

## **Encounters on the journey: reflections after thirty years.**

I am writing the first version of this introduction on the 7<sup>th</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of 2007 – the auspicious thirtieth anniversary of the start of the adventure that changed my intellectual life – the start of the writing of *The Origins of English Individualism*. So it seems a good day to formally start on another adventure, the charting of my intellectual adventures over a period of fifty years, and hopefully at least another twenty or so electronic (and multi-media) books.

### *An adolescent at Sedbergh and in the Lake District; 1955-1960*

It was at Sedbergh, and specifically in the sixth form, that my rather lacklustre academic performance began to improve as I became excited in both English literature and history. I still have my essays and school notebooks for Sedbergh and at a later date should be able to reconstruct a little of what excited me then and what I wrote. As we all know, the boy is father of the man, and in a Wordsworthian way those years at Sedbergh show many of the seeds of my later interests, not only in history but also literature. They give a sense of my early general desire to pursue the mystery of life and to try to overcome the separations and dissociations which afflict modernity.

There were a number of intellectual influences. Living in Hawkshead where Wordsworth went to school and later following his Italian expedition, I became deeply attracted to his poetry, as well as that of his contemporaries. The same struggle to maintain childhood innocence and unity which we find as the core of Wordsworth's poetry has penetrated deep within me. (It will probably be worth expanding at a later date on Wordsworth, Hawkshead, the metaphysical and Romantic poets and other influences.)

Linked to the above was clearly the very strong influence of my grandmother, who brought me up from the age of five to twenty, and my mother, who was away in India much of the time but nevertheless influenced me deeply. It will be worth paying a tribute to her and minimally including a somewhat expanded version of the piece I wrote on her on my website. Her interest in history, religion (Buddhism), India, poetry and philosophy was an enormous influence even though she was mostly physically very distant in India. The whole ensemble of adolescence, the Sedbergh fells, the Lake District, and discovering an interest in history (and here my uncles Richard and Robert also deserve a mention) are one package.

As for history, I will be able to look at my essays and the comments of my principal history teacher Andrew Morgan on them to see how I was doing and what I thought at that time. A few appropriate extracts could be included, for instance the essay I wrote on the 'The Origins of the Renaissance' or the essay on 'Montesquieu', or essays on 'The Origins of the English Civil War'. Each of these, some thirty to forty years later, would turn from a student essay into a book or books. This seeds-to-flowers phenomenon cannot often be observed, but as I have preserved a great deal, it is possible to do so in this case and I can watch the growing boy from the vantage point fifty years later – emotion recollected in tranquillity.

Above all, I would be probing to find out what my problem was then, what I have been searching for. I think something worthwhile (to me at least) could be done as one chapter in intellectual origins. As Tocqueville constantly stressed, if we want to understand later events it is always helpful to go back to 'the point of origin'. What is true of civilizations is also true of individuals. And my 'point of origin' is the Lake District and Sedbergh between 1955-1960. There may even be something from the Dragon. [In order to recreate these early times my letters to and from my mother may also be invaluable.] And of course as part of this I would note the continuing influence of my first sixth form teachers, David Alban and especially Andrew Morgan, the latter of whom I have fortunately made a film interview.

*An undergraduate at Oxford; 1960-3*

Equally important as a 'point of origin' was my time as an undergraduate at Oxford. Here the material is much more extensive as I have kept all my undergraduate notes and essays and many other materials including letters. So I shall have to be selective. It may be best to provide a rough overview of my formal education, that is to say what I studied and read, with a few extracts from essays or letters which again anticipate future work. Obvious examples would be the first-term encounter with Tocqueville, which later flowered as a book. Or the encounter with R. H. Tawney and Tudor and Stuart history and the influence of Christopher Hill. Or again the influence of teachers such as James Campbell and Harry Pitt, as well as those of several of my contemporaries such as Dick Smethurst, Peter Gooden, Mark Cullingham, Erik Pearse, David Isaacs and others, as well as girl-friends, especially Julie Simor.

What I would try to capture here once again are the underlying threads – the rejection of evangelical Christianity, the interest in folklore, in Arthurian legend, the reading of CS Lewis and Tolkien, the growing interest in political philosophy and demography etc. There is probably lots here, but also lots of avenues which I did not explore, doors I did not open, such as administrative or political history.

I should obviously consider what I was learning about how to study, think, write, argue, do minor research. The influence of Brian Harrison and others would need elaborating. It is probable that I have forgotten much of what was important, but sorting out my notes will bring forgotten thoughts to the surface and concentrating on the ways in which all this fed into my later life will help with the perennial problems of both world history and autobiographical writing – namely, what should I leave out!

A coda to Oxford is the summer as a Youth Hostel warden in the Lakes, where I reverted to the problems that interested me most – the dissociation of sensibility, magic and enchantment and the whole cost and pain of modernity.

*Doctoral research at Oxford: 1963-66*

Here I will try to capture something of the atmosphere of excitement of Oxford at that time. Again, I have many documents and the period revolves around my discovery of the joys of real documentary research in history, the probing into local history, beginning to learn something about a new discipline, anthropology, and starting to develop the idea of bringing together history and anthropology. The central themes are magic, enchantment, law and liberty, which are central to my life's work and it was an enormously rich experience. The new social history, the *Annales* influence, the heyday of the *Past and Present* school interpretation, the start of the Cambridge Group, all joined to make this enormously exciting.

Having learnt a little of what it is to think and read and write as an undergraduate. I was now learning the craft of history. There is ample material here as well as being some interviews and lectures, on the people who influenced me then, Lienhardt, Beattie, Needham, Keith Thomas and others.

The problems did not change, but I was learning some of the 'Tools and the Job' as Keith Thomas put it in an article. I knew roughly what the job was – to understand myself and my society in space and in time. I was now learning how to use the tools. The main outcome in this period was my thesis, later a book, on *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (1970).

The influence of my mother, now retired and starting to move towards the Hebrides, continued in this period and the new influence of my wife Gill, whom I married just after I left Oxford, also began to be felt.

*Master's in Anthropology at the London School of Economics; 1966-68.*

Again I would like to convey the excitement and atmosphere of the L.S.E. a little. At Oxford as an undergraduate I had tried to get an overview of the received wisdom in history, something of the philosophy of history, and how to think as a historian. In the lectures at the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford in 1965-6, and then at the LSE, I tried to do the same thing again in anthropology. My teachers, Schapera, Firth, Forge, Fox, Woodburn, Mair and others are partly captured on film and my lecture notes are extant. There were also people on the fringes, especially at University College London, Mary Douglas and her circle. There were also sociologists both at the L.S.E. and elsewhere, Ronald Dore, W.M. Williams and others, who influenced me. Especially influential were demographers and demographic historians such as David Glass, D.E.C. Eversley, Chris Langford, and Keith Hopkins, both demographer and sociologist. It was here that I first met and read some of the work of Ernest Gellner who was later to become one of the most important influences on my intellectual life.

My contemporaries, especially Peter Loizos, David Seddon and Andrew and David Turton were also very important. It was also during this period that I went further into English social history with the work on three Essex villages (Hatfield Peverel, Boreham and Little Baddow) and the book on Ralph Josselin. Again, I received a lot of help and

support from my family, especially my mother and my sister Anne, and my wife Gill. The film and paper record is getting stronger all the time.

This is when I moved slightly away from the magical and enchantment side to the economic and demographic and came for the first time under the influence of Malthus, who continued to inspire me through my life. By the end of this period I had a grounding in some of the basics of anthropology, but I had also maintained my interest in history, both in my M.Phil. Dissertation and the books on Josselin and village studies in Essex and as I revised my D.Phil on witchcraft for publication The thesis was examined by two great influences on my life at that time and later, E.E. Evans-Pritchard and Christopher Hill.

*Doctoral research in anthropology in Nepal and the School of Oriental and African Studies; 1968-1971*

After learning the general approach and absorbing a rough map of a discipline, the second stage is learning the craft skills. In the case of anthropology, this consisted of doing fieldwork – following in the famous method of ‘participant observation’, supposedly pioneered by Malinowski.

In 1968 it was not thought that one could do much to prepare people for ‘the field’ so I was assigned a supervisor, Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, and I looked for a ‘field’. I had wanted to work in North East India, in particularly among the matrilineal peoples of Assam (Garos and Khasis) because my mother had often spoken of them and I had been born in Shillong next to this area. But political turbulence in Nagaland made it impossible to go there, so Haimendorf suggested I worked among the Gurungs of central Nepal, which my wife Gill and I did for fifteen months.

I found the fieldwork extremely difficult, though here were some wonderful moments as well. I was homesick, often frustrated at the slow pace of work, and pined for libraries and western amenities. My wife Gill also found it very difficult, but we survived and I learnt some of the basic skills and formed bonds which would lead to many return visits and one of the most detailed, long-term, studies in anthropology. I also began to become interested in visual methods of recording – film and photography – which was also to prove a growing interest.

The teachers and colleagues I made in this period, Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, Adrian Mayer, Lionel and Pat Caplan, Nick Allen and others are once again mainly documented in film interviews. The considerable collection of field notes, films and letters contain a good deal that feeds into the general theme of the riddle of modernity. For, alongside the fairly dry work on resources and population, I experienced for the first time an enchanted landscape imbued with spiritual forces which I had sensed in Wordsworth and Keats and in the world of witches. All this fed into the theme of my work with Keith Thomas and summarized in the title of his book ‘Religion and the Decline of Magic’ for here there was a real magic. The privilege of experiencing such a

world has sustained me and helped me to understand the magic, enchanted, world of Japan. The Nepal work ended as a Ph.D. and the book *Resources and Population*.

*Research Fellowship at King's College Cambridge; 1971-1974*

I was extremely fortunate to be elected to a Senior Research Fellowship in History at King's College and to have four years for research. Although interrupted by the breakdown of my first marriage, this was more than compensated for by meeting and later marrying Sarah Harrison who then became an equal partner and companion in all subsequent adventures. From 1970 onwards my input into intellectual explorations was fully matched by her enormous energy, dedication and intelligence. Together we have set up many projects and she has acted as a superb editor of all my subsequent books.

We started to develop the intensive study of two English parishes, Kirkby Lonsdale in Cumbria and Earls Colne in Essex. We also began our long collaboration with computer scientists, starting with Charles Jardine and later Tim King and others. Simultaneously I was working on pursuing the themes started in *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin* and my M.Phil. dissertation on marriage, family and sexual history in England.

Again it was an immensely exciting period. I was on the fringes of the Department of Social Anthropology, where I encountered the great Cambridge generation, Audrey Richards, Meyer Fortes, Reo Fortune, Jack and Esther Goody, Edmund Leach, Stanley Tambiah, John Barnes and others. I began to be swept up in new developments in anthropology – structuralism, Marxism and others, which had just been starting when I was training at the L.S.E.

I also became much more involved in the work of the 'Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure' and became friends with Peter Laslett and increasingly influenced by the work of E.A. Wrigley and Roger Schofield.

In King's College, I was a member of the Fellowship Electors and met many distinguished thinkers, especially some world famous scientists such as Sidney Brenner, Pat Bateson, Gabriel Horn, Dan McKenzie, Herbert Huppert, as well as others such as Geoffrey Lloyd, Tony Tanner and a number of others, some of whom I have interviewed.

This was a time when I consolidated my historical training with wider reading in the Annales School, deeper work on historical sources, and improving my methods and understanding of history and anthropology.

*Lecturer in Social Anthropology at Cambridge; 1975-1981.*

These are the years in which I was finding my feet as a teacher and administrator in the Department of Social Anthropology, under the guidance of Jack Goody who became a very large influence on my life from this period onwards. These were possibly the most hectic and turbulent years of my life both for private and public reasons. My personal life was very full. Sarah and I moved with her children to our new house at Lode, where we

have remained since, setting up home, gardening, stocking our barn and library and at the end starting a second-hand book business which has continued to this day. All this took a great deal of energy, but provided the essential space to think and work in.

Secondly, I was involved in a great deal of administration. I was Secretary of the Faculty Board for two years almost immediately after joining the Department, became a long-serving member of various committees of the Social Science Research Council (later ESRC), and had to learn how an ancient university works.

Thirdly, I was laying down the skills and contents of a full lecture load, supervision of undergraduates and postgraduate students, in a discipline which I had only come to late in life – social anthropology – and this again required a lot of energy.

Fourthly, I was running a large and complex research project on the history and anthropology of three communities (Earls Colne, Essex; Kirkby Lonsdale, Cumbria; Thak in Nepal) for the SSRC over all of this seven-year period. Applying for and administering grants, dealing with supervising committees, learning to work with colleagues in computing, all these took a great deal of time and thought.

And not least, I was undergoing a major shift in my whole theoretical paradigm. This started to change thirty years ago today, as I started to write an article which would lead into the book on *The Origins of English Individualism*. That book and subsequent work along similar themes took me in new directions and I explored further the interface between anthropology and history. It was, among other things, a time when I also started to read various classic authors more carefully, Tocqueville, Marc Bloch, Maitland, Maine, who were later to become the subjects of more extended studies. In other words my mental horizons were shifting.

Fortunately there is a convenient insight into some of the ferment, with Jack Goody, Ernest Gellner, Keith Thomas, Edmund Leach, Peter Burke, Edward Thompson and others who were great influences in this period in film discussing the issues which I was most interested in. This is contained in the conferences I filmed for the SSRC in 1976/7, just before starting *Individualism*. The theme of the conference was ‘history and anthropology’ and this was the period when I fused together the anthropological and historical parts of my training in order to set up a new paradigm of change and continuity.

*Reader in Historical Anthropology at Cambridge, part one; 1981-1986*

Again this was a busy time, although in slightly different ways. This was a time when we were completing the Earls Colne study and publishing the records on microfilm with Charles Chadwyck-Healey. It was the time of writing various drafts of *Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840* (1986), and further articles collected in *The Culture of Capitalism* (1987). I also started a project which extended the work on witchcraft through a study of the records of the Portuguese Inquisition in Lisbon.

Methodologically, the work on database systems continued and began to enter a new phase with the start of work at the end of the period on the new probabilistic systems developed by Martin Porter. I began to spend much energy trying to learn how the Museum Cataloguing System (MUSCAT) worked, and also experimenting with multi-media, which began to be possible as Videodisc technology evolved.

Organizationally I carried a good deal of the burden of the transition from Jack Goody's Headship of the Department of Social Anthropology to that of Ernest Gellner in 1983. And it was Ernest Gellner whose work perhaps dominated this period. I was Chair of the Faculty, Head of Department several times, and generally very busy, but it is a period where all the threads were being woven together, even though there was no particularly new direction in the work.

*Reader in Historical Anthropology at Cambridge, part two; 1986-1991*

In 1986 Sarah and I went to Nepal for the first time together. Thereafter we made almost annual visits until 2001, including one of three months in 1988. This was a time of deepening of fieldwork techniques, of encounters with Dor Bahadur Bista, a closer tie with the Indian sociologist and anthropologist Andre Beteille and others, of more supervision of graduate students working on India and Nepal. In particular increased filming and a deepening relationship with Dilmaya and her family enriched the period.

The other main thread was also Himalayan, namely increasing work on the Naga videodisc project, a linking of computers and multi-media using the MUSCAT system. A great deal of technical expertise had to be learnt in this collaboration with the Audio Visual Aids Unit. The new film potentials of smaller cameras led to the expansion of the interviews with anthropologists and others. Theoretically I had moved away from the pursuit of the riddle of the modern world and was now hoarding information and trying to widen the base of data which I could draw on.

Previously my work had been mainly based on intensive studies of English European history, but now it was being extended to Nepal and the Naga Hills. We also experimented with Museum exhibitions, and I spent time assisting with the construction of the BBC Domesday project and making the MUSCAT system work on smaller computers. It was the first great period of desktop computing and with the new 'Amiga' we worked a great deal with Michael Bryant and others in various experiments. We also translated and soon published the classic work by Bernard Pignede on the Gurungs of Nepal.

*Professor of Anthropological Science at Cambridge, part one: 1991-96*

This was in many ways one of the most exciting periods of my intellectual life as I took up my Professorship. The first two years continued with much administration in Ernest Gellner's last years as I was effectively Head of Department much of the time, but once Marilyn Strathern arrived the burden was suddenly lifted.

A major turning point was meeting Gerry Martin in the autumn of 1990. He provided crucial support, mental and material, for the next fourteen years and made it possible, among other things, to finish the Naga project, to film more effectively in Nepal, and encouraged me to return to those big questions concerning the nature and origins of the modern world. It is all described on my website under 'Important people: Gerry Martin'.

Another turning point was in the summer of 1990 when Sarah and I made our first visit to Japan and met Kenichi and Toshiko Nakamura in Hokkaido. Over the next sixteen years, culminating in books on Fukuzawa Yukichi and the book on Japan to be published this year, we struggled together to translate between British and Japanese culture. They, and a number of other Japanese friends and colleagues, gently educated me in the ways of that great and enigmatic civilization.

Intellectually, it was in the autumn of 1993, with the Nagas finished, that I started to write an article, which led into a short and then a very long book on *The Savage Wars of Peace; England, Japan and the Malthusian Trap* (1997). This was my first comparative work between England and Japan and incorporated much of my interest in demography and the ongoing encounter with Thomas Malthus. It also pursued the interest in technologies and material culture which Gerry and I shared. Involvement in Gerry Martin's 'Achievement Project' and a growing interest in world history and running seminars on Japan were also important. And it was the time when Gerry's financial support enabled me, with the help of Penny Lang, to have some sixty thousand quotations put into a database.

#### *Professor of Anthropological Science at Cambridge, part two: 1996-2001*

This was the period dominated by working on global history with Gerry. The work in Nepal was less intense after the tragic death of my 'sister' Dilmaya Gurung in 1995, though we visited almost every year and with digital cameras took a good deal of film. Filming also took a much larger role when, in 1998-9, I was involved with David Dugan in 'The Day the World Took Off', series for Channel 4, with seminars, interviews and then the editing of unused rushes for websites.

This was also a time when, after the birth of Sarah's first grandchild, Lily, in 1997, we spent a good deal of time visiting Australia and filming Lily and Rosa growing up – a new comparative film project. And the video interviews with anthropologists continued apace.

But it was the new venture into philosophical history that was the centre of this period, culminating in the *Riddle of the Modern World* (2002) and *The Making of the Modern World* (2002) considering the work of great theorists. It was also a time when I worked with Gerry on technological history and particularly the history of glass, which resulted in 2002 in our joint book *The Glass Bathyscaphe*. The influence of Lewis Mumford and the global history seminars of the Achievement Project were particularly strong.

Towards the later part, we began to work on the construction of my website, with the help of Sarah, and of Mark Turin and Sara Schneidermann. This led to a very time-consuming re-working of the Earls Colne project materials with the computing assistance of Tim Mills in order to make it available on the Internet. Likewise, we started to rework the Naga videodisc materials so they could be put on the web. The thread of work on Japan was continued in the work on Fukuzawa and other writings.

*Professor of Anthropological Science at Cambridge, part three; 2001-6*

This was the last period of the collaboration with Gerry before his death in 2005. We worked together in relation to a book which I wrote with my mother on *Green Gold; The Empire of Tea* (2003). Gerry also encouraged me to write a simple overview book about my ideas for more general readers, which I did in the form of a set of letters to my granddaughter Lily, namely *Letters to Lily; On How the World Works* (2005). This stemmed out of my relationship with Lily and Rosa, who continued to be the centre of much filmmaking both in Australia and when they returned to England.

Nepal was now the scene of a civil war, so we were unable to visit between 2002 and 2005, but we continued to work on some of the materials from there. I worked intensively on Japan on and off, and in 2005, on a visit from Kenichi and Toshiko, started to write the book which is to be published in 2007, *Japan Through the Looking Glass*.

Another major shift was a third involvement in Asia. After a tourist trip to China in 1996 with Gerry and Hilda Martin, we went on our first serious expedition to China with the demographic historian James Lee in 2002. We visited Liaoning and the North East and then in three subsequent years we travelled and lectured and set up, with support from George Appell in America, a project on China. This incorporated half a dozen Chinese Ph.D. students working on China, and various collaborations with Chinese universities and filmmakers.

This period is perhaps most notable for its emphasis on forms of mass communication. While earlier periods had been centred round how to find, analyse, link and interrogate data, and make it available in a fairly undigested form through databases and long books, from about 2001 onwards the Internet began to flourish. We set up 'Digital Himalaya' and then 'Digital Orient' with Mark and Sara and Xiaoxiao Yan and put more and more materials up on my website.

The advent of Dspace encouraged this and the interviews were made available to a wide audience. I also developed the concept of the 'web-book', that is a short book (Tea, Glass, Letters to Lily, Japan) with further details and films on the website behind the book.

So now, on 7<sup>th</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, 2007, the shape of my life seems roughly like this.

1958-1963. Learning the framework of European history, how to study history, how to write essays, how to read etc.

1963-1967. Learning the craft of historical research, how to find, read and analyse documents and learn the process that created them – especially English documents 1400-1700 and local records and starting to learn about anthropology.

1965-1968. Learning the framework of anthropology, what it is and some of the basics in kinship etc.

1968-1971. Learning the craft of anthropological research in the field in Nepal.

1971-1975. Expanding anthropological/historical reading and learning about demography and computers.

1976-1981. Intensive study of Earls Colne and *English Individualism*, database development.

1981-1986. Consequences of *Individualism*, in particular on marriage and love and further computer developments.

1986-1991. Naga project and probabilistic retrieval; the Domesday, videodisc and museum and other projects. Return to the Gurungs.

1991-1996. Work in Nepal, further database development, learning about Japan and writing about it. Working with Gerry and *Savage Wars*.

1996-2001. Further work in Thak, Japan and *Riddle and Making of the Modern World*. Lily and Australia. The 'Day' television films and more filming. Technological history and *Glass*. World history with Gerry.

2001-6. finishing off Japan. Work on Tea with Iris. Summarizing it all in *Letters to Lily*. Web development and interviews of ancestors. Starting to work on China.

2006-2011 ??? Youtube, ancestor interviews, China, e-books, Thak virtual village, centre for Cultural Archives?