

Lesley Brown's Tribute to Miriam at Miriam's Funeral Service on 31 May

In February 1967 Miriam was a Research Fellow at St Anne's, and mother of two young daughters. She agreed to a request from Isobel Henderson, Ancient History Fellow at Somerville and Miriam's former tutor, to take over the last two Roman History tutorials for a trio of Somerville Lit Hum Finalists as Mrs Henderson was facing a major operation. I was one of that trio, and I arrived at the Griffin house, essay in hand, shocked by the news that my tutor hadn't survived the operation. Miriam (who I then met for the first time) was kindness itself. After some consoling words, she gently steered me to the business of the tutorial. It was thus I got my first glimpse of what a special person and what a superb teacher Miriam was. I had no idea then how grievously Miriam herself felt the loss. And I certainly had no inkling that in the course of time Miriam would become a valued colleague and very dear friend for so many years.

Nan Dunbar recalled how Miriam came to be elected, later in 1967, to the Ancient History Fellowship here. Janet Vaughan, in her last year as Principal, took a keen interest in the election. Learning that Miriam was a very strong candidate and had a young family, Dame Janet took it on herself to investigate, telephoned Miriam and visited her at home. She came back favourably impressed, declaring of Miriam that 'she is what the French call *rangée*' – which Nan took to mean well-organised. Academic heavyweights such as Ronald Syme and Tony Andrewes gave Miriam top ranking among the candidates, and she dazzled at interview. Thus began Miriam's thirty five years as Ancient History Fellow here. I could not have been more fortunate in my senior colleague (I started as a philosophy tutor here a few years later), and generations of undergraduates were equally fortunate. They encountered her penetrating intellect, her insistence on high standards, and her huge care for them as students and as human beings.

As well as teaching classicists, Miriam put great efforts into the joint School of Ancient and Modern History. Barbara Harvey confessed that she and Jennifer Loach 'sometimes groaned at the extra candidates they had to interview', as Miriam was so energetic at Admissions time. Barbara acknowledged that it was thanks to Miriam's dedication in the early years that the Joint School with Modern History grew to flourish (as it still does today).

Another teaching and admin burden Miriam assumed was a result of the swingeing cuts to academic posts inflicted in the late eighties. Some colleges had their own posts axed, and entered into academic marriages so that they could continue to teach ancient history. Thus it was that Miriam came to be the ancient history tutor for Trinity, on top of her Somerville duties. Being married to a Balliol man she must have found it awkward that her academic marriage was to the neighbouring and rival college, but she gave Trinity full value, and her Trinity pupils were as inspired and as grateful as the Somerville ones. They turned up in great numbers at her retirement lunch here in 2002, along with some seventy former Somerville pupils.

That Music as an academic subject flourishes here is also due in no small part to Miriam, who looked after Music undergraduates for many years when Somerville had no Music faculty appointment. She kept at the forefront of Governing Body's attention the need to get a share in a University appointment in Music. She would have been delighted to learn that the College has just secured a Music Faculty appointment to be a Fellow here. Miriam was also an assiduous attender at

performances given by our wonderful musicians and choir. Last November she came to Chapel to hear the choir sing and to listen to a talk about the shofar, and reported to me that she loved hearing the blowing of the ram's horn.

It's not my place to speak at any length of Miriam's stellar achievements as a Roman Historian. Major publications, on Seneca, on Nero, on Roman philosophy, appeared during her time as a Fellow, and she continued to break new ground, and to publish important works during her retirement. This stream of publications continued after she recovered from her grievous illness four summers ago. You've heard from Loveday about the forthcoming appearance of her Collected Papers. I had many conversations with Miriam as she was working on the introduction and notes to a volume of some of Cicero's philosophical writings which appeared last year. The book's title, *Cicero on Life and Death*, puzzled the reviewer, who wasn't aware that Miriam had chosen it as a tribute to Jasper's celebrated monograph: *Homer on Life and Death*. In all my conversations with her, Miriam's pride in Jasper and in each and every member of her family shone through.

Miriam was a welcome figure at ancient philosophy meetings, where she was an equal with some leading ancient philosophers, and earned their respect and admiration, despite her typically modest assessment of her own achievements. Indeed, through her interest in Stoicism in particular, she was ahead of the trend in moral philosophy, which only more recently has taken seriously so-called practical ethics. I remember (decades ago) attending lectures she gave on ancient thought about suicide.

Miriam was often invited to contribute to radio and television programmes; anything from Nero or Augustus, to the burning of Rome or ancient cynicism. She spoke with authority but without any flashiness; always giving the impression that she was thinking as she spoke, and never patronising the hearers. But you had to be lucky to catch those media appearances, because Miriam never let it be known that they were about to be broadcast. I'm sure I must have missed many more than I managed to catch. She was greatly in demand to talk at schools and Classical Association meetings – or so I gathered from her occasionally telling me about a particular school or town she had visited, squeezing it into a busy term schedule but making no song and dance about all the academic invitations she accepted.

Miriam's integrity was legendary. If she felt the College, or the Faculty Board, was proposing to act unethically, or to override a core academic value, she would speak out, and we would listen. On many occasions, she was our conscience.

Very many of us here, and far more worldwide, knew Miriam as a wonderful friend, hospitable, witty but never gossipy, and above all showing very practical friendship and concern for anyone she knew to be in difficulties, while making light of any troubles of her own. I know that I was only one of scores to whom she extended such a warm hand. I'm going to end by quoting something Barbara Harvey wrote, when recording some memories on Miriam's retirement.

'As President of the SCR, she has been without a superior in my recollection. I was truly astonished, but delighted, when she visited me in the John Radcliffe in 1997 when I had my appendix trouble. She happened to come at a time when the two medievalist editors I have worked with on the DNB were also there, and the four of us had a tremendously stimulating historical conversation. My visitors felt they were drinking at the fount!'