

Milton-under-Wychwood W.I. The Thatcher Years

On Tuesday 16th April, the night before Baroness Thatcher's funeral, Milton WI were delighted to welcome Amanda Ponsonby MBE as our speaker for the evening. She came to us, straight off the train from attending the private service at the Palace of Westminster before returning to London after the meeting for the Funeral Service at St. Paul's the next day. We felt very honoured that she was able to come to speak to us.



Lady Thatcher
at the Garter Ceremony, Windsor

What Made the Prime Minister Tick

Amanda Ponsonby came from a political family; her father was Michael Colvin MP, and at the age of 19 she went to work for Geoffrey Howe who was at the time the Shadow Chancellor. She stayed with his office for five years during which time he became Chancellor in 1979. After a couple of years abroad she returned in 1983 to work in the political office for Margaret Thatcher and was very involved in the briefing for press conferences. Margaret Thatcher was very proud of being Prime Minister and devoted every waking moment to governing. She famously needed very little sleep and Amanda said of course that meant at times her staff got very little as well. Her first Party Conference was in 1983 and at 3am when the speech for the Prime Minister's main speech next day had just been typed, the news of the Cecil Parkinson and Sarah Keays scandal broke

which meant a lot more consultation and re-writing was necessary. No-one got to bed before 5.30am and the Prime Minister was up again at 7am. The second Party Conference that Amanda was involved with was in 1984 at Brighton when the IRA bombed the Grand Hotel. It was a very frightening time for all concerned but Amanda said that even amongst the sadness and devastation there was

something quite comical about seeing all the politicians and their office staff in their nightclothes in the cells at Lewes Police Station where they had been taken as a place of safety. Amanda had Mrs Thatcher's speech with her and found a typewriter in the Police Station to re-type the speech for the next day as of course it was business as usual.

Maggie in Moscow

Amanda was also involved with a lot of the Prime Minister's trips abroad. They travelled in a special RAF plane for long foreign trips when the press accompanied them. On these trips Amanda also helped with Mrs Thatcher's clothes. She loved her clothes and all her different outfits had names sometimes depending on where they had first been worn and for what occasion. As the first woman Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher had no wife to help with a lot of domestic detail and staff from her political office helped out

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with this. Amanda was also with Mrs Thatcher on her first trip to Moscow to meet with President Gorbachev. Driving from the airport to the British Residence it was noticeable that there was no-one on the streets. Asking why, they were informed that the KGB had imposed a curfew but by the end of the five-day visit the streets were thronging with people eager to see Mrs Thatcher and the KGB had no control over it. Moscow had never seen the like of it before.

Amanda said that in her early years Mrs Thatcher's ambition had been to be Chancellor, as there had never been a woman Prime Minister. Amanda felt that Denis Thatcher had been a wonderfully devoted husband. She reflected that in

high office women often sacrificed more than men and probably what had suffered most was Lady Thatcher's relationship with her children. Lady Thatcher's last years after her husband's death had been hard for her with her failing health.

Amanda has very special memories of her time with Lady Thatcher and hopes one day to put them into a book.

Milton WI felt very privileged to hear Amanda's thoughts on the very moving service that she had attended that day at Westminster and that she had still managed to come to speak to us.

We meet on the **3rd Tuesday** of every month, in **Milton Village Hall**. Do come along and join us. For more information phone Linda Dixon on: 01993 830411.

Rose Hartley

Trudy Reflects on... The Art of Criticism

What exactly is a 'critic'? I looked up the word in my trusty O.E.D. and was quite taken aback by the first meaning given: '*a person who censures*'. Ugh, not for me. The second meaning is an improvement: '*a person who reviews or judges the merits of literary, artistic or musical works*'.

I began to learn the art of criticism at an early age. My colleagues (other disenchanted with authority 15-year olds) and I, made the Chicago Tribune when we walked out of our Junior Speech Class on strike after the removal of our beloved teacher. He had, you see, endangered the school board by giving everyone in his class an 'A' grade for the semester. To these prosaic board members, the possibility that every single member of that class could have achieved such a standard of excellence was impossible to believe. They asked for Mr. Colcord's resignation. Dave Colcord patiently

explained that each of his students, to his (critical mind), had performed to the very best standard that he or she could achieve. In his opinion, such effort deserved an 'A' grade. It made no difference. Authority had spoken. Disgruntled and far from being convinced of the fairness of the decision, we eventually straggled back to class where we made the supply teacher's life a total misery for the rest of the year.

I have never forgotten this incident and I have never been sorry for my part in it. Dave Colcord had thoughtfully critiqued the efforts of his class and graded them accordingly. I read somewhere that every individual is a unique blend of DNA, experience and psychological complexity. It is always worth keeping that in mind when judging or censuring.

Trudy Yates

Trudy gives an 'A' grade in her review of Hound of the Baskervilles, page 33.