



MUM'S DIARIES 1941-1946

These have been transcribed by her son Jonathan from loose-leaf pages, mostly notebook size, with six holes down one side of each page. Initially sorted into years by her daughter Antonia, they cover September 1941 to 1946, the war years. The Japanese invaded Hong Kong in December 1941 when Mum was 19 years old.

When originally collected together by Antonia, following Mum's death in 2015, these diary pages were in disarray, Mum having shuffled through them on occasions in her later years when she was suffering from memory loss. Frustratingly there are many large gaps, notably when the Japanese invaded, and during liberation, August 1945, following the "3 years 8 months" as the Japanese occupation was referred to after the war. Whether these missing sections are lost, purposely removed, or she stopped keeping a diary at times of high stress or through fear of Japanese reprisal, we shall probably never know, although there is an instance when she berates herself for not keeping up her diary, following what she refers to as momentous happenings (see below). There may have even been times when she had no access to pen or paper. Although the diary reveals no concrete indications that she was interned, I believe, gleaned from my Dad's faint, spidery scribbling's when attempting to interview my mum in order to obtain compensation from the Japanese Govt. (mum's application was turned down) that initially, following the invasion Christmas 1941, she may have been interned before being granted 3rd National Status. Passes were issued by the Japanese to those from countries considered neutral, or by those vouched for by a neutral, or those considered no threat to Japan.

"Very quickly after the Japanese took Hong Kong, the problem of survival was the inescapable obsession of the population. European, Britons and Americans were interned. With resources limited, the new rulers were glad to allow the rest to fend for themselves – including all the Chinese. Half the residents became unemployed; and soon it was obvious that there was to be an acute shortage of jobs and food."

J. Gittins

Mum, during the occupation years covered by her diary moved about relatively freely using a pass (probably as below). While the Chinese were treated terribly by the Japanese (used for bayonet and beheading practice) they weren't interned en masse but rather driven from the colony through terror and starvation. It is estimated that over 10,000 Chinese women were raped in the month following the invasion. The relatively small number of Eurasians (~600) were initially interned, but then released as neutrals by the Japanese 'united against the British colonial



John Charles Lang's (Mum's dad) 3rd National Pass

oppressors' although the many who fought in the resistance with the BAAG (or associated with BAAG members), when caught, were tortured and executed. A few Eurasian noncombatants did end up in Stanley Camp, but those with no means of survival following the incarceration or death of their male breadwinners, were interned in Rosehill camp, which Mum visited on several occasions noted in her diary.

In 1943 Rosehill became a Red Cross internment camp for a large number of Filho de Macau and other Eurasian and third national families whose fathers, brothers and sons had been serving in the colonial service, British HK Volunteer Defense Force, and those who had been made prisoners of war either in Shamshuipo Camp in Kowloon or taken to labour camps in Japan. The families thus were effectively destitute with no money coming in. There were isolated instances of Eurasian military POW's whose family members who were put in the Stanley Civilian Internment Camp, but for the majority, the Japanese considered they were "not British enough" to warrant internment and they were temporarily left to their own devices. With no earner in the family they had to rely on the Red Cross and were ordered into Rosary Hill. The diet was not brilliant but food throughout the colony had become more difficult with shipping being harassed by US submarines and the land connections cut intermittently by Chinese guerillas. Many moved



themselves to Macau when they could find the money, where the British Consul was able to help in some cases.

For the Eurasians, along with all others attempting to survive in Hong Kong under the Japanese, the lack of money and thus food became an all-consuming pastime. It could be that the relatively wealthy Lang family matriarch Susie Lang (following her husband's death) paid off the Japanese using silks or jewels, to leave the family alone. The Lang boys were sent out with valuable family items, including fabrics, to sell on the black market. "I was a hawker" (Pc. Archie Lang to his son Derek). This apparently was a fairly common survival tactic amongst Eurasians with items of value. Mum does allude briefly in her diary, to the possibility of having to go to Stanley camp, when the Japanese threaten to stop her Red Cross aid payments (Dec. 27th 1943).

The Island of Macau was neutral during this period, and many Eurasians of means obtained permission from the Japanese to move there, including Mum's family. Those granted permission had their names posted on a notice board in a public place, which applicants scanned frequently. The Lang's left for Macau some time after John Charles's death in 1942, however Mum stayed behind in HK but spent some time in Macau – probably in 1944, returning to HK before the rest of the family, following the Japanese surrender August 1945.

I'm certain Mum never meant the diary for a wider audience than herself, however I like to think that she would have been pleased by my and Antonia's belated attempts to use it to try and understand what made her tick (to use one of my Dad's favourite terms). Of course this begs the question, why didn't we just ask her – this would have been a hell of a sight easier than untangling the mess of enigmatic diary entries and myriad of letters. The short answer, to borrow from the Victorians, would be to say that 'one didn't'. As anyone who has parents who suffered in the war knows, and there must be millions of us – these things just weren't discussed. Now that Mum and Dad are both lying in the Heath and Reach church yard, other than these written artifacts, all Toni and I have to go on are a series of anecdotes, often recounted in the heat of family rows, and memories of parental eccentricities. Mum always kept a well-stocked larder (on occasion, under her bed) of canned goods (best by dates long expired), and as children we were applauded for eating every last grain of rice from our bowls. Whether the following anecdotes were true or invented as moralizing tales to try and get us to behave – I leave it to the reader to decide, however I recount them here before they fade from our failing memories.

My mother was wonderfully bilingual in English and Cantonese, and although in England her chance to use it was restricted to Chinese restaurant outings and occasional visits with relatives, as a five year old visiting Hong Kong I can still remember dozing on her lap as the staccato Cantonese conversation washed around me. I believe her English was accent-less, that is, perfect BBC enunciation, and that similarly her Cantonese was of high quality. This facility put her much in demand as a teacher of English to Cantonese speakers, and, apparently, other nationalities. I remember Mum correcting me on several occasions "I am not an English teacher, I am a teacher of English". She recounted to me incidents where she taught Japanese soldiers to sing 'Happy Birthday', and on another occasion 'There Will Always Be An England'.



While nursing, mum was looking after injured Canadian soldiers, who involved her in their plan to escape, presumably to Free China. She did her utmost to talk them out of it – fearful that they would be captured and shot (the most likely outcome). One of her diary entries is the address of a soldier from Manitoba, Canada, written in his hand.

- Mum talked of seeing a relatively wealthy man throw up on the street, the vomit quickly being devoured by starving Chinese. You can bet this anecdote stayed in my boyhood memory!
- The boys were sent foraging for food, and once came back with a dog's head (Pc. Antonia and Uncle Robin)
- Following the invasion, the Japanese replaced the Hong Kong Dollar with Military Yen (M¥ or just ¥). This money was not convertible with any other currency, including regular Japanese Yen, and due to rapid inflation during the occupation, quickly became worthless. I remember my father showing me a bundle of this pretty paper money he or my mother must have kept as a souvenir.



Antonia held by Stephanie and Sue HK 1953

A wonderfully memorable yearlong visit was made to HK in 1963, travelling by the P&O Line ship the Chusan. This enabled us children (I was 5, Antonia 11) to put some faces to names in Mum's family, and see Hong Kong before it became the modern glass and steel city it is today (The Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank was still the tallest building). Dad stayed at home, tied to his job as a bank clerk. Mum also took Antonia for a HK visit when she was a baby in 1953.

My Mum's spelling as a young woman was way better than mine has ever been, but mistakes seem to coincide with stressful happenings. In addition Mum was not always accurate with her dates and

later in 1946 reversed the order of her entries. She also on occasion has left half-page gaps, maybe intending to go back later and fill them in, and in places dates have been added later in the same hand, but a different pen. She writes in ink, probably mixed using "ink powder" that she refers to. When this was in short supply she reverts to pencil. She was learning shorthand, but in her diaries only uses contractions such as B4 for before, K'loon for Kowloon. The conjunction 'and' is always just a squiggle, periods (full stops) occur at random, three dots (∴) i.e. therefore, are used upside-down for because. She uses tho' for although and other Americanisms, especially during her time with Jack, and when she thought she might be repatriated to the States. She also makes reference to learning French, Russian, Shorthand and Mainland Chinese (but never Japanese). She was an accomplished academic, and was taking university exams towards a BA degree the Christmas the Japanese invaded. Subjects she studied in her 18 months as a university



student included English Literature, French, Psychology and Biology – the Vice Chancellor makes mention of her as “one of the best students of her year”.

The wonderful colonial word Tiffin or just ‘tif’ in Mums diary (from English colloquial or slang tiffing meaning to take a little drink) refers to any light meal other than a main meal. I don’t know if the term was still used by the English at home in the 1940’s, but all references to tiffin disappear once Mum arrives in the UK to be replaced with Tea or Pubbing. I found a menu from the Gloucester Hotel (HK) shortly after the war that listed tiffin as \$1.25 (HKD).

Movies, mostly Hollywood, but some British, were very important to Mum and her peer group, providing a window on the western world, and are very useful for corroborating years in the diary. Mum once told me that she never missed a Hollywood movie release during her time in H.K. and that seeing them provided her huge enjoyment. Attempts to relive much loved scenes from these movies could explain her frequent trips to the Hong Kong, Peninsula and Gloucester Hotels, and later when Eurasians were allowed in, the Hong Kong Club, where, if her boyfriends’ letters from pow camp are to be believed, numerous fancy cocktails were consumed at intervals between dances when she removed her too small shoes to rest her feet. As well as influencing her writing style, these movies surely also influenced her attempts to stay in fashion. Both hair (the permanent wave was in) and clothes. Mum was always a sharp dresser, and I’m sure the ‘sewing amahs’ were kept busy adapting and repairing. The only surviving sketch in her diary pages is of a 40’s style dress (27 Jan. ’44). Maintaining a supply of underwear, stockings and shoes that fit was a constant struggle, witness the number of references to these items.

Mum was a prolific reader of current philosophical and political English literature, as well as the classics. Always a church goer, the diary indicates she attended Anglican Church most Sundays, probably usually St. John’s Cathedral, but maybe also St. Andrews, and I remember throughout our childhood years Mum always loved immersing herself in the ceremony, music, rituals and buildings of the Church of England. Diary entries indicate she was active in the church choir and she hob knobbed with the religious elite; her diary records her spending time with Bishop Hall driving around the New Territories visiting orphanages.

Although a few entries make her appear snobbish and even racist; dear reader, please remember that she was only 18/19 years old when the diary starts, in many ways much more naïve than today’s teenagers, but exposed to horrendous events – minimally, the death by heart attack of her father, shortly after the Japanese invaded, and the beheading of her uncles, and death in action of many of her boyfriends who served with the BAAG and the HVDC, and the incarceration of others in pow camps in awful conditions. She herself may have narrowly escaped mutilation and rape during the early days of the invasion. The female students at UHK offered their services to the Auxiliary Nursing Service, based out of the Queen Mary Hospital. One of the most notorious occasions of brutality occurred at the St. Stephen’s College Hospital (see *The Women of Stanley*), and although it has proved impossible to verify if my mother was present – many of the details do seem to fit her scattered memories. On entering the hospital the Japanese soldiers herded the doctors into a room and shot them; patients in bed were bayoneted and the nurses raped. Would it be churlish to assume that the St. Stephens incident was recorded, as many of the victims were



‘white’? From my Internet research I think not. Many other such incidences involving Chinese or Eurasian nurses are alluded to, but substantiating details are not recorded, at least in the English language. Although not covered in her diary, personal communication with a reliable witness (Joyce Symons with Antonia Rollins) indicates that she escaped these horrors by hiding in a locker room, but God knows what witnessing such events would do to a young woman. During my research I came across reference to a pact that nurses in the Auxiliary Nursing Service made, following an incident of rape and murder by the Japanese soldiers, not to make mention of it ever (*The Women of Stanley*). Society was maybe less accepting of such talk back then, and to my knowledge Mum never received any counseling for PTSD, although she and Dad went for counseling later in life with a psychologist, Doctor Hare. But this was to investigate probable underlying psychological reasons for Dad’s colitis; the doctor referred to Mum’s experiences as a ‘can of worms’ she was not ready to open at this point (Pc. Antonia). Mum did mention to me once how unfair it was that military personnel received recognition for the hardship they endured, as did the British civilians interned in Stanley Camp, whereas little mention is made of the suffering of Chinese, Eurasians or Indians. These thoughts were especially prominent for her when our be-medalled Dad took part in the annual Remembrance Day Parade, marching down Whitehall.

Despite periods of depression which were to plague her throughout her life, there are many upbeat entries in Mum’s diary pages, and for me sitting in the middle of a freezing Canadian winter, it is hard not to feel envious as I read of one of her many trips on the Star Ferry (still one of the great city experiences anywhere in the world) as she travelled on her everyday commute from Kowloon to Hong Kong, perhaps to a rendezvous with a boyfriend at the Gloucester Hotel. And this with the wonderful colonial architecture, before the glass and steel monoliths of today were built, hiding all views of the spectacular surrounding HK scenery.

The following diary extract (October 1942) is uncharacteristically introspective, and to my jaundiced ears, in the knowledge of my Mum’s tendency towards sarcasm, and avoidance of patriotic jingoism, suggests lines from a self-improvement book or movie with a moral guidance message. However I should probably bury such criticism and accept it as the honest recounting of thoughts of a still optimistic 20 year-old girl.

“Another H is here. This year it is important by the fact that we are advised not to go out. Anti Japanese activities on China’s national day in annexed Hong Kong. Well I’m writing my diary again after a lapse of months. When I especially should have written because of such important events – Black pages in the history of my life. Pages written by the Japanese – the deaths of Daddy and Eileen Van Bergen. I will never forgive the nips. I loath them with all my powers and senses of feeling. But also I love – just as I hate Japan I love Britain. I live for Britain and the future. One wonderful thing I have gained, or regained my religion - in that I gain my peace, my happiness. I have found out how to live – for others through tolerance. TOLERANCE – the secret word to gain happiness – to live beautiful life. My activities these days are uncolourful. I am lucky in that I am adaptable mentally as well as physically. I am quite resigned to this situation to the extent that I seldom even hope – maybe it is not resignation alone – it is complete confidence in the future. I have patience where this, a great test & concerned but none with little



trials – where my immediate happiness & satisfaction is concerned. I am selfish, intolerant to childishness. In all sincerity I think I am a better person – more sincere, tolerant, undemanding, understanding, less lazy. I realize the futility of Dad’s life. In his way he was a good father. He gave – everything. He took very little.”

In 1946 my Dad comes on the scene (first mention February 22nd) and I have incorporated his diary entries with Mum’s. My Mum’s dates are often ‘woolly’ however Dad, despite flying back and forth across Asia and being in a different country most days, and I’m guessing often hung-over, was always accurate as to dates. Against my better judgment I have included scans of my Dad’s diary pages where Mum and Dad’s paths crossed. Against my better judgment because his non-p.c. remarks about Mum’s Asian appearance (it reads as if Mum was an exotic doll he collected on his travels rather than a choice of life mate) and his heavy drinking life style are probably not suitable reading for younger readers. Those readers of fragile sensibilities please read selectively the 1946 diary entries! Far be it for a son to make judgment on his father’s behaviour – I am off shortly to burn my own diaries! To yet again quote my Dad “people in glass-houses shouldn’t throw stones”.

Lastly, it is impossible to understand Mum’s formative years in HK without some sense of what it was like to be visibly Eurasian in a British colony. For myself, at almost 60 years of age, the concept that I too am partly Eurasian has only recently solidified. Race in our family was never discussed, and, of course, one of the delights of childhood is that one never questions or notices such things. To this end I have included a few paragraphs on what it was like to be Eurasian in HK around the war years, gleaned from first hand accounts found on the internet.

Editors notes are in italics. Words guessed at end with ? or ***, maybe you can fill in some of the entries I failed to make sense of. In transcribing the diary pages I have occasionally taken the liberty of changing entries from note form to narrative, to make them easier to read.

I received extensive help in compiling Mum’s Diaries, firstly from family. My sister Antonia started on the project, but following the theft of her laptop, handed it over to me. My nephew Derek’s extensive research into the Lang genealogy is included in the ‘Family’ section. My niece Edwina sent me a copy of her father’s (Eddie Gosano) autobiography *Hong Kong Farewell*. My Uncle Robin, my mother’s youngest brother, accompanied myself and Antonia for a lightning one-week trip, November 2016, back to Hong Kong where the Kotwall’s made us so very welcome.

This project would not have been possible without extensive use of the Internet, notably for locating and contacting several persons. Bruce Chan, my fellow Canadian second cousin once removed, and his book *Forbidden Merchandise*. Peter Hall and his book on HK Eurasians *In The Web*. Tony Banham’s book *We Shall Suffer There* provided a chronology of military events, Tony put me straight on the ‘two Cedrics’ conundrum. Bea Hutcheon (nee Greaves), a fellow UHK student of Mum’s, had a strikingly similar war to Mum. I located Bea in New South Wales and was able to include her concise account. Lastly Cedric’s brother Mike who I located in NZ.

Jonathan Rollins, Canmore, Canada 2019



Acronyms:

ANS	Auxiliary Nursing Service
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
BAAG	British Army Aid Group (see pg. 105)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBE	Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DBS	The Lang family boys all went to Diocesan Boy's School



Early days, D.B.S. George Kotwall middle row far right

DFM Distinguished Flying Medal

DGS Diocesan Girls School Mum was a pupil and went on to teach here – she also lived at DGS for a time in the war years. DGS was central to Mum's life in HK. Below are two of Mum's report cards, the second would have been for the year before she started university. For more on life at prewar DGS see pg. 249 & Appendix F.



**DIOCESAN GIRLS' SCHOOL
KOWLOON**

REPORT FOR Summer TERM 1928
 NAME Phyllis Lang CLASS X
 No. IN CLASS 26 POSITION IN CLASS _____

SUBJECT	MARKS GAINED IN EXAM.	REMARKS
Scripture		
Grammar		
Composition		
Dictation		
Literature		
Reading		Has made marked progress this year & seems to have overcome her shyness. English quite good.
Recitation		
History		
Geography		
Hygiene		
Nature Study		
Arithmetic		Tries very nicely with letters & figures. Will do better after more practice.
Writing		
Drawing		
Handwork		
Needlework		
Music		

CONDUCT A good little girl.

FORM MISTRESS E. K. Walters

HEAD MISTRESS A very good report H.D. Sawyer

A month's notice in writing is required before the removal of a pupil, otherwise a month's fees are due.



**DIOCESAN GIRLS' SCHOOL
KOWLOON.**

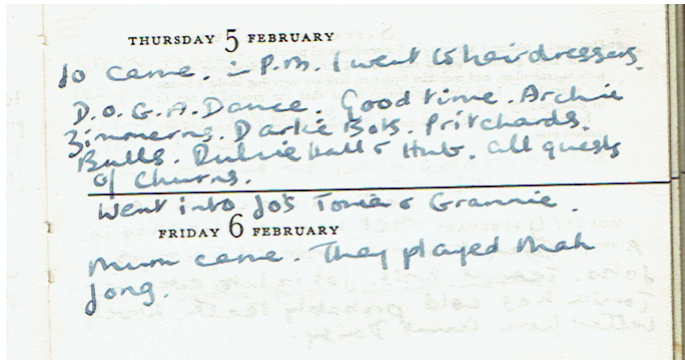
Report for Summer Term 1939
 Name Phyllis Lang Class 11
 No. in Class 25 Position in Class _____

SUBJECT	MARKS GAINED IN EXAM.	REMARKS
Scripture		Is interested & thoughtful, but apt to be too diffuse. <i>Gul.</i> } Enthusiastic and energetic; does good, sound work in this field <i>K.L.</i>
Grammar		
Composition		
Dictation		
Literature		
Reading		
Recitation		
History		{ Much improved this Term - <i>M.C.B.</i> Shows interest.
Geography		
General Science		Fair, could be better. <i>L.L.</i>
Botany		
Physics		
Chemistry		
Domestic Science		Very good indeed. <i>M.C.B.</i>
Arithmetic		- Tries to understand the work, but should not hold so tenaciously to her own ideas when they are wrong. <i>G.F.G.</i>
Algebra		
Geometry		
Drawing		
Needlework		
French	<i>Madore</i>	Seems to like this subject and is enthusiastic and keen. <i>M.P.R.</i>
Chinese		
Drill & Games		Fairly good, with effort could be better. <i>J.V.L.</i>
Conduct	<i>Good</i>	<i>M.C.B.</i>
Head Mistress	A keen and conscientious worker. Some of her work is of good quality. She is a sensible, dependable	
New Term Begins	<i>September 6th</i>	Boarders Return <i>Gul.</i>

A month's notice in writing is required before the removal of a pupil, otherwise a month's fees are due.



DOGA Diocesan Old Girls' Association, mum took the opportunity during her 1954 H.K. visit to attend a DOGA dance (see diary entry below and pg. 84).



- ENSA Entertainments National Service Association (every night something awful)
- ERC East River Column – Chinese communist resistance group operating in the Pearl River delta
- HKAAF Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force – formed 1949?
- HKC Hong Kong Club, located across from the Cenotaph. Eurasians not permitted until after the war.
- HKD Hong Kong Dollar
- HKU/UHK The University of Hong Kong – founded 1911
- HKVDC Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (see pg. 94)
- ICRC International Committee of Red Cross
- KIA Killed In Action
- KT/Kai Tak H.K. airport was extended using POW labor during the war (Cedric worked on this) – even so in 1945/6 my Dad told me the approach was quite challenging requiring you to be lined up correctly – before even seeing the runway, pop over a hill with a Chinese cemetery on it before plonking down. Aircraft sometimes fell on the cemetery or slid off the end of the runway into the harbor.
- KWIZ Kweillin Weekly Intelligence Summary produced by BAAG (see Appendix B)
- OHMS On Her Majesty's Service
- P&O Pacific and Orient
- Pc. Personal Communication
- p.c. Politically Correct
- PFF Pathfinder Force, elite group in Bomber Command that marked targets



POW	Prisoner of War
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAPWI	Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (see 1946 Editor's Notes) also known satirically as Retain All Prisoners Of War Indefinitely.
RN	Royal Navy
SEAAF	South East Asia Air Force
SEAC	South East Asia Command zone
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum London
VAD	Voluntary Aid Detachment (see pg. 84)
VRC	Victoria Rowing/Recreation Club
YHA	Youth Hostelling Association – English organization providing accommodation to hikers

Hotels/Clubs:

Gloucester, also Glouc.

Hong Kong Club, adjacent to the Cenotaph

Hong Kong Cricket Club

Hong Kong Hotel, also the Hong Kong

Peninsular, also Penin.

Restaurants:

Blue Birds

Café Chine

Dairy Farm (DF) A Hong Kong institution, much beloved by Anglophiles, dairy not being part of the traditional Chinese diet. Mum was a frequent client, taking Dad there on one of their first dates, and taking us children there when we spent a year in H.K. in 1962.

Dr. Ribs

Kowloon Confectionary



Golden City


Landau's/Jimmy's Kitchen The Landau brothers had BAAG connections, Mum spent time with them on their 'farm'.

Parisian Grill Queen's Road Central

Sprinkles

Sun Sun

Wiseman's Café Wiseman was located on the first floor of the Lane Crawford building in Des Voeux Rd., Central, HK. In the 1930's a four-course meal cost \$1.50, about 12 pence. Employees had BAAG connections, one of whom was tortured to death by the Japanese, but did not reveal his connections.

G.  R.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT HONG KONG.

LOCAL EXAMINATION SYNDICATE
Hong Kong School Certificate Examination.

Admit Candidate Number 339

Name PHYLLIS KATHLEEN LANG

School DIACESAN GIRLS' SCHOOL, KOWLOON.


Signature Phyllis Lang Date 15th Feb. 1939

I hereby certify that the attached photograph is a true likeness of

Phyllis Kathleen Lang

.....

Signature (across the photograph) of the Head of the School or College presenting the candidate.



(P.T.O.)

Mum's "matriculation certificate" prior to starting at HKU, signed by Elizabeth Gibbins



Grandma Susie (left), Hazel (Jo) (center back), Mary Camiard? holding Antonia (right) 1953. Stephanie and Suzanne Gossano (left and center front). Mary and her father (probably second from right) pop Camiard, are mentioned throughout Mum's Diary (20 references). They were neighbours living near King's Terrace Kowloon

Below, Mum right standing, and middle row centre DGS Field Hockey Teams. Many of Mum's friends mentioned in her diary can be found here including Vivian Jex, Paddy Pasco, Ciely Kotewall, Cham and the Churns.

