



## THE WAY WE ARE

Here is our latest newsletter with its usual Research Network and broader research industry updates and general interest articles.

2023 was a good year for the Research Network with a boost to our membership and retention of existing members. Our event programme went very well with excellent attendance at our lunches. You can read reviews of our Autumn Lunch, AGM and Christmas Drinks, along with our NED Talk by Chris Martin in September. There are previews of our events planned for 2024, so please save the dates.

Penny Briki updates us about The Tony Cowling Foundation and Claire Harris for the MRBA. We also have fascinating general interest articles contributed by David Cooper, Guy Consterdine and Tony Dent on such diverse subjects as Alaska, ancestry and family heritage, and AI respectively.

We also have our regular feature by Peter Bartram, Jane Bain's Nature Diary and obituaries for Peter Daniels, Chris White and Wendy Gordon, who sadly passed away in 2023.

As always, please feel free to contribute interesting or humorous articles yourselves for the next issue. Any topic is very welcome via [editor@research-network.org.uk](mailto:editor@research-network.org.uk).

## SPRING LUNCH: 24<sup>TH</sup> APRIL AT EV

This year, we could not resist a return to one of our popular, excellent value restaurants for our Spring Lunch at 12.30 on Wednesday 24th April.



EV, as many of the members will know, is part of the Tas Turkish restaurant group. It is located at The Arches, 97–99 Isabella Street, London SE1 8DA, near Southwark Underground station. The restaurant has real character: partly exotic as it is behind a surprisingly dense row of trees and bushes, while being totally central London-esque with the railway running over its roof arches.

While restaurant prices are still rising, if less dramatically than during 2022–23, we can offer a Network member price of £45 for a three course meal with wine, helped by our much appreciated sponsorship. The style of food is Anatolian cuisine, and the restaurant has a friendly, open atmosphere with long dining tables, ideal for easy conversation. Please make a diary note of the date.

# THE WAY WE WERE

More recollections compiled by Peter Bartram

Having exhausted in this column the supply of anecdotes to be derived from stories in the MRS Newsletter and Research Magazine, it struck me that it would now be useful to illustrate how our way of life has changed since many of us began working 60+ years ago.

Many old survey results have been uploaded on to the website of the Archive of Market and Social Research ([www.amsr.org.uk](http://www.amsr.org.uk)) and they show how much change there has been in that time: we no longer smoke, believe in God or go to church, but we are fatter, travel more, and wear a seat belt when driving. And we always had doubts about Europe.

From some old Gallup surveys from 1938-1939 we know that...

- Back then, 83% of men and 39% of women said they smoked; now, the figures are 17% and 13% respectively.
- Back then, 68% of us attended a place of worship regularly or occasionally; now, only 6% of us do so on a typical Sunday.
- Back then, only 24% owned their own homes; now 50% do so.

From an Opinion Research Centre Poll in 1968....

- 80% of us believed there is a God; now, only 28% do so. From research in 2018 for the Independent, 65% think of chocolate when asked about Easter, while only 12% think of Jesus. We seem to have become a heathen, chocoholic nation.

From old Harris Polls 1969-1972....

- 72% had never been abroad; now, only 8% have never done so.
- Only 38% had a day-to-day bank account; it's now 97%.
- 62% were against our entry to the Common Market (but from an Omnisis poll we know that 60% of us now wish to re-join).
- Only 33% of drivers used a seat belt (it wasn't legally required then), and it is 98% now.
- 84% backed hanging; now, 65% want it brought back.
- 30% in the UK believed flying saucers were real; a recent poll found that 50% of us believe that extraterrestrial beings are real.
- In 1983, The College of Physicians said 31% of us were overweight (BMI 25+) and a further 9% were obese. By 2022, these figures had increased to 64% overweight and 26% clinically obese.

Another big change in our lives has been the increased sensitivity to issues related to gender, race and class. Things which used to be said and done cannot now be alluded to. But breaking such rules for a moment and in fear of prosecution, I venture to illustrate this with stories about the research industry which I can recall from back then:

- In 1967 my 44-year-old Managing Director regularly greeted me each morning with the enquiry "Hi Pete, are you getting plenty?" (I wasn't, but he liked to think I did).
- A British business executive visiting Japan was persuaded by his local manager to go to a lap-dancing bar and engage with the enticing ladies. Plagued by guilt the next day, he hoped his colleagues would forget about it, but when he got back to his UK office, he found a blow-up doll sitting in his chair.
- At the Annual MRS Conference in Brighton, many more couplings were attempted and took place than most of us were aware of. One lady researcher described her efforts to repel the unwanted advances of an older and richer delegate by saying "When I finally said 'No' he replied 'Oh, go on, you won't even notice it.'"
- The report on an earlier Annual Conference noted that 'After an exciting, pulsating evening with loads of drink, dancing and fun, late into the hours of Friday night, two researchers of variable sex ... were to be seen travelling incessantly up and down in the lift, clutching blindly at one another'.

Many more such tales could be told, but in today's climate they would mostly not now be seen as so innocent or funny.



# AUTUMN LUNCH AT BRASSERIE BLANC

This was a very popular event, held on Tuesday 17th October 2023. We were allocated a spacious private dining area adjacent to the main area of the restaurant at 9 Belvedere Road, Southbank, London SE1 8YP, near The Royal Festival Hall.

We enjoyed a truly excellent 3-course lunch with wine. The starter was a cheese soufflé, with Ford Farm Coastal Cheddar sauce, all servings looking impeccable across the guest tables; a real chef's challenge! The main course was prime chargrilled rump steak, with mixed leaf salad, French fries and a garlic tomato. The dessert was a sticky toffee pudding with cocoa & citrus syrup and crème fraiche, all very high quality and beautifully prepared.

The excellent value price of £60 for members was enabled by our generous sponsorship by Elizabeth Norman International and Prevision Research.

The remarkably rewarding attendance level was very special this year: 84 members and guests booked to come along, including 17 non-members and guests. Also, this was the first Research Network Lunch event attended by 6 new members: Margot Grantham, Michel Olszewski, Trisha Parker, David Riley, Ian Roberts and Penny Steele.

Our only struggle was a technical shortfall of our sound system which sadly hindered Adam Phillips' welcoming speech, so we will try to find a better solution next time!

More photos from the event are on the Research Network website.



# RESEARCH NETWORK: ACTIVITY UPDATE

## Membership update

We are benefiting hugely from the efforts of Jane A'Court and her team of Champions:- John Kelly, Ginny Monk, Liz Norman, Bob Qureshi, Chris Smith and Jonathon Wheeler. Jo Cleaver has also been a great member of the team but has now stood down, but Jade On has newly become a Champion and is very welcome with her social media expertise.

There have been 47 new members recruited over the past 15 months: Autumn 2022 – 21, Spring 2023 – 11, Summer 2023 – 11 and Autumn 2023 – 4, with potential new members in addition.

Of the 17 new joiners after 1st November 2022, 10 have renewed their membership and another 5 are likely to do so, which exceeds our target of 75% retention. Indeed, Jane wants to focus on member retention as well as attracting new joiners as part of her strategy. She would also like to organise an early evening dinner for those whose work commitments make lunchtime events difficult to attend.

Nick Tanner has also produced a revised brief promotional leaflet for circulation across various research organisations, entitled 'What is the Research Network?' including references to our social event plans for 2024.

We will also have a promotional stand at the next MRS Conference in London on Tuesday 12th March 2024.

## Future social events

These are also highlighted on the Research Network website and the usual invitations will be sent to all members well in advance. But please make a note of the following dates:

- Spring Lunch at EV Restaurant, Isabella Street, SE1 on Weds 24th April 2024 (See separate full preview in this newsletter). Cost: £45 for members.
- Summer Party at Doggetts, Blackfriars Bridge, SE1 on Tues 2nd July 2024. Cost: £30 for members.
- Autumn Lunch at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, SE1 on Tues 22nd October 2024. Cost: £60 for members.

For all events, the non-member cost is an additional £5.

Adam Phillips is also hoping to organise further NED Talks with the first one scheduled on Weds 14th Feb 2024 by Graham Woodham, entitled '33 Years of a Parallel French Life'. This is an overview of his slow renovation of a farmhouse surrounded by vines, along with a warm welcome and long-term friendship with his wine and cognac making neighbours, including the many quirky and fun aspects of a rural lifestyle slightly north of Bordeaux.

## AGM & CHRISTMAS DRINKS

Our meeting returned to Verian's offices (formerly Kantar Public) at 4 Millbank, which we last visited in 2021. This is a very attractive office close to the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, a short walk from Westminster Underground station through crowds of commuters and surprisingly, tourists taking photos in the dark. We are grateful for the friendly support of Verian staff.

Train strikes, cancellations and winter illnesses prevented some Network members from attending, but 30 managed to come along. Short update speeches were given by Adam Phillips, Gill Wareing (finances) and Jane Bain (future events programme).

Adam confirmed that 2023 has been a very successful year for the Research Network with three very well attended lunch events and membership levels back to where they were in 2019. He also assured members that the Steering Group are always seeking new ways to subsidise our event costs, and these are genuinely lower than normal restaurant prices, both this year and in 2024.

There was further discussion during the meeting about potential future strategies for keeping event prices attainable for those with limited means or no active sources of income. The Steering Group will continue to explore a range of options with the possibility of introducing some form of tiered pricing to make the events accessible to as many Network members as possible.

Adam also confirmed that five new Oral History interviews have been added to the AMSR website, with three further interviews at the editing stage—more than 50 planned by the end of 2024. An additional moderator is

sought to help this process. We also need a volunteer to set up and manage a LinkedIn site for the Network to augment its social media presence.

Attendees voted in favour of the 2022 AGM minutes and financial accounts, along with re-election of the Network Steering Group.

Gill Wareing assured our members that Research Network finances are very sound in 2023, ending the year without a deficit and with a £7000 accumulated reserve. We now have 205 members, including 14 non-paying associates.

Jane Bain outlined an excellent social event programme for 2024 (see further details in this newsletter) and emphasised our gratitude to all our generous sponsors who have kept our events very well priced. In 2023, five organisations kindly sponsored our social events:



Teneo Translations UK (Chris Barella)



Perspective Research Services (Paul Russell)



Elizabeth Norman International (Liz Norman)



Prevision Research (Bob Qureshi)

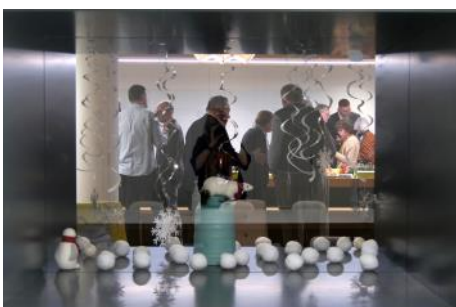


Verian (Michelle Harrison and Craig Watkins)

Discussions are already well under way with sponsors for the 2024 events.

Following the speeches, we all mingled and chatted over drinks and snacks until the meeting ended at 8pm. See the Research Network website for a full set of photos from the meeting.

A small selection of photos is shown below; there are more on the Research Network website.



## NED TALK SYNOPSIS

*On 15th September, Chris Martin, formerly a research project manager in our industry, gave a fascinating talk on his 6 month long, 5000+ mile adventure rowing across the Pacific Ocean. Twenty five Network members and guests joined the Zoom meeting, which was followed by a range of audience questions.*

Chris Martin used to row competitively as a junior in the British squad in 2001. He rowed in a coxless four in 2013, the year after the London Olympics in the World Rowing Championships, but moved away from competitive rowing as National Lottery funding dried up.

He then rowed solo to Antigua in a stable boat with a tiny cabin. He really enjoyed this, despite mishaps such as the rudder snapping off in bad weather and several broken oars. He subsequently made a plan with another experienced oarsman to row from Choshi in Japan across the Pacific Ocean to San Francisco. This was a 6 month crossing of about 7000 miles taking account of reverse currents and bad weather detours. They needed enough food, water and toilet rolls to last that whole time. He had not met his colleague previously, but luckily, they got on very well.

The boat was new and designed to be self-righting if heavy waves might have run the risk of capsizing. It was weighted below by five large fresh water bottles as ballast.



He and his colleague rowed in turns, 2 hours on and 2 hours off, leaving in early May, giving large commercial ships a wide berth early on in the major shipping lanes, ideally with a half mile gap. This was best when the ships went across their path as they were too large to see a small rowing boat below their bows. Obviously, terrible weather was the other hazard rather than a helpful tail wind.

Chris said that they adapted to 2 hours sleep at a time after a week or two, as this actually totalled 8 – 10 hours a day.

Once, a huge albatross flew over them and many whales passed close by, often three at a time, as well as shoals of yellow fin tuna. They also saw a rather ugly 'Sun Fish' sunning itself on its side; this was 6 metres long and 2 metres in diameter.

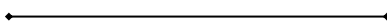
During the row, Chris phoned home twice a week, but had to mend equipment breakdowns such as faulty cables and dangerous short-circuiting solar panels which were a real fire risk.

Having planned the crossing to take 189 days, some of their food supplies turned out not to be sufficiently waterproof and deteriorated by late August. So they held back some foods, but seawater contamination destroyed too many food packs during September, preventing them from meeting their daily nutritional needs.

They tried contacting passing ships and their emergency support colleague back home and eventually, a Vietnam helicopter pilot dropped four waterproof packs of food for them. That was the best Big Mac and fries that Chris had ever eaten, even though it was cold, according to the maxim 'Hunger is the best flavour'.

Three days later, they saw the sun rise over distant clouds, revealing the Golden Gate Bridge and they benefited from the tide under the bridge to help them reach dry land in San Francisco.

Overall, by rowing day and night, they achieved a daily average of 26 miles, up to 50 miles a day if the tide was behind them, with 55 miles their absolute record. It took almost 2 weeks for Chris to fully recover his walking stability on land. 'Normal food' was the real bonus to completing their epic journey.



# A BAD DAY AT THE OFFICE

Graham Woodham

*In this occasional series, members recall episodes at work that might, with hindsight, have gone better. Here, Graham Woodham describes a few of his own 'bad days at the office'.*

I am lucky in my qualitative research career not to have experienced a catastrophic event with long lasting consequences, but there were a few awkward moments from time to time.



Only once can I remember a negative atmosphere developing during a research debrief. But I once carried out an image study for a well known American music TV channel when the whole subculture of music videos took off in parallel to the pop charts. The study spanned four European countries and the visiting clients from the US started by being open-minded to the results. But my Dutch colleagues in their findings had given a cultural warning that in The Netherlands, music fans could be rather cautious and conservative in their tastes. Because I was presenting these multi-cultural findings, one of the clients broke in and accused me of being judgmental. I emphasised that I was not interpreting the results, as this was purely the role of my locally based Dutch counterparts, but there was clearly a lack of trust and frosty atmosphere for the rest of the meeting.

On the way back to the office, wondering whether I had done something wrong, I was putting the file of my analysis notes in my briefcase as I walked to the top of the Underground escalator and the slippery plastic folder emptied its contents on to the moving steps. I had to run down to the bottom, overtaking the loose papers and with huge embarrassment collect all the individual sheets as they piled up, luckily not slipping down where the moving steps disappeared underneath to go round again.

Although the clients were not with me to witness this, strangely, no repeat business was commissioned.

On another occasion, I had to drive to a client near Oxford for a briefing meeting and the weather was horrific: dense snowfall in blizzard proportions for the whole journey. It was such a relief to arrive safely and step out of the car to walk to the office reception. Sadly, halfway there I stepped on some invisible ice and slid on my side for about 3 metres (yards in those days) through slush and snow. I had the humiliation of checking in for the meeting, totally saturated down one side of my formerly smartish suit. Much laughter and some sympathy started off the meeting with me being allocated the nearest seat to the radiator.

During qualitative fieldwork in recruiters' or respondents' homes, I experienced a number of interruptions by naughty pets. During one old-style focus group in the recruiter's living room, a small cat crept into the room and made herself known by jumping from the windowsill to the back of a sofa between two respondents. Their piercing screams only faded after a minute or two and the group took much longer to settle down properly. A comparable intrusion was made on another occasion by a small cheeky dog which wandered around a partly closed door to sit in front of an open fire. I asked if we should eject him and the respondents initially said no until he rolled over on his back displaying his excited genitals to everyone. We changed our collective opinions and when the laughter died down, he was politely asked to leave the room.

And finally, I once conducted a genuinely fascinating ethnographic and UX study into how people wash their dishes. More quirky variations than you might imagine which would shape innovative washing up liquid formulations. One very friendly respondent had a pet chameleon in a glass cage in the room next to the kitchen. I was increasingly fascinated by this rather taciturn pet over my three in-home interview visits.

On the last occasion, the respondent said "Would you like to get him out for a closer look, as he likes to climb up the curtains". We enjoyed this for at least 15 minutes before I left to go home. I later contacted the respondent to thank her for her research participation and she told me that her pet had climbed to the top of the curtain and changed colour to blend in and become invisible. After persistent efforts to re-capture him, she only succeeded in returning him to his cage late the next day. I was very embarrassed that my fascination with unusual animals had caused her so much inconvenience.

That's enough from me, but please do send any of your own 'Bad Day at the Office' stories for future newsletters!



# NATURE DIARY

## Extracts from Jane Bain's Nature Diary: July - December 2023

*As I write this on a cold January morning, it is hard to imagine that 2023 was the hottest year worldwide since pre-industrial times. In the UK, we had a dismal July, then a balmy September, followed by a succession of named storms bringing torrential rain through the Autumn months. Bright sunny days were a rare treat.*



**July:** Many wildflowers are shrivelled to a crisp, but waterside plants have survived the recent drought much better. A family of goldfinches feast on the seed pods of a clump of purple loosestrife growing beside the river.

Noisy flocks of house sparrows congregate in a garden hedge by the river walk. The house has bird feeders and groups of birds fly up to feed. This juvenile is wary of the crowd and waits for her turn on an adjacent fence.



**August:** In the French countryside for a summer break, there is different wildlife to observe. Hummingbird hawk moths visit flowers in the garden, hovering almost motionless, feeding with their long tongues.



Praying mantis are the strangest of creatures. This one lands on the surface of the water in the pool while I am swimming. I carefully rescue it, then watch while it climbs up a blade of grass and delicately cleans itself.



**September:** One of the warmest Septembers on record brings an 'Indian summer'. A pair of little egrets take advantage of the low water level in the reservoir, stirring up the silt with their yellow feet then pouncing on the tiny fish which they have disturbed.

Visiting the Wetland Centre, I notice a juvenile moorhen feeding two chicks. It is a youngster from earlier in the nesting season, which has stayed in the family group and is helping to care for its parents' second brood.







**October:** The Autumn remains warm and there are still many butterflies about. One of my favourites is this tiny holly blue, which I find feeding on ivy blossom.



There is a hole in a willow tree by the river walk which parakeets inspect every year. Encouraged by the warmth, a pair have already started guarding it.



**November:** At the reservoir, a strange bird surfaces right in front of me and quickly swims off. It is a female goosander, a rarity in this area. Later I hear that, unusually, there were several sightings locally that day.



Trudging back from a long walk, I stop for a rest in the cemetery and hear a wren trill very close by. Turning, I see it bobbing and singing on a nearby gravestone.

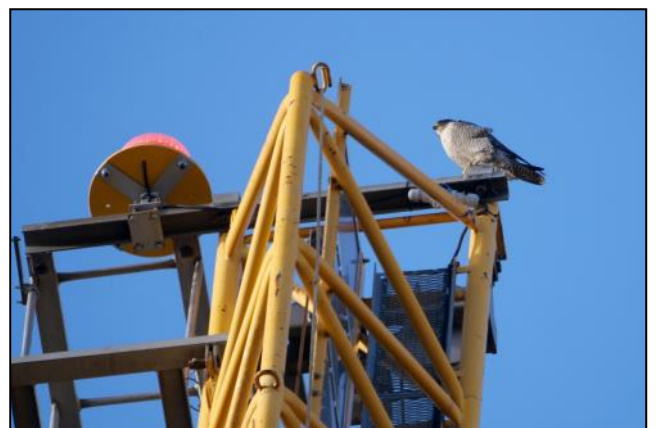


The winter storms are hard to avoid. I notice this young sparrowhawk one rainy day at the Wetland Centre. Its feathers are bedraggled, but it is hungry and heads for the bird feeders in hope of an easy catch.

**December:** Between the storms, there are occasional sunny winter days. As soon as the sun comes out, robins sing to defend their territories. This one has chosen a perch on a convenient satellite dish!



When the nearby building sites close at Christmas, the local peregrines use the tall cranes as vantage points. I spot the female, perched on a 'Falcon' brand of crane.



# AN UPDATE FROM THE MRBA – OUR INDUSTRY’S CHARITY

Claire Harris (MRBA Trustee and Committee Member)

The Research Network has been a staunch supporter of the Market Research Benevolent Association (MRBA) for many years and is one of our founding Patrons. While many readers will be familiar with the MRBA, some may be less aware of who we are and what we do. We’re delighted to have this opportunity to describe the help we’re here to provide, the difference we can make and to share our latest plans.

## Who we are and what we do:



The MRBA is unique. We’re the only independent charity specifically helping past and present members of the market and social research community. We do this by providing grants and interest-free loans to those in immediate financial need, or who are facing an imminent financial emergency, whether that’s through illness, bereavement, caring responsibilities, or other difficult personal circumstances.

Those we help span all levels of seniority, and all job roles and functions. So, we’re here for fieldworkers, recruiters, telephone interviewers, researchers, buyers of research, consultants, those who work in technical, operations, admin and management roles, and regardless of whether their role is office-based or remote. The only stipulation is that those applying for grants and interest-free loans must have worked in the industry for at least two years. Since 2018, MRBA Skills has also been offering bursaries to people working in market and social research, who wish to develop their research skills.

With the exception of our secretary/treasurer, the MRBA is run entirely by volunteers. Our trustees and committee members all work or have worked in our industry (indeed, many are members of the Research Network), and our team of case managers all have research backgrounds.

## The impact we have:

Since we were founded in 1977, we’ve given over £1.3 million in financial support and have helped over 1,200 research colleagues and, on occasion, their dependants. The amounts we give vary greatly; a few hundred pounds can pay priority bills such as council tax, cover urgent household repairs or to get a car back on the road to allow someone to get back to work. Sometimes the requirement is for a larger amount, such as help with funeral expenses or funding equipment for someone coping with a long-term disability or impairment. The needs we meet and the amounts we give are as varied as the people we’re here to help.

Applicants often feel under extreme pressure and completely overwhelmed by the time they approach us. When we are able to help, the sense of relief is evident. In the words of two recipients:

*“Thank you to the MRBA for helping get my car back on the road. It’s my lifeline. I can now get back to work”*

*“When I had to care for my disabled mother, the MRBA helped provide some essential equipment so she could be more comfortable at end of life”*

## Being top of mind:

The indications are that our help is needed more than ever, with the latter half of 2023 seeing a substantial increase in the help we gave. The cost-of-living crisis has been very real for many people. One wonders who these people would have turned to if the MRBA had not been there for them. But to come to us for help, people need to know we’re here.

In recent months, we’ve been exploring and developing further ways to spread the MRBA message. As a result, we’re updating our marketing and information materials to provide accessible, relevant and regular information about how we can help and the impact we make. We’ll be asking our Corporate Patrons to share this information within and across their organisations and inviting them to work with us on developing new ways to communicate our message

We’ll also continue to increase our presence on social media to keep awareness of the MRBA in the spotlight (if you aren’t already following us on LinkedIn, please do). March will, of course, see our annual Auction. And there will be other events this year, such as golf days and quiz nights

We’re also planning to expand our Skills bursary programme to encompass a broader range of qualifications. In this way, we’ll be able to support the educational needs of more people across the industry who are unable to fund this themselves.

## Our wonderful supporters:

These are exciting times for the MRBA. But none of our achievements would be possible without the support of everyone who has kindly donated to the MRBA, and we are indebted to all our Patrons, Governors, Friends, donors and supporters.

If you'd like to become an Individual Friend or a Corporate Patron or Friend, we'd be delighted to welcome you. Please email [info@mrba.org.uk](mailto:info@mrba.org.uk) for more information.

Once again, many thanks to the Research Network for having been a Corporate Patron from the outset, and for helping us to spread the word that we're here to help colleagues and former colleagues at times of great need

And finally, if you know of a colleague or associate, past or present, who might need and qualify for our help, please let them know we're here. We can be called on 0345 652 0303 to request an application form.

(Please be aware that enquiries are treated with the strictest confidentiality. And membership of the MRBA or the Market Research Society are not necessary.)

---

## ALASKA

David Cooper

This is the second of a pair of articles by David Cooper, who was Group Financial Director of Research International for 20 years as it passed from Unilever into the New York based Ogilvy Group and eventually on to WPP. The first article, covering his early career, was published in the August 2023 Newsletter.

Our love affair with Alaska started shortly after my retirement. We faced a six month gap between exchange and completion on a property, central to our move from work-bound suburbia to hoped-for life enhancement in the countryside. We needed to go somewhere. The obvious place, according to my wife Joan, was Alaska, because as a Canadian she resented never having been able to get north of Edmonton before getting bogged down with me 30 years previously. Joan can be very decisive and it's wise to go along with that if you can, sometimes turning a blind "I" to the latent unanticipated perils of a Carpe Diem strategy. Which is how, in the mid-winter of 1997, we found ourselves departing Dawson Creek in British Columbia in a borrowed car, albeit one seriously winterized with snow tyres and a cylinder block heater. Ahead lay a 7000 mile, two month long journey across parts of the remotest country in the world, most of it in sub-zero (Fahrenheit) temperatures.



This was our first introduction to a land area equivalent to one fifth of the rest of the United States put together. Superimposed over the 'Lower 48', Alaska would stretch with its archipelagos from the Pacific to the Atlantic, and from Mexico to Canada. The tiny population of 730,000, lives in one twentieth of one percent of that land area; the rest is a wildlife-rich mountainous wilderness inhabited mostly by Eskimos or Indians. The inland-dwelling Indians are mostly of Athabaskan origin, while the Eskimos morph through Inuit, Yupik and Aleut as you move south along the coast. In Alaska, the soubriquet 'Native American' imposed on them by liberal America is widely ignored by both races, who prefer to call themselves 'Indians' and 'Eskimos'. Their cultures are quite different but their tribal lands meet at a place called Old Woman Cabin where the mountains start their descent to the coastal plains bordering the Bering Sea. This contrasts with Canada where the term 'First Nation' is widely preferred across the races. Paradoxically, while Canadians ('unarmed Americans') are perceived by many to be more liberal-minded, our own wide experience of travelling in both countries suggests all too often that at least over the last century, the widespread atrocities wrought on the Canadian indigenous peoples in the name of 'integration' contrast unfavourably with more successful, albeit patchy, examples of integration we have seen in the US.

Back on the ALCAN (The Alaska Highway) we headed across grain fields and the Peace River to Fort Nelson, a grubby place dominated by huge timber laden trucks. The ALCAN was built with Canadian consent in 1942, to confront the Japanese who were already island-hopping up the Aleutians into Alaska. Neither ships nor aircraft could reach so far across a frozen sea. It was constructed by 11,000 much disparaged black American troops, seen then as incapable of fighting overseas. Six months and 2000 miles later, they had carved a road with one lane each way, capable of carrying heavy equipment across virgin forest and tundra from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks. This amazing feat brought belated recognition of their capabilities, further kickstarting the black emancipation movement. We gladly left our overnight truck-stop to head north up that same road.



The trees diminished in size as we moved north. Gradually, the logging trucks disappeared until we were seeing barely one or two vehicles an hour. Peace descended. Outside the car, you could hear snowflakes fall, or the call of an animal perhaps a mile or more away. Oncoming traffic announced its presence long before coming into sight. 200 miles later, as dusk fell, we entered another world as the only mid-winter guests at Liard Hot Springs, a thoughtfully pre-booked, gloriously rustic log cabin. Its most riveting feature was the interior decor, composed entirely of artfully arranged walrus penises which interestingly, are typically three feet long and naturally composed of bone. The second most riveting feature was the natural thermal pool surrounded by notices warning of recent bear attacks. Thanks to hibernation, we were less fazed by this than to find that in the time it took to re-clothe ourselves in all our thermal underwear, our bathing costumes had become frozen solid to the ground.

From this point on, we really had to be careful. The Yukon in midwinter is no place to screw up. We never left a safe haven without giving our next night's accommodation an ETA. Typically, this would be a caravan behind the next gas station three or four hundred miles up the road. Our only distractions were rivetingly beautiful wilderness and occasional glimpses of moose, caribou or bald eagles. We carried emergency supplies in the form of water, home-made elk burgers, candles to ward off frostbite, and a short-range CB radio to shout for help if we broke down (mobile telephony was in its infancy). If you had a dump of snow, you sat and waited for one of the State snow ploughs stationed every hundred miles or so, to come and dig you out. The ALCAN even today is the only overland access from the Lower 48 to Alaska and nothing is allowed to close it.

A brief stop in Whitehorse was memorable for the lovely log-fired wooden cabin, and promised a blueberry muffin and hot coffee breakfast delivered to our doorstep next morning. Instead, the owners arrived just after midnight and demanded that we follow them. This is how we came to be standing ankle deep in snow on a flatbed truck in the middle of the night, wearing parkas over our pyjamas watching magnificent curtains of green and red fire ripple from horizon to horizon with a sound like rustling silk. There is no space here to recount our multitude of similar adventures on to Fairbanks, across to Anchorage, around the Kenai Peninsular to Seward and back through the wonderful Denali National Park to Skagway, and from there by local car ferry down the hanging glacier, ridden Inside Passage for five days back to Vancouver.

Instead, we'll fast forward to 2008 when we returned to Alaska, determined to see completely roadless back country. An opportunity arose to do this by following the local, truly iconic Iditarod Dog Sled race, which is run once a year in late winter to commemorate the historic rescue in 1924 of a remote community on the Bering Sea from a lethal outbreak of diphtheria. The nearest serum was 850 miles away across the winter wilderness. Open cockpit ex-WW1 vintage aircraft were no match for centuries old traditional transport by dog sled, which was then still the only means of overland transport. A relay of volunteer Native American dog sled teams achieved this now legendary feat in just five days. Since 1974, an annual commemorative race has run the 1100 miles from Anchorage across ancient dog sled trails to Nome, crossing two mountain ranges in frozen wastes, populated only by scattered settlements. For them it is the social highlight of the year, as some of the villages play host to up to 100 dog sled teams with collectively 1600 highly trained, very valuable dogs, their mushers, and the supporting organisers and veterinary officials who manage the 25 strictly regulated checkpoints. There are no spectators beyond the locals and a few intrepid TV camera crews because there are no resources to house, transport or feed them. Research showed we were not alone in our frustrated exclusion from this epic. So, over the internet, we met up with 10 other like-minded dog crazy strangers. Together, we hired four small ski planes, a chef, two guides and the four pilots who organised everything else. We were all told to bring clothing certified to withstand cold down to minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit. No worries. The worst we experienced was minus 50.



We first met face-to-face on Day 1 at a restaurant in Anchorage. Lori, our amazing Chief Pilot (with 12,000 hours bush flying experience in her Cessna for the National Guard), introduced us to the other three. Her husband, Dan flew a classic antique de Havilland Beaver from his game lodge. Local Air Taxi pilot Jim had another Beaver, and Bill brought along another Cessna. He chose this workhorse plane because it was more suitable than his personal classic ex-WW2 B25 Mitchell Bomber, or the Boeing 767 he captained for American Airlines when he wasn't moonlighting with us. All the planes were mounted on skis, which could be hydraulically repositioned above or below big fat tundra tyres as conditions required.

That first night, in a bar in the nearby Indian community of Talkeetna, was an eye opener. We, the punters, came from South Africa, Australia, Argentina, Canada, America and England. Several were mature single ladies of a very intrepid disposition. ("Hi, I'm Sharon from Chicago. Ya dial 911, ya get me"), Sharon dispatched police cars to crime scenes. We all bonded heavily over prime rib and (pilots excepted) beer and played table tennis aggressively. In the corner of the bar were about 40 framed pictures of young smiling men and women. Nobody laughed when the barman explained softly that it was a shrine. Each one had been killed, either falling off or flying aircraft into Mt Denali, the highest mountain in North America, towering 20,000 feet over the bar's back door. Bill's fiancée joined us for the evening, and I fell in with her. She looked surprisingly weedy, small, unkempt and very tired. Thinking she'd had a bad day on secretarial duties, I remarked gently on her apparent tiredness. She had indeed just had a bad week. Piloting a National Guard C130 Hercules to Afghanistan and back with urgent supplies for forward troops battling with the Taliban. I was beginning to learn about Alaskans.

Joan and I have been privileged to fly with people like these for thousands of miles around Alaska, to places inaccessible to tourists and even to most Alaskans. There may be room for just two anecdotes. We always flew as a group in line astern, at two miles separation, under Visual Flight Rules (no instruments), typically at about 1000 feet so we could see the wildlife clearly. We swapped seats and planes regularly. At one point, we were with Bill in Plane 3, Lori was flying everybody's luggage and the guides in Plane 1. We were all wearing headphones and could talk plane to plane. The weather closed in suddenly, as it does there frequently, and visibility swiftly fell below limits. Lori decided to press on regardless, Bill declined to follow and said he was going to land immediately at a nearby abandoned Air Force base that he knew. Once down in a blizzard, accompanied by Dan in Plane 4, he parked us in a convenient hut before calling for help on his proper phone. This is how we all came to find ourselves occupying a local village house, hastily vacated by its owner, incentivised by a thick bunch of dollar bills. We made a great dinner out of the planes' emergency rations, comprising one case from each plane of Merlot and another of very nutritious king salmon. We talked late into the night and slept on the floor in our parkas.



In Nome (which is a corruption of an ancient misprint for No Name) we were invited to go fishing for king crab. At the main square, we found borrowed snow machines waiting for each of us. (more waving of dollar bills). Following our leader, a burly Eskimo, I gunned my steed over the road, past the traffic lights, across the beach and on to the frozen sea, hotly pursued by another rider anonymously clad in fur under a shiny black crash helmet. Three miles offshore, we stopped by a fishing hole laboriously cut into the ice near a marker pole bearing our leader's name. I was just pipped to the post by Black Helmet, a now visor-less triumphantly grinning Sharon from Chicago.

We caught 33 crabs. I asked our leader if anybody ever stole catch from his painstakingly dug remote ice hole. "Nope". "How could you stop them?" I asked. "I would kill them" came the reply. I am in no doubt that he would have. The nearest policeman was hundreds of miles away.



# THE BUG THAT KILLS THE HUMAN RACE: IS AI AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT?

Tony Dent

*Tony Dent represents Better Statistics and its involvement in maximising the value of Official Statistics to market and opinion research.*

In 1977, almost 50 years ago now, I spent the year working in New York because Denjon International had set up a US office under the name Denjon Data Analysis Inc. (DDA). Our primary objective was to sell data analysis services to the US market, based upon the Quantum package and I was there providing Sid Johnson with some administrative support, whilst also doing market research work, primarily running overview research programmes for Xerox in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela. The story of the main successes and failures of DDA belong elsewhere, but this story of the 'bug' counts as one of our successes and represents a useful lesson for those keen to get on to the AI bandwagon.

The mid to late 70's was an interesting time in the development of the computer industry, insofar as computing was still dominated by mainframes and massive rooms of equipment such as the Cray. At that time, the Quantum software was run on IBM mainframes and Denjon would buy computer time from organisations such as British Oxygen and the Central Electricity Generating Board, whose machines were not busy after normal working hours. However, the world was changing, such that the Donovan package, a competitor to Quantum, ran on the IBM1130, one of the first minicomputers. Then suddenly, there were a number of minicomputers available from some companies new to the market:- the Vax, produced by the Digital Equipment Company, Harris computers and the Prime minicomputer, to name but three. The mighty micro had not yet made an appearance, but these 'minis' were now the very thing and Denjon was looking at them in some detail with a view to moving Quantum from mainframe to one of these new minis.

Somehow that fact was reasonably widely known, and I was contacted by the Marketing Manager of Merck, Sharp and Dohme (MSD) and asked to conduct a feasibility study into the possibility of developing software for diagnosing illness and suggesting a therapy. The suggestion was that MSD might offer suitable systems for clinicians to use in their surgeries. Coincidentally, the Manager was Ken Coleman, an ex-colleague from when we had both worked at the Market Investigations Group in London a few years earlier.

Well, a young colleague and I worked at this with some enthusiasm, because it was a very interesting project and these new machines were theoretically, very powerful. In summary, our concept was to exploit a massive database of health history and to use an algorithm that cut through according to probabilities depending on answers to specific questions.

As an example, we might begin by asking age and sex and the database might cut to just those records with the same or similar profile, and then the next question would be associated with the most common problem found for that cohort and then carry on accordingly. For example, we might start with a question like "Do you have any pain?" [Yes/No], and the database cuts to include those issues that evidence associates with pain or not. Then supposing the answer is 'yes', the next question might be "Where does it hurt?" allowing the opportunity for multiple responses and cutting the resulting database according to the answers.

Although there might be a number of different forms of questioning, the concept was that the next question would always be determined by the data left 'in play' from the previous question, and always selecting the next 'most probable' criterion to take us forward. As I recall, we knew how to program that, or at least we thought we did! We also knew how to go back up the decision tree, in the event of 'no conclusion' to a particular question sequence. So, we didn't see the software requirement as representing any serious difficulty.

The real problem was that we realised that the size of the database required for even a modestly useful system, easily surpassed the capacity of any of the machines available at that time. Even if it were possible to bolt on additional storage, the processing power required for the algorithm to work was also beyond the capacity of the equipment available. So 'not feasible' was the simple conclusion to our efforts.

But it left me with the thought: supposing we could overcome these technical drawbacks, what then?

Well, as we know the world changes and it would always be necessary to update the information with the latest case studies to ensure that both diagnosis and therapy are kept up to date. But the more I considered the issue, I was reminded of Turing's original paper on computable numbers and the realisation that the system would always need something new.

Indeed, the more I thought about it, the more I felt that it would be almost impossible to achieve a truly comprehensive database that could be used for all diagnostic purposes, however powerful the machine might be to run the algorithm. I believed that bias against up-to-date information within the database was

inevitable; I therefore hypothesised the existence of a subtle bias in the data that would, very occasionally, provide the wrong therapy resulting in a death! Only on occasion, but sufficient to tip the delicate balance, so that the death rate would exceed the birth rate; a feature not noticed by a world now so dominated by computers whose systems we would not question, because they do everything for us.

Finally therefore, the bug that kills the human race is a computer bug, biased by the dominance of historical information and lacking information about NOW, let alone the future.

The core of truth contained in the above has been confirmed by the inaccuracy of some modern AI which has been found to have been constructed by investigating databases with inherent biases. Will we ever be able to avoid that? I doubt it.

Please note there is a forthcoming Net Zero Conference and Better Statistics are seeking contributors. Click here for details: [www.betterstats.net](http://www.betterstats.net)

---

## NEWS FROM THE TONY COWLING FOUNDATION

Penny Briki

Is it really twelve months ago already that we had the pleasure of outlining the TCF activities and plans for 2023? It has been an excellent year, and we are delighted to share the results of our key initiatives. As always, we welcome friends and colleagues in the Research Network to register on our website for more detailed descriptions of our work.

### The Tony Cowling Foundation Industry Innovation Award



This award has become the well-established highlight of our year and in 2023 we received no fewer than twenty four worthy entries from a pleasing geographical reach across fifteen countries. Entries were diverse and came from a mix of different sized businesses, from small to multi-national.

You may remember that we set the criteria for this award to spotlight work that has the potential to push the boundaries of our industry, something on which Tony himself always focused, through innovation in data, operations or in client application. Entries for the award this

year included a good blend of tech and ESG proposals, and it was encouraging to see several entries from emerging businesses – proof that our industry is still forging ahead!

Our close partnership with ESOMAR continues and we were delighted to announce the TCF Industry Innovation Award winner at their annual congress in Amsterdam in September.

Verian's 'Voice of Ukraine' was the winner of this year's award and is an all-round outstanding example of pioneering research. The platform is a digital research project which employs a state-of-the-art online data collection process to document the migration journeys and needs of war-displaced Ukrainians, mainly women. By shedding light on these lived experiences, this project is reshaping the narrative presented to policymakers and NGOs. We are sure you would like to know more about the Voice of Ukraine, so please refer to our website <https://tonycowlingfoundation.org/awards> to delve into more detail and explore how Verian's research might be applied to different situations.



Register on the TCF website to be added to our mailing list and stay informed about online events over the coming months to spotlight the work of all finalists for this 2023 award.



### Tony Cowling Foundation Annual Event

We were delighted to host over sixty guests at our first annual event in November. The choice of the venue and the atmosphere created on the night, provided a mixture of convivial discussion, offering the TCF team an opportunity to thank our donors and inform them of the exciting projects they are helping the Foundation to conduct. It was wonderful to connect



with so many supporters and friends from the industry and special thanks to those who travelled from abroad to be with us. To view the photo gallery, click here: <https://tonycowlingfoundation.org/Iodnov23>.

Highlights of the evening included presentations from our 2022 Industry Award winner Dr Jasper Grosskurth, Managing Director at Dalberg Research by video from Kenya, and 2023 Industry Award winner Dr Michelle Harrison, Global CEO, Verian, in the room.

## University of Cambridge Judge Business School

Our partnership with Cambridge Judge continues to evolve and explore new ways we can support their research.

It was an honour to host Cambridge Judge Business School’s Professor of Marketing and Vice-Dean for faculty, Jaideep Prabhu at the TCF annual event representing all the research projects our Foundation is helping to fund. Jaideep took the assembly through the key elements of the PhD research projects. More details on our website here: <https://tonycowlingfoundation.org/initiatives>.

In the researcher’s own words, the 2023 fascinating projects cover:

### **Artificial Intelligence**

“The goal is to create an image-based personality assessment, where the images are automatically generated through AI. A future application could be a world where ads are automatically created for each individual – a true ‘1-2-1 marketing world’.”

### **Social Media:**

“Most debates over social media exist within ‘bubbles’ that are well-known to amplify disinformation, but these debates often are carried out with little reference to the wider public. The goal is to understand how the wider public perceive social media debates.”

### **Mentor Matching through digitising and analysing rich data and insights on micro-entrepreneurs:**

“The goal is to develop mentor matching programmes for micro entrepreneurs in developing markets and to contribute to the emerging theory of marketing in informal sectors.”



As close friends to Tony and respected members of the Market Research industry, we hope you support the work we are doing at the TCF, and we would welcome your thoughts or suggestions.

To continue our work, we have launched our latest fundraising campaign with a target for 2024 of £40,000 to fund the awards and research projects. If you would like to help by donating or suggesting a sponsorship arrangement, please contact us directly by email to [admin@tonycowlingfoundation.org](mailto:admin@tonycowlingfoundation.org).

In January, the TCF is publishing the next edition of our own newsletter, Connections, which will also be available on our website. May we wish all the readers of the Research Network Newsletter the very best for 2024.

To donate visit the website <https://tonycowlingfoundation.org/info>.





# A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

Guy & Margaret Consterdine

**About the authors:** *Guy has worked in advertising agencies (S H Benson, Ogilvy & Mather) and publishers (Times Newspapers, Thomson Magazines, where he was research director). In his mid-40s, he set up his own international media research consultancy, Guy Consterdine Associates, which he ran until retirement. Margaret's career has been in teaching, becoming head of History at a school in the Woking area.*

**M**y wife Margaret and I have both been fascinated by discovering new things about our respective family histories. Our starting points were quite different. I knew relatively little about my immediate antecedents: family secrets were carefully guarded. Margaret, by contrast, already knew of all her relatives five or six generations back, centred in her quiet village in Somerset, but she wanted to go much further back.

The enforced at-home time of the Covid lockdowns was a good opportunity to complete our hitherto leisurely progress.

## Guy's Story



My principal investigation focused on three generations in the first half of the 20th century: my parents', grandparents' and great-grandparents' generations, including their many siblings.

I didn't even know the identity of some of these close ancestors (my maternal grandfather, for example, and almost all the great-grandparent generation), and I didn't know the full stories of any of them. It was kept mysterious and deliberately hidden. The secrets were known by very few, and they were tight-lipped. Misinformation was sometimes given to deflect awkward questions. But I was curious to know what had happened in upper social circles in the British Raj in India and then in twenties, thirties and forties Britain.

Initially I was surprised how little, in the early 21st century, was known by other living family members about our nearest generations. Nevertheless, and rather to my surprise, using a variety of sources I successfully uncovered the main outlines of events. Here are a few examples of my discoveries.

One of my great-grandmothers, Ivy, born in India in 1884, had a charismatic and sensual personality. She married twice, including tricking her second husband into marriage by adopting a false identity! She was mistress to at least one other man, including (almost certainly) an Indian Maharajah. She fled from India to Britain in 1923 under another false name to escape a scandal, and under yet another adopted name lived a life of wealth in England funded by an intimate male friend. However, she spent and gambled all her wealth away and died a pauper in an unmarked grave which has only recently been rediscovered.



One of Ivy's daughters, Nancy, conceived four daughters in the 1920s and 1930s with a variety of men. Her mother, Ivy informally adopted the first three and brought them up as her own children and the fourth, Virginia, was given away for adoption. Nancy then married, and only her fifth daughter, Felicity, was acknowledged as hers.

One of Ivy's sons, Henry, made the family governess pregnant in India in 1922. He stayed with her and their children but refused to marry her, presumably hoping for a socially better match. They came to England in 1932. In 1941, the former governess forced him to marry her in exchange for silence about another scandalous liaison which resulted in pregnancy.

There were seven members of the family who, when children, did not know who their fathers were; they were simply refused the information. My mother was one of them. When asking about her father she was told "It's none of your business!" or "That's not for you to know!" However, my recent research has identified who her father (my grandfather) was. It was too late for my mother to know as she'd died several years earlier. I found a string of circumstantial evidence had pointed to a particular man, Walter, and DNA evidence through Ancestry.com confirmed it for certain.

I also discovered that there were four members of the family who grew up believing themselves to be only children, when in fact they had half-brothers and/or half-sisters. One of these was Virginia, Nancy's fourth daughter. By now a grandmother herself, her grandchildren were keen to know about her birth family. She was able to trace me through Consterdine being an extremely rare surname. It was only because of the research I'd already completed that I immediately saw how she fitted into the family. Yet none of my living

family knew of her existence! This, and the mutual enthusiasm of meeting each other and remaining in touch, was one of the most exciting revelations to emerge through my research. And Felicity, Nancy's fifth daughter, was delighted to discover that she had another charming half-sister, a niece and nephew.

More generally, I can highlight a number of broad themes I became aware of which apply to many families, and some to all families:

- The vital role of chance in our lives, ranging from narrow escapes from death to chance meetings which lead to major turning points.
- We are not in total control of our lives; we are buffeted by events and the decisions of others.
- The power of a single moment to change lives.
- Decisions taken can have unexpected consequences.
- Relationships are not necessarily what they seem.
- Unplanned pregnancies can shape the wider family, especially when there are several of them.
- The effects of behaviour in one generation can cascade downwards and directly affect the lives of succeeding generations, with long-term consequences.
- Half-truths, evasions and downright lies may be employed to explain away inadmissible facts.
- One person's misdeeds can implicate others, who themselves may be obliged to dissimulate or lie, in order to cover up, and thus become entangled in a web of concealment and deception.
- Occasionally a hidden truth will slip out through an unguarded comment.
- One must expect surprises and revelations, not all of them good ones.
- The power of love: it can lead an individual to knowingly make life-changing sacrifices.

We have found that one of the great pleasures of family research is the heightened contacts with near and distant relatives, in to-and-fro exchanges about information, sources, legends and speculation – including those relations with whom we normally only communicated through Christmas cards.

### **Margaret's Story**

Margaret writes: Many years ago, I and my family researched and recorded all branches of my paternal and maternal ancestors back five or six generations.

During Covid lockdowns, my great-nephew Oliver (incidentally he is working in a market research company) contacted me about tracing the family tree. I gave him all my evidence, and he attempted to go further back. We were astonished how far he could go, and what was most exhilarating was that our ancestry can be traced right back to Edward I, my great x 22 grandfather. Beyond that, it's easy to trace further to William the Conqueror. No doubt many of us are descended from William, but very few of us have the evidence. This possibility was partly because our ancestors included members of the nobility whose lives were important enough to be recorded in public chronicles.



What especially interested me were the ancestral names coming up in the earliest times. I researched them further. Edward I's eldest son by his second wife Margaret of France, daughter of the French king, was Thomas Brotherton, my great x 21 grandfather. Thomas's half-brother became King Edward II, but Thomas plotted with Edward II's wife Isabella the 'She-Wolf of France' and her lover Roger Mortimer to have the unpopular Edward murdered by a group of nobles, and in a particularly brutal way. Edward III succeeded to the throne but was only a boy, so Isabella and Mortimer ruled in his place. Further plotting resulted in young Edward III having his mother Isabella exiled and Mortimer executed. Thomas Brotherton, as the boy king's half-uncle, then took over ruling the country while Edward remained a minor. Edward gave Brotherton the title Earl Marshall of England and Duke of Norfolk (1st creation).

Five generations after this bloodthirsty tale, Thomas's great x 3 granddaughter (my great x 16 grandmother) married John Howard. John was made 1st Duke of Norfolk (2nd creation), and thus Howard became the family name of the Dukes of Norfolk, as it is today.

As a former Head of History at a local school, I taught about some of these families and kings, so this ancestral line was especially fascinating to me. I'd loved to have told the children in my classes that these were my ancestors!

Considering the lustre and wealth of these royal and aristocratic families through centuries of generations, I am left wondering: where has the money gone and why am I not living in Arundel Castle?

## PETER DANIELS 1943–2023

*Sheila Robinson writes:*

**P**eter Daniels passed away in August and is much missed by all his family and many friends.

Born in Llanelli, he was Welsh to the core, although he spent much of his career 'abroad' in the London area. From an early age, he was taken by his father to Stradey Park and remained a passionate/obsessed Scarlets fan to the end. His e-mail address even included the numbers 9 and 3 remembering the day the Scarlets beat the All Blacks with that score!



Llanelli Grammar School was followed by Aberystwyth University (Politics and Economics), moving to London in the early 60s to pursue a career in Research, Marketing and Advertising. Roles at various companies including H J Heinz, Dorlands and Millward Brown were finally followed by his own market research company, Synergism, which he ran successfully for ten years before he retired.

Throughout his working life, the London Welsh Rugby club and the London Welsh Centre in Grays Inn Road (where he learned the Welsh language) were very important to him. In 2015, after Peter had been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, he and his second wife Gill decided to move from Hertfordshire to Llantwit Major in the Vale of Glamorgan. Now he joined a male voice choir, Meibion y Machlud, and even competed at the International Eisteddfod in Llangollen.

Retirement was obviously not in his genes because he found the time to write no less than four books which were published and well received. They mainly focused on Welsh history, Welsh finance and the views of Welsh people who had left and returned home later in life: 'hiraeth' – longing for the homeland. While the books do talk about the Welsh/English relationship and how 'horrible the English have been over the years', they are an excellent read.

Peter was an interesting and interested friend who loved to have conversations about anything and everything, and if there was a difference of opinion, so much the better! Brought up as an only child, his life ended with a very loving and large family, including his wife Gill, children, step-children, grandchildren, step-grandchildren, and very many friends.

A life well lived.

---

## WENDY GORDON 1942–2023

*Neil Swan, Martin Lee and Caroline Whitehill write:*



**T**he market research industry lost one of its foremost figures on 15th November 2023, when Wendy Gordon passed away. In a career that spanned over five decades, she was integral to the process of shaping qualitative market research in the UK and worldwide, along with pioneering ideas and thinking that have formed the basis of modern marketing insight.

Wendy came to the UK from South Africa in the late 1960s, having graduated in social anthropology and psychology. Wendy's interest in research had previously grown from stints at both JWT and Market Research Africa. Here in the UK, she contacted Bill Schlackman, whom she had previously briefly met, joining Schlackman as a permanent employee. Bill was hugely influential in helping Wendy build on her fascination with understanding people by giving her the professional and commercial skills to go on and build her own subsequent career.

This was a time when qualitative research was viewed with suspicion by many, but was starting to prove very helpful in brand and advertising development, alongside the growing field of advertising planning. Frustrated by the length of turnaround times involved, especially in creative development research, Wendy formed the specialist agency Quick-Search (later Q-Search) within the Schlackman organisation, alongside Colleen Ryan.

Wendy and Colleen yearned for their own business and in 1981 set up as The Research Business, initially from a flat in Haverstock Hill. This was a key growth time for qualitative research, and The Research Business thrived through its dynamism and ideas-orientation – Colleen the energetic businesswoman, Wendy the

brilliant thinker.

They set about professionalising research and The Research Business was soon the biggest qualitative agency in the industry, subsequently branching out into quantitative and international research, and rebranding as TRBI. Wendy had earned her reputation as a fearsome leader.

But if that was Wendy's public persona as a businessperson, the deeper reality about her was in her intellectual adventure and rigour. She was always more of an anthropologist than a researcher in the strict sense, and would break disciplinary borders and venture off in any direction that was intellectually challenging and useful, whether that was economics, neuroscience, social science or more recently, behavioural science, where Wendy's awareness of cognitive advances was well over a decade ahead of the mainstream.

After TRBI, Wendy was one of the founders of the brand consultancy The Fourth Room, before successfully establishing Acacia Avenue in 2002, bringing her unwavering energy back into the business of research and insight.

Wendy was also a true citizen of the industry. AQR, originally the Association of Qualitative Research Practitioners (AQR), was established in 1981, and Wendy took the helm as Chair shortly afterwards. She was a force in other industry bodies – the Market Research Society, where she was a Council Member, ESOMAR, The Research Society (in Australia) and more. She hosted training days and wrote papers; she was a visiting professor at the Birmingham Business School and was one of the first researchers to earn a place in the Women's Advertising Club of London (WACL). She propelled the research industry forward:- challenging, debating and driving new thinking through courses, papers and close relationships with the planning and client communities. This sense of collaboration characterised her whole career.

Wendy published two books on qualitative practice – Qualitative Market Research in 1988 and Goodthinking in 1999. These were followed by her 2016 finale, Mindframes, which was about different lenses through which to think. It was these different ways of thinking that really formed the heart of her philosophy.

Since Wendy retired, her curiosity and energy never subsided. She became an accomplished potter and continued to explore the world of market research vicariously through friends and ex-colleagues. She even suggested that ChatGPT write her obituary.

In common with many who leave an indelible mark, her character was multi-faceted. She could be fierce, resolute, combative and unstoppable. But she could also be generous, loyal, forgiving and kind. She believed in giving people their chance. Key qualities that characterised Wendy's career were her bravery and restlessness. She was most interested in ideas and people, and in particular, inspiring us to embrace the possibility of thinking differently.

---

## CHRIS WHITE 1956–2023

*David Iddiols writes:*

Chris White's career in market research began in the late 70s when the partners at QED, Chris Maxwell and Gary Moynihan, hired him and a handful of other graduates to print, collate and staple large quantities of questionnaires, often overnight. The appetite Chris showed for this and various other back-room tasks was enough to convince the directors that he merited a full time position, and so a hugely successful career was launched.

I had to wait until the early 80s to meet Chris, appropriately at an MRS conference in Brighton, at a time when having fun as well as listening to the latest thinking on clever research techniques was very much the order of the day. And Chris certainly knew how to have fun, as anyone who had the pleasure to be in his company will testify.

We became big friends as our careers progressed in parallel, and regularly socialised together, notably at ESOMAR conferences, on 'lads' weekends' each year in unsuspecting corners of Europe and on regular fishing trips to the slightly less exotic Plymouth. It was on such a trip, along with industry heavyweights like Ted Hudson, John Kelly and Geoff Payne, that Chris earned the nickname Sven, on account of a Scandi look he sported at the time: a ridiculous red rollneck cable-stitch sweater.

So, Sven he became – an entirely apt moniker for his fun loving side. But he was also Chris, someone who achieved so much success throughout his career. He was fast tracked to become a director at QED before becoming the youngest ever director to be appointed at NOP. He headed up their Mystery Shopping Division in



Oxford where he was justifiably proud to be able to cite a wide repertoire of household name brands, including the likes of BMW and TfL among his long list of clients. Later, when NOP was taken over by GFK (and then subsequently IPSOS), he continued to show the same voracious appetite for retaining and gaining new clients until his retirement in 2020.

It was during his time at GFK that he met and subsequently married Rachel, herself a leading light in the industry and ever willing to recognise the influence that Chris had as her mentor. Sadly she, along with her daughter Josie and two stepchildren, Harry and Madeline, now face the future without him.

Chris Maxwell recently put together some 'Memories of Chris,' in which he characterised Sven/Chris as reliable, loyal, unique, magnetic, inclusive, unpredictable, enthusiastic, devoted, resilient and brusque. I concur wholeheartedly with that list, and particularly liked the accompanying explanation of brusque – "Chris did not suffer fools gladly and his friends were privileged not to be defined as such".

His passing leaves a hole in the lives of so many people. A talented researcher and a much-loved bloke who will not be forgotten.

Chris passed peacefully away after a short fight against liver cancer on the 30th October 2023, aged a mere 67.



## **STEERING GROUP**

**T**he Research Network is directed by a Steering Group consisting at present of Adam Phillips (Chairman), Jane A'Court (Membership), Jane Bain (Website Editor and Events Co-organiser), Jane Gwilliam (Events Co-organiser), Linda Henshall (External Liaison), Nick Tanner (Website News Editor), Gill Wareing (Secretary-Treasurer), Frank Winter (Oral History and Data Protection) and Graham Woodham (*Newsletter* editor). Their names, addresses, phone and email details are in the Research Network Membership Directory. Please feel free to contact any member of the Steering Group on matters relevant to the areas they cover.