

## ADRIAN BAILEY

### **Versatile and prolific artist, writer and cook**

*(The Times)*

In the early 1950s Adrian Bailey and his friend Len Deighton – not yet a famous novelist – shared a basement flat in Emperor’s Gate, Kensington, where they kept open house. It was not a salubrious dwelling: there were dirty dishes piled high in the stone sink and, Bailey remembered, “an indescribable lavatory which had a trompe l’oeil painting of a loo roll behind the door, but no paper.” Despite this, the pair’s bonhomie and shared zest for cooking made them popular hosts. “Every night was a banquet night,” according to the advertising guru John Salmon.

Guests ranged from the artists John Minton and Stanley Spencer to rising stars such as Michael Caine and David Frost. One evening the Russian military attaché arrived with two bottles of vodka and, despite Cold War tensions, struck up a friendship with an American academic.

Bailey and Deighton had met at St Martin’s School of Art, where they were part of an extraordinarily talented cohort including Frank Auerbach, Leon Kossoff and Peter Blake. Deighton describes his friend as “a top-notch artist, musician and cook; added to this he had a wonderful dry wit and sense of humour.” Although he was to earn his living in other spheres, and only occasionally exhibited, Bailey always considered himself primarily a painter. One of his finest portraits, of his wife Fiona Macpherson, is in the collection of the National Galleries of Scotland.

He was also a gifted cellist, evangelical in his love of classical music. He had little time for more popular forms, despite witnessing the Beatles’ concert on the roof of the Apple building in 1969.

Adrian Alexander Bailey was born in 1928 in St Albans, the only child of Alexander Bailey and Jean Wilson. His father was hotelier and publican who

owned several properties in and around London, one of whose cellars served as the family air-raid shelter during the Blitz. His first career, however, had been as a bookseller and his son inherited his passion for the written word. As a pupil of Emmanuel School in Battersea his habit of walking slowly along the street with his nose in a book earned him the nickname “Tortoise.”

School was followed by two years’ National Service with the RAF. Assigned to ground communications, he boasted that his artistic skills found a rewarding outlet in forging official documents. Aviation continued to fascinate him and three decades later he published a history of the air war in Europe between 1939 and 1945.

On leaving the RAF Bailey studied at the Kingston and Byam Shaw schools of art before progressing to St Martin’s. It was there that he met his first wife, May Routh, who went on to become first a model and then a leading costume designer, dressing Peter Sellers in *Being There* and David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Although the marriage ended in divorce, they remained on good terms until her death in 2022.

After graduating Bailey established himself as a freelance illustrator, graphic designer and copywriter for major advertising agencies such as J. Walter Thompson and Collett Dickenson Pearce. The Mini Cooper was launched in 1959 with his slogan “The incredible little car;” he was rewarded with one of the first off the production line. Though never one for ostentation, a delight in beautiful cars was to be a recurring theme in his life.

Abandoning advertising for journalism, he moved to New York for several years as a writer and an illustrator for *Time* and *Life*. On arrival he was surprised to find a drinks trolley wheeled around the office every morning so that staff could help themselves to a cocktail.

Back in England he found himself much in demand as an illustrator for book covers. His drawings graced many Penguin paperbacks, among them H.E. Bates’s *The Darling Buds of May*, as well as Philip Roth’s first book, *Goodbye*

*Columbus*. He would later design covers for several of Len Deighton's novels, including the *Berlin Game*, *Mexico Set* and *London Match* trilogy.

He also provided illustrations for *Vogue* and the front covers of magazines such as *Homes and Gardens*. Contributing to *Queen* added another string to his bow as he was suddenly pressed into service as a restaurant reviewer.

The merger of *Queen* with *Harper's Bazaar* in 1970 provided a turning point in Bailey's life. Arriving in his Aston Martin to deliver artwork to the newly launched *Harpers & Queen*, his eyes locked outside the office with those of its young deputy editor, Fiona Macpherson. A twelve-year age difference did not hamper their courtship and in 1975 they married.

The couple settled in Camden, where their neighbours in Gloucester Crescent included Jonathan Miller, Alan Bennett – plus his Lady in the Van – and David Gentleman. Their son Oliver was born in 1976 and their daughter Susannah in 1982. Oliver works in finance and Susannah in interiors.

Unfazed by becoming a father at 48, Bailey embraced the role of house husband enthusiastically while his wife pursued her editorial career. When not cooking family meals, mending his children's clothes or undertaking the school run, he could be found working on extraordinary array of books.

Several were devoted to photography, including *The Book of Colour Photography* (1984), *The Illustrated Dictionary of Photography* (1987) and *Your Compact Camera* (1989). Cookery was also a rich seam, with titles ranging from *Fruits of the Earth* (1986 – arguably the first vegan cookbook) to *The Taste of France* (1987) and the *Pocket Encyclopaedia of Cook's Ingredients* (1990); he even explored Edwardian cuisine for *Mrs Bridges' Upstairs Downstairs Cookery Book* (1975). His great store of knowledge led to friendships with other experts in the field, including Delia Smith and Keith Floyd.

On other subjects he published *Passion for Fashion: Three Centuries of Changing Styles* (1988) and *Walt Disney's World of Fantasy* (1987), for which

he spent two weeks at the Disney studios studying their film techniques. A fascination with mythology led to *The Caves of the Sun* (1992), in which he dismissed Freud and Jung's psychological approach and argued that all religions and folk tales had their origins in the environment of early man. Closely examining cave art and stone circles, it took ten years to write, and although academics were divided about its merits it proved his most popular book.

His research often took him to unexpected places. He liked to recount how, while working on one book, he found himself in the red-light district of Hamburg, where a refusal to buy a magnum of champagne resulted in him being frog-marched to an ATM by a nightclub bouncer.

An unexpected project was a collaboration with one of the world's leading mountaineers: *Lakeland Rock: Classic Climbs with Chris Bonington* (1985). Bailey had hitherto shown no interest in sport, but his friendship with Bonington led him to don climbing gear and attempt some forbidding peaks.

He still found time for journalism, contributing travel pieces to *The Times* on destinations from New Orleans to Japan. A commission which particularly delighted him was an interview with Sir Frank Whittle, the inventor of the jet engine. He also wrote a popular cookery column for the *Sunday Express* with illustrations by his friend Mel Calman.

In 1994 he moved with his family to the West Country. They had no sooner arrived than Fiona Macpherson was asked to return to *Harpers & Queen* as editor. Over the next six years the demands of the job meant that she spent weekdays in London while her husband oversaw their home and children in Bath. Life became more complicated still in 1996 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and decided to keep her illness a secret from the world; nursing was added to Bailey's other domestic duties. She continued to work up until her death in November 2000.

To ease his children's sense of loss, Bailey took them on a series of trips to the Continent and beyond. "We ate at restaurants in Paris," his son remembers,

“sampled cake shops in Vienna, attended the opera in Prague and had breakfast on the rooftops of Marrakech. He was our personal tour guide, and his breadth of knowledge never ceased to amaze us.” An expedition to the site of Troy was also undertaken as research for a book, never completed, which argued that the *Iliad* was based on primitive sexual symbolism.

At an age when others were slowing down, Bailey showed little sign of doing so. His daughter’s decision to move to Buenos Aires gave him an opportunity to explore Argentina. An enthusiasm for the social historian and cookery writer Dorothy Hartley led to an anthology of her journalism, published in 2012. Ever keen to acquire and pass on knowledge, he took particular pleasure in teaching his young granddaughter Allegra to draw and paint. At 85 he set about learning ancient Greek.

He continued to enjoy a full social life, taking pleasure and amusement in being the oldest member of the Soho House group. He rekindled a relationship with his first girlfriend, Eve Goldsmith, whom he had known since the age of 16, and even in his nineties would drive two hundred miles to visit her in Liverpool.

A gentle, soft-spoken man, Bailey was a gifted raconteur with the knack of striking up conversation with anyone from any walk of life. He always felt most at home in London, and when asked where he would like to be buried replied, “Soho.” Heaven, in his imagination, was “that great cocktail bar in the sky.”