



And his wife

EXHIBITION IN THE NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY OF ICELAND - 10.-14.2. 2025

Equality Days of the University of Iceland and the Women's History Museum of the National Library of Iceland - University Library are presenting an exhibition under the sound work "Og kona hans" by Eirík Stephensen and Margréti Kristína Blöndal. The soundtrack belongs to a larger sound installation, "Hljóðrás doaðuns", which was installed in Hólavalla cemetery on the 19th-22nd. August 2023. The inspiration was the well-known inscription "and his wife" that was common on tombstones in earlier times and was descriptive of the status of women. At the end of the work there is a funeral hymn dedicated to men with first names, surnames and professional titles... and their wives.

Being the wife of a man in the upper echelons of society was a job in itself for many women well into the 20th century. But the myth that women did not work outside the home before 1950 lives on and is far from being a fact. Anna Sigurðardóttir (1908–1996), who was one of the founders of the Women's History Museum, published the book *Vinna kvenna á Íslandi í 1100 ár* (1985) which refers to sources about the contribution of women to the community. There she talks about farm women, laundresses, nannies and watchwomen, water carriers, sailors, maids, midwives, nurses and the list goes on. The book sheds light on the fact that women have always done a variety of jobs outside the home as well as inside. Anna received an honorary doctorate at the University of Iceland in 1986, the second woman in the school's history.

Not so long ago, women were not listed in the phone book, nor were their names identified on the front of mailboxes. Being known as "his wife" was common and women were often judged by their male counterparts whether they were husbands, fathers, brothers, lovers or friends.

Even today, there is a struggle to correct the underestimation of women's work, whether in paid or unpaid jobs. The Women's Year 2025 was announced on October 24, 2024, and with it more than 50 organizations of feminists, women, workers, disabled people and gay people are demanding real economic and social equality.

Rakel Adolphsdóttir

Víglundur rests here
and his wife
Sigmundur rests here
and his wife
Guðbrandur rests here
and his wife
Ástvaldur rests here
and his wife

Thoroddsen rests here
and his wife
here Espólín rests
and his wife
Sörensen rests here
and his wife
Hjaltalín rests here
and his wife

Here rests the captain
and his wife
here rests the provost
and his wife
here rests a rucker
and his wife
here rests a blacksmith
and his wife

Eiríkur Stephensen



Photographs in the exhibition are from the collection of the Women's History Archives. The epitaphs are preserved in the National Collection. Poems about women's work are by Theodóra Thoroddsen and Ólína Andrésdóttir. A picture of Bishop Valgerðar Jónsdóttir's tombstone is the back of Bishop Steingrím Jónsson's tombstone and is in Hólavellir Cemetery.

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Audio piece: Eiríkur Stephensen and Margrét Kristín Blöndal.

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HÁSKÓLANNA




KVINNASÖGUSAFN
ÍSLANDS



HÍ



Landsbókasafn Íslands
Háskólabókasafn