

## Somerville Commemoration Address

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Dr Fiona Gatty

The New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote:

We all know that the eulogy virtues are more important than the résumé ones. But our culture and our educational systems spend more time teaching the skills and strategies you need for career success than the qualities you need to radiate that sort of inner light. Many of us are clearer on how to build an external career than on how to build inner character.

From their obituaries, the lives commemorated today counter this observation as it relates to Somerville. There is a consistency to the qualities of character that emerge. The virtues of curiosity, creativity, intelligence, kindness, rigour, generosity, courage, persistence, and enthusiasm permeate the vignettes and stories we will sketch. These qualities of character speak of vocation and service, and a balancing between careers and families. Together they weave a complex, richly textured tapestry of lives that have a broad coherence, that hold together, and which can be said to also represent the qualities of the College, to which they were, in turn, unfailingly generous. Without exception these alumni appear to have been versatile life-long learners, eager to explore, learn new languages, and adapt the critical skills acquired at Somerville to changing circumstances and new horizons. For some, Somerville was the launch of an illustrious career.

Honorary Fellow and Benefactor Ruth Thompson, who died aged only 63, was one of the UK's leading experts on universities and higher education. Driven by a passionate belief in access to education and wanting to make the world a better place she had an influential career of over thirty years in several departments of government finally ending up in Innovation, Universities and Skills, where she was Director General, Higher Education, from 2006 to 2009. She was co-chair of the Higher Education Commission Report on the financial sustainability of the higher education system in England, and after retiring from her full-time career, she became an Audit Commissioner, and Deputy Chair of Governors at Birkbeck College and at the University of Staffordshire. Highly valued, she held a strong belief in the importance of the universities' work in the community and supported those returning to education later in life. Along with her husband, the Rt. Hon. Sir David Bean, she was a generous supporter of the Somerville, and a thoroughly engaged and influential Honorary Fellow, keen to meet students, keen to promote access, and ready with sage advice when asked. Cultured and versatile, she retained a love of Latin American literature throughout her life.

Sylvia Meek was leading figure in developing the prevention and control measures that has led to a 60 per cent reduction in deaths from malaria since 2000. Starting with just £50, she helped build up the Malaria Consortium into one of the world's foremost non-governmental organisations with an annual turnover of £40 million, focusing on community-based management and care of the disease. Known variously as 'Mighty Atom', 'Mother Malaria' and 'Mosquito Sylvia', she was admired by colleagues and friends for her intrepid spirit and for her unflinching courage during her final illness.

The career of Jennifer Jenkins, wife of the politician Roy, and Honorary Fellow of Somerville, mirrors the more complex journey taken by many Somervillians in their careers and personal life. She initially took work as a part-time teacher, and when family demands allowed, undertook voluntary work that focused on individual and consumer rights. Her competence and success in these positions led to a series of more responsible and visible jobs which amongst others included Chair of the Consumer Association, Chair of Historic Buildings Commission, and the Courtauld Institute, eventually receiving a DBE for her services to Historic Buildings.

Mavis Mate's husband died young, so to adapt to changed circumstances and a need to support her children she forged a successful academic career as the Department Head of History at the University of Oregon, and became one of the foremost scholars in the medievalist feminist movement. Jean Austin was also widowed young, and with 4 children to support adapted her life, becoming a distinguished Oxford Philosophy don at St Hilda's. Lydia Wright, the first of her family to go to university, started her career after Somerville at the Foreign Office, but moved to Vietnam with her husband, learnt Chinese whilst bringing up her children, and developed a career as a freelance writer for the Economist, the Financial Times and Newsweek. Annis Flew married the rationalist philosopher Anthony Flew, and they had 2 daughters. Muriel Bradshaw and her husband chose to become medical missionaries and were sent to Western Samoa together. Changing jobs to fit her husband's career, she described herself as the 'Spaghetti Junction Doctor' when life found her in charge of the Family Planning Clinic in Aston, Birmingham. Rosemary Walz married a lecturer from Heidelberg University, kept up with her languages, and learnt new ones as they moved countries, eventually settling in Mallorca. As many Somervillians trying to find a way to accommodate family and a love of learning possibly felt, she described herself as a 'lapsed academic, living in a kind of intellectual limbo. She wrote: 'The incorporeal entity we call Somerville I could perhaps liken to the Pole Star, assuring me of a sense of orientation and identity throughout the turmoils of my life.'

Henrietta Phipps, whose Roman Catholic faith and marriage were her rock, devoted her life to landscape design, and to preserving the artistic legacy of her distinguished family. Diana Johnson was an accomplished artist who explored the countryside in order to find new subjects, and experiment with different mediums. Art was her way of engaging with the world and life's complexities.

Pamela Neville-Sington, worked as a cultural double act with her documentary maker husband, independently writing ground-breaking works on the Trollope family and Robert Browning. Judith Barrow qualified as doctor, worked with Jonathan Miller in the History of Medicine at UCL, and after her marriage and divorce juggled bringing up her two children on her own. Despite being diagnosed with MS young, she managed to pursue an active social and community life, and a love of French culture and art. Anne Keynes, married a distinguished academic, undertook war work at the Ministry of Production, brought up four children and is remembered for her singing. Marie Corney moved to Oxford with her husband, and then after he had completed his studies, came to Somerville as a mature student to read Mathematics. Betty Norman who studied Medicine, and worked at Great Ormond Street, had 5 sons with her devoted husband Archie, and became a pioneer in the field of learning difficulties, in part prompted by family experience. Helen Minter managed to combine motherhood and career by working part-time with an international information organisation, and

after 15 years she became technical editor for the British Association of Dermatology, overseeing journal production. Mary Burns, married to a high-flying civil servant, lived through 2 World Wars, was a child psychiatric social worker for 30 years, taught social work and mental health at the LSE, played a leading part in Unitarian intellectual and education circles, and brought up 4 children.

Voluntary and community work is another common thread that binds many of the Somervillians remembered today. Elspeth Beckett, was a local Oxford GP, fostered children, and cooked for Big Issue sellers, while bringing up 4 children. Jean Hamblin was a founding member of the Soroptimist Global volunteers' movement, was Deputy Head of St Helena Grammar school, and received Maundy money from the Bishop of Derby in recognition of her contribution to the community. Lisa Shaw, although originally a City lawyer was drawn to social work, and after two diplomas in social studies, worked in childcare for over 30 years, learning Russian on the side. Caroline Storr joined the Army after Somerville, and served in the WRAC, Signals and Intelligence Corps. Over the course of different postings she became involved in army welfare, transferring the skills she had as a wise listener and a woman of faith into her community as an admired Lay reader. Dorethea Wallis painted, wrote, and undertook valuable voluntary psychiatric work social work for MIND and supported the homeless. Priscilla Read dedicated her life to the mentally ill, taking further training after Somerville in psychiatry, becoming a consultant at Colchester General Hospital and finally a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. She had a taste for beautiful things, for cooking, entertaining, travel and art. Elizabeth Browne was a pathologist and then became a Jungian psychoanalyst. Joy Northcott taught English as a Foreign Language in the education department at Edinburgh University and had a strong association with the charity Maggie's Centre. Betty Williams, who was the first person to get to Oxbridge from her grammar school attracted world-wide attention for her offer to take 40 strangers who would otherwise be on their own at Christmas, to lunch. With donations from all over the world her generous gesture was repeated over the course of three years. Prisca Middlemiss met her husband at university and taught English as she travelled with him in Germany and Finland. On their return to the UK she worked for the British Diabetic Association, and developed a career in medical journalism. With an easy ability to communicate complex ideas, she developed international networks linking parents and carers for rare disorders.

Angela Sinclair-Loutit was a stalwart social justice campaigner who continued going on protest marches into her 90s. After an intrepid time during the War driving a lorry with medical supplies through Yugoslavia, Angela lived in Canada, Thailand, Paris and Morocco before moving back to London on her own to bring up her three children. Before the War Moira Large joined the WRNS working on Morse Code, and became part of the effort to break ENIGMA. After Somerville and some time in publishing with the Phoenix Press she applied for a job in Northern Rhodesia to manage a mobile school library, which she developed into the worldwide charity Book Aid International. Somerville was well represented at Bletchley Park as both Mary Kenyon and Enid Fouace also worked there on breaking ENIGMA, Mary later being interviewed about her experience on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour. Post-war, Enid went into teaching, and after marriage lived in Paris and Normandy. Mercy Heatley found the time between bringing up five children to found the charity Children in Touch, became an activist with CND, and then an expert witness in opposition to the Iraq war. Her particular recommendations on autism were also

incorporated into the 1978 Warnock report. Her versatility and verve is typical of many others.

There were many of those who were pioneers professionally and personally. Glenys Kerr was first in her family to go to university. She became Deputy Head of Putney High School and also taught at Hampstead High School. Margaret Lee's story also demonstrates the powerful impact on generations of her education at Somerville. Her grandparents were illiterate, but despite this, and with the encouragement of her father and a grammar school education, she was offered a scholarship to read English at Somerville. She attended lectures given by C. S. Lewis and Tolkien, became a librarian and with marriage and 4 children stopped work. Her time at Somerville transformed generations of her family, her daughter becoming a judge, and all her children and grandchildren graduating from university. Lorna Ross, married to a curate based at Edinburgh University sought ordination without success, but nonetheless held to her deeply committed Christian faith. Lis Sheppard applied for a scholarship to Brazil in the middle of Finals and spent time in Rio de Janeiro and then the Amazonian city of Manaus. On her return to the UK she taught Modern Languages at Rugby High School.

Katharine Ross was present at the start of Oxfam at the University Church. She was on the governing body of one of Oxford's theological colleges and in between teaching Greek at Hampstead High School and studying German, was also a passionate advocate of women's ordination. Rosalind Maskell was Senior Medical Microbiologist at St Mary's Hospital, Portsmouth focusing her research in the field of urinary tract infections. Although her work was rewarded with a number of distinctions it did not find favour with the medical establishment of the day, but her persistence eventually paid off. Shelia MacLeod pioneered changes in the recognition and treatment of anorexia nervosa with her book 'The Art of Starvation'. In addition she wrote 7 novels, and went back to university undertaking a Masters and Doctorate in French and French photographers. Ann Taylor was a pioneer in academia becoming the first woman fellow at St Edmund's Hall in addition to holding positions at Stanford and Cornell. She was Chair of the University Committee on Student Health and Welfare and was an inspirational figure to many, promoting the cause of women in academia, in addition to bringing up five children. Rosemary Thomas who worked for CERN in the 70's, was a Fellow of the Royal College of Radiologists and was described as bold, innovative leader.

Harriet Brookland, worked at Lloyds of London, was the first woman on the floor of the Stock Exchange, and wrote about household economics. She became a successful self-employed businesswoman, tragically dying only 7 weeks after her second marriage. Anne Symonds was on the staff of the Evening Standard, and was a broadcaster and the political correspondent with the World Service for over 30 years. Louise Hirst worked for the Polish Development Bank, and Gillian Falconer was a friend of Margaret Thatcher's at university. She became a successful investor, photographer and designer, and her work was bought by Liberty's. She made her home in St Andrews and became the Vice-President of the St Andrew's Preservation Trust. Joanna Nicholson worked at the College of Law and then the City law firm McKenna's which she left to become a civil servant drafting legislation for the Department of Health. She left work to bring up her daughters and tragically died young at the age of only 50. Christine McCree along with a successful corporate

career at British Gas and later Glaxo SmithKline was a pioneer in her personal life and way of living.

Teaching and Academia were important life vocations for many of the deceased. Mary Bowen taught History at Harrow School for Girls and then went on to become a Senior lecturer in History at St Mary's College, Cheltenham. Eleanor Littleboy taught History at Henrietta Barnett School, and Valerie Dundas Grant taught Languages at Putney High School, later becoming a lecturer at Keele University. Shelia Richards driven by her curiosity and love of the cryptic taught local history in her community after a career as an interpreter and translator in Rome and France with the World Service, the Italian Government and later the British Museum. Janet Tanner was a respected teacher of French and Spanish at Marlborough College. Elizabeth Black taught Icelandic and Applied Linguistics at Edinburgh University and after retirement worked as a guide at the Burrell Collection in Glasgow. Elaine Fantham had a very distinguished academic career as the Giger Professor of Classics at Princeton University. With a speciality in Roman comedy she produced the standard textbook on women in antiquity and challenged the invasion of Iraq on National Public Radio. She received the Distinguished Service Award from the American Philological Association for her superlative service to the profession Celia Male was scientific adviser at the Medical Research Council, and was a prolific networker connecting scientific advisers and consultants and receiving international recognition for her work on genealogy.

There are different ways to recognise the value of a life well-lived. These obituaries only touch the surface of their lives and the impact of these lives, these Somervillian lives, on others. Today we acknowledge the rich and valuable qualities of those commemorated. In every ordinary life there was always the 'inner light' the element of the extra-ordinary, the versatile and the curious. Their lives were impacted by their time at Somerville, and in turn they held the College in great esteem and affection, as evidenced by their generosity. Of the 60 commemorated today over 50 were donors to the College during their lifetime, and 13 gave legacies.

As the College says, 'Once a Somervillian, always a Somervillian'. May they rest in peace.