

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)
Charles Neilson Gattey (1980-2005)

President:

Alan S Watts

Vice Presidents:

Richard Adams FRSL
John le Carré
Iain McIntyre

Chairman:

Terry Rickson

Vice Chairman:

Vacant

Membership Secretary:

Joan M Lewis
17 The Green
Corby Glen
GRANTHAM
NG33 4NP
membership@scpsw.co.uk

Meetings Secretary:

Ethel Corduff
10 Malcolm Road
Woodside
South Norwood
LONDON
SE25 5HG
meetings@scpsw.co.uk

Treasurer:

Beryl Jones
37 Lingham Lane
Moreton
WIRRAL
CH46 7SA

Competition Secretary:

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

Publicity Officer:

Jenny Chamier-Grove
publicity@scpsw.co.uk

Diary

Poetry Workshop Weekend

28th – 30th July 2006

President's Competition

(Myself When Young)

Closing date for entries 31st July 2006.

Annual Luncheon

21st October 2006

DATA PROTECTION ACT

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

Poetry Editor:

Joyce Thornton
129 Whitechapel Road
CLECKHEATON
West Yorkshire
BD19 6HS

Editor:

Adrian Danson
37 Hollingworth Road
PETTS WOOD
Kent
BR5 1AQ
adriand@onetel.com

ISSN 0959-0064

THE SCPSW AUTHOR

NUMBER 174

SUMMER 2006

CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial
- 6 Letters
- 7 Members' Successes
- 8 Gordon Gompers Farewell *Ethel Cordoff*
- 9 Gordon The Brave *Audrey Douglas*
- 10 My One Great Talent *Gordon Gompers*
- 13 Poetry Workshop
- 15 Poetry Pages *edited by Joyce Thornton*
- 20 A History of the Society of Civil Service Authors
Beryl Jones
- 24 1881 Valentine's Day in Penzance
Jenny Chamier Grove
- 29 A Parcel Arrives *Lena Simmons*
- 31 Queen Victoria's Thanet *Brian Jones*
- 35 A Tale of Revenge *Adrian Danson*
- 36 The Tooth the Holed Tooth and Nothing But the
Tooth *A F Danson*
- 37 The Bones of the Matter *Foot of the Yard*

Editorial

Adrian Danson

So what do you think of this Da Vinci Code affair? I was surprised to find *The Holy Blood & The Holy Grail*, the book that was allegedly plagiarised, being described as a work of fact. If I remember the TV expose correctly, the essence of the story was based, not upon academic research, but upon information provided by a Frenchman who was a confidence trickster. There was also no mention of *Jesus the Man* by Elizabeth Thiering, which I thought was far more relevant as a source.

But it is for another reason I raise the matter. Sales of both the first two books mentioned above have soared. Will you (please don't look over your shoulder, I mean you, yes YOU) find a published work that has an exciting, if dubious connection with fact, write your own version with even more far fetched embellishments, then send it to me for publication in serialised form in *Author*. We could all become rich and famous!!

Since packing the items in and on my desk in preparation for our house move on 1st August 2003 my life has been in a state of chaos. Purgatory is allegedly the place we go to atone for our sins after death. I think I am still alive, though I sometimes wonder, as I try to recall those awful sins for which I am now being punished.

Perhaps the end is nigh. We found a buyer for the new house some fifteen months after putting it on the market. Of course this means I am in the process of completing pages of forms, and pursuing the mortgage that our previous move was intended to avoid. Yes, I too was surprised that they gave mortgages to old fogies like me. "You live and learn." Now there is the repacking, the near certainty of different selling and buying dates and consequent loss of access to files etc. And, with fate's perfect sense of timing, my two weeks bowling holiday to Cyprus was a non-event, as I developed a pain in my left knee on the day we arrived and the surgeon told me a I would have to await my return to U.K. for an operation. At the moment of writing I am still waiting and still in pain. Now you understand my reference to Purgatory? Hobbling up and down the stairs of prospective new homes nearly finished me off. I would have been prepared to settle for a tent in someone's back yard by the time we found something more or less suitable. (More less than more, but I'm past caring!)

Enough of this for now, though a lack of material from members leaves me with much space to fill. One of the reasons for this is the extension of the closing date for annual competitions, and thus the absence of winning entries from this issue of Author. All members are invited to offer their work for inclusion in Author, preferably double-spaced, but it may be printed on both sides and you may use your own name or a pen name.

Apropos competitions: A member who wrote to complain about the views of the judge in the recent book competition, assumed that I agreed with such. This is not so. Indeed I found his criticism of style to be inappropriate, but I do not believe I have the right to edit a judge's comments, only to ensure that this judge is not asked to participate in future. The winner of said competition has yet to write to me to disclose their identity. Whoever it is should not be put off by the judge's comments. Their work was judged the best of the entries and probably gave pleasure to many of our members.

As I have indicated in the past, criticism should always be used for its worth to the writer, not simply seen as either praise or condemnation of the work. My objection to criticising style is that this is a matter of taste. I believe our Society, through Author, caters for all tastes, except for work that is extremely offensive and I hope that I have always kept within reasonable bounds in this respect.

One member who was never reluctant to criticise, often in a most forceful manner, was Gordon Gompers. It is with much regret and sadness that I have to advise that Gordon recently died. He not only contributed to Author for many years with his Marketing column, he was also a member who rarely missed a meeting. A.G.M's, parties, Chairman's Awaydays, or anything else, Gordon was always there and usually contributed something of interest. Ethel Corduff has given us a few words and I suspect others may want to add something in due course. For the first time, as far as I am aware, we have included a photograph in Author. For those who never met him, may I assure you that this is a photograph of Gordon Gompers, not Spencer Tracey.

We have not had Gordon's marketing ideas for several issues but, partly as a tribute to Gordon and partly because it is a useful feature of our magazine, I will try to find the time to go back over his past contributions and produce a new series from that source. Although some

of the magazines to which he refers may no longer be published, the essence of his advice will always remain valid.

It is perhaps evidence of Gordon's commitment to our Society that he has left us £1,000 in his will. This will, of course, considerably ease our financial problems and his generosity will be long remembered and is greatly appreciated.

Our thanks to Beryl Jones for another episode of our fascinating history and to others who have contributed their work for publication. Although we will shortly be publishing the competition winning entries, all members are invited to submit work for inclusion in future editions of Author.

I don't know how things stand with regard to finding a new poetry editor, but Joyce Thornton has still found time to spare from caring for Albert, to whom we send our best wishes, to provide the poetry pages that are included in this issue. This is much appreciated and I hope our poets will continue to provide us with their work, which is such an essential part of Author.

Short Story & Article Folios

It is recommended to any member who would like to get opinions on their work, perhaps before finalising such before entry into competitions etc., that they join a folio group to obtain this feedback. For short stories the person to contact is our chairman, Terry Rickson 48 Marlborough Road Ashford Middx TW15 3QA, and for articles it is membership secretary, Joan Lewis 17 The Green, Corby Glen, Grantham NG33 4NP.

Dates for the diary

Annual Luncheon 21st October 2006. Detail in next issue.

New Blood

For any member who lives within travelling distance of London, i.e. nearer than the moon, the Society needs new blood on the committee. This does not necessarily mean taking on a formal office, it means being available to attend meetings, mostly held in the morning on days when

other events take place, e.g. A.G.M., to offer ideas on running our affairs. Please let Ethel Corduff have your name if you are prepared to consider such. A few new faces and ideas would be most welcome.

Help required from working members

Will those still working in the civil service please make enquiries, perhaps to their personnel divisions, to see if they can obtain a copy of a very useful booklet, known as the "White Book," which is issued every 6 months and entitled "The IPO directory - information and press officers in government departments and public corporations." It may not be possible to procure a current copy for use by Jenny Chamier-Grove, our publicity officer, but when a new issue is received, the obsolete copy would still be very useful. Please contact Jenny if you can help.

Letters

In common with many other members of the Society I have been very grateful for your taking over the editorial chair and keeping the magazine going at a time when the Society appears to have encountered rough water. I wish I could offer some positive help but I am in my 84th year and on permanently (and happily) domiciled in the tiny Channel Island of Alderney.

Unlike the larger islands of Jersey and Guernsey we have no sea link with the U.K. and with current return air fares to Southampton apparently £150, we have to ration our visits to the mainland.

Apart from being one of the oldest members in age I am probably among the longest in membership. I first contributed to Author in the spring of 1948 edition (it was then a new venture) and I wrote my early recollections of the Society for issue number 100 (October 1991)

Incidentally, the Society was flourishing in 1991 - issue 100 listed the names of some 40 new members. What has happened to our Society? (Very little of consequence in my view, other than the continued dispersal of staff from London - Ed)

Just in case it is of some interest - and in you are short of material - I enclose an allegedly humorous piece about Alderney. I apologise for my indifferent handwriting - alas, despite my advanced age, I have yet to

master any keyboard, but my MS are impeccably word processed and presented, but by someone else!

In any event, warmest wishes to you and the Society from O'er the Channel and reiterated thanks for all your hard slog on our behalf, which has kept The Author on the road and given us a stimulating publication every quarter.

Yours sincerely,

John Gatrell

(It is with great embarrassment that I must admit to having misplaced John's "Laid Back in Alderney" and can only hope that it will resurface from the increasing muddle that precedes our house move. This is hardly the response I would have wished to reflect John's contribution, as this and his continued long membership is much valued - Ed)

Members' Successes

Leslie Wilkie, one of our newer members, has had a book of short stories published free (or should I now say for free?). This was effected by Pipers' Ash Ltd and the 30,000 page book is sold over the internet at £4.95 including package and posting. Leslie kindly sent me a copy and I have yet to finish reading it, but have enjoyed what I have read.

He thought that it might be a method of meeting my proposal for a Society collection, but I do not believe this would be appropriate. The reason is that I believe the ownership and any benefits must remain with the Society and particularly those members whose work is chosen for inclusion.

This is a matter that needs further thought, but for any member who is interested in having their own work published Pipers' Ash may well be of interest. They can be contacted on www.supamasu.com or write to proprietor, Mr A Tyson, Pipers' Ash Ltd., Church Road, Christian Malford, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 4BW.

Gordon Gompers Farewell

Ethel Corduff

We were saddened to hear of the death of our long time faithful member Gordon Gompers on 23rd February. He died a week after a tragic scalding accident while having a bath. His loving nephew Raymond and his wife spent this last week by Gordon's bedside in hospital. A former Editor of the "Author" and columnist and stalwart attendee of all our functions, despite his struggle to get there. Gordon will be sadly missed by all of us.

Gordon's obituary read by his nephew in church told us that he was born in Tooting over the family shop on 22nd January 1924 into the loving home of Marjory and Henri Rapp Gompers. The youngest of four children, an accident as a baby caused him his handicap that he fought all his life to overcome. He went to school in Clapham College; he enjoyed his time in Chichester where he was evacuated during the war.

He had a varied career as a projectionist, also working in the engineers department for the GLC, but his happiest time was the twenty years he spent as Usher at Camberwell Magistrates Court.

His nephew says Gordon's first love was writing, although he never reached the heights of his great love Jane Austin about whom he would talk at length. He has had many articles published, his third book on Morley College is due out shortly. This was recently reviewed by our President Alan Watts and the review read out at Gordon's funeral service at the English Martyrs Church, Streatham on 22nd March.

Gordon loved Wagner and music in general and he became the accredited music critic for several publications. His great love of the recorder brought him yearly to the Dolmetsch Festival at Hazelmere until it came to an end a few years ago.

He supported amateur dramatics by producing the sound effects needed and wrote articles about this, though he never caught up with computerised effects.

His funeral was attended by relatives, many friends and representatives of the numerous organisations he was involved in. The Society was represented by Ethel Corduff, Betty Griffin and Kathleen Stratton Collins. After burial at Wandsworth cemetery, we adjourned to the Streatham Baptist church hall for refreshments and reminiscences. Raymond had arranged a splendid display of Gordon's life with photos,

documents and his published work, including his award as the Brain of Lambeth. Gordon had been a member of the Friendly Club based at the church and the following poignant poem written by volunteer Audrey Douglas was read out and is printed here with her permission.

Gordon The Brave

Audrey Douglas

My hearings not good, no more are my eyes,
my sticks are a menace so it's no surprise.
I get in the way and people are cross,
but I guess that's life we are all at a loss.

Come ask how my life has been led
oft times uphill it had to be said.
Perseverance and drive help me reach many goals
Earning praise and respect in my various rolls.

Some thoughts to you I'd like to say as I pass along life's highway
try to be patient with those you don't know.
We're all quite different and some struggle so.
A gentle word would mean so much, a smile, a kiss or even a touch.

It's too late for change, I'm a stubborn old gent
I know your advice sincerely is meant.
But we have our own ways not always the best
Just think of me kindly as I go to my rest.

If any member would like to get in touch with Gordon's nephew or send a donation to Trinity Hospice in his memory please write to Mr. Raymond Gompers, 103 Radnor Avenue, Welling, Kent DA16 2DA

My One Great Talent

Gordon Gompers

We all have our talents, the trouble is that they can become a bit embarrassing.

As a long serving officer of the Inner London Magistrates' Courts, a fairly successful freelance journalist and a dabbler in politics it has been my lot to mingle with the mighty, something that I am very unfitted to do because I drop bricks better and bigger than most folk.

Perhaps my biggest brick was with the late James Laver. It was at an Annual Lunch of The Society of Civil Service Authors and many of the guests during the pre meal reception milled around Mr. Laver, The President. The conversation turned to play writing. I got rather annoyed by what I thought was his superior tone. '

“Tell me, Mr. Laver,” I said in a tired voice, “have you ever had a play accepted?”

“Yes, I think I have”, he murmured, modestly.

I learned “later that he had had a long running West End success called Nymph Errant.

At another Annual Lunch of The Society of Civil Service Authors I really made myself look foolish. I had covered myself with glory, or so I thought. I had had a spell as catering manager, won the first prize of the annual short story contest, and had been designated to start the Autumn lectures. There was now a different President, Lord Snow, who was sitting with his wife Pamela Hansford Johnson. I had gravitated towards them. Suddenly The Chairman, Charles Gattey, went up to Lord Snow.

“There is someone you must meet, Lord Snow, he cried, enthusiastically.

I straightened my tie and smoothed my hair. “Raj Patel,” Mr. Gattey went on, “Who has come all the way from Delhi to be with us”.

Time for me to evaporate!

Working in the courts accorded me plenty of opportunities to drop bricks. Once, at Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court I was summoned to the Senior Chief Clerks office to discuss my annual report. It was not altogether adverse. It was rambling and badly written but the import of

it was that “this officer is worth keeping but hardly promotional material”. “You can't send that to Bush House, sir” I protested.

“Indeed I can and will”.

“What, bad grammar and all” I cried before I could stop myself.

It was hardly surprising that I never climbed high up the legal ladder

Stipendiary magistrates are considered very important in the court service. There was a high ranking one who had a striking physical resemblance to one of the court clerks. At a Christmas party I had had enough to drink to impair my judgement. I came up to what I thought was a mere court clerk.

“How are you, my old chum?” I asked.

“In good order”, came the reply.

“That's what I like to hear”, I replied - thumping him on the back.

Come Monday and on arriving at work I was greeted by two colleagues. 'You were very friendly with Mr. Brown’, one commented.

“Mr. Brown, the stipendiary? That was Mr. Smith I was chatting to”.

“Mr. Smith was not there. That was a stipendiary magistrate that you were thumping on the back”.

“Oh Lor! I cried, expecting to be summoned up immediately to the Chief Clerk and instantly dismissed from the service. 'Don't worry about it” I was assured, “he was drunker than you were”.

Fortunately most of the people I dropped bricks on were the kind who loved a good laugh. During one Haslemere Festival I attended morning service at a local church. After the service I went into the hall for coffee. A nice elderly gentleman came up to me.

“How did you enjoy the concert? I saw you at The Hall last night'.

I said I had enjoyed it very much. I went on to say that I came every year and that I was a past music critic of Morley College and I had written quite a lot on the recorder renaissance. I then told him my name. He gave a little start which indicated that he had heard of me. “Who are you, sir?” I asked. “ Joseph Saxby”.

Now Joseph Saxby was the main harpsichordist with the Dolmetsch Group. However I had not seen him perform for a long time.

“But I thought you were dead” I blurted out.

He did not have much to say to me that time but later we had quite a few good laughs about it.

The worst possible brick is that which finds its way into print. When I saw the film *The Sound of Music* I was not impressed with the governess' method of teaching the Trapp children about the principles of music.

“Surely they will hardly learn by this 'doh ray mi' lark”, I thought. “The only way to learn is by an instrument and the recorder is best for the purpose”.

So in every article I wrote on the recorder renaissance (and I wrote quite a few) I always launched into an attack on Maria Trapp's method of teaching. Then I felt the need to improve my own recorder playing. I went and bought a tutor in Schott's of Gt. Marlborough Street. Who do you think was the author? Maria Trapp, of course.

Published in the *Morley Magazine*, Vol 105, No.2, autumn 1999.



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 Weekend 2006

As previously announced, the annual Poetry Workshop Weekend will take place on 28-30 July 2006 at the University of Central England, which is in Perry Bar, Birmingham.

The Timetable has now been finalised and, along with regular features such as the workshop session and Quiz, will feature three talks (on Michael Drayton, Quirky Poetic Forms and Isaac Rosenberg), a creative writing session and a poetry slam.

The cost will be about £152 per person, which includes all meals, en-suite accommodation and meeting room. As usual, we ask for a deposit of £30, with the balance payable in May. Alternatively, you may pay by instalments, by arrangement with our Treasurer, **Terry Rickson**.

A Booking Form was enclosed with the winter issue of *wavelengths*. This should be returned with your deposit to Terry. If you have lost your Booking Form, are a new member interested in joining us or have any queries about any aspect of the Weekend, please contact me, Mike Boland, at the address given above.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Poetry Workshop will be held during the Birmingham Weekend. If any member has any points to raise or motions they would like to submit for discussion, please send them to me by 1 July 2006.

Subscriptions 2006

Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop fell due on 1 January 2006. Existing members should have received a subscription form with the spring issue of *wavelengths*. Any member who has not yet renewed will not receive any further issues of the magazine, so if you haven't already renewed your subscription for 2006 do so now.

Please complete and send your form together with your cheques/postal orders to **Terry Rickson**, whose address appears above.

The cost of membership is £3 for members of the Society of Civil & Public Service Writers. **Please** remember to make out your cheques correctly: they should be made payable to **SCPSW Poetry Workshop Account**.

If anyone is interested in joining the Poetry Workshop, please contact **Terry Rickson** at the above address. He will be pleased to provide further details.

Membership of the Poetry Workshop provides:

- four issues of our magazine **wavelengths** each year - contributions of poems and articles on poetry are welcomed from PW members
- the chance of publication in **Waves**, the PW's annual anthology of members' work
- access to the popular Postal Folio scheme
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition (open exclusively to PW members)
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at the University of Birmingham

Dates to Remember

28 - 30 July 2006	Poetry Workshop Weekend
1 July 2006	deadline for motions for the AGM
1 August 2006	deadline for wavelengths # 8 (autumn issue)
1 September 2006	publication of wavelengths #8
30 September 2006	closing date for entries to the Bill Barnes Competition 2006
1 November 2005	deadline for wavelengths # 9
1 December 2005	publication of wavelengths # 9e

Poetry Pages

Edited by Joyce Thornton

The Garden Shed

Bill Torrie Douglas

It's a container for the lawnmower, garden tools
and things you might need, like half full
pots of paint, wooden off cuts,
left over rolls of wallpaper that might be useful
if patching is required.

It's a bolt hole, an escape, a hide
for smuggled cans of lager,
with a folding chair and an ear to
the outside world, with the ability
to ignore it and the facility to lock
the door from the inside.

Everybody has a garden shed
in which to meditate and philosophise,
where no one argues, disagrees or
interrupts. But the garden shed is for
single occupancy, and when you
leave, you must ensure that
you close the door
behind you.

Horse

Bill Torrie Douglas

There is something eternal about a horse,
with its eyes of wisdom
and its demeanour of contentment,
it knows more than we do.

It has carried man into battle,
strained to haul his weapons,
taken the hits from lance,
arrow, shell and bullet.

It's explored alien lands,
ploughed fields with pioneers,
braved torrent and tempest,
kept man alive in extreme situations.

The horse is entitled to feast on green pasture,
gallop like a young mustang across
hard wide beaches at low water,
look on mankind with total disdain.

A humble carthorse or a feted racehorse,
prancing in front of a hansom cab
or pounding steadfast across moors
in the wind and rain of a dark storm.

Talk to a horse, it will not interrupt,
feed it and receive grateful thanks,
brush its mane and flanks with love
but always beware of its kick.

Siesta

After a painting by Paul Simmons
Terry Rickson

Afternoon in Gandolfino and
Signora Lapina, like her neighbours, is indoors;
her blue shutters, newly painted,
take the slanting rays of sun.

Later, when it is cooler, her father
will come down the stepped street
and take his place on the seat
in the shade of the bougainvillia.

Signora Lapina will water the flowering pots;
“Bella, bella,” she will say,
extending a plump arm and hand
towards the blooms.

“Bella, bella,” the old man will repeat
and nod and smile from his seat.

Rain Collection

Terry Rickson

Rain in city streets
saves motorists
pounds at the car wash.

The intermittent beat of winter rain
beyond curtained windows;
double glazing has no time for memories.

wellingtons
a puddle
happy child

A sudden shower
scatters almond blossom;
pink for a gay wedding.

Once, raising its head
from sipping at a lane side runnel
left by a morning shower,
I saw an adder;
we hastened each out of the other's way.

Beneath my window,
summer rain resounds
tattoo on a watering can.

Picnic.
Rain on the sandwiches.
Rain in the tea.
"We're going home," said father.

Dark Flowers

Mike Boland

Dark flowers bloom, devour the light of the sun.
Gorgon like, their tendrils swarm, writhe overhead.
Sable petals spread, interlock, create a canopy
through which no light, no warmth can leach.
Crops fail, frost locks the soil;
we inhabit a tundra world.

We slash them with axes
.... they blunt our blades.
We sear them with fire
.... they are impervious
We douse them with poison
.... they thrive.

When we bought those seeds,
those genetically modified seeds,
we were promised an end to famine,
not light devouring weeds.

Dinner at World's End

Mike Boland

(Based on the painting 'Elegy for a Dead Admiral' by Jack Vettriano)

Late afternoon;
clouds gather.
Lightning unzips the sky
over fear hazed islands,
and still Hugh hasn't come.

I wear red, for red is the colour of death.
Not black, as Poe knew too well.
Red, for my dinner at World's End.
Black beetle waiters fuss and fret,
aware of my disappointment,
for still Hugh hasn't come.

The wine too glows red,
back lit by the night bound sun.
Violins saw our requiem.
Thunder does what thunder does best,
rain not far away,
and still Hugh hasn't come.

So like the man.
I thought it so romantic;
a scarlet themed dinner
to mark World's End.
I thought Hugh would have come.

He won't have another chance now.
Listen

what's that sound?

The Place

Alan S. Watts

The place was neither here nor there
Which no one could define
It was quite near to anywhere
Upon a given line

It was not very hard to find
Of that there was no doubt
And everyone knew where it was
And wished to point it out.
Yet if you stopped to question them
And ask the nearest way
They all would give a different route
And send you soon astray
Each one of them would make a point
Declaring 'This is best'
'If you should take another route
You'll need a lengthy rest'

A History of the Society of Civil Service Authors: continued

Beryl Jones

Lord Vansittart Drama Trophy

The very first full length play competition was held by the Society in 1947 and was won by Dr. Mary Sheridan of the Home Office for her play 'What is Love'. The runners up were Miss Doris Major (Ministry of Supply) for 'Time's Fool' and Montague Jackson (Ministry of Health) for 'Dr.Margaret'; whilst twenty five plays received Honourable Mentions.

The competition had been such an outstanding success, attracting fifty five entries, that Charles Neilson Gattey had the idea of holding a Festival of Plays by Civil Service Authors. With this in mind he suggested at a Committee Meeting in 1947 that the Society should invite Civil Service Dramatic Societies to take part in a Drama Festival of full length plays. These plays would be written by Society members and a Trophy would be awarded to the Dramatic Society presenting the production considered best in the opinion of an independent adjudicator. Charles argued that:

'Plays are intended primarily to be performed and it is very difficult to tell from reading most, how live audiences are going to react to them when presented on the stage. This explains why theatrical managers prefer to see a play tried out by a repertory company first before embarking on the perilous and expensive adventure of a West End production. Playwrights themselves can only learn their craft I from practical experience, and in this connection even amateur productions can be of great assistance.'

The President of the Society, Lord Vansittart, had offered to give a prize for a competition of the Society's choice and thus became the donor of the Trophy to encourage playwrights.

The scheme was publicised in the Civil Service press and fourteen representatives attended a meeting at The Victoria & Albert Museum. It was decided to hold the Festival in the spring of 1949 at theatres, independently chosen by the competing societies, and attended by a professional adjudicator. Charles Neilson Gattey was appointed Festival Officer, and eventually persuaded twelve societies to enter, whilst at the same time also securing the services of a distinguished adjudicator

L.A.G. Strong. However, owing to casting difficulties, the actual number of competing societies fell to eight.

The result was announced at the Annual Dinner held at the Criterion Restaurant on the 28th May, 1949 and was attended by one hundred and twenty members, guests and competing Dramatic Societies. At the top table before Lord Vansittart stood the 'Exquisitely proportioned silver gilt cup' presented as the Lord Vansittart Drama Trophy.

The Trophy was awarded on this occasion to the Ministry of Food Dramatic Society for the 'Willsons of Lewisham' written by Society member A.F. Ebert, which L.A.G. Strong found to be 'entirely honest and believable. It has warmth of heart. It has humour.' Only two marks away he placed the Customs and Excise Dramatic Society for 'What is Love' by Dr. Mary Sheridan and third, one mark away, the Board of Trade Dramatic Society. (Both A.F. Ebert and Dr. Sheridan apparently joined the Society in order to have their plays performed, and both, in the years ahead, became Vice Presidents).

At the conclusion of the proceedings James Laver proposed a toast to Charles Neilson Gattey in which he stated that he had done more work in organising the Festival in one year than he (James Laver) would care to do in five.

'A great occasion undoubtedly the most successful function in the Society's history was the general verdict.' So wrote Tommy Martin then Editor of the Civil Service Author in its summer issue.

The adjudicator L.A.G. Strong reported that: 'The quality of those chosen was high and reflects credit on the Civil Service as a nest of playwrights.'

Charles Neilson Gattey stated that he had found it very hard work acting as Festival Organiser but its success, and the practical help it gave to playwrights, encouraged him to organise another Festival for the autumn of 1950.

For this second Festival there were five entries and the winner was the Ministry of Food Dramatic Society for 'Dr. Margaret' by H. Montague Jackson, and the runner up was the Mount Players for 'North Light' by G.F. Gilmour. Unfortunately in 1952 (third Festival) due to last minute withdrawals, there were only two entries. The Mount Players came first with 'Cousin Amy' by G.F. Gilmour and the runner up being the

Ministry of Health Dramatic Society for 'The Thing Me Loves' by H. Montague Jackson.

Entries increased for the fourth Festival in 1954 when five Dramatic Societies competed for the Trophy. This was won by the Admiralty for 'The House on the Moor' by Dr. Mary Sheridan with G.F.Gilmour's play 'The Moon Casts a Shadow' runner up.

The adjudication and presentation of the Trophy was held on the 2nd June, 1954 in the Oak Room of the Arts Theatre and was followed by a Brains Trust with James Laver acting as quizmaster. Members of the panel on that occasion were Flora Robson, Patricia Chown, John Bourne and John Fernald. The Brains Trust was followed by a general quiz and a display of conjuring presented by John Bourne. This Festival had made a profit of 6/6d but the Oak Room meeting netted a loss of £9/9/-, even though one hundred and five tickets had been sold 1 3/6d and one hundred and eleven refreshments 2 2/5d each. Apparently the hire of the room and extra chairs, plus the adjudicator's fee had run up the cost.

Peter Shrives had taken over the heavy duties of Festival Organiser and he was succeeded by the 'indefatigable' Frank Ebert for the 1954 Festival. However, due to Frank's other Society duties (Competition Secretary) the task of organising the fifth Festival was handed over to Mrs Menzies. This was planned for the spring of 1956 but despite all Mrs Menzies' valiant efforts, only one Society entered and the Festival was abandoned.

When Lord Vansittart passed away in 1957, Charles Neilson Gattey thought a fitting tribute to his memory would be by making a determined effort to hold the postponed fifth Festival in the spring of 1958. Reginald Ridge was the Festival organiser on this occasion, and it was due to his perseverance and hard work that three drama groups agreed to compete.

For this fifth Festival it was decided, in order to minimise the financial risk, the three plays would be given carefully rehearsed stage readings instead of actual productions. The winning play was 'The Passionate Reformers' by Montague Jackson, performed by the Ministry of Health Dramatic Society; the other two entries being 'Daughter of Azrael' by Adrian Randle performed by the Admiralty Dramatic Society

and 'All Men Fail' by Frank Ebert, presented by the Ministry of Supply Players.

The sixth Drama Festival was held in March 1962, the Trophy being won by the Ministry of Health Dramatic Society with the presentation of Charles Neilson Gattey's play 'A Shopful of Glamour'. There were only two entries the other being 'Night on Solomon's Creek' by Alec Price presented by the Admiralty Dramatic Society.

In 1968 an attempt to hold the seventh Drama Festival was abandoned when no entries were received. Therefore, in 1970 it was decided to award the Trophy to the Dramatic Society giving the best production of a one act play by a member of the Authors' Society, during the Federation of Drama Societies One Act Play Festival. However, as only one Society put on a play by a member of the S.C.S.A. ('The Guilty Ones' by Betty Richards, presented by the Centurion and Ad astral Players) the award was not made.

'It seems a great pity that the beautiful Trophy presented by Lord Vansittart is now gathering dust in the vaults of the Society's bank. Perhaps one day interest in the drama will be revived and the Trophy will once more see the light of day.'
(Charles Neilson Gattey)

One final comment on the lack of support by members of the Civil Service Dramatic Societies was printed in the Secretary's Newsletter of August/September 1970:

'The Committee had decided to offer the Vansittart Cup and the prize of £35, as well as the usual statuette trophy, in order to induce Civil Service Dramatic Societies to produce plays by members of the Society in the 1970 Festival. As only one Dramatic Society has put on such a play the cup and cash were withdrawn and it means that Civil Service Dramatic Societies are not interested in plays by fellow Civil Servants.'

NB: The Lord Vansittart Trophy is at present in the hands of our Meetings Secretary (March 2006) having been presented with it when she attended Charles' funeral.

1881 Valentine's Day in Penzance

Jenny Chamier Grove

If you want to know, I'm shaking. I must calm myself. I must forget what happened this morning. Forget what happened five years ago, when Frederic was twenty-one. But the more I try to order those images out of my mind the more they crowd in on me. Oh, I remember Frederic's twenty-first birthday. It's branded onto me like a tattoo. I feel my mind returning to it. But I've got an Inn to run, a day's work to do.

I began fretting last night when Frederic and Mabel arrived at the Inn and I showed them up to the best bedroom. I always give them the best bedroom. And, as we mounted the stairs and I showed them in, I had the familiar feeling of being snubbed as Mabel said, "Thank you Ruth. That will be all. You can leave us now."

And last night, as if that wasn't enough, she wanted supper. In their room, if you please. So I served them myself. I didn't ask the kitchen maid to do it. And as I set a steaming tureen of Mulligatawny soup on the table I said "There You Are, Frederic!" - forgetting that Mabel does not like me to call her husband Frederic.

"Ruth, don't call my husband Frederic, if you please. It's dreadful to see a woman of your age embarrass herself like that," Mabel said.

"My dear, I think you're being a bit harsh," murmured Frederic, subsiding behind his soup bowl.

"No Frederic it's not harsh. Ruth has to be told. You are Squire Treleaven and must be treated with respect."

"Yes, Ma'am," I mumbled, scowling once I was out of sight.

Frederic is twenty-six, I thought, as I closed the door behind me none too quietly. And for a moment, and before I could suppress it, there flashed through my mind a picture of Frederic's twenty-first birthday. Frederic laughing and grimacing. But the sharpness of the picture pierced me with its clarity.

When they'd finished supper and Frederic had finished most of my rolled treacle pudding, I said, "Will you have a glass of port?" The words popped out before I remembered that Mabel didn't like to see him drinking port after dinner.

She glared at me. "That will be all, Ruth, if you please," she said, closing her eyes slowly as if to dismiss me from her sight.

I left clumsily. But if I thought that would be the end of my troubles I was wrong. This morning... This morning I am filled with anxieties that swirl through my mind. They seem fixed in the past. My memory toils back over - how many years? Seventeen? Eighteen? To when I was a nursery maid hired by Squire Treleaven to look after his young nephew, Frederic. I never let the boy out of my sight. But when he was eight - and I was eighteen - we were kidnapped.

You may have heard the story, courtesy of those giggling scribblers Gilbert and Sullivan. The Pirates of Penzance, indeed! They dubbed me a maid-of-all-work. Me, Ruth, who does the work of a man. They mocked my truth for the sake of a rhyme. But under all those pretty lyrics lies a skeleton of truth. My truth.

Our kidnappers were not cruel men - they liked to fancy themselves pirates but they were not proper pirates, smugglers maybe. They had a schooner, The Black Kite. Fortunately, the crew took to Frederic. As for me, I was saved by my bacon. I became ship's cook.

It soothes me to remember those days - the slap of the sails, the whine of the wind in the rigging, The Black Kite returning with cargo, the customs cutter on the wind and chasing, her huge bowsprit looming larger and larger, like the great finger of the Almighty out of the curdled sky.

But in my mind I am always moving towards that moment - that day on the beach, five years ago, Frederic's twenty-first birthday. I can still hear the splash and patter of the shingle, Frederic whistling as he searches for stones to build me an oven on the beach. The Black Kite rocking at anchor. The crew singing and playing cards.

And I am shredding my beef suet. Then she appears. Mabel. She must have walked - or teetered, most like - around a rock. That rock. It's as if it's the edge of the earth, and I'm fated to remember it, over and over again.

I am stupefied by her appearance. There's a gaggle of girls tagging along behind her but I stare unremittingly at Mabel. I'd rowed ashore in breeches and a damp jacket, my muffin-shaped hat clamped onto my head and for the first time I feel the drab inelegance of my clothes.

Frederic's eyes, those bluish green eyes, like the sea on a cloudy day, seem to lighten when he looks at her.

I am still shredding my beef suet, all of it permeated by thoughts about Frederic. I hear him boasting, telling Mabel that he's a pirate.

And I think: Is she really a beauty? True, she has full lips, but what are they full off? All she talks about is the weather. I swipe at some hair which has fallen out of my muffin-shaped hat. And then for a brief instant a yearning comes over me. Frederic has grown into a man. I believe he has started to care for me and I've begun to return his feelings. Who is this Mabel, I wonder? Mabel stable as a table. Surely she's no match for my fierceness, my ferocious - my ferocious loyalty? I jump up and put my arm on Frederic's shoulder, and then, because it's clumsy and clearly an embarrassment to him, I take it away.

The bright sand becomes grey, a spring afternoon fading into drabness. By the time I've finished the suet, Frederic has asked Mabel to marry him. And my dreams are in shreds.

After their wedding I worked in an old coaching Inn, The Flounder's Head. I took over the kitchen and ran a tight ship. I took over the Inn and now look at it - The Flounder's Head, famous for yeast buns, lobster cutlets, raised game pie and rolled treacle pudding.

I'm proud of it - or I was, until this morning. This morning began as mornings always do. I dressed quickly and went down to the kitchen to give orders for breakfast.

I was warming milk and adding yeast to it when I remembered a large cream envelope, apparently delivered with the morning post. It was inscribed in ink, in a squiggly hand, To Frederic Treleven Esquire, The Flounder's Head. I mustn't forget to give it to him, I thought.

And then I remembered something else. Today is the feast of St Valentine. And I thought, 'Suppose it contains a sentimental token? Why should I give it to Frederic? He has no need of it. He has Mabel.'

The kitchen filled with the warm smell of yeast as I pondered. Should I throw the envelope away?

I picked it up, lifted the lid of the kitchen stove and was about to fling it into the orange flames when I paused and reflected a while. Then I made up my mind. Half an hour later, when Frederic and Mabel's breakfast had been served - in their room, of course - I placed the envelope in front of Frederic. But as I did so, I had little idea what turmoil would ensue, or that I'd be blamed for bringing it about.

There was a tearing sound as Frederic ripped open the envelope, glancing at Mabel as he did so. But if he expected a smiling cherub to emerge he was disappointed. As he drew out the card and studied it his face hardened as if it had been carved out of elmwood.

“Is something the matter?” I asked. “Let me get you a glass of egg wine,” I hurried on, forgetting that Mabel does not like to see him drinking in the morning. Frederic did not seem to hear. He flung the card onto a plate of mutton chops and stalked over to the window.

With a rustle of raiments, Mabel bustled after him, leaving the card marooned on the mutton chops. Should I leave the room, I wondered? Curiosity battled with discretion.

I lingered.

“Has something displeased you, Dearest?” Mabel asked.

“I'm surprised you have to ask, since you sent the card,” Frederic snapped.

“I sent the card? I don't understand,” Mabel trilled.

“Perhaps you'd like to look at it,” Frederic said, acidly.

Mabel darted back to the mutton chops and scooped up the card. As they examined it I edged up behind them and squinted at it too. As Valentine cards go it was hardly the prettiest. It showed an oddly disheveled gentleman, hat battered and cravat awry, clinging to a pillar for support. Beneath the picture was a rhyme. Frederic read it aloud, coldly:

"The kiss of the bottle is your hearts delight,
And fuddled you reel home to bed every night,
What care you for damsels no matter how fair,
Apart from your liquor you've no love to spare."

When he'd finished reading there was a silence. Then he read out the two words scrawled beneath the verse - 'From Mabel'.

“It's monstrous! Who can have sent such a vile thing?” Mabel's voice scaled an octave.

“You did, Mrs Treleaven, by all appearances,” I put in.

“I did not! I did no such thing! Ruth, you forget yourself.” Mabel turned to Frederic. “Dearest, you must believe me. I did not send this card!” Her voice was starting to quaver.

“Don't fret, Mrs Treleaven.” I blurted out. “Nobody who knows you could suspect you of it. When I think of your embroidery...”

But if I had forgotten that Mabel was a General's daughter, I was soon reminded.

“Ruth, I know who's at the bottom of this,” she flung at me, “Don't think I don't! It was you. You sent this card to Frederic to set him against me! You conceived this abominable scheme because you believed, deluded yourself that I'd stolen him from you. From that day on the beach when I first saw Frederic you deluded yourself that if he hadn't seen me he would have married you!”

I was taken aback by her vehemence. I could feel the colour rising in my cheeks. “It's not true,” I stuttered.

“You believed that if Frederic had never met me he would have married you. Frederic, we must leave the Inn at once!” Mabel insisted.

“But Mrs Treleaven,” I pleaded, “You don't really believe I could do such a thing, do you? I've got an Inn to run. Why should I send a Valentine card to your husband? I've looked after Frederic since he was eight years old. I've taught him all he knows. And if he is honest, I am honest. He'll vouch for me. He's known me since the days of The Black Kite.”

“I'm sick to death of hearing about The Black Kite,” Mabel screeched.

My mouth went dry as a cuttlefish bone. “This Valentine card was probably sent by some disaffected former tenant or a poacher, trying to cause trouble between you,” I stammered.

It was of no avail.

“Frederic! We're leaving at once!” Mabel repeated.

Suddenly Frederic seemed to make up his mind. “I'm not ready to leave,” he said stiffly. “Ruth, get me a glass of sherry.” And within half an hour Frederic was drinking downstairs and the carriage - containing an angry Mabel - was rattling against the road.

And here I am back in my own bedroom. Memory stirs inside me like a fog but I must calm myself. I must not think about that one moment five years ago that I can never get away from - Frederic's twenty-first birthday. I must not think about those images from the morning, the Valentine card, Mabel's unfairness and accusations. Suddenly I know what I must do. Slowly I reach under the bed, and draw out a box, and take out my old muffin-shaped hat. And I close my eyes and breathe in the salt, rope and seaweed - and the sweet, iodine smell of revenge.

A Parcel Arrives

Lena Simmons

The front door bell rang incessantly. Ben leapt out of bed. 'Who in the name of God is ringing my door bell, at this unearthly hour' He glanced at the bedside clock. Half past six. It was Saturday' Ben sighed: he treasured his weekends. The absolute relief from the 9 to 5 ritual. Snacked breakfasts' early trains. Noisy, hot underground stations. The 'sardine game, of being pushed into the packed train, with the cry from station staff of 'mind the doors' Someone always had to have that extra push before the doors would shut.

Finally, arriving at the office, with its high windows, strip lighting, dusty, and plants that had seen better days. He often wondered how they ever survived. They were seemingly never given any water or attention. The pigeons that landed on the window sill, next to his desk, were envied.

The door bell continued to ring. 'Alright leave off' he shouted to no one in particular. Pulling up the blinds, he glanced down on to the front path. Standing by the door stood a postman, struggling with a large parcel in a strong wind of a miserly, grey chilly November morning. Ben ran down the stairs, and opened the front door. 'Sign here sir please' 'Blowly morning' the postman offered. Ben was in no mood to discuss the weather. A chill wind blew up the garden path. Boxer shorts were no protection on a morning like this. Ben signed the slip, and closing the door behind him, he retreated to the kitchen, dumped the parcel on the table.

Putting on the kettle, he reached up to the shelf, and took down a biscuit tin. Selecting his favourite bourbon biscuit, he sat down at the table, and began studying the handwriting. Nothing bell ringing there. Reaching for a kitchen knife, he began ripping all the heavy brown paper off, revealing an old leather battered suitcase. Who on earth would have sent this to him?

Carefully taped under the lid of the suitcase, he found a letter addressed to: Mr Ben Harper. It began:

Dear Mr Harper

Mr Sinclair, a patient in our nursing home has requested that this case and contents be forwarded to you. He tells me that you are his son. . However, I'm sorry to inform you that Mr Sinclair is so very poorly, and we are not expecting him to recover. Mr Sinclair is on pain reducing injections, and morphine, drifting in and out of consciousness. Should you wish to see Mr Sinclair, I would advise an early visit.

Yours sincerely
Sybil Hargreaves,
Manager.

The Firs, Spinney Lane, Doncaster, South Yorks.

This couldn't be real. Ben now wide awake. Someone was having a laugh. His hands began to search through the case. Mingled with the contents an old, worn wallet. It contained a photo of a gaunt, grey looking man, about sixty, Addresses and telephone numbers, in a red velvet book. A photo of an elderly couple standing outside a Church, holding a baby in long, white christening robes. Several young boys and girls standing with them. War medals. A group of ten year old boys, in a classroom. Another of a young man in soldier's uniform, with his arm around a pretty girl. Finally, a large brown envelope marked IMPORTANT. Pulling out various letters and documents, he found a birth certificate. In disbelief, his mother's maiden name appeared on it. It read:

Certified Copy of an Entry of Birth Registration District: Hammersmith
Name: Benjamin Sinclair. DOB: 28 January 1961 Born: Victoria Hospital, Hammersmith. Name and Surname of Father: Arthur Sinclair. Name and Maiden Name of Mother: Doris Emily Harper Formerly Smart.

It was true. Not a sick joke. This Arthur Sinclair was indeed his father, Horrified, he'd been adopted. Why had he never been told? Frank the man he had called father all his life. Who was he? Thoughts began racing through his emotions. Feelings of being let down and cheated. All of his 24 years being a lie. Acquaintances spoke of how alike he was to his 'supposed' father.

He must see this man. Arthur.... Dad... The Dad hung heavy on his lips. According to the letter, there seemed precious little time to visit. So much to ask, so much to know.

With trembling hands, he picked up the phone, and dialled the nursing home's number. 'The Firs, Sybil Hargreaves speaking'.

'Oh, hello. I'm Ben Harper. I received the parcel you sent me. I'd like to visit er.... Dad.... um ... Mr Sinclair. Perhaps you would let me know your visiting times.

There was a pause; Sybil Hargreaves voice became subdued. She replied: I'm sorry to tell, you that Mr Sinclair past away at half past six, this morning.

Queen Victoria's Thanet

Brian Jones

The Isle of Thanet is unlike any other part of Kent. Inland there are huge windswept potato fields and an open treeless landscape that looks more like parts of the Continent rather than the orchard country near Canterbury.

Also, it isn't an island but a part of the coast comprising the towns of Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs.

Despite a history that stretches back 2,000 years Thanet, particularly Broadstairs and Ramsgate; is strongly Victorian in character with many well preserved 19th century buildings and many associations with famous Victorians. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to picture a town like Broadstairs with the holidaymakers of a bygone age; men in heavy suits and ladies in ankle length bustle skirts, coats and big hats.

The Victorian gentility of Broadstairs compares vividly with the very different appeal of the busy port of Ramsgate and the brash resort of Margate. Built on cliffs overlooking the sweeping sandy Viking Bay, the town peers confidently over the neat promenade gardens out to the English Channel. It was loved by novelist Charles Dickens, who wrote "David Copperfield" and other world famous stories from the study of the castellated Bleak house, which commands the best view on the edge of the bay. Because Dickens liked to spend holidays at Broadstairs there came to exist that fascinating "Dickens Land" half real, half fiction, yet completely familiar.

Another feature of Broadstairs is its air of isolation, even though its suburbs now encroach upon Ramsgate. This is because of the sharp indentations of the coast. This is the least spoiled Kent seaside town. The tall cliffs lead down to a tiny harbour, which still bustles with pleasure and fishing craft as it has for centuries.

When Charles Dickens came to stay in Broadstairs in 1837 he was twenty-five and already famous for "THE PICKWICK PAPERS". He took lodgings at 12 High Street where he worked on the final chapters. He was to return to the town on numerous holidays until 1851. It was in Broadstairs that he found much of his inspiration for one of his best loved characters, Betsey Trotwood, David Copperfield's aunt.

In what is now the Dickens House Museum lived a Miss Mary Strong, a hospitable spinster, who gave him tea and cakes. Dickens

remembered that Miss Strong was in continual dispute with the owners of the donkeys who passed by in front of her cottage. Dickens used the donkey incident for the character of Betsey Trotwood and described the cottage with its square gravelled garden full of flowers. To avoid embarrassment to Miss Strong the location of the cottage was moved to Dover.

The parlour of the Dickens House Museum was described in “David Copperfield” and is well known from the illustrations of “Phiz”. If the building were to be haunted by tea drinking spectres from the 10 Century, they would surely materialise in this quaint and cosy recreation of the post.

Dickens last visit to Broadstairs found him weary and in a low state, mentally and physically. His marriage had failed and that was an additional reason for depression. He had just returned from the Continent and, in the words of David Copperfield, one imagines him “passing on among the novelties of foreign towns, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pictures, castles, tombs, fantastic streets, as a dreamer might be, having my painful look through all, and hardly conscious of the objects as they fade before me”

The house was purchased by the Tattam family, in 1919 and in 1973 it became a Dickensian museum.

High up on the cliffs is Bleak House. Here in the study looking straight out across the sea Dickens wrote the greater part of “David Copperfield. “He played with his children in the garden and he entertained his friends many of whom were famous in literature and art.

In Charles Dickens’s day Bleak House was named Fort House, and the building has been greatly enlarged since he lived in it. But the whole of the old house still exists, including the bedroom and the dining room in which he and his friends feasted on the kind of gargantuan meals common in Victorian times.

Dickens had a great affection for Broadstairs - “our watering place” he called it and spent many summers there, sometimes at the Albion hotel and sometimes in houses away from the bay.

Dickens’s young mistress, Nelly Ethel Ternan, had also strong links with Kent. Their relationship lasted for nearly 13 years, until his death in 1870.

Nelly was born of theatrical parents in Maidstone Road, Rochester, and became a very successful actress, at home and abroad. The first meeting with Dickens was either at the races or in the theatre, when she was about 18. From the first meeting Dickens was infatuated and showered money and gifts at Nelly and her family.

In appearance she resembled Lucy Manette in 'A Tale of Two Cities' but her personality rather resembled Dolly Varden in 'Barnaby Rudge'

The affair was kept a closely guarded secret, known only to a few close friends. Decades would pass before the truth-came out.

After Dickens's death Nelly deducted 14 years from her- real age! And married a clergyman turned schoolteacher George Robinson. The young-couple moved to Margate where they led a most blameless life, doing charitable works and indulging in amateur theatricals.

The world at large knew nothing about her past.

The Dickens' festival has been held every year since June 1937 in Broadstairs. Crinoline ladies and top-hatted escorts promenade elegantly through the town and events such as a Dickens play, garden party, Victorian cricket match and old time music hall attract thousands of visitors.

Charles Dickens represents Victorian literature at its greatest. In the high street we find a museum devoted to the great Victorian engineer Thomas Crampton. Born in Broadstairs in 1816, he built the local water works, which now houses the museum. Crampton was a pioneer of locomotive construction and was responsible for the first cross-channel submarine cable between Dover and Calais.

Almost joined to Broadstairs is the port of Ramsgate, busy with ferries and hovercraft to the continent. It has one of the best preserved harbours in England with two piers, an outer harbour with brightly coloured fishing boats and an inner harbour with a marina for small craft.

The architect Augustus Welby Pugin has strong associations with Ramsgate though his best known work is in the houses of Parliament. Pugin built the Roman Catholic Church in St. Augustine's Road. Pugin lived at the Grange and, always sympathetic to sailors, used to watch for ships in distress at sea.

Unlike Broadstairs or Ramsgate the popular resort of Margate is depressingly of the 20 century. If Charles Dickens great friend and rival William Makepiece Thackeray were to return to Margate he would find little to remind him of his own times. He actually wrote a Margate novel, entitled “A shabby genteel story”, almost entirely set in the town, during a period before the coming of the railways. Thackeray describes one of the characters, Mr Gann, as having “A great rattling telescope with which he might be seen for hours on the sect shore or the pier examining the ships, the bathing machines, the ladies' schools as they paraded up and down the esplanade, and all the other objects which the telescopic view gave him”.

The town of Margate typifies the decline of English Regency and Victorian resorts.

Sea bathing first became really popular at the beginning of the 18th century. In 1750, a Dr. Richard Russell published a treatise on the subject. His treatment involved drinking seawater as well as bathing in it. and rubbing the body with seaweed. Seaweed, mixed with other ingredients, could also be taken in pill form, washed down with a pint of seawater mixed with milk. Dr. Russell clamed that saltwater was a cure for almost everything, including madness and rabies.

Dr. Russell popularised Brighton and then several other resorts, including Margate, where patrons come every summer to paddle in the sea, drink the waters, attend balls and parties.

The young princess Victoria had a great affection for Margate (and Ramsgate) and this helped to make Thanet popular with visitors.

Ladies were wearing uncomfortable linen sheets and men were bathing naked; clearly in the name of propriety some kind of bathing costume was required. Early examples were extremely heavy and bulky and designed to cover every part of the body. To be tanned brown by the sun was not fashionable in the 10 century. Victorian bathing costumes often included skirts, hats, trains, gloves and boots.

Margate's sandy beach and huge Dreamland amusement park still attracts hordes of visitors; away from the promenade Margate has developed into an unappealing town, though one which can offer many traditional English bucket and spade delights. Despite the mediocrity of Margate's centre Thanet is a land of many rich and well preserved links with a fascinating century.

A Tale of Revenge

Adrian Danson

I have always liked the northern expressions, “There's nought so queer as folk” and “There's nought so rare as common sense”. They came to mind recently when I met a couple from Morecambe who told me about a woman they met in Bournemouth whilst on holiday there. The woman came from Bath, which happens to be my home town.

“You come from Morecambe,” said the woman, “You poor dears. I bet you're glad to get away from that awful place aren't you?” The couple showed commendable restraint, merely asking what the woman knew of Morecambe. It transpired that she had never been there, but had been to Harrogate. Well I have been to both places and found them very attractive, more so in fine weather, but that can equally be said of Paris. The fact that the two towns are on opposite sides of the country was apparently not known to the offensive woman.

Next morning at breakfast I offered the couple the following, to be offered to the Bath resident in the event that they ever met her again.

In AD 79 Marcus Ridiculus Maximus led the Sixth Legion, known as Legio Sextae Ridiculus into the muddy area of Somerset known as Aquae Sulis. Too tired to continue further, they found local stone and built houses with an area in the middle that slowly filled with warm water from an underground spring and they called this their bath. After that there was much feasting and the consumption of fermented grape juice brought from home. This brought mighty rumbling from their nether regions, mighty noxious wind and mighty piles of Roman dung.

No way was Marcus going to settle amongst such reminders of home, so he ordered his slaves to carry the detritus to outlying land. This was continued for many years, always to the same seven sites, which over the centuries grew into hills and became a feature of the settlement of Aquae Sulis.

The soldiers of the Legio Sextae Ridiculus, or simply Ridiculus as they were commonly known, were made welcome when they arrived in an area full of virgins, the local males having developed a preference for skittles. Although historical records may lack proper evidence on the subject, it is generally recognised that these virgins were the founders of the women's liberation movement and their song “girls on top” was their

signature tune on Virgin Radio, which they founded. Their attraction to the men of the Legion was the origin of the phrase “virgin on the ridiculous”.

Although disposal of the solid detritus had been effected with typical Roman efficiency, the liquid element continued to seep into the crevices of the clay soil and over the centuries accumulated in the aquifers beneath Aquae Sulis, where it fermented and created an increasing amount of heat.

As one might imagine from the scientific fact that hot liquid rises, the heat warmed their bath, but in some places rose to the surface, where it was mistaken for orange cordial. Having run out of grape juice they were happy to have found this alternative, but in no time at all the population became ill. Indeed they may well have died, but for one adventurous centurion who had returned from a golf tournament at Royal St. Georges. He had brought back four cases of Morecambe water and by pure chance this was found to cure their illness. Henceforth the inhabitants of Dung City, later renamed Bath, took their annual holidays at Morecambe Bay and thus lived happily ever after.

(If I ever go home again to Bath, I'd better go in disguise if this gets out - Ed)

The Tooth the Holed Tooth and Nothing But the Tooth

A F Danson

I dig and delve with much delight, oblivious to the pain
Of my patient who is wont to fight, 'til I hit him once again
I know you'll think it isn't right, that I could use cocaine
Yet what would be my patient's plight if hooked upon that grain?
So I will not be one bit contrite, as I breach the swollen vein
And my patient, from tremendous height, does utter words profane
On landing, not a pretty sight, yet still I did contain
The laughter, whose convulsive might would split my sides in twain.
Amalgam filled and polished white, I wished him "Come again"

The Bones of the Matter

Foot of The Yard

Archie Sharpe scratched the chin he hadn't shaved for three days, couldn't be bothered, why should he? His wife had left him years ago, because she claimed he was more married to the job than her and maybe she was right. Then he'd been forced into early retirement at 50. Senior officers used to be able to extend their service and he'd been a Detective Superintendent, but then there'd been a change of policy - bloody politicians again.

“What the hell's the point?” He muttered to himself, as he scratched his itching chin again. Then the post and local paper dropped through his letterbox and a headline caught his eye.

'Council Desecrates Lost Love Ones!' “Now what's that all about?” He asked himself.

He opened his letters and found an offer of a post on the Council Police Liaison Committee.

He'd forgotten that he'd even applied for the job. Would I be kind enough to consider accepting the position, the letter asked. “Too bloody right I will” he shouted as he headed for the bathroom. Minutes later with grizzled hair freshly brushed and blue eyes showing intent, a smartly dressed, clean-shaven six-foot tall fourteen-stones of rejuvenated Archie marched to the post-box with his acceptance. He also decided to drop in on his old subordinates to have a chat about that newspaper headline.

'Council Desecrates Love Ones!' The Daily Echo headline screamed when the Department of Parks last tried to rearrange the tombstones. Months of public meetings had led to an acceptable compromise, protecting the Council from the prospect of compensation claims, whilst showing “due respect” for the dead.

The redesigned Cemetery necessitated careful excavation of the old bones and identity labels were attached to each packet with the name of the tomb from which they were removed, at least those that remained legible, all records having been lost in a fire. Modest containers were made ready for the reburial service in the new location, to which relatives of the deceased were invited through Newspaper advertisements.

The name Rollo Arnold Mears did not appear in this advertisement, because his grave was found to contain only a set of dentures, yet the local Press got wind of it and produced distress for his relatives by spreading the story across the front page.

In the CID room at the local Police Station Detective Inspector Don Winfield was reading the report as Detective Sergeant Stan Gibbs came in.

'What do you make of it Skipper?' He asked Don.

'If I'm not mistaken, when this Mears was buried I was trying to track down Harry Parsons. He was the biggest villain on our manor in those days and suddenly he turns up dead, his body beaten to a pulp and then burn beyond recognition.'

'So how did you know it was him?' Stan queried.

'I never met Harry's wife, but I read her sworn statement that she recognised some moles on Harry's back and his Dentist's statement that they were his teeth, so that was that. But now there's this Mears business and I don't believe in coincidences. Do me a favour Stan, go down to archives and dig out the old Harry Parsons file,' said Don.

Retired D/S Archie Sharpe heard all this through the open office door, but decided to leave them to it, as they were obviously dealing with the matter without his intervention. Little did he know that he would become involved in the issue soon enough.

Don spent the rest of the day poring over the file. Though it refreshed his memory, it told him nothing he didn't already know, but gave him the headache which precipitated a shouting match with his wife when he got home, right in front of her visiting parents.

'You knew Mummy and Daddy were coming to dinner this evening. That's why you're late isn't it? You just did it to annoy me. I know you of old.' Judith half screamed, half sobbed.

'If you weren't so self-centred you'd know my job can't be done to a timetable,' he roared back at her. He might have been more conciliatory had it not been for the fact that he really had forgotten and was driven by embarrassment.

'I know all about that,' she shouted. 'You tell me every day of the week, don't you? But today is special and I bet you forgot that too.'

Don grew more and more red in the face because she was right, he had no idea what was special about today. Judith assumed his complexion to be nothing but anger and this drove her into frenzy.

'Twenty years!' She screamed. 'Twenty years since I took you home to meet my parents and we got engaged, but you can't even take your fat behind off your cosy office chair to get home in time to celebrate the fact. It obviously means nothing to you. I hate you, do you hear? I really hate you.'

She slammed the door and ran upstairs, leaving Don to face his silent in-laws.

'I'm sorry about that,' he muttered. 'It really was something important that kept me. I've just discovered that a villain I was chasing years ago, and thought was dead, may still be at large and he and his wife are probably still laughing over twenty years later. He was a boxer you see, lost most of his teeth, so had the rest pulled out and wore dentures. When we were given a body burn beyond recognition we accepted his dentures and his wife's statement as proof, but sure as eggs is eggs she was in on it. Now all I've got to do is trace the pair of them, but I'm damned if I know where to start.'

He knew he shouldn't have discussed details of his work, even with his in-laws. It was quite improper, but he was feeling so embarrassed he was desperate to talk. When he began they had looked at each other in obvious discomfort, which he thought was due to the row with his wife, but as they began to back towards the door he began to see their facial expression and actions in a new light.

They left the house without a word. His face had given him away. They knew he knew; yet he did nothing to stop them as he mentally struggled with his quandary. What was he going to say to Judith, whom he was convinced knew nothing of her parent's secret? What was he going to say to his Detective Superintendent? How would he explain his marriage to the daughter of the number one criminal of the day? The fact that they had changed their name to Collins was not enough. How would he explain that it was his signature that authorised the file designation, 'Case Closed'?

With the tightening of his chest his angry red face turned purple, then blue. No words of explanation would now pass his lips to ease the guilt Judith assumed on finding him several hours later, once her own anger had subsided. Her parents might have eased her burden, but told her nothing of those final moments when their secret was in danger of being exposed; their secret was secure once more.

Perhaps they intended to say something at Don's funeral, but there sense of relief was still immense, the effect of several gins too great. They lost control and began to snigger during the eulogy delivered by Archie Sharpe. This resulted in an angry exchange outside the Crematorium that ended with Judith declaring that she never wished to see her parents again.

Their sniggering had not been lost on Archie, who was still adept at tailing someone without being spotted and he followed the Collins to their home. Archie had taken Mrs Flower's statement when she had identified her husband's remains and he recognised her, no matter what she was calling herself now. They had never been entitled to take a mug shot of Harry Parsons, but this Collins seemed to fit the general description, allowing for the effects of time.

'Mrs Parsons?' He asked as she answered the doorbell.

She slammed the door in his face and he heard the sound of running feet and the back door slamming shut, as he peered through the letterbox. He was too old to go chasing after them, though no older than the fugitives, but it didn't matter. The pair didn't hear the lorry as they rushed out between the parked cars.

Archie exercised considerable diplomatic skill when he explained matters in strictest confidence to the distraught Judith, who had once again been blaming herself for the latest deaths in her family. Rollo Arnold Mears had by then been reburied in a grave marked Harry Parsons, but his surviving relatives were not advised to avoid distressing them any further. The puzzled Council acceded to Archie and Judith's request that her parent's cremated remains be interred with the set of dentures in accommodation provided for the said Rollo Arnold Mears. Archie and Judith felt that it gave the matter certain tidiness.

The 'Case Closed' Parsons file was returned to archives, whilst Archie sat in the bar listening to details of another case that was attracting the attention of his old colleagues. Who knows, perhaps he might again find a way to lend a hand.