

COPPACK, MAIR HAFINA 'Hafina Clwyd' (1936-2011), author and columnist

Name: Mair Hafina Coppack
Date of birth: 1936
Date of death: 2011
Gender: Female
Occupation: author and columnist
Area of activity: Literature and Writing
Author: John Owen

Hafina Clwyd was born on 1st July 1936 in Gwyddelwern, Meirionethshire, the eldest of four children of Alun Jones (1907-1980), a farmer, and his wife Morfydd (née Jones, 1910-1971). She was brought up on Cefnmaenllwyd farm, and attended primary school at Gwyddelwern and Bala Girls' Grammar School. The family moved to Rhydonnen near Llandrnmog, Denbighshire, in 1953, and Hafina went to Brynhyfryd School, Ruthin, for a year before going on to train as a teacher at the Normal College, Bangor. In 1957 she went to teach in London eventually becoming head of department in a comprehensive school.

For a while she led a bohemian way of life with gusto. She was a strong feminist, amongst many things she supported was the campaign for legalised abortion after the death of her flatmate in the hands of a back-street abortionist. She worked as a secretary for Plaid Cymru MPs for a while. She married a pathologist called Andy Hawks in 1965 but she fell in love with Cliff Coppack, a divorcee with a teenage daughter, whom she married in London in 1971. She returned to the Vale of Clwyd on 1st January 1980 and settled in Ruthin. In retirement, she made full use of her leisure.

As an author, she published 11 volumes. The following are volumes of essays: *Shwrdd* (1967), *Clychau yn y Glaw* (1973), *Defaid yn Chwerthin* (1980), and *Pobol sy'n Cyfri* (2001). *Buwch ar y Lein* (1987) and *Prynu Lein Ddillad* (2009) are based on her Ruthin diaries. *Merch Morfydd* (1987) is autobiographical and both *Perfedd Hen Nain Llewelyn* (1985) and *Clust y Wenci* (1991) are selections of her articles. *Rhywbeth Bob Dydd* (2008) deals with significant and historical events. She also published the booklet *Cwis a Phos* (1984). In the last, difficult few weeks of her life, she was still able to present her diaries, *Mynd i'r Gwrych*, for publication (2011). She was editor of *Welsh Family History: A Guide to Research* and also gave significant support to the joint authors of a substantial volume on the history of the Ruthin rugby team, published in 2011.

She twice came close to winning the Prose Medal at the National Eisteddfod. Her entry for the Abergwaun National Eisteddfod in 1986 was published under the title *Merch Morfydd*. According to R. Geraint Gruffydd, one of the adjudicators, the work is 'an excellent autobiography ... the writing is consistently lively and interesting and often thrilling.' Rhiannon Davies Jones commented, 'an innate literary talent, one of the richest in the competition.' She twice herself adjudicated the Prose Medal competition (1997 and 2002), and also adjudicated Llyfr y Flwyddyn (Book of the Year), in 2005. She became a member of the Gorsedd in 1960, receiving the white robe in 1992 in recognition of her enormous contribution to Welsh culture. She was made an honorary Fellow of Bangor University in 2005. She was also a member of the Welsh Academy.

Her abilities as a writer were considerable. She wrote spontaneously, her words flowing fluently from mind to paper. It was interesting writing, witty, knowledgeable, amusing and often outspoken. She used the diaries she had kept since childhood to quarry ideas for many of her books. However, these diaries remain restricted for fifty years!

She was a committed journalist. Catrin Stevens commented that she was 'among the most enduring champions of the Welsh language press'. She wrote a regular column for *Y Faner* from 1962 to 1986 when she became editor of that remarkable weekly journal until its demise in 1992 and she was forthright in expressing her views on the decision to kill it. She wrote a weekly column for the *Western Mail* and continued to contribute until a few weeks before her death from cancer. She also wrote weekly the radio column for *Y Cymro*. Readers of *Y Wawr* were treated to a regular and rich diet of her diaries. She also contributed to *Yr Enfys* and the *Transactions* of the Historical Societies of Denbighshire and Meirionethshire. From 1983 to 1988, she was editor of *Y Bedol*, the Welsh-language community newspaper of Ruthin and its surrounding areas and then she became an advisory editor until her death. Her book, *Pobol sy'n Cyfri*, was based on essays published in *Y Bedol* on local and family history. So high were her standards in language and working practice that she found it difficult to tolerate people less organized than herself. She could, it is said, admonish but with tact!

She served in many organizations, councils and societies, with remarkable energy. In London, during the golden age of Welsh culture in the city, she was active with the Drama Society, Clwb y Cymry, Aelwyd yr Urdd, Denbighshire Society, Y Cymrodorion and the Book Club (which led to the establishment of the Welsh Books Council). When she came to Ruthin and to the heart of Welsh life, she threw herself into it. In addition to her major and longstanding contribution to *Y Bedol*, she was a member of the local Cylch Darllen, chair of Denbighshire Historical Society and secretary of the Ruthin Local History group. She established the Clwyd Family History Society. She was a link between the University in Bangor and extramural history classes in the town. She was also an active supporter of Ruthin Civic Society.

She supported Plaid Cymru for many years but turned to the Liberals, her husband, Cliff Coppack's party, after she received an anonymous and disparaging letter from an alleged Plaid member. She was a longstanding town councillor and was mayor of Ruthin in 2008-9 when she also opened the new Craft Centre. For fifteen years she was one of the Centre's team and took enormous pleasure in its work. She had charge of the Welsh language presentations for the Centre's various exhibitions and translated many of them. Among her essays for the Centre was one on Farm Women, a subject dear to the heart of a farmer's daughter.

She lectured to many societies over the years, especially on tracing ancestry and family history. It was no surprise then that, in due recognition, she was made a Fellow of Bangor University in 2005, a fitting crown to her career.

She had broad interests, dined often and wandered far and wide but the quiet core of her life were her husband and family (and her cats!). She died of melanoma on 14 March 2011 after a relatively short illness. Her energy may have waned and her exuberance dimmed but, not only did she manage to deliver her final volume to the press, she also arranged the details of her own funeral. She had taught scripture early in her career but, during her time in London, she abandoned the faith of her childhood and became a Humanist. On 23 March, as she had wished, her remains were laid to rest with her husband Cliff in the cemetery of Sant Meugan's Church near Ruthin and, afterwards, a meeting was held, in the Humanist tradition, in Tabernacl Chapel, Ruthin to give thanks for her life.

Author

John Owen

Sources

The Independent, 22 March 2011

Western Mail, 16 March 2011

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Hafina Clwyd](#)

Additional Links

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