

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

Former Presidents:

Humbert Wolfe (1935-40)
Lord Vansittart (1940-57)
Sir George Rostrevor
Hamilton (1957-67)
Bernard Newman (1967-68)
James Laver (1968-75)
Lord Snow (1975-80)

President:

Charles Neilson Gattey

Vice Presidents:

Richard Adams FRSL
John le Carré
Iain McIntyre

Chairman:

Alan S Watts

Vice Chairman:

Terry Rickson

Membership Secretary:

Joan M Lewis
17 The Green
Corby Glen
GRANTHAM
NG33 4NP
email: joan@hykin.fsnet.co.uk

Meetings Secretary:

Ethel Corduff
10 Malcolm Road
Woodside
South Norwood
LONDON
SE25 5HG
email: ecorduff@hotmail.com

Treasurer:

Joan M Lewis
17 The Green
Corby Glen
GRANTHAM
NG33 4NP
email: joan@hykin.fsnet.co.uk

Competition Secretary:

Ronald C Jeffreys
186 Lewis Flats
Lisgar Terrace
LONDON
W14 8SQ

Publicity Officer:

Vacant

Diary

Poetry Workshop Weekend
1st – 3rd August 2003

Chairman's Awayday
6th September 2003

Closing Date Bill Barnes
Competition
30th September 2003

Closing Date the Short Story
Book Prize Competition
30th September 2003

Closing Date W F & F G Froud
Memorial Competition
31st October 2003

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Members' names and addresses are held on a computer database which is used for mailing copies of the Civil Service Author.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in the SCPSW Author are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society.

Poetry Editor:

Joyce Thornton
129 Whitechapel Road
CLECKHEATON
West Yorkshire
BD19 6HS

Editor:

Adrian Danson
38 Cumberland Road
BROMLEY
Kent
BR2 0PQ
email:

adriand@onetel.net.uk

The SCPSW Author

Number 162

Summer 2003

CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial
- 4 Guidance for Members
- 5 Letters
- 6 Market Information *Gordon Gompers*
- 7 Editor's Report to AGM
- 8 SCPSW Competition Results
- 11 Neither Moon Nor Candlelight (Review) *Alan S Watts*
- 12 Poetry Pages
- 15 Poetry Workshop Pages
- 17 Gemini *Arthur E Bromley*
- 20 The Mad Musicians *Arthur E Bromley*
- 22 On Visiting the Hairdresser *Alan S Watts*
- 24 Sailing in Circles *Sinbad*
- 28 Bridging the Gap *Aaron Fuller*
- 34 Down the Drain *Felicity Verity*
- 39 Chaplin *Brian Jones*

Editorial:

I tire of the popular press being dominated by bad news, or somehow denigrating any good news. An example a cricket headline such as, “England annihilated by rampant Aussies”, or “England scrape a win against tired Aussies”. Could it not have been, “England put up a good fight against World’s strongest team” or “England show their mettle in beating Aussies”?

Unfortunately our recent editorials also seem to suffer from bad news and the latest is from our Treasurer Louise Lloyd. Sadly her son Tommy will need lengthy medical treatment and this will consume much of Louise’s time. We are grateful for the good work she has done since taking over the duties of Treasurer and accept that she can no longer spare the time to continue. I am sure everyone will join me in expressing our thanks for her help to date and wish Tommy an early recovery.

Sadly that means we are again asking for a volunteer from amongst our membership to take over the Treasurer’s duties. The fact that Louise worked part time, coped with the demands of a husband and 3 children, did writing that was good enough to win last year’s Froud Memorial Prize and still found time to take on our Treasurer’s duties will, I trust, prove that this duty is one that most members could take on if they were willing. Joan Hykin has generously agreed to assume this role for a short period, but, in view of her other duties, we must try to relieve her as soon as possible. Please let me have a flood of applicants so that we can fill this vacancy quickly.

Those who live in, or near. London will again be able to take advantage of the invitation to attend the Chairman’s Awayday at Beckenham on Saturday 6th September. Will those wishing to attend please contact him near the time on 020-8650-4746, to confirm that he has not moved house.

Doubtless Marjorie’s soups will again supplement the food that those attending are invited to bring in addition to their short stories and/or poems for reading at this entertaining event.

Guidance for Members

Adding to my proposal that you seek the advice of friends and acquaintances, when researching unfamiliar topics, Clare Gaen suggests you include strangers. As she says, it is common to discuss any number of matters with strangers on the bus/train, in the queue etc., but warns not to use real names and perhaps change enough details to ensure no one can recognise themselves from your writing – unless you were being unduly complimentary, of course.

At risk of repeating myself and stating the obvious, the following reflects recent correspondence and conversations, indicating that many writers who claim ambition still fail to address the inherent need for commitment.

I have recently lost many days looking for a new house, when I might otherwise have been doing some creative writing. There again I may have been doing any number of other things, as I am not a writer by profession and this pastime is mostly satisfied when I am in the mood. Of course, this may be the case for many members and brings me to the issue.

How much do you want to succeed as a writer? Is your ambition sufficient to give second place to all other matters? If it is not then there is a good chance that you will have only a modest degree of success, even if you are fortunate enough to have more than your fair share of talent.

This is true of almost all hobbies and pastimes; only by being fully committed in time and effort can we approach the standards of the professionals. On taking early retirement I thought I would be so committed. In reality my writing comes behind bowling and being a School Governor.

For myself I am content with the consequently limited success; exercising my imagination in creative writing gives me considerable satisfaction. Each of us must consider the inescapable fact that success depends upon commitment and perhaps that means sacrifice. Each must accept that without a great deal of effort we are likely to have limited success, yet also accept the sad fact that even total commitment still does not guarantee such.

This series was a response to member's requests for guidance. Including a number of related articles from members, I believe most areas have now been covered and the series ends here. Please continue to ask for advice and I will record such requests and advice given where I think it may be of general interest.

Adrian Danson

Member Successes

Steve Glason poems are now on display at Ipswich Railway Station, but he has also been filmed by BBC Look East gazing from a train window in the manner of John Betjamen. He was also interviewed by Radio Suffolk and had his photograph published in the local papers. Such fame is also attached to Ethel Corduff, whom you may have seen being interviewed on BBC Antiques Roadshow. Before you let your imagination run away with you, I must explain that the subject was a Romano-British pot – 1800 years old and valued at only £10.

I hope we can find space for the whole of a letter from Jill Burberry, providing a most interesting account of her successes.

Letters

Dear Editor

As promised I am enclosing a copy of my notes on creating a website by using basic HTML. There is a growing appreciation that anybody can publish their work on the internet if they know how – and having visited a few sites there is a lot of rubbish being published by people who think they are gifted writers but cannot string a sentence together. So maybe a few of our members can redress the balance and create some worthwhile sites by writers.

If you think there are SCPSW members who might be interested in having a copy, I'm happy for you to advertise it in The SCPSW Author. A warning that a certain level of computer expertise is needed to start with might be advisable. Although I have tried to keep the notes simple they are probably not suitable for a complete novice.

I can make it available either in hard copy or on disc (in Word). I would not wish to offer it through email as in my experience when sending anything other than plain text there is often corruption between servers and different systems, especially in the formatting, which sometimes alters the meaning or reduces it to nonsense.

Yours sincerely

John A Edwards FRPSL

38 Carleton Green Close, Pontefract, West Yorkshire, WF8 3NN

[For a copy of this easy to understand, yet comprehensive advice, please send A4 sae to John – Ed]

Market Information

Gordon E Gompers

As many of our leading members have been factual writers when I state that research is important I am only echoing what they have frequently stated.

The best sources of research are our libraries especially the reference ones. My services to Morley College's music led the vice principal to sponsor me for a reader's ticket to the British Museum Library. Here was the biggest collection of books in the United Kingdom but I did not find the going all that easy. I usually asked at first for just the one book I needed. It was a long wait. I got some attention when I asked for six books although I only needed to look at one. Needless to say I got fed up with doing that.

More satisfactory was Westminster Reference Library, 35 St. Martin's Street, WC2. However, these days I seldom go so far for my research needs. The reference section of Streatham Library has been much developed of late and Brixton Library has had its reference section greatly enlarged recently.

No doubt the largest reference library in South London is the Altenburg Gardens Reference Library off Lavender Hill. This proved to be not only a good avenue of research but a good subject to write about. I had an article about it published in *SW Magazine*. I found the staff very helpful!

No piece about useful libraries would be complete without a mention of Croydon Library. This vast attachment to the Clock Tower complex contains a very good magazine section. A good place to study one's markets.

§ § § § §

New Year Party 2003

It was encouraging to see the New Year party so well attended with twenty three members and guests travelling from Aylesbury, Kent, Dorset, Nottingham, Leicester, Surrey, Worcestershire, Middlesex and London.

The Judge of the W F and F G Froud Memorial Competition, Ron Edwards had kindly travelled from Poole, Dorset, to present the prizes.

First prize for *Life in the Intergalactic Services* was won by Louise Lloyd which was read aloud to much interest. Second prize winner was P W Stock for *Fight Night*, he was unable to be present as he was on holiday in Tenerife. The third prize was presented to Terry Rickson for *Promotion*.

Some members took opportunity to buy copies of Paul Williams' book *As Handsome Does*. Alan Watts said it was an excellent book.

The theme for the short story and poetry competition for those present was "Clocks" and it proved to be a very popular subject. The poetry competition was won by Alan Watts with Anthony Roberts second. Joan Lewis came first in the short story competition and Terry Rickson was second. A raffle was held for the first time, after which tea and mince pies were enjoyed.

Ethel Corduff

§ § § § §

Editor's Report to AGM

Perhaps it is only the stress of trying to sell our house & buy a new one, now consuming more than six months, that has worn me out. Perhaps the endless courses I have to attend as a School Governor. Whatever the reason, I find myself with less and less time to spare for SCPSW work.

Eventually my burden will ease and I will be able to offer the necessary commitment, but I wonder if there is not someone more capable of editorship. I invite anyone prepared to do so to give their name to the Chairman for consideration.

Many times in recent years, as we have struggled to meet the cost of publishing *Author*, despite its modest form, it has been suggested that we could survive with newsletters in its place, perhaps every second edition. In reality there is little saving in doing so, as the printing and postage costs would be only marginally less and the loss to members would, in the opinion of many, be too great. We will therefore continue in our present form for as long as our finances allow.

Although I have adequate material for another edition or two, despite my failure to return published work (I still intend to do so), I would appreciate

more. Our poetry editor is also continually short of contributions and member's help is needed to ensure that poetry continues to be an integral part of Author.

I intend to publish a new member's letter that criticises the quality of Author by comparison with other literary magazines. There may be an element of Catch 22 here, to the extent that we could only do so if we had a much larger membership; we would have a much larger membership if we did so. Unless someone feels inclined to present us with a gift of about £10,000, to finance such for one year, we will have to continue with our modest version. Perhaps such a view was misplaced in any event. We are not trying to compete as a literary magazine, but rather as a member's magazine that provides a means of communication to those employed by the Crown and dispersed throughout the British Isles.

I might add that, all the committee members contribute their efforts without payment and all other members are asked for a modest annual contribution. I hope the committee will remain willing to do so and other members continue to provide the financial support to ensure our continued existence.

Finally, as long as I continue as Editor, I remain willing to consider any changes to the content and format of Author that cost permits.

The Society of Civil & Public Servants

Competition Results

The W F & F G Froud Memorial Competition 2002

The Results

Number of entries 18. The results are as follows:—

1st Prize:— *Life in the Intergalactic Services* Louise Lloyd, Nottingham

2nd Prize:— *Fight Night* P W Stock, Swanage, Dorset

3rd Prize:— *Promotion* Terry Rickson, Ashford, Middlesex

R C Jeffreys

Competition Secretary

Vincent Brennan Competition

There were only 12 entries to this competition, which struck me as rather sad. I know there are not many chances of having a travel article accepted – although *The Lady* seems to publish them very frequently. But with so many of us taking our holidays abroad, there should be an urge to let others know of our experiences, and if one has an eye for the ridiculous or a mind which comes up with novel similes, even a few minutes in an airport lounge can provide rich material for a travel article. So I felt sad that so few of our members took the opportunity to enter this competition. I have the feeling that the majority prefer to write fiction, believing that only fiction (with poetry), is creative and imaginative. They should bear in mind that some of our greatest writers have produced travel books – R L Stevenson, Laurence Sterne, even Dr Johnson.

I found the quality of the majority of the entries was excellent. However, some showed that their authors had not read their work through after taking it from the typewriter, so there was an occasional word omitted or a spelling mistake. But these were few and far between and I have ignored them. The most serious criticism I have to make is that most of them read like a travel agent's hand-out. Even when a writer tried to persuade me otherwise by inserting a phrase such as 'We then went' or 'I found the accommodation perfectly adequate', I could not rid myself of that impression. Most entries failed to convince me that the traveller had travelled. I am quite sure they had, of course, but they could almost have compiled their articles from brochures.

After much thought I have decided to name the winners as:–

1. *With a Dzong in my Heart* by Nimrod
2. *Calypso's Isle* by Penelope Smith
3. *Swiss Break* by Bon Viveur

Alan S Watts

Judge

§ § § § §

Announcing the Short Story Book Prize Competition

Some 40 years ago Heron Books published a series of famous authors in leatherette hard binding, embossed with gold-leaf decoration and titles. You will often see these books displayed on bookshelves in films, TV programmes, or on the West-End stage.

As Lewis Wright was to have been our only short story competition this year, we are adding an additional competition that gives a set of these Heron Books as first prize and other books or book tokens will be offered to winners of second and third prizes.

Maximum 2,500 words, double or single-spaced, printed on both sides if you wish.

Quote only a pen name and your address, so the identity of the writer will be unknown when judging and do not ask for your entry to be returned.

Enclose £3 per entry payable to SCPSW.

The subject - anything you like, but your story must begin with the words, "If only I had known..."

Send your entries to the Editor not later than 30th September 2003.

Pen names of winners will be recorded in the Winter edition of Author. Their real names and winning stories will be published in a subsequent issue after owner's of the pen names have identified themselves.

The winner will be invited to choose either,

32 volume set of Russian Classics by Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, etc., or

21 volume set of the complete works of Joseph Conrad.

Announcing the W F & F G Froud Memorial Competition 2003

A War Poem of up to 36 lines

Competition for Members

The prizes will be £100, £30 and £20 for first, second and third place.

The poem can be about any aspect of war:–

First World War, Second World War, War in Iraq, impending war or the wars in recent times, such as the Falklands War and the problems in Afghanistan.

The poem can have an anti war theme also.

Descriptive, emotive or thought-provoking entries in the war poetry genre are sought.

Closing date 31st October 2003.

Usual competition rules apply, entries bearing pen name and own details separately with £2 each entry to Competition Secretary, R C Jeffreys, 186 Lewis Flats, Lisgar Terrace, London W14 8SQ

Neither Moon Nor Candlelight

Selected Poems of Humbert Wolfe

Published by The Auriol Press, £7.99, obtainable from 5 Auriol Road, London, W14 0SP

Review by Alan S Watts

I never had the good fortune to meet Humbert Wolfe, although I served my time as a Civil Servant in the same department – the Ministry of Labour. But our President, Mr Neilson Gattey, whom I have consulted (and who must be regarded as joint author of this review), while not having any close dealings with Mr Wolfe, saw him once or twice and attended one of his lectures. He tells me that he was a strikingly good-looking man and a most eloquent lecturer. Indeed, Mr Gattey goes so far as to say that he has never heard anyone who could compare with him as a speaker.

This is not the first article I have written about Humbert Wolfe. Before my retirement I contributed a piece to the Department's magazine *Minlabour* in which I deplored the fact that he was not as well-known and appreciated as he deserved to be. My short essay could do little to redress the wrong, but now with this selection placed before a wider public in a very attractive format and at a surprisingly low price, I sincerely hope that many more people will come to take an interest in the work of a leader amongst modern Civil Servant poets.

Wolfe died suddenly in 1940, so most of his poems were written in the shadow of the forthcoming war.

Listen! the wind is rising,
and the air is wild with leaves,
we have had our summer evenings:
now for October eves!

Come! let us draw the curtains,
and talk of other things,
and presently all will be quiet —
love, youth, and the sound of wings.

Often when I look out of my window I am reminded of one of Wolfe's shorter pieces:

Like a small grey
coffee-pot
sits the squirrel ...

Unfortunately I have insufficient space for all the poems I would like to quote. I must confine myself to one more, an example of his sardonic humour.

"Do you know Blackford? Nature keeps the tally
of those who found a smooth embosomed valley,
waiting for dawn among her hills, and splendid
with the shadow of her trees when day was ended,
who found this valley, and, being business-men,
swore that these things should not occur again.
They therefore added up a maze of brick
by some unspeakable arithmetic,
quietly boasting, as they clinched the sum,
God makes the country, but we make the slum ...

I hope I have interested you in the work of this intriguing man, and that you will follow up your nascent interest by purchasing a copy of this lovely little book.

§ § § § §

Poetry Pages

Edited by Joyce Thornton

Bang!

Andrew Millican

It began with a bang so they reckon.
An enormous flash, white incandescence
melding matter in a microsecond
that wasn't there before. How can that be?
It's over my head, beyond the five sense limits of my mental capacity.
If there was nothing there before the Big Bang
then who or what made the Big Bang go bang?

Perhaps that's why it's hard to comprehend.
It makes my brain hurt that I just can't grasp
the simple concept of a sound sending
out the seed waves of our own existence.
In fact, I think it's pretty poor to ask
the public to suspend their common sense
in favour of some boffin led belief
as far out as fairies, pillows and teeth.

I'm easy either way, I see both sides.
The Origin Of Species and Darwin,
it's a natural open policy to hide
nothing of evolutionary truth.
Or religion, it's a strange mix of love, sin
fear and guilt. And how repentance can smooth
it all out, set you back on a straight course
to heaven or, God forbid, something worse.

Little Tich

Albert Thornton

Tall scholars were often blinded
by his theorems and bald pate
reflecting sunshine shining through
the Summer classroom window.
Always arrived one minute
after lesson bell.
Always precise as his 3. 4. 5.
Always too sober
a stranger to the belly laugh.
Always had to leave chalk marks
strip-teasing on the blackboard.
Left as grimly as he came.
Cricket was OK but he froze solid
Winter rugby afternoons.

News Item

John Abrahams

Tears are whipped from my face
As I rage at a map
Of our equally antique countries and piratical routes.
I blush at my youthful impressions of flame
As I infer the real fires of war.
Reconciling fire and water seems a strange ambition
While our enemies make encyclopaedic plans
For our destruction.
I am seduced by fire, I burn in my love,
In my hate. With fire comes ice.
Water floods from on high,
Pours down upon the world,
Then, jungles breathe again
And beacons are extinguished.

Yet the planets still conspire to dance,
And the sun stays blind with its heavy knowledge.

Not Cricket

Neil Glover

The lethal process of cricket
Begins when you close your eyes.

I was five
The day my father saved my life
On a road, having
A sports ground on one side
From which came the sound of leather
Tortured by willow,
The road was lined here and there
By gappy starved bushes.
I had my eyes closed because

At that moment I did not want to see.

The batsman's swing was triumphant
Sending the ball flying for refuge
To the boundary.
My father caught it
Three inches from my face.

They went on to play the game,
As they go to play the game for England.
It begins when you close your eyes.

§ § § § §

Poetry Workshop

Mike Boland

Chairman: Liz Rowlands, 19 Arkley Court, Maidenhead, SL6 2YR
Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, TW15 3QA
Secretary: Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow Weald, HA3 6JU

PW 2003

This is the very last call for members wishing to take part in the Poetry Workshop Weekend at Manor House, University of Birmingham on 1-3 August 2003.

Cost of the Weekend is £121, which includes full board, en-suite room and conference facilities. Booking Forms were sent out with the Winter Newsletter, but if anyone would like to join us and either hasn't received or has lost their form, write to me at the address above.

Waves 2003

Copies of this year's edition of Waves, the Poetry Workshop's annual collection of members' work, are now available from **Bill Douglas** at 47 Walkerston Avenue, Largs, Ayrshire, KA30 8EP

Bill Barnes Competition 2003

The closing date for the 2003 Bill Barnes Competition, a poetry competition open exclusively to members of the Poetry Workshop, is 30 September 2003. Details and rules of the competition appeared in the Spring Newsletter.

Subscriptions

If you haven't renewed your subscription to the Poetry Workshop, the Spring Newsletter will be the last one you will receive this year. To rejoin, contact **Terry Rickson** at the above address. Membership of the Poetry Workshop is open to all members of the Society of Civil and Public Service Writers at an annual subscription rate of £3.

Membership of the Poetry Workshop provides:

- Three lively Newsletters a year, plus a fourth Competition Special edition.
- The chance to submit poems for publication in Waves
- Access to the popular postal folio scheme
- Eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition
- Eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at the University of Birmingham

Cheques for membership should be made payable to: Society of Civil & Public Service Writers Poetry Workshop Account, and sent to Terry Rickson at the address given above.

Dates to Remember

1-3 August 2003	Poetry Workshop Weekend
30 August 2003	Autumn Newsletter
30 September 2003	Closing Date, Bill Barnes Competition
30 November 2003	Winter Newsletter

Gemini

Arthur E Bromley

Up to the age of twenty-one I suffered acute shyness and blushing, which, to a young man having to suffer the jeers, sneers and laughter from others, was soul destroying.

I was 17 years of age when World War 2 started, and two years later my engineering apprenticeship was interrupted when I was called-up for the Army.

After the initial "square-bashing", I was posted to the Armourers Training School at Melton Mowbray, to start a twelve month concentrated course on the inspection, repair and zeroing of every small arm in the British Army.

On completing and passing-out of this course, I was posted to the newly formed Mountain Warfare Training Centre, located in the centre of the Cairngorm Mountains, in the Scottish Highlands. I was to be the resident armourer, and was awarded the rank of Sergeant to go with it.

As I arrived on my first day, I was informed that the C.O. wished to see me. I walked into his office, came to attention, and saluted. He looked up at me from his desk, and I could see he obviously did *not* like what he saw.

"Bit young, aren't you?" he growled in a guttural voice.

I blushed from head to toe, what a disastrous start.

The first two weeks were spent in my accepting the various small arms the War Office were sending me, among which was a recently invented anti-tank gun, called the P.I.A.T. (for short), which at that time was still on the secret list.

About a week later the C.O. called into my workshop and asked me if I had "swotted-up" on the new gun – I said I had.

"Good," he said, "because tomorrow you are to give a lecture on that gun to 200 students in the lecture hall."

I nearly fainted, me to give a lecture, me who'd not even look at person without blushing.

I had been informed that the job could entail advising or lecturing on small arms, but, of course *that* only happened to other people, never to me. But it just had.

I never slept that night, and on the following day I made my way reluctantly to the lecture hall and onto the stage. I was introduced as the Sergeant Armourer and everyone sat back awaiting the start of my lecture.

I stood up, and in a faltering inaudible voice, I started to talk, all the time my gaze was on the ground just ahead of me.

After about ten minutes of this agony, I could see I was getting nowhere with the students, they just sat there, staring at me, notebooks and pencils at the ready.

It was at that precise moment that the miracle happened – suddenly I felt a surge of anger passing through my body, I could hear my voice getting louder and clearer. I was now staring directly at the students as I belted out the particulars of the new gun.

After about an hour, when I had finished, I knew I had done well, every notebook was filled with notes, and as I walked back to my workshop that day, my 5ft 6ins had grown to 7ft 6ins.

In my workshop I picked up my shaving mirror and I looked at my face, suddenly getting the urge to shout "Blush you swine, go on, blush". My face did blush, but not as much as I thought it might.

The next day, I again looked in my mirror, "Blush you swine". This time I blushed even less than the day before, and every day for the next three weeks, I shouted at my face.

At the end of that period my face refused to blush, I had cracked it, and I never again blushed from that day to this.

I went on to give many more lectures in that lecture hall, and when the training centre had fulfilled its mission, it closed down and I was posted to Nigeria, West Africa, where I was put in charge of the Armourers Training School in Lagos.

In 1946 I was demobbed, to return to my civvy job as an engineer.

After a few years I decided I wanted to be my own boss, so I started my studies to become an Osteopath and Acupuncturist, studying in the evenings and attending College at weekends.

After a few years I qualified, and I opened a practice of my own, my wife taking on the dual role of Practice Manager and Receptionist.

A few months into the practice I got a phone call one day from a lady who said she was the secretary of the local Townswomen's Guild, and that her speaker for that week had taken ill, and could I step in at short notice and give a talk on my work as an Osteopath. I accepted and had a pleasant evening.

A few weeks later, I started getting letters and phone calls from various organisations, guilds, meetings etc., asking me to give my talk. I even gave half a dozen talks to the students at Liverpool University. A little while later, I was informed that my name had been added to the list of official speakers for the North West of England.

When I became 65 I retired, leaving my practice home to live in my present house in quiet, sedate, leafy mid Wirral.

One day having nothing to do, I sat down and decided to work out how many talks and lectures I had done in my lifetime, and was surprised when I got to the figure of 1,740.

The most amazing thing about all this was, that the person giving these talks and lectures – *me* – at one time could not even look at another person without going the colour of the proverbial beetroot.

I often ponder as to what really happened on that day of the miracle, but I *do* have a theory – as follows:–

As I stood on that stage agonising, me being a *Gemini*, I believe that my other half, my twin, the aggressive one, suddenly woke-up and *took over*, so changing my life forever.

True or Myth, who knows?



The Mad Musicians

Arthur E Bromley

It is generally accepted that all semi-pro musicians are mad, and having been in Dance Band and Orchestra Pit Band for almost 40 years who am I to argue.

The main idiosyncrasy of the breed is the fact that, whenever the band arrives at any ballroom or venue, the piano is never in the correct position and always has to be moved, even if only for a couple of inches.

About 30 years ago, my band, "The Ambassadors" were booked to do six gigs on the *Royal Iris*, a cruise boat, which at that time was sailing up and down the River Mersey doing evening cruises. We were to play for dancing.

On the first evening we went on board, and onto the bandstand, and, as usual the piano had to be moved, so two of us got up to push it, but found it would not budge, and when we looked down we found it had been bolted to the floor.

We were very surprised at this, we had never seen anything like it before, in all the hundreds of dance-halls we had played in.

The first three evenings went "according to plan", but on the fourth one, we found the river to be very choppy, and getting worse.

It was in the middle of *Margie* as the boat was making its turn at the Bar, to come back up river when an extra large wave hit it, tipping it up on one side, and immediately the whole band, players, chairs and instruments started to slide toward one end of the band-stand and we all ended up on top of one another amid loud protests, arms and legs flying everywhere. The drum-kit particularly making itself felt.

As we were picking ourselves up we noted that the only thing that had been left on the stand was the piano, so we realised why it had been bolted to the floor, a wayward baby-grand could have killed any one of us.

Just then we heard a groan from Alf, our pianist:

"Bloody 'ell, my zip's gone!!"

We all looked around, and sure enough there was Alf's blue and white "Y" fronts peeping out, we all burst out laughing.

"Shut up you idiots," hissed Alf. "What am I going to do now?"

That sobered us up, the dance had to go on.

I got an idea.

"Listen Alf, shuffle your way back to the piano with your back to the dancers, and sit on the piano-stool and stay there, don't move."

Alf did as I asked, and even when we all made our way to the bar at the interval, poor Alf remained a prisoner to his piano-stool, but we did bring him a bottle of beer back.

Fortunately he had a long raincoat with him, or goodness knows how he would have got home.

The dance still turned out to be a success, and many of the dancers came over to us at the end of the evening to tell us so, except that some of them said that the best part of the evening was when the band did its "sideways shuffle".

Whenever I hear *Margie* my mind flips back to the *Iris*, the Mersey and the whole band doing the "side shuffle".



Photo by Stuart Cameron

On Visiting the Hairdresser

Alan S Watts

"Surely," I thought to myself, as the hairdresser enfolded me in his blue-striped shroud, "I can find material here for an article, and even mentally compose most of it as I am undergoing the snip-snip of the hairdresser's scissors. There should never be the need to abdicate writing merely because the physical act of writing is impossible."

I don't like that modern title 'hairdresser': the old word 'barber' is much more to my taste. Of course, it can be argued that today's hairdressers no longer offer to shave their gentlemen customers, so they are no longer 'bearders' as the old title implies. (Furthermore, so many establishments announce themselves nowadays to be 'uni-sex', which is a very silly description when they mean they are catering for members of both sexes, not just for one.)

However, I am against discarding words merely because their present meaning has strayed from their original one. If that practice were strictly followed half the words in the dictionary would have to be deleted, especially job titles such as curate, auditor, solicitor, etc.

Returning to the subject of barbers, one could write a scholarly piece about barbers in literature. I am sure there must have been a barber in one of our early dramas called *Snip*. I can't believe that Jonson, Congreve or one of the Restoration men failed to introduce him, but I have yet to discover a barber in all Shakespeare's diversity of characters. Of course, as barbers in bygone days were also chirurgeons (surgeons) and advertised the fact with their badly-bandaged bloodstained poles, it is possible that some of Shakespeare's medical men plied the more humble and, we hope, less sanguinary trade also.

Barbers' shops were centres of gossip in the old days. Strange, but there was no conversation all the time I was having my hair cut. Customers and staff never exchanged a word. However, there was a copy of the day's newspaper on the bench and this reminded me of the time when news would be read aloud for the benefit of all present, especially for the illiterate. It was at the barber's one learned how Marlborough's campaigns were going and what taxes Sir Robert Walpole had imposed.

This club-like atmosphere of the old barbers' establishments is reflected in several literary works. It will be recalled how Roderick Random stepped into a barber's shop at Newcastle-on-Tyne where the young man who lathered his face, hearing his accent, asked: "Sir, I presume you are a Scotchman. Pray – what part of Scotland?" Thus, Roderick met again his old friend, Strap, who was so amazed at the encounter that he lathered not only Roderick's chin and upper lip, but his entire face. One wonders whether Smollett took the name 'Strap' from the strap on which barbers were so expert at 'stropping' their razors.

Dickens, too, introduced a barber into his novels. Poll Sweedlepipe in 'Martin Chuzzlewit' is not only a barber, but a bird-fancier – 'a little man, who with a clammy cold right hand, from which even rabbits and birds could not remove the smell of shaving-soap.' This is a reminder of the various other occupations which went with hairdressing – surgery to begin with, then peruke-making, and no doubt perfumery. One recalls the stories of bear's grease, with which dashing young gentlemen used to smooth down their hair in the days before Brylcreme. Is it really true that barbers kept bears in their cellars for this purpose? Or is that just a legend? Or a joke?

As I submitted to my haircut the notion of legends brought to mind that horrific story of Sweeny Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street. As I thought of him and saw my barber selecting a fresh pair of scissors, my chair creaked ominously. I had a closer look at my man who seemed innocence personified. Yet Mr Todd's customers must have regarded their barber as a mild innocuous man or they would never have ventured inside his shop. Just suppose that my coiffeur was cast in the same mould? The pie-shop was only half a block away, and doubtless there could be communication through the cellarage of the two premises. And – come to think of it – I had never seen any legs of mutton or sides of beef being carried into that pie-shop, nor had I ever checked how many people entering the shop had actually come out of it again.

"Would you like your eyebrows trimmed, sir?"

"No, thank-you," I replied, glad to get out of that creaking chair.

Coming home, I thought I would pen a little piece for *The Author* entitled perhaps

'On Visiting the Hairdresser.'

Sailing in Circles

Sinbad

Neither my last bottle of Pommard, nor any words of sympathy could ease my twin sister's misery; her agony on hearing her husband cite her inability to bear children during the divorce proceedings earlier that day.

'Who needs them?' I commented 'They may have turned out like him.'

My crass humour did nothing to ease her pain. I too was divorced last year, after my wife decided that she preferred horses and horsemen to me, so I should have known better. Such emotional problems are deeply disturbing, yet I had to do something to help my sister and perhaps ease the residual trauma of my own marital failure.

I proposed sailing to France to buy my favourite claret. At last came a semblance of her normal smile, a shine to her hazel eyes as we became engrossed in preparations.

We were at our Poole Harbour moorings before noon, yet it was after four by the time we'd stowed our gear and set sail in our 44-foot sloop inherited from Granddad. He was always going on about the war. Given the chance he'd drone on for hours, though my twin sister and I shouldn't complain as we consequently both got A grades in history.

Our boat was clinker-built of a Swedish design common before World War 2 and clearly well made as she was still seaworthy. Granddad said she once owned to a wealthy German who was swept overboard during a storm. Granddad was Coxswain of the Portland lifeboat and it was he who dragged the drowning German from the sea.

Granddad revived the German with dry blankets and rum and after he recovered the man was so grateful that he gave the RNLI £500 and took the crew and their wives for a slap-up dinner, but that wasn't the end of it. Next day when his boat was found adrift off Chesil Beach and towed to Weymouth, he paid the salvage fee and gave Granddad the boat. Granddad

refused, told him it was too much just for doing his duty, but the German insisted.

Granddad fell out with his old Army mates for saying, not all Germans were bad. One of them was certainly generous, yet Granddad seemed to mean more than that. It had something to do with "*Viel Gluck*" as the boat was still called, meaning Good Luck in German. Big in stature, big in heart, Granddad was a tolerant man who found good in everyone. He found excuses for those who cheated him, not dealing with them again his sole retribution. He always found something to smile about, had an ear for anyone's complaints, coins for any scrounger who asked. Grandma called him a saint, but we just loved him because he was our Granddad and now we loved his boat.

The tide and unpredictable early summer winds blew us so fast and far eastward that Ostend became the most convenient port. We wanted to visit friends in Hythe on our way home from France, so we didn't mind. With wind force six gusting eight we made good time. We were outside the main Ostend shops as they opened, yet might never have cleared Customs but for my sister.

Sarcasm can get the better of me when I face bureaucrats. The official asked our names, even as he read them in our passports. 'Mickey and Minney Mouse' was on the tip of my tongue, but Chris knew me well, got in first.

'Christine Sheldrake and this is my brother Robert'.

'M'sieur, M'dam Sheldrake!' Came the shout from the quayside some time later. Our booty had arrived and now we had to lower it by rope onto our deck 20 feet below.

'Not so quickly, I've only one pair of hands,' squealed Chris in that maiden in peril tone guaranteed to bring heroes rushing to their aid. It never fails, language is immaterial, that plaintive cry is international.

The deck became a forest of muscular young men and everything was stowed as I slowly searched our French phrase book for, 'Can I help?'

Naturally we finished a Cognac opened to celebrate the time saved. Naturally a second bottle magically appeared and met the same fate, so it was dark when we set out for home. Meandering slowly from the harbour under the steady pull of our little engine and less than steady hand on the tiller, we were soon beyond the dangerous Ferry routes, reverted to sail and the fresh sea air cleared our minds.

The billowing foresail made it hard to see night-time danger, though most hazards carry navigation lights.

'Anything your side Chris?' I asked.

'Something big a few miles to port, but heading west so we're fine as far as I can see. What about yours?'

'Some lights in the distance. I'll keep my eyes on them.'

So it continued throughout the early hours, the wind and tide so strong we were held to the French coast like iron to a magnet. Suddenly the wind died, a wet sea-mist settled over us like a grey blanket and we found ourselves becalmed close to Dunkirk.

'How much sea room do you think we've got?' Asked Chris, her normally bright red hair looking dowdy in the mist. She meant, how far were we from shore; from rocks and coastline hazards of far more likely threat than those at sea?

'I've checked the log regularly, but with the wind veering so much I'm not certain. We're probably under a mile from shore.'

'Were you thinking of using the engine?'

'There's only fuel for a couple of hours, which won't take us far. Better save it for a while I think and use it if we really have to, don't you?'

'I agree, but we'd better keep our eyes peeled. The tide's got us and we seem to be drifting shoreward.'

Mesmerised we stared long into the mist, waves gently lapping against our hull the only sound, the mist eroding our senses with its cold fingers, the Cognac's warmth long gone. Suddenly we heard voices from the sea.

Men's voices, shouting all around, splashing angrily and demanding to be hauled aboard in the name of mercy and other less savoury causes.

Like phantoms from the mist, came a myriad small boats and big ships with rafts and tenders running towards the beach now visible to port. Smoke, flames, fountains of erupting sand and hundreds of men assembled in regimented discipline. The only sound to reach us was the desperate call of men clinging to an upturned whaler close beside our boat, only their heads above water.

We glanced at each other, then without a word began to help them aboard.

'Bless 'e me dears. Now we be asking a favour snow you? Do you kind folk be fetching' us to Blighty in your fine yacht?'

As if the words were magical we suddenly had an offshore wind enough to steer on a northerly tack. The wind stiffened, sails filled yet the sea remained strangely calm. All the men were soldiers from the 2nd Dorsetshire Regiment, the aphoristic words 'Who's Afeared' visible on their cap badges.

They chatted among themselves, almost as if we weren't there, threw us a smile now and then with 'Bless 'e me dears.' Suddenly we were inside Dover Harbour and the men disappearing up rope nets on the side of a lighter that seemed to come from nowhere.

More blessings echoed around us, then an eerie silence. They and the barge were gone and we found ourselves beyond the harbour wall, soon passing Folkestone light and heading towards Hythe.

'Someone left their beret behind,' said Chris, in a strangely subdued tone. Look at the name inside it.'

The name tag was faded, yet clear enough for us to know we were not mistaken. It read, Corporal David G Sheldrake.

That was Granddad's name. Granddad who'd served in the Dorsetshire Regiment and was rescued from Dunkirk by a sailing boat.

Sudden waves slapped hard against the hull, the wind grew stronger and from amongst its whistling came the clearly whispered words,

'*Viel gluck meinen lieben.*'

We looked at each other but said nothing.

What could we say?

Bridging the Gap

Aaron Fuller

I was miserable, because although it was a half-day off to lead into the Easter break, as always, I had nothing special planned for the work-free afternoon, or the long weekend that followed it. I began locking away my work; it wasn't either confidential or important, I just didn't want anyone who might be involved in writing my appraisal seeing it.

'Doing anything with the rest of the day, Kate?' I asked. It was mainly rhetorical; I knew she *would* have plans, and that they would probably make me sick. Kate only needs half an hour to organise a four-course dinner party for herself and thirty of her and her husband's closest friends.

'Why, are you looking for a lift anywhere?' *Where did that come from?*

'No, just asking.'

'Because I could take you into Oxford, if you wanted. We could go shopping. *Go on*, it would be fun. How much time do you need to get ready?'

'Pardon?' I could hear the sound of an arm – mine – being twisted, and didn't like it.

'You can't go in a *collar and tie*, for goodness' sake. Why don't you go home, get your jeans on, and I'll pick you up on the way past?' Recognising that I was going shopping whether I wanted to or not, I said 'Sod it, let's live dangerously. I'll see you at one.' As I put on my jacket, Kate said, much louder than was necessary, 'Actually, one's a bit soon – I'll pick you up at a quarter past.' Everyone else in the office who had been chattering stopped doing so, and looked at either me or Kate, presumably wondering what story they had missed the first part of. Seeing lots of

intrigued faces, I said 'It's not like it sounds!' but even I thought it sounded weak.

'Hey, you're not going to be ready in time if you keep chatting! And after my giving you extra time, too!' shouted Kate from the other end of the open-plan, and embarrassingly full, office. 'Go *on*, you'll never make it at this rate!' she said. I sighed.

Kate was what she probably would have called 'fashionably late', but eventually she drove up an hour later, smiling sheepishly from behind the wheel of her Citroen AX, having presumably decided to go lowbrow and leave the BMW at home.

'I was beginning to worry,' I said after getting in.

'*Sorry*. After I left you I popped home to change, and the HR Director called round.' I'll say this for her name-dropping; it's slick. 'Now, what are you buying today?'

'I need more clothes.' As I said this I looked down and discovered yet another mark on my trouser legs from a cycling run during extremely grotty weather.

'Where do you normally use?'

'People tend to buy for me. I have two fashion seasons; they start the week before Christmas, and the week before my birthday. But when I *do* get anything myself, it's normally from BHS.'

'Are you serious?' she glanced sideways, and held my eye for a moment. 'You *are*. Dear *God*. Get a *life*!'

'They're cheap.'

'You're *really* missing the point. I think it's time you left BHS behind. Time to move on. You want to aim for making a statement about yourself with your clothes.'

'I *am* making a statement.'

'I meant a *positive* statement.'

'What would you recommend?'

'I tend to use Gap a lot. For example, this top came from there. So did these trousers. In fact, even my knickers came from Gap.'

'That last part was too much information, Kate.'

'Sorry. The point is, their stuff has character. And whatever you do, don't buy stuff 'for best'. It's a waste. I remember I bought some trousers for best once, and I ended up hardly wearing them.' She said all this without any apparent irony. This woman amazed me. The last time I even heard the phrase 'for best' was in a novel set in 1946.

As we walked towards the town centre, every other shop we passed seemed to have turned into the kind of budget clothes outlet that Kate probably wouldn't let me go into anymore. It was a struggle, but I remained strong.

'What are you doing for lunch?' she asked.

'Hadn't given it a lot of thought, to be honest.' I said. The apprehension of spending so much time clothes shopping was suppressing my appetite.

'Have you ever been to Pret a Manger?'

'No. Is it any good?'

'Not the cheapest in the world, but excellent.'

'That sounds novel.' Kate obviously hasn't seen *Yes Minister*, so the next thing I knew I was in a place where the staff all wore chefs outfits, jazz was playing in the background, and people were being served sandwiches and muffins on silver platters.

'What sort of sandwiches do you like?' she asked.

'I suppose cheese and pickle is out of the question?'

'Well, you've got all sorts of things – have a look around before you choose.' She darted around the shop, plucking packets off shelves, assembling a three-course lunch without apparently even reading the labels, like an experienced soldier reassembling a rifle while blindfolded.

Although I eventually found some cheese and pickle, it was actually *called* 'Shavings of organic low-fat rennet smothered in thousand-island garnish, delicately wrapped in a hand-picked selection of vinaigrette salad vegetables.'

We found ourselves stools. I *hate* stools – they're so undignified. These ones were so high that, as I climbed into mine, a bank of low cloud obscured the floor. Kate was having the same sandwich as me, but instead of coffee, she had a small bottle of chilled, blood-coloured gloop masquerading as 'fruit juice'. I nibbled slowly; it would probably make me look more appreciative, and besides, I wanted to get my money's worth.

'What do you think?' asked Kate. Predictably, she was at home on a stool.

'Mmmm,' I said.

'Good.' She looked at me, beaming like a young mother seeing her child coping well with his first day at school. 'Right; I need a list. Otherwise, I'll forget stuff.' She flipped open a notebook. I could see that it was full of those strange scribbles that made her subordinates' lives a nightmare when they were trying to work from her notes.

'First, I've got to go to Gap. And I need to buy my godson an outfit; Baby Gap for that one ...' Did she buy her contraception in 'Gap Pill'?

'... and I need to get my husband a book of some sort for his birthday, but it'll probably just be the latest Tom Clancy or something – to be honest, he's not much of a reader.' Her tone invited a protest that this didn't make him a bad person.

'It *was* your place that I saw that copy of *Utopia* on the shelf, wasn't it?'

'That's right. Well, I suppose he does have the Masters' Degree. Anyway, time to go. I'll see you later. Remember, make a statement!' I climbed down from my stool, she slid gracefully from hers.

I tried, I really did. I went into Gap not once, but twice, but the primary colours and confident staff wearing headsets for no apparent reason made it all too scary. I was tempted to buy a few pairs of socks to prove that I'd made an effort, but I couldn't find the socks. I could find all sorts of

heavily-branded baseball caps, boxer shorts, jogging bottoms, fleece jackets, scarves, belts and gloves, but no socks, possibly because no-one would see the logo while you were wearing them.

'What did you buy, then?' asked Kate within two seconds of arriving, while trying to peek into my 'House of Fraser' bag. (Their pastel colours and reticent staff had been much less frightening than Gap.) I showed her the beige jumper and 'olive' trousers that I would have described as green, that together had cost approximately my annual clothing budget.

'Very focused,' Kate said, pursing her lips. She sounded disappointed. 'So what did you think of Gap?'

'God, it was terrifying – there were reds, and greens, and purples, and *oranges*.'

'Too much, too soon, perhaps. But at least now you know.'

On the way home Kate continued my socialisation process as we shopped in the local Waitrose. 'Do you like good bread?' she suddenly asked. I assumed she meant baguettes.

'When I can make the effort to buy it.'

'Have you tried *this* before?' she pointed to the largest sesame-seed hamburger roll in history, labelled 'Focaccia'. 'It's great for breakfast, with honey spread over it,' she explained. I must have looked unconvinced, because she immediately saw another, and pointed to that. 'How about this one – it's made with Olive Oil.' The 'Daktalya' looked like a garlic loaf from Pizza Hut before they had sliced it into portions.

'Decisions, decisions,' I said. Deciding I couldn't decide, I grabbed both.

'Will they both keep?' asked Kate.

'Let's live life on the edge.'

'Good man. Hang on, let me get one of these...!' she reached high for an Easter Egg, and placed it in the trolley with more care than I've seen some women handle their children.

'Isn't your Godson a bit too young for those?' I asked. She smiled, but didn't say anything.

Half an hour later we were in my kitchen drinking coffee. While Kate was taking off her coat, I had rushed into the kitchen, swept up and hid all the unopened junk mail, invitations to transform my life by taking on additional debt, and the other stuff that kitchen tables always seem to collect. We both knew it had all just been moved, but unless we could actually *see* the crap, we could both pretend that it was *normal* for a twenty-five year old bachelor's kitchen to be tidy.

'I haven't got any real coffee, I'm afraid.'

'Quite all right.'

'But I *do* have Maxwell House instant cappuccino sachets.' I was aiming for an ironic tone, but it came out sounding totally socially clueless. To her credit, Kate scarcely paused.

'Actually, have you got any tea?' she asked. I gingerly took my box of tea bags out of the cupboard; I had last made some six months ago. 'Aha, best before Jan 04,' I said. She smiled again.

Kate left half an hour later. As she got up to leave, she pulled the egg out of her bag. 'This is for you,' she said.

I felt my cheeks go red. 'You're kidding! The only egg I've got this year, too.'

'Thought it might be, actually. Make sure you splash out a bit, and eat it all at once, though – otherwise it's not the same!'

The following day I discovered that some things were still as when I was six; I *still* couldn't break an Easter egg into two symmetrical halves with a single knock. What I *could*, and *did* do – after eating *all* the egg fragments – was go back into Oxford, move on from BHS olive and beige, and stuff my bike panniers with red, green, purple and orange clothes, bought from people wearing headsets and baseball caps.



Down the Drain

Felicity Verity

"Delores! Delores", Megan Morgan screamed again, then striding across the road, grasped her young daughter's pigtails and dragged the whimpering girl home.

"Why don't you answer when you're called?"

Delores made no reply, knowing nothing would calm her mother's anger once aroused. How could she admit that she found her foreign name so embarrassing that she pretended Delores was someone else?

Why, oh why was she given such a name? Megan never explained, but Delores suffered for it. School was a nightmare. At first she said her name was Dilys, but they soon exposed the lie, so she learnt the merit of silence, to volunteer no answers to teacher's questions and always to agree with bigger girls. She grew into an inoffensive woman, lowering her eyes as anyone approached and thus ignored by all, until the day she was knocked to the ground by the ever drunken Abraham Davies.

"Why don't you look where you're going to?" He bellowed. This was an unlikely beginning of a romance that lasted until her death.

Abe was a fireman at the coal mine and led the Rescue Party during the all too frequent collapses of the mine tunnels, until a secondary fall led to the amputation of Abe's right leg.

His Union collected £25 from the owners and that only because he had worked for them for 19 years without a day off. Even then the Unions had to threaten dire consequences if it was any less. They looked pleased with themselves when they brought Abe the money and he, picturing the pints of ale it would buy, was pretty pleased himself.

Delores was not pleased. Deeply buried resentment of childhood suffering had long sought an outlet. Came the hour, came the woman.

Delores was the only girl of six children and the youngest by twelve. None of her brothers married. All died in middle age, amidst malicious rumours of peculiar behaviour and appetites. Yet to find her courage, Delores left these whispers unchallenged, her resentment unmitigated.

However, five modest inheritances now provided the financial means to challenge the mine owners. Having rejected her demand for further compensation for her husband, they discovered she had money to contest the issue in Court and clear determination to pursue it to the bitter end.

If years of frustration fuelled a desire for battle, this was even now to be thwarted. The owners settled out of Court, agreeing a ninety nine year lease on three terraced miner's cottages at peppercorn rent. Thus was Davies's General Store born, the wife of its one legged owner had dared express a contrary view and never again cast down her eyes.

Abe spent much of the Store income at the Miner's Club buying ale for his "old butties". Even his wife's new confidence could not stop him, but gradually a change came over him. The business was so profitable, even such prodigal behaviour left money in his pocket. Unnoticed at first, it accumulated and he began putting it aside.

Having an innate distrust of Banks, he began converting the profits into golden sovereigns, but the craving for more began to dominate his life so much that he stopped drinking and raised his prices.

For a while his erstwhile "butties" continued to buy from him and bore his new stinginess, but gradually all abandoned him, save only those too idle or too rushed to walk half a mile to the main shops. Then he began to stay open late and sell items other shops would not, which brought back a few despite his adamant refusal to reduce prices.

Clearly accumulating gold gave him pleasure, but though poor Delores received no apparent benefit from this wealth she remained true to Abe until her dying day and delivered him a son named Caleb, so the Dynasty might continue.

Caleb Davies was one of those totally predictable people that make utterly boring companions and in consequence have no friends.

His predictability was the product of an orderly life and the conviction that, once a satisfactory way was found to do something there was no purpose in seeking any alternative. Anyone who asked if his way was ever satisfactory in

the first place, was met by an angry glare of incomprehension and rarely questioned him again.

Not clever nor stupid, his intransigent behaviour was like an actor, not understanding yet faithfully following lines of script. Nothing and no one influenced his consistent and rather eccentric behaviour. Abe appeared indifferent and Delores found no fault in him, so his odd youthful behaviour survived into manhood.

If there was moisture on the window when he awoke, Caleb assumed it was cold and wore extra clothes. Humidity changes, or wet garments on the radiator beneath the window, had nothing to do with it. From the first day of September to the last of May, he wore an overcoat and at no other time regardless of the weather. If anyone said good morning, he checked his watch before replying. He read his daily newspaper from cover to cover, including cookery hints, politics, financial advice and sport, yet with no apparent interest in any of these matters.

He rose at the same time each day, washed, shaved, ate a bowl of cereal, two pieces of toast and went to serve in the Store. At midday he ate whatever his Mother put before him and returned to the Store precisely 30 minutes later. At 4 p.m. he repeated the process, again with a 30 minute break and returned just in time for his bedtime cup of cocoa.

When Delores died Caleb proposed marriage to the 16 year-old girl living opposite. Her parents were all in favour, thinking their daughter was marrying into money. Any ambition, or wits she may have brought with her soon eroded under the monotonous routine of life with the Davies men.

The next moment of consequence was a collapsed mine shaft and consequential hundred yards subsidence behind the Store, running an equal distance to either side. As the subsidence linked the two pit-heads they decided to create an access passage. They widened and reinforced the bottom of the chasm created by the subsidence, built walls either side to protect adjacent property and roofed it over at ground level to restore lost backyards at the rear of the miner's houses.

After six months of excavation and building there was no sign of any subterranean disturbance above ground. Beneath the surface work continued, installing facilities to make the best use of the passage, including changing rooms and showers for the miners, all allegedly financed by the owners'

insurance claims. Shortly after completing the work one pit closed, leaving generous accommodation for those remaining.

Abe meticulously cleaned the store windows and, conforming to his new-found frugality, patched holes in the chamois leather with old laces to extend its life. Even this process had limits, yet the final stage of the leather's deterioration was never seen.

Abe celebrated his sixtieth birthday with hot chocolate after the store's usual late close, then let his heir into the secret.

He took Caleb into the stockroom at the rear, rolled back the old rug from the wall, raised a floorboard, put his hand into the space and withdrew a length of electrical wire, its insulation long gone. The attached chamois leather bag was decorated by a web of stitches. Unwinding the wire at the neck of the bag, Abe's hand shook in anticipation and gold sovereigns fell to the floor.

His slavering mouth and round wide eyes were matched by those of his son, as the pair silently gazed at this El Dorado.

"One day, perhaps one day soon boyyo, this will all be yours."

"But what will I do with it Father?"

"Save it my son, save it 'til it's enough."

"Enough for what Father?"

"I dunno my son I been wonderin' that since your dear Ma died. I dunno, maybe you can think too, they say two 'eads is better than one. Now I'll show you where it goes. See this old pipe? Was part of the drains 'fore they fixed the wall and made new ones. Down into the ground it goes. Down to 'ell for all I knows. Plenty of space look you. Plenty wire for plenty of bags, long as you remember to fix a stick to the end like this yer. Now don't forget that. Most important that is. Not that you need to, long as I'm lookin' after things, but case there be a need, now you knows.

Now promise you'll not lay 'and on it less I'm gone and not tell a soul our secret."

"I promise Da," Caleb said with great humility.

Was it relief on sharing the burden of responsibility? Was it something in the food prepared by Caleb's wife, whose ears were renowned for their sensitivity,

or was this simply idle conjecture by the normally unimaginative Caleb as he buried his Father a mere three months later? He certainly showed no imagination in deciding what to do with the money, continuing to accumulate and store it in the same predictable manner that he continued everything else.

Britain was in depression, people were sacked without compensation, less new jobs than fleas on a dog's tail and miners had their wages cut. It was more than pride and basic needs could take. A strike was the inevitable consequence at every pit except the one near Davies's General Store.

Caleb and his wife were never good neighbours, yet when their drain was blocked Myfyr Owen-Smith willingly came to their aid. A chimney sweep by trade, he forced his poles through the manhole to the blockage behind the store. Rippling muscles drew miner's wives from cottages either side, roaring encouragement as he sweated and strained to force his rods deep into the drain. Eventually, little by little, he broke past the unseen blockage until the poles slid freely and the accumulated water ran away.

Local rats had found food scarce of late and scouted for new sources. Much to their delight they found leather pouches, dry yet welcome to a hungry mouth. As gold coins were not to their taste they didn't mind them rolling down the pipe to the tee junction, but to get home again they had to thrust them aside. When Myfyr used his poles to break through this golden blockage he forced these valuable impediments through the wall of the pipe and through the ceiling of the miner's showers beneath.

As several miners found the gift from heaven and their shouts drew others, they had to divide their spoils with everyone. Gareth Evans was elected to travel to Cardiff each week to exchange eight sovereigns for cash from a seedy coin dealer who discretely sought no proof of ownership, retaining an extra ten per cent by way of compensation for such fortitude.

The money was distributed and raised the total income of each miner to slightly more than they had received before the reduction in pay was introduced. It couldn't last for ever, yet showed every sign of doing so. With extra money they were more inclined to shop at Davies's. Every few months Caleb turned profits into sovereigns at a seedy coin dealer's shop in Cardiff, packed them in chamois, into the old pipe, rats took a modest meal and another heavenly donation found its way into the showers, whose patrons never complained that muddy water chose the same outlet on rainy days.

Would Caleb one day resolve his quandary, try to retrieve his money? It didn't look very likely. Meanwhile, as long as Cardiff coin-dealer and Uncle of Caleb's wife consumed no more than Caleb's profits, retail economic principles would prevail in a certain Welsh valley.

Chaplin

Brian Jones

Lambeth Walk – a Saturday afternoon in late Victorian London. A narrow street crowded with cliff-like tenement buildings, mean shops, market stalls and raucous working-class shoppers.

A small, slender boy dressed in a big cloth cap and a loose sloppy overcoat, so long that it nearly reached his ankles was wandering listlessly along the market looking for rotten fruit on the ground. He was weary and hungry and quite alone in the world. His search was rewarded by two rotten oranges, which he sucked eagerly, one by one.

The market reeked. From stalls where whelks were sold rose the pungency of vinegar, decaying vegetables trodden under foot blended their putridness with the musty smell of second-hand clothes and the appetising smell of fried fish and chips.

He shuffled on, through the market, and into a region of dreary, poverty stricken terraced houses. All the pubs were crowded. Through the gaping doors he saw tightly packed crowds of men, women and children, drinking at the bar or waiting to have their jugs filled, tobacco smoke wreathing around their heads.

As the boy walked along, ragged street urchins ran by, some of them yelling insults about his ill fitting coat, their heavy boots squashing the horse dung that lay thick in the gutters. A smell of horses hung like a fog in the close streets and the noise of horses' hooves, barrel-organs, people on the crowded streets, mixed with the loud gusts of laughter coming from every pub, made a cacophony of sound.

It was early in the year – a misty, drizzly day that would turn to thick fog later.

Eventually the boy's wanderings led him to a big South London music hall.

The music hall rose before him like a fortress. As the boy loitered on the pavement the theatre was alluring and blazed upon him like a pantomime cave. As today, when rain drizzled, or when fogs transformed the town, when London was vast and grey, the music hall became unreal like a bedraggled oriental palace.

The lad came from a theatrical background; he knew that this was where his destiny lay, either, one day, he would succeed on the stage or he would be trampled down into the gutter and die young, a pauper and nonentity.

After wandering all the way to Waterloo Bridge and the river the boy returned to the music hall.

It was growing dark. A thick white mist had moved in from the channel, blended with the sooty, brackish fumes of a million chimneys, and made a thick fog which blanketed the city in a cold, wet embrace. Gaslights had become dull, circular blobs in a world of white blindness and the sharp hammer of footsteps and the rattle of hansom were the only sounds to pierce the fog.

The evening fog had gripped his throat and set his eyes watering. He was very tired.

The boy knew of a nearby back alley. Close to the kitchen of a big late-night restaurant. Here, if he was lucky and would not be disturbed, he could sleep, fairly warm and dry, until the dawn. At last he found the alley and the kitchen and using the overcoat as a blanket curled up on the pavement and fell instantly asleep.

This was a typical day in the bleakest year of Charlie Chaplin's poverty-stricken boyhood and yet from this grim background he would rise to become the most famous human being in the world, better known than the



leaders of great religions or the rulers of the world.