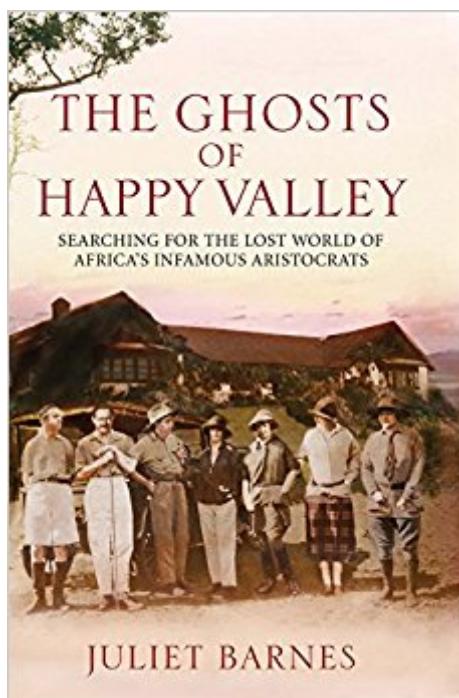


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# The Ghosts Of Happy Valley: The Biography



## Synopsis

Happy Valley was the name given to the region of Kenya's Central Highlands where a community of affluent, hedonistic white expatriates settled between the wars. Including the writer Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), the pioneering aviator Beryl Markham and the troubled socialite Idina Sackville whose life was told in Frances Osborne's bestselling *The Bolter*, the Happy Valley set's notoriety was sealed in 1931 with the sensational and still unsolved - murder of the Earl of Errol, the investigation of which laid bare the extent of the set's decadence and irresponsibility, and made for another bestselling book in James Fox's *White Mischief*. But what is left now? Juliet Barnes, who has lived in Kenya for many years, has set out to explore Happy Valley in a remarkable and indefatigable archaeological quest to find the homes and haunts of this extraordinary and vanished set of people - grand residences like Clouds up in the hills that once hosted opulent and scandalous parties. With the help of African guides, and guided by the memories of elderly expats she tracks down to the Muthiaga old enough to have first-hand memories of the likes of Idina and Lord Errol and the lives they led, what she finds - ruins reclaimed by luxuriant bush, tumbledown dwellings in which an African family ekes a subsistence living, or even a modest school - is a revelation of the state of modern Africa that makes the gilded era of the Happy Valley set seem even more fantastic. A book to set alongside such singular evocations of Africa and its strange colonial history as *The Africa House*, *The Ghosts of Happy Valley: The Biography* is a mesmerising blend of travel narrative, social history and personal quest.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'Barnes merges travelogue with history, visiting the ruined and reclaimed homes - once opulent abodes with rose gardens - of the wealthy and often ennobled white settlers of Wanjohi Valley, near the Aberdare mountains in west central Kenya. The author's journey to find out from locals where the set lived is determined and admirable.' A problem with the depiction of Happy Valley arises when you encounter stories like that of Mary Miller, to whom I am very distantly related. Juliet Barnes hears that Mary 'lived off lorry-loads of champagne and booze before shooting herself.' Also that she and her husband were on the edge of the notorious party set in their home near the Wanjohi or 'Happy' Valley, a chilly cleft in the Aberdare highlands near where Barnes herself lives today. The gossip is entirely untrue, as Barnes, a white Kenyan whose book thankfully begins to debunk the Happy Valley silliness, discovers. Beautifully written.' "The author does a good job of presenting the various views, with added insights after visiting the homes and hearing local lore about some of the main players. In the end a well-thought-out blended theory of the motive for Lord Erroll's murder and the possible perpetrators gives yet another twist to this unsolved mystery.... the book is a valuable addition to the library of anyone interested in this period of Kenya's history." "A page-turning exploration of historic houses & Kenya's notorious 'Happy Valley'. Truly a book of our time, this is a must read if you want to get under the skin of the last 100 years of Kenya's social history." 'Numerous books have been written about Kenya's infamous Happy Valley, but the latest edition, The Ghosts of Happy Valley: Searching for The Lost World of Africa's Infamous Aristocrats, offers a fresh, much needed, perspective. This book is highly recommended for those interested in this part of Kenya's history and wising to understand the current state of things.' 'Beautifully told travelogue and historical quest. With family histories woven in, this is a moving, entertaining and enlightening read, and an honest exploration of Kenya's colonial past.'Numerous books have been written about Kenya's infamous Happy Valley, but the latest edition, The Ghosts of Happy Valley: Searching for The Lost World of Africa's Infamous Aristocrats, offers a fresh, much needed, perspective. This book is highly recommended for those interested in this part of Kenya's history and wising to understand the current state of things.' A problem with the depiction of Happy Valley arises when you encounter stories like that of Mary Miller, to whom I am very distantly related. Juliet Barnes hears that Mary 'lived off lorry-loads of champagne and booze before shooting herself.' Also that she and her husband were on the edge of the notorious party set in their home near the Wanjohi or 'Happy' Valley, a chilly cleft in the Aberdare highlands near where Barnes herself lives today. The gossip is entirely untrue, as Barnes, a white Kenyan whose book thankfully begins

to debunk the Happy Valley silliness, discovers. Beautifully written. "Beautifully told travelogue and historical quest. With family histories woven in, this is a moving, entertaining and enlightening read, and an honest exploration of Kenya's colonial past."

Juliet Barnes was born and raised in Kenya and educated at St Andrews University and the London School of Journalism. She has published books for adults and children.

Very interesting look at Happy Valley from several different angles: the homes now and in the past, the death of the Earl, conservation, the racial conflicts both white and black and black on black, speculation on the murder, history of former land owners and up dates on their lives, stories about current residents, and much much more. The only comment I would suggest the reader read "White Mischief" by James Fox first -to understand some of the references in the book. There is also an excellent map to refer to as you read. Highly recommended! Other excellent writers of the past, both fiction and non-fiction, are: William Jarvis, Jane Kirkpatrick, Duncan Barrett, Eric Larsen, Margaret Mayhew, Sandra Dallas, and Judith Lennox. This book is excellent and deserves an A++++++

Interesting but bit long. I had trouble keeping the people separate although I have read about this group several times. I found the visits to the homes of the "ghosts" quite interesting.

Well written account of life in contemporary Kenya. Offers some insight into a long-ago murder. Otherwise an account of the decay of homes from Kenya's white-ruled heyday. Shows the end of a way of life which has been replaced by a decline of resources in that beautiful country.

I had read books about Lord Earl's death, as well as "Out of Africa", but this novel brilliantly ties all of these events and more together in a fascinating page-turner. Highly recommended for those who had lived and worked in Kenya.

Very revealing book about the lives of "settlers" in Kenya. I lived in Kenya in the 50's myself, as a child, and heard whispers about this community from my mother's fellow missionaries! There's a sadness to their story, too.

OK, but a little slow going at times.

One of the most intriguing tales of Colonial times

Looking forward to reading it...

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