

## YATES, WILFRID NIGEL (1944 - 2009), archivist and historian

**Name:** Wilfrid Nigel Yates  
**Date of birth:** 1944  
**Date of death:** 2009  
**Spouse:** Paula Gülen Yates (née Du Val)  
**Child:** Helena Yates  
**Child:** Patrick Yates  
**Child:** David Yates  
**Child:** Benedict Yates  
**Parent:** Thomas Yates  
**Parent:** Alice Yates (née Bentham)  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** archivist and historian  
**Area of activity:** History and Culture  
**Author:** Liz Rees

Nigel Yates was born on 1 July 1944 in Swansea, the son of Thomas Yates (1909-1997), a chartered accountant, and his wife Alice (née Bentham, 1912-1993). Alongside his younger sister Katharine Wilma (b. 1949) he was brought up a Roman Catholic and was educated at Craig-y-Nos Preparatory School in Swansea, followed in 1955 by Belmont Abbey School, Herefordshire. In 1962 he took up a place at the University of Hull, where he graduated MPhil in History and was awarded a doctorate in 1968. During his time at Hull he became an Anglo-Catholic, and was also active in student politics as a Liberal. Both his Christian faith and his politics remained vitally important to him throughout his life.

Following his PhD he took post-doctoral fellowships at Exeter (1968-1969) and Southampton (1969-1970), but, unable to progress further in academia, in 1971 he obtained a post as an archivist at Carmarthenshire Archives under Major Francis Jones. In 1973, as preparations were underway for the reorganisation of Carmarthenshire as part of the new county of Dyfed, Yates moved to North Tyneside, where he established an archive at North Shields Library, which itself became part of Tyne and Wear Archives Service. Leaving there in 1975 he moved to become head of Portsmouth City Archives and in 1980 was appointed county archivist of Kent at the relatively young age of 36.

His original field of study had been the medieval period, but while working in archives he began to research the Oxford Movement in the Anglican church, and undertook further study of church buildings, which had long interested him. In 1974 he published 'The parochial impact of the Oxford movement in south-west Wales' in *Carmarthenshire Studies. Essays presented to Major Francis Jones to mark his retirement as County Archivist of Carmarthenshire*, of which he was joint editor. In the same year he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

As an archivist his main interests lay with ecclesiastical and local history rather than the technical aspects of the work and he continued to publish prolifically, both alone and with colleagues. Although he had a generally academic approach he was keen to widen access to archives and facilitate researchers of all kinds, and was known for supporting initiative in colleagues. As county archivist in Kent he established branches at Ramsgate, Sevenoaks and Rochester, adding to the existing offices at Maidstone and Folkestone, and brokered a partnership with the diocese and city of Canterbury to manage the important archives there.

He was also a practical man, setting up new systems for parish surveys arising from the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978, first in Portsmouth, then in Kent, and being at the forefront of raising funds by charging, first overseas visitors, later dropped, and then for research carried out for users by staff, subsequently widely adopted by other archives. His conviviality and networking ability ensured that the archives were well-supported.

He contributed to a number of publications on Kent history, and was general editor of the Kent History Project, instituted to mark the centenary of the county council in 1989, as well as personally editing four of the ten volumes commissioned by the project. An exhibition 'Crown and Mitre: Religion and Society in Northern Europe since the Reformation' was an early recipient of European Funding in 1992 and toured internationally. He took early retirement from Kent County Council in 1994.

In 1967 he had married Paula Gülen Du Val (b. 1947), with whom he had four children, Helena, Patrick, David and Benedict. His wife served as a Liberal Democrat councillor and leader of Maidstone Borough Council. Following his retirement as county archivist they moved to Blandford Forum in Dorset, where his wife had been adopted as parliamentary candidate for North Dorset, coming second in the 1997 General Election. She subsequently also pursued an academic career and was elected President of Welsh Liberal Democrats in 2019.

While in Dorset Yates researched and published *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* (1999), and in 2000 he was appointed senior research fellow at the University of Wales, Lampeter, becoming Professor of Ecclesiastical History in 2005. This return to academia was perhaps the happiest and most productive period of his life. During this time he wrote or contributed to a number of further wide-ranging works encompassing the sixteenth century to the 1960s, on ecclesiastical reform, politics and wider society, liturgy and church buildings, on which he had become known as Europe's leading authority, covering Scotland and Ireland as well as England and Wales, and leaving three books to be published posthumously. In addition to his own work he served as the university's research director, and was also appointed Provincial Archivist to the Church in Wales, liaising between the church and local archives in the assignment of parish records. In 2007 he was awarded a Doctorate in Divinity by the University of Wales.

Nigel Yates was diagnosed with cancer in May 2007 and died on 15 January 2009. A funeral requiem was held in the university chapel at Lampeter on 23 January, and he was cremated in Aberystwyth. A memorial service, again at Lampeter, took place on 2 May 2009.

## Author

Liz Rees

## Sources

Dr Frances Knight, *The Church Times*, obituary, 12 February 2009

Matthew Reisz, *The Times higher education*, obituary, 12 February 2009

[Find my Past](#) website

Personal information supplied by Dr Paula Yates and by Charlotte Hodgson, archivist and former colleague

## Further reading

Dr Frances Knight, 'Professor Nigel Yates, 1944-2009', *The Welsh journal of religious history* 4 (2009), pp. 1-5

Wikipedia Article: [Nigel Yates](#)

## Additional Links

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