Redmer Yska and Cherie Jacobson
Manatū Taonga Public History Talk - June 2023

Katherine Mansfield's Europe: Station to Station

This is a transcript of a Public History panel discussion given at the National Library of New Zealand in June 2023 between author Redmer Yska and Cherie Jacobson, director of the Katherine Mansfield House and Garden in Wellington, about Redmer's book *Katherine Mansfield's Europe: Station to Station*. It has been lightly edited to assist sense and to remove some repetition.

Neill Atkinson
Kia ora kotou. Ko Neill Atkinson toku ingoa. Nau mai haere mai. Thank you everyone for coming today. It's wonderful to see such a big crowd here.

This year, 2023, is the centenary of Katherine Mansfield's death. We're delighted to have today Redmer Yska in conversation with Cherie Jacobson talking about Redmer's recently published history *Katherine Mansfield's Europe: Station to Station.* Redmer is a Wellington writer and historian, who I'm sure will be well known to most of you through a wide range of books that he has published on the social history of cannabis, 1950s New Zealand teenagers, Dutch New Zealanders like himself, a biography of Wellington City, which is a project that we did through the Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage and it was a great experience working alongside Redmer to support that project, and a history of the tabloid newspaper New Zealand's Truth. Yska's first book about Mansfield, *A strange, beautiful excitement Katherine Mansfield's Wellington,* was published in 2017, and was long listed for the 2018 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards.

And Cherie Jacobson is the director of Katherine Mansfield House and Garden, the 1888 house in Thorndon, which Katherine Mansfield was born in and is now a museum, I'm sure you're all familiar with. She has a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in English literature and a Master's in Museum and Heritage Practice. Since beginning at Katherine Mansfield house and garden in 2019, she has curated a range of Mansfield exhibitions including 'Consuming Katherine' and 'Mansfield and music' and collaborated on publications including *Woman in love Katherine Mansfield's: Love Letters* so I'm going to invite Cherie and Redmer to come up where they're going to sit in these comfy chairs and please join me in welcoming them

Cherie Jacobson
Kia ora Kotou, nga mihi for the introduction and to Manatū Taonga, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and Te Puna Mapuna o Aotearoa, the National Library for hosting us today. I love Redmer's new book. So, I'm very excited to chat with him about it.

Cherie Jacobson
Neill's done the general housekeeping, but I'd like to start by doing some “biographical housekeeping” - Redmer referred to as biographical housekeeping the other day and I quite liked that. Many of you will be familiar with Katherine Mansfield, but just so we're all on the same page. Here's a quick overview. Kathleen Mansfield Beecham was born in 1888. Not far from here and a house on Tinakori Road. The house is now open to the public as a museum, Katherine Mansfield House and Garden, which is where

I spend my days. As well as caring for the house and collection we have changing exhibitions and run a variety of events and exhibitions, activities and events aimed at celebrating and encouraging creativity. If you haven't visited or it's been a while. Please do come and see us the house underwent a major refresh in 2019. So, if you haven't visited for a while, it looks a bit different. We're open six days a week all year round and entry is free for under 18s.

But back to Mansfield. The third daughter of Harold and Annie Beecham, Mansfield spent her childhood in Wellington, living in Karori and Thorndon then traveled to London as a teenager with her two older sisters to attend Queens College. When she returned home three years later, she had discovered the work of Oscar Wilde, was exploring her sexuality and wanted to pursue a creative life. She felt stifled by colonial Wellington and her respectable upper-class family and longed to escape. A writer from an early age Mansfield had stories published in newspapers and magazines while still a teenager.

After her time at Queens College, she was determined to make a career from her writing, especially once her initial dream of becoming a professional cellist, was squashed by her parents. In 1908, she convinced her father to let her return to London and left New Zealand aged 19 for what would be the last time. Mansfield went on to become an internationally acclaimed writer, best known for her modernist short stories. Her work was admired by fellow 20th century writers, including Virginia Woolf and DH Lawrence.

She spent time living in England, Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland, and mixed with many progressive and well-known writers, artists, intellectuals, and philosophers. She published three collections of short stories during her lifetime, and after her death, her husband published more of her work, including her journals and letters. These evoke a passionate individual dedicated to her craft, whose life was tragically cut short by tuberculosis, age, just 34.

As Neill mentioned this year is the centenary of her death. So, we've been working with different organizations to celebrate 100 years of her creative legacy. New Zealand Post have released a set of stamps, and a garden party pin which I'm modeling here today. You can buy those on the New Zealand Post website or the Katherine Mansfield House and Garden website. I'm happy to demonstrate it up close afterwards. We had Te Papa hold a day of talks and a film screening.

A new ballet inspired by Mansfield was premiered by the Royal New Zealand Ballet, writers' festivals have featured Mansfield sessions, which Redmer is being part of. And coming up on 2nd July, there is an evening in Days Bay with a screening of a new short video with excerpts from the bay, featuring none other than the newly knighted Sir Ashley Bloomfield, and on the 7th and 8th of July there's a symposium led by Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington, followed by a concert at Queen Margaret College. There's a lot going on. So, we've created a special centenary website so you can check it all out at **www.km23.co.nz**

Now we're here to talk about Redmer's latest book, *Katherine Mansfield's Europe: Station to Station.* But I want to jump back a bit and start with Redmer's previous book, *A Strange, Beautiful Excitement: Katherine Mansfield's Wellington,* which was published in 2017, and is also a wonderful read.
So Redmer I wanted to start by asking when you finished that book, did you think you were done with Mansfield? Or did you already have the idea for this book brewing?

Redmer Yska
That was such a solid, helpful intro and it's great to be to know that there's actually so much going on this year for this great and sad centenary, and it's really nice to be to be part of it. No, I really thought when I finished *Strange, Beautiful* I was done - that that was it. And I think it's always the case when you finish a project I was so tired really and I was kind of done with it and, and I was proud of what I've been able to achieve to get a few things on the record to come up with a new theory of as to why the Beauchamps moved from Thorndon up to Karori, which no one's quite yet quite seems to have taken apart, which I'm quite pleased about.

And also chuffed to be able to find, unbelievably, Mansfield's first published story. And her first two published letters, in a bound volume of a weekly society magazine that was sitting at Wellington Public Library. I was pretty stunned, really, that it was still possible to find this kind of stuff out there - I sort of thought, oh no, there's really nothing more to ever be said about Mansfield. The scholars have scoured every library, everything, it's all settled, it's all been said and done and in a way that was sort of something that I kept at the back of my mind. And also, I suppose to I was pleased that with *Strange, Beautiful* that as a former Wellington City Council historian, having done my commissioned history, *Wellington: Biography of the City*, that I've been able to get into the Mansfield book, a lot of infrastructure, pipes, lethal typhoid epidemics, and strident calls for sanitary reform.

Cherie Jacobson
Well, people who visit the [Katherine Mansfield] House often really want to know about the toilet. So, I mean, I think these things are important.

Redmer Yska
Thank you. Yeah. I mean, sort of, by the end of it all, I was a bit concerned. I was, I was becoming known as a bit of a 'drain spotter'. But anyway, just to finish off my answer. In 2017, after I finished the book, I went on a trip to Europe with my daughter, and I couldn't really resist going and having a bit of a peek at a couple of Mansfield sites. I was in Holland and in Germany, I popped down, I was in the south in Bavaria, and I went down and had a look at Bad Wörishofen with my cousin Redmer.

And I also went over to France to Avon/Fontainebleau, and that was quite an eye opener for me, because I was just sort of staggered, I have got to say, by the extent to which Mansfield was honoured. And remembered, especially France, I mean, to go to Fontainebleau to meet with Bernard Bosque, which I was fortunate to be able to do, and go to, to the woods at Fontainebleau and to see the Mansfield commemorative rock or *rocher*, which was sitting there in these strange woods. I mean, that was such a place to go to, this was a place where Napoleon hunted stags, during the year, where Marie Antoinette rode her horse through the forest, where Monet and these other painters from the famous Barbizon school painted in the outside, it was such a historic and storied place, and there was Mansfield right in the heart of all this. So I was paying attention to that, really. And just finally - sorry this is a very long answer to a very short question - I was also stunned by the fact that Mansfield's name was on so many streets and plaques around Avon, an hour from Paris, far more commemoration of her name than I ever saw around for example, Wellington. So that was that that really sort of struck me too.

Cherie
And so, you went to some of these places just as part of your holiday. And you decided to write the book as a result of that. And then went to other places, because you felt like it was really important to

go and follow in her footsteps. I mean, we've got Google Maps now and so much available on the internet. Why did you feel like you had to go to some of these places? What, what did being there bring to you and make you able to put into the book?

Redmer Yska
Yeah. I think it sort of took time, really. I mean, I met Bernard Bosque in Fontainebleau. And we went to the Mansfield's grave, which he which he tends - and he runs a party for her every year on her birthday. And we said, we started emailing a bit and he sort of told me about this extraordinary party that was held in the woods at Fontainebleau, just before 1939, where 300 people came just to commemorate Mansfield's 50th. And so, I was really paying attention.

And then in 2018, Bernard said, 'Would you like to come to Valais, Switzerland, and we can walk on some of the trails, the places where she lived: Sierre in the valley and at Crans - Montana, up on the plateau. And I was still not really sure that there was something to write about. I was still thinking - this certainly would have been covered elsewhere. And really, I suppose I was sort of percolating a bit really. So, it would be another few months before I'd really decide to actually do something.

I did find that with the Wellington Mansfield book - being there is everything. You really have to go to the places, when you're doing a biography. It's just so helpful and so important to go to the places where your subject lived, and the places that they knew. You just get such a different perspective.

And in the case of Mansfield, she would write two letters every day, often three or four. And she'd spit them out like emails, just those long, long letters. And lots of them were kind of "wish you were here" letters from these exotic places when she was in France.

And so, when you've got the combination of brilliant correspondence like that, and you're in these places that she's actually writing about, you really feel that you're there, you have an incredible sense of her presence. So that I guess that again, that I could see there was some potential there, and so that really did inform my final decision to actually write something.

Cherie Jacobson
In terms of being in 'the place', I wondered if you could talk about some of the archival work you did, and I'm thinking particularly in Bad Wörishofen and how you manage the language barriers that I think probably existed, even with a decent level of German or French.

Redmer Yska
Yeah, I mean, German is quite a tough language, I had 5th form German, then I went back and I had about nine months of two sessions a week with Sophie from Vienna, who basically I'd sit with in Khandallah Park and she'd say 'you can talk to me for in German for an hour'. And I was just so alarmed by that and tried so hard, and I think I made some progress, but it really wasn't easy. But when it comes to archives, I mean, I just love archives, I really do. I mean, when I was doing the Wellington City Council history, I read 120 minute books, each 500 pages long - I think I read 65,000 pages of minutes, (I mean, I am Dutch). And these wonderful old volumes written in copperplate handwriting. What did I write here? I wrote 'these faded drainage reports, and rubbish furnace daybooks still smelling of smoke'. I mean, you have to care.

And I can see Jared Davidson up there, who's an absolute killer researcher and an archivist. And there's others - Ken Ross, Jane Tolerton and Paul Diamond and Mark Derby. And I'm part of that community, we really love archives. So when I was led finally to the *Fremdenbuch,* which was literally the foreigners book, in the at the Bad Wörishofen town hall, I was extremely comfortable with being handed a daybook (this was really just a ledger, which recorded all visitors to the town during 1919). And neat columns are divided by name, country of origin, and abode. And this wonderful resource which had all the actual dates of when Mansfield - who was named in it - when she arrived. This now allows us to actually fix the dates, because I don't think we'd ever really been able to fix them before.

And this little boy, Walter, who came to stay with Mansfield - that unbelievable story, about the little boy sent from England, by train, 1000 kilometers to basically support Mansfield after she lost her child. He stayed for six weeks, I mean, Ida [Baker] had said it was three months, but we were able to actually finally conclude from looking at the ledger, the date of Walter Sharp's arrival, and then his departure. And the other great thing was, I was actually, left alone in the boardroom, with the, with the *Fremdenbuch* with nice snacks and I could also jump onto Google Translate. So that was kind of helpful. I guess I had enough German just to kind of help me work my way around, and write down the kind of core stuff, the most sort of important information.

But I mean I had this other wonderful adventure with an archive as well in Fontainebleau, where I was at the church where Mansfield's funeral was, was held, which Bernard was able to kind of take us into, which I don't think anyone really knew, was still there.

And while we were visiting the church, the vicar reached up onto a shelf that was in the shadows and brought down this book from 1923, which really did belong in a temperature controlled archive, I'd say, but it was still seemed quite dry not at all damaged, and that was the bulk of that was the register of deaths, which, from 1923, which included a reference to Mansfield as a Katherine Middleton Murray who died, described as 'une femme de lettres'. So that was also another amazing sort of archival moment. So, there were a few.

Cherie Jacobson
And the importance of being there as well I think it illustrates being in those places.

Redmer Yska
Absolutely.

Cherie Jacobson
Another thing I noticed in the book is that it feels like you've got a really firm grasp on Mansfield's health and medical interactions. Some of it's very hard to read, like when you read what it would have been like for her to experience the X-ray treatment - it is awful. But it seems like you really tried to dig into the medical side of things and understand elements like the makeup of her potent cough mixture. So, was this a big learning curve for you? How did you piece it all together? And are you used to kind of having to approach a field of knowledge that isn't a specialty and try and get into it enough to be able to understand it and convey it to the reader?

Redmer Yska

Yeah, I mean, I think it's a side of her that I never really quite understood. I mean, I immersed myself in her five books of letters, and in a way, especially towards the end, it's really an invalid's diary. You know, she's so ill, especially in the last four or five years, and it's just unbelievable, how much she's actually struggling with, with illness, it's an invalid's diary in so many ways. And so, I really was struck by that stuff, and I did go and read around - there was so much that you can find now but I went and found popular texts. There's one called *Spitting Blood* which is a history of tuberculosis by a very good British medical historian, I talked to doctors. This was about tuberculosis, and it was such a thing. I think in New Zealand, TB was called "the bug". And but it just killed it just killed everyone and then an age before for antibiotics, it was just the worst thing. And so yeah, so I really did try and get to understand it. And another really interesting thing about the whole health aspect is that she was there at the time of the big Spanish flu pandemic, and she was paranoid about catching flu herself to catch flu, on top of TB was the things she was really, really scared, I think. And so, when she finally caught influenza, a few years after it was particularly lethal, she seemed to be actually reasonably relieved "now I finally caught it, now, I can kind of relax a bit". The fact that she tried to treat it with champagne probably wasn't a very good idea. And I think she found too - like with COVID, it had a long tail, so it didn't leave quite as easily.

And in terms of the drugs again, I would have thought this would have been settled, that what she was taking, - that there would have been some literary scholar who had majored in chemistry, who would have done a PhD on this, but no. So, literary scholars hadn't done the work or so it seemed to me, and it sounded like opiates were involved. So I went down, and I went and tracked down a wonderful military pharmacist, who lived in South Karori, an absolute expert, the New Zealand pharmaceutical society's go to person who knew everything and, and he was so helpful to me, and he came up with a really good explanation that I think really does help us sort of settle this a bit.

But I'm a journalist and I've worked as a sort of translator, in the sense, for government departments, turning policy frameworks, science and environmental stuff into plain English - that's one of my specialties. And I really quite enjoy doing this, this kind of thing, so in a way, this was another example of that, really.

Cherie Jacobson
Back on the flu thing, Mansfield also advised her friend to try and avoid the flu by drinking lots of milk and eating oranges. And then she had the flu and said she drank half a bottle of champagne, and it was gone. So next time you've got the flu, or COVID, you may or may not want to give that a go.

I love that your approach to understanding things can also be quite hands on. So, two examples that springs to mind, the water cure at Bad Wörishofen. And getting an antique pistol and having a go at shooting it to try and understand what it was like for Mansfield when she was given a gun in Italy to protect yourself. So, I wondered if you could talk about your hands-on approach to research beyond the archives. Although I know that I don't think you tried to replicate the cough mixture and try that. As far as we know.

Redmer Yska
I mean, all sorts of things - when you when you're traveling, you can plan some things, and some things that you can't plan and I suppose, in a case like this, it's a bit of a sort of hunt for copy too, and I mean, Mansfield was always chasing copying wasn't she. Unexpected things happen, like with my

phone going down the loo, right at the start of a whole project, well, it wasn't the right at the start, but it was once I decided to do the do the project. I lost my phone, so that was kind of some stuff you just can't plan for, and that was just like just beyond a nightmare - everything was on it. I didn't think I was going to come back from that. But I did.

But the water cure, in Bad Wörishofen seemed a logical thing to do. And I'm reasonably familiar with some of these, you might call them New Age sort of therapies or non-medical therapies and naturopathy, acupuncture, deep tissue massage, Alexander Technique. I could see that it was going to be a reasonably benign thing. I did check. And I didn't expect to be visited by Schwester Johanna though, at five in the morning, which I do talk about in the book, a nun holding a white plastic bucket. So that was a bit of a surprise. But as far as the gun was concerned, I mean, who knew Mansfield was armed? She actually was armed, she armed herself in Italy. And while she was given a gun, (that she stole, I think), and then basically kept it for the next three or four years and slept with it beside her bed,

Cherie Jacobson
With Chaucer, and Shakespeare alongside her as well. She says she's got her gun, Chaucer and Shakespeare,

Redmer Yska
I know. At one point, she describes it as a revolver. And then she describes us as an automatic pistol. And a friend of mine who is into guns. He got very interested in this. And he's the one who actually said come along to the club on Sunday morning. And we can blast a few, a few guns, and we can try and figure out what it was she was actually firing because she doesn't specify. So that was a bit of a bit of a lark in a way. And I quite enjoyed that. I mean, the first thing we did was fire this, this old World War One officers revolver, one really big 45 with bullets, like this big and I was so excited and paranoid, holding this thing. I've been given headphones by a guy wearing high vis vest from the army - but I forgot to put on my headphones. And so, I fired like four or five of these bullets and was just basically I'm still partly deaf. It was just unbelievable. But then I was thinking, but she wasn't wearing earmuffs. So, I thought I'd wear that one. But yeah, it felt like this was this was good, rich stuff to add to the story, sort of colour, I guess, background.

Cherie Jacobson
The book, as well as following Mansfield around Europe also feels very much like it's about people as well as place. And you meet many people in Europe, who you describe as the foot soldiers, ensuring Mansfield is not forgotten over there. How did you make these connections? And how important were they to the book coming to fruition?

Redmer Yska
I mean, I'm pretty sociable. And I think having been a journalist, just sort of you learn to become sociable, because you have to get things out of people, you've got a chief reporter there who says, "I want you to go out and cover this some particular meeting or go and talk to this person". And if you come back and you haven't got what they want, they're going to say, "No". You've had a really nice exchange with these people. And then your chief reporter says, "No, you've got to go back and ask them those questions again". You learn to kind of get it right the first time. So, I've kind of got that background - bitter experience in a sense, but no, I mean, I met these wonderful people, along the way, Bernard [Bosque] was just such a lovely person. Mansfield - for those of us who have been around

Mansfield for a while you do get a bit slightly. she sort of puts a bit of a spell on us. She's got that slightly spellbinding kind of quality, sort of enchanting kind of quality. I don't quite know how she does it, and still seems to be able to do it.

But anyway, I met Bernard, we talked about Mansfield endlessly, and especially her connection with France, Bernard said to me, "she's the other woman in my life apart from my wife", I don't go quite that far. But, I just was thinking, to meet him and this kind of commitment and all these other people who are part of his little community at Fontainebleau, who are all these kinds of fans and admirers (someone cruelly said ‘groupies’, I didn't want to say that) but it was really great to meet Bernard.

And then I was very fortunate then to have a friend who was a former diplomat, who had a friend who was our current ambassador in Germany. And he'd been to Bad Wörishofen in 2018, where a Mansfield statue had been unveiled 110 years after she was there, and he'd met some locals who had been responsible for erecting the statue, who really made themselves known to him. And, and one of these, one of these locals wrote to me, a guy called Henning Hoffman, and said, "You're researching Mansfield". And that was such a coup, really, to get to know Henning. And he wrote to me - typed letters. He didn't do email. And so, writing back to him and fourth, took some time.

Cherie Jacobson
Yeah, because he sent us some clippings from Le Monde and a German newspaper earlier this year. And I remember contacting you and saying, "Do you have his email address that I can email him to say, thank you very much". You said, "no, no, you're going to have to write to him, in a letter and send it in the post".

Redmer Yska
And he's in his 80s. He's a retired headmaster, and he's kind of Mansfield's literary bloodhound in Germany, who's done all this work on her. So, when I went to Bad Wörishofen I met Henning, and we went to the statue together. And really, I think I was so fortunate because in Germany, if you've got a kind of, sort of connection like that, which I had, through the, through to sort of, , mildly through diplomatic channels, the doors all seem to open for me, I was so lucky, you know? So, before I knew it, I was talking to the head of the local beautification society. And Michael Scharpf who was a really, wonderful researcher and historian, and also has been Gunda-Maria Eggerking. And so, these other people in the town, they were really just, as I say, big aficionados - they were real sort of knowledge holders, they had so much knowledge, so much useful stuff. So, I was thinking these people are very interesting and helpful. And it was that sense of this whole world, of this whole community of Mansfield true believers, devotees, and I was thinking, no one's really written about this before, there's really a story to tell here. And I also then found someone in Italy, who’d written a lot about Mansfield, and who curated an exhibition in San Remo. And that was another contact. Unfortunately, COVID meant that I wasn't able to go and meet Roberta Trice. But yeah, there were all these folks there who kind of were, keepers of the flame, I suppose.

Cherie Jacobson
And you mentioned it just then, but obviously COVID had an impact on this book. Because you, I think you started by going on holiday and visiting some Mansfield places and then got Creative New Zealand grant to continue working on the book. How much did COVID ruin some of your plans?

Redmer Yska
The whole issue of COVID was this double-edged sword because in a way, it was this fascinating, parallel, it was just so amazing to think that this global pandemic was occurring at the time when I was doing this work. I mean, I'd felt that I'd already got a lot of my field studies done by the time that that COVID really hit. Like I say, I'd gone in 2017, I had looked at Bad Wörishofen. And I'd been to Fontainebleau. A year later I'd gone to Switzerland and had a really good look at Switzerland. And then in 2019, I went back to France, and back to Germany again. And, I'd also gone to Paris and had had a good look at the Mansfield sites there. Bernard took me around. So suddenly the boom fell, or the or does the boom rise, I forget, but it certainly things changed once COVID. And suddenly it was it was all over. And I was kind of stuck here [in New Zealand].

But in a way, what happened was that I had this wonderful opportunity to go and really dig into National library and Alexander Turnbull Library archives, and find material there and really enjoy and spend a lot of time on the material there that I perhaps wouldn't have spent so much time on, for example, there was this amazing grave moss, that that Turnbull holds, which was sent by the soldiers who were the associates of Mansfield's late brother Leslie, after he was killed in Flanders, they, they were trying to kind of support Mansfield and sent her mementos from his grave and other bits and pieces, which she found weird and bit scary. But some of it was this amazing grave moss, and that was in the archives. And that was such a thing to kind of hold and sort of contemplate.

One big thing I that I must say about this whole experience, in this whole process, was that I really was guided by Mansfield's letters and Mansfield's diaries. I read the five volumes of the letters, probably two or three times, so I really got to know them. And they really did guide what I was doing. There's one particular letter, though, that that really struck me, written from Italy, just before she's about to leave. She's very, very ill, and very, very sad and in an incredibly bad way, the whole Italian interlude is sort of very frightening and she's about to leave for hospital at Menton. And when I was looking at the, the letters, in Vincent and Margaret's book, there was a little caption in about six point type saying "tears cover this particular letter, or tears stain this letter" so it was the tear-stained letter, the only one, but to say later, so, I mean, what's so amazing, like I said, just that day, I could go down, walk down to Turnbull, and order up the tear stained letter, and, and, and that was such a privilege, such a special thing to be able to do that. This this marvelous collection was just here, for me to, and we did, and I got Paul Diamond to come over and verify that he could see tear stains on it as well. And, yeah, I mean, I there was certainly some of the other writing was kind of blocked out. And it really did look like it was. So that was a really poignant moment, you know?

Cherie Jacobson
Well, thank you very much to all our National Library and Turnbull Library staff members who are here today, for the work they do, because it is really important and amazing. We're nearly close to time, we could talk for all afternoon, if not longer. And I do want to make sure there's time for questions.

But I have one question that I want to ask you. The book really brilliantly weaves together the past and the present, I think that's one of its real strengths. And in the present, you are one of the important characters, although you may not think so. You come across as endearing and amusing. And one of the things I liked most is that you're not afraid to admit your mistakes or missteps or disappointments. So, without giving too much away, you've already mentioned dropping your phone in the toilet. There's

also a visit to an elderly resident in Avon Fontainebleau who claims to know some shocking new information, which turns out to be a bit of a letdown.

Redmer Yska
Thank you so much. I mean, it's about storytelling really. And however you cut that up and whatever that looks, looks like. It's about the yarns. It's about the lols. It's kind of about the lols, isn't it? The laughs and a lot of this was pretty tough stuff to be writing about, this is a really quite a heartbreaking story. And, and so having some of the slightly lighter stuff is there - it's also about audience, it's really about audience, I don't want a story like this just to be confined to the sort of Academy and so a few scholars, who understand particular sort of $13 words, sort of care about it? That is not who I am. I think at times, I really wished I was one of those people, but I ain't, you know, I've got other skills to bring in. I'm a former newspaper journalist, and I mean, again, you really have to write in a very general, generic way. It's so much better to be trying to reach like a wider audience. And I think, public history is history for the public - aiming at the public. Is really has to be the future. Especially with the internet, and with all the changes in publishing. I just really want to get the word out.

Cherie Jacobson
And a fleeting opportunity to visit a certain room and then afterwards, you realize you forgot to take any photos. In the past, it seemed important for historians to maintain a bit of a shield of expertise. If you admitted getting something wrong or doing something silly, the whole reputation might come into question. But what I really love is that you bring us along on the journey with you and you don't talk down to us. So, can you talk a bit about your approach to history? Do you think it's more contemporary? Or is this the difference between academic history and public history? And I know I'm getting into dangerous territory here. But I really like that different approach you bring, so I thought, could you talk about that a bit?

And on the note of getting the word out, you have mentioned to me previously, that you had some mixed reactions, when you said you're working on a Mansfield book, someone said, "Oh, well, she's already a well-covered topic". And another person said, "well, she's too colonial, wasn't she? Why do we need to hear about her anymore?" Which made me think about research topics in general, or subjects, obviously, when you're paid to write a certain history, that's your job, you get interested in it, you go off and do it. But when you're doing a passion project like this, how do you deal with someone not sharing that passion and questioning what you want to do? How did you respond?

Redmer Yska
I was outraged. I mean, this friend, she's a bit of a grump. I'm very fond of her, but she's grumpy. And basically, she said, "what more thing to say about Mansfield?". So that was one moment, and then the other moment was taking the bus up past the past the uni with my friend, who was getting off up there, Denise, and she said to me, "So what are you up to the moment, Red?", and I said that I'm doing some work on Mansfield, and she looked and me and she said, "She's complicit in the colonial project", and I just thought I was so fascinated by her saying that, I just thought, wow, this is amazing, and I really took it on board. Probably sounds a bit too grown up. But I really thought that's so important, that this is her response. And I really tried to sort of factor that into the way that I saw her when I did a lot of reading and talking and thinking about that, because these are really important responses. So, they kind of they kind of spurred me on. I just was, I was quite sort of challenged, I think, by these responses. So, I just thought they were really important to kind of take on board and not just to say,

‘piss off. You don't know anything’, I just think being so teachable as you go is and, and just trying to kind of take on these points of view, is really very, very important to the way, and is actually did to have some impact on the final on the final product.

Cherie Jacobson
Well, I think you've proved the person who said there wasn't anything more to say about Mansfield wrong.

I know we've only got a few minutes left, but I now open up for some questions from our audience here and online. So, if you're online, you can type your question and a staff member will relay it to us. If you're in person, there are two microphones floating around and even if you think you've got a loud voice, it would be lovely if you could use the microphone, please. So, pop your hand up and we'll get into the questions.

Question One:
Thank you very much. Redmer, that has been absolutely fascinating. I haven't read your book yet. But I wondered if you had come across any of Katherine's relatives - and I'm thinking of Elizabeth Beauchamp. Elizabeth was her cousin who was became a very famous European novelist and wrote film scripts. But she was quite a bit older than Katherine. And they met and sort of buried their differences in Switzerland when Katherine was very unwell. And I'm just wondering if Elizabeth Beauchamp, who became Elizabeth von Arnim, and who was also very rude about the Prussians and the Russians, and the Germans, the way Katherine was, in her German Pension stories, and I wondered if you'd come across any of those Beauchamp relatives who might have had something to add to your research.

Redmer Yska
I mean, I certainly cover Elizabeth in the book to quite a large extent. I mean, she was she was Mansfield's next-door neighbor up on the plateau. And that's probably the reason why she was there in the first place. But I mean, she was like a lifetime inspiration to Mansfield, I think, is that thing about she was the first person she'd ever met who who'd written a book. There's this this family member had written a book, and at a very early age Mansfield was very sort of taken with Elizabeth. But there's many Beauchamps out there and I've talked to lots of them. Do you mean contemporary Beauchamps? Yeah, I mean, when I think with Strange, Beautiful Excitement, I talked to lots of local Beauchamps and, came across some great diaries and things like that. So, there was a lot there. Yeah. So, lots of them.

Question Two:
Kia ora. That was wonderful talk. I haven't read your book yet. At last night as at the Karori Historical Society in the meeting and saw photographs Chesney Wold. It was very isolated mansion. Down in that park near Karori Park is very damp. Did you find new research that was mentioned? Really quite isolated and damp location?

Redmer Yska
Well, I actually grew up there. Not at Chesney Wold but just up the road.

Cherie Jacobson

And I live in Karori!

Redmer Yska
I mean, they sometimes describe the people of Karori as the ‘children of the mist’ don’t they? But I mean, it's weird for Mansfield. She writes about Chesney Wold and those years, as it often I think, when you're a kid, she remembers the sunny days, and she's got the sun dappled stories and it's always a beautiful day and the gardens are fabulous. And, she's wandering around the Arcadian paradise or something. Karori has got its dampness, but I mean - when it really rains, that sort of end of the valley can be a bit shit - but it’s good old Karori.

Cherie Jacobson
And in terms of isolation, in Prelude, the aunt does write to a friend saying, basically, "we've moved to the ends of the earth. No one's going to come and visit me"

Redmer Yska
Yeah, but at least it won't kill us.

Question three:
Thank you, and I can't wait to read it. I just wondered when you were working with the people of Fontainebleau who are so committed, as you've described, once the discussion about Middleton Murry being too mean, in inverted commas, to pay for Katherine's grave, and her being buried in the pauper's grave until, in the end, her father, who's usually seen as the wicked man in the story, sent the money for her body to be transferred to where it is today next to Gertrude.

Cherie Jacobson
Sorry, and just to introduce because I realized I didn't mention his name in my biography, which wasn't on purpose. Katherine Mansfield's husband was John Middleton Murry. So that's who you're referring to.

Redmer Yska
I mean, there therein lies such a tale. I mean, the first time I went there, Bernard [Bosque], as we stood over the grave, He said, "we don't think for a minute that it's her". No, I mean, because of exactly as you say, Gill, I mean, I mean, Murry was too upset to stick around at the funeral, he forgot to pay the funeral fees, which is a very big deal in France. He didn’t pay for a plot. So, her coffin was put in the paupers’ part of the cemetery where they revolve the bones every year. And so she was there for six years. And, and there's all sorts of stories about how after six years she was certain saints who have not at all deteriorated. There's a special name for it. She’s “incorrupted" - I think there's an amazing word.

But alas, I think we really did lose her at that point. And it has always it's sort of rankled so much, because from 1929, when she was when she was given a tombstone up until 1957, her status, what was written on her term was Katherine Mansfield, wife of John Middleton Murray, there was his status.

And then as I tell in the book, because I found out through these wonderful MFAT files that I got my hands on, that our ambassador to France at the time, quietly plotted to get the words "Born in

Wellington, New Zealand", inscribed on the tomb, and that happened in 1957. So that was under the guise of cleaning.

And Alister McIntosh, who was at the time was Secretary [of MFAT], was very happy to be part of the conspiracy. And of course, the French authorities were fully informed as was the family. But it was in a way kind of act of annexation of Mansfield. Finally, we finally claimed to, but it aint her I don't think - which is just one of those things.

Cherie Jacobson
There is a fascinating diplomatic strand throughout the book, and quite a shocking ghoulish account of Mansfield being disinterred and re-buried by we'll call our milkman who's a very colorful French journalist Redmer's predecessor, in some sense, but we have to leave it there. As I said, we could talk all afternoon. The book is incredible. Even if you think you've, you've read all you can about Mansfield - there's more. We've come to the end of our time, and I'd like to thank Redmer so much both for his time and the huge amount of work he's put into this book. It really is an impressive achievement and to have it published in the centenary year of Mansfield's death makes it even more special. So, congratulations. Have a lovely afternoon, everyone. And please do check out our centenary website. There's lots going on in more added all the time for the year ahead. So, thank you.