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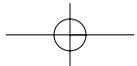
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## *Rob Phillips*

### *1959–2003*

As I am sure many readers of this journal know, Rob Phillips died in tragic circumstances on Christmas Day, 2003; his passing is a huge loss to us all, friends and colleagues in Wales and beyond. Shortly before he died he had been appointed as Professor of Border Studies at the University of Glamorgan; prior to that, and quite briefly, he was a Professor at MMU in the Institute of Education. From 1991–2002 he was lecturer and then senior lecturer in education at the University of Wales, Swansea.

One Saturday in early spring this year, Rob's widow, Dianne, asked me and another close colleague, Richard Daugherty, to spend a morning going through Rob's books in the house he had recently bought in his home town of Aberdare. It was an astonishing experience – not just because of the sheer volume of books that he had collected (he was a voracious buyer of books new and old – Hay-on-Wye was a favourite haunt) but also because of their range and diversity. Sorting through them brought home to me how much of a scholar he was and reminded me in vivid terms (if I needed reminding) just how much I, and many colleagues in the different communities he moved in, will miss him.

Firstly there were books related to the teaching of history – reflecting his early career as a history teacher for eight years in Avon and Somerset and then his eleven years at Swansea in charge of the history PGCE. Rob himself contributed to the literature on teacher education with several of his own books: *Reflective Practice in History Teaching 11–18: Meeting Standards and Applying Research* (Continuum, 2002); *Issues in the Teaching of History*, edited with J. Arthur (Routledge, 2000); *Historical Subject Knowledge and its Professional Application*, edited with G. Easdown (SCHTE, 1999) and *Preparation for Teaching History: Research and Practice*, edited with R. Guyer (SCHTE, 1998). But in his own library, as well as contemporary texts, there was a rich collection of much older books – textbooks and books on teaching method, that spanned the whole of the twentieth century. Rob was fascinated by the changing ways in which history has been taught in our schools, and what changing content and methods say about us and our society.

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During his time as a classroom teacher, Rob experienced the introduction of the national curriculum; for the first time in over sixty years, what history should be taught and not taught – indeed, what history was – was defined by the government rather than by teachers themselves. This was a formative experience for Rob, as it was for many teachers of his generation, and he chose to study the introduction of the English history national curriculum for his Ph.D. His research involved a detailed examination of the workings of the working party set up to define the history national curriculum. He managed to obtain (goodness knows how) access to all of their confidential minutes, and conducted interviews with Kenneth Baker and all of the leading players of the time. The significance of what they were doing in defining history for the next generation was not lost on those he researched. They were engaged in what Rob called ‘the battle for the big prize’ – and they knew it. The book he wrote from his Ph.D. – *History Teaching, Nationhood and the State* (Cassell, 1998) was awarded the Standing Conference for Studies in Education prize for the most outstanding book published in the field of education in that year. In many ways, the seeds of his later academic interests were sown at this time, too.

Another area of his book collection reflected his concerns with educational policy; he read widely in politics, sociology and social policy. He was particularly interested in the formation of educational policy in Wales both before and after devolution; an interest reflected in a number of his own books including *Education Policy Making in Wales: Explorations in Devolved Governance*, edited with R. Daugherty and G. Rees (University of Wales Press, 2001) and *Education, Reform and the State: Politics, Policy and Practice 1976–2001* edited with J. Furlong (Routledge, 2001).

For me, the most fascinating area of Rob’s library reflected his interest in the role of history, history teaching, and the creation of national identity. There were several hundred books on different aspects of nationalism and national identity – in Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland, obviously, but also in France, Australia, Germany, Russia and the USA. And, in exploring how national identity is created, he did not confine himself to history or to schooling. He had a rich seam of books on different aspects of cultural studies as they relate to national identity – film, television, art and literature. What this collection was supporting was his most recent research project ‘British Island Stories: History, Identity and Nationhood’ – part of the ESRC Devolution and Constitutional Change programme. His own books in this area of work included *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, edited with H. Brocklehurst (Palgrave, 2003); *The Idea of Wales: History, Identity and*

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*Obituary*

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*National Imagination* (University of Wales Press, 2003) and the book he was working on at the time of his death, *History and the Discursive Creation of National Identity: Theories and Narratives*.

Rob's last collection of books related to what was perhaps his greatest passion of all; the history of the First World War. Here again there were not just history books but poetry and biography, too. And his collection from this period was not just confined to books: he had collections of photographs and a whole range of memorabilia he had quite literally picked up during his frequent visits to the battlefields and woods of northern France: a gun, a gas-mask, a 'picket' for supporting a barbed-wire fence. From his original research into the war he had recently published a new book, this time not an academic book but one for schools, one that would be widely read in Wales and, he hoped beyond. Last year he wrote about this book and how proud he was of it:

Given history's importance to understanding the complex contemporary world in which we live, I would like to feel that I have contributed to the enhancement of the quality of life in Wales. I am particularly proud of *Wales in the World: the Battle of Mametz Wood 1916* (ACAC, 2003) which is based upon original research and tells the story of this extraordinary battle through the experience of five people. It is written deliberately in order to involve Welsh people directly, personally and emotionally in the First World War by focusing on the 'small stories' within the 'bigger picture'.

In recognition of the book's outstanding contribution in Wales it was awarded the Tir na n-Og prize for 2003.

Those of us who knew and worked closely with Rob know that he was not always an easy colleague or friend to get along with. The illness that seemed increasingly to blight his life in the last few years threw him into fits of depression and insecurity, that were sometimes hard to deal with. But this illness, hard as it was for Rob, was perhaps also the driving force behind his genius. He was a scholar of passion and creativity who, in just twelve years in higher education had achieved an immense amount – an excellent Ph.D., four single-authored books, eight edited books, over fifty other articles and a reputation as an outstanding teacher.

Many of us are going to miss Rob Phillips, especially those of us who knew him well. I miss his daft sense of humour, his passion for Wales (and for what was right and wrong with it), his wild enthusiasms, and (something known to only a few) his terrible drum-playing. But whether or not we knew him personally, all of us will miss him for what he was trying to tell us

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about who we are and where we have come from. Understanding the role of history teaching in the creation of our national identity is perhaps more important now than at any time in the recent past. This was something that Rob knew, and tried to share with us all.

John Furlong  
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