



Harriet Sandys signing copies of her book

Beyond that last blue mountain

Harriet Sandys is familiar to many of our readers for her sales of oriental textiles and decorative items but before settling in Somerset she spent many years travelling alone across the Middle and Near East, After a sheltered rural childhood in Cumbria, which included boarding school and “doing the season” Harriet Sandy’s parents were keen for her to find a sensible young man and settle down.

Harriet, having trained as an oriental carpet restorer in London, had other ideas and just after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, she set off for Peshawar to witness the plight of thousands of displaced Afghan refugees. Keen to help, she set up a small silk weaving project for illiterate Turkmen refugees, and was sent by UNESCO to Mazar-i-sharif to work with Afghanistan’s last remaining silk ikat weavers.

Harriet has now written a fascinating book about her experiences, as a very young woman travelling and working in war zones at a time of increasing Islamic fundamentalism. At the end of the first Gulf War she travelled with the Peshmerga in the newly-liberated Iraqi Kurdistan. Then in 1994 she joined



a group of unemployed builders and decorators driving convoys of food and aid from Croydon to the Muslim enclaves in Bosnia Herzegovina.

The book is a great romping read, recounting with matter of fact humour Harriet’s many adventures from being arrested by the KHAD, nearly dying of acute bacterial meningitis in a Kabul hospital, and rescuing an abandoned puppy, but also beautifully captures, through her lovely descriptive style, the atmosphere of a special place and period in its history.

Beyond That Last Blue Mountain. My Silk Road Journey by Harriet Sandys is available from all good bookshops.