

TRIBUTES TO URSULA MASSON



Ursula Masson 1945 - 2008

It was with great sadness that members of the Archive heard of Ursula's death. Numerous tributes were paid to Ursula at her funeral by those who had known and shared her life over the years, family, friends, colleagues at the University of Glamorgan and Llafur. Professor Deirdre Beddoe, a long time friend of Ursula, working colleague and fellow member of the Archive, paid tribute on behalf of the Archive and this eulogy is included. The Archive itself received numerous letters of condolence and sympathy and the Committee agreed that these should be shared with the members. Also included is an appeal by Jenny Sabine for ideas on how the Archive can pay tribute to Ursula in a more positive way.

Pat Widger, Editor

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Professor Deirdre Beddoe, President, Women's Archive of Wales:

Ursula was a wonderful woman who we are all going to miss. Without Ursula there would not have been a Women's Archive of Wales. It was her idea. Nor would there have been a Women's History Roadshow Project- again the inspired suggestion to run a series of women's history roadshows was hers. And of course Ursula has been our long-serving Chair.

Ursula was a superb feminist historian and scholar. Her main interest was in the political history of women in Wales. She wrote widely on the complex subject of the women's suffrage movement in Wales and was awarded her PhD on Welsh Women Liberals, 1883-1914.

She was also a very highly regarded teacher and much loved by her students. Amongst the many tributes that have flowed into the Archive since Ursula's death on April 7th have been several from mature women students who praised the patience and support that they unfailingly received from Ursula.

r those of us in the Archive, however, we are losing a dear friend and sister. We all miss her already and it is hard to bear ur thoughts are with Ursula's family in this truly sad time.

Llafur - The Welsh Peoples' History Society

We are very sad to announce that our friend and colleague, Ursula Masson, died peacefully on April 7th.

She had been ill for several years but continued to work and retain her optimism right to the end. Her fortitude, courage, and determination to continue with as much of her normal life as possible were inspirational.

We remember her for her approachability, compassion, good humour and efficiency. She was particularly kind to mature women students. Her wit is remembered with affection by many.

She was one of the founders of the Women's Archive of Wales, something which grew out of all the work she did with community groups and adult students over the years. She had been instrumental in gaining Lottery funding for the path-breaking women's history roadshows which were recently launched. They will be one of her memorials.

It is especially cruel that her life was cut short just as her research and writing were coming to full fruition. She published some fundamental works on women's politics in Wales and completed her doctoral thesis about a year ago. Anyone reading her work will recognise the quality of her analysis and the lucidity of her writing:

others who have worked in a field where the sources are thin and difficult will have a particular appreciation of just how hard - and intelligently - she worked.

She had long been an active member of Llafur - as a committee member, treasurer for some years, and as an editor of the journal. To this last task she brought a fine judgement, rigorous proof reading and sympathetic responses to contributors. As in all her activities she gave the work enormous an amount of time and energy. We mourn a lovely, intelligent, kind and dedicated woman.

Alun Burge:

Ursula has been an active member of the Welsh Social History Society (Llafur), and committee, for many years and with Neil, the joint editor of our journal.

She recently had a number of important publications, which will stand as a testimony to her work.

Ursula was a lovely, funny, woman, and the way in which she has dealt with her illness in recent years was an indicator of her inner strength.

Neil Evans:

There is little to add - for now - to Alun's moving email. I would just underline the importance of her recent work. In some ways you need to have worked on the sources for women's suffrage in Wales to have an appreciation of just how good it is. Her proof reading and judgement in the journal were huge assets which will be hard to replace. There is also the largely hidden history of her work in community education and the films she was so closely involved in in the 1980s.

But most all there was Ursula, even tempered, calm and efficient and always a pleasure to work with.

Angela John, Historian:

Ursula's kindness, wit and compassion, along with her support for mature women students in particular, will be badly missed. So too will the inspired work that she did as a Llafur editor and with the Welsh Women's Archive. It seems especially cruel that we should lose her just when she was at the height of her productivity. Her recent publications palpably demonstrate that she had become a superb feminist historian and Llafur is impoverished by this terrible, untimely loss

Chris Chapman, Historian and AM for Cynon Valley:

Thank you for letting me know. That is so sad- Ursula will be hugely missed.

Christine Kinsey, Artist:

I am so sorry to hear of the death of Ursula. She will be remembered for her enormous contribution to the archiving of the history of Welsh Women.

Bruna Chezzi, postgraduate student at Cardiff University :

I am profoundly sorry to receive the sad news about Ursula's death. As a young and late member of WAW, I have only recently met Ursula, but as a postgraduate student, I am aware and appreciate with great respect and admiration her academic work and the importance for WAW. I would like to offer my condolences to the family and join you emotionally in this time of sorrow.

David Doughan, Former Librarian, Fawcett Library, London

What very unhappy news! I have strong memories of Ursula, all of them pleasant. A very good scholar, and a very likeable person.

Ursula was an inspirational colleague and long-serving committee member for the West of England and South Wales Women's History Network and over the last ten years has organised many workshops and conferences for the network.

She was also a much admired and respected figure in the field of Welsh women's history. Her work was recognised two years ago at the Council of the Women of the Year lunch where she received an award as 'woman of achievement for 2006'. This was given in recognition of her recent publishing career and her work in promoting women's history and education in Wales particularly through the Welsh Women's Archive.

She will be greatly missed by us all.

***Dr Katherine Holden*, Convenor of Steering Committee, Women's History Network, UK
in a letter to Members of the West of England and South Wales History Network:**

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you that Ursula Masson died last night after a long battle with cancer.

Ursula was an inspirational colleague and long-serving committee member for the West of England and South Wales Women's History Network and over the last ten years has organised many workshops and conferences for the network.

She was also a much admired and respected figure in the field of Welsh women's history. Her work was recognised two years ago at the Council of the Women of the Year lunch where she received an award as 'woman of achievement for 2006'. This was given in recognition of her recent publishing career and her work in promoting women's history and education in Wales particularly through the Welsh Women's Archive.

She will be greatly missed by us all.

Honno Gwasg Menywod Cymru / Welsh Women's Press:

All of us in the office were very saddened by the news of Ursula's death. I knew that she had had cancer some time ago but was not aware that she had become ill again. She was a much valued contributor to Honno and we will be paying tribute to her in our next newsletter and on the website.

Dilys Jackson, Sculptor:

I am so sad to hear of the death of Ursula. She was a sweet person, always happy to share her knowledge and understanding. I always looked forward to meetings with her and was one of the many people that I know she helped in many ways. My thoughts are with you all.

Carolyn Davies, Postgraduate Student, USA

It is devastating news, although not unexpected. I've known Ursula since 1999 and I have also liked and admired her. Her life has been so positive and highly effective, and her mind and spirit first-rate.

With a heavy heart and thinking of you.

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IN MEMORY OF URSULA

Already a number of initiatives to honour Ursula's memory have been put in place. The University of Glamorgan will hold an annual lecture on International Women's Day, to be called the Ursula Masson Lecture.

In addition, the History Dept at the University of Glamorgan is awarding an Ursula Masson essay prize.

These are wonderful tributes to Ursula that will keep her and her achievements in the memories of so many people who knew her.

Ursula's family requested donations to Cancer Care Cymru instead of flowers at the funeral, and this is something we can still do as individuals.

BUT WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

From the Archive's perspective, we would like to establish an appropriate memorial to Ursula to mark her tremendous contribution to women's history in Wales, her feminism and her support and encouragement to so many women in so many ways.

The committee welcomes suggestions from members as to what form an appropriate and feasible memorial could take.

Please contact Jenny Sabine on Jennifer@sabine5.wanadoo.co.uk with your ideas by the 15th August.

DEIRDRE BEDDOE – EULOGY FOR URSULA 18 APRIL 2008

I'd like to speak about Ursula's work. It mattered a lot to her and it matters a lot to me that you should know just what she did.

Ursula and I became friends, many years ago now, because we shared a common passion- Welsh Women's History. And we shared a common concern – we knew that there was a desperate urgency to research and rescue that history.

Ursula contributed so much to the history of women in Wales. In the early days she worked with Swansea Women's History group producing a fascinating series of short films- not Hollywood productions – but cutting edge in terms of women's history. She honed in on the neglected topic of Welsh women conscientious objectors – most people, including historians, didn't even know that such women existed until then. The group also made a film on munition workers and a very interesting one on women and the miners' strike drawing comparisons with women in 1926. The title of the last of these- Smiling and Splendid Women- an echo from that earlier age, so reminds me of Ursula. Ursula was a splendid woman.

Ursula was a superb and rigorous scholar who was very highly regarded by the academic community. In her work she addressed the most neglected area of women's history here in Wales- politics. She wrote ground-breaking articles on the women's suffrage campaign, all based on her original researches. For her Ph.D topic, she tackled the complex relationships between Welsh women and the Liberal party. It is a testimony to Ursula's amazing strength of character, that she completed such a major piece of work despite years of ill health in her struggle against cancer. But she did it and she completed the work - again it has a title which I can only describe "So Ursula" – is 'For Women, for Wales and For Liberalism'. As her supervisors, June Hannam of UWE and I were privileged to be associated with this work.

In recent years the publications started to come thick and fast. There was Women's Rights and Womanly Duties: the Aberdare Women's Liberal Association 1891-1910 (2005). She edited and produced the new edition of Elizabeth Andrew's A Woman's Work is Never Done, (2006) and at the end of last year she produced along with Jane Aaron, The Very Salt of Life, Welsh Women's Political Writings from Chartism to Suffrage (2007). Ursula was in full flow and only her cruel illness has prevented her from carrying on with the work she loved and from which we all benefited so much. I'm pleased to be able to say that her Ph.D thesis will be published in the UWP Gender Studies in Wales series thanks to Jane Aaron and Sian Rhiannon Williams.

In the short time I have today I cannot convey to you the sheer charm of Ursula's writing. She knew these Liberal women – whether it was Mrs. George the Beehive, Aberdare, Miss Price, Rose Cottage or the magnificent, Norah Philipps, later Lady St Davids. When I walk through the grander residential streets of Cardiff I will always think of myself as walking through Villadom- a phrase drawn from her writing. Cardiff Women's Liberal Association was criticized by head office for recruiting new members exclusively from Villadom. (Not that Ursula was a Liberal. She was a socialist. You heard earlier who her real heroines were.)

Historians in Wales are indebted to Ursula. Wales is indebted to Ursula.

Ursula taught in the University of Glamorgan since 1994 and many students are immensely grateful to Ursula. Since her death we in AMC/WAW have received a stream of tributes including those from mature women students who all speak of her kindness and patience. And Ursula thrived at Glamorgan.

But she was involved in many other organizations.

- Ursula was a long-time member of Llafur, the Welsh People's History Society. In recent years she served as treasurer and from 2004 she acted with Neil Evans as joint editor of the journal. Llafur is a close community of Welsh historians and Llafur too greatly mourns Ursula's passing.
- Ursula set up, together with our friends and colleagues across the water, the South Wales and West of England Women's History Network., a wonderful support network for scholars and students. Ursula will be greatly missed by the West of England women too.
- But one of Ursula's greatest achievements was the setting up of Archif Menywod Cymru/The Women's Archive of Wales, an organization dedicated to rescuing the lost sources of our history.

The Archive was Ursula's idea and she was and will continue to be, its inspiration. The Wales Women's History Roadshow Project, now funded by a large grant from Heritage Lottery Fund was Ursula's idea too. It is a source of great joy to us – her friends and colleagues in the Archive- that Ursula's last public appearance was at the launch of the Roadshow Project at the National Assembly on January 29th. She chaired the launch with great style and aplomb. We in the Archive loved this truly remarkable woman. And we will make the Roadshows a fitting memorial to our dear sister Ursula.

Ursula was an extraordinary woman. She was funny, bright, intelligent and the most principled person I have ever known. She was brave, kind, compassionate, steady and modest. She'd have thought I 'm going way over the top today- but we all know that I am not. Ursula was my friend, my very good and dear friend. I loved being with her and I could count on her absolutely when I needed help- she was always there for me. I shall miss her terribly- I already do. We all miss her- but how fortunate we were to know her.

Ursula will indeed be sadly missed by all those who knew her but we will also have many fond memories of her courage, determination, inspiration, understanding, encouragement but most of all her friendship.

Pat Widger, Editor