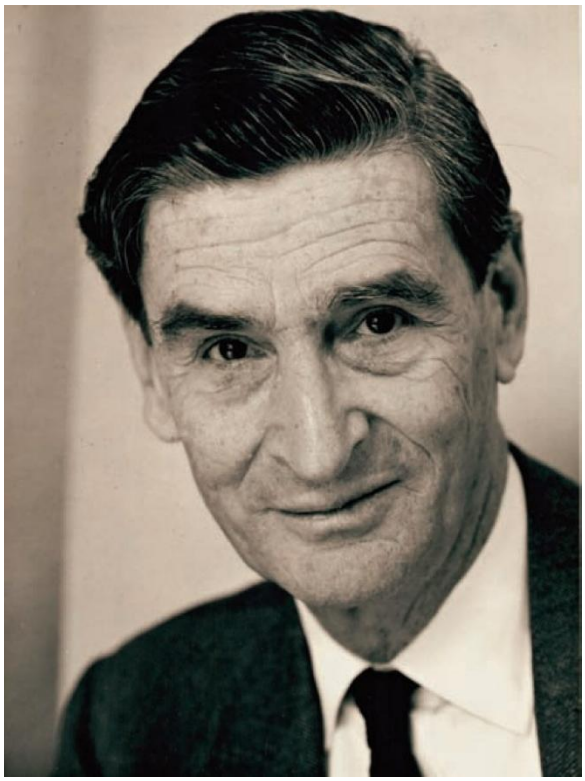
A Celebration of the Life of

Adrian Curtius Mayer

12 December 1922 – 9 September 2025

9 October 2025, Golders Green Crematorium
Celebrant: Kate Hobson



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Adrian was born to Sir Robert Mayer, a philanthropist who set up Youth and Music and the Robert Mayer Children's Concerts, and his wife Dorothy Piper, a singer and a Quaker; he had an elder brother Philip and a younger sister, Pauline. They lived in Cumberland Terrace near Regent's Park – Adrian remembered waking up to the sound of the sea lions barking in the zoo.

His upbringing and education were quite unconventional for the time. He took his first degree at St John's College Annapolis in Maryland, a liberal college with a broad curriculum that included the Classics, Philosophy, Maths and Science.

His mother's beliefs influenced him strongly – the Quaker conscience ran like a seam of precious metal through the bedrock of his whole life, affecting his conduct in both professional and personal matters. And so it was that in 1946 he volunteered in India with the Friends Ambulance Unit, a Quaker initiative; that came to shape much of his subsequent career.

After fieldwork in Kerala and, more extensively, among the Indians of Fiji, he undertook his major work in Central India from 1954 to 1956, returning many times over the next seventy years and more. His wife Kaia and baby daughter Claudia accompanied him in 1954, with younger daughter Camilla joining them after her birth in 1959. The presence of his family in the field enabled Adrian to forge lifelong connections across more than one social class.

Adrian examined everything with his anthropologist's eye, using that same detailed attention and regard in his interactions with family members, finding articles about subjects that he knew interested them so he could talk to them on a level. As he grew older, he revelled more and more in being able to bring something surprising out of his pocket for his granddaughters, revealing his knowledge of, for example, a recent gig by a popular singer and commenting on the costume they had worn. This is how he showed his love.

The readings were all chosen by Adrian, as was the music:

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30
Schubert String Quintet, 1st movement, by the Brodsky Quartet
C Jam Blues, by Lionel Hampton & Oscar Peterson

Reading: Zoe Baird – Lights Out by Edward Thomas

I have come to the borders of sleep,
The unfathomable deep
Forest where all must lose
Their way, however straight,
Or winding, soon or late;
They cannot choose.

Many a road and track
That, since the dawn's first crack,
Up to the forest brink,
Deceived the travellers
Suddenly now blurs,
And in they sink

Here love ends,
Despair, ambition ends,
All pleasure and all trouble,
Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends in sleep that is sweeter
Than tasks most noble.

There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would not tum from now
To go into the unknown
I must enter and leave alone
I know not how
.
The tall forest towers;
Its cloudy foliage lowers
Ahead, shelf above shelf;
Its silence I hear and obey
That I may lose my way
And myself.

Reading: Georgina Baird – Tolstoy, Extract of speech by Pierre in War and Peace

You say that you cannot see the kingdom of goodness and truth on earth. Neither have I seen it: nor is it possible for anyone to see it who looks upon this life as the sum and end of all. On the earth, that is to say on this earth, there is no truth. All is falsehood and evil: but in the universe, the whole universe, truth has its kingdom. And we who are now children of the earth are nonetheless children of the universe. Do I not feel in my soul that I am actually a member of this vast harmonious whole? Do I not feel that in this countless assemblage of beings, wherein the Divinity, the First Cause, or however you may term it, is manifested, I make one link, one step

between the lower beings and the higher? If I see, and clearly see, the ladder leading from plant to man, then why must I suppose that it breaks off at me, and does not lead further and beyond? I feel not only that I cannot utterly perish, since nothing in the universe is annihilated, but that I shall always be, and always was. I feel that besides me are spirits that live above me, and that in this universe there is truth

Tribute: Sunita Namjoshi

It is hard to encapsulate the vastness and complexity of emotions that exist within seventy-two years of friendship between two families – the Mayer's and the Bhatia's.

Uncle Adrian came to India with Aunt Kaia when Claudia was just a baby of six months, and Camilla was born five years after. What began as an unexpected connection between my parents and the Mayers soon blossomed into something much deeper – a bond that spanned generations and continents.

Uncle Adrian, so unknowingly, has always inspired in me a quest for knowledge. His boundless curiosity, his openness of mind, and his sheer delight in the act of learning. He inhaled India as if it were his own.

He astonished everyone with his shuddh Hindi – or pure Hindi, as we call it – and relished the looks of amazement on people's faces as they tried to reconcile this tall, erudite, gentle-faced Englishman with flawless command of a language.

I feel profoundly fortunate to have spent time with Uncle Adrian over the years in Mumbai. He loved visiting our coastal home in Alibaug, where he would sit contentedly, as much as he loved exploring cities or enjoying a hearty South Indian thali. But what was most special to me was his genuine interest in people.

Describing himself as being "so very academic," yet he was completely intrigued by those involved in commerce and business.

He would ask me questions about how businesses functioned in India, about production, about the way work unfolded in our world, and in doing so, he made me see my own work through his eyes, as something fascinating.

It has been an honour and a privilege to have shared time and memories with him. I am deeply grateful that through him, I have also been given a lasting connection – a sisterhood with Claudia and Camilla.

Uncle Adrian's presence will always remain with us: in laughter, in conversation, in the quiet grace with which he lived, and his curiosity for life that he carried wherever he went.

Tribute: Professor Pat Kaplan

First of all, I would like to thank Adrian's family for the singular honour of inviting me to deliver a few short memories of him. My main qualification for this is having known Adrian for 65 years, although there may be some here who can better that.

In preparing these remarks, I have used some of the many published pieces about Adrian, a video interview by Alan Macfarlane in 2017, as well as my own recollections of meetings and conversations with him, but I wouldn't claim to cover all aspects of his long and varied life.

Adrian reckoned that he had spent a total of over 70 years in India, besides doing fieldwork in other areas such as Fiji and Vancouver, Pakistan and Japan. He saw his life as being divided into the four stages of the Hindu life cycle: the ashramas.

The student – sishya
The first stage included not only his American undergraduate degree but also the two years he spent in India at the end of WW2, working with the Friends Ambulance Service. They travelled all over the subcontinent distributing food, milk and medicines. It was a period for him, as he put it, 'to learn about life'. It was also a period to begin to develop his great love for and knowledge of India.

The householder (grihastha) stage
The second stage, that of the householder, began in 1949 with his marriage to Kaia, a Danish artist. Adrian decided to learn Hindi, for which he went to SOAS, and then to the LSE to study social anthropology. Here he eventually earned a Ph.D. in 1953 for his research on Indians in Fiji. After a period at the ANU, he joined SOAS as a Lecturer in 1956, was promoted to Reader in 1964, and Professor in 1966, and remained thus until his retirement in 1985. Post formal retirement, he continued to be active in the world of anthropology.

My own first encounter with him was in 1960 when I entered SOAS to do a degree in African Studies. At that time, SOAS students took their anthropology lectures at the LSE, so Adrian was a somewhat distant presence and relations were formal.

In 1967, Adrian was running the seminar for anthropology post grads writing their theses, of which I was one. Although we all dreaded this ordeal, Adrian never made us feel inadequate or uninteresting, a similar trait encountered by many other people he met at different stages of his life. On the contrary, he encouraged us to 'announce our arrival' as pukka anthropologists by getting an article published in Man/JRAI.
Relations became less formal when he visited Lionel's hometown of Montreal and stayed with us during the summer vacation and enjoying Expo 67. It was then that we discovered his fluency in French, perhaps unsurprising as he had had a French nanny and French was his first language.

We were sometimes invited to go to his house on Highgate Hill and here we met Adrian's wife Kaia, who was an accomplished artist with her own studio. Sometimes we bumped into his two daughters, Claudia and Camilla, and much later we attended a celebration for Claudia's marriage to Jatinder, a theatre director. Adrian took us to see a play performed by their company Tara Arts, which we enjoyed very much.

Sadly, Kaia became unwell, and it was Adrian who was her chief carer during a long illness; his solicitude for her was very touching. Kaia died in 2006, and Adrian was left alone in the big house on Highgate Hill. After some time, I tentatively asked Adrian if he had any thought of moving into a smaller place. He replied that he did not want to do that, he was happy where he was, surrounded by his books and often with visitors staying: 'The girls will deal with it when I'm gone. In any case I'm still doing stuff, and I need my books.' He did indeed continue to 'do stuff' of various kinds, including fieldwork.

For a while after Kaia's death, Adrian worked with the Swan Hellenic travel agency as a lecturer on tours of India. He said it got him to India often, he enjoyed being there, and the clients were frequently knowledgeable and appreciative.

When he finally stopped 'swanning around', as we used to call it, Adrian would still go to India regularly to visit his friends in Madhya Pradesh well into his old age. He liked to go in the month of January when the weather was clement, and he could sit on the veranda of the palace, enjoying a *chota peg* with his friends.

Eventually Adrian was persuaded to move into the ground floor flat of a converted house near to his old home on Highgate Hill. Claudia and Jatinder lived just above. The new premises were perfect for him, especially after books and papers had been sorted and the collection downsized. We were invited to view it and were full of admiration for the immense work that must have been involved in re-homing his material.

Adrian called this his third period of life, that of detachment, letting go of so many of the material objects with which he had been surrounded. He even handed his India fieldwork notes over to a younger generation of scholars, including Ed Simpson and Tricia Jeffrey who supervised a set of re-studies. Ed also curated an important exhibition of Adrian's photos of his India field research in the Brunei gallery. Adrian was delighted by all of this, feeling that his work had had a new slice of life.

As Adrian got older, he still retained his lively intellectual curiosity, but his trips to town for exhibitions and plays became rarer. However, he welcomed visitors, including Lionel and me (especially if we brought some of our homemade sloe gin for a *chota peg*) as well as fellow Indianists like Johnny Parry and Chris Fuller. Such visits were never boring. Adrian often reminisced about his SOAS days and former colleagues, but he also liked to talk about his first experiences of India, including meeting Gandhi and Nehru.

We attended both of Adrian's 100th birthday parties. The one for family and friends was notable for the presentation to Adrian of the Karvir Star, an honour bestowed by the current rulers of Kolhapur, the area where he had done his first fieldwork in India in 1954. The second party in Senate House was also notable not only for its eminent speakers but also for the fact that Adrian himself gave a speech and without notes!

He once told us that he had hoped to live longer than his father, who died in 1985 at the age of 105, but it was not to be. This 'man for all seasons' died peacefully in his sleep just short of his 103rd birthday, after a life lived to the full and exceptionally well.

Reading: Claudia Mayer – The Locked Cemetery (in Arthur Waley's The Noh plays of Japan)

Do not think it is by my choice
that I loiter long in the world of men,
nor doubt that I shall forget our words,
nor come at last to lie beside you:
that, beneath nettle and fern,
promises kept,
bones mingled,
we shall care little at last
which way blows the wind.

Tribute: Jatinder Verma

I was once given advice on how to deliver a speech – start with a joke, he said. Seeing him sitting in the audience before me smiling, I think I managed it then. No joke comes to mind just now, but perhaps levity will come as I negotiate his initials – the A-C-M monogrammed on his innumerable red Smythson diaries.

A – for the Academic Adrian I first knew. As a young man studying the connection between History and Anthropology, his seminal work Caste & Kinship in Central India, showed me that caste was not static or fixed, but a dynamic propellant of political as well as social relations in the village of Jamgod and its surrounding region. Equally important, his book opened a kinship with an India I was yet to set foot on.

He writes in the Preface of the first edition published in 1958, "In particular I was close to the men who became brothers to my wife [Kaia] and daughter [Claudia, and later Camilla] … these ties rewarded me with friendships I shall not easily forget."

How prescient he proved to be, maintaining ties with his Indian family over the succeeding 70-odd years. A family that included, as he also acknowledges, the "many kindnesses of His Highness Sir Shahaji Chhatrapati, Maharaja of Kolhapur… [and] of Colonel and Srimati S. N. Bhatia [and their daughters Simbi and Sunita]." Jamgod, Kohlapur and the Bhatias – a triumvirate of connections that gave him two words which I feel describe his relationships across the globe.

The first is Seva – the "gift of giving" – or as he himself defined it "renunciation of selfishness through social service". Seva dramatically entered his life in 1946, when his 24-year-old self first landed in India as part of the ambulance corps of a Pennsylvanian Friends society, and met Gandhi. As he recalled, "Gandhiji asked us what we were doing in India. We told him, and he replied 'Yes, so for whose benefit is it?'

For whose benefit… A question he answered by scrupulously reciprocating what others gave – in India, Fiji, Pakistan, Trinidad, Mexico, Vancouver, Tokyo, Samarkand and everywhere else he went - no matter the class or origin of the gift-giver, or the nature of the gift. A seva that was another form of love.

A love expressed in slowly letting out the air in baby Claudia's swimming ring so she may learn to swim unaided. Or in enjoying young Camilla's taste for the music of Joan Armatrading, whatever he may have thought of it. A love expressed in his fundamental respect for others which he inculcated in his daughters and in his students as an absolute virtue.

Which brings me to the initial 'C'.

C, for his middle name Curtius and, pronounced differently, denoting the Courtesy, Curiosity and Conviviality that was his second skin.

Over the years, he'd developed the habit of leaving little notes for me, scribbling things like, "JV I think you are dealing with this. So over to you and thank you so much." An unfailing Courtesy that he also often peppered with the second Indian word that defined him, "mehrbani" – meaning "I'm obliged". More on that later.

Reading was a mark of his insatiable Curiosity. He once had 3 books on the go – a Balzac, a biography on the coach of Fiji's gold-winning rugger team, and the Mahabharata! Ever a pilgrim, as Claudia puts it, a seeker. Like reading all her 'O' level books in Cotis before they were to be chucked away because – well why not?! Or, as Zoe & Georgie recall, "learning all about what we thought was cool and then asking us about Beyonce!"

Such devouring of the world around him was echoed in his joy of parties. His Conviviality ensured guests were well-lubricated – as he often said, "Why have water when there's wine on the table?!"; he was enthusiastic about plying guests

with his signature pate and garlic mayonnaise; and remained attentive to their latest news.

And so to M, for Mayer and Mehrbani – his "I am obliged".

Obliged for your prodigious memory. Whether of seeing student strike-breakers during the General Strike of 1926, or of digging potatoes for dinner in Mr Strong's farm in North Dakota, or indeed of the only time you had your bedding roll opened by customs – in Shanghai – you could always be relied upon to pull something interesting out of the bag!

Obliged too for legating us a stack of unstoppable memories that hurtle through the present silence in the home we built. Of the cool young man returning from America in his jeans; of times spent tapping away on your typewriter in the mornings before swimming in the Med in Carloforte in the afternoons; of singing songs with Tassie; of attending whisky-fuelled parties with Simbi in Pune; of Deborah calling out, "here's today's Metro, Professor!"; of wanting to keep bees with Doic; of buying bra and pants from Victoria's Secrets for Georgie because her mother had inadvertently sent you her Christmas list; of looking like a matinee idol after getting your hair cut by Paola; of being prepared to meet Georgie's Lewis – who's a Hullian (or "codhead" in Yorkshire slang) – for the first time by having all the info on Hull ready to hand; of a student having to report her stolen handbag to the police and you saying "that'll take an hour – what're you doing for the remaining 23 hours of the day?"; of flying to Le Touquet with James for lunch; of sucking lollipops with Shahuji Maharaj in Kohlapur; of baking bread in Sydney; of Zoe talking to your ear-hairs on FaceTime; of driving a train in Rajasthan; of mimicking your friend Parry's "How about that?!" as you wiggled your eyebrows; of Lillian chivvying you to "eat more!"; of being, as Vole says, "an Etna of enthusiasm"; of reminiscing about trains in Sunita's beach house in Mumbai; of coming up with "Metaphysical-Man" to end the word-game you last played with Claudia…

Back to "Mehrbani". What I thought at the time an expression of your typical courteousness, I now think meant "I'm obliged for your seva". To which I say to you, Adrian Curtius Mayer, that on the contrary, I am and will remain obliged to you for your seva to and for us. And of course, for showing me caste and making me kin! Mehrbani.

Reading: Camilla Mayer Baird – Humanity, from RW Dixon's Historical Odes

There is a soul above the soul of each,
A mightier soul, which yet to each belongs:
There is a sound made of all human speech,
And numerous as the concourse of all songs:
And in that soul lives each, in each that soul,
Though all the ages are its lifetime vast;
Each soul that dies, in its most sacred whole
Receiveth life that shall for ever last.

And thus for ever with a wider span
Humanity o'erarches time and death;
Man can elect the universal man,
And live in life that ends not with his breath,
And gather glory that increaseth still
Till Time his glass with Death's last dust shall fill.

[While the coffin moves away, everyone sings 'To be a Pilgrim']

Closing words

The hymn you just sang speaks for Adrian who was, in his own way (as others have said), a pilgrim. His influence on many of you has been profound and he has left a legacy to be proud of.