

Joan Robins, 1908–94

Joan Robins, OBE, industrial executive, public servant and voluntary worker, died on April 7 aged 85. She was born in London on November 23, 1908.



An early feminist before the term was generally used, Joan Robins was unusual in her own generation. While having a long and successful career in industry and public service, she regarded her family life, based on a happy marriage of more than 50 years, as at least as important. Perhaps equally atypically, she was a staunch Tory and traditional Roman Catholic.

Joan Rafferty Godfrey, as she was born, was trained at Westminster College London, as a home economist and joined the Gas Light and Coke Company before the Second World War. After serving as a home service adviser with North Thames Gas, she became the chief home service adviser to the Gas Council for the next 30 years.

Joan Robins spent the Second World War at the Ministry of Food, where her interest in domestic efficiency led her into nutrition. Her war work was considered sufficiently important for her to be allowed to continue employing a nanny despite the conscription of most private domestic help, and eventually it led to her becoming the first television chef and then early television 'personality'.

She was not only probably the first woman executive in the gas industry, but also instrumental in facilitating the succession of the next generation of women. Her OBE citation singled out her contribution to 'furthering the cause of women in industry'.

During the last ten years of her work for the Gas Council, she was in constant demand for governmental and industrial committees, largely because at that time industry had so few women in such positions. Following her official retirement in her mid-sixties, she threw herself into voluntary work as an early board member and eventual vice president of the Women's National Commission, as president of the National Council of Women and of the National Board of Catholic Women, and as a co-founder of the Women Caring Trust for Northern Ireland. There was an international dimension to her work for professional women overseas. She retained the treasurership of the International Council of Women until her mid-eighties.

For the last 20 years of their lives Mick and Joan Robins were active in the life of their Oxfordshire village and of the Roman Catholic parish in which they lived. Recently they were occupied with the granting by the College of Arms of a coat of arms to the Deddington Parish Council, the first time that this particular type had been granted to any parish council in England. Mick Robins died four months before his wife who is survived by their daughter.

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