

www.womansarchivewales.org

'Voices from the Factory Floor'

Yes, at last the voices of women who worked in light industry factories throughout Wales between 1945 and 1973 are going to be heard and appreciated properly. Women's Archive of Wales has succeeded in getting a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund to record the oral histories of these women, whose contribution was critically important to the fragile economy of Wales at a time when the traditional heavy industries were facing challenging periods of recession and depression.



We have started publicising the aims of this exciting project already by writing to newspapers and the media inviting women factory workers to contact us. In a pilot project last year we succeeded in recording nine speakers but to fulfil the targets of this project we will need to identify 150-200 interviewees and record their experiences. They will be able to enlighten us about many different aspects regarding the workplace in this period: the working conditions before health and safety regulations became dominant, and how much they were paid before the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970. These women have extremely interesting stories to relate and it is vitally important that we capture them now before they are lost forever.

We shall be asking questions about social life in the factories and what kind of topics they discussed at work, as well as addressing issues such as the influence (or lack of influence) of trade unions and opportunities for training and promotion in the workplace. Yes, these women do have a wealth of fascinating stories to tell and it will be our privilege to capture and safeguard them for the future.



Workers at a clothing factory in Maesteg, 1950
Photographer: Geoff Charles, National Library of Wales

So, how can you help us?

If you worked in a light industry factory in this period or if you know of anyone who did – even if only for a short period, contact us and we can have a chat, and if you know of any relevant photographs or documents we would like to make copies of them. If you know of a factory which we should target in search of speakers – please let us know. At present we have identified c. 230 factories which were active in this period – about 50 of them in north Wales and the rest in the south but most of these have closed their doors or changed ownership and now are branches of large international companies.

At present the archive is in the process of appointing two Field Officers, for north and south Wales, to undertake much of the recording and transcribing for this project. BUT under the conditions of the HLF grant we have to identify volunteers who will help us deliver the project. Two training workshops will be held for volunteers in north and south Wales. We shall provide the necessary equipment and documentation and we will reimburse travelling expenses. You can work within your own locality and you can choose how many interviews you wish to make according to your personal circumstances.

At the end of the project the materials collected will be deposited in the National Sound and Screen Archive at the National Library and extracts from this new archive will be showcased on their website and on ours. Touring exhibitions of the photographs and documents collected will be organised.

This is an exciting and very important project, Why not help us to ensure that the voices of these key industrial women workers are heard and safeguarded for the future?

Please contact Catrin Stevens (Project Co-ordinator) on catrin@stevens2760.freemove.co.uk or on 01792 893410 if you can give an hour or two of your time to help us. MANY THANKS.

Tribute to Elaine Morgan 1920-2013



Elaine Morgan died on 12th July 2013 aged ninety-three at Prince Charles Hospital, Merthyr Tydfil. She was without doubt one of the most outstanding Welsh women of the twentieth century and I had the great pleasure - and the fun that went with it - of being able to call her my friend.

I will always regard it as a great privilege to have known Elaine. She was a woman of enormous talent: she had a brain like a planet and a mind like a razor but what was so amazing about her achievements was the diversity of her activities.

She was a wonderful dramatist who was responsible for some of the best dramas the BBC has ever produced. Who could ever forget her award winning dramatization of Vera Brittain's Testament of Youth? Elaine won the Royal television Society's Writer of the Year Award for that. I loved her Marie Curie series too.

Then came her spectacular entry into the world of science - or more specifically evolutionary theory. She challenged the male-centeredness of all the great evolutionists from Darwin onwards. The Descent of Woman (1972)

is a brilliant and myth shattering book, superbly argued and wittily written, and it quickly became an international best seller and a key feminist text.

But dramatist and evolutionary theorist did not mark the end of Elaine's writing career. From 2003, aged 83, she embarked on a third career - this time as a journalist. She became the Western Mail's columnist, 'Pensioner.' Her pieces were always fresh and thoughtful and who knew the lives of South Wales better than Elaine? In 2011, at the age of ninety-one, Elaine won the award Regional Columnist of the Year.

The people of Wales and especially South Wales are very proud of Elaine Morgan and hold her not only in great esteem but in great affection. Of course we are all proud of a Pontypridd girl - well Hopkinstown actually - (she was always quick to correct me on that). She was a miner's daughter who went up to Oxford and did so well. But what we loved most about her is that she stayed in Wales and Mountain Ash became her home. She was a wife, a mother and a valleys woman.

On a personal note, I regard myself as very privileged to have known Elaine and to be able to have called her my friend. I had met her briefly in the 1980s when I had twisted her arm to take part in the first conference ever held on the history of Welsh women. But it was a few years later that our friendship began. I had put her name forward within the University of Glamorgan as someone who should be honoured with a fellowship or honorary degree especially because all the people who had previously been honoured were men. So I went up to Mountain Ash to run this by her and when I arrived she said, "I know why you've come. You want me to contribute to the collection you're editing on Welsh women writing on the Second World War" Well, of course, it wasn't why I'd come but I was delighted to have Elaine as a contributor to Parachutes and Petticoats.

My work is rescuing the long neglected history of women in Wales and Elaine has been a great encouragement to me and a wonderful supporter of my work. I greatly valued her support and her encouragement.

She was also a Women's Archive of Wales member and a generous supporter of the Archives's activities. Elaine was a speaker at our Pontypridd Women's History Roadshow. Her name always drew crowds

I have tried to write a fulsome tribute to Elaine, covering her huge range of activities but when I think about her the words that come to my mind are always, "She was a lovely woman."

Deirdre Beddoe
Emeritus Professor of Women's History
The University of Glamorgan

A far from traditional life – a Review of *Knock 'em Cold, Kid* by Elaine Morgan

Elaine Morgan waited until last year to write her autobiography. It's a very entertaining book, though less of an autobiography than a series of sketches about parts of her life; clearly given such a long life a great deal is missing. Elaine was born in Pontypridd in 1920, and the first section of the book is an evocative account of her grandparents and parents lives, followed by her own childhood, including the difficulties of life on the dole in the 1930s. A clever only child enjoying the company of four adults in the household (her mother's parents lived with them) she was encouraged to apply for Oxford – 'I was entered for Oxford rather in the way that a promising horse is entered for the

Grand National, without consulting the horse' and in 1939 she entered Lady Margaret Hall to read English, a world away from the Rhondda, but one in which she apparently thrived.

She married schoolteacher Morien Morgan in 1945. For a while she was a full-time housewife and mother to three sons until she began to write, first as a scriptwriter in the newly-emerging world of TV, writing prize-winning scripts for series such as *'How Green was my Valley'* (1975) and *'Testament of Youth'* (1979).

Elaine Morgan is probably best known for her popular and controversial book *'The Descent of Woman'* (1972) challenging the assumptions and theories of male writers which were based only on adult males and ignoring women. She later wrote a more scientific book, *The Aquatic Ape*, which argued that humans evolved from a semi-aquatic environment. Though supported by many scientists, as well as feminists like me, there was plenty of opposition and derision at the time from male scientists who were scornful of the idea that a mere housewife from the Rhondda (as they saw her) could legitimately challenge established ideas.

Her interest in human evolution continued throughout her life and she attended and spoke at many academic conferences throughout the world continuing to write on the subject. At the same time she continued to live in Mountain Ash (until her death in July) and contributed a regular column to *The Western Mail* until she finally retired in January 2013.

Although the book is not really an autobiography, it is full of Elaine's characteristic wit, and it illustrates a number of episodes in the extraordinarily diverse life of a brilliant woman who spent most of her life in a small Welsh valley town.

Knock 'em Cold Kid: Elaine Morgan, Matador, 2012, ISBN 9781780882130

Avril Rolph, August 2013

Celebrating Sheila Parry

This year the Women's Archive of Wales will be celebrating Sheila Parry (née Davies) and her campaign sixty years ago for women's rights and gender equality.

In the academic year 1952-3, an attempt was made to set up a representative committee in the women's halls of residence in Bangor Normal College, on the lines of the representative committee in the men's halls of residence. Sheila Davies led the campaign, which had the support of the National Union of Students. At the end of the Christmas Term 1952, the College authorities warned Sheila that her activities were endangering her place there. She was in her last year of training at the time, and therefore her entire future was in jeopardy.

When Sheila Davies returned to the College in the New Year, she continued to campaign, still with the support of the NUS, and also with her parents' agreement. The College kept its promise. In March 1953 Sheila Davies was expelled, and she had to return home to the Rhondda. This was the beginning of campaigning on her behalf by the NUS, the NUT, and also Lorie Thomas and George Thomas, the M.P.s for the Rhondda.

With their support, the case received considerable public attention, and eventually Ms Davies was allowed to finish her training – but at Cardiff Training College. She was not allowed to return to Bangor. She went on to teach, and today lives in Chorley, Lancashire.

Sheila will be speaking at this year's Women's Archive of Wales' Conference on October 12-3, at the Soar Centre, Merthyr Tudful, when there will also be an exhibition based on her archive, which will outline her work for women's rights in 1952-3.

Elin Jones

Membership Mystery

A new standing order for £10 has started to be paid into the Archive's bank account. The payment is in the name of E. DAVIDGE. Unfortunately we have no other information about this payment, so the unknown person won't get our newsletter or any emails.

Does anyone recognise this unusual name? If so, please email me at gaimall@aol.com, as the bank is unable to give me any clues at all.

Gail Allen, Treasurer

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

**Copy date for next issue
Friday 15th November 2013**

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 is also available to members on line at www.womensarchivewales.org, in the Members Section.

This edition was edited by Caroline Fairclough, and translated by Catrin Stevens.

'Women as Staff and Patients in Denbigh Mental Hospital'



Left to right Pam Michael, Jill Piercy, Catrin Stevens (plus attentive audience)

At the Denbighshire and District National Eisteddfod in August the old Denbigh Asylum cast a grim shadow over several of the activities on the field – from the Art Pavilion with its rows of medicine bottles and their sad messages to a drama based upon patients' notes. Women's Archive of Wales contributed to this theme through a session in the Societies' Tent, in which Dr Pamela Michael, an expert on the history of health and mental health in Wales, discussed 'Women as Staff and Patients in Denbigh Asylum'. She illustrated her talk with compelling photographs,

contrasting formal pictures of the staff in the late nineteenth century with more modern and informal images of staff and patients socialising on walks and trips and in dances. This showed how the old asylum evolved

into a modern mental health hospital during its 150 year history.

One striking comment she made was that the hospital was built in 1848 to accommodate monoglot Welsh-speaking patients from north Wales. Every member of staff had to be able to speak Welsh, a remarkable policy at the time and in the wake of the Treason of the Blue Books in 1847. Dr Michael's talk was greatly appreciated by the audience of around 50 present.

Following the talk, members of the audience were invited to share their reminiscences as staff or patients. One ex-member of staff described the hospital eisteddfod and another noted that some of her colleagues had not felt able to attend the session because their memories were still too raw. To close the session Jill Piercy, an authority on the life and work of artist and author Brenda Chamberlain, read moving extracts from her writings, which reflected upon the period she spent as a patient in Denbigh Mental Hospital. Dr Michael had also organised an excellent exhibition of photographs of the hospital, through the kind permission of Denbighshire Record Office.

This is the second time AMC/WAW has staged an event at the National Eisteddfod and once more it was a resounding success. We look forward now to the challenge of finding a suitable topic for the 2014 Sir Gâr eisteddfod in Llanelli.

Catrin Stevens

No Job for a little Girl: Voices from Domestic Service – Rosemary Scadden Gomer 2013

In the 1990s Rosemary Scadden undertook a Master's degree at Cardiff University, working on the lives and experiences of young, some very young, Welsh women and girls who became domestic servants in the period between the wars. Two decades later, and with additional material gained from audiences to her lectures on the subject, she has produced a fascinating book based on the recordings she made for her dissertation.

The book contains, as well as the economic background to the period, chapters on Education and Training, Leaving Home, often for London, Working Conditions and Time Off. Some of the girls were trained in domestic service at Government centres set up in areas of deprivation, including Jacobsdale in Pontypridd. Many of them, whether being trained or going directly into employment, suffered extreme homesickness 'I nearly broke my heart. I was awfully homesick for two years.' Others found there were advantages to their new lives: practical, 'I was now being fed. I had good meals' and aspirational, 'I saw another side of life; a wider vision of life'.

The coming of World War II changed everything. Girls working in London returned to Wales to work in the factories or the Land Army, or joined the Women's forces where they might well find themselves sleeping in a hut with the daughters of the servant-employing classes.

No Job for a Little Girl is a well researched and very readable account of an almost forgotten way of life that was normal for thousands of servant girls and their employers. It has benefitted too from being twenty years in production, with the hindsight that this implies. As Rosemary Scadden says 'what was ordinary becomes extraordinary with time'. [CF]

Rosemary Scadden is speaking at the AMCV/WAW Conference in October.



Bookings are going well for the Annual Conference which will be held at Canolfan Soar, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8UB on the 12th and 13th October. Members should have been sent programme and booking details which are also available on the Website

<http://www.womensarchivewales.org/events.html>