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## SERENDIPITY

Pamela Lewis

Some years ago I was invited to go to Oxford from Nottingham with a WEA group to visit the Ashmolean Museum, to attend a lecture on Greek Pottery and to view the art collection. Happy as always to escape the confines of my native city and invited as a seat filler on the coach, my intentions were not serious.

Sitting in the lounge of the Randolph Hotel always has the same effect on me. A slow feeling of mischief creeps up with the coffee. I remember that it was in this room that Philip Larkin arranged to meet Barbara Pym for the first time, a room redolent with assignations and suitably anonymous. Taking time over coffee there always has the same outcome, someone we know strolls in and all our plans are altered. Lewis coffee stops are usually measured out not in coffee spoons but in the difficulty of the Times crossword. The Randolph is one of the cross-roads of the world.

We spent the lecture hour in the Department of Western Art. I had remembered that Nora Lavrin had presented work to the University of Oxford in February and September of 1975. Nora Lavrin, an artist, (1897-1985), met Jessie Wood née Chambers when Jessie attended a course of lectures on Russian Literature given by Professor Janko Lavrin of University College, Nottingham. They became close friends.

I had never seen any of her work with the exception of book illustration, and was very interested in the work brought out for inspection. Some surprise was shown at my request and the keeper on duty remarked that they had not been viewed very often. When the work was brought out I was offered a pair of white cotton gloves to wear. As they were at least extra large I would not have been able to turn over anything with ease. I produced from my pockets a pair of size 6½ even whiter house gloves and was able to proceed in comfort. Such a serious approach brought about the offer of five sketchbooks, I had no previous knowledge of the holding.

The sketchbooks, the size of children's jotters, are drawn journals, records of trips abroad. My husband glancing through them remarked "Here is something for you". Folio 16 of the sketchbook on France and Italy 1929-1930 was a page of drawings depicting a visit to the Cemetery at Vence where D.H.Lawrence had been buried on 4 March 1930.

Nora and Janko Lavrin went to Vence for their Easter holiday in 1930, Nora intending to draw and Janko to write. They called to say goodbye to their near neighbours, Jessie and Jack Wood on Breck Hill Road, Arnold, in what is now a suburb of Nottingham. After the Chambers Family left the Haggs they rented Arno Vale Farm. After Jessie married she chose to live within sight of the farm. This land has long since been developed for housing. Whilst there the news broke of Lawrence's death. As we can imagine Jessie and Jack asked them to visit the cemetery and to visit the grave. Another cross-roads, is it chance?

On the back of folio 15 is a written description:

In the spring of 1930 D.H.Lawrence died in Vence. Our dearest friend Jessie, the girlhood friend of D.H.Lawrence asked if we would when in Provence go to Vence. Lawrence had that week according to the Times been buried in the cemetery there. We went. Of new graves there were a few. One of these was that of D.H.L. but who could tell which - and there was no-one there to ask. We distributed our flowers on all beside the wall.

Jessie the supposed Miriam in *Sons and Lovers* was grateful.

I visited the Lavrins once in their frail old age, they were then living in Holland Park, it was a courtesy visit. My husband's parents were also part of their circle of friends during their time in Nottingham. Nora Lavrin exhibited at the Royal Academy and in galleries here and abroad, she was well known as a successful book illustrator. Her illustrations for the children's book *The Ship That Flew* by Hilda Lewis, my mother-in-law, first published in 1939 were considered too old-fashioned for the 1993 edition.

In the early 1950's Nottingham University was still so small that most of the academic staff knew each other. Dining with the Lewis family before my marriage, I met David Chambers several times, long before my interest in D.H.Lawrence was awakened. Tenuous links between families become part of daily living.

After my discovery in the Ashmolean I offered my finding to the C.U.P. biographers but as it was not used I hope it is of interest to readers of this journal albeit some years later.

# WORKS CITED

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LAVRIN Nora

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Extract from Nora Lavrin Sketchbook.