

THOMAS, HELEN WYN (1966 - 1989), peace activist

Name: Helen Wyn Thomas

Date of birth: 1966

Date of death: 1989

Parent: John David Richards Thomas

Parent: Janet Thomas (née Jones)

Gender: Female

Occupation: peace activist

Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements; Activism

Author: Ruth Gooding

Helen Wyn Thomas was born on 16 August 1966 in Newcastle Emlyn, Carmarthenshire, the daughter of John Thomas and his wife Janet (née Jones). Her parents ran the shops JDR Thomas and Y Goleudy in the town. Helen attended Ysgol Dyffryn Teifi and then studied history at St David's University College Lampeter.

After graduating, Helen travelled to India for six weeks, where she met Mother Theresa. On her return, she spent time working for Cardiff Women's Aid and various other charities, and also joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

At this time, Greenham Common in Berkshire was the site of a US airbase, where NATO planned to install 96 cruise missiles. In the late summer of 1981, the Welsh group 'Women for life on earth' marched from Cardiff to Greenham Common to protest. They set up the Women's Peace Camp there, and as the protest grew, other camps were established around the perimeter fence. Tens of thousands of women protested against war and nuclear weapons. They lived in very basic conditions, under constant harassment and the ongoing threat of eviction, and organized peaceful protests, ranging from decorating and cutting the perimeter fence to blockading the roads.

At the beginning of 1989, Helen joined the Yellow Gate camp at Greenham Common. Her mother said, 'They had been short of women at that time and she wanted to get involved,' and 'She wrote back to us and would tell us what an incredible inspiration the women were and how she really wanted to give her time to peace.' A committed Welsh speaker and campaigner, Helen translated a Greenham publicity pamphlet into Welsh and inspired several of her fellow protestors to investigate Welsh nationalist politics.

Helen Thomas was killed in a road accident at the camp on 5 August 1989, when she was hit by the wing mirror of a passing West Midlands police horsebox, while she stood on the safe zone, waiting to cross a road to post two letters. The horsebox was taking four horses to a charity display in Chichester. The inquest at Newbury Magistrates Court determined that the death was accidental. Although Helen's family felt her death was not properly investigated, they were unable to get the inquest re-opened. Helen's was the only death that occurred at Greenham as a result of the peace protests. She is remembered as the Greenham Common martyr.

As the Cold War came to an end, the missiles and American military personnel were returned to the United States between 1990 and 1992. The Women's Peace Camp closed on 5 September 2000. A peace garden there was opened to the public two years later. It includes a simple garden for Helen Thomas, the only woman mentioned in the site. Her garden features a circle of seven stones, brought from Welsh quarries, around an eternal flame sculpture. There is also a bench dedicated to her memory, by the town clock in her home town of Newcastle Emlyn. The folk singer Dafydd Iwan wrote a song, entitled 'Cân i Helen', in her memory. In 2019, she was one of five women short-listed for commemoration by the first statue of a named woman in Wales.

Author

Ruth Gooding

Sources

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[Greenham Common Peace Garden](#) (n.d.); retrieved 24 April 2020

E. E. Titcombe, *Yr ymgyrch yn parhau! (The struggle continues!): An exploration of the narratives from Wales, emerging from the Greenham Common women's peace camps 1981-2000*

Doctoral thesis, University of the West of England, Bristol, 2018

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Helen Thomas \(activist\)](#)

Additional Links

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Wikidata: [Q20755087](#)

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