

## **Rennie Frazer (1951-2021) – an appreciation**

Perhaps it was being brought up near the sea in Portobello that gave Rennie his love of the outdoors and travel to faraway places. Amongst his two brothers and sister he was seen as the one to be there when needed and later as one always willing to debate ideas and research interesting topics.

He followed his father into accountancy qualifying with Thomson McClintock in Edinburgh during a period of mergers and consolidation in the profession - a pattern that he would see throughout his career. Not long after qualifying the desire to travel took him to Zambia, first to work for Coopers and Lybrand and then as the financial controller on an EEC project supporting the development of cropping systems to replace expensive imports. There was opportunity for adventure as well as work. He delighted in telling his children of the time he wind-surfed on Lake Kariba completely unaware of the large number of crocodiles in the water.

After more than five years in Africa it was time to come nearer to home now armed with an enhanced interest in crops and soils. It was probably his love of the outdoors that led him to take a position as finance director of a manufacturing business in Carlisle. This didn't progress the agricultural connections but did give him access to the Lake District where he walked widely. During his time there the Chernobyl reactor exploded with rain-born contamination spreading across the Lakes, where he lived, and the West of Scotland, where he had been climbing in Ardgour during the weekend of the explosion. Seeing an Open University programme about the long-term retention of radioactive elements in plants and soils rekindled his interests, first formed in Africa, and he enrolled on a soil-science course at Aberdeen University.

If he had expectations that this move would be a life-changing one he was correct, though perhaps not for the reasons that he first expected. Josefina Schneidt, a botanist, was a research assistant in the same department at the University. Coincidentally she was lodging with the Benjamin family next door to where Rennie was staying with his brother, Richard, in the Manse. They met often, married and spent their honeymoon in Yunnan, China where Rennie was part of a research project and Josefina was collecting plants. This gave Rennie great scope to explore new foods, some well beyond the range of Josefina's tastes. He became a good and, by family standards, adventurous cook who regularly produced novel meals.

The economics of a mid-life change in career, combined with the start of a family drew him back to accountancy after their return from China and he worked as an accountant in legal firms for twenty years before retiring. With Josefina Rennie delighted in family activities with their three boys, Benjamin, Simon and Tobias. He enrolled in German language classes so that holidays with Josefina's parents in Ettersschlag, Germany were engaging. Hill walking, gardening and managing a highly productive allotment were high priorities.

When the Esk Valley Trust in its early days was seeking a voluntary treasurer and company secretary he answered the call. Rennie was the longest serving officer in the Trust's history, acting as treasurer, company secretary and then Trustee for fourteen years. Always thorough and dependable Rennie was a great supporter of the Trust. It wasn't a case of simply doing the financial sums; Rennie was absolutely committed to the aims of the Trust and had a great love of the Esk valleys. He walked the valleys regularly and was among the first to appear when work was needed in the Hewan Wood – a place particularly close to his heart. The history of the valleys fascinated him, not least the impact of industry on pollution in the rivers, a story that dates from the drama of a legal case in the 1860's to the modern day.

Rennie is a great loss to his family and many friends. Those who knew him will recall his gentle manner, his engaging smile and his tenacity. As you walk the paths along the Esk, remember Rennie – he would have loved to be with you.