

6th Feb 2015

Interview with Adrian Bartlett

By **Jacki Baxter** and **Margaret Ashman**

I would be interested to know how you got into printmaking

I got a job teaching it

You must have gone to college or art school

I went to Camberwell

Oh I went to Camberwell.....

Where I did some lithography. Not much else in the way of printmaking, I was a painter

Ah you started as a painter and then went into printmaking, you went and taught it

Yes

And where did you teach

Um, all over the place, Morley College

Oh, yes

Ruskin School in Oxford, Chelsea School of Art, Wimbledon School of Art

Ah, my daughter has just graduated from there, not doing print but doing sculpture.....

What medium do you work in?

Well I paint and mostly, most of my life I've been an etcher, more recently woodcuts.

Ah, and do you do something everyday?

Pretty well

Wow, old school.....

So, when did you become a member of the PmC or how did you hear about it?

Through Birgit

Ah, she was a member first

She was a founder member

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Right

And um, and I joined I think about 1971

Can you remember who else was in the founder members?

Um, Anthony Gross

Right

Peter Weaver

Oh yes, I'm talking to him, we are going to go and interview him soon

I think, Michael Rothenstein,

Because we used to have the Michael Rothenstein prize

We still have the trophy in the archives..... it hasn't been awarded for a while

Julian Trevelyan

Right

Can't think of any others at the moment

So what made you decide to join, because you knew Birgit?

Birgit told me to.

That's a good enough reason for anything

While you were a members which particular shows or activities, can you remember any particular ones

Yes, the Florence Print Biennale was a big thing

Did members put work in for that? Did you all go over?

As with the Venice Biennale, the organisers invite the Arts Council to nominate artists but the Arts Council at the time or British Council, Arts Council I think, at the time Printmaking wasn't anything like what it is nowadays

No

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There were very few, and they felt they didn't know enough about it, so they turned to the Printmakers Council to make the decision about who should go.

It must have been prestigious

Well, that's the result of having a selected membership, because they could trust it as being, ... as knowing what they are talking about.

So did that include other artforms as well as print, the Florence.....

No that was specifically a Print Biennale

And was that quite large?

Yes, enormous in the Pitti Palace in Florence

Wow

Prints came from all over the world

Do you remember who was included?

Well, I was, and Marc Balakjian..... no I can't remember

That was a real highlight

That was a highlight..... Galleries invited us to have shows without us having to pay and things, so because they trusted us to have good quality work.

Sure

So there were quite a lot at that time.

Can you remember any of the names of any of the galleries that might have invited you

Francis Kyle,

Oh wow,

He's moved away from prints I think, recently.

So the Printmakers Council in those days was really quite prestigious.

Yep

So were these all round the country? Or mostly in London?

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No there was a man I knew in Newcastle who's lived there all his life who was a member..... no all over the place

And were the members located all over as well?

Yep

And when you say they were selected what happened? Artists applied to the PmC and did they send photographs.....

No, no we had to do a portfolio of prints

Really

And they would be looked at very closely. If registration was bad, **out**. If it was just mono prints, **out**.

Where were the offices then?

Oh, we had an office in Clerkenwell in the ...lumpet?..... Warehouse

Would it be the members of the committee who got together to see the selection?

Yes

I don't suppose you can remember how many members we had at that time, roughly?

That show (the Birgit Skiold Memorial in 1983), 45 and it's probably not much more than that

Right

But that's in the early days and a lot of people wouldn't have heard about it by then

Wow, gosh

Also in answer to that question, we did a big exchange with California artists. We sent work over and they sent work over

Do you know somebody called Carolyn Stafford? Or Carolyn Clough, because she talked about that didn't she, Carolyn.....

That's right

Carolyn Stafford is she my sort of age?

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Yes

Well, I think we were at school together.

Oh my God, really, how fantastic. She has kept that very quiet hasn't she!

Was that shown at the Barbican do you remember?

No..... I don't think the Barbican was built then.

No it wouldn't have been

What year are we talking?

'72, '73

Okay

mid seventies anyway

I remember her saying that she has got some poster or catalogue or something from that show

Yes, we have seen it. Probably got it somewhere.

When you come to the show in November, friends reunited....., meet Carolyn...

Also we did a big fund raising auction. We got an auctioneer called Stephen Barclay from either Sothebys or Christies, and it attracted a lot of attention. People gave works to raise money for the PmC, and we made a lot of money..

Wow, that's an idea isn't it.

When you say a lot of money can you remember? Was it hundreds?

Oh hundreds, yes.

It would be worth a lot more in today's money..

And what was it to raise funds for, so that the PmC could continue to exist?

Yes, well for hiring premises and things like that

Did the members at that time have to pay membership fees?

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Yes, minimal

Really

A fiver or something

Well actually it's seventy pounds a year now which is like a fiver a month, well I know it was a fiver a year but it's not too dissimilar.

Gosh

Did you also do a portfolio at any time do you remember

I can't remember doing that

Maybe

Maybe it was later

What Contribution do you think the PmC has made to British Printmaking?

Initially I think by insisting on high technical standards

Yes

..... We did a lot of work on defining what an original print is – that's in there (indicates book, PmC publication 1977 Handbook of Printmaking Supplies)

Handbook of Printmaking Supplies

Well as I say, the production of that book was of course one of the things that it did; the suppliers of course are more or less out of date or have moved. The other things in there are still pretty interesting.

'the definition of an original print' we get asked that quite a lot

So was the public quite confused at that time about printing, about an original print

Just as confused as they are now

Now they ask all about digital prints

Can you describe what effect do you think your membership of the PmC has had for you, and the position of printmakers and printmaking in the UK?

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Well, the membership was quite small as I've said so the members that there were got quite a lot of attention, and I remember doing actually very well in terms of sales and things at that time. Simply because we were members of the PmC

So it was like an upper echelon.

Yes..... The only other alternative group was the Royal Society of Painter Etchers who, they had a lovely little gallery in Conduit Street, just behind Sothebys, and they showed little black and white Victorian type etchings and then eventually they more or less dissolved somebody stepped in and took over the name and got the Bankside place organised.

Interestingly enough to apply to become a member there you have to submit your portfolio and it goes before a committee.

But you're a member of the RE

Yes I am, I didn't actually apply, they sort of made me a member.

An honorary member?

No, not an honorary member

If you're an honorary member you can't show, you want to be a real member.....

The Printmakers Council offices now are in the studio of Michael Barratt who's the current president of the society

Oh I see

What do you think about modern day printmaking, where do you think its status is now?

Well, it's universally accepted artform in a way that it wasn't in 1965. The artists who showed prints were hardly ever unique printmakers, they were mostly painters or sculptors who might be invited by a gallery to put a few prints on a staircase, you know that sort of thing, it was very much a little sideline.

Do you ever go to the summer show and look round the printrooms then

Yes

What do you think of it now?

It's just a mixture isn't it

Are there any printmakers today whose work you like or admire

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Yes, Marc Balakjian, That's the sort of question I can't answer off the cuff.

Sorry

No, no, you're right to try

Thank you very much, I think you've answered all our questions comprehensively

You were chairman, weren't you.....

Yes,

What was your experience of being chairman, do you remember?

It was quite good fun, I only agreed to be Chairman if Sylvie Turner agreed to be secretary because she, I don't know if you've come across her at all or her work, but she was really hard working and very, very enthusiastic, and we made a good team together.

That always helps

She did that booklet and I raised the money for it.

It's a nice graphic on the front. It's very nice.

It always helps to have a good team and of course everyone's a volunteer.

Where do you stand, actually shall we turn it off.

Yes.