

# OBITUARY: JOAN D'ARCY

1940–2020

JOAN D'ARCY, who died on 19 July 2020, was born Joan Mayer at Tunstall, Stoke on Trent, on 7 June 1940, the daughter of Arthur Mayer, a china cup turner, and his wife Sarah (née Taylor), a potter's sponger. Between 1951 and 1958, benefiting like so many working-class children of her generation from the wider access to secondary education which became available after 1944, Joan was a pupil at Brownhills High School for Girls in Tunstall. At school she won a number of prizes, notably for music, passed Grade VIII violin with distinction, and was a prefect.<sup>1</sup> From there Joan entered Bedford College, University of London, then in Regent's Park, where she obtained a BA in history. She maintained close contact with some of her friends there till the day she died.

In 1966 Joan was invited to join a narrow boat for a trip on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. By the end of that cruise she was close friends with John D'Arcy, one of the boat's owners, and they were married a year later. The boat later provided many interesting voyages until the owners' partnership broke up in the 1990s. After their marriage Joan and John moved to Horsley Woodhouse, north of Derby, where they bought a cottage. In 1967 she was appointed to a teaching post at Melbourne county secondary school, which she left when John accepted an offer to work for Rolls-Royce in Munich for a year. Munich was a marvellous place to live for a lady of leisure, with trips to the Alps virtually every weekend. Eventually, that trip was over and Joan took a post at a girls' secondary modern school shortly before it was merged with Derby School to form a new comprehensive school on Moorway Lane, which opened in 1972.

After several years at Moorway Lane she became dissatisfied and in 1983 joined the first cohort of students to enrol for the newly established part-time MA in Regional and Local History at Nottingham University, graduating two years later. She afterwards taught at South East Derbyshire College, a further education college at Heanor. Following her success in the MA, Joan was invited to continue

<sup>1</sup> Details of school career very kindly supplied by Ms Louise Ferriday, Archives Services Manager, Stoke on Trent City Archives, from the school's admission records and magazine. A number of members of the DAS have contributed information to this obituary.

her studies at Nottingham for a PhD, which she obtained in 1996 after many years' part-time study combined with a busy teaching career. Her thesis, supervised by Dr David Marcombe, was on 'Late medieval Catholicism and the impact of the Reformation in the deanery of Derby, c.1520 to c.1570'. The external examiner was Dr Claire Cross of York University.

Joan was by this date teaching mature-age students at Nottingham, several of whom on one of her courses formed a research group under her leadership. One outcome of this was a detailed book on *Sadler Gate: a 1,000 year History of a Derby Street* (2010). She also ran a Workers' Educational Association class at Alfreton for several years.

Joan's holidays were now mostly spent touring Europe, especially the mountainous regions of Austria. Living in Derbyshire gave many opportunities to walk in the Peak, but in 1979 they bought an Elizabethan house on the site of the Roman fort at Chester Green. This had a large garden, stimulating Joan's love of gardening which had to compete with her historical interests.

Joan became heavily involved with the Derbyshire Archaeological Society in 1994, as a member of council, of which she was chairman in 2006–8. She was also on the committee of the society's Archaeological Research and Local History sections, was heavily involved in arranging lectures and visits for the society, compiled the index to the *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, and stored at her home the society's excavation and other equipment. With John she was a founder member of the group that organised the very successful five-day summer tours around the country for members. Joan represented the society on Derby City Council's Conservation Area Advisory Committee.

Joan was also chairman of the Little Chester Local History Group and later instigated a Heritage Centre in the aisle of St Paul's church, Chester Green. She edited a book on Little Chester, published as *A City within a City* (2012), that rapidly sold out. Her other publications included 'Framework knitting in the parish of Alfreton, 1670–1870' in the *DAJ* for 2017 (with an additional note in the 2018 volume) and numerous contributions to the history of Derby in *Derbyshire Miscellany*. The monographs she has written for the society are to be assembled for publication.

Joan was an unselfish and a dedicated teacher, always available to give her time to others. Kind and generous, she had the ability to get things going and will be much missed by many friends.

Three members of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society have added further memories of Joan:

*Ray Marjoram*, formerly the society's honorary librarian: The first that I



Joan D'Arcy in 2019.

remember of her is her offering to keyboard the library catalogue from the cards that we had made during book cleaning, using the new software that I had just purchased. That would be in 1991. I subsequently produced a slip for each new

entry and she edited and proof read all these until Anne Allcock, the present librarian, took over. From then on Joan was a major part of the team in our monthly visits. So for nearly thirty years she has worked with me in the library and I have been most grateful for her enthusiasm and scholarship.

*Rachel Walker:* Joan was tutor to the WEA Alfreton Local History Workshop for a number of years and helped the group publish a book of recollections of life in the Second World War in the Alfreton area called *Voices from the Past* in 2003. This was very well received and is still selling well.

*Susan Peberdy,* the society's present honorary secretary: Joan was my 'go to person' when questions arrived in my email inbox on local history and I shall miss her expertise and her human warmth that she unfailingly exhibited on all occasions. She went out of her way to make new members feel welcome and valued members of the society.