

Obituary: Professor Catherine Marsh, 1952-93

Cathie Marsh was Chair of the Social Statistics Section of the Royal Statistical Society from 1990 until 1992 and a committee member for several years before that. During this period she ensured that the Section's meetings were lively, well attended and on topics of both statistical and social importance. Cathie was a passionate believer in the power of rigorous analysis and rational argument in furthering the ends of social science and in the pursuit of social justice. She had an enormous capacity to inspire others to see further and to achieve more than they believed possible. Cathie's methodological interests resulted in two seminal books, *The Survey Method*, which re-established the value, within sociology, of the social survey in Britain, and *Exploring Data*, which reflected Cathie's desire to convince social science students not only of the value of empirical enquiry but also that 'data analysis is fun'. One of the most important contributions which Cathie made to social statistics was her work on the development of the 1991 census and, in particular, the leading part that she played in obtaining the release of anonymized samples of microdata from the 1991 census. From 1987 Cathie was a key participant in discussions with the Census Offices and later took over the chair of an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) subgroup on the 1991 census with the specific aim of making the case for the release of samples of microdata from the 1991 census. She took the lead in producing a major document which set out the arguments for the samples of anonymized records. The document included not just an assessment of the research value to be gained from such samples but also contained a detailed statistical assessment of the disclosure risks that could be incurred through their release. This latter assessment was vitally important in persuading the Census Offices that the risk of disclosure was negligible. The work was published in 1991 in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A*. Cathie's pioneering work in assessing risks of disclosure was recognized internationally, and in particular by an invitation to present a paper at the conference of the International Statistical Institute in Cairo in September 1991. Cathie's academic achievements were recognized when Manchester University awarded her a personal chair in 1992. In the same year she established the Census Microdata Unit, as the result of winning an ESRC award to house, disseminate and conduct a programme of research on the samples of anonymized records. It is a bitter blow that she did not live to see the fulfilment of all her work. But she has left her mark on social statistics and the social sciences in a way that few people have achieved; her memory will remain with us for many years to come.

Angela Dale