Heavitree Local History Society

Newsletter No. 95 **Dec 2024**

FORTHCOMING HLHS MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Unless indicated below, meetings are held at Heavitree United Reformed Church, on the second Wed of Mar, Jun, Sep & Dec, commencing at 7:30pm.

Wed 11th Dec 2024
Life 400 years ago in Heavitree
Dr Mark Hailwood, Senior Lecturer in Early Modern History at University of Bristol, will be drawing on his new Westcountry research to reveal insights into everyday living 400 years ago.
Dr Hailwood says "When we imagine life in preindustrial rural England there are certain images that come to mind - of a hard but quiet life, in small communities that were cut off from the world but where neighbourly ties were close and supportive. But how much do we really know about what it was like to live in such a village?
"I have been working on a project that uses a remarkably rich source - witness statements from court records - to reconstruct everyday life in seventeenth-century Westcountry villages from the testimony of the ordinary women and men who actually lived in them. In this talk I will discuss some of this material, much of which shows that such communities were not as sleepy as we often think".

Wed 12th Mar 2025
Sorcery to Supercomputers – Key Stories in the History of Weather Forecasting
Catherine Ross, Met Office Archivist

Wed 11th Jun 2025
Roman Exeter and life in its neighbouring areas
John Salvatore

Wed 10th Sep 2025
AGM

AGM

The boundary walk was one of the main highlights of the past year. It was nice to have a 10-year-old join us – the first since 1975!

We spent slightly more than last year but the bank balance still looks healthy.

The website is still very popular. We looked at the data. There were many first-time visitors and a few returners. Once people are on the website, they tend to look around at lots of different pages.

Many thanks to Jonathan for keeping this fantastic resource available, and many thanks to all committee members for their work.

Exeter Workhouse at Christmas: The Staff and Eggs (Exeter Memories)

The Exeter Corporation for the Poor met yesterday. Mr. A. Stoneman presided. Subject to passing a satisfactory examination, Mr. Hurley, aged 40, of Heavitree, who was discharged from the Army in 1908, after 14 years' service, was appointed an attendant at the Workhouse.

Mr. Edwards referred a bill, amounting to £7 11s, for eggs last month. He said it was a disgrace that such an amount should have to paid at the time. The Chairman said the Board were the hands of the doctor. A certain number the inmates required nourishment of this kind, and the Guardians could not say they should not have it.

Mr. Edwards: That is not the real answer. It may true that is the amount due doctor's orders, but the rest is an account for eggs for the staff:

The Chairman: What are you going give them?

Mr. Edwards: Oatmeal if you like: Nobody else can have eggs in times like the present.

Mrs. Roberts suggested that jam should be substituted. Mr. Edwards said he had made his protest, and it was for the Committee to decide whether it was right to continue to supply eggs when, owing to scarcity and high prices, most ratepayers had do without this form of diet.

The report of the Committee was adopted.

An application was made for the usual extras for the institution at Christmas.

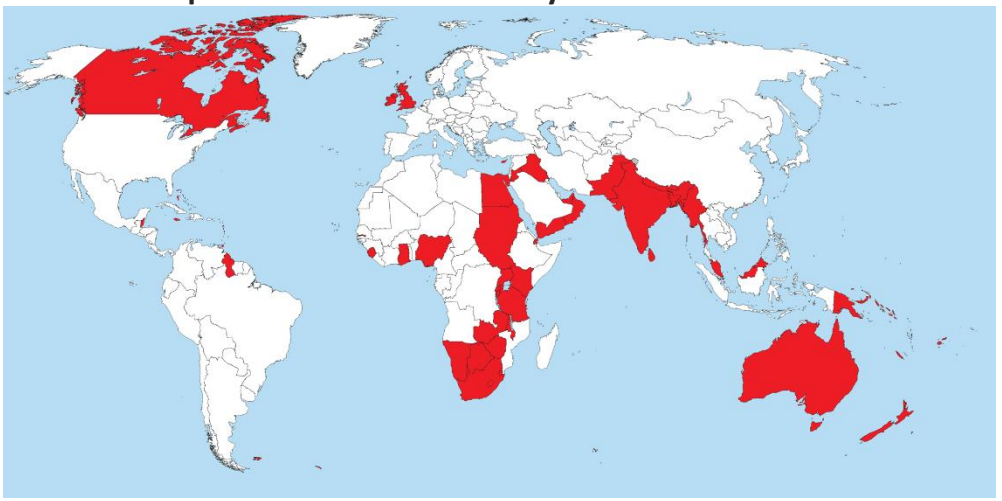
Mr. Edwards said if the staff could not do without eggs, he felt that these Christmas extras should be cut down. At present an exhibition was being held in Exeter to promote war economy. Were the Board, he asked, studying war economy? The Chairman said everything was carefully sifted, the Committee and cut down when necessary.

Mr. Loaring said the Management Committee had gone into the subject raised by Mr. Edwards, and it was still under consideration. Mr. Edwards said he should like to know how many chicken the Christmas extras would include.

The Chairman said the staff were last year allowed 3s per head.

Exeter and Plymouth Gazette - Wednesday 29 November 1916

Voices of Empire in Exeter – Todd Gray



Todd Gray came to talk to us about his two new books: Voices of Empire in Exeter 1575-1996: Part One – Imperial Exeter, and Part Two – Colonial Exonians. Empire is a divisive topic, and nothing had been written about Exeter's part in the British Empire. Yet the influence and impact of Empire is all around us. Just one example is the word 'coo ee!' – an Aboriginal signal call that became part of our language and is still used today. This and words like Blighty, anorak, hammocks, tobacco, tea, coffee and ketchup, all come from the British Empire.

Although we generally keep quite quiet about the Empire, as we do about Brexit, it cannot be denied that it was transformative and completely changed England. It was the largest empire the world had ever seen, covering 25% of the globe. It was still growing up to 1927. It's very difficult now to get academics to write about the Empire – saying the wrong thing could do damage to an institution or ruin a university. As an outsider himself, Todd sees things slightly differently, and having spent the last forty

years researching Exeter, he realised how integral Empire is to Exeter's history – this research is the missing chunk.

In the summer he interviewed 400 Exonians about the Empire – 40% were proud, 40% ashamed and 20% were ambivalent. The first word to come to mind for younger people was 'colonies', older people 'India' and the pink in atlases was also mentioned.

Most younger people were never taught about the Empire in school. Some didn't know what it was. One girl in a group from India said 'Well, you used to own us,' and a boy from Egypt said, 'You used to own us too!'

Todd decided his role was just to make the material available. Books resist judgment but let the protagonists and events speak for themselves. These books focus on 250 Exonians telling us, in their own words, their stories of Exeter and the Empire.

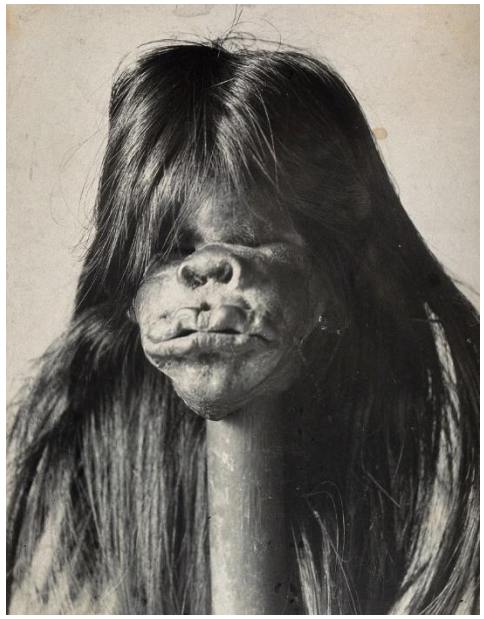
In 1920, James Owen, one of Exeter's leading newspaper proprietors, said at the Rougement Hotel:

'Everywhere men of British blood spread themselves over the face of the earth, doing the empire's business, staking their health and lives in high endeavour for England…wherever the flag went, wherever the trader went, there also went the seed of law and order, and the graces of civilisation.'

In 1956, Father Trevor Huddleston, described as 'a friend of coloured races', spoke to nearly 2000 people at Exeter Cathedral, about racial discrimination in South Africa. He had received a letter from a South African teacher, saying that the English were trying to turn the world against them, and that whites were the ruling class and blacks were for labour – and that he should leave them to it.

The generation which saw empire dissolve (aged 70 plus years) is sadly passing away – memories are disappearing. The younger don't know what questions to ask. There have been various controversies over the years: a woman from Nigeria felt uncomfortable walking down Blackboy Road

(assumed to be named after Charles II who had black hair); Bideford was described as 'the little white town' because of its white houses, but had to be renamed. Buller's statue in Exeter has been deemed as racist because of its triumphant portrayal of the empire: instead of being pulled down, an interpretation board will be put up. In the Guildhall is a portrait of General Mock, who owned land in North and South Carolina and sold it to establish slavery – the portrait's fate is yet uncommented upon.

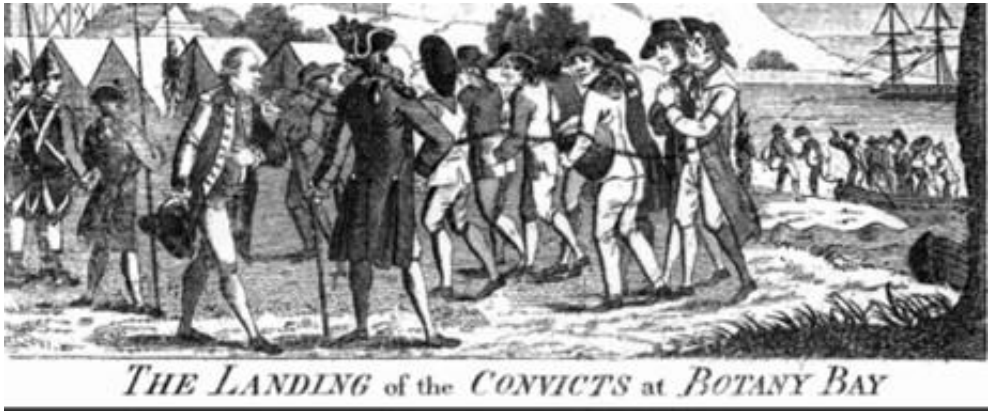


The RAMM is founded upon imperialism and there are many who think some of its objects should be returned. However, these objects also tell us about the country and the person who brought the artefact there. Each object will be more crucial in the future.

A disturbing tale told in 1869 about this type of object took place in the Bishop's Palace, Exeter, when a shrunken head was placed in the bed of Lord Rolle and his wife, as a practical joke. It was not uncommon for Europeans to purchase such curios as shrunken human heads picked clean by cannibals. In 1919, the museum accepted a Peruvian shrunken head, which remains part of the collection.

There are twenty-one Exeters in the world, thanks to the Empire, and many of Exeter's buildings have imperial connections. We mustn't forget that we were part of empires before we had our own empire. Of course, there is evidence of the Roman Empire in parts of the old city walls; the cathedral and Rougement Castle remain from the Norman Empire. Other than this, the only real reflection of imperial architecture is in three buildings: the Egyptian style catacombs, the Egyptian House in Holloway Street, and the villa Montefiore on the University campus. There are a small number of buildings that were given names linked to the empire. The grand sounding Imperial Hotel; Otago Cottage, and House off Topsham Road (probably linked to its owners', the horticultural Veitch family,

time living in South Africa); smaller late Victorian/early C20th houses such as



Crom-a-boo (an Irish war cry – see photo on the right), Derrig (Ireland?) and Khush Ghur (Afghanistan) all on Heavitree Road.

In Heavitree we have the memorial lamp named after General Charles George Gordon (1833-1885), Kipling Drive off Burnthouse Lane and of course, Ladysmith and Pretoria Roads, and the school.

The South African town of Ladysmith was relieved in 1900, and this was celebrated across the country.

Having read Todd's two books, I have picked out some Heavitree-related stories to share in this newsletter:

Tobacco

Although the mayor of Exeter was encouraged to restrict the use of tobacco in 1633, sales from the North American colonies increased, and by 1666 some 56,213lbs were imported into Exeter. In 1762, an old woman smoked in bed and caused ten houses in Heavitree to burn down!

Fraud

In 1846 a man who lived in Southlands, Fore Street, Heavitree, received a letter purportedly from Ellen Collins who claimed to be shipwrecked in Ireland and begging for money to return home to Exeter. It was actually from an Irish gang of swindlers.

Advice for Emigrants

It was often not known what happened to Exonians once they had emigrated, but some of them wrote home. George Pannell of Heavitree, who had emigrated to Adelaide, gave this advice:

'Persons coming here must give up all their English notions of ease, comforts and respectability, for such persons with high notions and very little to carry them out, will find themselves in a very awkward position here, for they are too proud to do for themselves, and people are not so willing to run here and there to work for others.'

Convicts

Nathaniel Dennoe (1807-1840) was born In Heavitree became a builder. In 1839 he sailed to Sydney, witnessing convicts being transported along the way. He wrote home:

'The men are very great drunkards and their morals are very bad…the women are the most abandoned I ever met with.'

He described life there:

'This is the place to see what the horrors of transportation are, the convicts are exposed all day to the heat of the sun in road making etc, and worked in irons, this is called the iron gang, but those work in the interior, and are supposed to be the worst lot. Then there are others who work about in Sydney streets, with overseers over them, but not in chains. I have seen, whilst travelling in the interior, 150 chained together with hand cuffs and irons about their legs, all of them carrying their little stock of clothes and necessaries – so those gentlemen at home who wish to be transported will not find themselves in clover when they get out.

The women are had from the factory at Paramatta, fifteen miles from Sydney, but they are generally the most drunken *** in existence. I counted sixteen children in the wood (stocks)'

Nathaniel also mentions several Exonians who he has seen, now working in Australia – including a shoe maker and a butcher., all doing very well. He also says:

'I have seen some of the Black natives, and such wretched creatures I never wish to see again – the women are very idle, they have not improved much by the White people, but have imbibed all of their vices. Both the men and women smoke and drink as much as they can get.'

The Failed Gold Digger

George Rowe died in Medway Terrace, Heavitree, in 1864, after a life of 'wandering and vicissitude'. He emigrated to Australia to try to make a fortune in gold, to pay off some of his debts. Unfortunately, he failed as a gold digger, but did have some success opening a refreshments tent, and after that selling his art work – local topographical views that fellow diggers commissioned and then were able to send home to show their loved ones what it was like there.

Iron Bark gully, Bendigo

The Curse of Tutankhamun

In 1924 it was believed that Helen Mary Nind, a thirty-two year old music teacher who lived at 56 Baker Street, had fallen victim to the curse of Tutenkhamun. It turned out that she had killed herself because she was in love with Hugh Gerald Evelyn White, and it was unrequited. White had been involved in Luxor and had stolen some artefacts, afterwards believing that he was cursed. He committed suicide whilst in a taxi en-route to the inquest of her death.

Exeter, Australia

It was actually a man from Heavitree who named Australia's Exeter. James Badgery sailed on the ship The Walker, so New South Wales in 1799. There, he was employed by the ship's captain to care for his seeds and plants. When he arrived in Australia, he acquired farmland and named his property Exeter Farm. The nearby rail stop was known as Badgery's Siding or Badgery's Bank but in 1890 the whole town was renamed as Exeter.

Dame Fortune

Cecil Southcott of 20 St Anne's Road was said to have been smiled upon by Dame Fortune, as he made many thousands of pounds over 13 years stay in Canada. He had left England as a Steerage Passenger (the lowest class) and sailed back First Class. He put his success down to giving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

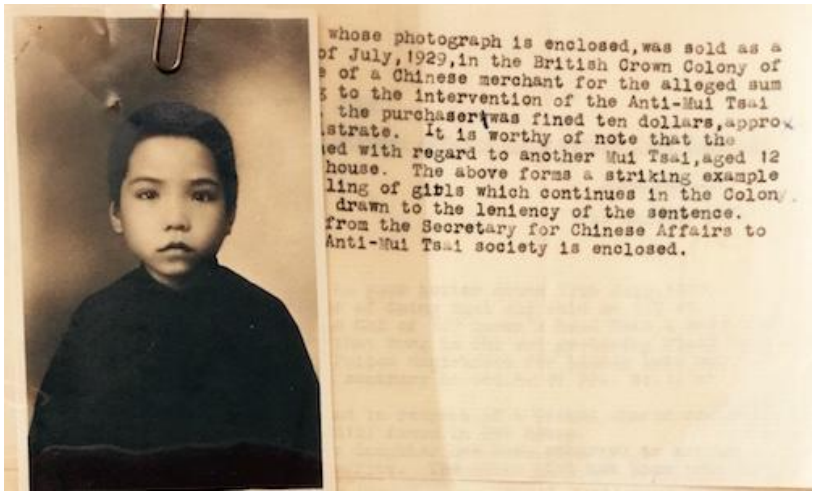
Slave Compensation

There were several former slave-owners who retired to Exeter from overseas once their slaves had been emancipated in the 1800s. These people were given substantial amounts of money in compensation by the government. Quite a lot of grand buildings in Heavitree were paid for with this compensation money (see the Squilometre Mont le Grand notes).

Mrs Rebecca Potter, a Jamaican, lived at 5 Stafford Terrace in Heavitree and later at South Wonford House, and in 1817 had owned thirty-three female slaves and thirty-six male slaves on a plantation in Jamaica. She was rewarded £135 19s 9d for just eight of these individuals.

Controversial Views

Edgar Mabery Tozer of 49 Regent's Park, sounds like a very strong character. He retired to Exeter after having worked in the far East as a solicitor. Some of his controversial letters remain. In 1933 he wrote to the Exeter & Devon Gazette, supporting the Chinese practice of indenturing girls. Mui Tsai was the practice of selling baby girls from poor families to rich and reputable families. They would officially be sold as domestic servants but in reality would often be resold as concubines or prostitutes. Tozer suggested that we should stop interfering and that the idea of large-scale child slavery was rubbish.


whose photograph is enclosed, was sold as a
of July, 1929, in the British Crown Colony of
of a Chinese merchant for the alleged sum
to the intervention of the Anti-Mui Tsai
the purchaser was fined ten dollars, approx.
strate. It is worthy of note that the
ed with regard to another Mui Tsai, aged 12
house. The above forms a striking example
ling of girls which continues in the Colony
drawn to the leniency of the sentence.
from the Secretary for Chinese Affairs to
Anti-Mui Tsai society is enclosed.

In 1931 Tozer also wrote to the newspaper to argue against Indian self-government, saying that we should look at India not as a country, but as a continent, and that Indians wanted to be ruled by gentlemen, not geniuses. During his life he racked up huge debts and was described by a judge as a 'a mere jackal who enticed boys to put up money.'

Ethnicity

Generally, those living in Heavitree up to the mid-1900s wouldn't have experienced much multi-culturalism, but Todd's book contains some interesting accounts from those living or travelling overseas. For example, in 1849, Anna Paynter wrote to her brother John Hooker in Heavitree, describing the natives in New South Wales:

'The poor Blacks are not very numerous…when in the bush they go about quite naked, but they are not allowed to come into the town without a blanket, which the government provides. They are very harmless and will do anything for a bit of tobacco. They call the children pick-a-ninny. They are very lazy. You would laugh to see them dance, they cry bow and make terrible noises.'

George Henry Haydon, of Stafford Terrace, Heavitree, wrote about the Australian Aboriginals in quite a sympathetic way compared to many. He said that had they been treated kindly, they would not have retaliated with similar cruelty, and that for each white man killed, ten blacks were killed. He described the white bullock drivers as being the cruellest, confining and brutally thrashing the Aboriginals for pure fun. When they later retaliated by killing a shepherd, he described it as their only way of getting justice.

Haydon made good friends with a member of the Werribee tribe and described how sad they both were to be parted when he left Australia.

An assistant master at Ladysmith School wrote about his time travelling from Karachi to Basra in 1916 during the war, describing the Gurkhas very favourably. He described the bazaars of Iraq:

'Grave Indian soldiers and jolly little Gurkhas gaze curiously at the Arab merchant as he sits drinking his evening coffee; and swarms of shrill voiced beggars implore assistance, in the name of Allah, from the passer-by. Above all the babel of languages and sound the voice of the British soldier is heard as he chaffers good-humouredly for everything, from tins of tobacco to tins of pineapple. It is just possible too, that he is enquiring where the wine of his forefathers may be obtained.'

A Broken Marriage

In 1925, a solicitor living at 63 Polsloe Road, presented a letter in which James Byrne admitted infidelity and referred to skin colour in a very negative way, insulting and breaking the heart of his wife, who was of European blood but had been born in India:

'Candidly, I do not care in the way I used to, and under the circumstances it would be a mistake for us to come together again. To tell you the truth, I have not been faithful. This is not a hasty decision…there has always been with me the horrible dread of what our children would be like if we had any. Thank God, you have never had any, and if we had any with any colour taint, I would have killed them myself.'

Heavitree vs. South Africa

In 1968, Mrs Bongekile Dlomo, staff nurse at the Wonford Hospital and President of the African National Congress Women's League, spoke strongly about how, in comparison to South Africa, people in Exeter knew little about racial tension. She lived at 32 Newcombe Street. Her husband had been incarcerated at Robben Island, and on his release came to join her in Exeter.

Missionaries

All Christian denominations carried out missionary work in the colonies. Henry Callaway was the assistant teacher in a small school in Heavitree in 1833-1835, and later was ordained the first bishop of Kaffraria where he translated the Book of Psalms into the Zulu language.

Japanese Prisoners of War

Many Exeter men were captured overseas and kept as Japanese POW during WWII, including one mentioned in my booklet on Regent Square.

In 1945 Lionel Bradstreet returned home to 125 Rifford Road, after being imprisoned by the Japanese in the British colony of Singapore. He was kept with 5000 other prisoners in a camp that covered three acres. The men built their own huts out of bamboo. He described the terrible conditions – no sanitation or health facilities; a daily diet of a pint of rice and river water. The work was 'very gruelling' and the authorities

'systematically brutal'. When he refused to order sick men to work, he was punished by being stripped and tied to a tree for six days and six nights. Towards the end of the war, he broke out of the camp at night in order to meet a party of Allied intelligence officers who had parachuted near them. By this time, he had performed more than a dozen amputations with the sole use of a kitchen knife.

The empire still has a huge legacy in Exeter and beyond – in our language, the world language, and because Americans speak it, it's even more influential. The Empire isn't gone – we forget that there are still remnants of it and many small islands that are still part of it. There are thousands of descendants of Heavitree and Exeter colonists – their genes are all over the world. Ireland is one of the most enduring legacies of colonialism – these people were once English.

History is always about the living, and the Empire is not completely in the past – it is part of everyone who was in the room. The British Empire is us, and until we look hard at the evidence, we won't fully understand Exeter.

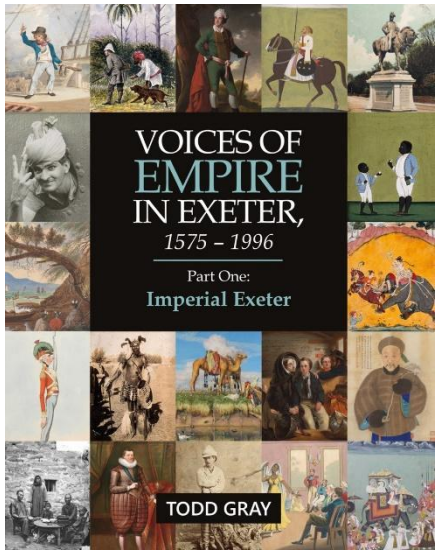
One nice Heavitree link to the Empire to finish on:

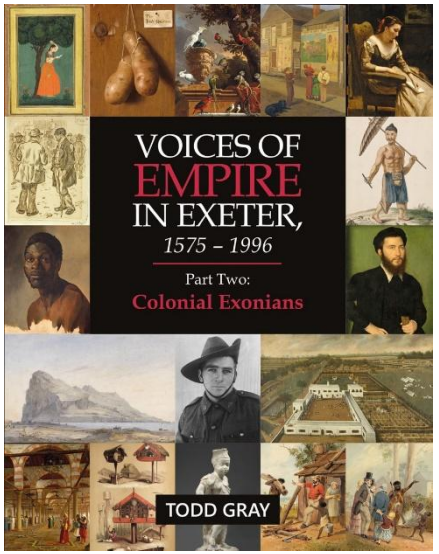
Mohammed Abdullah arrived in Exeter in 1969 from the Indian Subcontinent (now Bangladesh). He came to Exeter because he had a handful of friends working at the Curry House and the Taj Mahal. He wanted to come because: 'Exeter was very nice and quiet with beautiful countryside. We thought about coming here because it was so beautiful. '

He felt a huge sense of community in Exeter and was made to feel that he belonged. He did say that Exeter people struggled to handle the hot curries and preferred korma or eventually chicken tikka masala.

He eventually married and opened the Light of India in Heavitree (now Curry King), which he ran with his partner from 1983-2003.

Sally Robinson





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