

JOAN D'ARCY: AN APPRECIATION

RICHARD A. GAUNT

JOAN was my A-Level History tutor on the much-loved Joint Matriculation Board paper 'Britain 1815–1914' when I attended South East Derbyshire College from 1988 to 1990. The experience turned out to be transformative. She quickly identified me as potential university material, encouraged me to think seriously about applying for higher education in a way which I had not done before, and (unprompted) offered me extra tuition in preparation for university entrance examinations. Joan was a serious historian but always embodied the joy of learning. I respected both her judgement and her ability.

I ended up studying History and Politics at Nottingham, maintaining contact with Joan, and visiting her at the college shortly after graduating in 1994, just as she was about to take early retirement in order to pursue her own research interests, including finishing her PhD. My own path into academia, by way of teacher training and a PhD in nineteenth-century British history, were decisions which she encouraged and endorsed.

In subsequent years, our relationship matured into that of respected peers rather than tutor and student. Once, she treated me to a tour of Stone House Prebend, where I learned about the mixed advantages of living in a listed building. Christmas cards and e-mails maintained contact, long after I secured a full-time academic position at Nottingham. Through these, I kept track of Joan's research projects and publications, which were as rooted in the nineteenth century as my own. She came to hear me when I spoke to the Local History section of the DAS and at Nottingham's Saturday morning local history seminar. We always picked up where we had left off, as though the intervening years had been momentary interruptions to a single conversation. However, my strongest recollection will always be of the occasion when Joan came to speak to Heanor and District Local History Society in Wilmot Street community centre, only a few hundred yards from the college buildings where she had taught me. Barely had the meeting begun when the whole building was plunged into darkness by a power-cut. After a brief debate amongst the organisers, Joan asked whether the



Joan D'Arcy with Richard Gaunt (centre) and John Beckett.

audience would mind her continuing anyway? She proceeded to hold her audience transfixed, as it sat in total darkness for the best part of the next hour, relying on nothing but her distinctively warm and appealing voice and her innate ability to tell a well-researched historical story. It was a marvellous display, a memorable evening, and a fitting illustration of the many strengths which Joan D'Arcy possessed as a local historian.