



Mary Dolan

(2 December 1931 - 2 April 2004)

When Mary Dolan's funeral was held at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Armidale, NSW on 7 April this year, the building was filled to overflowing. People were standing inside and outside. Present were family and friends from near and far, colleagues, members of probably every local church, and members of none. It was explicitly a service to give thanks for the life of one who had loving service of others and of her Master as her first priority. Mary had died suddenly in Sydney while on Australian Institute of Archaeology business; and it is her longstanding link with the Institute which makes it right to record her passing in *Buried History*.

Born in Adelaide in the middle of the Depression to Mervyn and Elizabeth Margaret Neely who had migrated from County Armagh, Mary Boyd Woodburn Neely gave an early sign of her intellectual potential by becoming dux of her primary school in the suburb of Prospect. Likewise she was dux of Seymour College, a Presbyterian Secondary School for Girls in Adelaide. Matriculation from high school in 1949 saw her proceed to complete a BA at the

University of Adelaide. After starting in the Sciences, the lure of archaeology and history won her across to the Arts Faculty. The offer of a teaching position at Methodist Ladies' College in Melbourne brought her to that city where two interlocking influences proved seminal for her life direction. While undertaking a DipEd at Melbourne to equip herself for school teaching, Mary also attended an Honours seminar on Pacific (including Australian) Prehistory given by Professor John Mulvaney, the doyen of the subject. The second matter of consequence was that Mary came into contact with the Australian Institute of Archaeology, and was employed by Mr Beasley in the late 1950s as the Institute's education officer. After making several contributions to the Institute's initial journal, *Ancient Times: A Quarterly Review of Biblical Archaeology*,¹ Mary was given responsibility to get *Buried History* under way in March 1958 as a bi-monthly archaeological news bulletin for senior school students; but its readership focus broadened once it succeeded *Ancient Times* (the latter ran for five volumes from mid-1956 to mid-1961). Already in her contributions to these journals

the signs were in evidence of her deep fascination for the Ancient Near East, and especially the Assyrian Empire.

In 1960 another interstate transfer occurred with Mary's appointment as tutor in (Ancient) History at the University of New England in Armidale. Isabel McBryde, who had already started teaching in that Department in 1958 and then left for study at Cambridge, returned to UNE to teach Ancient History and Prehistory (the latter with an emphasis on Australian archaeology); and the two shared a study at the university, teaching Ancient History there together.

Australia. This range of archaeological expertise made possible the development of an Ancient History course at UNE different from most offered at the time. It situated the Classical civilizations of Greece and Rome in the wider contexts of ancient Europe and the Mediterranean. This allowed new perspectives on the ancient Mediterranean world to emerge. Mary also contributed substantially to the program directed by Isabel of regional fieldwork on the New England region's Aboriginal past. These surveys and excavations were conducted in the Clarence Valley, the Tablelands and far north-western NSW. Isabel remembers



Mary Dolan excavating at Hazor in Israel, 2000 (photo: courtesy of the Dolan family)

They had already met a little before at an excavation led by John Mulvaney at Glen Ayre near Cape Otway in Victoria. The lifelong friendship they enjoyed began here. In the early 1960s Mary also began an MA on the history of archaeology in Israel, under Mulvaney's supervision; but she gave so much of her energy to the archaeology of the New England region that she did not complete the thesis.

In their five years teaching together, Mary's Ancient Near Eastern interests (especially her deep knowledge of Egypt and Mesopotamia) complemented Isabel's focus on Iron Age Europe, Roman Britain and the new field of Aboriginal

Mary's participation as generous, always energetic, focussed and capable. Her sense of fun balanced her professional approach to the work.

Mary left her History tutorship at UNE upon her marriage in May 1964 to her Medieval History colleague Dr James (Jimmy) Dolan, who had been widowed the year before. She suddenly became a mother to five children aged one to nine. In 1969, Mary resumed teaching, this time at the Armidale Teachers' College, the first non-metropolitan teachers' college in Australia (est. 1928), and older than the university by a decade. She remained

there during the ATC's transformation into a College of Advanced Education; and when tertiary institutions were amalgamated across Australia in the late 1980s, Mary returned to UNE to teach in the Faculty of Education until she retired—well past the official retirement age—in 2003. Here she taught future teachers of Ancient History (including Aboriginal Prehistory), Medieval and English History, and Studies in Religion as part of the DipEd program. She also participated in the Egyptian History unit offered through the Classics and Ancient History Department.

In all her work career teaching was to the fore: Mary was not primarily a researcher. To teach with enthusiasm in any and every context—children, students, the community, congregations—gave her great satisfaction. And the energy with which she went about it bubbled out to her audiences. This endeared her to many, made her memorable, and instilled in those she taught a love of the ancient world as well as respect for other religious traditions. 'Mrs Dolan is SO COOL!' wrote one school student recently in the visitors' book at the University's Museum of Antiquities after Mary had just given them a hands-on session with her own collection of ancient lamps and other artefacts.

It was a natural extension of her passion for Ancient History that she served for several years on the NSW Ancient History Higher School Certificate Examination Committee, where her brief was particularly for the Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Following her retirement from the University, Mary took on the role of providing liaison between the Australian Institute of Archaeology and NSW secondary teachers of Ancient History in order to build among the latter awareness of the Institute's resources available to teachers. She was in Sydney to represent the Institute at an Ancient History Teachers' conference when she died so suddenly. Mary maintained an active link with the Institute for almost fifty years: when she could, she travelled (by bus!) from Armidale to Melbourne for the Institute's AGM.

At the time of her death, Mary was getting ready to return to Israel for another season of archaeological digging at Hazor. Over the previous nearly twenty years she had travelled extensively in Mediterranean countries: Syria, Jordan, Greece, Turkey. In that period she participated in over twenty digs in Israel, sometimes two at separate times of the year. Those sites where she worked included Tel Dor, Jezreel, Megiddo, Ein Gedi and (her personal favourite) Hazor, where she worked for her largest number of seasons under the Director, Professor Amnon Ben-Tor.² Even in years of great unrest in Israel, she still went for the digging season because she knew that foreign participation would be down. Injuries she sustained from tent pegs and falls may have occasioned knee operations back in Australia, but did not dampen her enthusiasm to return the next season. Mary was a 'savvy' traveller, and knew how to be the 'innocent elderly lady' if she wanted to see a site to which a taxi driver was reluctant to take her.



Mary taking refreshment from an ancient beer jug, Hazor excavations 2001 (photo: courtesy of the Dolan family)

In her archaeological work, as in her teaching, Mary was an unpretentious 'doer'. She expected to get her hands dirty. The first to help with student advising or to be present at the Museum of Antiquities for Open days, she did not trumpet her contribution. Not one for pietism, hers was a practical faith, firmly grounded in reality. This enabled her to be generous-spirited to others, never disapproving. And she knew how to laugh, particularly—a special gift, this—at herself.

Yet Mary certainly recognised that life was serious; and if laughter made up one side of the see-saw, a deep sense of responsibility to others balanced it on the other. She was a loyal Presbyterian, but unabashedly committed to ecumenism. To some at the time it must have seemed a paradox that this Irish Presbyterian should marry a Scottish Catholic. Mary's marriage to Jimmy in 1964, a year after the death of his wife, Kate, had a major impact on her life. She left work to focus on the five young children: Judith, Martin, Stephen, Kath, and Jo. Perhaps when the final balance is weighed, this least public of roles was her most significant one. Jimmy died suddenly at work in 1978, and Mary's care for the children continued unwavering. At her funeral her stepson Martin spoke of Mary's acceptance of difference, her strong sense of fairness, of how she was always in such haste with whatever she did, and of how she revelled in learning and helping others to learn. Mary,

who almost died herself in 1977, had 14 years' of marriage with Jimmy. They had no children but, in Martin's words, she was 'mother in all but name' to the five of them.

Endearing, generous, memorable, hilarious, a helper ... Mary Dolan was all these things, and more. For she did not take her eyes off the Master she served, and her commitment to him was unspokenly evident in how she treated others and lived herself. If no trumpets blew for Mary in her life—she gave short shrift to any who attempted to do so!—they certainly did in the Celestial City when 'Mrs Standfast' passed over the river that has been 'a terror to many'.

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Endnotes

1 'The transfer of a birthright', vol. 2.1 (1957) 9-10; 'The Exodus from Egypt', 2.2 (1957) 13-15; 'Recent discoveries at Jericho', 2.3 (1958) 11-14; 'Ezion Geber', 2.4 (1958) 6-7; 'The fall of Lachish', *ibid.*, 12-15; 'The destruction of Hazor', 3.1 (1958) 11-14; 'Through the Transjordan', 3.2 (1958) 7-9; 'The Canaanites: the depths of religious corruption', 3.3 (1959) 13-15; 'The bloodthirsty Anat', 3.4 (1959) 8-10; etc.

2 See her article, 'Digging up Hazor: a personal perspective', *Buried History* 36 (2000) 4-12.