

Society Notices

Remembering Professor Nicola Verdon

It is with great sadness that the British Agricultural History Society reports the death of our friend, colleague and President, Professor Nicola Verdon (1970–2024), who was tragically killed in a cycling accident on 29 December last year. One of the most distinguished rural historians of her generation, Nicola's publications were particularly acclaimed for the light they shone on the lives of farm workers and rural women.

Nicola studied at the University of Sussex and University of Leicester, before going on to teach and research at Harlaxton College, the University of Reading, the University of Sussex and since 2011 at Sheffield Hallam University. During her career she took up major and often essential offices in the BAHS, including Secretary (2009–2017), organizing many conferences, and being elected President. Leading publications include *Rural women workers in 19th-century England* (Boydell, 2002) and *Working the land: A history of the farmworker in England from 1850 to the present day* (Palgrave, 2017). She was active and committed in disseminating knowledge of and enthusiasm for rural history in many spheres, beyond her academic post.

Nicola's funeral took place on 19 February 2025. The booklet that accompanied a gathering in her memory that day included a passage from her article published in this journal, 'A distinctive service: Ruth Uzzell, the National Union of Agricultural Workers, and the place of women in inter-war rural trade unionism', 72, I (2024), pp. 84–100. We reproduce it again here as a tribute to Nicola as a scholar, a person, and a friend.

How was Uzzell able to maintain her position within the leadership of the union, when the women who came before her had not? The first explanation lies in her personality, and her skills in debate and people-management. Uzzell was direct, humorous, and sharp. Far from being deterred or silenced by an all-male audience, Uzzell thrived, and she cultivated a confidence in travelling, in public speaking and in holding her own in a male-dominated trade union organization. Descriptions of her frequently draw upon her character and temperament, highlighting her 'resonant voice', her 'quick understanding', her 'eloquent and pithy speeches' and 'her forceful, energetic and withal loveable personality'. She often used wit as a method to silence hecklers and to win the confidence of the floor. She caused laughter at the 1930 conference when she explained her reason for being brief in her speech: 'because I know very well the married men want to hear their own voices here, even if they cannot hear them at home'. On being interrupted by a 'little insignificant man' at a meeting in Oxford who had asked her 'Don't you wish you were a man?', she replied, 'Yes, don't you?'. She was not afraid to be combative but rather than being condemned for this, she earned recognition for being 'a match for all the men'.

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