

1941-1963. Childhood, adolescence and undergraduate life: learning what the questions are.

I have written separately at length about the major influence of my mother, Iris Macfarlane (q.v.), but she was not alone. I also learnt a great deal from my sisters. Fiona, two years younger than me, is an extremely intelligent person, probably more so than I, and a very good artist. Growing up with her sharpened my wit and we remained friends. She enlivened my life with her enormous energy and imagination. Anne, four years younger than me, was quieter but also contributed to my intellectual development. For instance for a year or more when I was in London in 1967 she lived with us and helped on my various village reconstruction projects.

My father, Donald, also influenced me deeply, though in a more indirect way. He was an engineer and practical man, but we shared an interest in games, fishing and other things. Later in life as I became an intellectual we became distanced. But he was always loving and supportive. I particularly remember my pride in him when at school (he was handsome, strong, generous and a very good sportsman, soldier etc) and my delight at being with him on my teenage visits to Assam. He made considerable financial sacrifices by sending me to expensive schools and I never remember him being anything but kind and supportive. I always felt slightly in awe of him, but he was an excellent role model in many ways and it is clear that parts of my character come from those Scottish roots.

My mother's parents and siblings also had an enormous influence on me. I was left at home in Oxford and then Dorset and the Lake District when my parents returned to their tea plantation in Assam. My mother's parents, William and Violet Rhodes James were the ones who looked after me from the age of about five to twenty-three. It is difficult to over-emphasize the influence of my grand-mother, Violet. A remarkable woman by any standards (see my mother's piece on her, and her son's funeral oration), she was tough to the verge of bullying, enormously energetic, organizing, snobbish yet egalitarian, rude yet charming, artistic, very bright, a really remarkable, if frustrated in her talents, lady, a real matriarch. She taught me so much about life, manners, obligations, how to keep my head down and so on. While she was in some ways not a good mother to her own children, or even particularly good with my sisters, to me she was almost always civil and supportive and I was always very fond of her. Many of my character-traits, in particular my love of hoarding all memorials of the past, have come from her.

Her husband, Will, was also a benign influence on my life. A man of sweet disposition, learned, poetic, something of a dreamer, cowed by his wife, a sort of academic in essence who had through accident become an army officer (and a distinguished one with an M.C. and ending as a Colonel). I was enormously fond of him. He used to discuss poetry with me on our walks through the valley where Wordsworth grew up and I still treasure his watch. He was generous, kind and charitable and helped make my childhood a delight.

My mother had three brothers. The oldest, Billy, I did not see a great deal of as he was away in the army and then retired to be a school-teacher. I did like his

children, my cousins Caroline, Robin and Sarah. The next brother, Richard, slightly older than my mother, had a very considerable influence on me. He did not marry until late in life so treated my grand-parents house as his home to a large extent until I was about 23. We spent a good deal of time together and his love of music, interest in intellectual matters (he had read history at Oxford and taught economics and history at Haileybury College), and devout Christianity influenced me very greatly. I used to go on holidays with him, especially to evangelical Christian boy's camps, and I owe much of my (by now much suppressed) religiosity to him. He wrote for the papers and an autobiography of his war-time exploits in *Chindits*. So we discussed books, ideas and the meaning of life on our long walks, again adding an academic flavour to my life. Like me, he loved the northern mountains and I remember him as always gentle and encouraging to his young nephew.

My mother's younger brother, Robert (later Sir Robert), had the greatest influence of the three. He was only nine years older than I, and since we were brought up together, went to the same school (Sedbergh) and same College and University (Worcester, Oxford), he seemed more like an older brother than an uncle. He was always amazingly tolerant of someone who had suddenly arrived to divert some of his mother's love and attention away. He never bullied me and always encouraged and guided me. He shared his toys and his rich imaginative life, and perhaps this rather lonely little boy was pleased to have a younger 'sibling', however innocent and cack-handed at games, to play with. So I learnt from this in many ways brilliant and original mind. He taught me a great deal about all aspects of being a boy and then a man and I admired him greatly.

There was also another side to our relationship, an element of envy or competition. Robert did so well. He was apparently successful at Sedbergh, gained a good degree at Oxford, a Clerkship in the House of Commons, a Fellowship at All Souls, a Professorship at Sussex, an advisor to Kurt Waldheim at the U.N., a Conservative Member of Parliament for Cambridge and finally a Knighthood. He also wrote a dozen well-received books, some of them such as *Rosebery* winning many prizes. To cap it all, he had several pretty girl-friends, ending with the very beautiful and charming Angela as his wife. What an example, and one which, if possible, I would try to surpass. So, both as a model, an encouragement and rival he was most important. His liberal conservatism was off-set by my mother's radical labour views and provided balance in my upbringing. I dedicated one of my books to Robert soon after his death at an early age of cancer (*Making of the Modern World*) and in the preface to that book wrote a little of his profound influence on me.

Other relations of the previous generation also played a lesser part. My father's parents in Scotland and my father's brother Alan and his wife Jean, and their cousins there, all looked after me in school holidays and I was very fond of them, as I was of Richard and Robert's children. Of course my wife Gill and our daughter Kat have had enormous effects on my life, though this is not the place to expand on that. Nor will I expand on the continuing influence of my loved step-children by Sarah Harrison, my second wife, Inge and Astrid, nor of my adored grand-children Lily and Rosa. As for Sarah Harrison herself, her influence has been the greatest of all in my life and so I have devoted a separate section to her. (q.v.)

My first distinct memories of school are of the Dragon School at Oxford, which I attended from about eight to thirteen. Various excellent teachers come to mind, in particular the communist but inspiring music master ('Bruno') who introduced me to my passion for Gilbert and Sullivan, and the brilliant science master, Gerdt Somerhoff. I also made some rich friendships, though only one of them remains to this day.

At Sedbergh School, from the age of thirteen to eighteen, the pattern was repeated. Some deep and meaningful friendships though none have remained to, except to one of my master's, the exceptional Andrew Morgan about whom I have written separately. (q.v.) There was some excellent teaching and after two traumatic years at the bottom of the heap, I began to enjoy the school in its idyllic Yorkshire setting and was sad to leave.

As an undergraduate in Oxford, I again made really good friends, many of whom influenced me, though only Erik Pearse (who married my sister Anne) now remains a friend. The undergraduate who influenced me most intellectually was Paul Hyams, slightly older and a brilliant medievalist with whom I shared supervisions. He helped to raise my abilities and perhaps to draw me to an interest in documents, medieval history and Maitland. Particularly influential was my first real girl-friend, the extraordinary daughter of a Hungarian immigrant family, Julie Simor, with whom I shared a world of fantasy and faëry for several years.

Of my undergraduate teachers I was deeply impressed by the rigorous James Campbell, an Anglo-Saxon and medieval scholar of the most distinguished kind. He set very high standards and taught me to question notions of progress and revolutionary change. I have used his ideas in later work, particularly in *The Origins of English Individualism* which he kindly checked for me. Harry Pitt, my modern history teacher was also a considerable influence, broadening my mind, encouraging and in later years remaining a true friend. He argued with everything, but in a friendly and pleasant way, and treated me with great kindness. Lady Rosalind Clay, a doughty north Oxford historian, also became a friend after teaching me Tudor and Stuart history and through her I gained an entry into the world of Oxford gossip as he father had been Master of Balliol, one daughter was the historian Rosalind Mitchison, and her son-in-law the politician Peter Shore.

Two other influences were accidental. My latin was appalling and in order to get me through the compulsory exam I was tutored by David McLellan, who was later to become one of the greatest Marx scholars of the century. David's room-mate was Brian Harrison, then a research fellow at Nuffield. Brian became my role model. He lent me all his amazing undergraduate notes on books and lectures which I re-typed, and introduced me to his vast set of card indexes, based on the 'one fact one card' method he had adapted from Beatrice Webb. This indexing obsession started by him has played a large part in my life since and he was extremely kind to this younger colleague.