

www.womansarchivewales.org

## Remembering the beginnings of the Women's Archive of Wales

'I helped Ursula Masson to set up a meeting which was to be held in her house on the evening of December 6<sup>th</sup>, but little did I imagine how much that would impact on my life in the coming decades. The meeting was arranged a few months after the end of the two year project on the Women's Liberation Movement and Women's Peace Movement in Wales where the need for a women's archive had become ever more apparent; women invited included those who had been interviewed as part of the project plus others who Ursula thought might be interested. We had quite a few apologies but those who came were enthusiastic at the idea and, importantly, some were willing to be active in trying to make it happen.

I'd worked closely with Ursula for the two years of the project and shared her enthusiasm for the idea of a women's archive, not least because there was nothing comparable in Wales to the organisations in England, Scotland and Ireland. Sharing ideas about how this might happen, and realising that the first steps to make it a reality were just about to start was both exciting and a little scary. I don't think it ever occurred to me at the time not to be part of the working group, it seemed an obvious next step to the work I'd been doing on the WLM Project, and somehow I'm still here!

Avril Rolph

'Twenty years ago this month – in December 1997 – Ursula Masson held a meeting in her house in Kimberley Road, Cardiff, to discuss 'establishing a Women's Archive/Feminist Archive for Wales... Aims: To gather general and on-going support for such an idea from a broad group of women, and to establish a working group willing to develop the idea further, defining the purposes of such an archive, the feasibility of the project, and sources of funding.'

I was one of those who gathered that dark evening. In retrospect it seems the room was packed with women but Ursula's list (now safely stored in the AMC/WAW Administrative Archive in Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff) shows that 16 women attended. There was fairly unanimous agreement that the project should be attempted. Ursula then asked who would join a working group to set it up. I remember volunteering, and saying to my companion as we drove home that I would need something to keep me occupied when I retired. 20 years on I can say I certainly found that something!

Jenny Sabine.

**2018** will be a year of celebrating the Archive, beginning with an Anniversary Day Event and Ursula Masson Memorial Lecture on 8th March 2018 at the Pierhead Building, Cardiff. It will be organised jointly with the University of South Wales. Keep an eye on our website for more.

You are invited:

Meeting to discuss establishing a Women's Archive/Feminist Archive for Wales:

Where? 115 Kimberley Rd, Penylan Cardiff. (Corner of Kimberley and Waterloo Rd). Telephone.01222.494705 if you get lost.

When? Saturday December 6th at 6pm, for "business" at 7pm.

Aims: To gather general and on-going support for such an idea from a broad group of women; and to establish a working group willing to develop the idea further, defining the purposes of such an archive, the feasibility of the project, and sources of funding.

All interested women welcome.

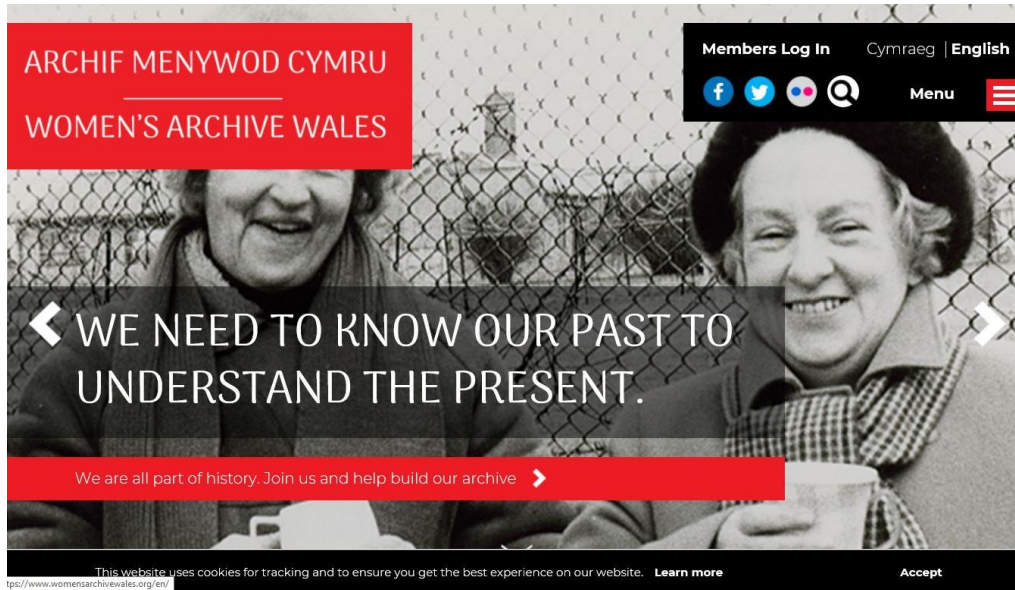
Contacts:

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Avril Rolph 01222.705623. email [arolph@glamorgan.ac.uk](mailto:arolph@glamorgan.ac.uk)

## New Website

The new AMC/WAW website had a 'soft' launch in October, and is very well worth spending time with. There are



a number of new features, including the ability to pay subscriptions on line, and the committee members' favourite items in the collection. See if you can locate whose choice the image below was. There will be many more. The new Members' section will, it is hoped, become a



place where WAW members can share research interest and exchange ideas. For the first time, we will be publishing Conference and other papers. Contact us with your ideas of what you would like to see on the members' pages.

To enable the Members' section and membership generally work as they should, we do need your current email addresses.

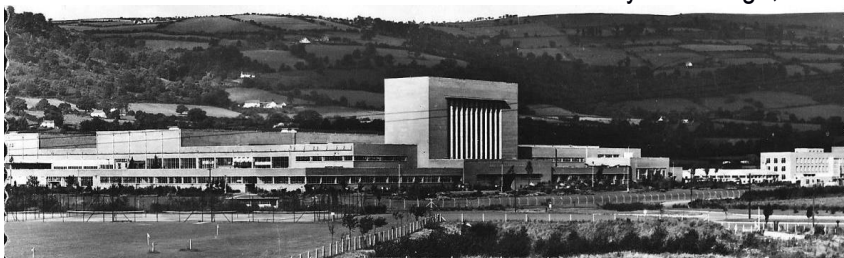
Please keep Sue Thomas up to date with any change of email address (and indeed postal address). Contact her at [membershipsecretary@womensarchivewales.org](mailto:membershipsecretary@womensarchivewales.org)

The website was designed by Waters Creative of Swansea, and the legwork for the Archive was carried out by Avril Rolph with considerable assistance from Gail Allen, Catrin Stevens and Sue Thomas. Very many thanks to them all

## Voices from the Factory Floor – a reaction

The Archive's book 'Voices from the Factory Floor' has resonated very deeply with me. After my father died in 1949 my mother was the first of two women to be employed in the newly opened British Nylon Spinners Factory near Pont-y-pwl. She worked shifts on a production line burning nylon off spindles, it was dangerous work. Women and men worked on the production line doing exactly the same job but women were paid half of what the men were being paid and accused of working for 'pin money' and taking men's jobs. My mother worked there for 14 years as well as looking after her family.

It's interesting looking again at the photographs of B.N.S in the book. My mother talked about the executive dining room. The top management tier always seemed remote and exclusive. B.N.S recruited girls from the local Grammar Schools, like Pont-y-pool Girls Grammar, to work in the 'Labs'. They were very sought-after jobs and the girls were seemingly well looked after. But it was a very different story for girls from the local Secondary Modern Schools or women who had left school at 12 years of age, like my mother, who worked on the production line.



When B.N.S opened in 1949 it boasted the longest production line in Europe! I was taken there on an open day as a 'treat'. I thought I was walking into hell. I think I became a feminist at the age of ten!

I am producing my book 'Truth, Lies & Alibis, A Visual Memoir' (Parthian Books and due out in October 2019) in words and images for my mother, to tell her story as well as other women's stories from the Valleys.

Christine Kinsey

## Conference at Aberystwyth – a great success!

Record numbers attended our annual conference at Aberystwyth, which was organised by Jane Aaron, Eurwen Booth, Gwyneth Tyson Roberts and Llinos Dafis who did a wonderful job.



PhD student Jay Rees was a first time attendee, and a Conference speaker. Here are her impressions:

First of all, I would like to say thank you to those who organised the fantastic and insightful event. The range of topics and discussions, generated from the varied background of participants, were second to none. The atmosphere created for sharing new ideas was warm, open and friendly.

During my time at Aberystwyth, I presented a paper on the topic 'Bob Baker's Bird of the Week: Perceptions of Femininity at Swansea University in the 1960s.' The opportunity to present this paper to likeminded individuals and to the alumni of Swansea was invaluable. From their feedback, I was able to make some much needed changes and additions to my analysis of female students. In addition, I created connections with past Swansea students, which has increased the possibility of more oral interviews for my study.

I thoroughly enjoyed the papers given throughout both days. From the analysis of patch work quilts to discussions of Middle Class Women and their social mobility in Carmarthen, I was introduced to new topics and different methods of study concerning Welsh Women. The extra activities during the conference weekend were fantastic. The dinner was great fun, as was the raffle and book sale. It was lovely to meet the association to which I hope to work closer with in the future.

### The new Committee

Following the AGM in October, the new AMC/WAW committee is

Deirdre Beddoe	President
Catrin Stevens	Chair
Chris Chapman	Vice Chair
Avril Rolph	Secretary
Gail Allen	Treasurer
Sue Thomas	Membership secretary
Caroline Fairclough	Newsletter editor
Shan Robinson	Minutes secretary
Catrin Edwards, Dinah Evans, Elin Jones, Gwyneth Roberts, Jenny Sabine, Kate Sullivan, Sue Trevelyan Jones, and Val Wakefield.	
Archives advisors:	Susan Edwards and Rhian Diggins, both Glamorgan Archives.

Jenny Sabine, retiring Chair, hands over to Catrin Stevens, WAW's new Chair.





### Dorethea Bate 1878-1951

Dorethea Bate was born in Napier House, Spilman Street, Carmarthen on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1878. She was the daughter of Henry and Elizabeth Bate; her father was Superintendent of Police in Carmarthenshire. When she was about two years old the family moved to Green Hall which was just on the outskirts of town where Fountain Hall Terrace is now. The family lived there until Dorethea was about eight years old and then they moved to Gellidywell near Cenarth when her father retired. Dorethea had little, if any, formal education but she seems to have been fascinated by wildlife and nature. When she was nineteen years old, in 1898, she 'turned up' at

the Natural History Museum in Kensington and asked for a job. Despite being so young and having no qualifications, she became the first women employed in a scientific capacity by the Museum. The job they gave her doesn't sound very attractive as it involved sorting through and classifying bird skins. Nevertheless, she was to be employed by the Museum for fifty years.

The focus of her life's work was the exploration of how and why different species adapt and change. She undertook this by studying fossils. She was also fascinated by archaeology and, therefore, helped to develop the science of archaeozoology.

In the course of her work, she led 'digs' on the islands of Cyprus, Crete, Malta and other parts of the Mediterranean Sea. It is not surprising that she became an expert in climatic interpretation.

She also undertook explorations in China and Palestine and one of the highlights of her career was the discovery of fossilised elephant remains and the bones of a giant tortoise in Bethlehem. Her 'finds' were transported back to the museum in Kensington.

In 1940 she was elected fellow of the Royal Geological Society

The Second World War greatly curtailed her journeys but she worked in the Zoological Branch of the Museum in Hertfordshire and became Officer in Charge there. She carried on working and exploring until her death in January 1951.

Dorethea Bate was one of the outstanding scientists of her generation, the fact that she was a woman makes her achievements all the more extraordinary.

Mary Thorley

A blue plaque commemorating Dorethea was unveiled in Carmarthen on December 6<sup>th</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-west-wales-42242084>

### Prize for Abergavenny Museum's exhibition.

Congratulations to Abergavenny Museum which was awarded Women's History Network's annual Community History Project prize for its *Monmouthshire Women Making Change* exhibition. Topics covered include the contributions made to the Suffrage Movement and the Peace movement by Monmouthshire women, as well as their continuing contribution to local, national and international projects.

The exhibition is open until 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018.



Dorothea Bate and a workman in the pit at Bethlehem (? 1937).  
Copyright Natural History Museum

