

Jean Harrod, top international diplomat and now writer of crime fiction was the speaker at the May 23rd meeting. Jean left school following a careers talk from someone in the Foreign Office and decided to join the civil service hoping for postings abroad. Within a couple of years, she was posted to Geneva to attend an international conference. This was the first of many postings abroad. Jean had a flair for languages and quickly picked up the language of the country she was posted to, including mandarin and Indonesian. She met her husband, another diplomat, in Geneva. When they married, she was expected to give up work which was the general policy at the time. She was asked to resign on several occasions but the letters were conveniently mislaid in a drawer and she took no further action. In 1975 the Sex Discrimination Act became law and her resignation was not necessary. She was the first married woman in the Foreign Office to be allowed to continue with her career.

Initially she and her husband lived in Berlin at the time of the Cold War and they were aware that the house was bugged and that they were being watched wherever they went. It was often necessary to walk outside to have a private conversation.

Jean described one occasion in China, when she innocently boarded a taxi, and it turned out that she had been kidnapped. The kidnappers were not aware that she spoke fluent mandarin and following a friendly conversation about their respective families, the kidnappers let her go but the outcome could have been very different.

Following a long career, she and her husband applied for early retirement. This was granted to her husband but she was informed that as she was one of the few senior women in the Foreign Office, she would have to stay. Early retirement was eventually granted and she decided to try her hand as a novelist, drawing on her experiences as an international diplomat. The first novel, *Deadly Diplomacy*, tells the tale of a British consul catapulted into a murder investigation in Australia, where Jean was formerly a Deputy High Commissioner. Other novels have followed and feature the jet setting diplomat Jess Turner.

This presentation was a tour de force. Also many women in the audience could relate to their own experiences at work prior to the Sex Discrimination Act.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 27th June when Morlin Ellis will be speaking on *The History of Spanish Art in 15 Objects*.

Ian Reid

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