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'I was born an anarchist': Interviews with Kitty Lamb

Introduction

These are the raw notes from two interviews with activist **Kitty Lamb (1901 - 1992)** about her life and the development of her anarchist beliefs. She participated in raising money for the Republic during the Spanish Civil War, war resistance in the Second World War, the campaign against capital punishment in the nineteen-fifties, and for nuclear disarmament in the sixties. She took the platform at Speakers Corner, and the stage in anarchist cabaret. Self-deprecating though she was about her own activities, these fragmentary stories illustrate her lifelong commitment to a better world, and give an insight into the shifting social and political groupings and alliances within which her ideas developed.

The interviews were carried out at the beginning of the nineteen eighties, as part of the activities of the Anarchist Feminist History Group. We weren't professional historians (or interviewers): we were political activists wanting to piece together stories of anarchist women in Britain. Gillian Fleming and I interviewed Kitty Lamb twice at her flat (37 Belsize Park Gardens, London NW3) – but the interviews were never written up, and though the sessions were recorded, the current whereabouts of the tapes is unknown.

What survives are the notes we each made during the interviews, and a contemporaneous transcription of part of those notes. Rather than leave these gathering yet more dust among my papers, I have decided to make them available online for other researchers to use. What appears here is my amalgamation of the notes. I have not attempted to restructure them into an edited interview – they simply give a summary of what was discussed, as it was discussed. If the tapes are rediscovered I will make them available to researchers. Meanwhile, I would be glad to hear from anyone who has any further information, clarification or corrections to add.

Notes on the text:

I have added some sub-headings to this version of the interview notes to make them a bit easier to follow.

KL – Kitty Lamb.

[Text in square brackets] indicates comment or query by an interviewer at the time the notes were first made.

[Text in italics in square brackets] indicates comment made by JG for this 2022 version.

For online publication, a small number of identifying details have been omitted. Minor corrections, e.g. to spellings of names, etc. have not been indicated.

Interview One: October 10, 1980 [or 1981].

Family and Upbringing

Born 1901 in Surbiton – very conservative area. Family lower-middle/working class, poor. Six children – Kitty the oldest of 3 girls.

Parents very kind; never violent towards the children. Happy childhood. Both parents saw themselves as labour supporters (though no Labour Party at that time.) Her mother militant.

Kitty educated (poorly) at the local church school.

Left home at 29. Temped (as shorthand-typist) for many years.

Political education: the family's next-door neighbour, Mrs Sims, had known William Morris when she was a young woman, and had been very influenced by his ideas. She was militantly working-class ("sort of Co-operative Women's Guild type"). She used to talk to Kitty Lamb's mother about Morris and socialism; Kitty, then a young child, used to listen and was very interested. There used to be a drunken labourer living in the area, called Bill Morris, and Kitty used to gaze after him in fascination as he lurched up the street, thinking that he was the William Morris she had heard so often discussed.

The neighbour living opposite, Mrs Wheatsheaf, was a pillar of the Co-op Women's Guild and also very militant.

Once, Kitty Lamb wanted to go to a children's tea party organised by the Primrose League, and was very disappointed when her mother explained that they couldn't support the wicked Tories. Her mother used to shout at Tory canvassers. Her mother identified very strongly with labour women. The family was very poor, and her mother was often up half the night making clothes etc. Very little overt political activity in Surbiton. When she was 11, Kitty Lamb saw a demonstration of the unemployed, from the school playground: "a lot of men shouting."

At that time, until about 1914, the church was a dominant influence in the community. All the churches would be full for services once or twice every Sunday. Cultural dominance (but church provided some aesthetic knowledge, e.g. KL's appreciation of music and social life – picnics etc, Sunday school treats). People dominated by the need to be respectable (e.g. always wear a hat in the street). To be a socialist was to be an outsider.

The family often used to spend Christmas with the Sims family, and Bert Sims, the eldest boy (about KL's age) supplied them with a workers' songbook and they all sang about rivers of blood. He later became a Communist Party member. In the 20s he started the first CP group in his mother's house in Surbiton. (By then both families had moved to Tolworth, [*a suburb of Surbiton*]). Sometimes when she went round to visit, KL was roped into putting notices into envelopes for Bert's group, but she never joined.

Difficulties of finding out about sex. Mother very inhibited and (as in other families) never spoke about it to her children. Later, she told KL that she didn't

like sex but that it was a woman's duty – after all, the man's the breadwinner. There was a very un-respectable Irish family living nearby, who were referred to by mother as "scum of the earth". And a girl from that family told KL babies come out of your belly. KL was horrified, and didn't dare tell her mother about this. Remembers her mother refusing to tell her what a monthly nurse was. *[Monthly nurses looked after women after childbirth]*. When KL was 11 or 12, the headmistress of her school, who was reckoned to be very progressive, sent all the girls home with a sealed note for their mothers. Then she took a dozen girls into her room and locked the door and started to tell them about birds and bees and pollen (nothing about babies) getting very embarrassed and muddled up, leaving girls like KL mystified, while the more knowing girls giggled. No contraceptives and no concept of enjoyment for working class women. Girls had no knowledge of sex, and marriage was the only expectation.

Mother militant, very class-conscious and used to drum into KL that the haute bourgeoisie "no better than we are". Her mother originally came from Byfleet, at that time country village and still very feudal – she was the only child who refused to curtsy to the squire, (circa 1870 to 80). She had worked as a servant - once in a private lunatic asylum where there was 'one representative of every aristocratic family' in the country.

KL's paternal grandfather ran a laundry and her father worked in it from the age of 12. When there was the great Tooley Street fire in Bermondsey, a tallow factory caught fire, and the melting tallow ran into the Thames where men in rowboats, including the Lambs, scooped it up; this tallow was then used to get the laundry going in a big way and it became a very successful enterprise. KL's mother would have been disturbed by the idea of anarchism, holding the stereotype, publicised by the press, of anarchists as terrorists and murderers. At the time of the Sydney Street Siege, the *Daily Mirror*, (the family's paper) published a picture showing a man with a top hat and fur-collared coat holding a gun and grinning. KL, then about eight, thought "what a horrible man" – later discovered it was Churchill.

1920s: Bohemians

Since she was a small girl, KL had dreamed of mixing with Bohemians. This started to come true after she left home at 29 with the "Bloomsbury bug". In the late 20s she was invited by a woman from work to a Bloomsbury party. A small crowded room, with a Black man reading from Katherine Mansfield by candlelight, while everyone ignored him. KL's packet of Players *[cigarettes]* vanished in no time. It was "the high point of my life". The party was given by a small fat gay man, Gerald *[Kingshott]*, who was in a temper because his boyfriend was playing up to someone else. Gerald later became her lifelong friend. Contrast to church socials! Many homosexuals at these parties, and many African students – including princes and royalty. These students weren't accepted in 'high society' so they came to less prejudiced Bohemia/Bloomsbury – saw Bohemian women as sexually available.

Kesi, Adimula – Nigerian Royal Family. Abyssinians. Insults from white men passers-by when walking with along with Black men. KL's flatmate, Bets, had an affair with a Burmese man. Later, in the 30's, Kenyatta accused KL of racism when she wouldn't dance with him at a party (she was a bad dancer, and

frightened of him). He stamped up and down the room, making a scene. Afterwards, they avoided each other. Then, after his *Facing Mount Kenya* was published, there was a launch party and KL (by then in the ILP) went – and won a copy in a raffle. Kenyatta shook her hand and wrote a fraternal message in it. In 1932, Angela Gair [?] from Paris introduced a West Indian called George Padmore into the Bohemian circles. Padmore had been on the Comintern as the Commissioner for Colonial Affairs, but had quarrelled and left it. He was very influential on the African liberation movements e.g. on Nkrumah. His secretary and later companion was an East End Jewish woman, Dorothy Pizer. She went with him, at Nkrumah's invitation, to Ghana. Padmore died there, and she died there subsequently and was given a state funeral in the newly independent state. Padmore also influenced Ralph Bunch, from the USA.

These were pioneer groups in breaking down social taboos. No [?] sexual or racial prejudice. Cleared the way for modern attitudes.

1930's: Spanish Civil War, Anarchism, ILP.

In the 30's many public meetings organised by the CP, attended by lots of poets [?] and intellectuals. Anti-Nazi meetings and demos. (Slogan: "What did Hitler do to the Boy Scouts?"). Other meetings at she heard Emma Goldman speak. KL moved by all the incredible fervour and excitement at these meetings. Spanish Civil War – it felt like "a flame across Europe" Trafalgar Square would be full for meetings.

The first anarchist meeting KL went to – invited by a Scottish railway worker called Jimmy. KL, who was in the ILP at the time, went with friends. It was held at the Holborn headquarters of the Women's Freedom League, who let out rooms for meetings. There were about 6 people sitting at a table with a parcel in the middle of it. (KL and friends giggling at the thought it was a bomb.) The anarchists were shouting and swearing at each other ('low language') ... the issue was volunteering - who would go to Spain. One morose man volunteered (to get away from his hysterically giggling wife?) There were a lot of rough types then in London and Glasgow anarchist groups, and a small number of intellectuals. KL was not very impressed by this first encounter with anarchism, but found it entertaining, unlike the prim and proper ILP meetings. Jimmy introduced her to Albert Meltzer, then about 18, and KL invited him to speak to her little ILP group in Chalk Farm. He muttered away almost inaudibly, but they liked him, though not otherwise impressed. By the 30s, KL identified more with POUM.

KL was friendly with John Gray, an artist and member of the PEN club. He was a cousin of Ethel Mannin; he used to hold weekend parties in a cottage in Lurgashall, Sussex. He mentions KL in his autobiography, *Gin and Bitters*. Ethel Mannin and Emma Goldman organised a concert in aid of Spain – Paul Robeson sang. It was at this concert that she began to identify as an anarchist woman. KL went, and Mannin introduced her to Emma Goldman. (KL impressed by EG recognising her again, weeks later.) [On that later occasion?] the hall was filled with high society girls selling programmes [it seems EG was cultivated as a trendy figure] – KL had been supposed to, but was fed up with this and went home. At another time she heard Emma and Ethel shouting at each other (though they were very fond of each other).

By this time, KL and Audrey Brockway (Fenner's daughter) were second-line ILP speakers and used to speak on the rostrum at Hampstead Heath. An old Guild Socialist man used to listen to her, and told her, "you're not an ILP'er, you're a Kitty Lamber". This worried KL. Fred Lohr also used to speak, and he veered from the ILP towards anarchism, and eventually became a Roman Catholic! While he was an anarchist, he told Kitty Lamb she was also an anarchist, not a revolutionary socialist – she wasn't quite convinced.

40's: Anti Militarism, anarchism, and World War 2.¹

Dick Sowker [*Souter?*], who took KL to her first meeting, was still about in the anarchist movement, as were John Hewetson, Philip Samson, Vernon Richards, and Mary Louise Berneri – a small but active group. At the time of the *Freedom* sedition trial during the war, a Freedom Defence Committee was set up, including Orwell, Herbert Read, George Woodcock, Henry Moore, Rebecca West, Vera Brittain, Julian Symons, Alex Comfort. KL was invited to join, and was "half paralysed in this distinguished company". She was on the small *working* [KL's emphasis] committee (suspects that was why she was invited), to discuss allocation of funds. They used to meet at the PPU [*Peace Pledge Union*] in Endsleigh Street, in an uncomfortable room with wooden benches, next to the toilet. Orwell and Symons and Comfort would come, though not the other famous members. Orwell objected to sending £25 to the No Conscription League, because he said he agreed with conscription, whereupon KL rose to her feet and denounced him, growing red-faced. Lanky Orwell replied patronisingly that he had only meant in certain circumstances.

Finally, KL left the ILP. The arrogant local party chairman, an academic historian, had an article in the *New Leader* in about 1942, called "What is the Value of Human Life", saying men should join up to fight the Nazis. KL was against the war, not feeling she could condemn the whole nation: "we've all got a bit of a Nazi in us" – so she left. Once, on a train, she interrupted some men having an anti-German conversation, and one said to her: "Are you a bloody Nazi? I'll knock your old man down!" It was very difficult being against the war. It was at the concert [*see above*] when Kitty Lamb first began to identify as an anarchist woman, and the war that led to her break with revolutionary socialism.

Public Speaking

At this time KL was living in Highgate in a furnished room [*let by?*] a young married woman who was also anti-war, and they used to discuss it. KL decided to go to Marble Arch to speak. What would she stand on? Her friend lent her a kitchen stool and wished her luck. KL set off on the bus with the stool, went to Marble Arch, climbed on it and orated. A crowd gathered and then 'Khaki Joe', a battered figure in an army coat, appeared and informed her that he rented out rostrums to speakers for a shilling per afternoon. After that Kitty Lamb spoke there regularly on Sunday afternoons for months. At that time, she didn't know how to project her voice, so she was muttering away to those who could hear her. Often two male hecklers would be there, turning her words into pornographic cracks. Also lots of tourists – including Americans taking photographs.

Finally, she was asked to speak at a large meeting [who by?]. A speaker called Simon, an ex-pilot (said to be quite a few at that time, turning against bombing missions) and spare-time film actor. He was very pale and lantern-jawed. There was a regular heckler there, a woman in the CP – fat, red-faced, apron, rolled-up sleeves. She heckled Simon, and Kitty, on the platform, told her to shut up. The woman said, "We don't want to hear you, Death Takes a Holiday". (A reference to the title of a popular film of the time). Although this was probably meant for Simon, KL thought it was aimed at her, and felt so humiliated that she went home and never went to speak there again. When Women for Westminster (including Rebecca Seear) asked her to speak, KL made excuses.

On Trial

Tom Early, Welshman, Celtic poet, still alive (and in the phone book). His wife was Elizabeth Early – exotic woman (bad stammer). She had a long affair with Tony Gibson. Both Earlys were anarchists and pacifists. Both had affairs – open-minded – Tom once asked Kitty Lamb for her sister's phone number after meeting her in YWCA, but she didn't give it to him. Elizabeth Early was sentenced to 6 weeks in jail for refusing National Service. She was sentenced at Clerkenwell by a magistrate called Pole who had a bad name – and gave her a longer than the standard sentence.

KL, who was had up on the same charge, got only a light sentence from a charming magistrate called Broderick.

Compulsory fire watching in air-raid areas for employees, on their employers' premises, two or three nights a week. KL was then working in Gower Street. Her boss used to go off to his large house in Haslemere, Surrey – no fire watching for him! KL thought this was unjust, and besides she was scared. So much fear and misery after air raids, contrary to press propaganda about so-called cheerful spirit. Holborn Borough Council first sent her letters and then a man to remonstrate with her. He said he sympathised and that women shouldn't have to do it, and he had a daughter of his own ... In the end he cried, but he said it was her duty. KL was unconvinced.

She used to argue publicly in the Gower Arms etc about the war – the landlord knew her views, and some people thought she'd been picked-on deliberately, and she now thinks so too. The night before the court appearance she had a meeting to decide what to say in court. She planned an inspiring speech from the dock, the crowd of friends were there to hear her. She began "It is not I who is here in this dock ..." Magistrate: "you're not in the dock my dear, you're in the witness box." Then Kitty Lamb's voice gave out, and she had to go and stand up by the magistrate to be heard. Much sympathetic laughter in court throughout, from police and court officials as well. The only hostile person was the official from Holborn: "not my fault she's got these bloody silly ideas." Always anti-climax – never managed to be a heroine – ended by being fined £1. "An insult, really." Seven days to pay said the magistrate; then as she stared in surprise, he amended it to 14, then 21 days. KL has no martyr complex and went out intending to pay, but all her friends said: "You won't pay. You will go to jail won't you?" When she got home she found her ex-husband had been round and left a pound note on the kitchen table... But she felt she had to oblige her friends. It was a bad time (though retrospectively an interesting time) to go to jail – war hardships, staff shortages.

KL read H.N. Brailsford's *How Capitalism causes War* [probably 'Why Capitalism Means War' 1938] – great influence on her. (His third wife Evamaria lives downstairs from KL's flat).

Farcical elements in her life

Holloway Prison

Seven days in Holloway prison. Goes to Clerkenwell Court and requests to start her sentence early, the week before Easter. Toilet paper issue. The women in Holloway asked her to make speeches about prison conditions when she was out, which she did. Prisoners friendly, but some prison officers thought she must be a Nazi. Women could choose to do National Service by working as prison officers. (Suspects blacklist amongst officers) Make-up and curlers hidden under plants in cell. Prostitutes there. Petty theft. Others in prison as alternative to doing National Service in Army.

She hoped to make anti-war propaganda in prison, but (contrary to propaganda about improved prison conditions) picking oakum – and throwing it on the floor to be swept up.

Prison graveyard. A privilege to be shown Edith Thomson's grave (hanged for murder) – Thompson made a sort of heroine by other prisoners – macabre.

Prison medical – half-hour with doctor - political argument over war issue. Doctor Charity Taylor, who later became Governor of Holloway.

Religion? None. - Prison chaplain – C of E interview. Prayer for a miserable sinner. She used each visit by an official as a chance to 'put her message across'.

Cells unlocked during air raids. Prisoners crawled into one another's cells on hands and knees.

Menstrual disturbances were common, and so were psychological disturbances.

Prison Visitor – KL gave her the propaganda line – "A good way of driving people away"

Atmosphere of apathy in jail – scope for stirring things up.

Anarchism and emotions

She was still in the ILP at this stage – drifted into anarchist movement halfway through the war – but had had 'certain [anarchist] instincts' since childhood.

Others pushing her in that direction:

Frederick Lohr (demagogic anarchist who flitted from one philosophy to another and eventually became Roman Catholic) asked her to join his group (she didn't).

She used to read Aldred's *The Word*.

Anarchist personalities who stood out against the war and made a strong public impression. She drifted from one political credo to another until finally anarchism – rather than intellectually thought-out, was propelled by an anti-authoritarian instinct - e.g. at work, against bosses who told her what to do. She often worked for solicitors, and saw the goings-on of the ruling class.

Fred Lohr speaking at Lincoln's Inn. Tony Turner (SPGB) got hundreds for speaking in Lincoln's Inn to solicitors' clerks. KL working for solicitors at the time – saw the goings-on of the ruling class.

Philip Sansom, John Hewetson, Vernon Richards. Intellectuals vs militants. Scottish anarchists - Ralph Leach, Dick [?] much more militant. Difficulties of defining oneself as anarchist - now associated with e.g. Baader Meinhof gang. 'We're all just expressing ourselves'? Everyone thinks *themselves* to be the only real anarchists – e.g. Sid Parker, Nicolas Walter. Easier, and more understandable, to say 'I'm a socialist'. KL finds it hard to see that true anarchism will ever really develop. Didn't vote for many years, until candidate was Ben Whitaker, socialist and pacifist, very principled. He was elected – got a Tory out – but in the next election lost seat by 50 votes. Though KL doesn't believe in party politics, some things could be achieved through Labour, e.g. abolition of capital punishment, throwing out the Rent Act. – Tories wouldn't have done it. Jack Robinson tells her 'You're just a 19th Century liberal' – but if you *can* achieve something in the way of progress through government ... how else? Capital punishment was not going to be abolished *except* by parliament. Many dedicated people were involved in the campaign. KL says her involvement in it was very emotional. Need for emotions – human impulses necessary for a new society. Those against 'emotiveness' inhumane? Shouldn't be cold and mechanical. Her feeling against any sort of killing.

Campaigning against Capital Punishment

1953 + involved in struggle against capital punishment – emotional (human) impulse, and part of fight to create a better society. Set off by the Derek Bentley case. [*Bentley was hanged for murder in 1953. His family never gave up campaigning, and his conviction would finally be quashed in 1998*] World-wide reaction. Her friend Bob Tucker (an anarchist who went into the air-force during war - Germany) – made KL the pen-friend of a German ex-Luftwaffe pilot, who wrote about it from Australia. Concern from USA as well – great reverberations. After the hanging of Bentley and public outcry, police were harassed and unpopular - had to go about in pairs. "I didn't have much effect in getting rid of [capital punishment]". KL became friendly with the Bentley family – his parents - and is still friends with Iris Bentley, his sister.

'Punishment' should have been eliminated from the dictionary long ago. KL is pessimistic about the sadism of people who would come to hangings. She is against capital punishment because 'No man is good enough to be another man's master.' The campaign began with a little group here [*at her flat*]. Albert Meltzer knew Gerald Kingshott - an open homosexual - who was the prime mover. Kingshott leaned towards anarchism - concerned about capital punishment, Criminal Justice Act, homosexuality; in the 30s also anti-colonialism and African cause. He came from a bourgeois family and wanted to be a Roman Catholic priest – organised the novices and got thrown out of monastery. Sent to Canada where got in with [*...illegible ... 'theatres' ???*] and got to USA where

knew Isadora Duncan. Got involved with a millionaire's son and eventually deported after 7-8 years in Chicago. Working-class dining car attendants.

Gerald Kingshott organised Anti-[*Imp?*] [*? Imperialist?*] study group on Africa, and KL was in this – it met here. From this decided to have a public meeting over Bentley case, which KL had been going on about. Hired St Pancras Town Hall. She got a line-up of seven prominent speakers to come, including Donald Soper and Fenner Brockway. This was after Bentley's execution – League Against Capital Punishment formed at this meeting. KL chaired the meeting – badly – unable to shut people up. Friends were signalling to her to shut up, but she was tired so kept talking. Soper did the same thing. KL had no watch and one speaker never got to speak. KL wrote an article for a socialist paper which was reprinted elsewhere. Follow-up meeting, chaired by Gerald, was poorly attended. Labour MP Anne Kerr, and Liberal candidate also involved. There was another group against capital punishment in existence at the time which did more – KL wasn't the La Pasionara of the anti- capital punishment movement!

She was part of Malatesta Club, along with Jack Robinson and Philip Samson. 50ish. [*does this refer to date, or KL's age? Could be either*]

Ann – an 18 yr.-old Roman Catholic bourgeoise, articed to a solicitor - and her sister - who KL worked with – wanted to go to a meeting on homosexuality advertised in *Freedom*. At a pub in Goodge Street.

After the war Tony's café in Charlotte Street – dark and smelly.

KL and Ann become friends – together do washing up, cleaning and cooking (eggs and bacon) at Malatesta Club two or three nights a week from 8-12. Jack, who had invited her to help with chores and refreshments, ran the catering and made snide remarks from the side-lines. After the P.O. reclaimed the original room in Holborn, the Club moved to a basement room off Percy Street, but not so good there – finally folded.

Ann eloped to Gretna Green at 18 to marry bourgeois Richard, pursued by her mother and detectives. (Later divorced). KL is still in ill-favour with Ann's mother. "Winifred Lamb". Ann finally joined the Young Liberals.

New Sesame Club (Bedford Square) middle-class organisation - discussion group had a meeting on Anarchism – Ann and KL went. Speaker - barrister Neil McDermott. He had pacifist leanings - finally became a Labour minister. Later left politics to work in [Africa? Asia?] U.N. job.

Mary Canipa was around a bit then – quiet and withdrawn – ex-Catholic.

Interview Two: October 23, 1981.

KL was 80 two weeks ago. She has lived in this flat since 1943. Then it belonged to the Church Commissioners – now housing association.

Nehru visits Brailsford in this house.

Birth Control etc [NB notes for the sub-section are very garbled - problems with our note-taking, KL's memory or both?]

Sir Walter Strickland - important Maltese family [Alexander????] financed Guy Aldred's press and paper *The Word*. Aldred was once a paid propagandist for the Secular Society. Strickland and Aldred - United Socialist Movement. Rose Witcop a speaker on birth control in her own right. Worked at contraceptive clinic off Tottenham Court Road - Whitfield Street [association with Marie Stopes's one?]. Sylvia [Pankhurst??] had one too. Marie Stopes started off in Kentish Town.

Groups paid boys/old men to fly post/billboards on birth control in public toilets - police used to chase them. Political meetings mixing Marxian dialectics and pill-selling; or political talk then sell birth-control book. (A way of avoiding police).

Rev. issue of Old Moore [*Almanac*].

Blacklist.[?]

Aldermaston

Went on early Aldermaston marches. Aldermaston March 1956 (she missed this because was staying with friends) Remembers Women's March with black sashes against the bomb, in Trafalgar Square - only half-full - rain/wet.

People's ignorance - need to know working-class history. Need to understand Marxist economics to understand the world/Western capitalism. Better education a partial answer.

Vegetarian - no, though would like to be if could afford the time and trouble and expense (profiteering of health shops). Hates thought of the way animals treated. But, especially now she's old, she needs to have enough protein to go on making herself a nuisance.

"We are all against the war" - anarchists, POWS and Deserters²

During [*World War 2*] came into contact with a group of pacifists/vegetarians - forerunners of today's ideas - seen as cranks and lunatics then.

Alan Alban - one of these - conscientious objector exempt to do agricultural work - father bought him an acre of land in Suffolk - beehives, cheese, onions, garlic - she stayed there at weekends. (She says she has natural antihistamine that makes her immune to stings). Daisy Green was the place - near Boxford. He had caravan. Alban had fallen for Joan (KL's then flatmate) - who'd had TB and stayed there and more or less cured through fresh air - Joan eventually married him. He talked to her about food values. KL used to go down there to sunbathe - Old vicar shocked to come across her sunbathing there. Vicar of Boxford - a young man with wife - both Communists.

Big German POW camp two or three fields away from the caravan. Prisoners were allowed to exercise near the camp, and 3 or 4 of them used to visit Alan and Joan for tea! - near end 1945. KL rung up from Belsize Park Station by an escapee, "Blondie" - Alan had helped him to escape on a bike through Epping Forest and then took him to his parents who were pacifists (they helped deserters) - but his mother was horrified and scared. (By then a Rowntree woman had got three months for helping POWs). KL went to meet Blondie, who

was wearing a POW uniform with a short mac over it. He had asked a policeman the way at Liverpool Street.

KL was sharing this flat with Gerald Kingshott at this time. An army deserter, had been staying there. He used to burn uniforms a couple at a time. Gerald picked up boys in pub and helped harbour deserters. (He later got 6 months for harbouring deserters). Police detectives questioned local men about Gerald at this time – "Of course, he's a Nancy-boy, isn't he?" – but they pretended not to understand.

Sharing her rations with them. Blondie added to happy crowd. He stayed for a week – didn't want to dye his lovely hair. Had no real politics. (Though nominally a Nazi?) Nobody took any notice of him when they all went to the local Belsize Tavern. He helped to decorate the kitchen. Pablo – Spanish anarchist – was here one day – idea that "we are all against the war" - he gave £1 to Blondie to go to Cardiff docks and get on Spanish ship – (Kitty was having an affair with him by then and didn't want him to go.)

A Jewish American Trotskyist [*anti-semitic nickname*] in the U.S. Navy – jumped ship to make contacts over here – disliked, but was in and out of the flat - having an affair with (another) Joan. [...] Pablo had advised Blondie against London docks – Cardiff safer. But on Saturday (not Friday because superstitious) Blondie caught at London docks – front page of *Evening Standard*. But didn't betray anyone. He was aged about 25, from Panzer regiment. They had all been thrilled – an exciting adventure to have Blondie staying –he was seen as a refugee - but [*the American*] was terrified they (and he) would be caught – so they all thought he had advised Blondie to go to London Docks, and had wanted him to be caught there

Autobiography

Chris Moore – woman at BBC – asked Kitty to write her autobiography. KL cried when Chris rang back and said it would go ahead. History Workshop as probable publishers.

Women

Women not the witty sex because of conditioning, domestic ties, et cetera.

Importance of post-60s revolution especially in clothing and- especially for women – for the first time it doesn't matter what you wear – you can wear what you like. When young, there was a great emphasis on being respectable and smart. Great conformity in fashion. Hats and gloves. Now a variety. Conformism in thought and clothing connected. Young women have made this transformation – it must make for freedom of thought as well. Women have struck a hefty blow for personal freedom which is often overlooked ("why do the men prefer Greta Garbo to me"). Sexual freedom (and the freedom not to marry as well). Small things add up - Need for formal hairdos – formal attitude to life. In the 14-18 War all this was still thought very important.

Herself

She was born with a strong instinct for personal freedom.

At 10 years old picked up leaflets on socialism on way to school, – Labour meeting – read it in the street – bread and peace and freedom and happiness – very impressed. At lunchtime (after hiding them) gave them to other girls who all threw them away, except 3 from socialist families. Still might feel inferior to a room full of rich and titled until started arguing – ingrained in me. Humiliated when her mother asked a question at a political meeting.

General Strike - she still worked and so did the family – feeling of many poor families that couldn't lose their jobs. Kitty Lamb was a shorthand typist, and worked - unenthusiastically - though a nagging feeling that she shouldn't. Train from Surbiton driven by a young man in silk hat, morning coat and spats. Cheered by many passengers when they arrived - they (but not KL) sang "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" A friend's sister, who was engaged to a (later sacked) striker, went to work on her old bike – arrived in the late afternoon. Pretended the bike had broken down. Boss said "Bravo Miss Austen" – and then she'd leave again after half-an-hour. Many people did this sort of thing. She used to buy *British Worker* broadsheet. She wanted something exciting and socialistic – not the Labour Party. She found Bloomsbury lot – they were all communists. "30s fever". She had strong political instincts. In a little political group run by two Communist Party members, it was suggested she join the CP – told to go to a little cell of intellectuals in Holborn but no one was there when she went (they had gone to a meeting) When she came back she saw Gerald [Kingshott], who told her not to join the CP as he was by now disillusioned with it - (she – confused)

Racism

Bayana – marvellous beautiful Abyssinian prince – bisexual – flamboyant - awful with women. Also prince Johann[es?] who was upset by colour prejudice and wondered if KL minded walking with him – she had to put up with racist comments. Coming from Surbiton, KL did herself have colour prejudice for a year or so –her flatmate was having an affair with an eminent Nigerian - Crown Prince Adimula, and KL was rather horrified, but changed her attitude after a while. (He became the Lord Chief Justice of Nigeria.) They made a fuss of him at Cambridge - in universities no (visible) prejudice because they could tell who would be important, become a leader.

She and Bets used to get chucked out of one lodgings after another because of Bets' wild parties, boyfriends et cetera. A white South African who lived in one of these flats, Henry Karoo [Kerr?] came with them to a party and horrified to see 'n[...]'s' at the party. Betts told him to fuck off. Karoo later had a job where knowing Africans would be an advantage to him, and then he asked to meet them. Old-maid neighbour and haddock episode.

(Black Crows Acts) [*Is this a reference to USA Black Codes/Jim Crow laws?*]

Italian/Abyssinian War, Spanish Civil War, ILP and anarchism

Very left-wing but still confused. Italian/ Abyssinian War stirred her up. Two young men – the Martin's [?] - sons of Abyssinian ambassadors/ a minister KL knew – both bombed to death in Addis Ababa. KL and Gerald very upset, and she wanted to join something opposing that kind of thing. Gerald suggested the ILP. She was then living in Belsize Park, so she went to the Hampstead ILP -

Same section Orwell had been in. They asked if she was a Trotskyist, (as the Trots had left the week before). Much infiltration then, but Kitty Lamb had never heard of them. Group included a schoolteacher ("I'm the depressed schoolteacher that Orwell wrote about"), an insurance agent, a housewife. They asked her to speak on Hampstead Heath - she was terrified but did so. But didn't know how to project her voice then. Content: - rivalry between nations, exploitation, capitalism, colonialism, predictions of war.

Supported POUM in the Spanish Civil War - collected sixpence a week for the Spanish workers and sold *Spanish Worker* - very dedicated. One working class person gave all his savings for Spain, Sold ILP *New Leader* paper. Marxist economics (now partly proved by present circumstances). Support for war argued over in the ILP - she left ILP over attitude to war.

Frederick Lohr - talked about anarchism. Lohr wanted to train a small group as anarchist teachers. KL offered a place but refused. Lohr and Tony Turner, a great demagogue and guru figure from the SPBG, spoke at Lincoln's Inn. Turner got great crowds - had a circle, "the faithful", around him. Interrupted by a Canadian soldier "You're a c-t". "So are you".

KL used to listen, but Lohr said "that's not for you, anarchism is for you". (Philip Samson would remember Lohr). This made an impression. (She was divorced by then - her ex-husband was very political and used to say she should have been with the anarchists). Lohr lent her anarchist literature - *Fields Factories and Workshops* etc. Red Lion Street anarchist bookshop - went there for years. Absorbed atmosphere.

"My promptings are anarchistic more and more now."

She won't accept authority, instinct to do things and live in her own way, personal freedom - her natural philosophy. Leads own life. "Personal freedom is the most important thing in the world to me." I've not been a great worker for anarchism. Did help out and collate *Freedom* at one time. She would leave *Freedom* on tube trains and buses.

Marriage, pacifism

Used to say she wasn't good enough to be a pacifist, though her ex-husband was in Peace Pledge Union and induced her to join. His name was Plume - he was much younger than her. In 1940 they married because of the war. He was in jail a number of times because he wasn't registered as a conscientious objector. He married about three times during the war. Would go on binges. Bought two houses in Chalk farm and had a flat in one of them. Accidentally gassed himself at the end of the war. He used to make Kitty read books on Marxist economics. She associated with groups rather than joining them. Drawn to nonviolence (but she's "too militant").

Some London organization "L.A.M.B." - people said she should join.

Capital Punishment

Campaign against capital punishment after the Bentley case when innocent man executed "I'm terribly naïve" - balls-up over the meeting. She went on and on, not understanding friends' signals - and then the speakers did too. [See previous

interview] People got the "false impression" that she'd done a lot to stop capital punishment. (It could come back now, especially if there was a referendum)
Wrote an article about capital punishment that was later reprinted in a New Zealand publication, next to an article by Bertrand Russell.

Anarchist Cabaret and performing.

Used to go to anarchist do's. (She used to do skits): Anarchist cabaret at Centro Iberico – about 10 years ago Albert Meltzer suggested she should take part – KL did some skits with a half-American man. Petered out when John Olday died. About 1971 American boy promoter asked her to take part in an Amnesty International benefit. Solemn affair – KL only 'non-professional' one there. Only comic item in it. At Collegiate Theatre in London University – duo with Leonard Fenton. Collegiate theatre in November – very nervous and often ad-libbed - this went down well. She did a turn at pensioners' do with Interaction. Thinks she could have been good on stage but too late now.

Tells horror story experience of being lost in UCL corridors looking for the theatre (about 10 years ago).

Now

Her philosophical and practical attitude now is anarchist. **History is proving now that anarchism is right** – brutal authority increasing power, incompetent governments. Modern history the proof. But – how can human beings do it [practice anarchism.]? But what else is there? needs sacrifice and adjustment. The anarchist idea is spreading. In the War [WW2], when she was first involved, only in London, Bristol, Glasgow and Whiteway. It seems incredible to her now when she sees all the branches listed on the back of *Freedom* - it seems worldwide. Time will prove how genuine it is. Must have some effect.

A year ago KL on Camden Pensioners and T.U. Association – minuting secretary - (left because not enough time). Now in a little Hampstead branch

Camden News has pics of KL on demos – now being shown in a local library display. Pics on TV – Hiroshima Tree commemoration and Aldermaston marches.

Notes and References

¹ [*Useful background to this section can be found in Pete Grafton's oral history [You You, and You! The People Out of Step with World War II](#) (Pluto, 1981), which includes interviews with anarchists.*]

² [*Grafton, [You, You & You!](#) particularly the [chapter on Disaffection of the Forces.](#)*]