

RUSBRIDGE, ROSALIND (1915-2004), teacher and peace campaigner

Name: Rosalind Rusbridge
Date of birth: 1915
Date of death: 2004
Spouse: Ewart Rusbridge
Child: Stella Faith Ellis (née Rusbridge)
Child: Paul Inqli Rusbridge
Parent: Emily Sarah Bevan (née Hemming)
Parent: Sidney Bevan
Gender: Female
Occupation: teacher and peace campaigner
Area of activity: Education; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Religion
Author: Jean Silvan Evans

Rosalind was born on 19 April 1915, the daughter of Sidney Bevan DCM (1878-1935) and Emily Sarah Bevan (née Hemming, 1878-1974), both teachers in Swansea. She had a younger brother Sidney Hemming Bevan (born 1921). Rosalind always said she was a socialist and Christian-pacifist before she left school. Her father won the DCM for evacuating wounded men under fire in the First World War but came home anti-war. Greatly affected by gas, he died from its effects in his fifties. Her mother was distressed and angry at his early death and became a pacifist. A more explicit influence on the teenage Rosalind was that of the Rev Howard Inqli James, the charismatic and controversial pacifist minister at Pantygydr Baptist Church (1923-31), who later became chair of the British Baptist Pacifist Fellowship. Rosalind and her brother were both conscientious objectors in the Second World War.

Educated at Swansea High School for Girls, Rosalind won a state scholarship to Cambridge University, gaining a first in classics in 1938 and going on to take a DipEd with distinction at Oxford University. She married Ewart Rusbridge (1917-1969), an Oxford double first in music and classics, in 1942. Both were devout Baptists and met at university Baptist gatherings. Ewart, too, was a conscientious objector during the war. They adopted two children, Paul Inqli Rusbridge (born 1952) and Stella Faith Ellis (born 1955).

Rosalind returned to Swansea to take up a post as classics mistress at Glanmor Girls School in September 1939. At the centre of the peace movement, she became secretary of Swansea United Pacifists, helped to sell *Peace News* in the streets and on the beach, and was the official tenant of the group's Saturday Peace Stall in Swansea Market. She was one of the first women to join the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) when it opened to women. Known as a passionate speaker, she shared a national platform with distinguished pacifists Sybil Thorndike and Vera Brittain and took part in a deputation to Buckingham Palace.

By 1940, as the war began to go badly for the Allies, Swansea was one of the areas where a general tolerance of pacifists gave way to harsh opposition, and agitation there gave rise to the League of Swansea Loyalists which combined with the British Legion to hound the pacifists. Rosalind was asked to close the Market Peace Stall and told there were threats of 'a nasty incident'. She refused and the next Saturday found it closed and padlocked by order of the council.

In June Swansea Borough Council debated a resolution calling for the suspension of all council employees who were conscientious objectors or members of the PPU. That motion was left to lie on the table, but a campaign in the local press continued to stir up hatred against pacifists. In a special meeting of the council on 28 June the Labour Party allowed a free vote, and by a majority of 33-12 it was agreed to suspend pacifists employed by the council for the duration of the war and, further, to ask all council employees to sign a Declaration of Allegiance and support for the war.

Rosalind was among those who refused to sign and lost her job. Reaction soon set in. There were protests from teaching unions and the National Council for Civil Liberties but the crunch came in October with a memorandum from the Home Secretary pointing out that no-one should be penalised for holding opinions. At an acrimonious meeting in October, with the Labour whip restored, the council narrowly rescinded the suspension. By then, however, Rosalind was teaching at Chester Boys Grammar School and refused the invitation to return to Swansea. She said she felt loyalty was due to the authority that had taken her on rather than the home town that 'threw her out'.

She never returned to Swansea to teach. At Chester she was made welcome and made friendships which lasted for life. Rosalind and Ewart were married in Chester in 1942 but remained in their respective jobs until after the war when Rosalind joined her husband at Mill Hill School, where he was director of music. They moved to Bristol in 1948 when Ewart joined Bristol Grammar School, and there the family remained.

Rosalind worked as a part-time teacher for most of her career, mainly in Clifton High School for Girls, not retiring until she was almost 70. Her early socialism and Christian-pacifism never left her and she campaigned ceaselessly for human rights. Labour Party meetings were held in her house and she once stood in a Parliamentary election against the long-time sitting Conservative MP. She was a very active member of Horfield Baptist Church, and was said to be 'the conscience of the church', always demanding support for some cause to show that Christian faith must be lived outside the walls of the church. She represented the south-west on the national body of the Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CCND), and regularly marched in protest at the American bases in Aldermaston and Greenham Common.

Although it lasted for only a few months of her long life, she is remembered today primarily for her part in the Swansea suspension crisis of 1940. A total of 19 council employees were suspended, 10 of them women, but it was Rosalind's recollections which conveyed the story most memorably, firstly in the film made by the Swansea Women's History Group in 1988, *Swansea Conchie Controversy*, and then in her chapter in the anthology of women's wartime experiences *Parachutes and Petticoats*, published in 1992.

Rosalind Rusbridge died of cancer on 9 July 2004 at the age of 89, and was cremated after a service at Horfield Baptist Church, Bristol.

Author

Jean Silvan Evans

Sources

Information from her brother, Sidney Hemming Bevan, and her daughter, Stella Faith Ellis

[Rosalind Bevan \(1915 - 2004\)](#), Cymdeithas y Cymod website

Ursula Masson, 'Loyalty and Dissent: Wartime Wales in 1940' in *Radical Wales*, 29 (Spring 1991)

Ursula Masson, Gail Allen & Jen Wilson, [Swansea Conchie Controversy](#), film made under the auspices of Swansea Women's History Group, 1988. Now in archives at Swansea campus of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Peace Pledge Union website, '[Facing hostility](#)'

Rosalind Rusbridge, 'A woman pacifist in wartime' in Leigh Verrill-Rhys and Deirdre Beddoe (eds.) *Parachutes and Petticoats* (1992)

Rosalind Rusbridge '[Bitter blasphemy](#)', letter in The Guardian Wed 12 December 2001

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Rosalind Rusbridge](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q29948275](#)

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