

## Dr Francesca Carnevali 1964 - 2013

Posted on Monday 20th May 2013



It is with an overwhelming sense of loss that the Department of History has to announce the death of its much-loved colleague, Francesca Carnevali. Following a long illness, Francesca passed away peacefully on the morning of Saturday 18 May 2013. She was with her family and her husband at their house in Piombino.

Francesca was well known among business and economic historians as a clever, intellectually honest academic with a tremendous commitment to the discipline. She published work on many subjects, though is best known for her comparative studies of banking and for her more recent work on trade associations, social capital and regional economies, particularly through her case studies on the British and American jewellery industries.

Francesca came to Birmingham in 1996 from the LSE, after a brief spell at Swansea. She joined the then Economic and Social History Department, and proved an absolutely crucial linchpin for the subsequent merger with Medieval and Modern History. If there were to be any tensions in such a combination, Francesca's charm, wit, friendliness and generosity of spirit was crucial to the transition.

Francesca was a central figure in the life of the History department for nearly two decades. Her contributions to departmental debates were always made with an incredible commitment to both the students' and her colleagues' best interests. She championed economic history and brought the Economic History Society here for its annual conference in 2002. She brought new subjects to the curriculum, some of which fed through into her textbook, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, that she compiled with Julie-Marie Strange.

Her hospitality was crucial in making this department tick and for bringing colleagues together from various social, geographic and academic backgrounds. She livened up the corridors of the History department (not least with her idiosyncratic suggestions for departmental social events!). She will be sorely missed by a generation of staff and students.

If you would like to donate to Cancer Research UK in memory of Francesca, you may do so here: <http://donateinmemory.cancerresearchuk.org/0003993> (<http://donateinmemory.cancerresearchuk.org/0003993>)

### Tributes

#### Alistair Grant

At 1:08PM on 24 June 2013, Alistair Grant wrote:

I am truly saddened to hear of the loss of Francesca. I met her when I applied to do doctoral research at Birmingham in 2008 and she agreed to supervise me. I was thrilled to meet someone so young and vibrant, informed and wise, and who shared my passion for the Birmingham and Midlands metalware trade. Although we weren't successful with funding for my research at Birmingham, Francesca continued to help guide my thoughts and shape my proposal, and was wonderfully generous in encouraging me to apply again, successfully, with the V&A Museum and University of Sussex. She urged me to persevere, and I was greatly inspired by her frank advice, unwavering confidence and resolute encouragement. As a teacher, supervisor and mentor she had that all too rare gift of being able to genially suggest that you may be wrong and ought to look elsewhere, whilst somehow boosting your confidence in yourself and leaving you enthused. There are few teachers so giving, and her intelligent and incisive writing, and generous spirit is an unforgettable example to all who study and teach and were fortunate enough to have met her.

#### Jane Lancaster

At 1:13PM on 07 June 2013, Jane Lancaster wrote:

I will miss Francesca, who was one of my favorite people. She was sharp and funny and I loved having her stay in our house in Providence. We would compare archival adventures over a glass or two of wine, then get back to the serious business of making sense of it all.

But there isn't a lot of sense in someone so vibrant dying too soon. Jane Lancaster

#### Tony Lancaster

At 11:58AM on 07 June 2013, Tony Lancaster wrote:

I am greatly saddened by the news of Francesca's painfully premature death. I have known her since she came to stay at our house in Rhode Island during her study of the Providence and Birmingham Jewellery industries. We became good friends, both in the U.S. and in my old haunts in Birmingham and I enjoyed her lively mind and charming smile. Her loss is particularly sad for me because she stayed with us at a time when I was suffering from a cancer that was thought to be terminal. She was kindness itself and generous and she helped me through an ordeal, help that I was unable to return. We shall miss her.

Tony Lancaster, Brown University

#### Ann Beverley Fuller Carnevali

At 10:48AM on 04 June 2013, Ann Beverley Fuller Carnevali wrote:

I would like to thank you all for the wonderful things you have said about my daughter Francesca. Reading your comments, and in many cases your emails, has given me the strength to face each day. In the last one by Gordon Lynch, he says "a rare generosity of spirit" - this is the most perfect phrase by which to remember her. Thank you Gordon and thank you all.

#### Gordon Lynch

At 11:12PM on 27 May 2013, Gordon Lynch wrote:

I originally met Francesca through a reading group that was run by colleagues in the History Department. In the years following, I came to recognise Francesca as one of the most remarkable people that I will ever meet. She was wise, intelligent, incisive and had a rare generosity of spirit. She had a passionate dislike of injustice and an equally passionate belief in the intellectual mission of the university. I could both laugh with her at absurd things and talk to her about the things that were most serious to me, knowing that I could trust in her good sense and compassion. She had a genuine concern for others' well-being which found expression both through her support for friends and for colleagues. She was much loved and has been taken from us too quickly. My thoughts are with P, her family and all mourning her loss.

Gordon Lynch

### **Franco Sarcina**

At 11:35AM on 26 May 2013, Franco Sarcina wrote:

Ti conobbi in prima liceo, a Milano. Abbiamo condiviso delle belle cose: la musica, una breve vacanza, tante amicizie. Mi mancherai.

Riposa in pace, Francesca. Ti voglio bene.

### **Alex Mold**

At 9:14PM on 22 May 2013, Alex Mold wrote:

I got to know Francesca when I was a PhD student. She was the first person that made me realise that historians don't just describe, they create as well. Francesca's sharp mind and quick wit were paired with a warmth and generosity; I have so many happy memories of evenings eating delicious meals in her home surrounded by books, cats and dogs! I lent her a book the last time I saw her, and would love to know what she thought of it. I liked it, she probably hated it! It hardly seems possible that someone who was so alive can be gone, but she lives on in the memories of so many people whose lives she touched. Farewell, dear friend. With love to Paolo, Ann and Max.

### **Deborah Jewison**

At 8:39PM on 22 May 2013, Deborah Jewison wrote:

When I moved to Birmingham in 2004 I lodged with Francesca (and Elaine) for about 18 months. My first impressions of Francesca were that she was very clever, lively, and slightly intimidating! As I got to know her I discovered other things about her: she was a great cook; could be very silly at times; loved shoes and jewellery; and was incredibly kind, welcoming and generous, and shared my love of gardening. She encouraged me to go to pottery at the mac and was the recipient of several of my efforts in clay; she taught me how to make 'proper' pasta sauce, how to make risotto, how to stuff a turkey, and, most importantly, how to load a dishwasher correctly!

When I started my PhD, Francesca was someone with whom I could talk archives, sources and concepts as our areas of study overlapped slightly; she was always happy to point me in the right direction and recommend a book or two to read.

We had many a conversation over fish finger sandwiches in Kings Heath, or over scampi and chips in staff house; proof that her appreciation of good food didn't stop her enjoying less healthy stuff from time to time.

Francesca was a great friend and the world will be a less colourful place without her intelligent, witty, and vibrant presence in it.

### **Noelle Plack**

At 6:45PM on 22 May 2013, Noelle Plack wrote:

We have lost a dear, beautiful friend. Francesca has been one of my closest friends since I arrived in Britain from California in 1999. Some how we just got each other as she was one of the few people I had met in Birmingham who had ever visited Los Angeles, as her brother Max trained as a dentist at UCLA. As a PhD student in the department, she always made me feel welcome and supported by being so warm and friendly. Her sharp wit, intelligence, joyous (& slightly devious!) spirit will be deeply missed by all. She was incredibly hospitable and I will fondly remember the countless meals we shared together over the years discussing the virtues (& frustrations!) of Mediterranean life, culture, FOOD and WINE. She brought much sunshine to this cold, damp and grey island - may her smile continue to shine upon us. Ciao Bella.

### **Caterina Bruschi**

At 1:16PM on 22 May 2013, Caterina Bruschi wrote:

There was a message on the answerphone when I learned I had been appointed at Birmingham in 2000: 'I'm Francesca Carnevali. I look forward to having you as a colleague. Brava!' Francesca and I were first of all friends from that moment onwards. We soon made a little clique of Italianness in the department - always sat together at meetings and shared our opinions scribbling to each other tiny comments on the agenda sheet, like we were at school. I was completely new to the English academic system, and owe her everything I achieved in Birmingham - she told me all I needed to know in order to 'decode' and apply the rules and regulations, gave me tips for my teaching, advice on academic politics, opinions on people and support via UCU. But most of all, she was my girly friend in town, showing me around Birmingham, hosting me when needed, sharing food and sports together and introducing me to colleagues and friends. Students loved her and feared her, as she never gave in on the quality of the work expected. And she did well. A sign on her door said 'claws beat skin': a clear warning that Francesca could not stand hot air. So, we were warned! I will miss her, and know that that corridor, that department will never be the same again. With love to Francesca, to Paolo, Anna and Max. Cate

### **Simone Laqua-O'Donnell**

At 9:59AM on 22 May 2013, Simone Laqua-O'Donnell wrote:

I arrived at the School of History and Cultures in 2009, when Francesca was already absent a lot of the time. But when she was there, her office door was always open and I used to pop my head round the door to say "hello" and to have a chat or to go for a quick espresso if possible. I am glad I did. Reading her staff profile last week, I was struck by the beautiful woman looking out from the picture: that smile, the confidence, the sparkle and intelligence, all the things that everyone talks about when remembering Francesca - it's all captured in that one snapshot. In her role as the School's chief whip for the REF, it was her duty to get me to finish my book and pronto! But when we discussed it, Francesca always encouraged me to stick to my guns and only submit it to the publishers once I was happy with it. I wish I could tell her now: "It is done and I am happy with it" - only to be the recipient of that smile. Rest in peace, Francesca.

### **Malcolm Dick**

At 10:23PM on 21 May 2013, Malcolm Dick wrote:

One of Francesca's achievements was the creation of the Centre for West Midlands History in 2006. Initially a vehicle for supporting the MA in West Midlands History, it became a research centre and a network for connecting the University with heritage professionals and independent scholars in the region and beyond. I was privileged to work with Francesca in developing the work of the Centre and I admired her sharp intelligence, her ability to focus on essentials and her intolerance of things she knew to be wrong. At the same time she was hugely supportive of those she worked with, including postgraduate students. There are a number of individuals who owe their induction into historical scholarship to her. Francesca has many legacies, including the creation of a centre of excellence for the study of regional history. We can be proud to have known a wonderful human being.

### **Julie Rak**

At 4:01PM on 21 May 2013, Julie Rak wrote:

I knew Francesca because she was a very good friend of my partner, Danielle Fuller, who works in the Department of American and Canadian Studies at the University of Birmingham. I loved and still love Francesca: she was a brilliant interlocutor who also took joy in everyday life. When I stayed in the UK for awhile, Francesca gave me books and advice about British cooking and gardening. She gave me the subtitle for my recent book on the memoir industry. She was a defender of the intellectual mission of the university, and she opposed attempts to make it more about the institution and less about its people. I miss her very much, and I am thinking of Paolo, her wonderful partner, at this time.

Regards, Julie Rak University of Alberta, Canada

### **Ulrich Marsch**

At 2:23PM on 21 May 2013, Ulrich Marsch wrote:

The moment Francesca and I met in autumn 1990 at the LSE, at the beginning of our courses, it was a promise for a life long friendship, full of humor, hospitality, generosity, openness, curiosity, reflection, passion for history in all its shades, I remember all to well the evenings after class with other friends in our favorite pubs, the Three Tons or at the Beaver's Retreat, followed by mountains of pasta in her London flat, not to mention the discussions and debates on economics, history, business and many other things. She was among the best in our classes, and we tried to catch up with her the best we could. We arranged get togethers in Milan, Munich or in Dresden, and even if we did not see for a longer time, our talk were as if we had seen just last weekend. She was a friend one has a few in life, and you hardly acquire in your later years. The loss is enormous, My sincerest commiserations to her lovely husband Paolo and her family.

### **Elaine Fulton**

At 12:49PM on 21 May 2013, Elaine Fulton wrote:

I was given an office just across the corridor from Francesca when I started my first lectureship at Birmingham ten years ago. This proved to be extremely fortuitous: I soon found myself in close daily contact with a lively and welcoming new colleague who helped me integrate into a new job, department and city, and who soon became a wonderful friend. Over the years we saw each other through lots of up and downs, even house-sharing and cat-sharing (don't ask!) for a period, and I could not have wished for a more loyal, fun and generous friend. Francesca was also a tenacious and perceptive historian, sensible and thoughtful colleague and- thanks to her ability to charm anyone and anything- an outstanding networker. Our loss is immense, and we can only think of Francesca's husband Paolo and the rest of her family at this time. Francesca will be sorely missed as a colleague and as a friend.

### **Matthew Schofield**

At 10:47AM on 21 May 2013, Matthew Schofield wrote:

Francesca's lectures were amongst my favourites as an undergraduate student because you could tell that she really cared about her teaching and her research. Conversations I had with her as a postgraduate really helped me define my research. She really added to the positive, supportive and open atmosphere for postgraduates in the Department, including allowing me to attend an Economic History Society conference at the last minute to hear some papers. Just a couple of weeks ago I discovered the talks about Birmingham goods that Francesca organised last year, which had been put on Youtube- a great idea and I really enjoyed them, they reminded me of happy times. I am really saddened by Francesca's death and my most sincere condolences go out to Francesca's family and colleagues.

### **Danielle Fuller**

At 10:44AM on 21 May 2013, Danielle Fuller wrote:

As well as being a wonderful friend to many people, Francesca was a great colleague. Her integrity was as inspiring as her intelligence, wit and charm. She also cut an extremely elegant figure around campus - she was, after all, from Milan! She had a strong sense of justice and was prepared to challenge others in the defence of what she knew was right. For some time she was a BUCU caseworker - work that she did quietly but thoughtfully, always listening carefully to those whom she helped. She was one of the most impressive individuals I have ever known. She lived what she believed and she lived well. Like many others, I will miss her hugely, both at work and at home.

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