



Claire Storm Phillips

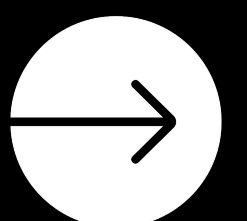
Procurement Adventurer

Intro

With Claire's role in **horticulture**, we concluded that Kew Gardens would be a perfect spot to meet for lunch and have an amble around chatting all things procurement. The sun shone and the Indian Chestnuts were in full flower.

Here's her story...

July 2023



How did your procurement adventure begin?

I applied to the graduate scheme at **Tesco** wanting to be a buyer – I wanted to be a buyer of food and household goods. However, I was put into what they called **Procurement which is GNFR (Goods Not for Resale)**. At first, I wasn't too happy about this, but it turned out to be brilliant as I had loads of freedom to try lots of different procurement techniques sourcing things like uniforms, paper bags and recycling services.

I think businesses need to do much more to promote procurement – it was not something I heard being talked about at any of the university job fairs.

**"In the UK we
seek the truth,
In China, it's
about reaching
harmony"**



You speak fluent Mandarin and worked in China. What was that like?

Yes – I studied **Mandarin at Cambridge** and had a year abroad studying in Beijing. I also worked there for Tesco for two years. The way of business is very different. In the UK we seek the truth. In China it's about reaching harmony which might not always be the truth! Eg if I asked, “are the deliveries on time?” the answer might be “Yes, yes, yes” even if they're not. They don't want to lose face. Instead, I'd have to ask, “when is a good time for the deliveries to arrive?”

The West doesn't really understand China or make a proper effort to learn about them either! Whereas, they make a huge effort to learn about our language and culture.

**I had to buy a
private jet!**

What's been your most unusual or interesting procurement adventure?

Believe it or not I had to buy **a private jet for a CEO** (not Flamingo's CEO!). The CEO didn't last long in their role.

I also sourced a fleet of three-temperature (ambient, chilled, frozen) vans for Tesco in China for their home delivery service; something never done in China before. Our competitors were using air conditioned mini-buses!



Tell us about your current role...

I'm the **indirect spend procurement manager** for **Flamingo Horticulture** who is one of the UK's leading importers of fresh cut flowers, pot plants and vegetables such as mange-tout. We have growing operations in East Africa as well as partners in the UK, Holland and Northwestern Europe.

My role is everything that supports the **growing and selling of the flowers and plants** such as fertilizer, drip irrigation, plant pots, water troughs for the hydroponic growing and storage space. These things might not sound as cool as the produce itself, but each sub-category is so diverse and requires considerable strategic thinking. For example, with fertilizer how to manage the volatile market and decide whether it is better to use distributors or ship it in ourselves. Pots aren't easy either. We have to make a forecast of how much to source from China many months before, say the Christmas period – it's easy to get it wrong and end up with the wrong stock.



**"I notice
procurement being
referred to as a
service function
less and less"**

How do you see Procurement evolving over the next 10 years?

I'm an optimist so I'll go with the hopeful view – I notice Procurement being referred to as a **service function less and less**. We want to drive the change and I know we can.

It would be remiss not to talk about tech. Some things like eAuctions haven't had such a play as everyone thought they might. AI will definitely play a role. I don't think it will take over everything, but it will be a key tool. I've used AI (ChatGPT) now and again to get over writer's block. It's really good for standard answers such as if I wanted to write a procurement policy but the output still needs a check. It's also good for functional tasks too such as a quick way to write a macro in excel.

What would you like your suppliers to say about you ?

Good listener. Firm but fair

**"Value chain
analysis is my
favourite"**

What are the cleverest procurement techniques you use?

Value chain analysis is my favourite – it's so useful to look at a broad spectrum end-to-end. I did a project looking to reduce costs with call centres where we looked holistically at the problem. The immediate answer came from consolidating call centres but the true value came from tuning in the FAQs, especially in the retailer's app, and hence reducing the number of calls being placed in the first place.

How can the procurement profession support a healthy work life balance?

Flamingo has been really supportive with my family. We have a one year old daughter. I work at the beginning of the week and my partner works at the tail end of the week. This way we give Branwen hands on parenting whilst maintaining our careers. It's made me super-efficient and I come to work fully committed and engaged. So more of this sort of flexi working is key to attracting and retaining a strong team.



Where did you last go abroad?

Recently, I went to the **Dutch flower auction in Holland** – it's one of the largest buildings in the World covering a whopping 520,000 sq meters. The colours are incredible and the smell of greenery intoxicating.

Who is your greatest source of inspiration?

My grandpa who raised me in my tween years. He was hard working, humble and curious.

The other is Harold Gillies, a New Zealand plastic surgeon who pioneered extraordinary techniques for facial reconstruction during WW1 and WW2. He blended science and art in his work with a huge dose of tenacity. And he looked much broader than just his core surgery learning about dentistry and anaesthetics too. He realised plastic surgery took time and patience and was known to use the phrase: “never do today what you could do tomorrow” – ie take your time to do the task properly. There's an insightful book about him titled “The Face Maker”.

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

THE FACEMAKER

'Thrilling ...
endlessly fascinating ...
Fitzharris brings
to life a neglected
slice of medical
history'
Financial Times

'Engrossing ...
an intensely
moving story
about a
remarkable
medical pioneer'
Guardian

LINDSEY
FITZHARRIS



**"We took 4-month
old Branwen
backpacking
round Mexico"**

If you could take a 3-month sabbatical where would you go?

We've actually just had one, although 6 months not 3. We took Branwen when she was 4 months old backpacking around Mexico. She was amazing at getting us introduction to Mexicans and was often called the gringo baby!

Looking forward, I'd love to go to Taiwan as I speak the language, the food is apparently delicious and there is great hiking.

What's the one thing you won't travel overseas without?

Suncream - I'm ginger!

Rapid Fire

Roses or alstroemerias?

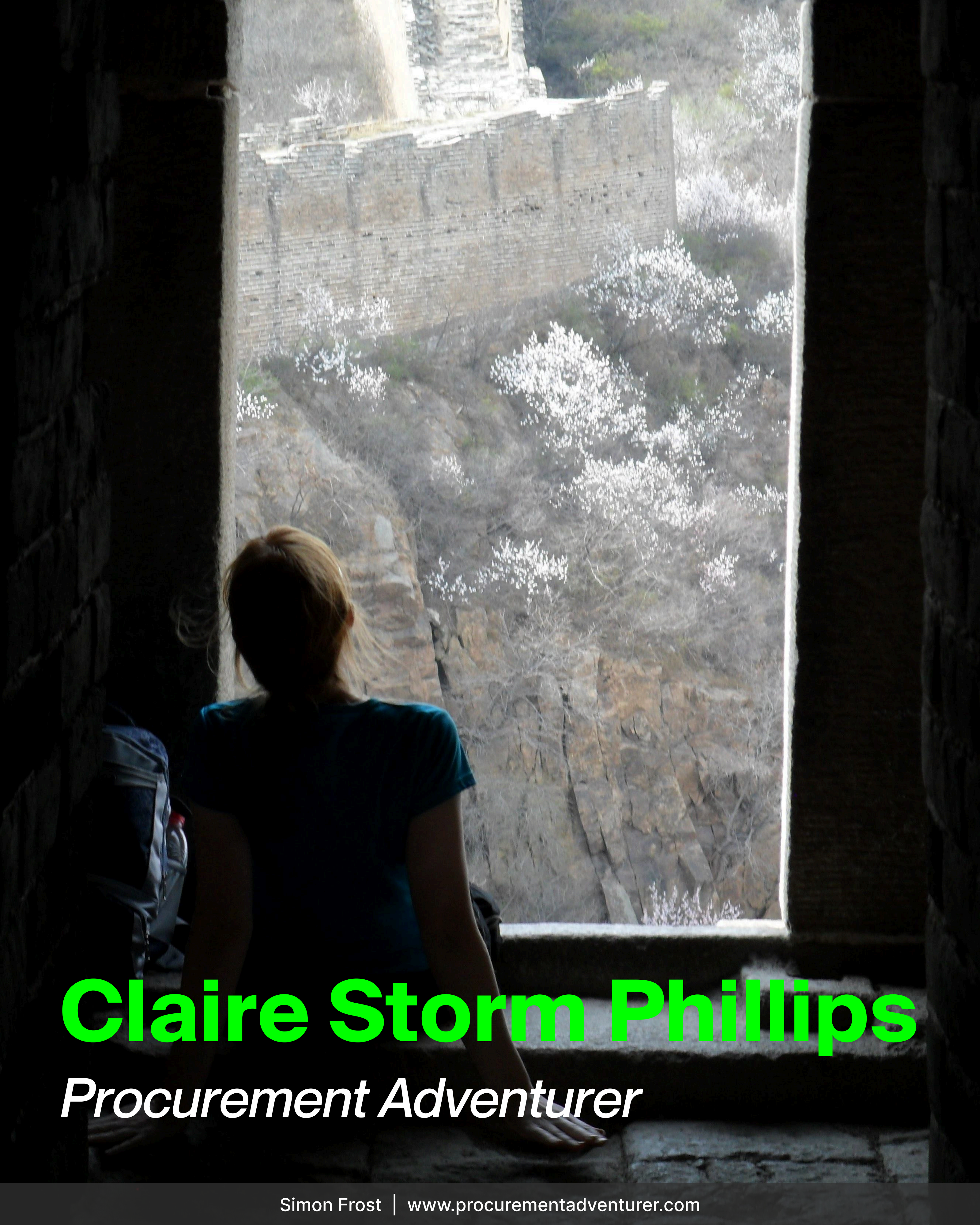
Roses

Favourite style of Chinese Food?

Xin Jiang which is a delicious **blend of Central Asian and Chinese style**

Mange tout or peas?

Mange Tout



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