



# The Ghosts of Happy Valley: Searching for the Lost World of Africa's Infamous Aristocrats

*Juliet Barnes*

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Happy Valley was the name given to the Wanjohi Valley in the Kenya Highlands, where a small community of affluent, hedonistic white expatriates settled between the wars. While Kenya's early colonial days have been immortalised by farming pioneers like Lord Delamere and Karen Blixen, and the pioneering aviator Beryl Markham, Happy Valley became infamous under the influence of troubled socialite, Lady Idina Sackville, whose life was told in Frances Osborne's bestselling *The Bolter*. The era culminated with the notorious murder of the Earl of Erroll in 1941, the investigation of which laid bare the Happy Valley set's decadence and irresponsibility, chronicled in another bestseller, James Fox's *White Mischief*. But what is left now? In a remarkable and indefatigable archaeological quest Juliet Barnes, who has lived in Kenya all her life and whose grandparents knew some of the Happy Valley characters, has set out to explore Happy Valley to find the former homes and haunts of this extraordinary and transient set of people. With the help of a remarkable African guide and further assisted by the memories of elderly former settlers, she finds the remains of grand residences tucked away beneath the mountains and speaks to local elders who share first-hand memories of these bygone times. Nowadays these old homes, she discovers, have become tumbledown dwellings for many African families, school buildings, or their ruins have almost disappeared without trace - a revelation of the state of modern Africa that makes the gilded era of the Happy Valley set even more fantastic. A book to set alongside such singular evocations of Africa's strange colonial history as *The Africa House*, *The Ghosts of Happy Valley* is a mesmerising blend of travel narrative, social history and personal quest.

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