

**Jeremy Peter Samuel Montagu**  
**27 December 1927-11 September 2020**  
**3 Tevet 5688-22 Elul 5781**



## Wolvercote Cemetery 14 September 2020

### Rachel Montagu

I suggested to Jer that his stone to match Gwen's אשת חיל, a woman of valour should read אשרי האיש, happy is the man; the man in Psalm 1 who was happy to study Torah and follow the path of righteousness and who was like a tree planted by streams of water. Jeremy, that great tree-trunk of a man, whose 92 years of life we have come to give thanks for today, thought briefly and said, 'yes, I was happy'. He was then still reeling from losing Gwen, his adored wife of almost 50 years, but I think he has had quite a bit of happiness in the last 17 years – and that much of that came from us, gathered here now to wish him farewell.

In childhood, Jeremy later career path showed early: aged 5, walking in Kensington Gardens, he heard a band playing, rushed towards the bandstand and tried to conduct them from below.

Jeremy's great-grandfather when asked about his mania for collecting, replied that in heaven, if he could collect nothing else, he would collect cherubs. So there's a gene for the collecting tendency that Jeremy also showed early: once at prep school they emptied his pockets. The long, long list of their contents filled a page in the school magazine.

After going to America early in the war, Granny thought that Jeremy and Jennifer should return to England once the blitz was over to share their contemporaries' wartime experience. Their time in America was much of what Jeremy and Jennifer talked about together when she visited last week. Grandpa, through his intelligence work, knew the V-bombs would soon arrive in London, but could not for security reasons tell Granny not to send their children home. So he found them boarding schools as far from London as possible. For Jeremy this meant Gordonstoun, a school whose sporting emphasis Ewen would have enjoyed himself. Less keen on the sport, Jeremy continued the horn playing he had begun in America.

What he imbibed best from the school was Kurt Hahn's ethos of service to others which Jeremy always said was behind the immense time and trouble he took to answer enquiries and to try to help and to help those who consulted him.

Post-war national service took him to Egypt and to his first experiences of teaching, which developed into one of his greatest skills. Afterwards he went to Cambridge to Trinity, Ewen's old college, to study economics, then regarded an essential preliminary to studying law. At the end of his first year the College told Ewen that Jeremy didn't seem to be doing very well at economics or be very interested in it. They were willing to offer him help in retaking his exams, but since the college music society was flourishing under his leadership as never before in its history, they thought that perhaps his interests lay elsewhere and should be pursued elsewhere. So Jeremy went to the Guildhall to study conducting and then percussion. Music was then considered an unlikely career for someone of his background, tho' at least 3 family members have become musicians since.

The Mishnah says that whoever saves a life is like one who saved the whole world. Jeremy saved 2 lives – an excellent swimmer, he swam out to save the lives of 2 men who got into trouble sailing off Warren Beach. One of them wanted to give him a present, and asked Grandpa whether a Gilbert and Sullivan record would be suitable. Grandpa thought that far too frivolous for his scholarly son, but Jer would probably have enjoyed it.

As a young conductor, he and Gwen lived on her salary while he spent his earnings making up the deficit on the concerts he put on and conducted: the Montagu String Orchestra.

Because of his passionate concern for truth and authenticity, particularly in sound, he was one of the first to have a harpsichord playing the continuo for Bach rather than the piano. Since few musicians in the 50s were interested in recreating the sound the composer would have heard if that meant an old harpsichord, rather than a nice modern piano, he lost the battle: but he won the war. These days harpsichord continuo is commonplace at a Bach concert.

I'm afraid my arrival put an end to his concert conducting career because he had to use his earnings to support the family. I'm sorry, Jeremy. Percussion which he had begun to learn to improve his rhythm as a conductor then became his living, both as a player and a teacher although he continued to conduct amateur orchestras – and we children used to enjoy going with him to their rehearsals.

He also started to apply that collecting gene to musical instruments, from Europe and elsewhere. Collecting historical instruments led to membership of The Galpin Society where in 2004 he was awarded the Anthony Baines prize awarded in recognition of an outstanding contribution to organology, the study of musical instruments. His citation says, "he has lived up to his wish 'to make anything we publish as good as it possibly can be, let's help each other and let's work together'". He served as Galpin Society Secretary from 1965-71 and later felt very honoured to be asked to become their President.

There are many more professional achievements and awards but I don't have time to list them all now – as he often said, 'do look at the Jeremy Montagu website'.

Gwen was worried that all the music in the house must disturb the neighbours, and asked: The neighbour said, 'we don't hear any music; what we do hear is roars of laughter'. We will none of us hear that great barking laugh again.

When he became the percussion player for Michael Morrow's group Musica Reservata, who played mediaeval music on the most authentic instruments that could be managed, Jeremy built his own reproductions of early percussion. It is their Prisoners Song that Jeremy asked us to include in this service. During last week when he was looking forward to being released from his sudden unaccustomed frailty, the idea of a Prisoner longing for release took on an unanticipated shade of meaning.

He became so well known in the field of instrument studies that when he got up to speak at an early international conference and the chair said, 'identify yourself' so his name would be included in the recording as Jeremy went to the podium, the whole hall filled with laughter.

He also started writing books, first on how to play percussion, then a series for David and Charles on the history of musical instruments, and later some very solid and well illustrated books, some on instruments in general and some on specific instruments. Some years ago he said, no more books, only articles – but the desire to create books was too deep, and he has since written 4 more. I have found the one on biblical instruments really useful when teaching, and during his last illness I sat reading and enjoying his lectures on the industrial revolution's effect on musical instruments. Jeremy talked a lot about his hopes for the enduring usefulness of his books in our last fluent long conversation, clearly very concerned about his legacy. The 'team' approach usual in our family life was part of the books too: I text-edited some of them; recently Kate has taken over photography and Simon puts them on Jer's website.

As the pile of published volumes grew, Jeremy started to identify himself as a writer: when spending a sabbatical in Jerusalem, he was asked to write in Hebrew by his Ulpan teacher.

He produced a mini-book, an illustrated bedtime story for his grandson Jacob, not what the teacher expected. He also wrote an autobiography, plus a frivolous romp: the Life and Loves of Wendy, the Dragon.

in 1981 Jeremy became Curator of the Bate Collection at Oxford, a part of the Music Faculty. A job which perfectly suited his range of skills. He could lecture on musical instruments to the students in the morning, make brackets to hold the instruments in the display cases and write informative labels and leaflets during the afternoons. His fundraising to buy more instruments was so successful that at the launch party of a new clutch of harpsichords, the then secretary of the music faculty was heard wondering how much more space could be found for the Bate to expand into if he was so unstoppable. When the Javanese embassy decided where to give a gamelan ensemble to Oxford they ended up at the Bate, although that is a museum of European instruments - because the embassy scout noticed the buzz created by the many wind bands, and horn bands who Jeremy encouraged to practise there. His school headmaster Hahn's ethos of service was significant in the time and extent of help Jeremy offered students and colleagues.

Psalm 1 says the righteous man is like a flourishing tree planted by the water. Two things in particular helped him and Gwen flourish when transplanted to Oxford. He became a fellow of Wadham, and the extended family atmosphere at the college was very important both in Gwen's lifetime and to him during his widowhood. At Wadham's annual family party, the younger fellows bring their parents and the older fellows their grandchildren. Jer for some years brought both his mother and his grandchildren. Jeremy wanted to do something to help college life and became editor of the Wadham Gazette.

Another benefit of their move to Oxford, the Oxford Jewish Congregation suited them religiously and the friendships made there enhanced their lives. Jeremy was for a while the Senior Member for the J-Soc, a role in which he saw himself as representing the students to the authorities and not representing the authorities to the students. Gwen and Jeremy entertained students and synagogue visitors at Iffley Rd, including invigilating students with exams on shabbat and festivals. In one introduction to Jewish student life, they were described as 'this cuddly couple with a whole-meal vibe'. His 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at Richmond Rd was a wonderful celebration and outpouring of communal affection. Whenever I invited him for shabbat in recent years, I was told, 'but I've got to start the service at OJC'. He continued that, aged 92, until lockdown began. He also became a regular haftarah reader.

Jeremy wanted psalm 148 included in this service, because, he said, it says everything about God in the world. He publicly praised God by continuing Richard Koch's custom of saying Kaddish whenever there were no mourners present. Louis Jacobs, Jer's rabbi and mentor as a young adult said that praising God is what we are here in this world to do, and to say kaddish for a parent is to continue their work in the world even after their death. So we know what we have to do now.

Jeremy's judgment could sometimes be poor: one example: Jeremy once said in a conversation about friendship, 'I don't really have any friends'. The messages pouring in since news got out that he was ill make a nonsense of that statement. But this was early in their time in Oxford, before they met Adele, Miriam and David and other Oxford people who then became close to them, and before he met Laurence Libin in his work writing the musical instrument entries for the Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments, whom he came to regard as an honorary brother.

From friendships to love: To translate Proverbs 18:22 freely, he did well when he found himself a wife. In the 1950s he and Gwen met at a friend's house, and both then repeatedly

visited the friend, hoping to meet the other again. Then Jeremy – always prompt – had a seat at a concert, saw Gwen standing, offered her his seat, and subsequently his heart.

Their Hebrew names ירמיהו נעמי are a perfect pattern for their married life: 2 letters are the same and the rest different: some of their life was closely shared and some activities were separate.

They wanted to bring us up with Judaism central to our lives The film with my first baby pictures includes pictures of candles and homebaked challah as they started to do Friday night together, blessing their children, and later reading the weekly portion together after dinner, starting a love of Jewish learning in us all. Then came weekly synagogue attendance, shofar blowing for his Aunt Lily's synagogue, cheder teaching, and synagogue committees, later a role as treasurer of the Leo Baeck College.

He used to give lectures on musical instruments, to schools and elsewhere: rows of examples from his collection laid out on trestle tables and he worked his way along demonstrating their development and sound. He gave one of these lectures in aid of Leo Baeck at St John's Smith Square; many synagogue worthies had come clearly prepared to be bored to tears in aid of a good cause and afterwards were heard exclaiming in surprise how much they had enjoyed it.

When Gwen died unexpectedly, with steely courage, he rebuilt his life, cooking for himself, still invigilating students, still hospitable, still writing, still forming new friendships

He was intuitive and emotionally aware in conversation – perhaps I'm unfair to his contemporaries in saying that was to an extent unusual in a man of his generation and education.

He had a great love for Israel; he and Gwen visited frequently, later he alone. Visiting his favourite shops in the old city, praying at the kotel, attending synagogue there, keeping in touch with fellow musicologists or the friends he made through his children, spending time with family. Before his coffin was closed we wound a tsitit thread round his fingers and put in some soil from Israel: he loved the commandments and loved Israel and that felt a beautifully symbolic last gesture.

He was wonderful in emergencies – when Gwen, who remained hurt that she arrived too late to say goodbye when her sister died in her teens, heard that her mother was ill, Jeremy got her onto a train immediately and she was with her mother when she died.

Jeremy was concerned about the legacy of his writing and the future of his books. What about his legacy to us, his family and close friends? We know how much his family meant to him. Sarah whose nursing skills enabled him to die at home, has sustained him body and soul by her cooking and other help; Simon with whom he made music, who helped him make his books available via his website and who also gave him hospitality during his long visits to Jerusalem, the city he loved; Heftsi, he was so pleased about your closeness to both Gwen and himself. Jacob who said after Jer's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, 'that man who spoke about Saba today in shul didn't say anything like nice enough things about him, Saba's much better than that': Jacob, the admiration was mutual. Abigail, 'my granddaughter the doctor', whose graduation ceremonies he was proud to attend, and who gave him not only nachas but Mark, a beloved grandson-in-law, whose job in research physics and university teaching has for years been fitted in round the time-consuming task of helping Saba with his computer. Abigail also gave him 2 beautiful – and bright – great-grandchildren, Zac and Leah. We saw Saba's face glowing at you in person and via zoom. Avital, in Gilad you too have also brought Jer a

likeable grandson-in-law, and three more beautiful great-grandchildren – also beamed at on zoom - and another opportunity to be sandek. And he admired the photography. Kate, Jer proudly emailed to me Lawrie Libin's comment after a dinner together about your and Eli's good looks. I snottily replied that Eli's kindness and intelligence are more important than his looks, nice tho' those are for the onlooker. Kate, similarly, you too are more than your undoubted good looks: your wisdom in dealing with other people and your skilled help in personal care have made a great difference to Jer this week; your photographic skills have improved his books and for years you have usefully mediated between him and the wonders of modern technology. Aviad, I remember, even if you don't, Saba bending over you to make reassuring comments as you sat on his lap prior to your brit. Since then your kindness, cleverness and conversational skills have built your link to Saba. Eli, after your bar mitzvah, Saba admired the calm way you read your bar mitzvah portion. Ahinoam, Saba smiled at a photo of you aged 8 or so: 'she's becoming a beauty' – but you also with your focus on archaeology, one of the interests Saba and Savta shared, are more than your good looks in his eyes. And he praised your shofar blowing. Isaac, Saba was the first to identify your musicality – when he beat a rhythm on the table between handwashing and motzi, he commented on how well you as a toddler did at beating complex rhythms back. And he was really impressed by your dissertation. Ellat, Saba enjoyed getting to know you as a young adult while you were living in Oxford last year. Saul, Jer confided to a friend that he hoped he was a useful role model to you.

His legacy to us? To follow his example, to be generous with our money and our time, to be hospitable, to show awareness of others' emotions, to work and work on getting things right, as he did his books, to attend synagogue and study Torah – we heard after days of a voice so weak and thready we could hardly understand, the emphatic way he said ה' הוא האלקים last Saturday. To feel joy – his gleeful smile as we reminisced about our childhood round his bed last Friday afternoon.

I started with the beginning of the book of Psalms and I want to end at the book's end now the tree that has sheltered and supported our lives, and encouraged our growth has fallen.–

כל הנשמה תהלל יה הללויה

Let every soul praise the Eternal, Hallelujah, in gratitude to God because we had Jer for so long. His example, his memory will truly be a blessing זכרונו לברכה

## **Jeremy's grandchildren:**

We sat up two nights ago and thought about what we would want to say and there was a long stream of stories and memories that had us in stitches which is, we agreed, what Saba would have wanted. As Saba said to Simon last week, 'laughter is how we deal with things as a family'. Here are some that we would like to share with you.

Growing up with Jeremy as our Saba was an amazing gift. He was never-endingly generous, taking us to Blackwells and risking bankruptcy by letting us leave with piles and piles of books, buying instruments, oboes, cellos, flutes, banjos, guitars, cornets etc and paying for lessons, offering house and boat loans, gifts of beautiful jewellery, his time to teach us things and so much more. No matter what we put our minds to he was unceasingly encouraging. The only thing bad thing about growing up as a small child in that house was that you couldn't touch anything or play too exuberantly. If you did you might hit a cow bell or a gong or a drum and an angry exclamation of "mind my instruments" would echo through the house. You knew you had become an adult when you were trusted to actually touch and maybe even play the instruments.

Saba insisted that his grandchildren always try new foods, but he himself knew exactly what he liked. Sometimes what he liked was year old biltong that he had to cut the mould off. The man had a stomach of steel which is how he lived to 92 despite the buckets of oil he used to fry his rice, fish and renowned fried bread. As his grandson-in-law, Mark, discovered when he lived with him for 3 months he had a designated spoon and fork for each item and meal. In fact his kitchen was so set the way he liked it that it is a good thing that he wasn't coming downstairs after his heart attack because he would have had another when he would have seen what we had done to it.

Saba set an example for us on how to move through the world with respect and dignity, except maybe, when it came to Oxford tourists. He was the ultimate loyal customer, he had a man for everything, a snuff man, an olive man, a kabanos man, a pottery man, a yoghurt lady and the list goes on. He was always proud of all of our achievements, big or little. Even on his death bed the huge smile that came to his face when his great grandchildren Zac and Leah said the brachah for the challah was heart warming. He showed us how to treat a loved one by loving Safta so wonderfully. Always saying eishet cheyil, a song for a woman of valour, to her every Friday night. He showed us how to head up a family by accepting us in every way, adopting spouses as his own children, encouraging family holidays in the UK, Israel and even South Africa. He loved to bless us in shul, braving the mechitsa, and covering us under his tallit for the priestly blessing. He loved to watch the blessing cascade down the generations on Friday night. He would bless his children, and they theirs and they theirs; it gave him great joy.

Simply in every way a mensch