

# RECOGNISING EXCELLENCE

## THE ALYSON BAILES HISTORY PRIZE



**A**lyson Bailes was a fan of science fiction, choral music and Icelandic heavy metal, and had an extraordinary gift for languages including French, German, Mandarin Chinese and Swedish.

Now Alyson (Modern History, 1966) is commemorated at Somerville with an annual prize for an outstanding performance from an undergraduate historian. Alyson, who died in 2016 aged 67, served as British ambassador to Finland and as a diplomat to China, West Germany, Hungary and other postings.

The creation of the Alyson Bailes History Prize was spearheaded by her friends Roz Morris and Venetia Kudrle with the intention of creating a lasting tribute to her. The prize has been supported by her family, including her sister and brother-in-law Jane and Anthony Inglese. The first winner of the prize is Anna Jones. Anna said: "I was honoured to receive this prize, even more so when I realized how impressive Alyson's achievements were. Her incredible skill at languages has inspired me to use the prize money to learn Mandarin."

### *Roz Morris writes:*

Alyson was always extraordinary and exceptional. I've lived my life as a journalist and media trainer and I've met a lot of very bright people over the past 50 years, but Alyson was without doubt the cleverest person I've ever met and also one of the

kindest and most generous. It was a real privilege to be her friend, and her death from kidney cancer in April 2016 at the age of 67 is a great loss.

She came up to Oxford aged 17 with a Scholarship to read Modern History and it was always clear she was going to get a First. She was a bit shy to

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begin with, but she soon joined in with the 1966 History group and several of us have now been friends for the past 50 years.

I had the idea of a History Prize in Alyson's name after her death because it seemed so appropriate to commemorate her time at Somerville in this way. Alyson was a brilliant student and, as well as her academic success, she was part of the all-woman team representing Somerville on University Challenge in 1968. When we were at Oxford in the 1960s the college was for women only and there were just 5 women's colleges alongside 27 colleges for men.

Somerville was the springboard for Alyson's career in the Foreign Office where, after gaining top marks in the Diplomatic Service entrance exam, she worked in various countries including Hungary, West Germany, Belgium, and China. She was very pleased when she was made an

Honorary Fellow of the College in 2000 after she became HM Ambassador to Finland.

She had a lifelong love of history and scholarship — in many languages (She spoke 7 languages and could read 4 more) and her friends and family are all delighted that, with the invaluable administrative help of the college, we have managed to raise the funds for this prize to encourage first year History students to continue following Alyson's lifelong search for knowledge.

### *Venetia Kudrle writes:*

I remember sitting next to Alyson at breakfast early on and learning that she had won her Somerville scholarship when she was 16. As a group of historians, we were all rather proud of her. She was the perfect classmate, making strong coffee and lending opinions, books, or notes — whatever was needed. She borrowed my notes on the 19th century before Schools; I was so proud to be asked.

In a great coincidence, a colleague in the US had worked with her on an international peacekeeping mission. He told me that in addition to her extraordinary intellectual gifts she was a generous and considerate colleague, always striving to synthesize work between colleagues and generously recognize the contributions of others. ●

*For more information on the Alyson Bailes History Prize, please contact:  
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