

Shona Kelly Wray, From Roisin Cossar

Like so many people here today, I've known Shona for a long time. We first met as graduate students through a mutual Italian friend, Costantino Marmo, in Toronto in the early 1990s, but then we lost touch until Shona happened to share a taxi with a colleague of mine at a conference in 2002. From that point we started emailing frequently, which led to meeting up at conferences across the States and in Britain, writing an essay together, and planning collaborative projects for the future. We submitted our applications for research fellowships at the Villa I Tatti at the same time, and were flabbergasted and thrilled when we both got in. Those months we spent in Florence together really solidified our friendship, and I'll never forget all the things we did together - lunches, dinners, walks, time with our families, and trips to galleries, churches, and archives in Florence, Venice, and Padua. She was - and will remain - my great friend, and also one of the people I respected most in our field of Italian medieval history. Today I want to honour her by saying a few things about who Shona was as a scholar.

The first thing Shona would want you to know about her scholarship, I think, was that it was always based on archival sources. She had a great affinity for records that she excavated from the archives - like this [show

image]. You can see from this image that working with documents like these poses special challenges, and Shona had enviable skills both as a Latinist and a paleographer - she could puzzle out words that even to colleagues in the same field looked like meaningless squiggles on a page. Early on in her scholarly career she had identified Bologna and its great archives as the site for her work -- especially the huge parchment volumes known as the *Libri Memoriali*, which were compiled by notaries working in Bologna in the fourteenth century. Within the *Memoriali*, as they are known, you can find all kinds of records, especially anything involving the exchange of property. But Shona's abiding interest was in wills, or testaments. The will, she argued, was gateway to understanding so many aspects of a society. While some scholars in the past had argued that only members of the propertied elite made their wills in the Middle Ages, Shona found ample evidence to the contrary in the *Memoriali*. The wills of poor women, second-hand clothes sellers, servants, and many others peopled her research through the years.

In her PhD thesis, and then her 2009 book, Shona also used records from the *Memoriali* to think again about a story that is very familiar to anyone who has ever taken a first-year Western Civ course at university or college: that is, the response of people to the onset of the plague, or Black Death, in Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century. Traditional studies

of that terrible crisis emphasize how the Black Death caused social breakdown, as people abandoned even their closest family members and fled for their lives, but as Shona read the testaments of people dying of plague in Bologna, she realized that there was another story to tell. That is, she argued, the people of the fourteenth century "managed" their responses to the plague, arranging for the futures of their loved ones through their testaments. In Shona's view (and it's a compelling argument) the people of 1348 were not irrational or governed by fear in the face of the epidemic. Instead, she saw them as complete human beings with rich emotional lives and the ability to support one another in challenging times. Her empathy for the people of the past, coupled with her close, accurate reading of her archival sources, gave her arguments a particularly strong foundation - and unsettled some of the most prominent scholars in the field at the same time.

In recent years Shona had extended her work to the households of educated people, such as notaries and university professors, in the fourteenth century. The last conference presentation she gave, at a meeting in Belgium in early May, was titled "Notarial Families and Households in Trecento Bologna." In that paper, she examined the testaments of notaries, their wives, widows, and daughters, and argued that by paying attention to the family lives of those legal professionals we can see that they were much more

socially heterogeneous than they have been previously portrayed. Her research on notarial households was part of her broader interest in re-examining the histories of medieval professions and institutions -- she did this by investigating the links between the public face of professionals and their families and households. Her I Tatti fellowship project this year was a study of the families of professors at the University of Bologna. She was particularly interested in examining the women in those families, both their domestic lives, and their public status. For that reason, when we went on an I Tatti trip to Padua in April (and many of you will know that Shona spent her junior year abroad in Padua in 1983), she took a group of us to see the tomb of Bettina, one of the daughters of a famous law professor from Bologna.

[image] On her tomb, Shona showed us, Bettina is described both as her father's daughter and as the wife of a well-known law prof. Bettina, it seems, was the glue binding these two legal scholars together, and she was recognized in this way on her tomb. Shona planned her next book on faculty families, possibly organized into case studies dealing with families from each of the faculties of the university. This plan had already borne fruit, as she had written an essay on the wives of law faculty members in Bologna that will appear in print in the next year.

Shona's work had a significant impact on our profession. Her insistence on the importance of archival sources, her willingness to rethink traditional narratives and her courage in challenging some of the most entrenched ideas about medieval life will all continue to influence the many scholars who worked with her. We'll tell our students about her work, and ensure that the ideas she prized live on in them. And our memory of her, her wonderful laugh, her "seize the day" approach to life, and her enormous capacity for friendship, will live on in us, too. Thanks for listening.