

Arriving in Cambridge as a graduate student in 1968, feeling like a very small fish straight out of the much smaller pool that was Trinity College Dublin. What stands out in my memory?

The shilling in the slot for the gas fires in our rooms in Whitstead, the sprawling Edwardian graduate house attached to Newnham College, where Liliane, Sue and I all found ourselves staying. The freshly baked cheese scones and flapjacks in the tearoom in the University Library (the UL, as we rapidly learned to call it), where everyone seemed to meet up at one time or another. The astonishing freedom of being able to browse freely through the bookstacks of practically the entire contents of the UL, and take down whatever we wanted from the shelves.

Above all, perhaps, coming from what was by comparison a very small and provincial university environment, there was the excitement of finding myself in the midst of a large and cosmopolitan group of people for whom the greatest thing we had in common was a love of the adventure of learning . Right from the start, this included Liliane, straight from the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris and the upheavals of May 1968, and Sue and Eve, both natives of the Cambridge system (as I saw them at any rate!).

Liliane says that arriving in Cambridge felt like a door into a whole new world of freedom after the confined atmosphere of the very French, very Parisian Ecole Normale Supérieure. And as Eve has also remembered her saying, it was a haven of calm after May 1968 (she had not even been able to sit her final BA examinations that summer as she should have done, and had to take them in London instead, some time after her arrival in Cambridge).

I remember my first impressions of Liliane as being very warm and funny, very sweet and apparently very unassuming - and as a tremendously hard and focussed worker, quite unlike the more laid-back style I was accustomed to. Looking back, what strikes me above all is the sheer professionalism she displayed by comparison to our much more amateur approach. In my case at any rate, I had come straight from a BA course in English at TCD and had been admitted to the Cambridge PhD programme on the strength of a very vague research project in medieval English romance. The sole gesture towards training in research methods that I remember receiving on arrival in Cambridge (or at any time thereafter) was an hour-long session conducted by two very distinguished Shakespearian scholars (Muriel Bradbrook and L C Knights, if I remember rightly), which consisted of a joint dirge lamenting the fact that so many people nowadays seemed to want to come to do a PhD in Cambridge "just because they wanted a professional academic qualification" whereas in their eyes the only true reason for doing a doctorate was "because you had a book inside you that needed to be brought out".

The contrast with the academic culture Liliane hailed from, the culture of the Ecole Normale, with its focus precisely on getting the professional academic qualifications necessary for a career in

the French educational system, could not be more complete ... And in the end, of the four of us, it was indeed only Liliane who eventually went on to get a doctorate (not to mention her Agrégation) and to launch out into a highly successful academic career. This is not to say that Eve, Sue and myself did not in our different ways go on to do highly satisfying and interesting things, nor that any of us has ever lost our shared love of culture and learning. Nor do I for one moment think that Liliane would have been any less successful academically under the "English system".

Perhaps the best thing we all carried away from 1960s Cambridge's relaxed inclusiveness was just that freedom to discover and explore all kinds of ideas and friendships that have remained with us ever since - not least with Liliane!

Lucy Mitchell