



Fleur Adcock: A personal memory



Love of nature: Fleur Adcock walks among the bluebells... the English variety were her favourites

We reported last month that Fleur Adcock, internationally acclaimed poet and an East Finchley resident for 61 years, died in October aged 90. Here, Fleur's neighbours Sandy and John Barker remember their close friend.

When we arrived in England from New Zealand in 1973, we came to stay in East Finchley because John's cousin in Lincoln Road, Jenny Gould, thought her friend, the poet Fleur Adcock two doors away, might let us rent two rooms, which she did.

Later we moved opposite and Fleur remained a much-loved close friend. Fifty years later in August 2023, we took

Fleur out in the High Road to celebrate. Afterwards she sent us this poem as "a little souvenir of our lunch".

*Meze and Shish
Busy, busy: what with a working day
and Andrew home from school for the summer
after his dazzling O-level results,
and an EFNA meeting in the evening
(East Finchley Neighbourhood Association),
it was 9:30 PM before I*

*met my prospective tenants: Jenny Gould's cousin John, a teacher from New Zealand,
and his new young wife, Sandy-with-a-Y
'They seem very pleasant', I wrote later
in my packed-to-overflowing journal;
as a result of which the three of us are now beaming at a Turkish waitress
who's photographing our celebration
in the restaurant on my street corner,
built on the site of Jay's furniture store,
where fifty years ago this week I bought
a chest of drawers for their bed-sitter.*

We wonder what she wrote in her journal six months after we first arrived. So many of our New Zealand friends came to stay and not all of them kept to the rules, the most important of which was not using the bathroom before 11am (we were allowed to use the toilet next door, and there was a basin downstairs).

Fleur celebrated her 40th birthday in February 1974 and

the house was packed with literary friends from NZ, UK and around the world. John got talking to someone called Alan Sillitoe and asked him what he did and could he make a living out of writing?

Fleur had spent much of her childhood with her sister in the English countryside during the war before the family returned to NZ and her garden had a very rural feeling. She nurtured her birds and when she was away would ask friends to make sure the birds had food and water.

Walks in the woods around East Finchley were an important part of her day. She loved bluebells but they really had to be English bluebells, not Spanish. Sometimes in May we would take her to Maulden in Bedfordshire where she had discovered glades of English bluebells when researching her ancestors, another great passion

of hers.

She was very fond of East Finchley, regularly buying cos lettuce, olive oil and Cyprus potatoes from Tony's Continental, and she felt Budgens had been transformed, although its rules were not followed by our dog Henry.

*...think of Henry, who at the faintest sniff
Of freedom through a not quite latched front gate
Is in at Budgen's automatic doors
To snaffle up another chocolate bar
From the impulse buys at the nearest checkout.*

She wrote a poem for Jenny Gould's funeral about Jenny and Tony fixing up 10 Lincoln Rd and making a special garden.

It finished:

*All things pass, dear Jenny. Rest in peace
I shall think of you in a Paradise Garden.*

And you too, dear Fleur.



Lunch with friends: Fleur enjoying a meal at Meze and Shish in the High Road with Sandy and John Barker

Hornet threat to our native bees: what's the latest?



Look out: Warning poster for the Asian Hornet

Local beekeeper Lucie Chaumeton warned us last January about the imminent arrival in Britain of the Asian Hornet which poses a threat to our native species. With her own bees ready for winter, we asked her for an update on what is now being named the Yellow Legged Hornet:

The Archer: Why the new name Yellow Legged Hornet?

Lucie: As new species of hornets from Asia make incursions into Southern Europe, the more descriptive name of Yellow Legged Hornet (YLH) will prove invaluable if other species cross the Channel.

How many hornets were found and where?

With 68 credible UK sightings and 23 nests destroyed, mostly in Kent and Sussex, last year's hotspots, the nearest sighting to us was in Croydon. These numbers are almost 70% below 2023. The wet spring kept all species of wasps back, but government and community action also made a positive impact.

What action was taken?

In 2024, systematic spring

trapping of queens was organised around the sites of 2023 nest destructions, involving both communities and government agencies. All credible sightings were followed up and nests destroyed, thanks to continued government funding with additional 'bee inspectors' recruited to help battle the invaders. Twelve dedicated volunteers kept watch in East Finchley but, thankfully, did not catch any Yellow Legged Hornets.

What next?

I am pleased that the very effective National Bee Unit's 'eradication' mandate continues to be funded. This is particularly important, given that one nest destroyed this year was the genetic offspring of a nest destroyed in Rye, East Sussex, in 2023, the first recorded home-grown Yellow Asian Hornet. Following this year's Croydon sighting, the unit is asking everyone to look out for YLH, and for their nests as the trees drop their leaves. YLH can fly until the frosts arrive.

RICKY SAVAGE... THE VOICE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

Midas touch

It's January and the papers are packed with the lists of all those artists who didn't make it through to the end of last year. 2024 was not a bumper year, not like 2016 that claimed David Bowie, Prince and George Michael, but sadly Quincy Jones and Steve Harley did go off to find out if there is life after Later with Jools Holland. In the land of thespians Maggie Smith had her last curtain call and won't be around for another series of Downton Abbey.

But one celebrity death that sticks in my memory, and I'm not too sure why it should be, is Liam Payne's. I mean, I didn't even like One Direction, but then I wasn't a teenager when they were around. Ever since rock'n'roll was invented there were kids happy to change their name in search of fame and to find that Midas touch. Some made it, but others must have wished that they'd never got what they wished for.

Back in the 1950s, pop music manager Larry Parnes had a roster of pretty boys who he gave new names and marketed to teenage girls. Who, apart from his family, remembers Vince Eager today? OK, sometimes it worked and persuading young Harry Webb to change his name has given the lad over 65 years of fame, even if only true fans know that there was a time before he was Cliff Richard. But the ones who always stood the best chance of surviving were the bands, the gang who got together, made music, made records people bought and mostly did it their way. You know, bands like Oasis, The Who, and The Rolling Stones. They lasted whereas the manufactured pop stars had their moment and then got forgotten because they were just product.

One Direction were manufactured for a teen market, just like Take That, Boyzone and today's entire K-pop industry. They were never meant to last for ever, only for long enough to break another generation of teenagers' hearts. And then what? The luckiest ones, like Harry Styles or Robbie Williams get another chance. The rest are left standing next to a deserted motorway trying to hitch a ride, but not realising that the circus has left town. I guess Liam Payne was one of them and, like so many others who dreamed that dream, they never read the small print.

Back in the early 1970s Ian Hunter got it right when he wrote that rock'n'roll is a loser's game; it takes control and you can't explain the reason for the sights or for the sounds. But the grease paint will still stick to your face and nothing can erase that rock'n'roll dreaming from your mind.



Beekeeper: Lucie Chaumeton

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