneumonia in October 1918, aged 31. Another probable nurse was Ethel Thomas, memorialised on a family grave in Dan y Graig cemetery, Swansea. She died 'on active service at Mesopotamia', aged 25. Curiously the accompanying text is 'greater love hath no man than this ...' Other VADs died



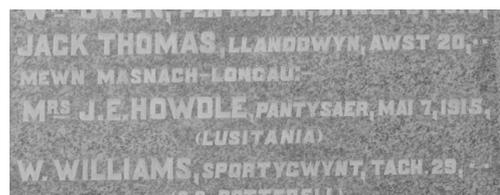
Photograph Catrin Stevens

nearer home, often of the Spanish flu that ravaged much of the world in 1918-19.

Another group memorialised is the munitions workers. Swansea Cenotaph [left] has a list of workers, probably all women (though C J Prichard has not been identified, M Fitzmaurice was Mary), many or all of whom died in explosions at the National Explosives Factory, Pembrey.

The 'munitionettes' were not all girls; Edith Copham was 55, and Mary Fitzmaurice had seven children.

Not all the women on memorials were engaged in war work. Mrs J E Howdle of Pantysaer, Ynys Mon, died in the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915 (she was a stewardess) and is remembered on Benllech war memorial. Emily Pickford of Penarth was a singer who entertained the troops as a member of Miss Lena Ashwell's Concert Parties. She drowned when the car she was travelling



Photograph Val Wakefield

in skidded on ice into the River Somme on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1919. She is remembered on the Penarth memorial, unlike two more unfortunate munitions workers, Gwendoline Williams and Sarah Jane Thomas, who died in January 1919 in an explosion in Pembrey but were not recorded on the Swansea Cenotaph.

Many of the women recorded remain enigmas. For example, the tiny Roll of Honour on the playing field gates in Govilon, Monmouthshire includes amongst its twelve names that of May Prosser. No one knows who she was. There is an M Prosser listed on the Rural Districts section of the Abergavenny memorial, but this gets us no further.

Any additions to this collection would be gratefully appreciated. Please send them to [caroline\\_fairclough@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:caroline_fairclough@yahoo.co.uk), with a photograph and location details. If you would like references for the information in this article, please contact me.

Caroline Fairclough

## Your articles wanted and needed

Many of you who read this Newsletter will have come across small, interesting pieces of women's history. If you are one of these, please turn your discovery into a short (and it can be extremely short; one paragraph will do,) or longer piece for the Newsletter. There is so much knowledge and talent out there. Share it!

Email to me [caroline\\_fairclough@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:caroline_fairclough@yahoo.co.uk)

## Robin Evans

In July the Archive heard the sad news of Robin Evans' death. He was a loyal member of the Archive, and an inspiring teacher, historian and prolific author. Maritime history was his chief interest, and he made an outstanding contribution to this field through his books and also by establishing MOROL, the society which promotes every aspect of maritime history in Wales. But Robin always set the history of Wales in its wider context. He wrote a number of history textbooks which combined Welsh history with the history of the world in that period, as well as a textbook on the contribution of immigrants to Wales in the twentieth century.

Robin always paid appropriate attention to women's history. One of his last books was *Merched y Môr*, (Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2013) an account of women's contribution to every aspect of life in Wales' maritime communities – as ship owners, travellers, independent wives and mothers who sustained their homes and families while their husbands were away at sea. It should be noted that Robin finished this book, and much other work besides, when he was receiving treatment for the cancer which caused his death.

We remember an exceptional historian, and a very brave and gentle person.

Elin Jones

## Audrey Jones

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of Audrey Jones on 16<sup>th</sup> August.

Audrey had been a member of AMC / WAW since it began; at the first AGM, held in Swansea Museum on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1998, she quite rightly took issue with the English version of our then working name, 'Welsh Women's Archive' on the grounds that the history of women in Wales covered very many women who weren't Welsh – hence the name Women's Archive of Wales was adopted.

When I was working with the late Ursula Masson on the South Wales Feminist History Project, Audrey's name came up several times as someone I must interview, which I did in 1997 in her house in Dinas Powys. She had been involved in the Wales Women's Rights Committee in the 1970s, which led in due course to the Wales Assembly of Women; a teacher, Audrey was totally committed to opening up opportunities for girls and young women in education; and she was for many years a contributor to the UN in relation to women's rights across the world, as well as in other more local women's organisations. I encountered Audrey many times in subsequent years, and put her name forward as one of the women influential in Wales for the University of Sussex & British Library Research Project, *Sisterhood and After: an oral history of the Women's Liberation Movement*. Extracts from this interview (recorded in September 2011) can be heard at

[www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/sisterhood/bioview.html#id=143996&v=true&id=143996](http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/sisterhood/bioview.html#id=143996&v=true&id=143996).

President Deirdre Beddoe spoke on behalf of AMC / WAW at Audrey's funeral, and Jenny Sabine (Chair) also attended. An obituary appeared in the Penarth Times of 20<sup>th</sup> August .

Avril Rolph

## Efforts and Ideals: Prints of the First World War

The National Museum, Cardiff is currently showing a series of 66 prints commissioned by the British Government in 1917 to develop support and raise funds for the War, at home and overseas. Many of the country's most celebrated artists were involved in the project.

Whilst the Ideals section of the series is largely symbolic and allegorical, with titles like *The Restoration of Serbia* and *The Freedom of the Seas* the Efforts prints have one fascinating section showing women's work during the war. The image on the right, by AS Hartrick, is one of three illustrating munitions work, and is entitled *On Munitions: Heavy Work (Drilling and Casting)*. Women appear in other prints too. See if you can spot the women worker in Christopher Nevinson's *Assembling (aircraft) Parts*.

The exhibition remains open until 7<sup>th</sup> January 1917. If you are unable to get to Cardiff, the whole series is available on the National Museum's website [https://www.museumwales.ac.uk/rhagor/efforts\\_ideals/](https://www.museumwales.ac.uk/rhagor/efforts_ideals/).



Image courtesy of National Museum Cardiff