

RFS Newsletter

Newsletter Issue No.57

December 2016



See page 8

Contents

Editorial	02
Forthcoming meetings	02
Essay Prize Winners	04
Meeting reports	
Schmaltz and champagne	05
Extra mural reports	
The Cutty Sark	06
Rotherhithe	08
Dennis Severs House	10
Wine tasting in Bordeaux	11
A member's artwork	16
Articles	
A short account of two therapies	17
A book which influenced me	17
The Lost Rivers of London	19
Minna Wagner	21
A matter of consideration	25
Death on the house	26

EDITOR: Dr Richard Lansdown

EDITORIAL BOARD: Nick Coni, Sally Gordon Boyd, Katharine Whitehorn

RFS COMMITTEE: Dr James Carne (Chairman), Dr David Murfin (Honorary Secretary), Dr Julian Axe (Honorary Treasurer), Dr Jeffrey Rosenberg (Honorary Meetings Secretary), Dr Rosalind Stanwell Smith (Honorary Extramural Events Secretary), Mrs Sally Gordon Boyd, Dr Richard Lansdown, Dr Robin Loveday, Professor James Malpas, Dr John Scadding, Ms Katharine Whitehorn, Professor Robin Williamson

Please address all correspondence to: The Editor, Retired Fellows Society Newsletter, Academic Department, Royal Society of Medicine, 1 Wimpole Street, London W1G OAE or email: rglansdown@yahoo.co.uk



The ROYAL
SOCIETY of
MEDICINE

Editorial

Will future generations look back and wonder how on earth we managed without personalised medicine? “Goodness” they will say, “in those days doctors, faced with two people with similar symptoms, would give both patients identical prescriptions. They realised that their approach meant that the drug worked for some but not for others but had no idea of the importance of genetic testing in order to tailor treatment not just to the symptoms but to the individual”.

The first complete human genome sequence was published fifteen years ago but until recently analysing an individual’s DNA was too expensive for general use. This, it seems, is changing. An American firm called Helix is planning to run millions of tests a year, storing the data online so that they can be accessed at any time. Consult a doctor in future and he/she will peer at a screen, tap a few keys and link your genes with a specific, tailor made treatment.

Where will this end? Some sixty years ago I heard a trainee teacher explain how important it was to group pupils according to their learning style rather than trying to teach a whole class. Will personalised medicine extend to personalised education? Will our great grandchildren enter school at five clutching a DNA analysis? Will there be personalised selection for universities? “No use you applying to Oxford, your genes just don’t fit, try the LSE.”

And think of the field day that dating agencies will have, not to mention the cultures which retain the practice of arranged marriages.

Think also of the scope for lawyers defending dodgy clients: “Yes, m’lud, my client did indeed rob seven or eight banks, but if you consider his genes you will appreciate the level of mitigating circumstances. I suggest that a suspended sentence would be appropriate.”

And what of the possible ease with which one could fake one’s analysis?

As someone I once worked with constantly said, “It’s all very difficult.”

Forthcoming meetings

Thursday 16 February 2017

Professor Keith Lowe: 1945 - the myth of the rebirth from the ashes of World War II

Professor Lowe studied English Literature at Manchester University. After twelve years as a history publisher he embarked on a full-time career as a writer and historian and is now widely recognised as an authority on the Second World War and its aftermath.

His books include *Inferno: The Devastation of Hamburg*, 1943 and the international bestseller

Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II, which won the Hessel-Tiltman prize for history, and Italy’s prestigious Cherasco History prize. They have been translated into twenty languages.

He regularly lectures at universities and other institutions on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thursday 16 March 2017

Dr Thomas Sebrell: The Ku Klux Klan

Dr Sebrell obtained an MA in United States History from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and

State University, USA and was awarded the J. Ambler Johnston Scholarship for his distinguished work on the American Civil War. He received his PhD in History from Queen Mary University of London in 2010 after being awarded the Overseas Student Scholarship. Dr Sebrell has published numerous works, his work including *Persuading John Bull: Union & Confederate Propaganda in Britain, 1860-65 and Battlefields & Beyond*:

He is a visiting lecturer at the University of Westminster.

Thursday 20 April 2017

Mr Francis Wells: The Renaissance heart - from Erasistratus to Vesalius and beyond

Naissant anatomy is associated with the work of Vesalius and his masterpiece *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* published in 1543. This huge event in the life of anatomy began the move away from Galenic principles and teaching, which held sway for 1500 years to that point, and indeed beyond.

Leonardo da Vinci's work on human anatomy was known about in his time. Sadly, none of it was published until more recent times and therefore, its contribution was not recognised.

Mr Wells has had the great good fortune to be able to spend some considerable time with the drawings that he did of the heart, along with their accompanying notes. The more he studied them the more obvious it became to him that Leonardo had a very profound understanding of the physiology as well as much of the anatomy.

The lecture will draw upon this experience and also present the results of some work that he did in reproducing all of Leonardo's dissections of the heart.

Thursday 18 May 2017

Professor Caroline Wilkinson: Facial reconstruction - depicting the dead

Professor Wilkinson is a graduate of the University of Manchester, where she also led the unit of Art in Medicine from 2000 – 2005 and received a NESTA fellowship

to develop a 3D computerised facial reconstruction system for use in forensic and archaeological depiction.

She is the Director of the Face Lab, a Liverpool John Moores University research group based in Liverpool Science Park. The Face Lab carries out forensic/archaeological research and consultancy work and this includes craniofacial analysis, facial depiction and forensic art. Craniofacial analysis involves the depiction and identification of unknown bodies for forensic investigation or historical figures for archaeological interpretation.

Professor Wilkinson's high profile facial depiction work includes facial depictions of Richard III, St Nicholas, J.S Bach, Ramesses II and Mary, Queen of Scots.

Thursday 15 June 2017

Mr Robert Hulse: Brunel's Great Eastern; the ship that changed the world

Mr Hulse is co-author of *The Brunels' Tunnel*, jointly published with the Institution of Civil Engineers. He is Director of London's Brunel Museum, housed in the original Thames Tunnel engine house and winner of The Queen's Award.

He has worked in education and museums for 20 years. He has taught at London University and City University; lectured at Tokyo University, the Royal Institution of Great Britain and Tel Aviv University. He has just returned from a lecture tour of east coast American universities with the

English Speaking Union.

He strongly supports museums in their search for a new and dynamic role within their local communities. He is the first man since Brunel to hold an underwater fairground and is now working on a project to build an underground theatre in the chamber where Brunel began and nearly ended his career.

Extramural events

Tuesday 11 April 2017

Courtiers to paupers, a walk with Sue Weir

We will explore the squares and streets of this Royal borough, the homes of the rich and famous, the first private estate to be lit by electricity, a hospital and a very fashionable square.

Tuesday 9 May 2017

Walls, halls and a few stairs, a walk with Sue Weir

This is an opportunity to explore the hidden corners of the City. Passing churches, squares, Livery Halls (see how many you can count) and glimpsing the remains of the Roman Wall which encloses the City. We will also enjoy unexpected gardens and green spaces.

Retired Fellows Society

Wednesday 28 June 2017

Innovation & expansion, a walk with Sue Weir

Today we will see the exciting recreation of the former abandoned plots of Somers Town, passing a small museum, large library and the largest biomedical research centre, a rare nature park, a new university and a sparkling concert hall.

Monday 10 July 2017

Exclusive Cruise for the RFS on the Lower Danube from Budapest with AMA Waterways (AmaCerto) with Sue Weir. Departing July 10th for 7 nights. Contact Sally at Go River Cruise 0800 954 0064

Wednesday 20 September 2017

Elegant Mayfair, a walk with Sue Weir

Walking through the expensive and elegant Grosvenor estate there are still hidden corners and unexpected green spaces in the heart of London to explore and of course a well-known market.

Volunteers Required

For a project on the effects of ageing on the immune system; the study involves taking blood and skin samples.

If you are:

Ages 16-40 yrs or 65yrs and older
Relatively healthy

To discuss this study please contact:

Megan Harries

Email: m.harries@ucl.ac.uk

Tel: 07341127838

Chairman's Essay Prize:

Trust me, I'm a Doctor

Congratulations to the following winners:

Retired Fellow: Mr Richard Rawlins, MB BS MBA FRCS

Student: Chiara Catterwell-Sinkeldam of King's College London

Highly Commended were:

Lauren Quinn of the University of Birmingham

Caitriona Cox of the University of Cambridge

Gut-bug Pioneers

*Salmon and Escherich might sound a tasty dish,
But your appetite would vanish if you knew that Escherich
Was a busy German medic who in eighteen eighty-five
Was culturing the faeces of folk who didn't thrive.
To grow a new bacterium at the time was lots of fun,
Novel methods were developed by this innovative Hun.
In tribute to his Arbeit the bug received his name
And with colon's Latin genitive E.coli got its fame.*

*Now also in the eighties, this time in USA,
A veterinary scientist was beavering away.
Daniel Salmon had to study what gave hogs the diarrhoea,
And by clever culture methods got the agent to appear.
This dangerous bacterium caused cholera in swine
And another Latin genitive described it all just fine.
Cholerae-suis was the first germ of a group with common bits
Which colonise intestines, causing fearful bouts of squits.
To honour his researches, paying tribute to the fella
The taxonomic chappies named the genus Salmonella.*

Arthur Baskerville

Meeting reports

Schmaltz and champagne: all about Viennese opera

Friday 16 June 2016



An actor manqué, Derek Scott qualified from Guy's Hospital and practised

as a dental surgeon in London for 40 years before retiring in 1993. His lecture might be described as an amalgam of scholarship and entertainment. It was plentifully illustrated with pictures of the major composers of operetta plus audio clips from several of their best-known works, including the can-can from Offenbach's *Orpheus and the Underworld* (*Orphée aux Enfers*). The heyday of operetta was the second half of the 19th century, and its capitals were Berlin and Munich together with the Vienna of Emperor Franz Josef. In Italy and elsewhere the genre was often looked down upon as a bastard form of art. Nevertheless, for a number of generations operetta was the most popular form of light entertainment in Western Europe, its modern equivalent being the ubiquitous musicals that fill the West End theatres of today.

The characteristics of operetta are an inconsequential plot

(over-populated by aristocrats, sometimes incognito), a spoken dialogue which could be risqué or satirical, cheerful music with uplifting tunes, happy romantic endings and magnificent sets traditionally based in Ruritania (like musical versions of *The Prisoner of Zenda*).

The quality of the lyrics did not always match that of the musical numbers, for as Beaumarchais said: "anything too stupid to be spoken is sung". The schmaltz – viz. an excess of sentimentality – was mitigated by the widespread demand for champagne (obviously not Prosecco) that was shown by dedicated followers of operetta.

Father of the genre was the violinist and composer Josef Strauss (1804-49), almost literally so because his three sons (Johann, Josef and Eduard) were all talented musicians and became eminent practitioners of this music. Strauss senior popularised the waltz, which overwhelmed the stately quadrille but was regarded in some quarters as a wicked dance that involved an indecent intertwining of the limbs; one wonders how these early critics would have reacted to the latin dances featured on *Strictly Come Dancing*.

The works of Johann Strauss, notably *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Zigeunerbaron* (*Gypsy Baron*), had their first performances at the Theater an der Wien (Vienna) and are considered the apotheosis of operetta. Austro-Hungary certainly led the field in operetta as well as

dance, other noted composers being Franz von Suppé (1819-95), Carl Zeller (1842-98) and Richard Heuburger (1856-1914).

Jacques Offenbach (1819-80), who adopted French nationality and became known as the Mozart of the Champs Elysées, took the surname from his birthplace in Germany. Georges Bizet grumbled that "in order to succeed today you must be either dead or German or preferably both".

More recent exponents of operetta include other Austro-Hungarians, Sigmund Romberg (1887-1951: *The Student Prince*) and Franz Lehar (1870-1948: *The Merry Widow*), as well as the British Ivor Novello (1893-1951, born in Cardiff) and the pairing of William Gilbert with Arthur Sullivan.

In his retirement Derek Scott has become a stalwart supporter of the University of the Third Age, and he demonstrated his skill in addressing a similar audience in this delightful lecture. Perhaps the most memorable features were the carefully-chosen musical interludes played on his portable tape recorder. Halfway through the talk there was a frisson of horror when the tape got stuck and, on removal from the machine, extruded itself all over the podium in what was clearly a terminal fashion. Unfazed the lecturer reached into his pocket, produced a replacement tape and treated us to the second half of the duet "The Bold Gendarmes" from *Geneviève de Brabant* (Offenbach): an enviably smooth recovery from the jaws of disaster.

Robin Williamson

Extra mural reports

The Cutty Sark

Friday, September 16th 2016 saw a group of us making a visit to the Cutty Sark, one of three last remaining tea clippers and the most famous. This Grade I listed monument has been part of the Greenwich skyline for several decades. As part of a refurbishment in 2006 she was raised 3 metres off the ground and a massive gallery was built round the hull for weather protection. This allows the visitor to view the ship from below. At the far end of the gallery one can see the largest collection in the world of over 230 figureheads from various ships. We assembled in the gallery where, Jeremy, our guide, gave us an excellent talk about the tea trade and the history of the ship following which we sat down to a sumptuous tea with finger sandwiches, cakes, scones and of course three types of tea. We then explored the three decks and the crew's quarters. Everywhere was furnished as it might have been in her heyday. There were helpful captions, videos and very knowledgeable volunteers to answer questions.

In the early 1800s, tea drinking in Europe continued to grow in popularity even though it was expensive and had a duty of 119% imposed on it. Ships would go out to China with beer and spirits and return with tea; for some the round trip took nearly a year. John Willis, a prescient Scot,

realised there was great profit to be made from faster shipping of tea. In 1869, he commissioned a new type of ship, the clipper, which by virtue of a narrow hull, tall masts and huge sail area, was able to cleave through water at a much faster rate. She was built from Indian teak and iron, with a sheeting of Muntz metal, a mixture of copper and zinc, to prevent encrustation by barnacles.

What the ship's design lost in cargo space was made up for by her speed of 17.5 knots. When fully laden her cargo was worth 18 million pounds in today's money. The journey was now reduced to 73 days and this also entitled her crew to a hefty bonus. There were now "clipper races" with bets being placed to see which ship would bring in the first tea of the season, the Cutty Sark winning in 1877. Unfortunately 1869 also saw the opening of the Suez Canal, which shortened the distance to China by 3,000 miles but sailing ships could not use this crossing because of unfavourable winds. Despite increasing competition from steamships, the Cutty Sark operated very successfully for eight years as a tea clipper, she then carried general cargo like coal, shark bones, rice, jaggery (molasses) and wool.

Richard Woodget, her captain for 10 years, managed to occupy his time on board by developing other interests. He bred sheep dogs, became a skilled photographer, learnt to roller skate and to ride a

bike. Sailing ships were becoming less profitable as steamships were faster, had a bigger freight charge and a smaller insurance premium. The Cutty Sark was then bought by the Portuguese in 1895, cut down to the size of a barque and subsequently fell into a decline. Captain Wilfred Dowman, a previous crew member of the ship, chanced upon it off the coast of Falmouth in 1922 and bought it for the vast sum of £3,750, the money being provided by Mrs Dowman nee Courtauld. They set about her restoration and used her as a training ship for merchant navy cadets, operating from Falmouth.

The Cutty Sark was proudly exhibited to visitors. She inspired Berry Brothers to create in 1923, the iconic Cutty Sark whisky in a green bottle with a yellow label, specially for the American market post prohibition in 1933.

Following Captain Dowman's death, Mrs Dowman sold the ship for 10 shillings to the Nautical Training College in Greenhithe, Kent in 1938 and that was the last time that she put to sea. She continued as a training ship for naval cadets but her general condition was worsening gradually. She was acquired by a specially formed trust in 1951 and placed in a purpose built dry dock in Greenwich where she continued as a popular visitors' attraction. While she was undergoing a 25 million pound refurbishment in 2007, a big fire broke out on deck causing huge damage. Fortunately, the rigging and other artefacts had already been removed and were stored

elsewhere. The new cost of 40 million pounds was made up by the Heritage lottery fund and foreign donations.

The name Cutty Sark comes from Burns' poem Tam O'Shanter. Tam, the drunken farmer is riding home in the dark when he sees witches cavorting in the local church yard. A particularly comely witch,

Nannie, is wearing a revealing dress and Tam cries out in appreciation "weel done, cutty-sark (short chemise)". Nannie gives chase and a fearful Tam escapes but not before Nannie has pulled off his mare's tail. Nannie was immortalised by being cast as a figurehead for the ship and now occupies pride of place in the

exhibition of stern decorations.

If you missed this excellent meeting, you can go independently. The Cutty Sark is a short walk from Greenwich Railway station and the DLR.

Sush Day, who also took the photograph



Nannie,

Definition of lackadaisical

A bicycle made for one

Thanks to the BBC via James Carne

What you may see

A man heard on the news of a murder; a detailed description of the suspect was given.

A few moments later he heard a noise outside and went to look. He saw a shadowing figure which met the description of the man suspected of the killing. He reached for his phone and then saw that the figure outside had a phone as well.

It did not take long for him to realise that the figure was his reflection.

Acknowledgements to Bruno Lansdown

This reminds the editor of a true story: I was walking down a long corridor in a hotel and saw an old man approaching me. He looked vaguely familiar and I soon registered that I was looking at a mirror..

Rotherhithe: Exploring our maritime heritage

8 June 2016

Our group met with Sue Weir at Canada Water tube station, conveniently located next door to the award winning library designed by Piers Gough so we had the opportunity to survey the damp day from the warm ambiance of the library coffee shop (good coffee and food). In front of us lay the open public space that comprises of the bus station, Canada Water tube station, Surrey Quays shopping centre and lake. A modern sculpture of stevedores unloading timber from an imaginary ship can be seen on one side of the freshwater lake and wildlife refuge and the banks of the lake rustled with the sound of the wind through the rushes.

To many of us this area was known as one of the first to be bombed in the Blitz of 1940 with the surrounding docklands reduced to rubble. As a female student in the 1960s it was a part of London that was never visited. In fact the taxi drivers refused to take one there – even to visit a famous public house or Chinese restaurant. The whole area had certain notoriety, partly because, although some house building had been commenced, most of the area had remained rundown or derelict since World War II. It was also considered to be ‘rough’.

In the 1970s the docks became

totally redundant and a bold massive redesign of the dockland area was needed, with the London Borough of Southwark amongst other boroughs forming an area that became known as the London Dockland’s Development Corporation.

Our group departed the lake area that was once part of the Canada and Quebec Dock. Here the ships from Canada would arrive with grain and timber. The timber was unloaded and then kept in the large timber ponds until it left the docks for the canals or road transportation. Along the road are the rebuilt formal Victorian brick offices of the manager of the docks now used as a local educational facility and opposite a well-kept park with attractive flower beds. The amount of informal parkland we saw on the walk was impressive.

The landscape architects had obviously collaborated well with the planners of the urban building scheme and the spoil from the dock area had been used to form green open spaces and park areas with trees and bushes providing pleasant walk ways all hidden away by the side of very busy roads that encircle the entrance to the Rotherhithe Tunnel. This busy route connects the southern side of the Thames with Whitechapel and Limehouse north of the River, and was built in 1904. (Not to be confused with the nearby tunnel built by Brunel in 1843, and now used by Transport for London.)

The couple of bends in the tunnel

were designed to avoid the docks on either side and also to prevent horses seeing daylight and bolting for the far exit. The traffic is so heavy today that it is almost at a standstill every rush hour. Difficult to imagine horses bolting through the space!

Across from the entrance to the tunnel is the Norwegian Church of St Olav’s, built in 1927, a focus of Norwegian resistance in World War II, where King Haakon and the Norwegian government in exile worshipped. It has a weathervane in the shape of a Viking longboat.

After another few minutes’ walk we reached the River Thames passing Neptune Street, Elephant Lane, Brunel Road, Slave Lane, Swan Lane, Cathay Street, Bombay Wharf and Mayflower Street: evocative names that point to much history.

On the land side of the Thames Path lies a green area with an ancient wall once part of the manor House of King Edward III (1327-1377). The area was once an island and the King would arrive by boat to his moated residence. Behind this area is a restored hilly area, King’s Stairs Gardens, which achieved Village Green status in 2012, a lovely space with mature trees, and a wildflower meadow, important for children and families enjoying picnics and recreational activities. The small pathway to the river from the road is still called King’s Stairs. Nearby is the historic 16th century Mayflower

Inn, the original mooring point of the Mayflower, the Pilgrim Fathers' ship. The area is called Rotherhithe Village.

We then walked along the Thames path to the handsome St Mary the Virgin Church, built in 1716 by a colleague of Sir Christopher Wren. Today, a thriving church in this riverside village community. Sadly at the time of our afternoon walk the church was locked. In the graveyard is the final resting place of Christopher Jones, Captain of the Mayflower which took the Pilgrim Fathers to America in 1620. It is also the burial place of Prince Lee Boo of Palau, aged 20 years, a Pacific Island Prince who was sent to London by his father to be educated, but sadly died of the smallpox. He sailed with Captain Henry Wilson of the *Antelope* whom he first met when his ship the *Antelope* was wrecked on an island off the shores of Palau.

Opposite the church is an 18th century school founded for poor seamen's children, the carved figures over the door showing the colourful uniforms worn over two hundred years ago. Next to it is the nineteenth century rectory. Further along Railway Avenue we arrived at the Brunel Museum and the brick buildings that housed the shaft that serviced his tunnel on the south side of the Thames, the first tunnel in the world to be driven under a navigable river. A similar building could be seen across the river in Shadwell.

Much of Rotherhithe Village consists of warehouses that were used to store rice, tapioca and flour, and now have been converted into businesses or living accommodation. The gantries connecting the riverside buildings to those behind have been transformed by the residents, into imaginative bijoux gardens with flowering bushes and flowers.

Another warehouse in the village is the home of Sands Films where they create the costumes for many of the TV and film dramas - *The Hollow Crown*, *Wolf Hall* and *Little Dorrit* being examples of their expertise.

Lastly Sue explained the meaning of the term 'under suffrage'. It originated from this area of warehouses. Customs regulations stated that all goods where duty was payable had to be offloaded in legal quays but as a consequence the legal quays were unable to deal with the volume of cargoes so sufferance wharves were established that allowed or suffered the landing of goods to ease the bottleneck at the legal quays. The local sufferance quays closed in the 1960s.

The tour ended by the warehouses and we returned to Canada Water tube station by a direct route (only 6 minutes if not taking the 'pretty route').

In two hours Sue had led us on a circular walking tour that encompassed four centuries of English history, with many of the

important buildings associated with the docks and maritime activities standing before us. It was obvious that the modern urban planners and architects had lovingly preserved, or rebuilt, the historic gems that are still at the heart of today's Rotherhithe and it now has a new vitality with a thriving community, some incredible views from the Thames Path across to Canada Water and Tower Bridge – and some interesting historic inns. Unfortunately time did not allow us to visit them but they are a good excuse for another visit to Bermondsey and Rotherhithe in the future.

Christine Platt



Rhichard Lansdown South Bank bikes

Visit to Dennis Severs' House in Folgate Street, Spitalfields 5 August 2016

Just off busy, modern Bishopsgate in the City lies the extraordinary home created by Dennis Severs, an American with an eccentric passion for the past. He lived there until near his death in 1999, sharing a long gone lifestyle with the imaginary occupants, four generations of the Jervis family. They were Huguenot silk weavers, typical of other Spitalfields weavers in the 1700s. He called it "still life drama" and arranged evening visits for others to experience the sensation of walking into an Old Master painting. Furnishings, portraits, antique china, discarded clothing and half eaten meals clutter the small four-storey house. The aim is to give the impression that the inhabitants have just left, possibly disturbed by our arrival. There are no 'mod cons', the only water supply being to a small sink in the pantry kitchen. Candles are lit for evening visits.

Our visit was on a sunny August afternoon. Outside light shimmered over the cobwebs and dust, for their servants do not appear to have been very industrious. Beds were unmade, with the detail of an unemptied chamber pot showing how they managed sanitation. Apparently Severs installed a Thomas Crapper toilet in the back yard, which we didn't have a chance

to explore. The atmosphere of the Jervis bedroom made one think of that abandoned bride, Miss Havesham, living with the remnants of her wedding feast. Half drunk coffee and dusty sweetmeats lay on the small tables, while an ornate dress hung nearby for Mrs. Jervis to wear later. Explicit reference to Charles Dickens is made in a bedroom dedicated to his characters; an overnight stay, possibly, for Little Nell and her grandfather, or that eventually reformed miser Ebenezer Scrooge. In other rooms, even on the landings of the creaking staircase, china bowls contained sweets, fruit and ginger bread. Some were fresh, others appeared hardened with age, creating an eerie impression of ghosts who like to nibble occasionally, not bothered with the constraints of time.

In effect, the Severs house is a performance art installation, the atmosphere increased by sound effects such as footsteps, chiming clocks and an occasional thunderous roll in the attic, representing cannons at the Tower of London marking a Royal birthday. Some rooms in the house are redolent of the 1700s, others the 19th century and china in Dennis Severs' ground floor parlour dates from more recent events, such as Royal weddings. It is as if he completely identified with his ghostly companions, giving them a giant dolls house, where accuracy to time period was less important than the

sensory experience of stepping into their world. There are no ropes or barriers and no display cases, or descriptions of items. Yellowed notes ask if you have guessed the identity of portraits or who owned various artefacts. The house motto is "you either see it, or you don't".

To 'see it' visitors are requested to maintain absolute silence, with a sentry on each landing having to remind our group of this, as each room made one want to ask questions. Even on a summer day, interiors were quite dark. It was all too easy to lose ones footing on the uneven cellar floors and mounting the narrow staircase with its wobbly bannister was an adventure in itself. A more detailed introductory talk would have helped, but this could have counteracted the intention of making us walk into the frame of an old painting. David Hockney loved its artistry; others have criticised it as a romantic confection. I recommend viewing the online recordings that describe its history: these include interviews the house's creator and explain why Severs was so captivated by the shadowy family with whom he shared his life.

Reference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yr2HtBYSNY0> (or just Google Dennis Severs House documentaries to track it down).

Rosalind Stanwell-Smith

RFS wine tasting cruise – a taste of Bordeaux

10 - 17 June 2016

The cruise, on the AmaWaterways boat 'AmaDolce' was organised by Sue Weir in her usual inimitable style. Nothing ever went wrong, or if it did it was fixed before anyone noticed. We all had a terrific time wine-tasting through Bordeaux where 60% of the economy is connected to the wine industry.

The rivers Garonne and Dordogne join to form the Gironde estuary which opens on to the Atlantic Ocean. They are in the French Department de la Gironde these days, although in the past much of it was in what was known as Aquitaine. During the reign of Henry II (married to Eleanor of Aquitaine, their eldest son being Richard I), the Bordeaux region was 'English' – or maybe, it would be more correct to describe England as having been Angevin. Richard I spent only one year of his life in England, and he hated it. The Romans were the first to plant vines in the region, discovering that the milieu of soil and climate was particularly well suited to growing these crops – with microenvironments between different locations suiting different varieties of grape and resulting in subtle differences between wines produced. The chief rock of the area is limestone, whose precise calcium, gravel, sand and clay contents can vary between

château and château – profoundly influencing the precise type and quality of the intensely local varieties of wine.

Much of the wine produced in the Bordeaux area is red, additionally with sweet white wines (mostly Sauternes), dry whites, and smaller quantities of rosé and sparkling wines such as Crément de Bordeaux. 'Château' does not necessarily mean a castle or house, rather an establishment with its own vineyard, producing its specific type of wine. Wine production in France is highly regulated, terms cannot be deviated from. We also learned about cultivation, harvesting, fermentation in vats and barrels, and bottling. Red wines permitted

to be produced in the Bordeaux zone are Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Malbec, which are blended according to tradition. For Sauternes, permitted whites are Sémillon, Sauvignon blanc, Sauvignon gris, Ugni blanc, Colombard, Merlot blanc, Odenc, and Mauzac, although they are most commonly blended from Sémillon, Sauvignon blanc, Sauvignon gris and Muscadelle/ Muscadet (pseudonyms for the same grape). Their area is the Graves section of Bordeaux wineries on the left bank of the Garonne, upstream of Bordeaux. Popular dry white Entre-deux-Mers wine is made of blended Sauvignon blanc and Semillon; On the morning of June the



Château Roquetaillade

Retired Fellows Society

11th, the boat set off early and cruised up the Garonne to the Bazas market. Bazas is small and previously fortified, with thick, high ramparts and a majestic town entrance gate. It was charming, French small-town ambiance, with the freshest of fruit and vegetables on display. In the afternoon, first we went to Château Roquetaillade initially built in the 10th century by Charlemagne and rebuilt in the 14th. We were acquainted of its medieval history and given a tour of the current château, in which the owning family still lives. Our charming lady guide educated us in the decorative style of a Victorian era French interior designer – Monsieur Eugène Viollet le Duc, who had performed the most recent update. We all thanked her and each of us gave her a small tip for her trouble. It wasn't until we were

back on the coach that our local guide remembered to inform us that we had been shown around by the Marquise herself! Does one normally tip a marquise? Maybe we should have given her more – towards upkeep of the castle? Tasting that day was of Sauternes and Semillon at Château Guiraud where we were assured that Sauternes are NOT merely dessert wines, but more properly should be drunk as aperitifs. The most expensive Sauternes are of the of the Premier Cru Supérieur estate of Château d'Yquem.

Heading downstream, the morning of our third day, was centred around Pauillac, the Haut-Medoc, on the left bank of the Gironde estuary, including an excellent lecture on 'France Today' given to us by our tour director Kriss, once more emphasising the importance

of 'terroir' – upon which, here, the Médoc vines - Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grapes, depend. We learnt (and noticed everywhere subsequently) that rose bushes are planted at the ends of all rows of vines. This is because roses are sensitive to environmental challenge – if something happens to the rose bushes, it is an alert to quickly discover the problem and take essential precautions to protect the multitudinous rows of precious vines (think canaries and coal mines). Some harvesting attracts transitory immigrant workers, sometimes just from different neighbourhoods, or perhaps Spanish pickers whose own harvest falls ahead of that in France. However, only skilled professionals are employed to pick grapes for Premier Grand Cru wines.



Gateway of the Blaye Citadel

Next we toured the rest of the area by coach, the whole of the Gironde seemingly completely carpeted by vineyards. At Chateau Margaux, strictly private, we got out of the coach and (through the railings) glimpsed the fine house. Its wine retails at 400 Euros the bottle!

At some Pauillac châteaux modern aspects may be hi-tech, lasers and cameras being used in grape sorting, although there can be optical sorting machines, running at as much as 80Km/hr, selecting only perfect grapes. Reject grapes are air-jetted out and returned to the soil. Vinification takes around four weeks in huge vats at some of the châteaux, and chilled to 3°C for cold fermentation. We were introduced to the system of 'pump-over' in which fermenting wine is drained into tubs, from bottoms of vats, from beneath their skins and other surface detritus, and after yeast oxidation is pumped back into tops of the vats again. In this way flavours of the skins and background items remain, being gently stirred into the maturing wine. Steel came to be used for vats in the 1960s, replacing wood, for this purpose. Some wineries use stainless steel vats and hoses initially, but age wine in French oak barrels, using new ones each year. After one year's use the barrels are sold to smaller estates or go to Scotland to the whisky brewing industry. By Monday June 13th we had travelled to the north

side of the Gironde estuary. There we visited the extensive Blaye citadel, the site of a medieval castle constructed by the family of Geoffrey Rudel.

That the castle had been rebuilt in the seventeenth century was readily noticeable, due to the presence of gun emplacements for muskets and cannon. By the nineteenth century, there was also a jail and a central bakery. The medieval section of the citadel was separate from the seventeenth century buildings, yet within the surrounding battlements.

That afternoon our engagement was to attend a special indoor wine festival in the town of Bourg; the venue was high, and again views were stupendous. Cabernets are produced on the left bank, Merlots on the right and Fronsac more northerly, not necessarily near the river banks. Historically, Bourg was first established by the Romans, but over a millennium later was fortified by the English. At the festival, we were offered four types of Cotes de Bourg (one white and three reds), plus as ever, a range of tasty canapés. In addition,

the citizens of Bourg provided a singing and dancing group, with whom we could join in with some traditional French melodies and dances. All great fun.

On our fifth day, we explored the area around Bourg seeing the numerous châteaux, all surrounded by their extensive stretches of vineyards. Some were precisely as one would imagine them, although ranging from 'compact' to stately. Others were modern buildings looking very purposeful and efficient.

There were more choices of excursions (some involving bicycles) but again, our group unanimously chose to be taken



Neil Weir : *The Château de la Rivière*

Retired Fellows Society

to St Emilion. The trip started unfavourably – pouring with rain – however, we sheltered in a charming cloister until our local guide obtained the special keys to let us in to the eighth century grotto and hermitage of St Emilion himself, then on to the twelfth century, UNESCO listed monolithic church – huge and totally hollowed out of the bedrock. For pilgrims, ancient and modern, St Emilion is important, as it is one of the stages on the route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Next, off to the day's tasting. On the way we were shown that the Pomerol area abuts St Emilion, Pomerol wines having higher copper content than St Emilions. For the Grand Cru Classé wines, grapes are picked by hand by expert pickers – no casual labour for this job. Next they are sorted, before cold fermentation in vats, with (the now familiar) pumping-over system. They take 18 months to age in barrels, and then are blended for 5 days before filtration and bottling. In 1955 classification of these Grands Crus started here, there being 860 wineries in all.

The boat remained moored overnight at Libourne and on the morning there was a choice of excursions to the weekly outdoor market at the fortified bastide of Créon (existing for the last 500 years) or to Château de Vayres, on the left bank of the Dordogne. At the market we had tastings of

cheese, charcuterie and bread as well as time to look at the other stalls and make purchases. Here, in southwest France, we were close to Spain, and some of the produce on offer was in fact Spanish.

In the afternoon, we visited the Château de la Rivière which had beautiful gardens and fabulous views over the Dordogne. The afternoon was clement, and we were all charmed when Neil Weir took out his artist's pad and proceeded to draw then paint the beautiful château.

By day seven the boat was back at Bordeaux. In the morning, we had a coach + walking tour of the beautiful historic city. The name translates as 'on the banks of the waters' reminding us that originally, the land on which the settlement was constructed was little more than a malaria-infested marsh. The first and most notable of the bridges, 400 metres long, is still referred to as the 'Stone Bridge,' Pont de Pierre. The city is a UNESCO World Heritage site, classified as a 'City of Art and History'. Many areas of the city have names of saints, St Paul district, St Catherine Street (for shopping) and more. There are fine art galleries and key layout of the city centre is a Hausmann-designed arrangement of genteel public gardens, regency buildings and palaces, opening on to the grand, gracious, curving river embankment-the Enfilade.

At the Place de la Republique, we were also able to enjoy the fifteenth century School of Justice, the City Hall and Bishop's Palace. Back to the boat for lunch, and then our final afternoon was free for us to return, according to our preferences, to the sights of Bordeaux centre that had most attracted our individual interests.

On Friday 17th we sadly disembarked the AmaDolce. We had had a marvellous and instructive trip and can now, officially, class ourselves as wine bores! Tired but happy, we all said goodbye to each other, but looking forward to re-unite again, next time!

Catherine Sarraf

Photographs John Robinson and Colin Birt
Painting Neil Weir

Christmas Crackers

What did Cinderella say when the chemist lost her photographs?

Some day my prints will come.

What do snowmen eat for lunch?

Icebergers

What do you get if you cross Santa with a duck?

A Christmas quacker.

Would you like to edit this Newsletter?

The present editor's term of office ends in June 2017.

The job description is simple: to collect and edit material for three issues a year.

Virtually all the contributions come by email.

The layout is done in the RSM's very efficient Marketing Department.

The editor is a member of the RFS committee which meets in London four times a year.

Anyone interested is invited to contact the present editor, Richard Lansdown, by email at rglansdown@yahoo.co.uk or by phone at 0207 267 6982.

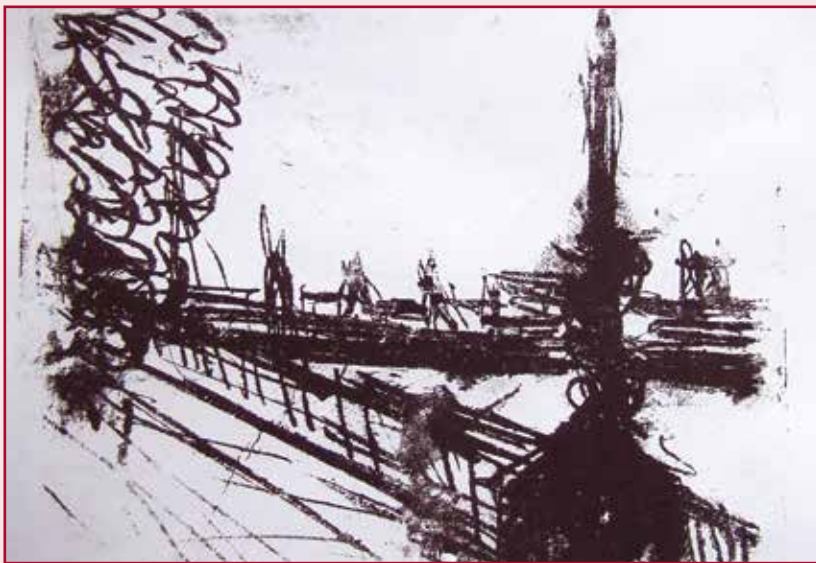


Barrie Parker - A Family Moment

Art work by R.D. Howard



Self portrait



Hungerford Bridge

Articles

A short account of two unusual therapeutic modalities: Some curious (proven) therapies

A H Alabbasi

Our middle school chemistry teacher in Baghdad, a London graduate, used to spend most of the class talking about the London Underground, the British museums and other landmarks of London. We were left dreaming that one day we would see the things he mentioned; it was interesting that most of us had those dreams realised.

He also mentioned to us that in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul¹, people with a cold used to cover their heads with their underpants

to get “relief” of the symptoms of nasal congestion. As school children we used to be taken to a nearby dispensary by a teacher where those who had a cold were given a piece of cotton wool soaked in ammonia to get relief. Only as a medical student did I realise that the explanation for the ‘magic’ Mosul Cold Remedy was the decomposition of the drops of urine that remained in the underwear after urination, decomposed by urea splitting organisms into releasing ammonia.

We also used to describe people who did not blink after committing an embarrassing act as people who must have been washing their eyes with urine. They must have been washing their eyes with their own urine.

One day as a child I was standing in front of the door of my house suffering from an inflamed painful eye for three or four days; a lady

acquaintance passed by and looked into my eye and said, “What’s wrong with your red eye?” and in no time she spat into my eye and swiftly moved away. In my anger she was followed by a volley of every stone on the road I could lay my hands on. The next morning my eye was clear and painless.

It appeared to me while at medical school that it was possible that the benefit in a) and b) was due to the presence of IgA in the urine and saliva respectively. (Frequent blinking is a symptom of an unhealthy conjunctiva).

1. The name Mosul means a connector between east and west on the ancient Silk Road. The textile muslin is derived from the name of that city.

Editor’s note: a fascinating account but the Editorial Board of the *Newsletter* does not recommend these approaches as treatments of first choice.

A book which influenced me

David Murfin

The Better Angels of our Nature. The decline of violence in history and its causes by Steven Pinker. First published in Great Britain by Allen Lane 2011.

The author at the time of writing was the Johnstone family professor in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University. The book challenges an often traditionally held view that humans

are spiralling to self-destruct in an increasingly violent world. The author approaches the study of violence in some depth and concludes that overall trends are towards improvement in human nature and these trends are continuing.

We would be hesitant in describing that our present existence is associated with peaceable times. The book draws on history and acknowledges that peace is a strong notion for our continuing existence. The title takes words attributed to

Abraham Lincoln and while total peaceful coexistence may be impossible for mankind it remains a psychological goal.

We need to look to the past to appreciate just how violent humans have been singularly and collectively. Recent advances using radiological and DNA analysis have provided data of the last days of a Neolithic man. Subsequent historical findings indicate that violence often surrounded human death. The development of the written

Retired Fellows Society

word gave only too often vivid descriptions of events and the author sets out to prove that the dangers of the past far exceeded those of the present.

The origins of violence are often discussed in terms of logic and human nature. Theorists consider that there were probable incentives for violence which may have been built into the evolutionary process. Primatologists have confirmed that the behaviour of chimpanzees in expressing lethal aggression is normal between communities. Examples of behaviour amongst primitive human tribes does not make comfortable reading.

The author is persuaded to use a 10,000 year horizon as a boundary for change. The benefits gained by government in defined states are persuasive. Research does indicate that the percentage of deaths in warfare is far higher in non-state over state societies. Scepticism about political leadership may be somewhat historical but governments improve matters by voluntarily or forcibly limiting violent behaviour.

Studies in English history show large declines in the rate of homicide over some 800 years. Murder rates in Europe have been steadily declining over centuries. Men are far more likely to commit murder (other than infanticide) than women and they are more likely to kill in their 20s. The changes for improvement are

thought to be related to strong governance and advances in commerce.

Violence has not declined in modern society at an acceptable rate for those trapped in poverty or who exist on the margins of mainstream society. The increase of violence in America in the 1960s has been well documented, fuelled by drugs with a rise in the homicide rate. While there have been some improvements, many American states battle with convincing sections of society that they are not excluded and not to see violence as a way of life.

The use of torture as a corrupted means of control has a long history. Historical data exists of methods used proving the potential depravity of human instincts. We have moved on from engaging in cruelty as a national control method in most governed countries. We should be thankful for the period of the 'enlightenment' and hope that we continue to respect human rights. Literature does support the concept that humans are capable of invoking revenge for spurious reasons. This dark side of human nature has not been controlled by a global standard. Torture has reduced to a large degree but has not been eliminated.

Capital punishment prevails in certain countries but has markedly diminished. Slavery has also reduced to relatively small numbers compared to the

past and the contribution of the Quaker Society was notable in attaining abolition. Debt bondage is considered by the author to be closely related to a form of slavery. Thankfully the treatment of debtors has become steadily more civilised. Governments are now expected to exclude violence as a control mechanism and ideally to encompass democracy.

Wars make for depressing figures in terms of injury and death. Studies have indicated that most wars last for just over two years but the longer they persist the less likely they are to end. Reliable data indicate that over the last two hundred years homicides consistently exceed war related deaths. Governments should however try to avoid large wars at all costs.

Europe is a continent which has been virtually at war for the last one thousand years. The leaders of nations rather glorified war and the rewards of feeling dominant over neighbours. The author feels however that we have entered a long period of peace amongst powerful nations.

Conflicts based on civil wars have bucked the trends over the last sixty years with governments responsible for supervising riches in oil and minerals particularly vulnerable to civil war and uprisings. Totalitarian governments often use violence as a control mechanism. They ultimately fail however in their

objectives and few leaders avoid an early death.

Civil rights continue to define our existence with crimes against African Americans a sensitive area. There is evidence of a decline in rape cases and the author predicts that violence against women will continue to decline. Acts of violence against children are now defined in law by most civilised countries but they have been relatively slow in being recognised. The issue of child kidnapping is a particular issue in America even though relative numbers are small. Tolerance to homosexuality has

grown while violence is relatively rare. The author believes that modern technology and the rise in published books contributes to a wider scope for ideas. Hopefully this is beneficial to the way we act and think.

Evil behaviour often expands further than an understanding of normal standards of humanity. Brain scanning has indicated some alterations of anatomy in individuals perpetuating antisocial and violent behaviour. The frontal lobe of the brain has traditionally been considered as being linked to self-control.

General intelligence in humans is considered to be rising with precise evidence based on test scores. Whether the opportunities for learning have helped reduce levels of violence is open to discussion. Some feel we are at risk of a creeping complacency about the decline in violence.

Professor Pinker is at present a visiting professor at New College of the Humanities in London. He firmly believes that history is pointing in the right direction. His abilities as a powerful writer convinced me that the world is becoming a better place.

The Lost Rivers of London

Nicholas Barton

Every river has its tributaries. The Thames has many, the largest being the Kennet, the Lea and the Medway. Others are little more than streams.

As London has grown, the tributaries which pass through it have been put underground, where some of them act as sewers. They have thus become "lost" but have had surprisingly great effects upon and uses within the metropolis. They have been employed for defence, shipping, fishing and other recreations, to power water mills and to supply water for drinking and industry. Many of them form boundaries and their names are remembered in road names, the most obvious

being Fleet Street which is named after the River Fleet.

For the purpose of a short article, it seems best to describe just four of the most central rivers.

The Walbrook

This had two main sources, one near the Angel and the other in Shoreditch. They joined near the Bank of England and the combined stream flowed down the street still called Walbrook, with the Roman temple of Mithras on its west bank and Wren's church of St Stephen Walbrook on the east. It joined the Thames just east of Southwark Bridge.

Like other urban streets it was used as a sewer and people threw their rubbish into it as they still do into streams that remain open; it was therefore covered over during the Middle Ages.

The River Fleet

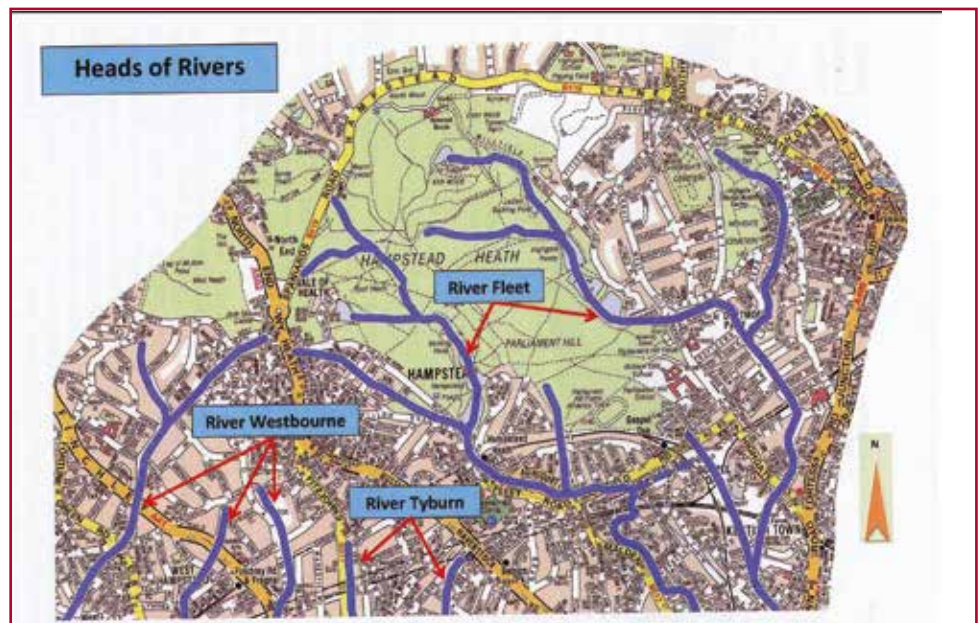
This was the largest of the Lost Rivers. It rose from two sources on the south side of Hampstead Heath, one forming the chain of ponds east of Hampstead and the other the Highgate Ponds which were built as reservoirs.

The two streams joined near Camden Town, flowed down to King's Cross and continued down King's Cross Road and Farringdon Road where the valley is still clearly visible, especially where it is crossed by Holborn Viaduct. Near here it turned at least one water mill, remembered in Turnmill Street, and in 1862 burst out and flooded the Metropolitan Railway which was under construction.

The lower part of the Fleet could originally carry boats whose cargo included stone for the building of old St Paul's and corn and hay

Retired Fellows Society

for St Bartholomew's Hospital. After the Great Fire of 1666, as part of the rebuilding of the City, the Fleet below Holborn Bridge (which preceded the viaduct) was made into a canal but this was not a commercial success. In 1733 it was covered down to Fleet Bridge (at Ludgate Circus) and in 1829 the rest was covered by New Bridge Street down to the Thames.



The Hampstead-Highgate 'massif', showing the heads of three Lost Rivers.

The Tyburn

This smaller stream arose on Fitzjohn's Avenue, which runs down the south side of Hampstead, and continued through Swiss Cottage and Regent's Park where it used to supply the lake.

Marylebone Lane pursues a sinuous course because it was once the path beside the Tyburn which crossed Oxford Street near Bond Street station. This is close to the RSM and you can still see the dip in Oxford Street. Near here a Conduit was built, in 1236, to carry water from the stream to a public supply in Cheapside within the City of London.

The Tyburn then crossed Piccadilly, where again you can see the dip, and passed under Buckingham Palace. Here, in 1862, a man being taken on a tour of the sewers insisted on stopping to sing the National Anthem.

Beyond here the Thames entered a marshy area intersected with ditches and it is impossible to be certain which was its original or main course. By the 12th century one stream went to Westminster but this may have



The Fleet near St Pancras

been man-made to supply the Abbey. There was also a stream flowing south from Victoria approximately along the line of Tachbrook Street (and sometimes called the Tachbrook) to join the Thames near Vauxhall Bridge. The lowest part of this was still open in the 20th century but is now covered by the high class Tachbrook Estate.

The Westbourne

This arose on the west side of Hampstead Heath and passed down through Kilburn to Bayswater, originally Baynard's Watering Place. In Hyde Park it was dammed up to create the Serpentine. The Knights Bridge crossed the Westbourne. At Sloane Square underground station it still crosses above the trains in a huge iron pipe. Below here it supplied the Chelsea Waterworks which had a filter bed so effective "as to render the water transparent".

The Effra

This small river began in Norwood and flowed through Belair Park in Dulwich where a portion of the stream can be seen forming a narrow lake. Continuing beside Brockwell Park, it ran down the line of Brixton Road to the Oval. When it was buried in the late 19th century the spoil from the excavation was used to provide embankments for the spectators at the cricket ground.

In 1664 Lord Loughborough obtained a Private Act of Parliament to make a navigable canal of the Effra from near

Brixton Causeway to the Thames.

By 1785 it was a sewer with a double mouth, one on each side of Vauxhall Bridge. On the public promenade in front of the M16 building is an iron ladder down to the river from which, at low tide, you could get a close look at the eastern outfall of the Effra but I have not tried this myself.

Conclusion

Though now underground, these small rivers are still there, now encased in sewers. The tiny and intermittent tributaries of these tributaries still follow their original courses and probably now flow outside the sewers, accounting for the damp conditions experienced by many who live close to the Lost Rivers.

One cannot easily visit the sewers because heavy rain can cause in them a mini-Tsunami so anyone who enters has to be accompanied by a crew of sewer men to ensure their safety. However, you can still trace their courses on foot: Marylebone Lane would be a good start.

Editor's note: Nicholas Barton is a retired Orthopaedic Surgeon. His book *The Lost Rivers of London* was first published in 1962. A new edition, which he wrote with Stephen Myers, a water engineer, was published in 2016 by Historical Publications, ISBN number 978-1-905286-51-5, price £22.50. It contains detailed maps in colour showing the courses of the lost rivers in relation to the modern streets

Minna Wagner, with respect

Ronald Millar

Minna who?

The composer, Richard Wagner, was married twice in his seventy years. His second wife Cosima, illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt, understood his genius, had many gifts and has been much written about. His first wife, Minna (Christine Wilhelmine Planer), was slow to appreciate that she had married a creative artist on a supreme level, remained childless, and left scant evidence of her own worth. For these reasons, she has been relatively neglected in the vast Wagnerian literature.

But this is a life interwoven with that of a great genius, and there had to be good reasons for their marriage to last for 32 years. And Minna, a leading, highly attractive actress, much sought-after by both provincial theatre managers and admirers, was well able to set her own terms in both instances

Wagner, aged 21 years in 1834, turning down an offer of music director at a theatre company near Leipzig - after being asked to conduct Don Giovanni without rehearsal - happened to seek overnight accommodation in lodgings where Minna resided. Captivated on sight, he changed his mind and accepted the appointment. (How sensitively, in *Die Walkure* Act One, does Wagner express in music that magnetic exchange of erotic power - the sexual glance, without which, too, there would be no

Retired Fellows Society

Tristan and Isolde).

Minna, four years older, was charming, had a grave and dignified assurance, dressed well, and walked proudly and serenely (Wagner's description). He saw in her a maidenly delicacy and an unintended voluptuous invitation.

However, Minna's sexual history was eventful. Natalie, passed off as her sister, was the product of a teenage seduction and abandonment by a Guards officer; and recently, preceding or coinciding with Wagner's arrival, one aristocratic lover was enamoured enough to paint her portrait.

Wagner at first wrote to a friend that he was too busy for love affairs, but mentioned one lady, and then: "You should also get the Planer girl - she has given me a couple of moments of "sexual transfiguration". That he did not mind "sharing" Minna, about three months after their first encounter, shows a certain insouciance. This was soon to change

Wagner wrote more than 12000 letters in his lifetime, many very long and over-demonstrative when personal, but on musical subjects critically studied. His letters to Minna were discovered late, and hers to him are mostly lost, so that her responses have to be judged, unreliably, from his replies.

Escaping probably from Wagner's tortured emotions, Minna accepted an engagement in Berlin. News

of "scandalous behaviour" there was passed on to Wagner, whose desolation at her departure, dramatically expressed in daily letters, brought her back within two weeks. This marked a change in their relationship, at least on his side, Wagner "turning serious", with promises of marriage,

His courtship (if embarrassingly operatic statements of love, self-pitying confessions, and imploring pleas for forgiveness of his jealousies, can be called that), was prolonged and uncertain, for Minna kept a certain independence and a privacy about her plans and male friendships, leaving him exasperated. Physical possession did not expose her inner self.

That they were ill-matched, but in emotional bondage, Richard and Minna seemed aware. Reported to be quarrelling just beforehand, they were married in Konisberg in late 1836, about two and a half years after meeting. Then, twice within six months, Minna absconded. Wagner, told about the coincident disappearance of an admirer, went in pursuit, but found his wife at the home of her parents. Details of these escapades are unknown.

Then began two lives like no other, part-shared and part-separated: A supreme musical dramatist (and compulsive essayist); a wife of limited culture and frustrated domesticity; a nomadic existence of unsettlement, in penury or in

extravagant surroundings financed by debt; a constant struggle for compatibility.

Across the Baltic Sea from Konisberg to a Riga theatre, the company soon bankrupt, hazardous escape from creditors, Minna's fall from an upturned carriage, a dangerous sea voyage, on to Paris for two and a half years of artistic frustration, poverty, and the threat of debtors' prison.

And then is it stability? Wagner in 1842, respected Kappelmeister in Dresden, *The Flying Dutchman* performed (his first "mature" opera), in debt for apartments luxuriously furnished, for costly silks and satins essential to his creative mood? For seven years, yes.

But alas, this composer is also a political person, a revolutionary in print, an active participant in the failed Dresden riots of 1849, in danger of imprisonment or execution. Expelled from Germany, he escapes to Zurich. Sometime then, Minna has separation in mind, her hopes for a settled life shattered – but to Wagner's protests of dismay. The emotional bond persists after these near-thirteen years of marriage.

And throughout these trials of very existence, the restless genius continues to research his mythic sources, write libretti for operas to come, and compose music of unique emotional power.

Richard in Zurich, Minna at first remaining in Dresden, a period of productivity is delayed by a brief affair with an English girl unhappily married, daughter of a woman disposed to endow an annuity on Richard. Husband discovers and threatens murder, plans to elope to the East (destination uncertain) are disrupted, annuity is cancelled. Now it is Richard's notion to separate, lasting just long enough to seriously disturb Minna.

Conjugation is resumed in Zurich, in accommodation offered by Otto Wesendonk, a wealthy industrialist and generous supporter, his own house just built nearby. Wagner's mind, now, is not only on his *Tristan and Isolde*, but also on Otto's wife Mathilde, who can easily visit his workroom.

Wagner's convincing need for a muse, while composing this uniquely sensual and erotic opera, with its new chromaticism and famous "Tristan chord", was answered by Mathilde, an attractive woman with intelligence and artistic sensibility. The five verses for Wagner's *Wesendonk* lieder, a template for parts of the opera, were written by her. The consensus is that their relationship was not consummated.

Otto Wesendonk's broadminded tolerance of his wife's emotional adultery did not last. Jealousy erupted, as it did in Minna, who was present throughout this period in 1858. An altercation between the two women was witnessed

by the young Cosima Liszt (first exposure to her future husband), and soon Wagner departed for Paris, Minna to Dresden. The marriage was near to disruption.

Minna wrote to Mathilde: "...you have succeeded in alienating my husband's affections after nearly 22 years of marriage."

Subsequent correspondence was sparse. Yet in a letter to a friend, Minna wrote objectively: "He will always find his home with her in Dresden...the old companion of his life." And aware in late 1862 that Wagner was living alone in a small German town, she could write to Natalie: "He sounded gloomy, so I went to him." Then: "Richard was hugely delighted...he nearly pulled my head off for joy."

A fine beginning, but a bad conclusion: A gift arriving from Mathilde Wesendonk was an incendiary to Minna's jealousy and Wagner's defensive rage. Ten days of "hell" led to a final (physical) separation. Yet, in 1863, Wagner said that "no one shall take her place." Although the duplicity is unworthy (Wagner was already involved with Cosima, his second wife), the stormy saga lasted up to Minna's death in 1866. Wagner, far from Dresden, arranged but did not attend her funeral.

So is it all obvious? – this most intelligent of composers "lost his heart" to a pretty woman, blindly fulfilling nature's intentions regardless of incompatibilities. He

had no more sense than countless millions of men compelled by sexual attraction into unsuitable marriages?

But the issue always is mutual need, the more emphatic when both had unsettled childhoods. For a time, Richard had enjoyed release from his "reverent seriousness" in temporary licentiousness. But this was an intense young man, and at some point psychological need, and the strength of his sexual attraction to Minna, compelled a new regard. It was no answer to have a good time with a loose woman. Paul Dawson-Bowling (*The Wagner Experience* vol. 1) usefully analyses the changing balance in a sexual affair – when one party turns serious, jealous of exclusivity. Significantly, Minna was an exception to Wagner's other intimate relationships - with attached women.

Some at least of their troubles came from Wagner's need to idealise his wife as purer than she was. But the emotional conflicts which she aroused in him cannot have been without influence on his powerful creative impulse. Is it coincidental that Wagner's heroines – in *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhauser*, *Lohengrin*, *Meistersinger* – were women of virginal purity? To be obsessed with a promiscuous woman and write from the heart about the opposite would have been artistically demanding and perhaps dishonest.

Retired Fellows Society

The almost universal view of Minna is that she was unable to be what Wagner supposedly needed – a peaceful companion, a help, a home-provider. While this is partly true, what are the facts?

First, Minna, whenever she was in the position to be, was a competent home-maker. In Natalie's words: "She well knew how to make the small household cosily neat and clean, by meticulous order and tidiness. Calmly and quietly she worked... she always looked rosy, fresh, neat, and exceedingly clean, so that nobody would guess that she did all his menial work."

Perhaps some embellishment there, but friends echoed it. And this covers their worst of times, in Paris.

Second, while Wagner could write that he felt "bound to her by a thousand chains of old and mutual suffering", his recurrent thoughts of divorce were neither countenanced by Minna, nor pursued. Their lives were such that Nietzsche said: "it is as if you are so much the dramatist that you yourself can only live in this way."

Third is the reality of Richard's need for Minna - a firm basis for a psychological stance that all male/female relationships are confrontational. Wagner's demons were as constant as his contradictions - insecurity, lack of recognition, swings in his compositional confidence. On

record is Emperor Bismarck's comment that he had never met a man with such self-assurance. Yet here is Wagner's astonishing confession: "If only I could write arias and duets...You all imagine that it's meat and drink for me, but you're wrong...No one will believe how bunglingly incompetent I am; I'm totally incapable of composing." Perhaps this, the depressive side of creativity, was a necessary balance, even if nonsensical.

Fourth, to neglect or downgrade Minna's role in Wagner's life infers that he should have married very differently – but would his compositions have been "improved" thereby? Minna was Wagner's choice, and it was during this (not Cosima's) marriage that he more or less completed all his mature operas (except *Parsifal* and parts of the Ring). Even in their times of separation, Minna could not be banished from Wagner's emotional life. And he could write: "I must have tranquillity of spirit, and that is possible only when I am near you."

Did it matter to Wagner's creative impulse that his wife was not a true Wagnerian, that her admiration was for his conducting (a major part of his life)? "...all the beauty you created had come to life in the home I had made." And: "...the ninth symphony will remain forever in my memory, because of you."

In his later, and dubious, autobiography, Wagner wrote: "I do not believe that she ever felt any sort of passion or love for me, but she never met my impetuous advances with coldness." That is both unkind and probably untrue.

Overall, although there were good times, it is a sad tale of frustration – Minna's, at self-sacrificing domestic unsettlement and forced tolerance of her husband's wayward erotic life; Wagner's – in continuous search for an ideal love and a fulfilling artistic sympathy.

Yet, how unfair to Minna that it is the names of Mathilde Wesendonk and (later) Cosima Liszt which have the much stronger hold in musical history.

Not long before her death in 1866, Minna publically refuted a newspaper allegation that Wagner had not supported her adequately. His financial loyalty to her when apart – often a weighty addition to the self-incurred debts for which he was pursued for most of his life – was a responsibility to his wife shamelessly denied to his numerous lenders.

In a late letter, Wagner wrote: "Life is such a serious matter and so terribly difficult...Poor Minna! Fate has tied you to one of the strangest of men...No wonder that your suffering is so great." Poor Minna, indeed

About half a century later, Elgar inscribed on the manuscript of his

Dream of Gerontius: "This is the best of me"... "for the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept, loved and hated..."

In that mysterious conjunction of the superhumanly creative with the daily ordinariness, Minna was there, an indelible if indefinable contributor to the Wagnerian miracle. History should be kinder.

The quotes here are mainly from three sources - *The Burrell Collection, Selected letters of Richard Wagner* (edit. Spencer and Donnington); and *Richard Wagner, the Last of the Titans* (Kohler).

A matter of consideration

Eric Paleamus

This is not a case-report, bizarre though it is. Rather, it is about anaesthesia under difficult conditions - not in some remote corner of the third world, but because of thoughtless behaviour in a large, modern, well-equipped clinic in the Western World.

The patient was past child-bearing age, but her abdomen was larger than any parturient's ("inconceivably", in irony). This was third-world pathology made manifest, a feminine equivalent to the gross elephantiasis of the scrotum illustrated in old surgical texts. And she was a late addition to the operating list, the surgical team's excuse for not seeking a prior "anaesthesia consultation". Perhaps this was merely to continue a pretence of normality,

for her only treatment had been a course of diuretics and the advice to lose weight; she had not reported breathlessness and her blood biochemistry was normal.

Here, there are no designated anaesthetic rooms, but I had given the patient my usual midazolam 2mg.I.V. So now, as we wheel her into the operating room, she is unaware of the all-too-common background noise - of social gossip and laughter. For these are nurses who work traditionally "for" surgeon so-and-so: "no, sir, we are not anaesthesia-helpers" - except, of course, in a rush for the resuscitation cart.

But the clamour intensifies unusually as the surgeons arrive: staff-man, senior and junior residents, along with several unfamiliar visitors. For this is indeed an interesting case, and we are in a famous, much visited "surgeon's hospital".

My anaesthesia resident has barely three months' experience, as we face two major risks to induction posed by this uniquely enormous abdominal mass - aspiration of gastric contents, and a fall in blood pressure akin to the supine hypotensive syndrome in pregnant women. Can I respect my resident's quiet insistence on his own "hands-on" experience?

So many conflicting issues, militating against a rapid, smooth induction. While I am over concerned, as the awful din persists, to avoid a confrontation in front of these unthinking visitors.

In a sudden brief silence, we begin

the induction. Tracheal intubation is quick. I hear someone say, to general mirth, that inserting a urinary catheter may be the most difficult part of the operation. It is of course just the humour of incredulity, but unamusing to this intent anaesthetist.

And it is while gaining access for this manoeuvre, achieved by much manipulation, including abdominal pressure, while the patient lies supine as though in a pregnancy advanced far beyond term, that my resident, trying to insert an arterial line, cannot feel a pulse. The noise has drowned the ECG's bleeping, but a glance at the oscilloscope confirms his alarm. The beats are infrequent, their potentials small (has the heart been pushed away from the electrodes?), so I reach quickly for atropine - while, nearby, a photographer positions himself.

The rowdy, mixed populace inhibits me from plain-speaking. I curse inwardly, glare about, but stay silent. What can I say, that they should not already know? It is too late to clear the room.

I am reminded, playing this part, of the lecturer oddly able to concentrate on his delivery while acutely aware of the audience's every move and response.

But here, the input is much more distracting and dangerous. My thoughts rush in a paranoia of anger at the casual indifference, the lack of insight. For years surgeons have dominated, anaesthesia is merely a means.

My resident is still struggling

Retired Fellows Society

for an arterial line, as I override the “automatic” blood pressure cuff, set for too-long intervals. A reading of seventy systolic appears, but this has just been a threatened cardiac arrest, one of those common cardiac slowings which respond to atropine.

Yet the adrenaline surge, the ancient alarm that was once, for me, a commoner experience, and for less cause – is exaggerated in this here and now. And I ask myself if there is a more inconsiderate place to work, that no one in their right mind would tolerate it...

Those others, strangers, who have come to view the extraordinary abdomen press forward, as I place the arterial line and a second, large-bore peripheral IV. The staff-surgeon stands in an impatient wait. Yet I doubt if fifteen minutes have elapsed since we induced.

“This is no joke-case for us, you know”, I remark as I hear another burst of laughter from some distance away.

“Nor for us”, he concedes. But my hint brings just a disregarding silence. He drops the drapes across the anaesthetic screen and the cacophony quietens. When I say more loudly that we nearly lost the patient, there is a more general hush as the “real” action begins.

And some 32 litres of fluid - yes! – are suctioned from this non-malignant ovarian cyst. Of course this has accumulated over a long period of time. Nevertheless, a quickly-inserted internal jugular

catheter, to measure central venous pressure, tells us that we have to treat the continuing low blood pressure with large volumes of colloid and Ringer-lactate solution. And gradually the case becomes as routine as so many others in this institution of tertiary care.

At the end, I feel badly at exposing our new resident to this - a training in what not to do. He has witnessed, and has heard, too much that is wrong. Yes, I should have emptied the room, demanded silence. On another day, perhaps I would. Had we seen our patient earlier, we could have taken the time to get arterial and IV lines in place, quietly, before allowing the surgeons - or operating-room nurses - near.

But the excuses I can make - that I have another patient, and resident, to look after; that we are short-staffed on Fridays (a notorious “calling-in-sick” day); and not least that I am tired from a late night - are no answers to the needs of the patient and my worthy trainee. The case - the patient, the indication - for an anaesthetic room won't occur to him, for he has never seen the like.

More intravenous fluids in Recovery Room, and she is awake, stable, her abdomen of normal size. Our difficulties are over, and now too readily dismissible. But the necessity to confront certain surgeons and nurses, to emphasise the banally obvious - that the concentration and foresight required for safe

anaesthesia are impaired by crude noise - causes me continuing dismay, frustration, and anger.

Later, when I convey some of this to the surgeon in a quiet aside, his acknowledgement is laconic and unconvincing.

Of course it was at “St. Elsewhere's”, this “matter of consideration”. And many years have passed...

Death on the House: Episode two

by Felix Bruckner

In the first episode, Dr Edwin Scott, now retired, looked back to 1960, to his first day as a houseman at St Peter's Hospital in Hitchin. He was made welcome there.

Wednesday, 2nd June: The table lamp cast a warm glow over the small room. The gramophone was playing Chris Barber's *Petite Fleur*. I sat comfortably on the solitary arm-chair with a tumbler of whisky in my hand. Across the room on the bed sat Adam Fenchurch, my opposite number. He was into his last month as house physician to Dr Thomas Cottar, the junior of the two consultant physicians. I had met him two evenings before, when he had given me much needed help and moral support with my very first emergency admission.

Yesterday's rain had passed, and now, through the open curtains, I could see a bright, almost full moon and the sky frosted

with stars. His room was in the overflow doctors' quarters at the north-east corner of the hospital backing onto Ward Four; it had its own entrance down a path behind the main residents' quarters where I lived. Fenchurch shared this annexe with the paediatric senior house officer (when he was on call), the gynaecology SHO, the surgical registrar and one of the surgical SHO's.

"It's a piece of cake, Edwin. We rarely have more than four admissions in twenty-four hours, and we get good back-up from our registrars; but if you're ever really worried, you can always give me a buzz, and I'll help out again ... You'll enjoy it here, I'm sure. Like I said, it's not too busy, the GP's are good, and there's a very high standard of medicine at St Peter's. You should get a car, though; it'll be a bit boring in Hitchin without transport."

He was slim and fair, with a quiet yet confident manner; he had twinkling grey eyes and an infectious smile – instantly likeable. Like all Dr Cottar's housemen he had trained at St Thomas' Hospital.

"I only knew your Jill by sight," he regretted. "She was a year below me ... But didn't she share a flat with a rugby player for a time, and mix with the rugger crowd?"

This was a reminder of a faintly disagreeable episode in my life: I quickly changed the subject.

"What's my registrar like?"

"Brian Root? A bit rum, really, but comes in if asked and seems to

know his stuff ... He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth ... Father's a barrister, a silk. ... Brian was Eton, Cambridge and the London Hospital. Made a promising start; then seems to have fallen by the wayside. He's been here about a year ..."

I sipped my drink, listened to the music and gazed through the window at the silver landscape.

"I say, Edwin, you must read *Casino Royale*; it's the first of the Ian Fleming James Bond books. It's less sophisticated than the others, but I'm finding it enthralling." He indicated an open book on his bedside table.

We discussed *Dr No*, *From Russia with Love*, and *Goldfinger*, all of which I had read. (The Bond books had become a cult at the London Hospital Medical College, before I had left.) *Petite Fleur* was replaced by Cleo Laine's verbal gymnastics with Johnny Dankworth's band, and then George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

"What about Dr Middleton?"

"Oh, Uncle Peter. The hospital's not named after him, by the way ... Well, under that rather forbidding exterior there beats a heart of gold. You'll get on just fine with him."

"And the charge nurse on Ward Ten – Stanley Pollett – what about him?"

"Another rum sort of a cove... big fellow, probably quite useful in a fight; was a cook in the merchant navy. Very efficient; runs a tight

ship: 'All ship-shape and Bristol fashion'. In spite of his frowns and gruff voice, the nurses twist him around their little fingers..."

He got up, went to the gramophone and put on another record – Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden playing Hoagy Carmichael's *Rockin' Chair*. The mournful blues melody with its loud trumpet accompaniment echoed in the room, and I wondered if we were disturbing anyone.

"I've got the whole porta cabin to myself this evening; no need to worry..." he reassured me. "But how did you find your first forty-eight hours at St Peter's? How was Monday's lady with the stroke?"

"Oh, she's quite well now, weakness already improving ... Dr Middleton seemed quite pleased on the ward round, yesterday."

There was a long pause, while he topped up our drinks; then Adam continued with his briefing.

"At weekends you will be on take with my boss and my registrar, Steve Bolton, and admit cases into our beds. You'll like Steve, a very bright lad. He was at Cambridge (Trinity College) and St Mary's Hospital ... Rugby blue, excellent doctor, always willing to come in.; just passed his MRCP. He's married with a small child – both delightful ... Rents a small house on the way to Letchworth. Anyway, you couldn't meet a nicer fellow ... Tom Cottar, my consultant, had been a high flier; was senior medical registrar at Tommy's

Retired Fellows Society

with an interest in cardiology ... Apparently he became deaf, and had to lower his sights ... Now has a big private practice in Hitchin, large house with swimming pool, souped-up Bentley saloon, wife and two teenage daughters. Seems content."

I was digesting all this, feeling relaxed, the second glass of whisky half empty in my hand, when the phone rang. I had given switchboard my whereabouts, in case of emergency. My contentment evaporated instantly, and I felt the pounding of my heart. Adam answered the phone, but immediately passed the receiver over to me.

"Sorry to trouble you, Dr Scott. I've got Dr Cumberbatch on the line for you about an admission ... Putting you through, sir." There was a brief pause, a click and then a rich plummy voice came on the line:

"Hello, Dr Scott, I hear you're the new HP. I'm Michael Cumberbatch, one of the Hitchin general practitioners. I have a lady who I think should come in: a case of pneumonia ..."

When I had finished with the GP, I rang Brian Root:

"I've just had a Dr Cumberbatch on the phone, Dr Root. He's sending in a lady with pneumonia to Ward Four. It's almost ten o'clock, and I wondered if you wanted to come in, or if I should"

He cut across me in mid flow:

"No need for that yet. You admit her, make a diagnosis, then ring me again ... I'll come in if there are

any problems. Otherwise, you can start her on antibiotics, and get her X-rayed in the morning."

Before I could reply, the line went dead ...

"Don't go yet," Adam advised softly, as I went to rise, his voice reassuring and calming.

"Ring the ward to let them know. Then there'll be at least another half-hour before the patient has been safely admitted into a bed by the nursing staff, so you'll have plenty of time to finish your drink. There's a back door to these quarters, which opens out opposite Ward Four."

Louis Armstrong's trumpet faded away. I phoned Ward Four, and asked the night staff-nurse to contact me when the patient had been admitted.

"I'll be in Dr Fenchurch's room."

Then I returned to my whisky.

"Have a peppermint, Edwin, when you've finished. Can't have you smelling like a public bar when you see only your second emergency patient ..."

The phone rang. My pulse started to accelerate again. The patient had arrived and was ready for me. I put on my white coat. Adam unlocked the back door to the doctors' annexe; as I crossed the covered corridor to Ward Four, I heard him lock it again.

It was half-past ten. The main lights were off, and the patients were composing themselves to sleep. A few soft snores were already audible. Staff-Nurse

showed me to the side room, still brightly lit in contrast to the main ward, and handed me the slim hospital folder.

"Mrs Agnes Baker, Dr Scott, aged fifty-six ..."

She remained at the bedside to chaperone me. My pulse had settled. Almost calmly, I embarked on the history.

"Good evening, Mrs Baker. Can you tell me about your condition, please?"

"Dr Michael sent me... he's absolutely marvellous, doctor. He took one look at me from the bedroom door, as soon as he arrived at my home. 'Aggie,' he said, 'I must send you into hospital immediately ...' and here I am!"

Eventually, I was able to elicit a history: she had been well until two days before, when she developed a dry hacking cough and felt feverish. It got worse, and she took to her bed shortly after breakfast, today. She had no appetite, and had eaten virtually nothing since then ... There was no cough in the family. She was a housewife with two grown-up daughters who had both left home. She smoked nil, and was teetotal.

The staff-nurse handed me the bedside chart: Temperature 102.4 degrees Fahrenheit, Pulse 100, Respirations 25 per minute.

"I'll just examine you now, Mrs Baker ..."

Her face was flushed, skin dry, with a cold sore (herpes febrilis)

at the angle of her mouth; lips were cracked, tongue dry and coated. There was no anaemia or jaundice. In the artificial light it was difficult to tell for certain, but I thought that her lips were tinged blue. There was no clubbing of the fingers and no lymphadenopathy. The pulse was one hundred and six, regular, bounding; blood pressure one hundred and ten over seventy, jugular venous pressure not elevated...

The staff-nurse helped the patient to remove her nightie, and I listened with my stethoscope (which I had previously warmed on the palm of my hand): heart sounds normal.

I examined the respiratory system: the chest moved normally with respiration; trachea was central, and the heart was not displaced. I percussed the chest: the left side was dull at the back. I listened again with the diaphragm of my stethoscope: there was bronchial breathing over the left lower lobe, with numerous fine crepitation's.

"Say 'Ninety-nine'", and I was able to elicit vocal resonance and tactile vocal fremitus.

I completed my examination – the abdomen and central nervous system were normal. I deliberated for a moment, before facing the patient again.

"You have a left lower lobe pneumonia, Mrs Baker ... I'll give you some antibiotics, and we'll soon have you better. You'll have to stay in hospital for ten to fourteen days, though, and be confined to bed for the first three

or four of these."

I turned to the nurse.

"I'll write her up for intramuscular penicillin and streptomycin – do you have it on the ward?"

She nodded.

"We'll try her with some oxygen; also I want a sputum for culture and sensitivities, and a two-hourly BP and TPR chart. I'll write a form for a chest X-ray, and she can have that tomorrow when the department opens... I'll let you get some sleep now, my dear ..." It was half past eleven.

"Now I'd better phone Dr Root," I informed staff-nurse softly, when we had reached her office. I picked up the receiver with a feeling of exultation, mixed with trepidation at the lateness of the hour, and his possible response.

Friday, 11th June: The countryside sailed by – sunny fields and hedgerows, quaint Hertfordshire villages, old market towns and a new garden city. My heart felt light, as I reviewed the last ten days: my emergency admissions, on call with my registrar, Brian Root, on week-days (Mondays and Wednesdays), and with Dr Cottar's registrar, Steve Bolton, over last week-end; ward rounds with Doctors Root and Middleton; the unexpected appearance of Sir Humphrey Golding on the ward to see his two leukaemia patients, just before lunch on Wednesday; then escorting him to his Rolls in the consultants' section of the car park, and finally watching him drive sedately away, with a regal wave – back to London and his

main place of work, University College Hospital.

Before May, I had never heard of Hitchin, let alone St Peter's Hospital. How then, Gentle Reader, had I landed up here? On qualifying, I had been advised by the medical school general office to apply for a house job without delay. The school was duty-bound to provide two supervised posts for each of its students, during the first year after qualification – the so-called pre-registration posts. It was only after completing these that we would be deemed fit to take on unsupervised duties, either in hospital or in general practice. As there were always less pre-registration appointments at the London Hospital than the number of students passing finals, the medical school had made arrangements with a number of non-teaching hospitals to take the rest: this ensured that all our students received posts, and at the same time the peripheral hospitals had a regular supply of house physicians and house surgeons of the requisite quality. These linked hospitals were mostly within a reasonable radius of The London in towns such as Bedford, Ilford, Romford, St Albans, Hitchin, where some of us had already been on our student electives. We were allowed to tick up to five boxes on the application form, one of which was marked "Any". I had chosen four firms at The London Hospital through which I had passed as a student, and had then ticked "any" as my final choice...

After coping on my own with

Retired Fellows Society

calls at dead of night, seeing my patients recover over the ensuing days, being treated with friendliness and totally-unaccustomed respect by the nurses, sisters and even doctors, I had lost much of my fear. However my heart would still race at the sound of the telephone or the buzzing which announced the appearance of the wall-lights – notably the pattern of red, green, yellow and white, which was my code. I was now familiar with all the histories, having admitted the majority of the cases myself. On the Friday morning, I had taken Adam Fenchurch around the wards and shown him the Middleton patients, priming him on potential problems whilst I was away...

I came out of my reverie at the sight of the tall grimy buildings of London, as the train slowed on its approach to King's Cross Station.

After a filling supper, I sat on the sofa in the small breakfast-room in Oban Road, watching television – Emergency Ward Ten. I had arrived home at teatime with my suitcase; though the hospital laundry routinely dealt with the resident doctors' dirty clothes, mother insisted that I bring mine home at week-ends, so that she could wash and iron the items personally. From the moment of my arrival, Mum and my sister Jane had hovered attentively, bombarding me with questions, their faces wreathed in smiles. Now, from the corner of my eye, I saw their gaze fixed on me, interested in how I would react to the medical drama series.

I smiled inwardly at the excessively handsome doctors, the flawlessly beautiful nurses, the succession of life and death situations ... I prepared to enjoy myself. Then the telephone rang on screen: my pulse raced, and I felt the perspiration breaking out all over me; a heavy weight compressed the pit of my stomach.

"What's the matter, dear? You look quite pale."

"I've just remembered something I forgot to do ..."

I rose and hurried out of the room.

Saturday, 12th June: Saturday afternoon was warm and sunny – only an occasional wispy cloud rode high in the pale sky, as we strolled arm in arm over Clapham Common, past the pond where fathers and small boys sailed their toy yachts, as they had when I was still at school. Jill Pritchard was due to start her house physician's post at St Thomas' Hospital at the beginning of July: in just under three weeks' time. Her face and fore-arms had not yet lost their deep tan. A soft breeze ruffled her hair when she turned to gaze happily towards me. We hadn't seen each other since our holiday together after qualifying...

Saturday, 22nd May: The train journey had become boring after the first few hours, the views from the window monotonous. The carriage was comfortable, never full, the passengers were cosmopolitan, ever changing; I recognised their speech as

French or German, but though I knew both languages, I couldn't follow, because they spoke either too rapidly or too idiomatically. The boredom was relieved by a splendid three-course dinner (with wine) in the restaurant car, over which we lingered for an hour and a half.

We sat in the half-empty compartment through the night, as we couldn't afford a sleeper, the lights low, Jill's head on my shoulder. I dozed sporadically. I was jolted awake by a station stop; it was dark outside. Was this Lyon, the second town of France? I couldn't be bothered to look.

Sometime later, I was woken again, we showed our passports, and we were over the border in Italy...

We breakfasted on coffee and croissants in the dining car. The sun was shining, there was a distant view of mountains, nearer at hand cypress trees, terraced fields, an occasional ox-drawn cart; then factories with car parks containing hundreds of new vehicles ready for distribution. Was this Turin? ("Torino" came over the loudspeaker.) Finally the train pulled into Milan station and stopped. I lifted our suitcases off the luggage rack and we descended onto the hot sun-drenched platform. We had three hours to wait for our connection to Alassio.

At a kiosk inside the concourse, we treated ourselves to coffee and a sandwich; mine had a cheese filling, and belatedly I remembered that I disliked cheese; however I

was so tired that I couldn't really taste it anyway.

"We might as well take in the sights of Milano, while we wait." Jill was being positive.

However, her usually bright eyes had lost their lustre, were sunken and surrounded by bruised, dark-blue rings; her voice was low and lacked force. She was clearly as tired as I.

Outside the station, the sun beat down on us; we scuttled into the shade of the buildings across the road, dragging our suitcases behind us on their small wheels. A tram approached; we boarded with our burdens, grateful for the shade and the light breeze as we moved off.

"Does this tram go to the Cathedral – Cathedrale?" Jill asked the conductor.

"Duomo, si, sempre ..." he nodded.

The buildings and pedestrians outside passed in a blur. I must have nodded off, because after what seemed a very short time, I found him tugging at my sleeve, and I realized that we had arrived. All I could take in from the pavement was a broad marble façade in black and white, rising to the heavens, and incorporating some celestial statuary. I couldn't concentrate on the details: the day was too warm, my suitcase was too heavy, my weariness too great. Jill and I exchanged glances: without further ado we crossed the road, and took the next tram back, our expedition at an end. Our exploration of Milan

had been an unqualified success – we had not even glimpsed La Scala Opera House!

Everything in Milan seemed to be made of marble. I waited on a marble bench with no backrest, rather like a coffee table back home, in a cool cavernous marble hall. I looked after the cases while Jill, who seemed to have more energy – or was it just initiative –, went in search of the platform for the suburban train to Alassio.

"Come quickly. It's waiting, almost full – though there's still another hour before departure."

The train had no air-conditioning, and the seats were wooden; yet there was a festive atmosphere in our carriage, the working classes southward bound on holiday, chatting noisily, laughing, eating. We found two seats near each other, and a man helped me raise our cases onto the wooden luggage rack. He appeared to be the father (il padre?). I sat next to him and two small boys; Jill sat down opposite, with a table between, next to the mother (la madre?) and a slightly older girl; on the mother's lap was perched an infant of about nine months drinking milk greedily from a bottle.

"Piccolo bambino," I ventured.

"Sì, piccolo bambino ..." and we were instantly welcomed into the family, offered lemonade in paper cups which we gratefully accepted, bread and sausage which we politely refused, and cross-examined in incomprehensible Italian.

"Alassio," Jill contributed. There were nods and a further stream of gibberish. While the woman was admiring Jill's engagement ring, I dozed off again; I awoke with a jerk to find that we had arrived at our destination, and il padre was lifting our suitcases off the rack for us, and helping us out of the carriage with many fond "arrivederci".

A taxi took us to our hotel. It was six o'clock when we were deposited at the main entrance.

Volunteers Required

For a project on the effects of ageing on the immune system; the study involves taking blood and skin samples.

If you are:

Ages 16-40 yrs or
65yrs and older
Relatively healthy

To discuss this study please contact:

Megan Harries:
m.harries@ucl.ac.uk Tel
07341127838

In the next issue

How Sally Gordon Boyd became a medical ethicist

An account of medical training in Iraq

Art work by Richard Thacker

What a remarkable coincidence

In 1990, a fifteen year old student from Argoed High School in Wales sat his GCSE exams. His name was James Bond, his paper reference number was 007 and the exam invigilator was Mr Goldfinger.

In 1937 a road sweeper called Joseph Figlock was cleaning an alley when a baby boy fell from a fourth storey window and landed on his shoulders. This broke the baby's fall and his life was saved. A year later the same baby fell from the same window and once again landed on Mr Figlock, once again the baby's life was saved.

In 1660 a ship sank off Dover; the only survivor was called Hugh Williams. In 1767 another ship sank in exactly the same spot. There was only one survivor called.....Hugh Williams. In 1820 a ship capsized on the Thames with only one survivor, called Hugh Williams. In 1940 a German mine blew up a ship leaving two survivors, a man and his nephew. The man was called Hugh Williams, his nephew was called Hugh Williams.

Twin brothers called Jim Lewis and Jim Springer had been separated at birth and adopted by different parents, both families, who did not know each other, choosing the name James. The boys grew up also not knowing each other but both had sought police and security training in their twenties. Each had married a woman named Linda. Both had sons, one of whom was called James Alan, the other was called James Allan. Both men divorced their first wives and both remarried older women, both called Betty. Both owned dogs which they named Toy. They both died in 2002, dying within hours of each after separate accidents on the same road.

Neville and Erskine Ebbin both died aged 17 in a road accident involving a taxi. However, they were killed a year apart, with each riding the same moped. Both were killed by the same taxi driver who was carrying the same passenger.

Acknowledgements to the Evening Standard 16 June 2016.

