



Charlotte Waterlow, MBE, 1915-2011 - Personal Recollections

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Many Network members will have experienced an existential crisis, a time when you realise that neither conventional religion nor reductionist science makes sense of life. Mine started when I was a Neurochemistry research student in the 1970s. I left Neurochemistry and worked in Environmental Science and blues singing....then I married an academic and moved to Cambridge, but the existential crisis went with me. I was lucky enough to meet a young Bernard Carr at dinner at Trinity College and discovered that serious physicists could look seriously at paranormal phenomena! My husband joined the staff at Surrey University in 1981 and we moved to Peperharow Road, Godalming (the street where Aldous Huxley was born). It was my privilege to meet the retiring Vice Chancellor of Surrey University, Peter Leggett, who became over the years a dear friend and mentor. He introduced me to the Network and 'fast tracked' me on to the Council to take his place when he retired. He also introduced me to Charlotte Waterlow.

Charlotte lived in a ground floor flat in Peperharow Road. I had noticed her for years before I formally met her. She was very short. She looked as if she bought her clothes at jumble sales, and probably did. But she had the most beautiful face with the palest of blue eyes and silver hair and lines of intelligence, wisdom and humour. I knew she must be a fascinating person and she certainly was. Her father, Sir Sydney Waterlow, was a member of the Bloomsbury Set and had once proposed marriage to Virginia Woolf (she wrote him a letter, turning him down, which Charlotte and her brother, John, later sold at Sotheby's for thousands of pounds!) John became an eminent professor of Nutrition and their sister, Judith, a child psychiatrist. Charlotte herself took a First in History at Newnham College, Cambridge in the 1930s. She was a contemporary of the notorious soviet spies, Guy Burgess, Kim Philby and Donald Maclean and was herself approached to join the Communist party as she was known to hold radical views. Instead, however, her father introduced her to an esoteric mystical brotherhood, which followed teachings channelled to an American dentist in the late 19th century. ... When she worked for the Civil Service during and after the War, she would cycle down to Balham after work once or twice a week to take part in esoteric rituals!

She was awarded an MBE in 1950 for her services to the Foreign Office, but later took up teaching, first at a school in Guildford (now attended by my grandson), and then from 1967 to 1982 she taught in Canada and the USA and wrote a variety of history books some of which became standard texts. She loved the USA, took American citizenship and for the rest of her life she spent many weeks there almost every year.

She retired to Godalming in 1982 but worked tirelessly, writing, lecturing and travelling. She was a peace campaigner and a member of the World Federalist movement. She never lost her interest in spiritual matters and was a committed member of the Network for many years. She experienced a terrible tragedy when her sister committed suicide in 1966 at the age of 45, but there followed a number of experiences, including an encounter with her late father, which convinced her of the continuity of life beyond death.

She was oblivious to many material concerns. Her flat was so cluttered I remember having to climb over piles of books and papers to find a clearing in which to sit! She wanted only enough

money to be able to continue her travels and she gave away any money she felt she didn't need. I remember she sold her flat for exactly what she needed to buy her new home, a fraction of its commercial value (not popular with the estate agent!).

Among the many things I loved about her, and what left a lifelong impression on me, was her optimism. The theme of her book the 'Hinge of History' was that humankind behaves like an organism going through its childhood and adolescence. Adulthood is still some way off but we are heading that way. She could always counter any argument that things are getting worse from the broader perspective of history. One of my favourite quotes of hers was 'Throughout the whole of human history, at least 99% of the population have been told what to do by the lords and what to think by the priests'. She saw this present age as unique because of the concept of equality, of the unprecedented opportunities for women, and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, she was also realistic. She was aware of the threat posed to progress by nuclear weapons and fundamentalist religion. She had visited Palestinian refugee camps in the early 1950s and always maintained that there could be no peace in the Middle East until the angry young men growing up in those camps in poverty were given economic opportunities, human dignity, identity and hope. I'm sure that is equally true of the angry young men of Afghanistan and North Africa today. In her words, the World has a choice: to 'grow up or blow up'.

Charlotte was born into a time when women could only have a professional life if they renounced the right to marry. This was quite explicit. Had she married while working at the Foreign Office, she would have been sacked! She made the difficult decision therefore to remain single. However, she had many friends and a very fulfilled life. I always remember her saying (when I was approaching 40 with some trepidation) how she had enjoyed her 50s so much that it surprised her that her 60s and 70s were even better! So I should perhaps have not been so surprised when, at the age of 76 in 1992, she announced that she had fallen in love and was moving to Cirencester to be near her lover! He was also a peace campaigner and World Federalist and the two of them had many happy travels together, continuing their lecturing and writing to the end.

She inspired great loyalty in everyone who knew her, including her many American friends. Rosemarie Cassel-Brown persuaded Charlotte to write her memoirs: 'From Bloomsbury to Balham and Beyond' and wrote a beautiful obituary for her funeral. Adam Frost, who had been a student of Charlotte's in the 1970s in Boston and impressed by her 'cheerful revolutionary agitation', has founded a wonderful memorial to her. He has started a series of conferences in her memory. The first 'Waterlow World Maturity Conference' was held in October 2012 at the Boston Nature Center, Mass. The next is scheduled for October 2013.

This 40th anniversary year of the Network is an appropriate time to acknowledge our debt to our founders and that pioneering generation. So...Thank you, Charlotte, for your indomitable spirit, courage and optimism and, especially, thank you for your friendship.

Diana Clift is a Vice-President of the Network.