

# THE RESEARCH NETWORK

## NEWSLETTER

**Editor:** Nick Tanner **Editorial Advisors:** Phyllis Vangelder, Tom Punt

Issue No. 17: February 2011

## THE WAY WE ARE NOW

Nick Tanner

**A**fter last September's memorial-laden edition, this *Newsletter* is much lighter on obituaries and redresses the balance with articles on the leisure activities of a number of active Research Network members. In addition, we have commentaries, for those who weren't there but of course also for those who were, on the Autumn Lunch and on December's AGM; a brief preview of the Spring Lunch which will take place in April; and Peter Bartram's regular trawl through the *MRS Newsletters* of yesteryear. But of course we do also have the sad duty to record the deaths of two members, Ginny Valentine and Bob Tofts, and you will find their obituaries in the usual place, together with some reflections on the memorial held recently for Andrew McIntosh.

One subject that seems to crop up regularly at Steering Group meetings, at the AGM and also in casual conversations between Network members, is that of social networks—Facebook and LinkedIn, to name but two. Some members (and they have their advocates on the Steering Group) are keen to use such networks to promote dialogue; but our Facebook Group, which has been running for about eighteen months now, still has only 39 members out of a Network membership of 250 or so.

A recent BBC Radio 4 programme on the subject (*The Secret History of Social Networking*) suggested that

social networks work when “you have a reasonable expectation that all your friends either are on them or have the ability to be on them” and it went on to draw a parallel with the telephone: “if you're the only one that has a phone, it has no use whatever”. Most of us, I'm sure, can remember debating whether it would be useful for the company to have a fax machine, or a computer, or an e-mail account; perhaps in a couple of years' time social networks, too, will have reached the tipping point beyond which only luddites and those who have raised obstinacy to an art-form will still be resisting them. Or perhaps not ...

At the AGM in December, one member suggested that we should set up a Yahoo! Group as another communications route for the Network. Tom Punt, who manages our website and is an Administrator of the Facebook group, believes that Yahoo! would be unlikely to generate higher levels of use than Facebook but the Steering Group would be willing to consider the idea if there were clear support from members and, better still, if someone would volunteer to administer such a group.

Do you have a view? Please let us know – by post, by e-mail or even, heaven forefend, by posting your comments on the Network's Facebook page or the Members' Comments page of the website!

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## SPRING LUNCH: 12<sup>TH</sup> APRIL AT TULI

**T**his year's Spring Lunch for Research Network members and their guests will be held at Tuli, in the homophonous Tooley Street, London SE1. Describing itself as an “eastern fusion restaurant”, Tuli specialises in Chinese flavours and styles. For those who have visited TNS-RI in More London Place, Tuli lies



between those offices and the London Dungeon, in a building set into the arches below London Bridge station.

Invitations will be sent out shortly but please put it in your diary—from 12:30 on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> April. We look forward to seeing you there.

# THE WAY WE WERE

Peter Bartram's selections from MRS Newsletters of yesteryear

## 30 years ago (1981):

John Parfitt, Chairman of the Society 1970-71, was awarded the CBE in the New Years Honours. Nothing to do with the MR industry, it was for his work with youth hostelling as Chairman of the YHA England and Wales, and with the International Youth Hostel Federation. As he was also Chairman of Mass Observation, R&D Director of MRB International, and had just been appointed Chairman of the Media Research Consultancy, it is remarkable that he could manage such a hinterland of activity.

One of the guests at Quantime's Christmas party broke into a technical discussion between Cliff Holmes, Paul Harris and Jonathan Jephcott to ask what a collection of statisticians might be called. The immediate suggestion was 'a distribution' but this gave rise to a sequence of Newsletter correspondence in which other offerings included 'a sample', 'a cell', 'a percentage', 'a quota', 'a cluster', 'a mean bunch' and finally 'Why not simply call them 'deviants'?'

The sensitivity of qual v quant issues was highlighted when MRS Chairman John Barter had said in his February piece "... However enthusiastic they are about the product, two groups of eight housewives in Bolton cannot guarantee the success of the national launch." A month later the fury of the qualitative researchers was revealed in letters from John Goodyear and Leslie Collins, which John Barter dismissed with a reply which began "I never cease to be amazed by the sensitivity of some qualitative researchers..."

Guess who is being talked about when the Chairman writes in June "The Editor of the Newsletter is one of the least cynical people I know. Bearing in mind the number of years over which she has been Publications Officer for the Society, and some of the people with whom she has had to cope, this is a considerable triumph for her essential good nature over her experience." (*Answer: Phyllis Vangelder*).

The Val-id column reported that Ivor McGloughlin had made a welcome visit to London, and asked "Was he bursting to give us news? Information tumbled from his lips as he kept us abreast of the changing scene

in Canada, with such pearls as 'Mark Lovell has had a baby at my house,' and 'I'm driving 40 yards further these days.' 'But what is the purpose of your visit?' I asked. His reply: "To mow my lawn."

With a referendum looming up on our current political horizon, it is worth saying that arguments about voting systems are nothing new: in a letter in the January Newsletter, James Rothman questioned MRS Chairman John Barter's report that "while there is a good deal of support for a transferable vote system in theory, Council tends to feel that the present system has an attractive simplicity." James asked: "Does he mean that members of the Society would be incapable of ranking candidates for election to the Council in order of preference, or does he mean that it would not be possible to process the results at the AGM?"

## And 25 years ago (1986):

Graeme Cranch, ex-Chairman of the International Committee, reviewed the first 20 years of its existence and ended by saying that "its discussions, albeit serious in content, show a cheerful enjoyment which the old stagers find refreshing after the frequent dourness of earlier days. There is time to laugh ... Could the appointment of a Chairman from the distaff side have anything to do with that welcome change?" (*So who was the Chairman he was referring to? Answers on a postcard please*)

In his 'Jobbing Gardener' column, John Bound looked forward to his first visit to the new offices of the Society in Oxford Street. He recalled that "in many parts of London, unexpected splendour hides behind an unassuming facade and no doubt this is true of 175 Oxford Street. I see myself stepping from the lift into a spacious gallery lit by chandeliers and softly carpeted ..." (*A far cry from the reality*)

Martin Collins reported on the Annual Conference in his April piece by saying "I heard mutterings that many of the papers only re-presented things that were known twenty years ago. Personally I don't find that a strong criticism. Few people have the time to review past papers themselves and many will benefit from papers that re-visit the topic for them."

# AUTUMN LUNCH AT BOROUGH BAR

Nick Tanner

In Tas we added not only a new venue to our lunch programme but also a new cuisine: this small group of London restaurants specialises in food from Anatolia, which Wikipedia defines as “the western two-thirds of the Asian part of Turkey”. One can cause a good deal of offence by confusing Greek with Turkish cuisine (or, worse, requesting Turkish coffee in a Greek Cypriot restaurant); the similarities are evident and understandable but the menu at Tas was a satisfying combination of familiar and more esoteric dishes which made for a most enjoyable and interesting meal.



Our Chairman welcomed four new members and six guests who he hoped would soon be converted to members; and in the spirit of inclusion that is now *de rigueur* in most business circles outside the Sky Sports studio, offered a similar welcome to those whom he described as “old lags”. This was Nigel’s first public appearance at a Network event since an “unfortunate argument with a staircase”, as he put it, prevented his attendance at the Summer Party.

Nigel also took the opportunity to report the news that Phyllis Vangelder had retired from the Steering Group and to thank her for her incomparable contribution to the Network. There is more on this subject in the report on the AGM.



Welcomes, thanks and news duly delivered, the event meandered to a close in the time-honoured way reminiscent of an MRS Conference dinner – with members leaving their assigned or chosen tables and wandering the room in a search for further old friends, or possibly for unfinished bottles of wine. We are, as always, very much indebted to Jane Bain and Jane Gwilliam for having researched, selected and negotiated with the restaurant and for thereby providing another fine event for our pleasure.

# 2010 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



In his speech at the Autumn Lunch, Nigel Spackman made the following announcement: "You will be pleased to know that your Steering Group, never happy with the status quo, has like all forward-thinking organisations been doing a bit of re-branding. Since so few members turn up to the AGM, it will henceforth be called the 'Christmas Drinks and AGM', thus putting the main emphasis on the part that will interest you all most."

In fulfilment of his promise, wine and mince pies were served before the AGM, and wine and nibbles after. And the re-branding, alongside a somewhat earlier start time, did indeed seem to improve the attendance: 30 members in 2008, 25 in 2009 but a massive 39 this year. How many other organisations can claim a 56% year-on-year increase?

In other respects, too, the Network has had a good year. Subscription and lunch prices have remained constant yet again (and

will do so for another year); membership remains constant at 255, with recruitment exactly balancing losses due to resignation and other, sadder causes; and on the financial front, this year's surplus was higher than expected.

It had been announced at the Autumn Lunch that Phyllis Vangelder had retired from the Steering Group. She felt that since she had relinquished her role as co-editor of the *Newsletter*, the reason for her presence on the Steering Group had disappeared. Her resignation was accepted by other members of the Group with considerable reluctance but she remains an Editorial Advisor to the *Newsletter* and we are delighted that we can continue in that way to benefit from her experience and wisdom. Both Nigel Spackman and Nick Tanner expressed their heartfelt thanks to Phyllis for her past and continuing contributions.

Full minutes of the meeting were circulated to members by Gill Wareing in mid-December.



# A COLLECTION OF MUNROS

Nigel Spackman

If you say the number “283” to one sector of the population it will provoke a stir of recognition and a faraway look in the eyes. Because that’s the number of mountains in Scotland over 3000 feet— known as The Munros. For many people it’s a lifetime goal to make it to the top of all the Munros and at the latest count almost 5000 have done so. The list does not include my name—yet. But at the time of writing I have another 91 to go, and my aim is to finish the “round”, as it’s known, before my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.



The name comes from the first person to measure and list all the Scottish mountains, Sir Hugh Munro. He was a hardy Victorian laird, who marched the hills in his cape and kilt, carrying his barometer to measure the height, undeterred by bad weather. Sadly he never completed his round, dying in 1919 with only two still to do.

My own Munro round began in the '70s. I had been a rock and ice climber since University days and a winter climbing trip to the Cairngorm Mountains in NE Scotland was a regular part of my annual programme. The weather in Scotland being what it is, many days found us unable to do any serious *climbing*, and we ended up instead *walking* to the peak of one of the many mountains. One evening, either over too many pints in a pub, or marooned in a tent in bad weather, my regular climbing partner and I added up the number of Munros we had each done. To my chagrin I found he was ahead of me... and thus began an obsession!

When I was working, finding time to feed this obsession wasn’t always easy. Driving to even the closest Munro takes about 7 hours from London, and reaching those in the far north-west adds a good 5 hours to that, so a weekend trip was out of the question. But office closures over Christmas and New Year often found me celebrating Hogmanay in

Glencoe, with one of my regular climbing partners, Tim Bowles, also a Research Network member. And most years my family put up with me spending a week away in the early summer... and if you wonder why early summer, you’ve obviously never been to the Highlands in August, the height of the midge season. Few things can drive you to distraction more readily than the evil Scottish midge, so I avoid July and August like the plague.

Now I’ve retired I am able to add to my list of peaks much more easily. For the last two years I have spent a whole month in Scotland, adding about 30 to my tally each year (and here I should thank my fellow members of the Network Steering Group for being happy to schedule our meetings around my trips). At the present rate of progress my last one, already earmarked as Schiehallion, a beautiful conical mountain above Loch Tay, should be done in June 2013, after which there will be the most enormous celebration for all those who have been up a Munro with me!

The question everybody asks is of course “why do you do it?”, and on days when you struggle to the top of an uninspiring peak in pouring rain, and on arrival you don’t even have a nice view because you’re in the cloud ... well, you do tend to ask yourself the same question. But there’s always pleasure in the physical exertion needed to make it to the top, and in the challenge of navigating there and back safely. Admittedly in these days of GPS the navigational challenge is not what it used to be when fumbling in a gale with a soggy, flapping Ordnance Survey map, but for purists like myself who carry a GPS only for insurance, the navigation certainly adds to the appeal.



But not all days are like that. Let me share a few highlights. Two years ago on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday I camped alone in a tiny tent high in the mountains,

above the remote Glen Etive. I woke early to a clear blue, windless morning with not a soul in sight, and having opened my birthday cards, found myself by 7am. on the top of Meall nan Euan (they do have some bizarre names!), with the whole of the Highlands spread out around me. Few experiences can compare with that.



Back in the 80's walking along the glorious South Kintail ridge, which traverses no fewer than seven Munros, I saw a figure in the distance coming towards me. As we got closer I was surprised to see it was a woman who looked to be in her 70s, if not more. We stopped to chat, and in the way that Munroists do, we asked each other how many we had done. To my astonishment she had not only done them all, but was indeed the first woman ever to have done so, having completed her round in 1947. What an inspiration it was to see her still enjoying the hills so many years later.

Once, friends and I were walking in deep snow through the Lairig Ghru, a wild pass that traverses the Cairngorms. The cloud base was low, below the tops of the valley sides, so it was like walking through a cloud topped tunnel. Suddenly out of the cloud only a couple of hundred feet above our heads a golden eagle appeared circling round and round for several minutes. It was a breathtaking sight, but one couldn't help wondering if he was sizing us up for his next meal!

Perhaps the most inspirational mountain for me has been An Teallach, in the far north-west of Scotland, close to the home of our most northerly Research Network member, Roger Beeson. I first climbed it in winter, when the traverse of the two separate Munro tops was an arduous 8 hour day, starting and finishing in the dark. But the satisfaction of reaching the highest point, after having to use ice-axe and crampons for several hundred feet, and to be able to look out over the largest uninhabited area of the UK, was unsurpassable.

I don't always go to the mountains on my own, of course. Despite what sceptics may think, many people find the mountains appealing and have been happy to share the experience with me – apart from Tim Bowles, Roger Gane (another Network member) has also been to Scotland with me. Between them Tim and Roger have accompanied me to the top of at least 30 Munros, so many thanks to them both for their company.

One of the more confusing aspects is the definition of a Munro. On the face of it it's simple—a mountain top over 3000 feet is a Munro—but it's not that straightforward. If a mountain has two adjoining pinnacles at the top, both of them over 3000 feet, with a gap between of only a few yards, does it count as one or two? Most of us would think this should count as one but unfortunately Sir Hugh never used a precise definition. Consequently the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC), the guardian of the list, occasionally adds or subtracts a peak, either because of revised measurements or some other change of mind.



A good example is a very remote mountain called Angel Peak in the Cairngorms. Back in the 80's Tim Bowles and I made several abortive attempts to climb a Munro close to Angel Peak, but were always beaten back by awful weather. Finally on our fourth attempt we did it, en route carefully skirting round Angel Peak itself, which was not then a Munro, to avoid wasting energy. However, a few years later the SMC capriciously elevated Angel Peak to Munro status, so now I have to make the long trek back when we could so easily have done it before! Such are the trials of the Munroist.

So this year's trip is scheduled for May/June, and planning is well in hand. Any members prepared to put up with sleeping in a tent, walking in the rain, dodging midges, and getting exhausted, are welcome—all for the dubious pleasure of an invitation to the post Munro party in 2013!

# SWAYED BY THE MEREST ZEPHYR

Confessions of a reluctant retailer by John Kelly

Those that know me would admit that it would be putting an extreme gloss on the statement to say that I am a reluctant and unwilling gardener. I have discovered over the years that I have neither the aptitude nor the inclination for the activity—nor, more importantly, the patience.

So, it will come as some surprise to discover that I now, with my long-suffering wife, run an online shop selling wind chimes and other associated items ([www.thewindchimeshop.co.uk](http://www.thewindchimeshop.co.uk)). How this came about is somewhat involved—please read on!

It is not that I intended to be indifferent to horticulture, as, given a Hibernian lineage, I thought I might at least be able to grow potatoes! Indeed, when we moved into our present house some 30-odd years ago I had grandiose schemes for a veritable cornucopia of vegetables. I even drew a plan of sorts: well, a rectangle with some wavy lines indicating the crops—artistry being another accomplishment sadly lacking in my armoury.

All went beguilingly well at the planting stage: Stuttgarter Giant onions, leeks, carrots, beetroot, radishes and other delicacies that set the mouth watering—all took to the bed with relish. I was relatively diligent as I feared a visit at any moment from the Radio 4 Gardeners' Question Time SWOT team, or, more worryingly, from Eileen, a near neighbour who could seemingly grow flowers by merely looking at the ground. I was assiduous (relatively) in deterring, trapping and generally annihilating all known pests, and, given the number of them, I imagine an 'all points bulletin' had been issued on their grapevine!

It wasn't long, however, before I had a premonition that all was not well in paradise (or, more precisely, in our small Elysian field) and this was confirmed at 'harvest time'. The leeks would have been proud to have been called chives, but I am not sure that any chive would have been flattered by the association. The onion sets came out smaller than they went in! As for the carrots, whilst perfectly formed and beautifully coloured, they would have given even the most 'nouvelle' of chefs a problem using them in a Cuisine Minceur dish. I shall save my own blushes by withholding any description of the other legumes.

Now, dear readers, as researchers, you would be

rightly aghast at the fundamental mistakes I made in not assessing the evidence that was staring me in the face.

Even a cursory glance at the local Gertrude Jekyll's (OK, neighbour Eileen's) garden would have indicated the complete absence of vegetables—not even an indomitable herb to be seen. The number of pests probably indicated that my putative (and puny) vegetation was the only food source for a considerable radius.

Whilst the garden is relatively modest in size, it does contain a small number of large oaks which, when not endangering the foundations of the house, soak up almost all the available moisture: in spring and summer they screen off most of the sunlight and in autumn and early winter they provide a constant shower of falling leaves, some of which seem to linger until the next fall despite any number of rakings and trips to the dump.

Yet, the most important clue emerged whilst I was digging the bed. I repeatedly came across what I thought was plasticine, and idly wondered whether the children of a previous owner, as a permanent punishment, had been set the herculean task of replacing all the existing soil with their play dough.

A little belated research, though, revealed this less than malleable substance to be clay—often the bane of the life of an accomplished gardener, let alone an ingénu like me. This also provided an explanation for the hushed tones of the neighbours when addressing the subject of subsidence.

My lack of 'clay awareness' was an understandable mistake to make, given that the soil in the front appeared, at least to me, to be of a reasonable standard. Apparently there is the equivalent of a fault line running underneath the house, where the 'good' soil gives way to glutinous (when wet) or hard pan (when dry) clay, and where, to all intents and purposes, all gardening ceases—even grass is difficult to grow!

Following this signal lack of success as a plantsman, I decided to do the only sensible thing and turn the area into a mini (minimal) sporting arena for my two sons: doubling as it would, depending upon the season, as our own Wembley or Twickenham or

Lords. Sad to say, however, my exploits as a sports coach were no better than as an agriculturalist.

Eventually, as may be imagined, the treatment meted out to the 'garden' took its toll and, our nestlings having flown the coop, we decided the only way forward was a make-over in the form of landscaping to a layout (you've guessed it) of my own devising.

It then transpired that Paul, the landscaping contractor, wished to have a website, which my wife constructed using software designed by my eldest son. Not only was he undertaking landscaping but he also wished to sell garden ornaments and wind chimes online. My wife, apart from implementing the site design, took and edited the product shots using our recently remodelled garden as a backdrop. It soon became clear that wind chimes would be the most popular items and the other ornaments were excised from the site.

When, after a couple of years Paul decided that he wished to close the site down and concentrate on the day job, we decided to buy the site, stock and 'goodwill' from him—and the odyssey began.

Now, at first sight you might think that there is little similarity between selling wind chimes online and market research. But there are some, and the formidable triumvirate (Geoffrey Roughton, Jennifer Bowen and, not least, Tony Mastel) who struggled so hard to impart their knowledge to this erstwhile callow trainee, would, I hope, be proud to see their diligence has not gone unrewarded.

Those frenetic Friday afternoons and early evenings devoted to getting survey kits out (following the inevitable questionnaire collating and stapling competitions) have proved invaluable training for the picking and packing process. Dealings with our local sub-post offices are far easier than the bargaining (and blandishments) that were required in order to get reluctant union men to accept bags of post that had missed the collection time at the Heddon Street post office. Indeed, the whole process of managing logistics in market research has served me well when dealing with suppliers of various kinds and managing clients with as yet unfulfilled orders.

One of the major differences from market research is that the clients, are, to all intents and purposes, anonymous, as are we, but their moods and needs must still be satisfied, which requires, like a response to an RFQ, not only background research but also a cost-effective proposition that is attractively presented.

However, as with research, it is essential to maintain constant competitive intelligence in this keenly price sensitive environment, not to mention the ever-present need to maintain a significant range of stock offerings covering all forms of chimes, spinners, dreamcatchers, etc.

For the moment I am happy to leave my fate in the hands of Boreas, Notus, Eurus and Zephyrus and the legacy of Tim Berners-Lee. And of course I agree with our old friend Seneca:

*'If a man knows not what harbour he seeks, any wind is the right wind.'*



## MAJOR TO MINOR?

*We are regularly amused by Michael Bird's contributions to the letter pages of The Times. Here is a particularly pithy offering from 20th December:*

Sir,  
Prephoria is inevitably followed by postalgia.

M Bird,  
London SW13

## MRBA

The MRBA was important in the establishment of the Research Network. Seven of the nine members of its Management Committee are also members of the Research Network. It is right therefore that we should have the MRBA in mind both in terms of supporting it—which we have done collectively every year—and in referring to it anyone who is in need of its support. Its Secretary-Treasurer, Danielle Scott, would be pleased to answer any questions on 0845 652 0303.





# NATURE DIARY - AUTUMN/WINTER 2010-11

Jane Bain

**I** began keeping a *Daily Picture Diary* in 2003. Over the years this has become, in part, a catalogue of the wildlife on and beside the River Thames near Hammersmith, where we live. Here are some of my observations over the last few months.

**August:** The end of August and the young birds are maturing into adulthood. The young herons are still rather awkward and ungainly, but are now managing to fend for themselves.



**September:** There is an abundance of fruit and berries this year and the ring-necked parakeets—those exotic London residents—are making the most of it.

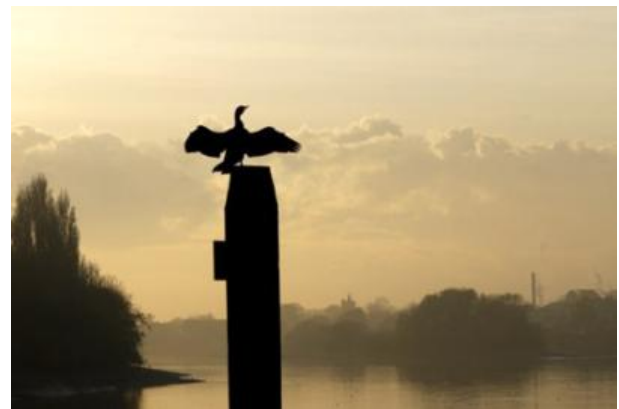


**October:** One of the delights of Autumn is watching the cygnets trying out their newly grown wing feathers and having flying lessons. Their trial runs start off with much preliminary flapping until eventually they manage to run along the water for a short distance and briefly take off, before belly-flopping back into the river.



**November:** This is a time of misty mornings and spectacular early sunsets.

The rowing clubs along this stretch of the river have rafts which are attached to tall piles and the cormorants make the most of these posts for grooming and drying their wings.



**December:** The snow and ice this month mean that many birds are having to resort to extreme measures to find food. On several mornings I see a common snipe - normally an extremely shy and retiring bird - foraging for worms on the riverside front lawn of one of the grand old houses on Chiswick Mall.



At the London Wetland Centre in Barnes, across the river from here (well worth a visit, if you enjoy bird-life) the lakes on the reserve are all frozen and the waterfowl are working hard to keep some stretches of water ice-free.

A furious robin accosts me on the terrace of the cafeteria. Because of the bitter cold, nobody is eating outdoors and the robin's regular supply of crumbs has been abruptly cut off.



**January:** The warmer days of early January provide a brief respite from the winter cold and some of the first signs of Spring: parakeets canoodling in the big willow tree near the Black Lion Pub and the first ice cream van of the year even doing a passably good trade.

The swans are becoming increasingly territorial as the breeding season approaches and some of the confrontations between rival males can be quite brutal. A swan which finds itself on another male's 'patch' can get a severe beating if it does not retreat quickly enough.



Great excitement. The kestrel who lost her mate last year has found a new partner. The new pair are back at their regular hunting ground in Dukes Meadows, across the river from where the kestrels usually nest. Even more surprisingly, they have decided that the sculpture of herons at the side of the large open recreation ground makes a perfect hunting perch.



## JOHN PARFITT'S INFLUENCE

### Letter to the Editor

**M**y name is Daniel H. Macey. Although my family came to the America from England in the 1620's (spelled Macy) and was one of 9 families who bought the island of Nantucket, I have always felt some kinship to your country.

I have had a career in market research in the US. Specifically, most of my work has focused on continuous purchase panel data. When I started in 1968 I was introduced to new product forecasting, using the then current Parfitt/Collins model. (It has been revised in several ways, including some of my own). Once I had a phone discussion with Mr Parfitt about some issue. He was very accommodating and, being a youngster, I was thrilled to make his acquaintance. I have conducted over 100 new product evaluations/forecasts, largely using the results of John's work, so I have some sort of connection that I am sure that he was never aware. I also know of several other people in research who have relied on his model. By now it is rather accepted practice in new product research.

Anyway, I just thought some people in your group might be interested in knowing how far and wide John's influence has been.

Daniel Macey  
Macey Marketing Group, Inc

# BY TRAIN TO TALLINN

Nick Tanner

“Dad’s mid-life crisis train trip”—that’s how my teenage daughter described the holiday. Maybe that’s how it looked to the outside world but to me it was exciting, interesting and unusual: two weeks of independent travel (nine trains, two coaches and an unplanned bus) covering some 2,000 miles between London and Tallinn. The focus: half a dozen cities that had all enjoyed a renaissance since emerging from behind the Iron Curtain.

The appeal of rail travel is threefold. First, it avoids much of the irritation, discomfort and downright inconvenience of flying—no check-in times or x-ray machines (Eurostar excepted), no dehydration, no enforced immobility and no DVT. Second, it keeps you in touch with the land that you’re crossing, so that the journey is not something to be endured in the interval between departure and arrival but an interesting and enjoyable experience in itself. Third, it feels so much environmentally friendlier.

Thus it was that 9½ hours after leaving London, I was arriving in Weimar, home not only to the eponymous republic but also to Goethe, Schiller, Bach, Liszt and the Bauhaus. I had watched the scenery change from Kentish downland to Flanders fields, to the hills of the Ardennes, to the forests and rivers that stretch between Cologne and Frankfurt, to the pastures of south-east Germany; and I understood the context of where I was far better than if I had boarded an aluminium tube at Gatwick and re-emerged two hours later in another tarmac field.

Weimar offers points of interest at almost every corner; it is not only attractive but packed full of history and culture. The Russian military cemetery,

devoid of signposts but well-tended, was an especially poignant find on a rainy afternoon walk in the park. Goethe’s Garden House brings the great man to life in a way you don’t expect. And for a fan of Tom Lehrer, the statue of Walter Gropius and Alma Mahler produced a quiet giggle.



This broad pattern – beautiful and historic cities, each with a fascinating cultural story to tell – was repeated in each subsequent destination of the trip: Dresden, Krakow, Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. Each boasts an old town packed with mediaeval, gothic or renaissance architecture. Guided walks ensure that you see the most important sights and also provide the opportunity to talk to real local people; there’s nothing like personal contact to improve your understanding of a city and its history.

And the glory of it was, in this internet age it wasn’t difficult to organise. The Man in Seat 61 ([www.seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com)) offers brilliant advice on planning such a journey; German railways have a terrific online timetable covering the whole of Europe; hotel search sites help you choose good hotels at the right price (in my case, €50 a night including breakfast). The trains were clean and comfortable; and when the rail options finally ran out beyond Vilnius, the coach travel almost matched them on both dimensions.

For anyone who likes the journey to be as interesting as the destination, this is the way to do it. And at some point near the end of the journey, the words of a song from *Cabaret* came to my mind: “The continent of Europe is so wide, mein Herr/Not only up and down but side to side, mein Herr...” And I thought, I’ve done side-to-side now—next time, I must try up-and-down. Narvik to Gibraltar, perhaps?



Weimar: Goethe's Garden House



Dresden: Zwinger Palace



Tallinn: Market Square

# CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF ANDREW McINTOSH

Tom Punt

Andrew died on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2010 (Obituary, Network Newsletter, Summer 2010) and his funeral took place on 8<sup>th</sup> September, attended by many Network members. On 19<sup>th</sup> January of this year a large number of his friends from politics, business and private life attended a meeting at St John's Smith Square for a public celebration of his life and work.



The full script of the speeches will be available shortly. Suffice it to say here that all the political speakers spoke of Andrew's dedication to any brief he was given as a working peer, his intellect and his quick mastery of his various offices in opposition and in government when, perhaps belatedly, he was given ministerial office in the Lords, where he had been deputy Chief Whip with responsibility for media and heritage.

Rachel Pierce, the cousin of Andrew's late wife Naomi Sargant, welcomed those attending on behalf of Andrew's immediate family. She reminded us that it was just over four years before that a similar meeting had been held at St John's to celebrate Naomi's life (reported in the Winter 2007 Network Newsletter).

The meeting was addressed by four friends of Andrew's who are members of the House of Lords—Lord Peston, Lord Gavron and Baroness Hollis, all Labour peers, and the Rt. Hon. Baroness Anelay, the Conservative Chief Whip in the Lords. In addition, a tribute was paid by Dr Anne Corbett who knew Andrew in his role as a member of the Parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe., Finally Sir Jeremy Isaacs, a friend of Andrew's since 1951, gave a masterful and moving summing up.

The speeches were preceded by the first two movements of Mozart's String Quintet in C (K516) played most beautifully by the Sacconi Quartet augmented by Becky Jones of the Callino Quartet; and the final movement was played to end the main speeches.

Lord Peston spoke, amongst other things, of Andrew's strong loyalty to the Labour Party and to comprehensive education; Baroness Hollis of his knowledge of the Lords and its procedures but also of his friendship; Baroness Anelay of his warmth and willingness to help a political opponent raised to the peerage almost a decade later than himself. Dr Corbett discussed his Europeanism which led him to be appointed chairman of the education and media sub-committee of the assembly and its *rapporteur* on media freedom; and Lord Gavron his wide knowledge, his formidable memory for poetic quotations (and Gilbert and Sullivan songs) and his love and mastery of French language and civilisation, as well as his achievements in market research as founder of IFF.

Finally Sir Jeremy Isaacs, Andrew's friend for nearly sixty years, spoke of Andrew's great humanity but also his sense of fun and his ability to distinguish great claret from good. How lucky we are to have known Andrew and our thanks go to his sons Philip and Francis and his stepson David for organising this wonderful meeting.

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## ROBERT TOFTS 1932 - 2010

John Downham

Bob Tofts, who died just before Christmas, was a close friend and colleague for many years. He will be very widely missed, both in the UK and in the various countries abroad where he had worked or which he visited during his career as a market researcher.



the way he entered the profession. After leaving school he did not go on to university but started work in an office and only later gained a degree the hard way, continuing with his daytime job while studying psychology as a mature student at Birkbeck College. Having qualified he was then recruited by Alex Mitchell who was in charge of market research at the Lintas advertising agency (then owned by

Bob was in certain respects an unconventional researcher - not least in

Unilever). This was the start of a long and varied career in different parts of Unilever.

At Lintas he was at first concerned primarily with research into advertising, although his research remit subsequently widened with a transfer to RBL (also a Unilever company). His professional career really took off, however, with postings to Unilever research units abroad. The first was for a year in the Milan unit and this was followed by a considerably more important post in India. In the 1970s Hindustan Lever decided that they needed an experienced researcher from outside to head up their existing Marketing Research Department in Bombay, in order to broaden its skills and help prepare a younger generation of local researchers to take over. After HLL approached Unilever in the UK for assistance it was arranged that Bob, together with his family, should be seconded to Bombay for three years to take on this assignment. Being exposed to a very different professional environment, with much broader research and marketing responsibilities, provided Bob with an opportunity which he used to the full and thoroughly enjoyed. It was to stand him in good stead later—and incidentally also ensured that the Tofts family would become devotees of, and expert in, Indian cuisine.

His successful experience in India spurred Bob's interest in working internationally and led to a subsequent posting to run the Unilever market research unit in Madrid, again for three years. There is however always a potential problem about spending much time abroad in a multinational organisation—that of later making a satisfactory re-entry to the UK scene after a lapse of several years away from base. Thus when the Spanish attachment was coming to an end, there was uncertainty about finding a suitably senior post back in RBL. This problem for Bob fortunately proved an opportunity for me since at that time I was looking for a new number two and his background exactly matched the post's requirements. Meeting Bob again at an ESOMAR Congress gave me the chance to sound him out over a breakfast. He leapt at the idea of working as an international research advisor and his transfer to Unilever's central Marketing Division was duly arranged. He stayed with me until my retirement from Unilever, then taking over most of my duties until his own retirement six years later in 1992.

Bob had a very down-to-earth approach when faced with any suggestion of technical obscurity in research. He was an excellent de-mystifier and

teacher, good at communicating with the non-expert. A typical example was a brief guide Bob wrote, primarily for Unilever brand managers, on 'Motivation Research' which was one of the simplest and clearest explanations of the objectives and methods of such research I have yet to see. He felt strongly about the constant dangers of GIGO (garbage in—garbage out) and the fundamental need to focus on the underlying quality of the information collected and used in research studies. For Bob this did not mean taking an unduly purist approach to research but constantly asking how well a particular methodology works in practice, whether it produces valid findings, and whether it is cost-effective. He took a very realistic view about what it is reasonable to expect of research under often difficult operating conditions and when resources are limited.

He had a good but often wry sense of humour. I remember his once saying to me that his parents seemed to have suffered a lapse of imagination in giving him the second name 'Arthur', the resulting set of initials proving a potential minefield at school. He took a very sceptical view of anything he regarded as unduly officious authority or unnecessary bureaucracy and, if required, was always ready to dig in his heels on an issue with which he disagreed. A typical example of this was that at a time when non-smoking was increasingly the rule in Unilever offices, Bob, as an unreformed smoker, had a bold sign on the table facing the visitor just inside his own office door reading "THIS IS A SMOKING ZONE".

Such frequently justified suspicion of the dangers of bureaucracy was perhaps one of the reasons why, although being an active and popular player in various professional bodies such as the MRS, AURA and ESOMAR, Bob usually appeared reluctant to run for office in them. However this in no way detracts from the importance of his contributions to the market research world internationally where he will be remembered with great affection and respect.

Throughout his career Bob was strongly supported by Mary, whom he married in 1955. Being the wife of a researcher, particularly one who spends much time working abroad, calls for adaptability and patience: the fact that Mary had originally trained as a nurse was also of great help when Bob started to suffer from ill-health in recent years, especially during his final illness. The sincere sympathy of all those who knew Bob will go to Mary and their family, and his death leaves a sad gap in all our lives.

# VIRGINIA VALENTINE 1939-2010

Compiled by Nick Tanner from articles by Malcolm Evans, Wendy Gordon and Brian Tarran

Virginia Valentine, who died of cancer at her home in Norfolk on 30th November 2010, was a much loved and highly respected semiotician, widely recognised as the person who introduced semiotics to the UK market research industry back in the 1980s.



In 2007 she joined Truth, the strategic insight consultancy founded by Andy Dexter, to work as a creative partner. Dexter said: "Ginny was one of a handful of genuine research revolutionaries—and as a person, she was one of a kind. She had a rare combination of intellectual rigour, absolute disregard for conventional wisdom, and a great sense of humour. She

Ginny was nominated for and won numerous awards from the MRS during her career, including Best Methodological Paper in 1984, Best Presented Paper in 1989, Best Conference Paper in 1995 and Best New Thinking in 2000 and 2001. She was a Fellow of the MRS and a member of the Research Network.

Having studied at the Royal Academy for Dramatic Arts (RADA), Ginny Valentine eventually joined an advertising agency to supplement the meagre and intermittent earnings offered by the theatre. She was recruited by Wendy Gordon to the Research Business in the mid-1980s and they formed Trigger, described by Wendy as "her first effort, with willing acolytes to carry out her experiments, to apply the principles of semiotics to qualitative research through the use of innovative and deconstructed stimulus material."

In 1988 she and her husband Monty Alexander (Obituary, *Newsletter*, Summer 2008) set up Semiotic Solutions, a company created to provide semiotic analysis and training and to advance technical development.

Inspired by a course on the analysis of folk tales at North London Polytechnic (where she completed an English degree) and by the ferment in critical theory at that time, Ginny put together a mix of techniques adapted from Barthes (cultural meanings and codes), Propp (structure of narrative) and Claude Levi-Strauss (cultural contradictions and myth)—the latter inspiring her 'myth quadrants', a hallmark of the Valentine approach to analysing brand communications. Many of today's best known commercial semioticians, within UK and globally, learned or refined their skills under Ginny's tutelage. The methodology she developed at Semiotic Solutions became the basis of a commercial approach widely applied in the UK through the 1990s and now internationally.

was a great friend and supporter of Truth—in every sense of the word. It was a pleasure to know her and work with her, and we'll miss her."

Speaking in 2007 at the MRS annual conference, Ginny remarked how there was "some serious acknowledgement and admiration for the power and value of semiotics—coupled with an intense frustration at the complexity of the theory that provides the value and the power". The uncompromising complexity of her discourse in client meetings could occasionally be similarly frustrating but John Cassidy (CEO of The Big Picture) recalls with affection a semiotic debrief for Ambrosia where Ginny started by talking the assembled client and agency group through what she called "the cosmic landscape of rice-puddingness".

Her erstwhile colleague Malcolm Evans, writing in the online publication *Semionaut* a day or two after her death, offered the following thought:

"It is fervently to be hoped—though Ginny as a deeply humanitarian materialist thinker, in the best philosophical sense, would have seriously doubted it (no gurgled luvvie New Age postmodern fantasist she)—that somewhere exists a cosmic landscape of ambrosial and sensorially transcendent aperitif-ness in which Ginny and Monty, rapt in each other's company, are enjoying again the first of the day. With the sun just barely touching the yardarm."

***The following is taken from an address given at Ginny's funeral by her close friend and colleague Gill Ereaut:***

Ginny's intellect, creativity and tenacity are all well documented now in various obituaries. But for those here today who don't know the industry in which she operated, be in no doubt about her significance. She single-handedly changed a whole industry, being a

thorn in the side of the establishment, but going on to commit huge amounts of time and energy to that industry, changing it for ever from the inside. She changed the lives and fortunes of people - individual colleagues and clients—as well as whole brands and businesses. She mattered. She was Market Research royalty. It was a privilege to work close to her, to be at court.

Gin always gave people credit, carefully acknowledged any contribution, and listened. She expected everyone (until proved beyond all doubt otherwise, when she could be hilariously scathing) to have knowledge and intelligence. Clients didn't know whether to be flattered, baffled or scared by these high expectations—often they were all of those. At least one client knew her internally as 'Mad Ginny'—but kept coming back for more. The quality and originality of her thinking could not be bettered.

And watching her interview groups of 'ordinary' people (part of her work rarely talked about) was a lesson in what you get if you have high expectations and make no pre-judgements. Teenagers on Peperami, young mums on supermarket shopping, middle-aged men on Quality Street—all treated as

valued experts, all listened to carefully. All responding richly to that laser-beam attention, that beady eye, that Ginny magic. People rewarded her with deep insights—given, shared, not extracted.

Finally, I must mention the strength of the bonds she made. We worked together, but she was my mentor, inspiration, supporter, co-conspirator and dear, dear friend. When we first met in the early 80's we fought for two weeks, then we wrote a cracking conference paper (her first award winner of many), and went on to work together for something like 27 years.

I cannot really express the power of the combination of professional respect, personal affection and loyalty that characterised so many of her work relationships. To have been called "babe" and "doll" by Ginny, as well as having created work we were both proud of, is very precious to me, and I know many here share that.

She was fierce and fearless, infuriating and inspiring, funny and profound; one of the most remarkable and important people in my life. A beloved friend and unique presence and life force. To our life changing, life enhancing Ginny—thanks babe.



## STEERING GROUP

**T**he Research Network is directed by a Steering Group consisting at present of Nigel Spackman (Chairman), Jane Bain, Jane Gwilliam (Events Organisers), Linda Henshall (Relations with other MR bodies), Gill Wareing (Secretary-Treasurer) Tom Punt (Webmaster and *Newsletter* Editorial Advisor), Nick Tanner (Editor *Newsletter*) and Frank Winter (Data Protection and other regulatory matters). Their names, addresses, phone and email details are in the Members List. Please feel free to contact any member of the Steering Group on matters relevant to the areas they cover.