

ACCIDENTAL COLLISIONS: A PERSONAL MEMOIR

SALLY CHILVER

Transcribed and edited by
Mitzi Goheen and Eugenia Shanklin

Early Life

I was born in Turkey, at an inconvenient moment—the day before the First World War broke out (3 August 1914); we had to get out and were whisked off to Alexandria. From there my mother made her way to England, to Cornwall, where her parents had retired. We must have seemed an extraordinary party, including Louisa, a Greek nurse, and David, an Armenian manservant belonging to my father, whose life could have been in danger had he stayed; neither Louisa nor David had a word of English. The lonely David apparently did nothing but moon up and down the cliffs so it was naturally suspected that he was summoning German submarines.

My mother's name was Millicent Gilchrist; had she not been born in the Levant, she could probably have become a renowned pianist. She was the daughter of a Scottish entrepreneur, Gavin Gilchrist. He and his family had wandered out from Clydeside and dealt in port services in the wake of the British Navy and merchant marine, branching out into other businesses along the sea routes. A few ended up in Australia.

My mother married quite late, and mine was a difficult birth for her; soon after, she and my father were parted by the war for about four years. That may account for my being an only child.

We stayed in Cornwall until the war was over. My first memories are from there, the very hard winter of 1917, when the local canal iced over, and of my grandfather's death, which was puzzling to me.

After the war, my father fetched us all back to Turkey and we stayed there in a huge Gilchrist house, called Ranfurly, for three years. Then we became refugees once again during the Graeco-Turkish war; we found ourselves in Athens, escaping on a crowded Romanian boat, being deloused in an American Red Cross camp, kindly treated and fed till we found a hotel.

My father, Philip Perceval Graves, was then a foreign correspondent for *The Times*. During the war he had got involved with T. E. Lawrence in the Arab Bureau and Revolt. He was an Arabic and Turkish speaker, and was travelling around the Middle East, Balkans and Mediterranean when I was a child.

My father's people say they started off as colonists in Ireland, no doubt Protestant exploiters, but some later became Home Rulers and identified with Irish causes. The name is English and quite common. There is much family mythification—anyway, the younger sons went into clerical and professional occupations and their names are found in the records of Trinity College, Dublin, by the eighteenth century. One of them founded a historical society and another, my great-grandfather, was a don at TCD, a mathematician, historian and Irish bishop. His brother, though, was professor of law at the 'Godless College', University College, London, as well as an algebraist.

The Anglo-Irish clergy were parasitic on the community, of course. Some were given little parishes to look after, sinecures, so they had enough leisure to engage in studies of Gaelic and Irish folklore and to think about higher mathematics. Poor but privileged, three became Fellows of the Royal Society. One wonders how these clerics, with their very small incomes, managed to raise huge families.

My paternal great-grandfather, the Bishop, had nine surviving children; my grandfather ten, by two wives. He was a civil servant, educationist and folklorist. I haven't mentioned the women; my remarkable aunts and great-aunts, some eccentric, none idle. One of my great-aunts was nicknamed 'the Plague of Bishops' and two married naval men who became admirals. All my father's sisters married, except one. By some curious set of accidents quite a few of his family also gravitated to the Levant too.

Early Influences

After the Greco-Turkish war, when I was eight, we returned from Greece to England; first to Cornwall, where my maternal grandmother lived, then to London. Things were uncertain for a while at *The Times*, with changes of ownership, but then my father's fortunes improved. In Cornwall, I can't

remember why, I had a very patient Swiss governess for a time before going to a local school. When we returned to London; I went to a good girls' day school (which my parents could then afford) but with absolutely no science except for what one picked up in Geography lessons.

From the day school in London, at the age of around thirteen, I went to a boarding school called Benenden, getting an assisted place after passing an exam. It was a single-sex school, modelled on the boys' public schools, with the senior girls maintaining order—but no chastisements, of course. We were taught Latin and I could have done the sciences, but it was too late to start me off. It was a good school, then fairly spartan.

If you put large numbers of adolescents together they can be horrible to one another. When I was thirteen I was the height I am now, so I was known as the giraffe. I had my share of teasing until I got old enough to do the teasing myself. Eventually, I found my clique; it was a threesome. We excavated a cave in a hillside, used to go and live there, seeking privacy. These were called 'buggies'—hideouts where you could smoke (though we didn't), read illicit books, or have the kind of conversation that in the pupils' common room might make you seem conceited. 'Showing off' was discouraged.

The teaching at school was certainly good; they were all women teachers except for visiting ones, and there was an excellent reference library full of encyclopaedias. The art teaching was splendid; and very broad or contentious subjects were freely discussed in class.

I got into Somerville College, Oxford, but was a bit too young to attend, so I went to art school for a year. I was told there that I had absolutely no talent: quite right too. I was interested in joining the university—to meet more boys, I expect, or anyway more people.

Somerville, Oxford

Somerville was a really remarkable place: there was privacy, the company of young persons and a staff full of characters. I changed from English to History. One of my tutors was the exacting Maud Clarke: no unsupported generalities were allowed. We were to choose a special subject and periods, and I chose the end of the Roman Empire and what was known as 'St Augustine and his age', so I mixed a bit with archaeologists and later classicists. I went for some tutorials to Magdalen, to a famous man named Stevens who was known as 'Tom Brown'. He used to say 'Come at 9.30; you can make breakfast and clean out the bird cage'. Then, after the essay, he would tell me what he had been working on, or whatever issue occurred to him that day. I was also taught by Goronwy Edwards, a famous medievalist; I suppose that was when I got a taste for thinking about taxation and tolls. It was then that I met Richard Chilver, who helped me with the Greek

sources for my special period and even compiled a crib of a difficult author for me.

Somerville was an experience for most people because of the teaching and the conversation, and because of the other things you could find in undergraduate societies. There was a medieval history society, and various people from all over England came and talked to it. Or you could go and draw at the Ruskin School of Art, or ride, which I enjoyed, or argue at literary and political clubs. I belonged to the Irish Society, which was constantly in a state of whiskified disarray. It was at the time of the Irish Blue Shirts on Franco's side, and the Spanish Civil War was going on, so the meetings were divided and contentious.

I skimmed my work except for the bits I liked most; politics were to the fore and I was temporarily converted to Marxism by a fellow historian, so I joined all the hands-off groups, accompanied hunger marches and so on—a fairly typical left-wing groupie of the early thirties.

We visited a very intellectual group of striking miners in Wales, were lectured to by radical trades unionists, and went to various rallies. There was much conscience-searching. I recall being accused of being an 'incurable Social Democrat', at heart a bourgeois.

1935: Travel and Scribbling

I went down from Somerville in 1935 and then went on holiday with my mother. We were in Germany having a look at the Nazis; she thought I'd better go and look up my German step-relatives before the war she predicted broke out. We were in Berchtesgaden when my mother was bitten by some poisonous insect; she got rapid general septicaemia and died in a matter of days.

After that, I looked after my father for a few months; then I went off in the winter of 1935 on a tour to the Middle East and Bulgaria, just as people go to Nepal nowadays. My father arranged a few odd writing jobs for me, and I met him in Cairo where he was covering a conference. From there I went to Beersheba in a tiny plane and then to Jerusalem, where I had an aunt in broadcasting. At that time, there were some fascinating people about in Jerusalem like Tommy Hodgkin, then in the Palestine Service and later a radical African historian, and George Antonius (who wrote *The Arab Awakening*), also a member of the Colonial Service.

So I pottered about, looking at lots of places, keeping my father informed and sending the odd report on casualties in the troubles. Then I went up to Lebanon, where I fell in with some interesting francophone Arab intellectuals; on to Damascus, via Druze country (the country of the Assassins), and back by bus. At the Sea of Galilee I was laid low by some

stomach bug (a bout of amoebic dysentery) but was picked up and conveyed back to Jerusalem.

Back in Cairo was a very charming female first cousin who was a leader of the bright young things there. So I met her friends, including a young Hussar officer, Sean Hackett, who became head of British forces in Germany. He had joined the army, he said, because it gives one leisure for other pursuits, in his case the study of the Crusaders' castles. It was very odd to meet him again, many years later, as Principal of King's College London.

Then I met up again with my father. From Turkey, I went with him to Bulgaria. Somewhere in Bulgaria we were going along in a train when suddenly we stopped in the middle of a field. There were always coups and things going on, so we had no idea what was to happen, but a ladder was put against the door of our carriage and in came a man with six fingers on each hand. He announced, 'His Majesty is awaiting you at the bottom of the ladder'. The king was a butterfly collector, as my father was, so we were literally kidnapped off the train, which the king had been driving—a hobby of his.

We stayed for a few days at the king's dacha in the Rylo mountains and went butterfly collecting with him. When I came back to London I did some more freelancing and looked after my father for over a year. Then he re-met a widowed cousin whom he eventually married. So everybody was happy—and it meant that I could get married too, which I did in 1937. Kitty, my stepmother, was the nicest of persons. She brought her small son, George, whom my father adopted as his own: that made him very pleased. They eventually retired to Ireland, via Hampshire, after George had finished at Eton and gone to Trinity College Dublin.

My father resumed his Irish identity, was elected to the Irish Academy and took an interest in Cork University. Kitty, incapable of being idle, turned the house into a hotel and now George and Christiane, his French wife, manage it.

My father died in the early fifties. He was a funny chap, you could never tell what his politics were going to be. He objected to the gerryman-dering that went on in Ulster politics in the twenties and wrote about it in *The Times*. That earned him quite a few enemies. Persecution of any kind enraged him. When he went to India to report on constitutional changes, it was Ambedkar, leader of the so-called Scheduled Castes, who earned his greatest admiration.

He has a niche in history because he discovered that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a fraud, a plagiarized version of a pamphlet on another topic. You remember that antisemitic document that was widely circulated? When he died, his longest obit was in the *Jewish Chronicle*. There was a nice piece in *History Today* by the historian Christopher Sykes, all about this curious episode. He is buried at Bantry. The funeral was a great show with a mile-long procession on foot following the horse-drawn hearse.

At that time, I was writing reviews for odd journals and even thinking I was going to be a poet. It never occurred to me that academia was where I wanted to be—people didn't have to do Ph.Ds in those days. Once I got interested in French revolutionary thinkers and considered a thesis on Louis Blanc—thank God I didn't do it. Scribbling had started at Oxford. In those days there was a women's college magazine, which my friends thought was too chiffony, so we started up a short-lived rival, mildly feminist, called *Lysistrata*. We wrote to Virginia Woolf to ask her if she would like to write an introduction to the first number. She wrote back agreeing and then asked me to see her. After that I became an occasional visitor. I was asked to the house when a representative of 'the young' was needed and encouraged to air opinions.

She was rather beautiful and grand, sometimes scathing, very witty, but also very patient with 'the young' as she called us. Her husband was absolutely saintly. I started writing my first book, *A History of Socialism*, after Leonard Woolf said 'We need a general book, not a history of the Labour Party.' That book went through one or two editions: it is on the scrapheap now. I sat in the British Museum Reading Room writing it for a long time. I've lost my copy. I think I'd be rather ashamed of it now.

1937: Marriage

Richard and I had a very formal wedding at St Mark's, North Audley Street; it was between Richard's home and mine. I was dolled up all proper, with bridesmaids. Both are dead now. Many diplomats and other people came to please my father. And of course the press turned up.

Afterwards, Richard and I went back to a New Forest cottage in which we had already been spending weekends together, but none of this, of course, was known to my father. I remember that as we were leaving, Father—trying to think of something to say—leant over the car and told Richard to be sure he had 'sufficient petroleum'.

Richard and I remained married until he died in 1985. He was in the Civil Service, a career civil servant, but could have been a cabinet maker or potter had he so chosen. He had been a classical scholar and in the Service, he went quite high up, second from the top of a ministry; he was rather uncompromising and said what he thought to ministers, but some liked him. The Chilvers came originally from East Anglia, real English. Richard inherited some very heavy mahogany furniture and a water-colour of a family parsonage set among cows. His father was a solicitor. That, perhaps, gives the background. After that, I was busy setting up a flat and I kept on working at journalistic oddments.

The Second World War

Shortly after the war broke out in 1939 I was asked to present myself to the civil service establishment officers and allocated to a civil service job. I went first into the new Ministry of Economic Warfare; my bit, called Neutral Trade Intelligence, handled what were called Navicerts (to do with the blockade of Germany), which involved reading up on the economies of neutral countries so that they got what was necessary but not a surplus of, say, iron and steel, or even boots, to pass on to Germany. Information also came from anti-Nazi volunteers, railwaymen and telephone operators for instance, who must have taken great risks.

Then, having been noticed by an old friend of Father's who was finding people for a new secretariat section in the War Cabinet Office, I was transferred. That was where I worked on supplies to and from the overseas territories of Belgium and France.

That was the first time I learned about the French Cameroons—the need for things like the various kinds of cotton prints which supposedly encouraged 'the natives' to produce cash crops, for machetes and spare parts. I sent to the Naval Intelligence people for books about all these places: the Belgian Congo, Madagascar, French West and Equatorial Africa. I was, at the same time, working with the Free French forces and civilians concerned about their colonies. At the end of the war and after the liberation of Europe, I went back to journalism for a bit, this time employed by Daily News Ltd., until I was willingly lured back into the Civil Service as a temporary officer in the Colonial Office.

Colonial Office, 1947

The Colonial Office was a rather intellectual establishment in the old-fashioned way that Oxbridge is supposed to be in detective stories. My superiors were a scholarly lot and keen that younger administrators should know what they were talking about. Shop was talked, books lent, exercises set; there was an excellent library. So I was prepared for academic life to some extent. I became, in time, secretary of the Colonial Social Science Research Council, an advisory body which supervised research plans. This meant that one met many academic characters, such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Daryll Forde, Raymond Firth, Audrey Richards, and Margery Perham, and had to follow their arguments. The Colonial Office, seeing that I was genuinely interested in what they were saying, told me I could go to evening classes and lectures at the London School of Economics. Here I was put in the charge of Lucy Mair. So I went to the LSE, in the evenings, heard lectures by Edmund Leach and the fatherly Isaac Schapera, attended seminars and wrote papers. There were other people about, too. Maurice

Freedman was there, and I became great friends with Audrey Richards and Lucy Mair. They couldn't stand each other, those two; it was a well-known aversion.

Part of the research effort of the Colonial Office was connected with the great effort to establish local universities and provide them with teaching materials. I wasn't much involved in the politics of the decolonization process, but the Council was feeding research into it and setting up local research institutes. So you might say it was rather like both writing a Doomsday book and preparing university-educated elites. I wrote a memory piece about it for an LSE seminar which was published with others in *Anthropological Forum* in 1977. A good part of the job was getting the funds for the research institutes and individual projects through the Treasury. The research people engaged included ex-service men like Jack Goody, Paul Baxter and Mike Smith, as well as more recent graduates. A fair number of Americans were recruited too.

I first met the Australian Phyllis Kaberry in 1951 while I was at the Colonial Office, when she had completed the first draft of her *Women of the Grassfields*. One of my tasks was to get field reports into a publishable state; so I rang her up to ask her to come over and vet layout changes I had made and agree on illustrations. At much the same time I made friends with an American Fulbright Fellow, a fiery spirit named Ruth Landes, who had worked on the Ojibwa and in Brazil and was studying race relations in the UK. She introduced me to the classic American anthropological literature of the time. Both she and Phyllis were in and out of our house. Between them they improved my education. I was also sent on conference and business trips to Uganda, Kenya and to Nigeria, and, at the invitation of the Carnegie Dominions and Colonies Fund, to the USA to learn what was going on in American universities—in African studies in particular. There were also arrangements with French and Belgian official bodies for exchanges of information on research. Well, I was getting tired of being a reporter of other people's work and beginning to feel ashamed of dealing with the needs of institutions or regions without first-hand experience.

By 1957 I had been invited to come to Oxford to the Institute of Colonial Studies, which became Commonwealth Studies. The Colonial Service, then being indigenized, were trained here and at other universities. The task was to organize courses and research seminars for them. It was both a winding down and a winding up, in which the civil services of the newly independent countries were to be offered transitional opportunities for training and, later, attachments for special study. At the same time a merger with Queen Elizabeth House, which was to become the University's centre for all manner of development studies, was carried through.

Phyllis had already been planning to return to the Grassfields, Nso' in particular, and suggested I should join her during the long vacation, which was now possible. I had it in mind to make a documentary study of the archives of the three divisions and to try and observe local reactions to the

very rapid changes in the style of imperial rule taking place—on paper, at all events.

Cameroon

The first time I went out was for a mere two months in 1958. On that first field trip Phyllis was getting back into Nso' and had gone out earlier. I went by air to Kano, Lagos, hedge-hopping to Tiko airfield. A kind friend at UAC (United Africa Company) had arranged a lift to Bamenda for me.

The quickest route was through the French side; and somewhere near Babadju, we skidded off the road and were rescued by a French junior officer in a kepi, with much whistle-blowing and shouting. He, with his comfortable wife, gave us tea. This trivial incident remains in my mind because I was struck by the difference of style—the Frenchman more authoritarian, more demonstrative and more at home, in a more modest house, right next to a school, than his British counterpart. His wife was making a pastry. It was an unpretentious domestic scene.

In 1958, and later, there was a certain feeling that great transformations were at hand—all children would go to school, hospitals would be free, a lot of cargo would appear, etc. This applied mainly, of course, to young educated males, but it provoked a sort of reaction too that the past would be forgotten, and we were asked to record it. At one point we found a barricade across the road, surrounded by men who insisted that we turn off to visit Bamessing to 'take history'.

There were other effervescences, such as *anlu*,¹ directed as much against some of the new elite as the retreating colonial power, while old quarrels were revived and argued in the courts. We were classified as historians. In schools, the desire for local history, written down, arose at the same time as the call for independence—I mean the notion of the history of small groups, which had already been encouraged by the Colonial Education Department—going to a village on the spot and not doing it from the documents. So far as I was concerned, 'oral history', to start with, was less important than trying to understand resistances and accommodations to German and British imperial rule and the interpretations put on them by both parties.

In Bamenda, after I had explained my project to the District Officer, I was given complete *carte blanche* to look over the files, other than those in current use, and even encouraged to take away as many as could be fitted into Phyllis's Land Rover. We went to Nso' loaded to the brim with files. In Nso' I soon found myself locally involved—with Phyllis's induction as

1. The so-called women's revolt; see e.g. Ardener 1975.

Yaa woo kov (titular Queen Mother) and the preparations for it, with streams of visitors and the activities of the newly formed Nso' History Society. The *Ndzëëndzëv* dispute was on, too.² I was another pair of ears for the contestants. We stayed in the Basel Mission Rest House, to which many people came, quite a few with letters to be written. Fon Sembum III himself came secretly after nightfall, often depressed and worried (and often rightly), with his exhausted attendants, who curled up and slept on the floor. In addition to the office files I was working on, we set to work on the Nso' tax records and the arrangements behind them, which, so far as I was concerned, led me into a more detailed inquiry into how accommodations were made to colonial demands as well as providing a social geography of Nso'. When I got back, I tried a first draft on an Oxford seminar, and then Phyllis and I pared it down for publication in *Africa*.

Next time (1960), I went out for longer, to finish the colonial administration job, start on the Bali chiefdom, and visit areas in divisions other than the southernmost Bamenda Division. By this time Edwin and Shirley Ardener were creating the Archives at Buea, so it was possible to start work there, and fill in gaps. Buea was beautiful and damp—I recall opening a cupboard to discover that the pretty print dresses I had brought out were covered with mould.

This time Phyllis collected me, and we drove up via Kumba and the Mamfe road, crossing the iron bridge built by the British during the First World War, with hippos and crocs below, and inching round the hairpin bends on the Widekum–Bali stretch. Again, there was no difficulty in getting access to files, this time to the more detailed Native Authority files. I got through a vast number by reading them into a tape recorder whenever possible. From Bamenda we made a joint visit to Bafut and Bafreng, then Phyllis dropped me off at Mankon and went off to Nso' and Bamunka. Later, I was picked up again, went to Nso' and from there visited Ndu, Mbot, Ntem, and the Nkambe archives, and we went for a stay in Bum, an astonishing place. By this time I was collecting material everywhere on pre- and early-colonial regional trade and gift-exchange. Finally I was dropped off at Bali-Nyonga where Phyllis later joined me, and there made a start, with great help from Mfon Galega II. It's a cosmopolitan place, where everybody, almost, claimed to originate from somewhere else, and where there were some nonagenarians who had known the explorer Zintgraff. It was in that year too that we went to Belo to stay with the hospitable Schneiders and visited Laikom, where Gil Schneider arranged for us to be shown the royal statue that later became known as the Afo-a-Kom. By this time, of course, we had given up the idea of monographic studies—of Nso' and Bali, say—for a more regional survey approach, though as yet without much in the way of linguistic clues to guide us.

2. This was a dispute about the occupancy of the position of *Ndzëëndzëv*, the purported Nso' 'kingmaker'.

By the end of 1961 I had completed the Oxford task and moved back to London, where Kenneth Robinson kindly gave me an attachment as Research Fellow to the London Institute of Commonwealth Studies. This was ideal for preparation for the next trip with Phyllis. I learnt some linguistics at SOAS, read and re-read the German and French materials, what missionary material I could lay hands on, and tooth-combed Phyllis's and my notes. By this time too we were in touch with Claude Tardits and exchanging information.

We were back in 1963 for a longer period, in a now independent and federal Cameroon, revisiting some areas and making a foray into the Wum Division, including Kom. We went out by ship, with a Land Rover and a full kit. By this time, of course, we had come to know the ministers then in power and were given all necessary help, even being helpfully met at the docks by Mr Lafon (Faay Lii Wong) of Nso' and Mr Daiga of Bali. Mr Jua's help in Kom was essential and we were exceedingly lucky in our interpreter, E. K. Fombang, who had excellent English, as you can see from the vocabulary I collected from him. His father, a son of Foyn Yu, was enormously bright and wise and enjoyed teasing us. His son saw to it that we made no mistakes in etiquette. We visited Mme, Funggom and Bunaki, and I had a useful stint in the Wum archives. There had been various other strokes of luck. In London I had met two students to whom I owed introductions to Ku (Meta') and Bali-Gham, and on my return to Bali-Nyonga I found myself assigned to the care of the stately Do Paul Tita Sikod, a member of the customary court, in whose quarter I lived, and when he was busy I had other excellent helpers. I was allowed to join a local society and so became familiar to people. The language of Bali, Munggaka, is comparatively easy. I had a smattering of it, and when I attempted to say anything this was fun for everybody. 'You are speaking Church Bali,' they said.

I am making this survey job sound like a success story—there were hold-ups, failures and car troubles. Whole areas remained unvisited—Esu was being covered by the Ardeners, but more time should have been spent in Funggom and Wum. I wish Igor Kopytoff could have stayed in Wum longer and unravelled it further before getting ill. We got very little in Babungo—except charter-myths over and over again but now we have Ian Fowler's thesis. Practically nothing was done on the Yamba, but now Father Gufler is there, so look out for his work in *Anthropos* (1995, 1996).³ And also, there were distractions from what we were supposed to be at—a reconstructive survey of political systems and their adaptations under colonial rule. There were the farmer-grazier conflicts; the creeping changes in land tenure; the helter-skelter attempt at the introduction of Local Government, British style (a chapter since forgotten); the persistence of old quarrels now recorded in the local press; the seductions of ministerial office—let alone *anlu*. Since the survey was done—with few resources—

3. See also the article by Gufler below, pp. 43–67.

there have, of course, been major monographic studies and specialized papers. You have to think of *Traditional Bamenda* as something on the lines of the International Africa Institute Ethnographic Surveys, what Audrey Richards gaily called 'hoovering over the top'. One would rewrite it from start to finish now.

Mostly I walked everywhere. Phyllis used to drop me and basic kit in the Land Rover and then come back and pick me up and move me somewhere else, like a cat with kittens.

We came back by boat to Liverpool. I was as thin as a rake, having acquired an interesting parasite. At the Tropical Diseases Hospital, I luckily fell into the hands of an Indian registrar who had written a thesis on it; he was delighted to meet it again. I found it very hard to adjust for a while. I started trying to make a first draft of the survey, surrounded by notebooks, earlier summaries, tapes and cups of tea; Phyllis was to edit, revise and add to it, and I compiled a report for the Bali History Committee, corresponded with its members and sent them bits to comment on.

Post-Cameroon

Quite early on in 1964, to my surprise, I was invited to meet the Council of Bedford College (London University). They asked me for a c.v. and after that asked me formally if I would accept the post of principal. I don't know in the least who suggested me. It had just become a mixed college—the statutes had been changed—in so far as the student body was concerned, after having been a pioneer in women's higher education in this country, starting in 1849, giving its own diplomas. It took a long time for women to be admitted to degrees—that honour goes to Trinity College, Dublin. But the faculty had always been mixed at Bedford College.

Why did I accept the offer? Well, it was an honour, and I had no professional qualifications as either an ethno- or a grapho-historian—had not undergone any of the *rites de passage* in the proper way. My career, such as it was, had been more administrative than academic. I kept running away from the desk but I earned my living as an administrator. This was an administrative job and I was lucky in having very good staff to work with, as well as some very remarkable academic colleagues. The London colleges are of various shapes and sizes. This was a complete little campus with over 2,000 students. So there was everything to do from finding rugby pitches to places for electron microscopes, and a good deal of scope.

We had some excitements in 1968. They say 'revolutions start in the Department of Philosophy.' But it didn't last very long, as demands for student representation were easily met. When you are in this sort of job, you are a sitting duck to be put on government committees in addition to university ones, and some were very interesting indeed. One—a Royal

Commission—took me to Turkey, Israel and Malta, another to Moscow. There was also an enjoyable stint as a trustee of the British Museum.

After seven years I moved, in 1971, to Oxford to be Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, then still a wholly women's college—a very different scene and in a way more alarming. The University's system of government has been described as an ordered anarchy—a rather ritualized one in some ways. It works because of an invisible administration, ease of personal contact, and a good deal of devotion to duty. Before long, there were mounting pressures for colleges to 'go mixed', the men's colleges leading the way. Given the structure of the University, 'going mixed' meant co-residence and the introduction of men Fellows in women's colleges and vice versa in men's. There were other means of 'going mixed' which were never seriously considered, since collegiate identities were far too strong. And once the determination of some of the men's colleges to admit women and make at least a few elections of women to Fellowships was clear and presented on liberal grounds, some of the women's colleges began, one by one, to follow suit. 'Going mixed' was seen as the progressive, politically correct thing. It was a strong, if confused current, welcome to most undergraduates as emancipatory.

Once Lady Margaret Hall had voted for co-residence a new face was needed, and anyway I was 65, time to retire. Towards the end of my time, in 1979, we had our centenary, a great show with fireworks and music. By this time I had bought this little house to escape to with my files. So now I was backwards and forwards to London. But Phyllis had died in 1977 after a series of depressing illnesses from about 1973 on—it was a stroke. Mike Rowlands was her executor. Boxes of her Cameroon papers arrived—she had left them to the LSE, or rather to the British Library of Political and Economic Science within it. David Price, then a postgraduate student at the Institute of Social Anthropology, was installed in the attic and showed marvellous talents as an archivist. The papers—fieldnotes and correspondence—are now at the LSE and usable, but the tapes, alas, have perished.

Her death was a blow. I have, off and on, been transcribing and indexing some of her notes, and mine, for her benefit: sometimes combining them into topical sets to work on jointly as well as for use in the network of exchanges she had begun, both with Cameroon students and others. I temporarily inherited this informal network; but now it has greatly expanded following the CNRS conference on history and ethnology in Cameroon organized by Claude Tardits in 1973, Warnier's initiative in 1978 and the new approaches from Leiden and the USA, but also because of initiatives from inside Cameroon itself and its diaspora.

After Richard's death in 1985 I sold the London flat and moved my working books and papers to Oxford. I'm still sorting them here. I don't see myself writing my own Grassfield pieces. If I were thirty years younger now, what would I have done? I would have liked then to work more on Nso' or rather on Mbiame, Nkar, Nsë and the Noni chiefdoms, especially Nkor, a trade-centre, and then on to the northern and north-western sur-

rounding areas, and at the same time on the interesting disturbances, rebellions and alignments created by the entry of the missions. We were only too aware that we were 'hoovering over the top', doing a kind of handing-over job for others to take up. Still, there would have been masses of other projects to consider. There are still huge holes in that Grassfields map with its accidental frontiers—Dumbo, Misaje, Mbembe, Esimbi, northern Fungom, the Mashi-Furu-Nser area up to the Katsena, for example, and the northern escarpment area and immediate 'overside'. Very stout boots are needed still, I gather. But I'll interject here that apart from the Banyang, the 'overside' area north of the Cross is, I think, a virtual blank in the literature as yet, apart from administrative reports. So there is still room for new studies. Yes, even in get-at-able parts of the Ndop Plain, as well as revisits to places for which there are older studies—for example, Nsei, studied by Agathe Schmidt in the thirties. The wealth of cosmological material to be found 'off the road' is surely shown by Viviane Baeke's work on the Wuli of Mfumte,⁴ and for some unexpected findings see Bertrand Masquelier's remarkable work on a Metchum valley polity.

But this is not to deny for an instant the need for problem-oriented work or re-studies at intervals in areas about which a good deal is already known, or, say, of comparative studies of marriage or mortuary rituals, with some time depth.

I am conscious of being stuck in the early sixties. But Cameroonian colleagues remain interested, indeed almost fixated on that period, one in which the options before them were essentially dictated from outside.

I think if we were starting again I would be less surprised than I was at first by the varying interpretations of institutions and events we received, sometimes from the same person, and the difference between what is supposed to happen and what actually does happen on a particular occasion. One soon recognizes the clichés, including one's own.

I don't think I shall be writing anything new on local history. All the main points I would wish to illustrate about oral history have been made by David Henige and illustrated in Ranger and Hobsbawm's collection and in Jan Vansina's revised book. Of course, I remain interested in who is 'making the history' now. One should be reading the plays, novels and novelettes, too, to pick up the current clichés of the neo-traditional revival, and the local newspapers. The feedback loops are more complicated than ever.

4. See also her article below in this issue, pp. 21–41.

REFERENCES

Note: Works by Sally Chilver are to be found listed in her bibliography presented on pp. 111–117 below.

- ARDENER, SHIRLEY 1975. 'Sexual Insult and Female Militancy', in Shirley Ardener (ed.), *Perceiving Women*, London: Malaby Press, pp. 29–53.
- GUFLER, HERMANN 1995. 'Yamba Marriage Systems: Spouses and their Offspring between Protection and Affliction', *Anthropos*, Vol. XC, pp. 89–108.
- . . . 1996. 'Yamba Twin Ritual', *Anthropos*, Vol. XCI, pp. 33–51.
- HENIGE, DAVID 1982. *Oral historiography*, London: Longman.
- MASQUELIER, B. M. 1978. Structure and Process of Political Identity: Ide, a Polity of the Metchum Valley (Cameroon), University of Pennsylvania: Ph. D. dissertation.
- SCHMIDT, AGATHE 1951. 'Some Notes on the Influence of Religion on Economics in a Tikar Subtribe, West Africa', *African Studies*, Vol. X, no. 3, pp. 13–26.
- . . . 1955. 'The Water of Life', *African Studies*, Vol. XIV, no. 1, pp. 23–8.
- RANGER, TERENCE 1983. 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 211–62.
- TARDITS, CLAUDE (ed.) 1981. *Contribution de la recherche ethnologique à l'histoire des civilisations du Cameroun*, Paris: CNRS.
- VANSINA, JAN 1985. *Oral tradition as history*, London: J. Currey.
- WARNIER, JEAN-PAUL 1985. *Échanges, développement et hiérarchies dans le Bamenda pré-colonial (Cameroun)*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.