

INTERVIEW: ANN

Q1b. Have you always lived in Milton Keynes? (When did you arrive? What was your first impression? What reasons prompted your move?)

ANN:

No and it's really important to say I was brought up in Ireland, in Derry but also in Donegal. We lived for a while in a very remote cottage no roads or anything had to scramble up the hill in what they called a 'gentle' wood - that's like a Yates-ian fairy F.A.E.R.I.E. fairy wood. And a mother who had a kind of special insight. She was very practical, but she also had quite a psychic understanding which has always affected me. So also did classical literature, my undergraduate degree - that was wonderful - and after that anthropology at Oxford. Then I did fieldwork in Africa and also lived in Africa for a several years, university teaching.

My fieldwork was on storytelling. Recording the stories, which was very unusual in 1960s for a British anthropologist to do, then transcribing it translating it. And that has affected me all my life because I realised it wasn't the text it was the multisensory performance. So, it's not so much - well for Ireland it was sense of place, in Africa it was sense of experience, and then David and I - we've now been married over 50 years - were in Nigeria for four years, err... five years.

Then jobs at the Open University were advertised. So, we came back and settled in this house that you're in - this large house you're in, with the study extension that we built on. We bought it sight unseen, David's brilliant mother came and found it (she lived in Northampton) because we had three children who were under 4 when we came back, and two jobs, very demanding jobs, so we couldn't go round looking at houses and making offers and so on and this was the perfect house.

So, we've lived here since 1969 apart from three years away in Fiji and then came back to it - our place. A friend looked after it; she would dig in the front garden, and if people thought the house was empty, she would say 'oh no, why do you think I'm digging here?'. So, we weren't burgled at all.

It is very much our place. We only discovered that gradually, but it has added to our sense of place that this is old Bletchley which as I said earlier is the very first settlement in the area. It was certainly in the Domesday book but before that too, on Watling Street on the way up to the north. Before Milton Keynes in this area there was also Stony Stratford and Fenny Stratford across the river. And 'The three trees pub' which I'm sure goes right back to the beginning. We are only a couple hundred yards away from this very nice pub; the oldest post office, although now closed, was opposite that, a crossroads that was the beginning of Bletchley. That very much added to our sense of place and also that our children grew up here and went to school in the old church school just across the way, and then another just the other side across Rickley park just behind us, and the children played in our garden. So that all brings our sense of place, along with the orchard that my husband made here in the garden, and the flowers.

INTERVIEWER: What was your first impression?

ANN:

Getting lost! Church Green Road where we live has a sharp left-hand bend halfway up and if you go straight on, if you think it's the same road, but it's become Rickley Lane. Of course, the road bent at right angles because it was leading to the church, 'church green road'. You come to the church in different ways. You could also walk along Church Lane which is just across the road from here next to the Elizabethan cottages, just wide enough for a hearse to be pulled by horses. So that was the first impression. Then we came into this house, and we thought it was lovely except that it had horrible, horrible picture-wallpaper, Victorian, which we changed very quickly. We didn't really know that there was going to be a new city here but we gradually discovered. To begin with we thought that was awful, maybe uplifting but awful. But all right it was one of the reasons that the Open University was sited here because they could find a site that was free and not too expensive. Of course, the first things

we saw were the infrastructure and the drains and then the flat roof cardboard type houses on the way from here to the Open University.

Q2. What do you feel has changed the most in Milton Keynes?

ANN:

Well the roads are much easier now. It used to take us 20 minutes or more to get from here to the University, now maybe 10 minutes. And of course, there are what they call the V and H roads and the other roads then, I can never remember them by their numbers.

INTERVIEWER: H roads, it's all to do with the Vertical and Horizontal isn't it?

ANN:

I know! Very sensible, but not for people like me. Quite. Well actually I still get lost even on familiar routes. But you're always on a parallel so you can always get home, even somebody like me who is always getting lost! I remember, before, going around the lovely, lovely green areas, beautiful, and along the little cart tracks and now that's all part of Milton Keynes and the secure prison, and there are so many places like that. But what I think is so wonderful and maybe didn't put enough in my book are the walks I can go with my husband (and dogs when we had them), walking through so much green (they call them the Redways from the surfacing) and through the trees and by the rivers. I think it's so wonderful the way that Milton Keynes - and this adds to my sense of place - has kept the urban parks and the river and you can walk along and not see anything of the city really. You can walk from one end of the city to the other without crossing a road. That's not so much so in Bletchley actually, because it was here before. You know people who live in Bletchley feel quite strongly if they've been here a long time, that 'we are Bletchleyites. We are not from Milton Keynes!'

But now it is interesting that in the past if people asked where you came from it was no use saying Bletchley. You had to say, Milton Keynes, well unless they were our age group. But now if you say 'Bletchley' they say 'Ah, Bletchley Park!' They've heard of it; it is lovely, and that all adds to our sense.

And by now I very much approve of the new city, partly because of the reasons I said that it is very green, as I put in my book 'Tales of the city'. It is also so handy to get to things in the city centre and so on, though most of the time now because I no longer drive, I would tend to go more to Bletchley things. I used to go further afield. My husband now often shops in Bletchley, but we go to the city centre church in the centre of Milton Keynes. We love the shape of the dome and did you know the way they did the cross on the top? Whichever angle you look at it from you see it's a cross which is not so of others. So, we are Milton Keynesites as well as first and foremost Bletchleyites and foremost of all OLD Bletchleyites and old people in our 80s.

Oh and another thing that deepened my feeling about the area is - this is going to be relevant - at the medical surgery (Parkside they call it because it's not far from the famous Bletchley Park) - they have a concert every now and then in aid of a charity. The two most recent concerts were in aid of the charities in memory of two children that died near here, one while a baby at nine days old, the other boy maybe five years old. The charities are to raise money for other children like that: to give them their final wishes and to help their parents. I've done two stories, one about each of them, because they were both from Bletchley, and they're going to be audiobooks they are being recorded now with music, the second is just being done - I've recorded the spoken bit already but the music is being composed by a multi-musician, a Brazilian and multi-instrumentalist. They too have much deepened my sense of place. That's all been in the last year.

I will tell you an interesting thing - you might want to go and interview him, he's the Minister at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone in the city centre, who is called Ernesto. His sermon yesterday was about how we must tell stories and how important it is. He began, it was lovely, about a church in Guatemala that got to be known as the Coca-Cola church because the Minister said that you must not bring alcohol, as they used to do, so they would stand around drinking Coca-Cola. And what

happened was they all told their stories. He is so good, he takes a specific thing like that, he is from Peru, Spanish-speaking, so he is always talking about the Espiritu, not spirit, like Espania, Spain. He begins with a specific thing and then widens it; he is very good. He'd be really interesting to talk to about how he feels about Milton Keynes he's very thoughtful. He's quite busy. His English is perfect. It's just some of his pronunciation's, occasionally - not now but in its previous church he used to talk about angels as 'angles' and archangels'. Lovely. A very good artist.

Q3. What, if any, qualities make Milton Keynes unique?

ANN:

I actually don't think any more than makes any city or place or village or home unique. I know everyone says 'new', but it's not so new now. Is actually 50 years old. And I think it's so green, as against the many who call it a 'concrete' city, and well-planned like other garden cities. But otherwise like when I was studying music for my 'Hidden musicians' book, of course it is also unique, and all those wonderful musicians were unique, individual. But those patterns are found widely, and that's why my book came to be quite influential, revealing patterns that are found everywhere.

Q4. What would make you proud to live in a place? (Do you experience some of these elements in living in Milton Keynes? What could improve your pride in living in Milton Keynes?)

ANN:

I think just that it helps me to be myself and my family and my husband to be themselves but also secondarily that people have heard of Milton Keynes and they've heard of Bletchley Park which is so close. I can say I'm now a 'friend' of Bletchley Park, so if you come again, I can take you in free, and I'm very proud of that. I'm also proud because the Open University is here, and many people have heard of that, and so they should have. And I'm proud too because some people have heard of my two

books centred on Milton Keynes, and there is going to be a third book about taxi drivers here which is getting a bit behind itself because of my involvement in the 'Hearing Others' Voices' series.

INTERVIEWER: What could improve it?

ANN:

I think a bit more investment in Bletchley because they do so much in the city centre and the new bits. Every now and then they talk about doing something in Bletchley, but it doesn't come to a great deal. But I am proud anyway and proud of my family and what they've done - of my daughters and my grandchildren; they're no longer in Milton Keynes, but they come back and visit us here, and that makes me proud. I am proud - happy - at the fact that we look out on a preserved area and an Elizabethan cottage that won't be built on.

Q5. In your opinion what element of Milton Keynes is: The best. The most exciting. The hardest. Lacking. The most culturally significant. The richest in heritage?

INTERVIEWER: Best

ANN:

I'd say the way they've kept the villages as villages and all the green areas. So, as I think you have on the heading of your video, it is a village series of villages.

INTERVIEWER: The most exciting element?

ANN:

I don't know so much. Maybe the autumn leaves, they are amazing. Why will people go to New England when they have MK colours here? It's not the same every autumn but a lot of autumns, fantastic trees all along the main roads.

INTERVIEWER: The hardest?

ANN:

I don't think I've found it harder here than anywhere, I tend to get lost everywhere (I always have dreams of getting lost).

INTERVIEWER: Lacking?

ANN: Nothing!

INTERVIEWER: The most culturally significant?

ANN:

Well, as an anthropologist who likes to look at things holistically, I would say everything, everything is connected to everything else. If you have to take just one thing, I'd say the people, their souls.

INTERVIEWER: The richest in heritage?

ANN:

Well I don't know. Just what I do know about is the music and some of the stories, but I don't happen to know so very about the drama or the painting or the sculpture. I don't know about lots of it but am quite sure it is all equally rich- because how can you measure infinity?

Q6. Has Milton Keynes played a part in helping you gain any achievements which you might not have been successful in if you lived elsewhere? Has it aided any failures?

ANN:

Well, of course, it has enabled me to write two books one of which, the first one 'The hidden musicians' oddly enough seems to have started off a whole new field of study - music ethnography - that didn't exist before. Now it is recognised as an academic discipline. In fact, a couple of years ago they had an international conference organised by the music department at the Open University called 'The hidden musicians revisited'. I was asked to give a keynote speech at the end. It was wonderful to me that 50 or 60 participants each talked about their own work, studying things I would never have thought of, but they were all ethnographic in approach, as I had been. That was a most incredibly moving thing - that the Milton Keynes musicians had given rise to this.

And also, just living here. It would have been great wherever we lived I guess, with the children growing up, going to school. To university to Oxford and Cambridge, and then back at the holidays. We'd go away and come back to the garden so it has been very, very important in our lives. But it was our lives on the human side, so somewhere else would be the same probably, but we brought so much to here.

I can't actually think of anything lacking. Maybe the relative neglect of Bletchley like I said, but actually I think Milton Keynes has been a great achievement, they learned so much from the other garden cities.

Q7. If you were in charge of advertising Milton Keynes what view/image and/or tag line would you give it?

ANN:

Green, full of culture and art. The advertising should have lots of pictures and hopefully audio and video as well, but definitely pictures. As we know a picture can be worth 1000 words. But I don't know if they have a logo (nowadays I'm all into logos). They have some very good sculptures in the city. I think their advertising is very good.

INTERVIEWER:

I think it's very interesting that compared to other cities and towns in the UK Milton Keynes is the only one had an advertising campaign before it had a town.

ANN:

Of course, because they wanted to attract people to come here. They had these big placards up in Euston. It was very good.

INTERVIEWER:

I think for everywhere else they get their tagline after the town has been established and what is well known for Milton Keynes, 'the city of dreams', was they had to have that beforehand because nobody knew what it was going to be.

ANN:

People beforehand thought it was named for Milton and Keynes, two great Englishman.

INTERVIEWER: Lovely, all the urban myths about its beginning.

Q8. If Milton Keynes was a person could you describe them and the type of 50th party they might have?

ANN:

Lots of balloons - they do anyway, but they would be the kind of balloons that would just dissolve and not do anything nasty to the atmosphere and environment. Like the biodegradable stitches in yourself.

And the person? Like any person with huge depths and multi sides that they don't even understand fully themselves - and that's why we need the 'Hearing others' Voices' series that I'm editing just now, hidden depths, very complex but very simple on the surface. Like people. Like all people.

Q9. Please watch this clip from the BFI archives, 8 mins

(<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-milton-keynes-a-village-city-1973-online>). It shows the early days of Milton Keynes. Does this evoke any memories or thoughts you are comfortable sharing?

ANN:

Well do I recall those empty bull-dosed huge spaces, concreted roads and paths suddenly ending - nowhere. Hard then to visualise what was to come (not that we tried, we had our own stories then to think about instead). And now lovely. Places seem closer. Trees. Green.

Stony Stratford is mentioned, not Bletchley though that was then THE town and cultural centre in the whole area. It's important I guess to make people notice that 50 years later (now) we don't talk about

attracting 'bright men' (men) as they do in the video. Some details didn't happen as laid out, but yes, yes, yes, the basic vision did. And from the start, everyone called it, thinks of it as KNOWS it as - a CITY

Q 10. Do you think Milton Keynes has a good reputation a. Internally with its residents, b. Externally with the rest of the country? (Why do you think it has this reputation? How does that make you feel? What could improve it?)

ANN:

I think internally a very good one with almost all of its residents. Of course, there are always some people who don't like where they're living because they're having a hard time, maybe even with themselves, but most people love it here.

Externally still a lot of people think of it as a kind of cultureless desert, a concrete desert,(though if you say 'Bletchley', then they think Bletchley Park, that's good). I'm afraid they really still do, and it's so opposite to the reality - just look at those millions and millions of trees. The reputation may go back to the date when the city began and to its success. Because I think there was a lot of jealousy from the metropolitan areas and the academic kind of high culture people, who didn't want to move here from, from 'cultural' places like Edinburgh or London or Brighton. And then just from that negative idea of 'the city that I discussed at the beginning of my 'Tales of the city', the idea that to create a new one was a horrible thing. To me it's pretty inexplicable. I suppose in life like in stories you have to have an antihero and Milton Keynes has been a useful one!

I'm now used to it, so it doesn't make me as angry at it did, to begin with. Then it wasn't just I lived here and could see music and culture all around me, but also as an anthropologist. When I was working in West Africa a common view was that there was 'no economics' in Sierra Leone apart from the capital city where there was money whereas upcountry people grew rice and fed themselves and didn't rely much on money at all - so 'not economics'. But as an anthropologist I knew that it was economics: the ordered use of material resources. Similarly, the conventional view was that there was

no 'literature' in these rural villages since there was little or no literacy. But I could see that that was not true. True, there was little writing (though more than was made out) but there was literature. Indeed, that's probably my big contribution to understanding, together with my study of MK's 'hidden musicians'. 'Oral' literature exists and is valuable; there's a continuum between that and written literature, as I go on saying.

So both those things make me feel as an anthropologist that if you look at things ethnographically - at the actual practice on the ground not what outsiders assume - you will find there's so much there that outsiders don't notice or understand. Even insiders sometimes. It is so interesting that when I began my research, each school in the area said that 'We have an orchestra and are the only school in the area that has an orchestra!'. But they just about all did! They just couldn't believe that this kind of culture really extended right across the city. Even the musicians didn't quite understand how valuable they were.

Q 11. Do you know any stories, jokes, or urban myths about Milton Keynes? Can you share them?

ANN:

Well apart from the ones we talked about - that its culture-less, and the other, different, one that it's green and full of cultural history - I don't know that there are any other particular ones. But all the time I'm learning and people tell stories in the primary schools, and then there are the Somali people coming in, they have such a rich culture.

Date: 10/9/2018

Location: Interviewee's House, The Study - surrounded by books, academic papers and mementoes from travels around the world. Bletchley, MK

Observations: First impression is an incredibly intelligent woman who over her lifetime and academic interest has developed an incredible understanding of people from many difficult cultural backgrounds. Pre-interview she immediately started talking about her research trips, growing up in Ireland and the books she has and is authoring both fictional and factual. This occurred before I've had time to grab my recording equipment. Pre-interview, as part of the set up, I conveyed the reasons for my questions, and the nature of the research in general. The Interviewee was very interested and could compare between this study and work she had conducted herself. This enabled her to talk freely about the subjects raised in the interview, although perhaps being conscious of the focus of the study meant that her responses weren't as free as they might have been - as the responses were very neat and without hesitation. However, as stated previously this could be accounted for due to her knowledge of Milton Keynes (having been in the area since 1969) and her work in the area of anthropology especially regarding Milton Keynes.

As far as my first interview it was an enjoyable atmosphere, and I received good feedback from the interviewee, which given her experience in fieldwork was gratefully received.

Interview transcribed verbatim then sent to interviewee for 'member check', her response was swift and altered very little only to clarify her points.