

## Obituary – Joanne Bower

Joanne Bower, who for 36 years was the Honorary Secretary of the Farm and Food Society (FAFS), has died at the age of 93. Inspired by Ruth Harrison's book *Animal Machines* (1964) Joanne became one of the first campaigners for farm animal welfare. She abhorred the stress and suffering inherent in intensive production and in 1966 helped to establish FAFS in order to oppose this.

At the time few people knew about conditions on factory farms. The government had set up the Brambell Committee to look into the problems, but it needed a campaign to counter the intensive lobby. When the committee's report came to be discussed in Parliament Joanne organised a demonstration and smuggled a cage of stuffed hens into the House of Commons. The MP John Ellis used this to great effect during the debate.

Early FAFS members who worked with Joanne at that time included Peter Roberts, who went on to found Compassion in World Farming and the mother and daughter partnership of Violet Spalding and Clare Druce, who went on to found Chickens' Lib.

Her first job was as a secretary to the rising Liberal MP, Leslie Hore-Belisha. After a spell at the House of Commons she travelled down to Devonport during his campaign for re-election in the 1931 General Election. There she helped with his correspondence and daily typed his speeches on a portable typewriter from his notes or dictation, usually under pressure. She worked late into the night but found it all exhilarating and rewarding.

Joanne never embraced modern technology, but the experience of working for a go ahead MP who would soon find himself in government, may help to explain how she would later be able to manage the formidable FAFS's correspondence armed with no more than a manual typewriter, while simultaneously dealing with the day to day running of the charity and generating a constant stream of carefully researched papers.

Her considerable writing skills, however, extended far beyond her campaign work. As a freelance journalist she worked for a time in Fleet Street. She also wrote several successful plays.

During the war she was taken on by the Ministry of Information, initially in the Africa section. She recorded in her diary that she knew nothing at all about Africa, but that this did not seem to matter since no one else in the section had done either when they went there! She progressed from this to become an exhibition script writer and stayed on after the war, when the MOI became the Central Office of Information.

In 1947 Joanne (née Holbrook) married George Bower, an accountant and talented pianist. Her first daughter, Juliet, was born in 1949.

Everyone who knew Joanne admired her selfless determination to improve the lot of farm animals. She felt particularly for overcrowded chickens, pigs kept on concrete and dairy cows forced to give more milk than their bodies could stand. During the 1980s she played an important role in helping to shape the welfare sections of organic standards, lending support to both the Soil Association and EFRC.

Joanne knew it would take time to bring meaningful change. Her great strength lay in the conviction that detailed research and perseverance would eventually win through. For more than three decades she produced exposés and carefully argued papers into overcrowding,

disease, unnatural feed, antibiotics, pesticides, fertilisers, slurry pollution, biotechnology and much more, always showing that there were better ways to keep animals and produce food.

One example illustrates Joanne's approach. In 1970 she carried out an exhaustive review of pro-industry press coverage following the Swann Committee report on the dangers posed by the use of antibiotics in livestock feed. The industry was inching government action away from key recommendations made by Swann. She exposed the tricks they were using, including the placing of hundreds of media stories warning of '3d on a pound of bacon' if Swann was implemented in full, which she traced to just two tame academics.

Peter Singer, who became one of FAFS's patrons, drew extensively on Joanne's research into the conditions on factory farms in writing his highly influential *Animal Liberation* (1975).

Her many pamphlets and papers remain relevant today and merit careful re-examination. They invariably contain a sharp and early insight into problems which would later emerge into the open and which have sadly not yet gone away. 'Agriculture', she wrote, 'deals with life, which sets it apart from all other industries'. At a time when farming in Britain is increasingly being treated just like any other industry those words have a particular resonance.

For those who knew her only during the last phase of her life, as I did, the publicity stunt she organised in the House of Commons seems strangely out of character. Joanne was a modest Quaker who shunned the limelight and was embarrassed by personal praise. Born two years before the First World War, it is easy to think of her as someone from a different era. Yet, what shines out from her life is her energy, her ability and above all the enormous commitment she had to her own beliefs. Back in 1966 there were no established groups, as there are today, working solely for farm animal welfare. Joanne saw the opportunity to help the cause forward and she took it with both hands.

A longstanding advocate for an ethical dimension to agricultural policy-making, Joanne was also the driving force behind the creation of the Food Ethics Council.

She is survived by her daughter Phoebe Rae.

Richard Young

Lawrence Woodward adds:

"All those who worked with her at EFRC are very sorry to hear the sad news. EFRC was the beneficiary of FAFS resources and feels honoured to be trusted with that heritage – and we will do our best to live up to and carry on Joanne's example".

A shortened version of this obituary first appeared in EFRC *Bulletin* No. 82 February 2006