

**(People who have most influenced my life, by Alan Macfarlane)**

**Sarah Harrison (1942- )**

Any account of the partnership between Sarah Harrison and myself will inevitably gloss over much and omit much. It would never, even if it were book-length, do justice to its subject. So this should be read as just a brief summary of some aspects of our life and work together.

Ever since late childhood, my parents living abroad, and at times lonely and miserable at various schools, I have been romantically looking for the 'other one'. The partner and lover who would heal the wounds of loneliness and share the excitements of intellectual discovery. I became a workaholic around the age of 16 and from then on knew that my head and my heart could not be divided. My life's partner would have to share my intellectual world, otherwise we would quickly grow apart., So I had read all the great love poetry of the metaphysicals and the Romantics with delight and was always looking for my 'apple blossom maid', who would combine beauty, strength of character and intellectual ability. Yet it is easier to specify such a paragon and to embroider the image with Keatsian and Yeatsian imagery than to find such a living creature.

I married first in 1967 and Gill and I went to Nepal on fieldwork. We both found it very tough, but Gill, who had no particular role, found the loss of privacy especially difficult, and was ill a lot of the time. It became clear to me then and during the months after we returned that our goals were different. She naturally wanted to pursue her career and was not prepared to sacrifice everything and join me in my intense world. She was intelligent, capable and warm hearted, but our interests began to diverge.

Then in July 1970 I met Sarah Harrison. We immediately found a deep sympathy and mutual interest. Sarah worked with me on local documents and the reconstruction of the history of Kirkby Lonsdale, which we centred in her (and her then husband Brett's) barn in Yorkshire. We also edited together the very long diary of Ralph Josselin for the British Academy.

When we both separated from our respective partners, Sarah joined me in Cambridge and we began the Earls Colne historical study in earnest (c.1973). In a series of projects lasting over some 30 years, we have worked together on the task of transcribing, indexing and computerizing all the records of an Essex village over a period of five hundred years (q.v.). Although I and others were active in the project over the years, it was Sarah above all who made the project a success. At the period of maximum intensity, which lasted about 10 years, she would work up to sixty hours a week on the material. She has a remarkable jigsaw-piecing together kind of mind, endless patience and concentration. She achieved something which has never been done before or will ever be done again – and appeared to enjoy it. She worked very efficiently as an organizer and collaborator with three generations of computer scientist.

Sarah's mind is precise, rational and extremely logical. She is commonsensical and has a high practical intelligence. She is very curious and inquisitive. All these

characteristics filled in some defects in my own character. I tend to be more intuitive, emotional and irrational. The combination works well. I tend to have the original ideas, make the connections, have the enthusiasms. Sarah loves processing huge quantities of data, ordering and filing. So I would make the guesses, she would find the proof (or disproof).

This combination has formed the core of a number of collaborative projects. A second was our work in Nepal. My first trip with Gill had been fairly dreadful so I was wary of returning. But Sarah always wanted to share and understand my past, so we talked of returning for a short sight-seeing visit when her two daughters were old enough to be left at home. This occurred in 1986, so in that December we went for a four week trip to my original field-site.

Any fears I may have had that Sarah, who had never been further abroad than France at that time, might find it as emotionally or physically difficult as Gill were unfounded. In fact the reverse. We arrived in the village nervously and I had planned to stay only a day or two to see if anybody remembered me from 17 years earlier. Of course we got an enormously warm welcome and Sarah was captivated both by the scenery and the people. We stayed as long as we could and she only left on the condition that we would come back, and for longer, the next year.

So began almost annual visits to Thak every year for the next 15 years, varying from three weeks to three months. We worked together. I did the filming and some interviewing, Sarah did the still photography, census and kept the diary. Later on I tended to use our visits to do my own writing, but Sarah did almost all of the data gathering. The work was not confined to our time in Nepal, as all of the texts had to be entered into a database in England and the photos developed (in a darkroom, first in the Department and then at home) and indexed.

So several months each year from 1986 onwards have been devoted to what has turned out to be one of the most detailed and thorough longitudinal studies of a Himalayan community ever undertaken. And much of the nitty-gritty, back-breaking slog of collection, linking and data entry was done by Sarah. She also played a major part in re-translating and cleaning up the translation of the book by Bernard Pignède, *Les Gurungs*, which had first been translated by Gill and me, and was later published in Nepal in 1993.

Not overwhelmed by these two large projects, Sarah was also the central figure in a third on the Nagas of Assam (q.v.). This involved a huge amount of photography and data input. For example there were many texts to be typed in, many thousand of pages including the English version of Fürer-Haimendorf's fieldwork diaries, which had been translated into English, were typed from tape. There were also ten thousand black and white photographs, all of which had to be re-photographed using a special method we developed. This required months of work in a darkened cupboard. Sarah also constructed many of the indexes to the photographs by linking them to written texts.

This Naga project occupied half her time for about five years and the project could not have been finished successfully (culminating in a book, Museum exhibition, videodisc and text database) without her experience and energy.

In 1990 we first visited Japan and were immediately enormously intrigued by this extraordinary, convoluted, civilization. So then and in three subsequent visits during the 1990's we made a joint study of Japan. This involved photography, diaries, writing, setting up a library and other work. Sarah helped a great deal, though this was more my project than hers and I did a good deal of the data input and analysis.

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Although Sarah's major role was data input, linking and preparing data, she also shared all my ideas. I wrote *Witchcraft*, *Family Life* and to a certain extent *Resources* before we worked closely together. But from then on we discussed books as they were being written. Sarah would read draft after draft and make incisive comments on organization, argument and examples. We researched *Justice* together, Sarah completely typed the whole text of *Marriage* from my hand-written version. She read through *Riddle* and *Making* several times and helped to thin and improve them very greatly. One of her greatest achievements was with *Savage Wars*. At one point this reached about 260,000 words in length. I handed it over to Sarah and she suggested cutting out (and did the excisions herself) almost 100,000 words. The effect was a great improvement.

Over the years we worked out a way of enriching and testing ideas together. In an early stage one is trying out absurd, unprovable, hunches. If one discusses these with a rational and logical person like Sarah they can easily be destroyed for lack of evidence. So we established a convention that I would write and work up ideas for quite a while before she read the work or we discussed it. Then my job, when ready, was to try to persuade her that apparently far-fetched ideas were plausible. Many of my ideas have been fiercely resisted and probed, but finally allowed through.

This forensic device of testing the evidence and making rational judgements was both a cause and a consequence of the fact that Sarah was a Justice of the Peace (Magistrate) for about 17 years from about 1984 to 2001. We had both been early interested in the history of English law and impressed by the English magistracy and jury system during our work on English history. So when it was suggested she applied to be a magistrate she was eager to do so. She ended up as a Chairman of the Children's Bench, on the Child Support Agency Tribunal, the founding Chairman of the Cambridge Marriage Reconciliation Committee.

She was extremely effective at this time-consuming and responsible work, which took about a day a week of her time over this period. She applied the same method of rigorous cross-examination to my ideas as she did to the suspects who came before her in the court. If the evidence was there, and the facts were convincing, the arguments were allowed through. But not otherwise. It was a demanding scrutiny, but has saved me from endless errors and foolishness. She also contributed many insights and ideas of her own. So, to a large extent, my books are not only 'works in progress', but shared outputs between the two of us.

Much of my work depends on extensive bibliographical resources. Here again she was a key contributor. Many academics find themselves with partners who at the best tolerate, at the worst resent, their books. They are suspicious of the drain on the

family economy, the way in which the books take up precious space in the house and so on. In fact, many even distinguished academics only have a very small study or cubby-holes in which to work at home. When they retire from their academic posts they often have to get rid of the books which they have accumulated in their departments or colleges.

Sarah and I share a love of old books and from the first spent time hunting around in second-hand bookshops across the country. This is one of our favourite hobbies, along with a shared love of walking and classical music. There is nothing we like better than to go to somewhere like Hay on Wye and spend a couple of days going through all the books, punctuated by a pub meal and a night at the local Bed and Breakfast.

Very early on we decided that it would be good to make a virtue of this hobby and to provide an alternative job for Sarah to give her an independent existence when the Earls Colne Project finally came to an end. It could also provide an escape route if academic life lost its attraction and I wanted to retire.

So in about 1981 Sarah set up Bracton Books (named after Sir Henry de Bracton, the great English thirteenth century legal writer of 'The Laws and Customs of England') since our first intention was to concentrate on English law as well as social sciences. As it turned out, legal history and sources were not a good line, but we retained the name and I acted as academic adviser. Over the years Sarah built up an excellent stock, one of the largest and best quality second-hand social science collections for sale in the world. This was made possible by obtaining a number of academic libraries, starting with Meyer Fortes and then many others, and becoming the appointed agent to sell surplus books of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

The advantages for an academic of having a wife who is a book-seller are considerable. She found me numerous important books, there was a constant inflow of first-rate books of which I could take my pick (on payment). When I started on a new topic I would spend a day or two looking through not only my own 10,000 plus books, but Sarah's 15,000 as well. All these books were indexed in a sophisticated book-search system designed by Sarah and Michael Bryant, who wrote the program, called 'Bracsort'. This program was not only used to index the books in the book business, but also my own books (which Sarah also indexed for me), again invaluable when trying to find books or for bibliographic references.

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The environment within which one works can make all the difference between fragmented and distracted work at one extreme, and work in a situation which is conducive to intense, undisturbed, creative thought. Again Sarah provided the latter. She did this at a physical level. She is, among other things, a very good 'works manager'. She is very good and practical at design and charming and encouraging to workmen. From the 1980s we formed an association with an excellent local builder, Ron Greenhill, who proceeded to transform our simple property.

We had converted an old hay barn into a library when we first arrived in Lode, but after that Ron proceeded to work with Sarah on all sorts of projects over the years.

These included modification to our house, the building of an attic archive in the barn, the making of proper buildings in which Clive a bookbinder worked for many years (Sarah also repairs and binds books) and latterly a Japanese tea house and even more recently a shed which can be used for pottery making.

This transformed our house into a little research institute, with lovely trees and walks behind the complex of buildings. I use the tea house for really deep thought, the barn for certain writing and checking and to hold materials. It is an excellent arrangement. So there is no tension or contradiction, work and life can be blended.

Another great contribution was financial. Sarah is a first rate accountant, a competent and interested investor, a balanced, honest and trustworthy financial partner. She is keen on saving, but not as an end in itself, but so that we can help others. So I have never had to worry about money, never forced to do things which distract from my academic goals in order to earn money. Although our income has probably been lower than a number of friends until recently (because Sarah did not take on a full-time paid job for some years) we have accumulated reasonable amounts which we have invested in work, our property, children and charity. The freedom from financial anxiety, the ease of buying what I need for work or of travelling as we like, is made possible by Sarah, though there are other contributors.

Finally, we have shared an increasingly rich social world. By working together and in her book business, our friends are mutual and many of them as they came to know Sarah value her as much or more than they do me. She is charming and warm towards students, younger colleagues, villagers and family in Thak, people we meet on our travels all over the world.

A special gift comes through her family. Her two children by a former marriage, Inge and Astrid, were always extremely tactful and kind to the step-father who had broken up their parent's marriage. We have had many years of loving relationship. This has been enriched further when Inge had two daughters, Lily and Rosa. They are beautiful, intelligent and amusing grand-children and I have already benefited enormously from their company. The conclusion to *Savage Wars* and *Riddle* were both written in Australia around the birth and development of Lily. I have learnt a great deal from filming Lily since she was one minute old and comparing her to my little niece Premkumari in Thak. I have interviewed her and enjoyed our six-monthly visits to Australia.

So in these and a thousand ways, Sarah is indeed 'the other one' as Beatrice and Sidney Webb knew each other. It is that kind of relationship. Whatever I have formally produced is, in fact, collaborative with her. A remarkable and, as the Chinese would say, virtuous, woman.

