

1. What inspired you to write *The Gods Divided*?

I was inspired by my first meeting with Olive in the cemetery in Rieux on 27 May 1999; the story of Ben and Olive told to me by Lawrence Bloom on the journey to Rieux and my meeting with Olive on her 90th birthday in 2006 when she asked me to 'tell her story'.

2. How much of the story is fictionalised?

The principal story line is accurate, however certain details were fictionalised for the drama of the storyline.

3. What is the significance of the title?

'The Gods Divided' highlights the problems Olive had as a 'married' thereby 'chained' Catholic and Ben's similar loyalty to the Jewish faith which caused him to deceive his family. Yet the love between Olive and Ben remained firm.

4. How long did it take to write?

Approximately 2 years including research.

5. Talk through your research process – what did you read and where did you go?

i. Dr. John Sweetman, an old school friend, advised me re. RAF details which I then further researched.

John Sweetman is one of Britain's most renowned military historians. He is Hon. Research Fellow at Keele University and former Head of Defence and International Affairs at Sandhurst. He has written many books on the Second World War including *The Dambusters Raid*, and *Tirpitz*.

ii. Pam Bell (Olive's daughter-in-law) advised me about many details of Olive and Ben's lives.

iii. I visited relevant sites: Iwuy and Rieux in Northern France and Cable Street in the East End of London and the RAF Museum Hendon.

iv. I read RAF and BBC reports of the times, as acknowledged in the book. Also read French contemporary magazines and books and studied the background to the Papal visit. Read the school reports of Ben's 'boys' and the reports of French archivists Capliez and Colports on the crash of the Lancaster bomber in Iwuy.

6. What are your top tips for other people who want to carry out similar research?

Speak with as many people as possible involved with the story-line and visit all the places mentioned.

7. Is there any particular piece of research from the book that stuck in your mind?

The story of 'the battle of Cable Street'; the ceremony at Rieux cemetery and the Dagnieux's field in Iwuy where Ben's Lancaster crashed are all particularly poignant memories.

8. What was the hardest part of writing the book?

The structure. I eventually decided to start with Ben's final flight.

9. What was the most satisfying part of writing the book?

Doing justice to Ben and Olive's story

10. How was writing this book different to writing your previous books?

The Coburg Conspiracy is non-fiction, so all about research at the British Library and in Coburg itself – the book was a critique of the early Coburg family line.

Retribution is a critique of the pomposity and often ignorance among both the judiciary and senior QCs. This included 'real life' legal cases and a fictional international money-laundering plot set in the South of France and California.

The Gods Divided is a personalised account of two 'good' people who found it difficult to cope with the religious divides in the 1940s; particularly with prejudice, ignorance and major financial concerns which affected Olive. A much deeper and more socially exposed storyline than my other books.

11. What is your writing routine?

I write in longhand for the first draft and thereafter on computer. Early morning with jugs of black coffee to keep me going; my best time was checking and re-drafting in the afternoons.

12. What are your ideas for future books?

Ruth, my wife, wants me to write my memoirs. As a Solicitor; political leader/Lord Mayor of Portsmouth; Founder/Chair of Portsmouth and then London International String Quartet Competition I was fortunate to meet and talk with many eminent people among whom were Lord Mountbatten; Eisenhower, Menuhin, Thatcher and members of the Royal family – but this will be exclusively for the family.

13. What about the character of Ben particularly appealed to you?

His honesty set against his deception of his 'difficult' Mother. His loyalty to his religion (Cable Street – his 'Jewish' symbolic necklace) and to Olive. His outlook against Fascism (including his volunteering to Bomber Command and his second tour of 30+ Ops.)

14. What about the character of Olive particularly appealed to you?

Her loyalty to Ben; her support and love; her tenaciousness from 1944 onwards, her fine character and her loyalty to her Catholic Faith when it would have made life much easier for her to convert to Judaism.

15. Did Ben do the right thing by not telling his family about his relationship with Olive?

He had no option. His Mother would never have accepted his relationship with Olive (note her harshness when Ben said he wanted to be an accountant and his wish to join in the Cable Street fight).

16. Was Olive's experience of providing for her family after Ben's disappearance typical of the times?

Yes. There was no alternative. She was on her own with no family to fall back on.

17. What do you think might have happened to their relationship if Ben hadn't disappeared?

Due to the firm and resolute love between them and the two boys they would have enjoyed a happy life together, although not married. It is possible – although knowing 'the Bloom family' unlikely – that Ben might have succeeded in a reconciliation with his mother, and therefore with his siblings. But Olive and Ben would undoubtedly have remained in a strong relationship.