

## Notes from Local Interest Group Meeting 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

**Present in Hall:** Maureen Lloyd (ML), Wendy Ozols, John Price, James and Jenny Martin, Lucy Trench, Robert Collingwood, Cherry Williams, Marisa Pinnock, Neville Harley, Tim Francis, Grace Davies, Iris Lloyd, Roy Lloyd

**On Zoom:** Dainis Ozols, Sylvia Bigglestone, Margaret Price, Elsa Harflett, Sylvia Illingsworth, Elizabeth Passey, Avryl Lloyd, Richard Thomas

**Apologies:** Joan Lloyd, Jenny Francis, Ann and Howard Dean

ML welcomed everyone and explained that the format for the evening came from a suggestion made by Cherry Williams. ML said that it was important that the village gained “new blood” from time to time and she thanked the four “guinea pigs” for agreeing to come along to talk about their lives before coming to the Painscastle area. She especially thanked James and Jenny Martin who had stepped into the breach at short notice to replace Val and Mike Head. Mike is unwell and ML sent our best wishes to him for a speedy recovery. She introduced Robert Collingwood, Lucy Trench, James Martin and Jenny Martin who would be taking it in turns to tell us about their backgrounds. James and Jenny live in Gwyn’s Ploc and Robert and Lucy live at Lower Pengarth. Both moved to the Painscastle area in 2019.

### Robert Collingwood

Robert explained that he and Lucy had owned a cottage in Huntington for 35 years and so had been regular visitors to the area, and this is why they had decided to retire here. Their daughter, Elizabeth, who is a teacher, lives in their old cottage with her partner and baby. They also have a son who lives and works in New Mexico in the USA.

Robert is a retired architect. He was born and brought up in London at a time when rationing had just come to an end and life was quite austere – no central heating, clothes and children’s toys being passed on to others, etc. The family had a car, but Robert’s father did all the servicing, repairs, and so on. Children played outside unsupervised and no-one worried. Basically, it was a typical London middle class upbringing in the 1950s and 1960s.

The major difference for Robert was that his mother was Italian. She spoke English fluently, but with a strong accent. Every year, she would take Robert to see his grandparents in their small town on the Adriatic coast. Everything there was completely different – water was scarce, there was no bathroom, but they did have a loo. They did have water for a short time every day from one tap in the house, but in other parts of the town the women had to fetch water every day from the fountain beneath his grandparents’ house. Washerwomen did all of their washing outside at the communal laundry area by the fountain. All of the shopping was done in the market, with fresh produce brought there daily by the local farmers. Robert remembers there being things he had never seen in London – figs, peaches, grapes, artichokes, asparagus and amazing tomatoes and salads, as well as live chickens. The farmers had a hard life and worked on a share-cropping basis. This meant that they paid no rent, but they would put in all the labour and then have to share their crops and takings half and half with the landowner. Ox-drawn ploughs were a common sight. There was much emigration, mainly to USA and Germany, especially amongst the younger men, and so the farming was generally left to the older men and the women.

When Robert qualified as an architect, he found work as an assistant in a small practice. Whilst he was converting an old warehouse near Euston Station, the client mentioned that they had let part of the building to a fashionable American office furniture supplier, to use as a showroom. They had already appointed an American architect, a world-famous Princeton professor called Michael Graves, but he needed a local partner. Robert's firm was taken on to assist him, which was a fantastic opportunity. All of the work had to be completed in three months – a "mission impossible" as Robert put it! However, the reputation of Michael Graves meant that good people were anxious to work with him and so Robert soon had the team he needed, working day and night, and the showroom opened on time and in a blaze of publicity. His bosses made Robert a partner, but he felt that the credit belonged to the remarkable team. The firm grew to be quite large and soon had their own office building in Central London.

In 1990, the Iron Curtain collapsed and Robert's firm was approached by the British Council to look at some projects in Prague and Budapest; they got the Prague job and Robert was the partner in charge of the project. Initially, the British Council wanted to use British contractors and suppliers as no-one thought that Czech labour and materials were up to the job. However, Robert had met some really well educated, knowledgeable and capable people in the city. Wages for skilled workers were about £50 per month and Robert realized that this made bringing in British workers a ridiculous idea. So, ignoring all advice, he resolved to do the job using only local labour and materials – a high risk strategy. Not only was the work done impeccably, it was completed ahead of schedule and well under budget! It was opened by none other than President Vaclav Havel and was covered by the national press in both the UK and Czechoslovakia. Robert got a reputation as the go-to man for this sort of project; he says that it was the talents of the local people that were the key to the success of the project. The work flooded in. Robert was still commuting between London and Prague; he and Lucy, by now, had two children and a lovely house in London. Then Lucy suggested that they should move to live in Prague, so they let their house and moved there. They stayed for five years (Robert actually worked there for 10 years).

Robert finished his section by showing us photos of a number of the projects he has designed and worked on: the British Council in Prague; the Ericsson Palace (also in Prague); the British Embassy in Riga; the Italian Embassy in Prague; a boathouse for a school in Dorset; the Egyptian Embassy in London; an extension on the house at Lower Pengarth.

### **Lucy Trench**

Lucy was born in Nairobi; her father was the District Commissioner of a large area of Northern Kenya, home to the Samburu tribe. In 1963, they came to the UK to live in Somerset and then they moved to Ireland. Lucy said that her adulthood really began when she started at Trinity College, Dublin, where she studied History of Art and Italian.

After she graduated, she took a job as a textile conservator, training at the V & A Museum in London. She did this job for six years – textiles are still a passion of hers. Then she moved into publishing and the first book she worked on was "World Rugs and Carpets". From here, she moved to the National Gallery where she worked as an editor. Lucy described how amazing it was to work every day surrounded by some of the most beautiful paintings in the world.

Lucy and Robert had their children and then, in 1993, moved to Prague. The children went to a French school and they thoroughly enjoyed living there. The family had a pony and cart which contributed lots of fun. Whilst in Prague, Lucy did some journalism work.

When the family returned to the UK, Lucy went back to the V & A to work, this time as an editor. The galleries were being refurbished at this time and Lucy's job was to devise interpretative text for the exhibits. As a result, she became an expert in museum text. This is a very specific skill as you have to be able to "speak to everyone".

Having developed these various skills, Lucy did quite a bit of teaching around the world, for example in Doha and Germany. She also wrote some books including "Materials and Techniques in the Decorative Arts" and "The Victoria and Albert Museum". Her next post was Head of Interpretation at the V & A. The European Galleries were being refurbished at this time and her job was to help to develop storylines about the objects in the galleries. This involved choosing items for groupings from the many hundreds of thousands in the V & A's stock of wonderful objects, a complex and fascinating process. She also helped with the making of films to go with the new European Galleries and they also developed on-line games, which became extremely popular.

After some time, she left the V & A and went to work in the Science Museum as Head of Interpretation, a complete change of direction in terms of subject matter for Lucy. The Medicine galleries that she developed opened about four years ago and included a section on pandemics, somewhat prescient at the time!

Her final job before leaving London and moving to Painscastle was at the National Railway Museum in York, another post which she thoroughly enjoyed. Now, she is the Chair of the Sydney Nolan Trust at The Rodd, near Presteigne. Sydney Nolan was a very famous Australian artist who chose rural Herefordshire as his final home. The Trust inherited a number of his works which are exhibited at The Rodd. The Trust has an interesting and informative website, which is well worth looking at: <https://www.sidneynolantrust.org/>

Lucy and Robert now live at Lower Pengarth, having moved there in 2019, and Lucy is enjoying living closer to her daughter and being a grandmother.

### **Jenny Martin**

Jenny was born and brought up in SE London, in Eltham – a genuine baby-boomer. Although Eltham is now in London, it was in Kent and not very built-up during Jenny's childhood. Her brother was born three years after her and so hers was a typically nuclear family. Her father was an accountant and her mother was a mother and housewife, like most of the married women in the 1950s.

One of her earliest memories (besides that of the birth of her little brother) is the Queen's coronation, which the family watched on a tiny TV, at her aunt's house, with a very fuzzy picture.

At five years of age, Jenny started school at a local RC convent. School was strict but kind. Most of the children were not Catholics and so were viewed as slightly second class citizens!! At age 11, after passing her 11+ exam, she went on to grammar school, which was quite a shock after the convent.

During the early 1960s, Jenny's family went on many European holidays and so they saw lots of sights and other things that her contemporaries did not experience. Her father had been stationed in Greece during WW2 and billeted with a young family in Athens. He lost touch with them after the war, but in 1962 the two families reconnected and, in 1963, Jenny's family drove from London to Athens, through communist Yugoslavia, despite advice not to from the Foreign Office. Yugoslavia was quite an eye-opener for Jenny and her brother, who were subjected to "gawping eyes" every time they stopped the car. In Greece, they visited Athens, Delphi, the Peloponnese and Olympia, to name but a few sites.

After taking her A levels and doing well, Jenny got a place at Guy's Hospital to study Dentistry. It was not a typically "wild" student life as dental students have to work long hours. It was a five year course and they worked five days a week from 9am until 5pm, treating patients, going to lectures and doing lab work. Jenny had met her first husband, Nick, whilst she was still at school and he qualified as a doctor at the same time as Jenny qualified as a dentist; they were married whilst still at university. At this time it was unusual to find female dentists – only 10% of the students in Jenny's year were girls. Nowadays, the figure is more like 90%.

After graduating, Jenny worked in a small dental practice, but did not really enjoy the work. So, when Nick got his first hospital job, she found a post in the Oral Surgery department of the same hospital, The Middlesex in London. Following that, they both went to work in Norwich, where Jenny and one other colleague covered most of Norfolk in terms of oral surgery.

After Norfolk, Jenny and Nick set up home and had their three children, Katie, Tom and Helen, with Nick working his way up the ladder in London hospitals whilst Jenny worked in dental practice. Then, in 1986, Nick became a consultant physician in Brighton and so the family moved to rural Sussex. For the following 19 years, Jenny worked part-time, eventually setting up her own practice in Hove.

In 2003, when Nick left her, Jenny had to start all over again, selling the family home and going back to work; she had sold her practice by then. Then, in 2007, she met James; she was still living in Sussex at that time but was now ready to retire and she eventually joined him in Newbury in 2010. They wanted to move and decided to look in this area as she had spent many happy holidays here when her children were small. They bought Chapel House, one mile above The Rhydspence Inn, and were married in Bettws Chapel, two fields away, in 2012. They have enjoyed many wonderful holidays together – Sri Lanka, Australia, New Zealand, Greece, France, Italy and Spain, and they have spent wonderful times looking after the grandchildren.

Jenny told us that her elder daughter, Katie, works for the Royal Household, together with her husband. Her son, Tom, is in TV production, and is also a children's author. Helen, her other daughter, is an equine vet in Abergavenny. Altogether, they have four absolutely delightful grandchildren.

She and James are loving living in Painscastle and are so pleased that they moved here.

### **James Martin**

James explained that he had been born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), a "child of the empire". He was one of six children, five boys and one girl. He showed us a photo of his father as a young subaltern and his mother, who he said had been a chorus girl. His early years were spent at school in Ceylon, where there were enough British people for there to be clubs, churches and a school for them to attend. In 1961, aged 14, he was sent to boarding school in Liverpool. He remembers landing by ship in Tilbury and thinking that the people there looked very pale, grey and unhealthy! At 16, he decided to leave school and he worked at a number of different jobs, including on building sites, in hotels, at car washes, as a shop assistant and cooking burgers in a Wimpy bar, to name but a few.

After some time, he met John who became his guide and mentor and life-long friend – his "guardian angel" as he put it. Then, in 1967, he decided to travel overland to India, "following in the steps of the Beatles and on the hippy trail". However, he had only got as far as Iran when he ran out of money. This necessitated some action and so he managed to wangle a job with the local English language newspaper; he worked as a proofreader, despite having no qualifications in this area! By

this time, his parents had returned to the UK and so James decided to return home. On the way, he stopped off in Italy where he taught English to some very reluctant Italian servicemen. Whilst he was there, he learned Italian.

When he returned home, he decided that he needed to get an education and he went to Coleg Harlech (1972-73). From here, he secured a place at the University of Essex, where he studied English Literature (1973-76). On leaving university, he found that there were very few jobs to be had and so he went off to Switzerland, where he spent time in the Alps, working as a cowherd. (Details of this part of his life formed an article in *The Gossip* some time ago.) He returned to the UK and completed a Doctoral Thesis at Goldsmiths College, London, and then went on to do a Diploma in Teaching English to Overseas Students at Manchester University.

In 1982, he met his future wife, Bev, and they married in 1984. In the same year, he went to work for the British Council in Riyadh, in Saudi Arabia, where his son, Sam, was born in 1986. They returned to UK, but not for long as he was soon off to Brunei to teach, in 1987. By 1990, the family had moved to Jeddah (ie back to Saudi Arabia). Between 1990 and 1997, he was Head of Language Training and Development in a banking firm there. James told us that the swimming pool was far too hot to swim in so he and Sam took up another sort of pool (the type that is like snooker). They returned to the UK in 1997 and James had a number of senior school positions; the family was now living in Newbury in Berkshire. Sadly, in 2004, Bev died. Following her death, James and a colleague started a small boarding school, Newbury Hall, which took students from overseas.

By 2007, he had met Jenny and in 2010 she came to live with him in Newbury. They have had many great holidays together, including a number of trips back to Sri Lanka, where his sister still lives. James and Jenny moved to Chapel House, above the Rhydspence Inn, in 2011. They got married in Bettws Chapel in 2012 and, in November 2019, moved to Painscastle – where they are loving life, although it has been a little harder to meet people until now because of the Covid pandemic and consequent restrictions on everyday life.

At the end, ML thanked all four participants for their most interesting talks. Each of them had shown us some lovely photographs which really enhanced their presentations. We had all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, and had learned a good deal along the way. What fascinating and varied lives other people have. They have certainly set the bar very high for future contributions! Cherry Williams made a special point of thanking the speakers for rising to her challenge.

ML reminded us that next month's speaker will be Jennifer Lewis from Powys Family History Society, who will talk about the history of Llanbadarn Fawr since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially how she carried out her research, as well as extracting information from the data recorded. This meeting will be on Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> April, at 7.30pm.

Lastly, special thanks to John Price who once again ensured that we could hold a hybrid meeting. Without his hard work and technical know-how this would not be possible. It is very much appreciated by everyone, especially the Zoom audience.