

# The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

## Diary

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

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

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## **Editorial**

Paul Williams

Curious to see how it had changed over the years, I spent some time recently taking a look at back copies of *The Author*. It was noticeable that around fifteen years ago there seemed to be far more interchange of ideas and sometimes even comment on work submitted. Perhaps we could at least make a start with a few letters. Without a modicum of feedback it's impossible to know if anyone is actually reading the magazine!

I was amused to see something in the Editorial in the summer 2000 edition in which the then Editor, Howard Frost, in reply to comments about the poor overall quality of work submitted, lamented his 'failure as Editor to turn ordinary work into masterpieces'. This is clearly a very different view of an editor's role from that of Douglas Fulthorpe, whose article 'The Case Against Editing' appears in this edition. My own view is that some contributors welcome advice and comment from the Editor. There are usually more stories submitted than there is room for them and it would be a shame if some fairly good contributors were to lose the opportunity to have their work published here because the Editor had rejected it outright without making some suggestions that would make inclusion possible. Of course, an editor is not infallible, but sometimes he or she is the only person to read the story (other than perhaps compliant family and friends), and having someone else give a view as to how a story reads can be beneficial to a writer. Even when we read carefully what we have written, we still often read it through our own eyes rather than those of a potential reader. Many years ago, before Adrian's time, I had two stories edited, with paragraphs removed, and did not know about it until I saw them in print. I intend to continue Adrian's practice of referring back to the author if I feel a slight alteration would be appropriate. There are also a few cases where submissions are so unfinished that any reasonable person has to assume that the Editor is expected to do some cleaning up. Very occasionally, where for example a very elderly member has been submitting for years with little success, I will do my best to find a way of making something presentable for publication. I consider this simple kindness. This is a society, after

all, and we have to be as inclusive as possible of all our members. A 'one size fits all' editorial policy would not always allow that. There may also be cases where I think a story very good indeed but feel there is something that should be drawn to the writer's attention. It's not always instantly apparent who might welcome advice and who would not, so please don't take umbrage if you feel the Editor doesn't always get it right.

Now that warmer weather is very much with us I picked up a leaflet from my local tourist information centre giving details of Ipswich walks. I went along to two of these walks last year and they were most informative, each having a different theme. As I perused the leaflet it occurred to me that there have been very few articles here in recent years about some of the UK's ancient towns and villages, or its more modern ones for that matter. In my experience a good piece about a town or area, or a significant event that took place there, can be as riveting as many a short story, and I am sure many of us have some local knowledge we could share. Just a thought for those of us who sometimes find our fictional or poetic well running dry! Many historians can be included among the literary greats and it's not a bad area to hone one's writing skills.

### **Chairman's Chat**

Terry Rickson

'To the most High and Mighty Prince JAMES  
By the Grace of God  
King of Great Britain, France, Ireland  
Defender of the Faith etc....'

So opens the dedicatory preface to the King James Bible, also known as the Authorized Version, whose 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is being celebrated this year. I wonder how many folk, church-goers or not, have ever taken the trouble or even thought to read some of its more striking phrases! Many would sound OTT to the modern ear, for example, '.... Upon the setting of that bright Occidental Star, Queen Elizabeth of most happy memory....'

The King James was not the first Bible to be translated into English, the Geneva Bible, 1560, had been popular but its Calvinistic leanings did not recommend it in the religio/politico

tensions of the time. The six ‘learned companies’ of Anglican divines appointed around 1604 to produce a new version, played safe and came up with something along more ‘conservative’ lines, reflecting an older style of English. The use of the word ‘thou’, for example, was considered archaic even by the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and regarded as belittling when addressed to someone – Falstaff made play of it in ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’.

Much of the splendid language of the King James owes a great debt to the English linguist William Tyndale, martyred in 1536. Tyndale had studied and translated into English the New Testament and several books of the Old Testament by the time of his death. It is reckoned 84% of the New Testament in the King James is Tyndale’s work.

The whole ethos of the King James has become embedded in the English language and its words and rhythms have passed into speech with scarcely a thought as to their origin, thus none of it falls from grace and knowing the good folk of the society, I could never be accused of casting pearls before swine but, perhaps, as Chairman, endeavour to be all things to all men – a near impossible task!

### **Correction and Clarification**

Ethel Corduff

In the spring issue of Author in ‘75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Lunch 2010’, I made a regrettable error. I wrote that Terry Rickson thanked Adrian for his dedicated ten years as Editor. Instead I should have written, ‘Joanna Crawford, a long standing member, in a most stimulating speech thanked Adrian Danson for his dedicated ten years as Editor of Author’. Thank you Joanna and apologies for not mentioning it in the report.

### **Vee Bradley Humorous Poetry Competition**

Ethel Corduff

Any humorous topic, one prize of £30, maximum 30 lines. Due to a donation from Vee Bradley’s family, entrance is free (yes, free!). The usual rules apply, name and address on a separate sheet, SAE for return. Entries should be sent to Nina Matter, Competition Secretary, 4 Redruth House, Grange Road, Sutton, SM2 6RT. Closing date 31<sup>st</sup> July 2011.

## **Book Review**

### **A Displaced Person**

by long-standing member Joanna Crawford

Reviewed by Ethel Corduff

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939 and the country partitioned, hundreds of thousands were forcibly deported to the Soviet Union. Joanna Crawford is one of the few surviving deportees to Siberia. She and her family had to leave their comfortable home and begin a horrific journey, which ended in near starvation. There were heart-breaking close family losses on this journey.

Joanna's descriptions and Polish background make for an absorbing story. The effects of war on family and cultural life were heart rending. Polish people wanted to protect their culture at all costs and we learn much about this culture in Joanna's book. After a colourful period in Cairo the family settled in London.

The second part of the book deals with this period. I found it particularly interesting how a Polish family lived in forties and fifties London, a social history of that period from a Polish perspective. Joanna faced insurmountable obstacles to advance her creative talents but she remained positive.

Her characterisation is remarkable especially the picture she paints of her mother. The horrors of the war years are a sharp contrast to the delightful Cairo period. I did think the title 'A displaced child' would be more apt as the book is written from a child's perspective, but discover that it is important to stress that Joanna was called a 'displaced person', not a child.

'A Displaced Person' ISBN 9781449079888 can be ordered from the publisher, Authorhouse, or from Amazon, or you can ask your library to order it. I do recommend it.

## Poetry Workshop

Mike Boland

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Chairman: Barbara Stewart, The Old Malthouse, Brockhampton Mews, Bringsty, WR6 5TB

Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, TW15 3QA

Events Co-ordinator: Steve Pilley

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Two major new poetry collections have just been issued at the time I'm writing this piece for the summer issue, from Wendy Cope and Carol Ann Duffy, the Poet Laureate. Both are highly popular and best-selling (for poetry!) writers, yet are radically different in style. Which goes to show that the modern poetry scene is a wide church. It is a truism that bears repeating that anyone serious about poetry needs to keep abreast of current trends and writing styles, even if they then go on to write in their own voice. But poetry books, like any other, cost money, and keeping up-to-date can be an expensive pursuit. However, there is a resource available to most people (at least for now!) in the form of their local Public Library, who will order books for them to take out on loan. Many branches are under threat because they are seen as an easy target for spending cuts in the current economic crisis. This seems to me a particular act of cultural barbarism as the people most affected by closures are those most unable to avoid buying books for themselves, such as children and young people, the unemployed and senior citizens. The problem was made worse by the recent statement by John Redwood to the effect that libraries were only used by the middle classes, because his local branch contained books on antiques and glass-making in its non-fiction section. How patronising! As if only the well-off could possibly have an interest in such things or in literature in general. Man the barricades and save your local branch!

To happier matters:-

### **Wavelengths # 27**

The summer issue of wavelengths, the quarterly magazine provided free to all members of the Poetry Workshop, has now been published. If you haven't already received it, it will be with you very soon. As usual, the issue runs to 20 pages, and this time includes the text of the talk Barbara Stewart gave at last year's Weekend on R.S. Thomas,

plus a plethora of poems by PW members. It also includes the Newsletter section, which gives details of all the Workshop's activities, including the Rules for this year's Bill Barnes' Poetry Competition.

### **PW Weekend 2011**

This is the last call for members interested in attending the annual Poetry Workshop Weekend. As previously announced, this will be held over the weekend of 15-17<sup>th</sup> July. The venue will be the Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Birmingham as in previous years. The cost of the Weekend is £220 per head which includes accommodation, full board and conference facilities. We are booked in from 1pm on the Friday until after lunch on Sunday. Food at the bar on arrival, if needed (to be paid for separately). A Booking Form was enclosed with the winter issue of **wavelengths**. This should be returned with your deposit to **Terry Rickson** at the address given above. Please contact 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.

### **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 **Barbara Stewart** at the address above by 31 July.

### **Bill Barnes Competition 2011**

Details and Rules of Entry for this year's Bill Barnes Poetry Competition will appear in the summer issue of **wavelengths**. Closing date for the Competition is 30 September.

### **Subscriptions 2011**

Subscriptions to the Poetry Workshop fell due on 1 January 2011. Existing members should have received a subscription form with the winter 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 2011 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 £5 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
- Access to the new e-folio scheme (see **wavelengths** for details)
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition ( open exclusively to PW members)
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend

### **Dates to Remember**

<b>1 July 2011</b>	<b>deadline for motions for the AGM</b>
<b>15 - 17 July 2011</b>	<b>Poetry Workshop Weekend</b>
<b>1 August 2011</b>	<b>deadline for wavelengths # 28 (autumn issue)</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>publication of wavelengths # 28</b>
<b>30 September 2011</b>	<b>closing date for entries to the Bill Barnes Competition 2011</b>
<b>1 November 2011</b>	<b>deadline for wavelengths # 29</b>
<b>December 2011</b>	<b>publication of wavelengths # 29</b>

## Poetry Pages

Edited by Terry James

### Gimme Some Credit

Alan C Jones

I took out a girl from West Bromwich.  
We went for a meal on our own.  
And after I'd paid for the dinner  
I paid for the taxi back home.

I financed her lessons for driving.  
I bought her a car in the spring.  
I paid for a cruise on a liner,  
And forked out to buy her a ring.

I bought her a house in the country  
Far away off the beaten track.  
But when it came down to the mortgage,  
I couldn't pay anything back.

So now I am out on my earhole,  
Without a roof over my head.  
She took the first train back to Mother  
And said that she wished I was dead.

So all of you fellas take notice  
Be meaner and learn how to haggle  
'Cause if you throw all at some woman,  
You'll be left up the creek with no paddle.

### Sic Transit

Norman Bissett

Where have all the flowers gone,  
The gardens ablaze with joy and glory?  
After many a summer dies the swan,  
A commonplace, familiar story.

Where are the snows of yesteryear?  
Eh? *Où sont les neiges d'antan?*  
The drifts accumulated only to disappear.  
Evaporated now. All vanished. Gone.

Gone too soon like our youth, alas.  
We sit and age and watch life's glory pass.

## **Beginning**

Bill Terry Douglas

There's a town in the east called 'Beginning',  
where the sun never sets and the day never dies,  
the old don't get older, the young stay in youth,  
there's only the present, there's only one truth.

The people don't change, they smile all the time,  
they live for the moment and the moment's sublime,  
when they laugh it is gold, a cry it is silver,  
there is fun in their lives and the fun's never over.

I want to live life in the town called 'Beginning',  
where I won't have a foe, each acquaintance a friend,  
and maybe I'll find in the town called 'Beginning',  
that the story continues and the tale never ends.

## **Town Crier**

AE Hobbs

Our Town Crier, is no high flyer,  
Down to earth type is he.  
With lusty lungs, and a glib tongue,  
He imparts news to the community.

Scarlet robe, tricorne hat, plus a strident bell  
His manner, and his office,  
Suit him very well.

Alas the office is superseded,  
With email and internet.  
But we should keep up these traditions,  
Which we so easily forget.

## **The Surrey Suburbs**

Steve Glason

Just off the Kingston ByPass – Surrey dwellings spread  
Through many local stations – commuter railways thread  
Chessington and Tolworth – designed in '39  
Ending so abruptly – this fascinating line.

In Tudorbethan homesteads – ('Gardens' – 'Roads' and 'Drives')  
Suburbanites – they nestle – carrying out their lives  
To the pure 'Observer' – they seem contentedly smug  
Perhaps a drink to follow in the Toby Jug.

And so at Malden Manor – Civil Servants frown  
Delays – a daily habit – to matters of the Crown  
Heading now for Whitehall – advising Powers-that-Be  
Liberal/Conservative – it's all the same to me.

## **Rainbows**

Norman Bissett

Nosing upstream, its hooked, prognathous jaw  
Jutting against the water's weight, the salmon  
Wears its blue-green, silvery sea colours  
Working its fins and tail, it powers upwards  
Into the tide-race. Then it disappears.  
The peat-brown waters swirl. Peering, we wait.  
Here comes another snub-nosed depth-charge,  
Brown-backed but dappled, silvery pink and green.  
It fights and fights against the hydro-power,  
Battling like Sisyphus against the tide.  
And then it vanishes, even in a twinkling.

We step out of the observation chamber  
In the fish ladder. A double rainbow  
Arches overhead, across the louring sky.

## **Long Gevity**

Alan C Jones

We live at a place called Long Gevity  
The dinosaur denizen's dream  
In a state of decay and fragility,  
With hairnets and haemorrhoid cream.

We exercise daily by yawning  
Our outlook's increasingly bleak.  
It's a challenge to wake every morning  
And remember the day of the week.

We haven't much money for heating.  
Our woollens are bobbed and itch.  
If there's anyone new we're seen greeting  
The curtains continually twitch.

Every month we go out to the 'Social'  
And chat with the other old lads.  
A hearing-aid battery's essential  
Plus a pack of incontinence pads.

So here we live happily drooling  
Equipped with the brains of a dunce  
As it's nature we're constantly fooling  
It's as well that we're only old once.

### **Hawk**

Bill Torrie Douglas

Circling  
    radiant in the sun,  
Surveying,  
    seeking sustenance,  
Seeing everything  
    with acute sight,  
Staying  
    above our element  
until it pleases him  
    to swoop  
from his blue domain,  
    perfect for his  
perfect dive.

His call sounds thin and weak,  
    to fool the prey  
which will soon be his.  
    serenity returns to the afternoon,  
Temporarily,  
    to be disturbed by a distressed yell  
as  
the  
hawk  
    strikes.....

## **Limerick Junction**

Terry Rickson

There was an old man from Fowey,  
who went to sea on a buoy.  
Washed up at St. Blazey,  
his friends thought him crazy,  
he does it, you know, to annoy.

A pretty young thing from Australia  
re-invented herself as a dahlia,  
when her boy-friend found out,  
he let out a shout  
and her love life became just a falia.

There was an old poet from Dorset,  
enwrapped in his pastoral corset;  
if he'd written in Latin  
from the chair that he sat in,  
Ovid for sure would've endorsed it.

There was a young lady from Bude,  
who liked to bathe in the nude.  
When she dived off the pier,  
you couldn't get near,  
though some thought it all rather rude.

A drop out from uni. called Rob,  
had no intention of finding a job.  
When his mother found out,  
she gave him a clout.  
Now he's eager to earn a few bob.

A handsome young chap named Fitzwalter,  
many girls tried to get to the altar.  
But what can I say?  
He was decidedly gay  
married his friend from Gibraltar.

## **The Case Against Editing**

Douglas Fulthorpe

Many decades ago a new digest-sized magazine was launched. On its back cover there were two short parodies; one a western, the other a science fiction story. Each caricatured the lower level of its respective genre; unsubtle, action-filled and sensationally written. An accompanying note declared, “You’ll never find it in *Galaxy*. It went on to ask, “Seem similar?” They should, it continued; the second was simply a western translated into a science fiction setting.

The magazine was *Galaxy Science Fiction*, and, true to his word, editor H L Gold largely, although not entirely, avoided stories which were little more than westerns or sea stories against a space background. *Galaxy* offered very good terms in payments and rights to authors, and not surprisingly went on to rival, and some felt surpass, *Astounding Science Fiction*, which had dominated the field for the previous decade and a half. H L Gold was, however, a compulsive meddler, clearly a perfectionist who demanded stories to his own exacting standard, and could not accept anything without modifying it. Stories were sent back to top-flight authors with suggestions for extensive alterations, and, sometimes, complete rewrites. Authors accepted his tyranny, presumably because he paid a very high rate of three cents a word in an extremely competitive and notoriously underpaid field. Many were nevertheless furious at his constant interference.

He claimed he never made any changes without permission; others have said he personally rewrote every story he published. This may have contributed to the ill-health which precipitated his retirement.

My own feeling is that an author can not give of his best if he is dancing to someone-else’s tune. If an editor is going through your work with a fine tooth-comb, cutting sections or phrases out, correcting (at least in his view) the punctuation, changing words, pruning, honing and tuning, in effect producing his own version of your sweat-drenched, already much rubbed out and hacked-about creation, then, if you accept it, you will end up writing as he thinks you should, and, I have little doubt, turning out poorer stuff.

An extreme example of this occurred when an English author, whose own story was strikingly portrayed in a BBC documentary,

unwisely accepted a commission to write a screenplay, on terms requiring him to perform rewrites *without extra payment*. He had been obliged to write the script nine times, which had cost him his marriage and home. Fortunately a teenage girl had taken him under her wing, managing his meagre finances and, indeed, his life. He seemed to be on the road to recovery. My point is that, apart from the substantial psychological damage which he must have suffered, I doubt that the ninth version bore much resemblance to the original, or had much worth.

During my career as a professional engineer I wrote many reports, pretty low-grade stuff about testing and machinery. Frequently someone higher up the ladder would decide to rewrite my work, particularly after they discovered I had had material published professionally. Even Nicholas Monsarrat, shortly after the publication of his masterpiece *The Cruel Sea*, while in the course of quitting his job to become a full-time professional author, suffered the indignity of having his letters and memos “corrected” by small-minded tyrants inappropriately termed “Civil Servants”\*.

I was at one time a member of the Science Fiction Writers Of America. Its members had a very low opinion of editors, and, as writers in a fairly spectacular genre, they could fairly blister the air, and sometimes the paper, with their colourful phrases. Some American authors type NWC MF at the top of their manuscripts. *Author's* code of propriety prohibits my disclosing the meaning of this, but, if anyone cares to e-mail or telephone me\*\*, I will be happy to translate.

Actually, despite the title of this article, I am not against editors or editing in the catholic sense. Most, if not all, of us recognise the toil and considerable skill involved in the multiplicity of editorial tasks: taking manuscripts, then reading, selecting, and assembling them into a coherent and balanced selection, and, not least, writing an editorial. Then there is the dealing with such written and telephone correspondence as may arise, forwarding material to the printer, and, finally, arranging distribution. Not a task many would undertake lightly.

Frederick Pohl, a leading science fiction author and editor, explained in his memoirs how pulp magazines were always short of money. The publisher needed his profit to live, rents and the costs of heating and lighting had to be paid, the printers, distributors and

retailers took their cut, then, not quite at the end of the queue, if there was any money left, the authors were paid their pitiful half-a-cent (and on occasion even less) per word. At the very end stood the editor. In Frederick Pohl's case he was obliged to include his own stories in the magazine, while other editors had "moonlighting" jobs. Not surprisingly magazines frequently folded, and editors were regularly dismissed or moved on.

My objection is to editing in the restricted sense, where the editor takes upon himself to modify a manuscript. Technically, any changes without permission, be they to words, punctuation, or paragraph spacing, are breaches of copyright, and this should be borne in mind because the editor, by assuming responsibility, exposes himself to possible repercussions.

The point has legitimately been made that some submitted work is so full of grammatical, constructional and spelling mistakes that the publication will not risk damage to its reputation. Understandably, faced with this dilemma, some authors might welcome help. Others might decide to go to night-school to learn English, and read a book or two on writing. Some might attend writing workshops, although I would not welcome the moulding of my work by a tutor. I have also found on occasion that perceived faults indicate that the critic has missed the point, or is himself technically unsound. There is also the possibility that he may purloin your ideas. Sometimes there is a faint whiff of arrogance in attempting to correct someone-else's treasure.

In my professionally published work there have been a few attempts by editors to modify my submissions, and these were slight. As such they were nevertheless unwelcome. One amateur story of mine had twenty-four changes, before I gave up checking and withdrew the work. My two professionally published plays were completely unmodified, and, on acceptance, a proof copy was sent to me for my approval. Apart from one or two minor slips by the typesetter (and a few of my own) I had nothing to correct. One professionally published story appeared with "star-rimed sky" replaced by "star-rimmed sky", an annoying change. I had not been sent a proof copy... In any case, I feel an editor who wishes to modify a submission should first, before even sharpening his red pencil, seek permission from the author.

It is, I suggest, important to recognise a fundamental difference between editing a professional magazine and an amateur publication

such as *Author*. In the first case the magazine must be profitable, and the editor's first priority is to persuade the reader to part with his cash. If this does not happen the publisher faces financial collapse and closure. He can take various courses of action, which need not be detailed here, but an early casualty is frequently the editor. For an amateur organisation such as SPCSW the membership is ultimately both publisher and reader. Funding originates not from sales, but from members' subscriptions, and editorial policy must be decided by the membership, who will decide what degree of freedom of action the editor will have. Clearly this must be considerable, and in his selection process he will strive for quality. Those members who have yet to develop their skills fully may welcome help. Equally there are those who do not welcome corrections, but would nevertheless be grateful should typographical or spelling errors be pointed out.

I am asking that broad editorial guidelines, regarding selection and corrections, be discussed and formulated by the membership. Above all, let's be friendly.

Finally I include a one-act play to illustrate my sentiments.

#### ITALIAN TRAGEDY

MICHELANGELO: (*entering peevishly through a marble portal at Polony Art Gallery*) Where's my statue? What have you done with it?

CURATOR: (*beaming*) There it is! (*He points to a sculpture bearing the sign, Madonna and Child*).

MICHELANGELO: What have you done with it? There are two children, one on each knee.

CURATOR: (*kindly*) I added a little girl. It lends balance to the work.

MICHELANGELO: (*furiously*) Why? Was it going to topple over?

CURATOR: (*laughing*) That's very good.

MICHELANGELO (*taking a step back*) The Madonna's hair is shorter.

CURATOR: I chipped a bit off. In centuries to come the urchin cut will be very popular.

MICHELANGELO: (*suddenly glaring at the statue, and almost speechless*) You've emasculated Jesus!

CURATOR: I'm afraid we have our own codes here at Polony. (*Again kindly*) Look, I'm trying to help you. Many artists welcome it. Go to the next gallery and have a look at your painting. I've been busy with my turps rag and paint-brush. (*Eyes twinkling*) I think you'll like it. (*To MICHELANGELO, who has produced a mallet and chisel*) You're not going to modify it, surely?

MICHELANGELO: (*advancing upon the curator*) Oh, no, I'm not going to alter the *sculpture*.

Curtain

Douglas Fulthorpe was a Civil Servant for 24 years.

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## **Fabric of Society - Working Clothes**

Beryl Jones

Much has been written over the years regarding fashion, mainly for the middle classes and above. To redress this balance a little, what follows is a description of clothing worn by two entirely different sets of manual workers from the 14th to the 19th Century.

It has been said that the possibly the oldest garment donned for work is the apron. In 1307 it was known as a 'naperonne' which meant a linen napkin or nappy. By the 1500s this pronunciation had changed to 'apurn' which in turn changed again when Shakespeare apparently wrote 'apron.' Whether this was deliberate, a mistake or a misreading of his writing is unknown.

In 1362 Edward III issued a statute forbidding the wearing of finer fabrics for his lowly subjects. Yeomen and craftsmen were restricted to cloth not costing more than £2 per piece whilst oxherds, cowherds, swineherds, shepherds, carters, ploughmen and dairymen were limited to undyed blanket cloth or russet at one shilling per yard. This statute was not repealed until the end of the 17th Century by which time this uniform colour of brown or creamy white worn by the men and their families had become a firm tradition in the West Country.

The smock frock which originated in Spain and crossed the channel in the early 1600s was a combination of a 'smock', a woman's linen shift, and 'frock', a long gown worn by clergymen. This religious aspect is still retained as in the expression 'unfrocked' priest. Thus a long loose linen gown was a smock frock, the early garments being plain without the elaborate smocking that began in the mid 18c. These smocks were adopted by farm labourers as well as wagoners, drovers, ostlers and brick makers. Smock frocks protected their suits back and front better than any apron.

Smock frocks were simple to make without shaping or waists, and undyed linen was easy to wash. They were much in favour with wives and mothers who made the garments at this level of society, for the clothes worn underneath didn't have to be washed so often. By the end of the 18c they were an institution, with length being a matter of personal taste. It is said that no better thing has ever been devised for any outdoor wear, for smock frocks were both warm and convenient and took an astonishing amount of wet. Linseed oil was sometimes added for extra waterproofing.

By the 1820s smocking became popular, eventually becoming a 19c tradition. Some smock frocks were elaborately worked from the shoulder downwards to the breast with small glass beads dotted here and there. These worked smock frocks would be for 'best' and handed down from generation to generation. Smocking rarely reflected the job done by the wearer.

Eventually, with industrialisation, these garments began to be mass produced in the new factories often in drabbet, which was a twilled cotton cloth, or cotton drill.

Smock frocks died out first in the industrial Midlands. Thomas Hardy was apparently distressed to see changes in Dorset between 1850 and 1880 as town wear ousted rural, and mass-produced clothes made an impact. Shops were full of cheap suits which soon became shabby. These clothes were not as robust as smock frocks, corduroy or leather breeches for work. Unfortunately the young could see how the middle classes dressed and naturally wanted to emulate them even if only in shoddy cloth.

Dress however could still be a sensitive area in village life as attested by Joseph Arch (a shepherd's son) born in 1826 in Barford, Warks.

‘My clothing was of the coarsest. I had to go to school in smock frocks and old hob-nailed boots. Workday garb was the same. Sons of joiners, just becoming genteel, used to dress in shoddy suits. Many a stand up fight we used to have, regular pitched battles of smock frocks against cloth coat they were. Smock frocks held their own right well.’

By the 1850s shepherds were some of the few who were still wearing this garment until about 1880 when even they gave up.

In the late 1850s the Wigan Pit Brow Girls were a *cause celebre* due to their distinctive style of dress. They worked in trousers, totally shocking to Victorian sensibilities. In the 1860s, at the height of the controversy, the fashion of the day was the crinoline and outsiders considered the trousers of the Wigan Pit Brow girls to be utterly degrading. On the one hand it was thought to be unfeminine, making the girls coarse and mannish in their behaviour, and on the other hand thought to be provocative, leading to immorality and ruin.

Their outfits comprised a hooded bonnet of padded cotton, ragged and patched trousers with petticoats over the top, open blue striped shirt, cloth waistcoat generally double breasted and stout brass-clasped clogs on their bare feet. The petticoat was rolled up, as a joiner rolls up his apron, never let down and totally useless, only retained as a symbol of their sex.

During the 1870s mill owners banned fashionable crinolines and bustles but allowed hair nets for safety reasons. The mill girls wore short sleeved pinafores, developed in the weaving industry, with narrow petticoats and clogs on bare feet. Shawls, the last reminder of the mantles common in the 17c, endured down to the Second World War and for a little time thereafter.

## Two Years as an Army Cadet (1948-50)

Roy D Stevens

**A**t the age of fourteen, together with several of my friends, I joined the Broadstone Detachment of the Dorset ACF (Broadstone is situated three miles north of Poole).

We met one evening a week at the Fleets Bridge TA Drill Hall near Poole (long since demolished). Apart from practising drill, I remember small arms classes where we were taught to strip and reassemble a Bren gun, and became proficient in 'the naming of parts'. There was also a .22 rifle range in the basement which I enjoyed immensely, becoming quite a good shot.

In the summer holidays of the second year we went on two weeks camp to Tregantle Fort on the south coast of Cornwall, crossing on the Tor Point Ferry. The fort was manned by either Regular or TA troops. We were in tented accommodation just outside the fort. I remember queuing up for a meal dished up by army cooks. In our free time we climbed down steep cliffs to a sandy cove where we went for a swim, keeping a wary eye open for Portuguese Man-of-War jellyfish which can give a nasty sting.

We took part in several night exercises in the woods on the outskirts of Broadstone. I recall much throwing of thunderflashes and blundering about in the dark! These exercises usually ended in a certain amount of chaos, but I suppose I learnt something from them. On occasional Sundays we paraded through the main road in Broadstone. Although I remember feeling quite proud as we marched along (trying to keep in step!), we must have been the cause of some amusement to the bystanders, dressed as we were in our ill-fitting uniforms. We were issued with forage caps with two brass buttons, one above the other, at the front. Talk about Fred Karno's army!

On looking back, I feel those two years I spent as an Army Cadet must have stood me in good stead when it came to facing the rigours of National Service Basic Training at Royal Artillery, Park Hall Camp, Oswestry, two years later in October 1952.

## How Rainbows Came To Be

Philippa Rae

*(This story was the runner-up in the WF and FG Froud Annual Children's Story Competition 2010. The winning entry appeared in the spring edition.)*

Once upon a time there was a little town called Chuddle-on-Sea, and in the middle of the town stood the Town Hall. It was a very important looking building made from brown sandstone.

Right at the top of the Town Hall there was a large clock. Underneath the clock, in the clock tower, lived Mr Wetter and Mrs Bright. When it was raining, Mr Wetter would trundle out of the clock tower and put up his umbrella. He would stay there until the sun came out. When the rain stopped, Mr Wetter would go back under the shelter and Mrs Bright would take her turn and come out into the sunshine.

'I really wish I could speak to Mrs Bright,' thought Mr Wetter sadly, 'but we never get the chance.' When I am out, she is in, and when the rain stops and I go in, Mrs Bright comes out.' Mrs Bright felt the same. 'I would just love to talk to Mr Wetter,' she thought, 'but how are we ever going to meet?'

It made both Mr Wetter and Mrs Bright feel very sad that they could not talk to each other. Each of them felt very lonely up there in the sun and the rain with no-one to talk to. The townspeople loved the clock and they loved Mr Wetter and Mrs Bright but they sometimes wondered why the two little people looked so sad.

'There's Mr Wetter,' they would say. 'Rain must be coming. Just look at his downturned mouth. He looks so unhappy.'

One autumnal day, Mr Wetter was out in the rain. A swallow passing through Chuddle-on-Sea on his way somewhere warmer and sunnier stopped to rest on the clock. He spied Mr Wetter standing there.

'Why are you standing out in all this rain?' asked the swallow.

'It's my job,' replied Mr Wetter.

'Is that why you look so sad?' asked the swallow.

'No,' said Mr Wetter, 'I have my umbrella to keep me dry.' He explained to the swallow what was making him so unhappy.

The swallow thought a moment and then said, ‘I have an idea, but first I need to talk to the sun and the rain.’

First the swallow spoke to the sun and then he spoke to the rain. Then he flew back to the clock tower and told Mr Wetter what he had done.

‘But what will happen now?’ asked Mr Wetter.

‘Just wait and see, Mr Wetter,’ said the swallow with a grin and off he flew.

Later that day a strange thing happened. First it began to rain. Large, shiny drops of water splashed onto the clock tower and Mr Wetter popped out. Then the sun poked its head through the clouds. Its warm rays shone through the rain onto the clock tower causing Mrs Bright to pop out too.

‘What has happened, Mr Wetter?’ asked Mrs Bright. ‘We’re both out at the same time.’

‘I know,’ said Mr Wetter, just as surprised as her. ‘And it’s raining and sunny at the same time.’

‘This is the first chance we’ve had to speak to each other,’ said Mrs Bright. She smiled a bright shiny smile.

‘Isn’t it great,’ said Mr Wetter, with an equally bright and shiny smile.

Mr Wetter and Mrs Bright were so happy and their smiles so bright and shiny that they reflected the sun’s rays onto the raindrops. As the light from the sun bounced off each raindrop, it split into many different colours – red, orange, yellow, green, indigo and violet. Together the colours spread across the sky in a beautiful arc.

‘Look at that!’ cried all the townspeople, pointing to the sky. ‘And look at Mr Wetter and Mrs Bright. They are both smiling!’

So now, if ever you see a rainbow lighting up the sky when the sun is out in the rain, you will know that in the little town of Chuddle-on-Sea, Mr Wetter and Mrs Bright are chatting happily.

## The Gift

Una McMorran

**I**t all started when Johnny Oldfield, a book reviewer, critic and writer, who regarded himself a guardian of the use of the English language, failed to practice what he had preached to others.

It was well known in Little Bowling that Johnny Oldfield disliked, above all else, being bald but he could not bring himself to say so in plain English.

‘My lack of hair’ or ‘I’ve lost my thatch’ were examples of his sidestepping phraseology.

The person who most frequently heard about Johnny’s problem was his next-door neighbour and friend, Herby Browning.

Johnny once confided to Herby that his greatest ambition in life was to grow his hair. Born in the same year, still unmarried, they lived in their respective houses next to each other since the early death of both sets of parents. The two men had many things in common but there was one difference - Herby had a splendid head of thick, curly hair. He took it entirely for granted and apart from a note in his diary to have it cut every six weeks, paid scant heed to his hair or appearance. Johnny Oldfield, even without hair, was in fact, a very good-looking man. He had a boyish face, a well-proportioned body and a delightful speaking voice. Women found him attractive. He had a few good friends who, like Herby, put up with his obsession. One did not particularly notice his baldness until *he* mentioned it. Herby knew that Johnny had tried every possible way to make his hair grow - except one. The person in whose power it lay to try this last option had always said, ‘no’. That person was his oldest friend, Herby himself!

When he was still a very young man Herby had discovered that, on certain occasions, he had the ability to heal people by ‘laying on of hands’! He did so with great reluctance and always with a feeling of unworthiness. This healing power did not have a religious aspect and was as a complete a mystery to Herby as to everyone else. On the occasions when he had used his gift, he was left exhausted and as though he had given up part of himself. The *not knowing what it was all about* part of this gift frightened him and always left him feeling exceedingly low spirited.

Herby Browning, a librarian by profession, felt great affection for his friend, Johnny, even so, he always refused Johnny's often repeated plea to his, 'laying on of hands' to make his hair grow. Johnny was absolutely certain of Herby's ability, if only he would try.

'It's not an illness, man! Be thankful for all that you have. I don't even notice your... lack of hair. You know I'm reluctant to use my gift unless there is an absolute need. Anyway who do you think I am, Asclepius?'

'My dear Herby, I am perfectly sure that you are more gifted at healing than that old

Greek sod.'

Johnny, because of his profession, could work at home. He loved his work and his self-contained world. His comfortable way of life was disrupted one night when all the lights in his house failed. Next morning, the electrician appeared to be delighted to tell him that the entire house had, without delay, to be rewired from cellar to attic. This was how Johnny, torch in hand, came to be in the attic and to find the old trunk again. He dimly remembered lugging it up to the attic after his father had died, his mother tearfully insisting that she could not part with all his father's things at once.

'I'm not ready to part with everything that belonged to him,' she had murmured, her handkerchief to her eyes.

The trunk had remained in the attic after his mother, too, had died and it was now surrounded by a lifetime's unwanted objects. Reluctantly Johnny decided to clear the attic so that the electrician would have room to work. The lock of the trunk was soon dealt with and the contents removed to lighten the load. It contained a great quantity of clothing that had belonged to his father and a beautiful coromandel wood box, about thirty centimetres square, the elegant key still in the lock. He lifted out the box and put it beside him. It was then that he noticed the photograph lying at the bottom of the trunk where the box had been. It was of mother, father and himself at the age of eight or nine and amazingly, he had a crop of thick, fair, curly hair! Mother, her serious and rather large face, making her meagre amount of hair appear even thinner. Father smiling, looked happy and handsome, with his wonderful head of hair shining in the photographer's lights. Johnny looked at the family group for a long time before turning again to the lovely wooden box but the key would not turn. Intrigued and not wishing to damage the key or box,

Johnny thought it worthwhile to plod down to the cellar to find a suitable lubricant. A small amount of thin oil and he was able to turn the key without difficulty. Bending forward eagerly, he looked into the box - then he recoiled in horror! After a moment he recovered. A second look made him laugh with relief. It was hair! Memory flooded back - he *knew* that hair! Of course he did, it was his father's hair! His eyes misted and he had problems with swallowing. Mother must have carefully cut it before...he plunged his hand into the box to feel again, his father's abundant curling hair and lifted out - a *wig*!

Johnny felt betrayed. He sat for a long time in the stuffy, cluttered attic. Things began to make sense. Father must have needed to wear a wig from an early age. So, he too, suffered hair loss. Mother's hair had always been thin, verging on skimpy...so my problem is genes - *not having the right ones!* He looked at the photograph, then at the wig and flinging both to the floor he stamped on them and with mounting rage and shouted.

'Bastards! Bastards! Bastards! You always gave me everything I wanted when I was a child and now the *only* thing I want in the world, you have denied me.'

Two weeks later, still feeling depressed after his ordeal in the attic, Johnny was in Herby's sitting room telling him all that had taken place.

'Man you look awful! You've lost a lot of weight - aren't you eating?'

'I don't feel that anything matters. Of course I'll never find a cure to grow my hair *now!* It's *their* fault; life is so unfair. There is no hope - except from *you* and you won't help me. Another thing, that electrician is still with me and he's so sodding *cheerful!*'

Herby looked at his friend of half a lifetime, lying on the sofa in a listless and dejected state, and was moved to pity.

'If there was a possible way to give you my head of hair - I would. What you need now is a brandy, and come to think of it so do I.'

Herby returned from the kitchen in a remarkably short time with the drinks and a plate of neatly made chicken sandwiches. He had intended them to be a late night snack while watching a film, however...after their second drink they were chatting easily when Johnny gave a rueful laugh as he began to speak.

‘Do you remember - I can’t believe it now - about the hoax?’ Then he really began to laugh.

‘I’ve forgotten,’ lied Herby, ‘remind me while I top up...excuse me, while I *refill* your empty glass.’

‘Well, it started with this hoax ‘phone call from a woman. Oh, she really had me fooled. She said, “I know you wish to grow your hair and I have heard of this saintly nun whose intercessional prayers have brought about wonderful results. Her convent is not more than fifty miles from Great Bowling and Sister Mary Alopecia has, I’m told, a long list of successes.” Well, I can tell you Herby, I was all fired up as usual, but fortunately I had the good sense to discuss the telephone call with you.’

Herby grinned. ‘Now that you remind me, yes; but I think our all time favourite ‘cure’ was a hair from the Yeti’s foot!’

Both men roared with laughter.

‘How about the *standing-on-my-head-for-hours-to-increase-the-blood-supply*, cure? That one ended up with me being in a neck brace for weeks!’

They fell back helpless with laughter.

‘Seriously, Johnny, have you looked at men’s hair fashions lately; *really* looked? That last athletics meeting I saw on television - those virile sportsmen had shaved their heads and were as hairless as you.’

‘They had a *choice*!’

Herby quickly realised that this conversation might end in tears, so, looking at his watch, said, ‘Come on, I’ll see you home.’

‘Can I have another drink - not going until I have another...’

‘Why not? I’ll join you, but only a small one. We are going to feel like Hell in the morning.’

With some difficulty they eventually reached Johnny’s bedroom. After a lengthy struggle,

Johnny was in his pyjamas but after the third attempt, they were *still* buttoned incorrectly, allowing his abundant chest hair to spill out. This brought on another bout of laughing. He was in bed at last.

Herby sighed with relief and was making unsteadily for the door when Johnny’s drowsy eyes fell on a small oil painting of his father, hanging

on the wall opposite to his bed. His rage, fuelled by drink, was immediate and violent.

‘You whited sepulchre! You bald headed bustard! Hypocrite! You...’ and lots more.

It was the bedside clock that finally felled his father. This brought on a storm of dry sobbing, choking and uncontrollable shaking. Herby tried everything he knew to bring the situation under control. He was exhausted, frightened, bewildered and rather drunk. He feared that Johnny would do something really terrible to himself, or choke, if left alone. Should he call the doctor - the telephone was downstairs...after all he had plied him with brandy... It was in this crisis situation and against all his inclinations, that he pacified Johnny Oldfield by offering him his dearest wish, ‘laying on of hands’.

Grasping the shuddering Johnny firmly by his shoulders, he proceeded to do so.

Johnny Oldfield awoke, not only because it was morning - something had disturbed him. He awoke because something was tickling his right shoulder. He sleepily raised his left arm to reach the irritating spot and his fingers touched - *hair!* He froze. Now wide awake, he stayed in that position while his mind raced. Hardly daring to believe, but knowing that something had happened while he had slept, he allowed his fingers once more to feel *hair!* The full significance of this hit him. His hair must have grown in the night and had reached his shoulders!

It was then that he remembered! The previous night Herby had grasped his shoulders and intoned over and over,

*‘Make this man’s hair grow.’*

Then glorious warmth had flooded throughout his body. Johnny’s mind was exploding with joy as he slowly raised his hand, which had been lying motionless on his shoulder. Anticipating the sensation of feeling hair on his scalp and hardly daring to breathe, his fingers tenderly touched his head, which was – completely hairless.

It was then that he became aware that his pyjamas were tight about his chest and crotch, *desperately* tight, and that he was feeling unbearably hot all over. He leapt from his bed and tore his pyjamas from his body, which was from shoulders to toes covered in long hair. *His hair had grown* and was, as he watched - *still growing!*

## A Spoiled Child

‘Chav Lad’

When Annie received her invitation to her grand-nephew Jason’s birthday party her first instinct was to go out and buy him a really expensive present. She knew that money was tight for his parents. Mark had been made redundant the year before and, after several months of unemployment, had had to accept a much lower paid job. Sharon could only manage a part-time temp job what with having baby Victoria to take care of. Annie knew that for a while they had even faced the prospect of losing the house. This calamity was averted after Mark auctioned off his prized collection of Beatles memorabilia. The car too had been sold and replaced with an old banger. When she last saw them, at Christmas, they were still as cheerful as ever and Jason seemed happy enough despite the fact that his hoped-for bicycle had not materialised. ‘Next year, perhaps,’ Sharon had told him.

Annie set off on her shopping expedition, a bicycle uppermost in her mind, but when she saw the prices she paused for thought. It was not that she could not afford it, nor that she did not want to spend that much, but she knew that Sharon and Mark were very proud. They had almost angrily turned down offers of help from Annie and other members of the family during those hard times and were hardly likely to soften their stance now that things were marginally better. To present Jason with a bicycle would have been an announcement that she could give him things his own parents couldn’t. How much could they afford to spend on him? she wondered. Twenty pounds? Thirty at most. She decided that, much as she wanted to, she could not go above that.

That presented her with another dilemma. What on earth did one buy a boy of ten? A gift voucher would have solved the problem but that too had its difficulties. She had given them all quite generous Marks and Spencer’s gift vouchers at Christmas, thinking that it would allow them to buy some nice clothes without worrying. Yet although they didn’t say anything, she detected a fleeting hint of offence, as though she was giving them money which, in a sense, she was.

She realised that she was passing Argos and, desperate for ideas, she popped in to look at their catalogue. Eventually she alighted on a sort of mini planetarium. ‘See the stars cross your ceiling.’ said the

description, 'Listen to a planet commentary. Includes CD-Rom. Requires 6 AA batteries'. Jason, she recalled, was interested in stuff like that, at least he had listened attentively enough when Mark had once pointed out the constellations to him. The price was £19.99, reduced from £24.99. With the batteries (she decided to buy twelve so that Jason could have some spares) that would take her up to the limit she had set herself.

Jason's birthday bash was to be on the Sunday afternoon at four. Annie rang Sharon to ask if she could come early to help get things ready, an offer Sharon gratefully accepted. When she arrived at two, however, there was little left to do.

'It's not what you could call a big event,' Sharon explained. 'A couple of Jason's school friends will be coming and three or four neighbours and their kids. The adults can sit in the kitchen getting sloshed while the kids get on with it. We can keep an eye on them through the hatch. As it happens it's Grant next door's birthday too. He's a year older than Jason though. Perhaps I should explain, he's...'

Sharon was interrupted by Victoria, who had clearly awoken from a slumber and was demanding attention.

'Oh dear, I expect she needs changing. Jason's in the garden with Grant.'

Annie went into the garden with her present, which she handed to Jason who was seated on a bench with his friend. He was extremely appreciative when he opened the package. Grant was less impressed.

'That's the cheap battery one! My gran gave me the proper electric one that costs nearly a hundred pounds!'

What a revolting child, thought Annie. She noticed that he was wearing the latest Arsenal strip and cap, which she knew cost a fortune.

'So what did your mum and dad get you?' Grant pursued.

'A football,' said Jason, and added, after thinking hard, 'and a box of paints.'

Grant smiled with what to Annie looked like smugness.

'My mum and dad are taking me to Disneyland, the one in Florida. We're staying at a five star hotel.'

'Well,' said Annie, affecting joviality, 'if it has that many stars

you'll be able to see it on your planetarium!

'You mean you're getting a holiday to Disneyland as well as the new computer?' asked Jason in wonder.

'Yeah. And they've given me a sound system too. Aunty Vera and Uncle Stan got me a play station.'

'But you've already got one,' said Jason.

'Yeah, but this one's the new play station 4. It cost more than five hundred quid with all the games.'

Annie and Jason both digested this. What an unbelievably spoilt child, Annie thought. She could not resist a hasty mental calculation. The presents must have come to a couple of thousand, and that did not include the trip to Disneyland which had to be at least as much again. Her heart went out to Jason as she glowered at Grant.

'Not all my presents were as dear as that,' said Grant modestly, as though he had read her thoughts. 'My other gran only gave me a digital radio. I've seen the same ones in Comet for about seventy quid.'

'That's the poor side of the family I take it?' Annie said humorously but with a hint of acid. 'I only hope you realise how lucky you are.'

They heard Grant's name being called from the other side of the fence.

'Better go now,' he said. 'I'll see you later.'

Jason looked thoughtful for a few moments after Grant had gone, a look of intense sadness on his face.

'It must annoy you when you hear him going on about his presents,' she said sympathetically.

'No, not really,' said Jason. 'He's not always like that. He's been a good mate.'

Annie was impressed by Jason's mature attitude but found it difficult to believe that there was not the slightest hint of jealousy.

'But surely,' she said, 'you must sometimes wish you could swap places with him?'

Jason looked at her in surprise.

'Why would I want to swap places with someone who's dying of leukaemia?' he asked.

## Skegness Was So Bracing

Ruth Seer

‘Gran, why don’t you and Granddad ever go away on holiday?’

‘Can’t afford to, Betty. And I suppose, to be truthful, we don’t want to at our time of life. Too much effort.’

Betty and her Mum and Dad were looking forward to their annual holiday to Skegness. Gran and Granddad were going to look after their house, including the pets.

Granddad said, ‘We’ll see to ‘em, if we remember. Weather forecast for the next few days over Lincolnshire is bad, lots of cold winds and rain. I bet this holiday extravaganza costs you all a pretty penny, just look at the railway fare for a start. How much is it nowadays? I read that they’re planning to get rid of the steam trains, and electrify ‘em all. Daft idea, there’s too many daft notions being spouted, only ten years after the War. I wouldn’t dare ride in a ‘lectric train. Imagine sitting in a compartment, with volts and things going through you. What would happen if you touched summat metal?’

Gran said with a sigh, ‘Leave us your address, just in case. You never know, something might happen to us whilst you’re away. I always keep a bag packed ready, in case one of us is taken badly, and has to go to hospital. You go and enjoy yourselves whilst you can. Forget about us, we shall have a quiet week on our own, as usual. Just the two of us. Young folk like to go and have a nice time, never mind the oldies. But at our ages, anything could happen, at any time. Still, we’ve paid into a funeral plan at the Co-op.’

With these encouraging words ringing in their ears the holidaymakers set off, calling ‘Bye-bye! See you in a week! Don’t forget to feed the animals!’

That evening old couple ate a frugal supper, then Granddad went out to the pub leaving Gran to read her *Woman’s Own*. He returned home later and remembered – the animals. His wife had gone to bed and was sitting up amongst the pillows, still reading. He said, ‘It’s nearly midnight. Have you fed them creatures?’

‘Err ... no.’

Go and feed the fish and let out that cat. Then feed the dog and walk him.’

‘What! At this time of night! Do it yourself!’

‘Them poor dumb animals are relying on us. It’s your fault you forgot.’

‘Them poor dumb animals have probably eaten each other by now. I bet that cat has pushed over the goldfish bowl and enjoyed his fish supper. If you go now, I’ll do it tomorrow – probably.’ The old woman muttered the latter word quietly.

‘Oh all right. Pesky animals, just a load of bother. Why couldn’t they take ‘em on holiday with them?’ Granddad’s complaining voice was heard all the way downstairs.

Mary, Tom and Betty departed for Skegness from the local railway station which had won prizes for being the prettiest, neatest and most attractive station in the county. There were colourful tubs of flowers on the platforms and it was always clean and tidy. In previous summers the family had been to Mablethorpe, Cleethorpes and Ingoldmells. Names that conjured visions of bright sunny days, blue skies, ice creams, sticks of rock, buckets and spades, and sandcastles with little plastic flags that flapped merrily in the sea breeze.

They stayed (as they always did) in a caravan. It was a cheap holiday but conditions on the caravan park were basic, to say the least. There was a communal toilet and washroom some distance away. The caravans had the minimum of necessities inside so caravaners had to bring bed linen, towels, and tea towels, as well as clothes for the week, including swimwear and rainwear.

Tom staggered from the station with the heavy suitcases. There was a hasty shopping trip to the park’s shop upon their arrival. The shop sold everything they needed, including the essential brown sticky flypaper. Mary never forgot to bring the Seven Seas Cod Liver Oil for her daughter.

They hurried down to the sands, and Betty set about building sandcastles. Then she took photographs with her little Brownie camera; Tom sitting on a deckchair snoozing (with a hanky over his face), and Mary sitting on a deckchair (knitting).

Betty chose postcards to send to her friends. Mary told her not to buy the rude ones.

‘They’re not rude, they’re saucy,’ said Tom.

‘They’re rude. They shouldn’t put stuff like that on display,’ argued Mary.

They always enjoyed the novelty of their first day away. But sometimes it rained, the caravan had to be cleaned, the beds made and the shopping to be done, meals to get ready, etc. The novelty soon disappeared for Mary.

The family took sandwiches down to the beach for a picnic. Wrapped up well in warm jumpers and coats, they inhaled the fresh sea air. The lunch was placed on a tablecloth and looked appetising. There was a choice of fish paste or cheese sandwiches which always seemed to be much tastier when eaten outdoors. As they enjoyed their feast, they debated whether to take a walk, or play with the beach ball, after lunch.

‘How about an ice cream?’

Betty and her Mum wanted to choose their own, so the three walked across the sands to a nearby van. There was a long queue, and not much choice remaining to them. When they returned to their picnic spot with a choc-ice apiece, they saw to their dismay that the tide was coming in. The deck chairs lying on the beach were now soaking wet, and so was Mary’s knitting. They ran to the rescue of the sodden objects, and Tom dropped his ice cream in the water. As he picked up a deck chair, his foot slipped on a piece of seaweed. He fell down on the wet sand and Mary, dropping her handbag, tried to pull him to his feet. The bag and its contents then had a good soaking as the waves washed over it.

They made their way rather damply through the dunes and back to the caravan. Mary lost her sunglasses and Tom lost a pound’s worth of loose change from his pocket, in the dunes. Careless Betty then dropped her Brownie camera in a rock pool. They reached the door of the caravan, exhausted and bad tempered.

Tom groaned. ‘Oh no! I’ve lost the key! It must have fallen from my pocket with the change.’

Mary took charge. ‘Tom and Betty, you go back and look for it. It can’t have been more than two miles back. I’ll go to the site office and ask if they’ve got a spare one.’ She didn’t know that the office was closed during the afternoons. Father and daughter hurried to obey their

orders, and Mary walked along the path to the site office. What a day, she thought. Ahhh! What's that coming from that dustbin? It's a rat!

As if in sympathy, there was a loud clap of thunder. A cloud burst overhead. In a few seconds she was saturated from head to foot.

During the week Mary made sandwiches for their lunch each day, and in the evenings they ate fish and chips from greasy newspapers, bought from a dingy shop. Tom hurried there every evening and stood in a queue for ages. Sometimes he got wet on the way back, in the true fashion of an English coastal holidaymaker. But the family never suffered from sunburn or heatstroke, and they went home at the end of the week with enough washing to keep Mary busy for the whole of the following week. She said she needed a holiday to recover from her holiday.

When they arrived home they found no problems; but the cat and dog, both looking thinner, were overjoyed to see them. The gold fish was swimming happily and energetically (a replacement from the pet shop because the previous occupier had died two days ago).

The following year Betty's aunt and uncle retired to Skegness and invited their niece to stay. This time she travelled on a coach (because there was a rail strike) on her own, for the first time. Tom and Mary escorted Betty to the bus station to board the long distance coach. Her suitcase was placed in the hold. Tom slipped some coins into the palm of the driver.

'Keep an eye on her, her uncle's meeting her.'

The driver slipped the money in his pocket, and immediately put Betty out of his mind.

The parents had a few words of advice for their daughter.

'Don't talk to anyone, especially single men. The ones with fair hair are the worst. And avoid men with curly hair.'

'Don't take sweets from anyone. They might be drugged,' said Mary.

'Keep your purse with you at all times, and look out for pickpockets,' said Tom.

'Stay in your seat all the time. And avoid talking to red-haired women. And don't let anyone entice you away, in case you get taken into the

slave trade,’ said Mary. ‘You’ve got clean clothes on, in case you’re knocked down and have to go into hospital. Have you got a clean hanky?’

Betty was now feeling confused with so many instructions to remember. And also a little scared in case she would encounter fair haired women with drugged hankies, or red haired men with dirty sweets, or was it the other way round? Mary’s parting words were reassuring.

‘When the coach stops for a break, try to not go to the toilet. Public toilets aren’t clean. You might catch VD. If you have to go, don’t sit on the toilet seat.’

As the coach departed Betty waved to her parents, hoping that she wouldn’t need the toilet. She began to feel excited, and half hoped that an adventure would happen to her. But there were no fair, curly or red haired people on the coach, and if anyone had sweets they didn’t share them.

The coach stopped twice, both times in dirty and ugly looking towns. During the first stop a man boarded the vehicle when the driver was absent, and tried to sell copies of an almanac, which cheerfully predicted events for the forthcoming year; earthquakes, tornadoes, flooding, drought, and the landing of alien spaceships.

‘Don’t buy one,’ a woman said, sitting opposite her. ‘They ain’t the genuine ones, they’ll sell you any old rubbish on these journeys.’

Betty had no intention of acquiring a copy, partially because she couldn’t afford one, and partially because she didn’t want to know the future. And she’d been told not to talk to anyone. At the next stop a man and a woman entered and tried to sell religious literature.

Eventually the coach arrived at its destination. It had been a long journey, the girl’s limbs felt stiff and she was thirsty. Her uncle met her. The coach driver watched Betty as she climbed into a car with the unshaven, casually dressed man. Wasn’t that the kid whose Dad had given him some money, to look after her? He shrugged his shoulders. So many parents gave him money for the same reason on these coach journeys. I’m not a nanny, he thought.

And he scowled at a poster of a fat, pipe-smoking, jolly-looking fisherman who wore a blue jersey and black boots.

## Afternoon Tea at the Clarence

Terry Rickson

“There you are,” said Charlie Cruet, “set down as gentle as you like and by your favourite waiter too.”

“Ooooh yer,” exclaimed Sybil Salt, “cor, ‘e’s a bit of alright, in ‘e, that Marcus.”

Her companion Pansy Pepper sighed. “It’s them eyes!”

“Ar say,” Sybil added, “and ‘e’s got a lovely bum an’ all!”

Pansy continued dreamily, “‘e can give me a twiddle on this ‘ere cruet any time ‘e likes, dear.”

“Really!” sniffed Vi Vinaigrette from her place in the cruet, “how common!”

“Did yer ‘ear that, Panse? Common, I like that. Common indeed!”

“I’ll ‘ave you know,” Pansy said, “we was ‘ere in the war, when it was bombed.”

“Yerse, an’ she’s got the dent in ‘er silver top sifter to prove it an’ all,” Sybil added in defence of her friend.

“Well, it’s about time they pensioned you two off is all I can say,” was Vi’s tart reply.

“Well, I....”

But before the argument could develop further, Charlie cut in. “Now, now, ladies, a bit of decorum, please. Remember this is the Clarence and you’re on your favourite table with the best view.”

Indeed they were. Sybil Salt, Pansy Pepper and Micky Mustard occupied the lower part of the cruet, while slightly above them were Oliver Oil and Vi Vinaigrette. From their position on this particular table they had a good view of the restaurant, the tables spread with immaculate white cloths, the exquisite china, the silverware and tasteful posies of flowers in their holders. All this matched to perfection by the Clarence’s team of impeccable waiters and waitresses.

The restaurant was beginning to fill with clientele eager for afternoon tea and cakes, for which the Clarence was renowned.

“Ah,” said Oliver, “there are those four ladies who came in earlier for lunch; looks as though they’ve had a good afternoon’s shopping.”

The four in question had settled themselves comfortably at a table by a window and were soon enjoying their tea and the delicacies on the cake-stand. One of their number, still with an empty plate, had her hand pressed to her chest in a gesture of “I daren’t, I daren’t, my diet!” then succumbed to a generous portion of iced meringue Romanov, a Clarence speciality. Her companions, meanwhile, demolished profiteroles and lemon mousse gateaux without so much as a care.

“Tuck in,” Oliver said cheerfully, “you’ll love it.”

Two upper-class mums, each with their little Giles and Annabel, loudly discussed what was on offer in the braying accents of the well-heeled. They decided finally on cherry roulade and madeleines for themselves and cream horns and meringues for their offspring, without so much as a glance or a “thank you” to their waitress.

At a secluded table for two, an attractive young woman was seated with an older man.

“They’re not married,” observed Vi. “Look at the way he’s plying her with mille feuille slices.”

“Thinks he’s a bit of a ‘leg-over Leo’ and in with a chance, I shouldn’t wonder,” laughed Charlie.

“Really, Charlie, do you have to be so coarse?” retorted Vi.

This only made Charlie laugh all the more.

“How about these two,” said Micky as a florid middle-aged couple were escorted to a table. “The Colonel and his lady, do you think?”

“What do you think she’ll go for?” enquired Pansy.

“By the size of ‘er, cream cakes,” said Sybil. “There yer are, what did I tell yer, eclairs.”

“Gawd, them teeth!” gasped Pansy. “Blimey, she’s getting ‘er gnashers into those eclairs alright.”

So she was, cream and slowly melting chocolate oozing at every bite.

“Gawd, what an ‘orrible sight,” Sybil said.

“The Colonel’s having a second slice of rich fruit cake,” observed Micky.

“Yer,” Sybil laughed, “the icing and bits of glace cherry stuck to ‘is moustache quite suit ‘im.”

“Disgusting!” was Vi’s comment.

By now there was a subdued but happy buzz of folk enjoying their tea. Tables were cleared discreetly and re-laid. The staff moved effortlessly between the tables with salvers of cherry and Madeira cake, choux buns, Florentines and chocolate almond torte. Other delights to tempt the discerning took the form of muffins, crumpets, shortbread and another Clarence speciality, mini Banbury cakes.

“The little bugger! Did you see that, Panse?”

“Wot?”

“That Giles, or whatever ‘e calls ‘isself,” Sybil exclaimed. “Pinched the last cream ‘orn orf ‘is sister’s plate when she weren’t lookin’. That’s it, go on give ‘im one!” Sybil encouraged, seeing Annabel give her brother a kick under the table.

“I’d give ‘im one an’ all, to be goin’ on with,” added Pansy grimly.

The childrens’ mother, Madeleine in hand, barely paused in her loud conversation to remonstrate.

An American lady, having demolished a plate of finger slices of Welsh rarebit, Caerphilly cheese and with Dijon mustard and real ale, without crusts, of course, gazed enraptured as a tray of pastries arrived at their table and exclaimed to her companion, “Gee, they’d just love it back in New Jersey.”

“Really, they’ve no style at all, ‘sniffed Vi, wrinkling her nose.

“Oh, I say,” exclaimed Oliver, “the Colonel’s lady is going for the toffee fudge slices.”

“That’ll put another stone on, dear,” chortled Sybil.

“Right then, boys and girls,” Charlie said, interrupting the chatter, “get fell in and on parade. Here comes Marcus with a couple for our table.” Then, with a quiet chuckle, “Might be your lucky day, Panse, and he’ll give you a twiddle!”