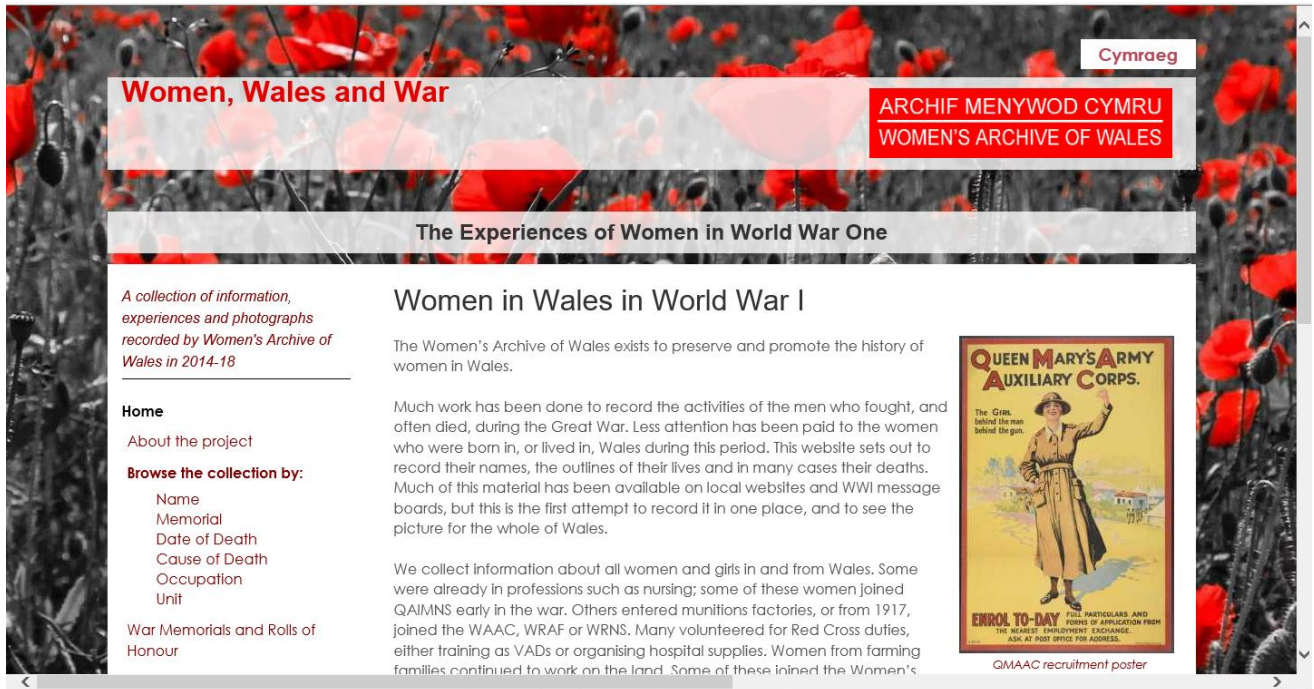


Women in World War I: the Welsh Experience



After rather more tweaks than we had anticipated the Women, Wales and War/Menywod, Cymru a Rhyfel website is now live. Here you can find details of over 120 women and girls in or from Wales who lived, worked, and in some cases died during the years 1914 - 1919. The site is bilingual, and fully searchable by name, place, occupation and often cause and place of death, and there are also background essays giving a context.

It is by no means complete. There are already about forty names waiting to be loaded (we had to stop somewhere and actually create the site), and we hope that there are many more stories waiting to be told and photographs to be included. Some areas have barely been touched; for example we have the name of only one women peace campaigner (Olive Francis), and very little on the Women's Land Army. It is a live site, with contact details. We still very much want to hear from you.

Our HLF grant also stretched to creating a set of four posters which will be sent to every secondary school in Wales. They have the general title 'What did Women in Wales do during the First World War?', and cover Nursing, The Armed Services, Munitions and At Home and on the Land, and will be in English and Welsh editions. Preliminary research by Catrin Stevens indicates that they should prove very popular with history teachers. We hope to show these off at the Conference in October, where we will officially launch the site with tea and cake.

None of this would have been possible without the help of a great many people, members of WAW and others, or without the generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, to whom many thanks.



International Women's Day at Bangor University 2016

International Women's Day was this year celebrated on 12th March at Bangor University. It was organised by Shan Ashton, Director of Lifelong Learning and the MA Women's Studies course, in collaboration with WEN Wales.

There was an all-day women's enterprise fair, and information points from Chwarae Teg; Bangor University Social Work; the Prime business and leadership project; Bawso; Women's Aid; The Open University and the Soroptimists. AMC/WAW leaflets were available, together with a display from the World War I project.

The day began with a workshop run by Krista Powell Edwards of Chwarae Teg, which was an excellent introduction to the day. It was followed by a fascinating talk from Paola Dyboski, of Dr. Zig's Extraordinary Bubbles, who had an inspiring story to tell. Following that was a very moving talk from Malan Wilkinson, who shared her story concerning mental health difficulties. Rhian Huws Williams, the Chief Executive of the Care Council for Wales, then showed a short video about "Caring in Wales" which was very emotive and Rhian explained how it was hoped to improve services. There was special emphasis placed on the importance of language as the core element of good practice in Wales.

Lunch was used as a way of supporting the student "Dragons" group of cheerleaders, who had all made sandwiches, pasties and cakes which were on sale for donations, and it was good to see their enterprise.

In the evening, in the Teras Bar, there was a celebration of "Lleisiau – Voices". The entertainers were SERA (cerddor /singer-songwriter); Rebecca Palin (Golden Fable); Sophie McKeand (Bardd y Brenin/leuenedid Cymru / Young People's Laureate for Wales); and Nesdi Jones (Canwr Bollywood Cymreig/Welsh Bollywood singer).

Altogether, it was a very interesting, entertaining and varied day of celebration.

Val Wakefield

Women by Joe Bach

including the 1951 miners panels
Swansea Museum

21 May - 10 July 2016. Free Entry

An exhibition of artwork by Josef Herman, selected from the Josef Herman Art Foundation Cymru collection and curated by local artist Erin Rickard.



Josef Herman is known for his depiction of working people, specifically miners. While these figures are a central theme within his work they do not stand alone. This exhibition celebrates his portrayal of women, equally as strong and broad as their male counterparts, with additional qualities of tenderness.

For this exhibition Erin Rickard has assembled what she considers a moving insight into the warmth and sensitivity of the artist's nature. Coming to Wales in 1944 Josef was warmly welcomed into the Welsh community of Ystradgynlais, being given the endearing nickname of Joe Bach. The women of Jo Bach are depicted in a monumental and emotionally intimate manner, celebrating their role as pillars of community, a quality that Josef Herman cherished. If you are in Swansea, this is an exhibition not to miss!

Jenny Sabine

19th Annual Conference October 2016

This year's Conference will be held in Bangor, on the 8th and 9th October. The venue is the Cledwyn Rooms at Bangor University, and some accommodation has been reserved at the Management Centre of the Business School (details below). A varied and interesting programme is in preparation! Booking details will be sent out soon.

contact Management Centre, Bangor Business School, College Road, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2DG

Phone: +44 (0)1248 365 900

Email info@themanagementcentre.co.uk

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 26h August**

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.

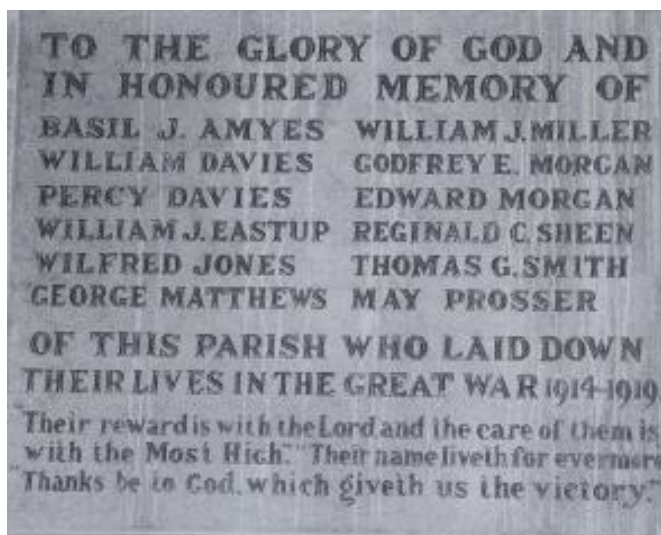
This Newsletter was edited by Caroline Fairclough, and translated by Catrin Stevens,

May Prosser, Munitionette

The two First World War memorials in the village of Govilon, near Abergavenny, record, in alphabetical order, the eleven men 'from this Parish who laid down their lives for King and Country in the Great War', followed – unusually – by the name of one woman, May Prosser.



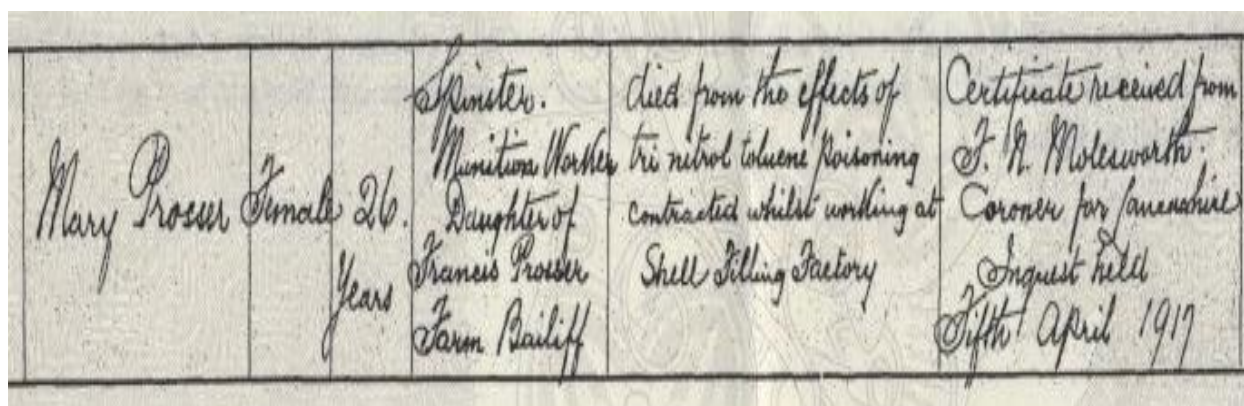
Entrance to the King George V Playing Field, Govilon



Memorial plaque Christ Church, Govilon

May Prosser was born in Dyffrynbach farm, Gilwern, on 19 February 1891, the fourth daughter, among ten children, of Margaret (née Morris), a native of Cwmdy, near Crickhowell, and Francis Prosser, a farm labourer from Herefordshire. (Her Christian name is recorded as 'Mary' in both her birth and death certificates, though she was clearly generally known as 'May'.) Marrying in 1875, her parents lived successively in Talgarth, Cwmdy and Gilwern, before finally settling at Oak Cottage, Govilon, around 1902.

By the time of the 1911 census, May – now aged 20 – was a domestic servant in Rochdale, Lancashire, following in the footsteps of two of her elder sisters, who had ventured north for similar employment some years earlier. In late 1916, May took a job in a munitions factory. Despite the fact that one had opened in Rochdale in July of that year, she appears to have worked elsewhere, possibly at the White Lund munitions factory, in Morecambe, some sixty miles away. Having had a decade in domestic service – an occupation commonly entailing long hours of badly-paid drudgery and servility – she may well have been attracted by the far better wages and also the camaraderie and social and economic independence offered by munitions work. 'Doing her bit' for the war effort, as others in her family were, could also have been a motivation – a brother served in the army, one sister was employed at the munitions works in Hereford and another worked as a cook in the Women's Army Auxiliary



Corps.

'Munitionettes' (as women workers in the industry were frequently termed) laboured in extremely unhealthy and hazardous conditions, carrying potentially life-threatening risks – from poisoning, accidents and explosions. May Prosser was one of a considerable number of victims of poisoning. Having been passed fit on commencing

munitions work in early November 1916, she was dead within five months. The inquest heard from her eldest sister, Margaret, that when May 'came to Rochdale at Christmas she did not appear to have been as lively as usual'. Resuming work, her decline was swift. By late January, she was diagnosed with 'toxic jaundice' and conveyed to an infirmary. Discharged after a month – 'though not cured' – she again returned to Rochdale, where she came under the care of Dr William Bateman, who immediately concluded that she was suffering from 'pernicious anaemia' with 'symptoms of poisoning'. She spent the last weeks of her life at her sister's Rochdale home, where she died and was then presumably buried in the town.

May's father and mother continued to live in Govilon until their deaths, always conscious that their daughter had lost her life directly as a result of the war. 'She gave her life for her country', concluded the notice of death in the *Abergavenny Chronicle*. A year later, an item in the 'In Memoriam' column, read: 'In Most Affectionate Remembrance of May, much-loved daughter of Francis and Margaret Prosser, Govilon, who died on April 3, 1917, from the effects of shell filling, aged 26'.

In the aftermath of war, communities everywhere were passionate about permanently commemorating those from their locality who had died in the conflict. In Govilon, a public meeting in February 1919 concluded that a recreation ground for the village would be the most fitting memorial and in the course of the next few years a committee worked towards bringing this to fruition. In the meantime, in April 1921, a stone mural tablet was unveiled at the parish church, where Francis and Margaret Prosser were staunch worshippers. It could well have been their close relationship with the vicar that ensured the inclusion of May's name on the church memorial and then the 'Roll of Honour' inscribed on the gateway pillars of the new recreation ground later in the year simply adopted the same list of names.

Whatever the precise circumstances, it was to the village's credit that when erecting its memorials in the immediate post-war years it did not overlook the claim of a female non-combatant. During the First World War, hundreds of women, perhaps over a thousand, died as a result of munitions work, overwhelmingly through explosions but a significant number, certainly more than a hundred, as a result of TNT poisoning. The names of the majority of these have gone unrecorded on local war memorials. But, as one mother from north Wales vehemently argued: 'Young girls . . . who risked their lives every day in munitions works, handling high explosives and other dangerous substances, were *real* soldiers'.

Ryland Wallace

[My thanks to Caroline Fairclough of Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales for alerting me to the 'Great War Forum' contribution of 'Fychan' who provides the vital Rochdale link, enabling the details of May Prosser's life to emerge.]

Iris Owens

We were sorry to hear of the unexpected death in May of WAW member Iris Owens of Ystrad Mynach. She had participated in the Voices from the Factory Floor project, as she had worked at Currans, Cardiff whilst a student. (VSE057, also called Iris Radley)

Women's Archive of Wales at the Monmouthshire and District National Eisteddfod

Once again the Sub-Committee which organises our annual lecture at the National Eisteddfod is very excited by the feast which we have prepared this year. The title of the session will be: 'The Suffragettes, the Eisteddfod and More!' Dr Ryland Wallace, who is an expert on the history of the women's suffrage movement in Wales will be discussing how the Suffragettes especially targeted the National Eisteddfod ceremonies to draw attention to their cause, and then Dr Elin Jones (in collaboration with Professor Angela V. John) will speak about Lady Rhondda's contribution to this cause . . . and much more. Dr Siân Rhiannon Williams will chair the meeting.

The session will take place in the Societies' Unit 2 at 11.30am on Friday the 5th of August. Don't miss this chance to hear about a very interesting topic. The meeting is open to all and simultaneous translation will be provided. Croeso!

Catrin Stevens