

Marie-Elsa Bragg interviews Jenni Murray at the Proms LitFest



SYLVIA COURRY

Dame Jenni Murray, the celebrated journalist and broadcaster, who has presented BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour since 1987, was one of the guests at this year's Lit Fest and was interviewed by Marie-Elsa Bragg, who is a Priest in the diocese of London and has just published her first book. Jenni's popularity was evident when she addressed a packed house on a late Saturday afternoon. Firstly, Marie-Elsa asked her to

read some extracts from her new book 'A History of Britain in 21 Women: A Personal Selection'. A book which depicts women that Jenni has chosen from famous queens, unrecognised visionaries, great artists and trailblazing politicians; all of whom pushed back boundaries and revolutionised our world.

Jenni initially read from the Introduction to her book, starting with a quote from Thomas Carlyle

whose fundamental premise, was that the 'history of the world is but the biography of great men'; Jenni explained that women were seen in their role as the good wife and mother and nothing else; not seen as movers or shakers like their male counterparts.

Where did this feminist influence on her begin? Well, it began in Barnsley where Jenny was born and raised, and it was by hard work and good fortune

that Jenni attended a grammar school in her native Barnsley. She then went to Hull University to read French and Drama. Although her own mother did not attend University, she ensured that Jenni had speech and drama lessons to remove her Barnsley accent.

Jenni recounted that while she was a schoolgirl she was taken on frequent trips to London with her parents, where she was made aware of famous women, whose statues stood prominently in the capital. This had a profound effect upon her and she was struck by the achievements of certain women that she considered role models. It is this that has formed the basis of her new book. She has also ensured that her sons are informed about the battles women have had to fight to be educated. For Jenni sexism has no place in the time we now occupy.

Although Jenni's working life started in local radio in Bristol, she originally established her

career in television on Newsnight. However she said she always felt more comfortable and "at home" in a radio studio. Thus began her long-term career on Radio 4.

Marie-Elsa highlighted that Jenni's book conveys stories of women who had real struggles and yet she found Jenni is tender in her commentary of these women. Jenni explained that one of the women that had to appear in her book was Mary Quant, the famous English fashion designer of the 1960s. Jenni felt Mary Quant had changed her life, and other women lives, with her iconic designs and the way that women dressed. She confessed that she still had her Mary Quant designed old leather mini skirt from the 1960s.

Jenni also spoke of the importance of female mentorship. One woman that also had to be included in her book was Fanny Burney, who was an English satirical novelist, diarist and playwright who developed breast

cancer, something that Jenni was diagnosed with eleven years ago. Jenni spoke of Fanny's surgery in 1810 and how she endured the procedure and yet survived for the next thirty years.

Finally Jenni spoke about what sustains her, which is raising her sons and feeling passionately about certain things. Yet, it was also the importance of fathers that Jenni has communicated in her book. She believes men are wonderful too and stressed that the women in her book were only able to achieve what they did because of their fathers. Indeed, she had a wonderful father and grandfather who were kind, gentle men.

Finally, Jenni commented that women should go for whatever they want and make a choice. Her choice was to have a good job and a family. She shared that making a choice should be regardless of gender. For the listeners of Radio 4 that has been a delight for us all.

DAPHNE BERKOVITZ

Tom Roberts: an Australian artist on the Suburb

The annual Michael Rowley lecture this year was given by Lucrezia Walker in The Meeting House on 21st May, and the subject was the Father of modern Australian painting, Tom Roberts.

Roberts was born in Dorchester in 1856 but in 1869, after the

death of his father, moved with his mother and sisters to Australia, where they had family. Living in Melbourne, a city made wealthy by the gold rush, his interest in art soon became apparent as he started his artistic studies in 1873. He returned to the UK in 1881

to study at the Royal Academy, being the first major Australian artist to do so, and then spent some time on a continental tour, visiting Spain, France and Italy. He was introduced to the principles of Impressionism and was much influenced by Whistler, and the en plein air school of painting.

On his return to Australia in 1885 he started painting camps on the outskirts of Melbourne at Box Hill and Heidelberg, where the Heidelberg School of Australian Impressionism was born. Based on the plein air practice Roberts and his colleagues, "went to the bush... and tried to get it down as truly as we could."

Roberts had brought some 9" by 5" painted cigar-box lids back from London, and in 1889 he contributed 62 of the 182 small panels in the "9 by 5 Impressionism Exhibition" in Melbourne, which although now celebrated did not impress at the time.

To make a living he became known for his portrait painting and, as a result, was awarded the commission to paint the opening of Australia's first parliament in 1901. A two and a half year task it became known as The Big Picture, being just over 3 by 5 metres in size. The painting included 269



separate portraits and, as many of the attendees lived in London, the work brought him back to London in 1903. He hoped it would make his name and lead to greater success.

During his stay in London he came to live in the Suburb, perhaps attracted by its reputation as a social experiment and Bohemian artiness. He lived at 10 Southway, a house which was built to his specific requirements, and later became the first of Harold Wilson's two homes in that road.

Although his career here never took off, he did have some paintings accepted by the Royal Academy in 1910. He commented that, "England doesn't want anybody... only the exceptional in any line." He had always appreciated the importance of the picture frame and much of his income came from making frames with his

wife Lillie, whom he had married in 1896.

His return to Australia was delayed by the outbreak of war and he worked in an army hospital in Wandsworth before returning to live in Australia in 1923. He settled in a country cottage with his wife and began painting small landscapes again. He died in 1931, and although he failed to sell much work in his lifetime, his influence on Australian painting has been marked.

He described the subject of his work as "the familiar beauty of our own country, its warmth

and sunshine", and as a testament of his stature today his work was on display last year at the headline summer show in the National Gallery of Australia.

TERRY BROOKS



WORDSEARCH

In this issue we have concealed the names of 20 London boroughs (one of them is highlighted to start you off - please don't count it in your total). Names may be read in all directions, straight or diagonally. Please send your entries by email to cristina.lago@gmail.com with your name and contact details. The closing date is September 17. All correct entries go into a draw to win a £20 voucher from our independent local shop Joseph's Bookstore. Good luck!

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Opening of the first parliament

SPRING WORDSEARCH ANSWERS, FACTS & WINNER
 The answers to the last issue's Famous Painters Wordsearch were as follows: Banksy, Duchamp, Goya, Hokusai, Hopper, Kahlo, Kandinsky, Klimt, Marc, Michelangelo, Monet, O'Keeffe, Picasso, Pollock, Rivera, Rubens, Seurat, Titian, Turner and Vermeer.

DID YOU KNOW...?

- There are only about 15 of Leonardo Da Vinci paintings left today, the authorship of several paintings traditionally attributed to Leonardo being disputed.
 - The logo of Chupa Chups, the famous Spanish lollipop brand, was designed by Salvador Dalí.
 - Damien Hirst, also known as the 'bad boy of Brit Art,' directed the music video of 'Country House' by the band Blur.
- Yvonne Oliver from Asmunds Hill is the winner of the Joseph's Bookstore £20 voucher: congratulations! Thank you also to all of you who also sent your answers, keep participating!

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