

Uncultured Pearls

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DRAMA

Now Another Day

No Contract For Love

Account Rendered

The Pit Digger

The Bahrat Tender

Your Humble Investigator (a series in collaboration with Lory Alder)

comprising: *Chase The Ace, Special Twist, Crooks' Tour.*

MUSICAL COMEDY

Two Hours of Happiness (in collaboration with Malcolm Knight)

UNCULTURED PEARLS

**A COLLECTION OF VERSE
AND MORE**

by

JOSEPH SINCLAIR



ASPEN
London, England

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18 Leamington House
Stonegrove
Edgware
Middlesex HA8 7TN
England
Tel: +44 020 8958 5462
Email: joseph.sinclair@btinternet.com

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reproduced or transmitted in any form, electronic or
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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to its two earliest influences:

To Rita Coleman, my first serious romantic relationship, the break-up of which caused me to embark on a frenetic orgy of poetic invention that relieved an otherwise desolate period of National Service in the Royal Engineers.

And to Stella Blend, whose kind and devoted criticism of my early works during that period effectively encouraged my attention to details that might otherwise have been fatally ignored.

Within these pages I shall make occasional reference to both of these wonderful women and identify their influence.

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COMMENTARY ON EARLY VERSE SECTION

My first serious poem (*Our Struggle*) was written just before the War and then revised in 1944 when I was an evacuee in Llanelli, South Wales. It was very poor, and is included in this anthology solely because of a certain historical interest. In 1945 I sent it to John Betjeman, who at that time wrote for the Daily Herald, without telling him it had been written by a 12-year old. Surprisingly he did respond. Unsurprisingly he was particularly scathing, suggesting that the poet would benefit by revisiting Palgrave's Golden Treasury. I was shattered and it was many years before I could bring myself to forgive him. But had I been an adult - as he had little reason to doubt - he was actually being very kind. Anyway, that's the reason the poem has been included.

An interesting, if somewhat tenuous, link to the final verses in this section, *Pot Pourri*, was the discussion it provoked in the late 1950s with Helen Winnick, who I met when she was an assistant in a bookshop in Moorgate. She had an interesting, if somewhat bizarre background, having been at one time associated with Kenneth Haigh, the Acid Bath Murderer, but having happily escaped that fate. Prior to her employment at the bookshop, she had been secretary at the British Interplanetary Society, working for Arthur C. Clarke, the noted science fiction novelist. Many decades later, during one of my business visits to Sri Lanka, I wangled an invitation to tea with Sir Arthur. He remembered that period of his life quite well. He also recalled Helen, but couldn't or wouldn't recount any stories.



(1)
EARLY VERSE

This section comprises a selection of verse written in the 1940s, both during the second World War, while evacuated to Llanelli in South Wales, and during and subsequent to my military service at Longmoor Camp in the Corps of Royal Engineers.

AIR RAID



With breathless bewilderment and awe
Stood watchers, petrified, with bated breath,
Perceiving beauty born of slaughter,
The grim announcer of impending death.

Their eyes were roving, sleep-endowed,
From scarlet flame to steep-banked cloud,
Were seeking, probing, ceaselessly
For what they were afraid to miss
And even more afraid to see.

Then each man's heart was filled with dread;
That hornet-drone was overhead,
And suddenly the atmosphere
Was pregnant with the full-blown seed
Of unpremeditated fear.

The amber glow in stealthy silence
Arose relentlessly with fearful might,
Imbued the air with ghostly beauty
Dissolving softly into patient night.

Longmoor, 1948

*[Stella Blend considered the last line to be an
example of my finest poetry.]*

BURNSALL CHURCH - WHARFEDALE

Majestic monument to honest prayer,
Thy plain and rugged beauty doth excite
All sentiments this eager heart can bear,
And banishes bewilderment and fear,
And fills one with warm comfort in the night.

What messages of hope you must convey
When being sighted first by Wharfedale men
Returning at the ending of the day;
Or smiling at the children in their play;
And scowling at the poacher in the glen.

For all emotions your stout walls inspire,
As are contained within the viewer's heart:
Be it the fear of people who conspire,
Or shame of those whose sin is their desire.
Fresh hope to each of these your walls impart.

Yet rests the clock at twenty past the noon
And looking o'er the village all stands still.
You hold your head with pride as some tribune
Or sentinel, toward the sun and moon;
And keep your silent vigil on the hill.

Longmoor, June 1949

LITTLE MAN – WHAT NOW? (To the atom bomb)

Bravo, my little man, but why so scared?
You've made the grade, with yesterday compared
Have far outmatched the power on the red morn
You gained with poisoned dart and venom'd thorn.
Though merely one man at a time to slay
Seemed, even then, such long-drawn-out delay.
How trivial are those bows and arrows now
That you have learned by leaping stages how
Grim Death's vast lethal scythe to sharpen fresh,
And scatter into dust mere mortal flesh.
So on the discard throw your crude machines,
Your battleships, your tanks, your submarines.
One day, with Earth a sepulchre of stone
You'll reign a prince, the conqueror – alone!

London, 1947

*[This was produced in collaboration with the late
Mike Koslover for the wall newspaper of the North
Hackney branch of the Young Communist League.]*

MY SONG

I want to pour my heart into a flood of song:
The song of the individual struggling
In the midst of over-powering oppression;
The song of slave and master;
The song of man and mate;
Boy and girl;
Mother and child.
The song that has for centuries been sung
And yet remains unsung.
The triumphant march of victory;
Of Good over Evil;
Love over Selfishness;
Honesty and Cleanliness of mind and body
Over Corruption, Depravity and Soullessness.
The slow pavane in regal solemnity,
Portraying the grief of a man
For his own atrocities,
And those perpetrated by his brothers everywhere,
Whether in mistaken philanthropy
Or openly degenerate vindictiveness.
Such is my song.

London, 1946

CRI DE COEUR

Les enchêvetrements de mon esprit;
Mes pensées dans un fouillis, melangées,
Comme s'il n'y avait jamais y compris
L'idée d'un sens, une raison, tout complet.
N'importe comment j'ai la volonté
De céder sous le dirigisme de l'âme,
C'est toujours de la faiblesse de mon corps
Que je ne suis pas vainqueur de ma flâme.

Longmoor, 1948

[This was written one year after I had spent some months at the University of Neuchatel in Switzerland and attended a course at the Sorbonne in Paris. My friend in Paris, David Grimberg, described it as nonsense. But he was studying medicine. So what did he know of poetry? 60 years later, a French member of the staff of one of my publishers expressed amazement that it should have been produced by a 17-year old Englishman. She, of course, was a very talented critic!]

FRUSTRATION 1

This constant strife and effort
To be articulate,
And give my thoughts the weapon
Of expression;
And not gesticulate.

Longmoor, August 1948

FRUSTRATION 2

There is so much I must say,
So little that I may,
And mind, stagnated, lends itself
To physical decay.

Longmoor, November 1948

EVE OF ROMANCE

On such an eve, as every man does know,
All Nature does unite, and each caress
Imparts a soft, subdued, translucent glow
Which emanates, though efforts to suppress
It fail, as each fold of the loved one's dress
Descends by stages to the floor below.

And then in revelation she does stand,
That eyes may see what only hands have known,
Exulting in the beauty that was planned
By Him, supreme of sculptors, and has grown
And, having blossomed, ripened, now is shown
To eyes that lust, but eyes that understand.

He stands before her; falls upon his knees
To pay his homage to a form divine.
His arms encircle, nerveless yet to squeeze
That body, still and statuesque of line,
But gazes at her face as in a shrine
Of goddess Venus. Dropping by degrees

His eyes encompass first that brow serene
And then her rapt'rous azure lids, half-closed,
Expressively, for teeming thoughts might glean
Her roused emotions were her eyes exposed,
Although revealing features quite composed,
More beauteous than e'er before had been.



A nose such as no artist could produce,
On either side of which a modest blush
Bears witness to her feelings. To reduce
Her lips to words, though words would like to gush
Forth from this pen is, as it were, to brush
Aside all artistry, without excuse.

And then here chin and throat of lily white,
Unmarked by blemish, pure as falling snow,
Descending in such curve as Hogarth might
Admire, for him such beauty were enow,
But beauty such as this can only slow
The downward passage of his eager sight.

For with frail man desire begets desire
And passion rules out sentiments of art.
The mind subordinates itself to fire
Intense and ardent, springing from the heart,
A fire which, unextinguished, does impart
Such ecstasies as sense and frame inspire.

Longmoor, 1948

*[Written at the request of the orderly room staff of
the Royal Enginners, Longmoor Camp, who hated
it! They were expecting another Eskimo Nell.]*

LIFE

War;
Competition;
Mental frustration,
Striving to gain self-respect and ambition.

Force;
Inhibition;
Utter starvation;
Lifelong attempt to avoid this condition.

Morals;
Convention;
No violation
Without a penalty for such dissention.

Fortune;
Contention;
Supreme elation
As unknown matters attain comprehension.

Study;
Reflection;
Gay recreation;
Always a venture inviting correction.

Control;
Direction;
No compensation;
Nothing which does not involve some inspection.

Death;
Degradation;
Life's expectation
Wanes as the breath nears its last expiration.

Birth;
Procreation;
Love's consummation,
Gladly producing the next generation.

Longmoor, 1948

SINCERITY

Happy memories the longest lasting,
Memories of times the fastest passing.

The old is loath to give way to the new,
As I am loath to lose my heart to you.

Longmoor, 1948

OUR STRUGGLE

Dawn approaches; day is coming,
Day with all its laughs and joys
Covering a multitude of
Unplacated wants.
Bringing with it renewed struggle
'gainst the forces of Reaction
In attempts to forward freedom
And progress the Rights of Man.
Ever forward, frank and fearless,
Fit to fight the fight for freedom,
Fit to fight with pen – with rifle,
Dealing blow with mind and hand;
Fit to give one's life if that will
Benefit Humanity.
Life is but the way we live it.
What is Death? Oblivion,
Impenetrable nothingness.
Be not feared of Death my brothers,
Fear not for the life that could be;
Hold out hope for that which will be
Wrought by your resourcefulness;
Strengthened by sincerity.
Till you reap your just reward
In the dawn of a new day.

Llanelli, 1945

SILENCE

Silence
and for a brief instance
the world stands still,
and the roving spirit
crests the hill of solitude.
And then the dripping tap of memory
fills the mind with noise.
The sound of past occurrences,
blaring of triumphant hopes,
the muted strains of profitless experience;
the terrible maddening noise.
You grapple with remembrance
without success,
in efforts to retain oblivion.
Amidst the crescendo
and mounting turmoil of emotions
a small voice says "It was not so",
but soon its tone is smothered.
You feel that life is slipping from your grasp
and fight a losing battle with despair,
till finally your will is overcome.
And then –
silence.

Longmoor, July 1949

FOUR POEMS

Poem (1)

Would I had time enough, and had no care
To take up arms against
Blackest despair.

Would that the tragedy and all the fear,
Heartache and misery
Could disappear,

Leaving the luxury of carefree life,
Without necessity,
Trouble and strife;

Inspiring hopefulness, no brevity
Of grim Death's enemy
Longevity.

Would that the lowly mind could soar above,
Losing in selfishness,
Gaining in love.

Could learn that love alone banishes fear,
Love of so many things
That we hold dear.

Love of vitality; joy in the powers
Pursuant from knowledge
That only is ours.

Throw to the wind of scorn, morality;
Anachronist conven-
tionality.

Catch to your heart instead, new-found release
From that hard moral code.
Freedom increase!

Why should we be denied things of import?
Life's own abandonment,
We ourselves thwart,

Thwart with this struggle, inherently vile,
Life's lasting tourney 'gainst
Love's chilling smile.

Thus does the shade advance, filling with gloom
My very soul, and does
Presage my doom.

Would I had time enough, and had no care
To take up arms against
Blackest despair.

Longmoor, 1948

Poem (2)

Is mind to be subordinate to matter,
The physical preferred to the ethereal?
Is gain the sole incentive used to flatter?
And should one only care for things material?
Or is there some one things that rules supreme;
That holds all justice, mercy, tenderness;
And does not merely come into the scheme
And order of this wretched universe?
For honesty remains a second best
In worlds where only profit dictates sense,
And truth must be content to stay hard-pressed,
For virtues bring but mental recompense.

Longmoor, 1948

Poem (3)

Man is but a shallow creature
In the confines of his mind.
Though history proves his teacher,
Learns not. Life can be unkind
To all those who reject reason,
Favouring instinctive right;
Forsaking as out of season
Modesty, however slight.
Can it be that life regresses,
Having limits to its range?
Can one say that naught progresses
Past a modicum of change?

Longmoor, 1948

Poem (4)

Fair thou art,
But fairer yet to me
The pure, sweet beauty of thy noble mind.
Rich thou art
Beyond all worldly wealth,
And true to me beyond all common truth.

No passions, effervescent, cooling fast,
To damp the ardour of a loving heart;
No sudden ecstasies of sense and frame,
Dissolving, bitterly, the way they came;
But living, lasting, joy serene,
The joy that has for aeons been
And evermore will be.

For spirit being not intense
And rousing false emotions as the flesh,
As recompense is durable,
Depending on such things as faith
And full unearthly, deep unselfishness.

To give doth benefit as much the giver
As him that doth receive.
Naught else can chasten save true sympathy
If any man doth grieve.

Longmoor 1948

PURGATORY

There was a picture hanging in the gallery of my soul
Of one ideal in character, in body and in mind,
A vision conjured up by blind and beautiful desire,
Perfect in form, perfect in heart, by perfection inspired,
Possessing both the virtues and the sensual attributes,
While clean and incorruptible, and faithful, true and kind,
Instilling into frail man a modicum of strength.

But rare it is for woman to compare with an ideal
In beauty physical or of the spirit, and must yield
Both mentally and bodily, for human frailty shows
And honesty and faithfulness to selfishness give way.
My vision crumbled fast in unassuageable decay
And disillusion rapidly took inspiration's place;
Where once was something concrete now is gaping void shown.

Thus mental desolation now does stare me in the face;
That love-inspired creation that proceeded from my mind,
Unreached, yet not unreachable, has ceased to be alive;
Has fallen from her pedestal, while all about I hear
The laughing, gloating, caustic comments of those whom I once
Did deign to call my friends. They know naught else but how to
mock
And scatter on the wind of scorn all vestiges of love.

Ambition is the spur resuscitates the fevered frame
When physical endurance is approaching breaking point.
That thing beyond one's outstretched hands
Which greets with chill disdain
All efforts at possession, and would stay apart,
While body agonised and brain unite in tort'rous scheme
And drive one to despair, to grief, to living death unseen.

Unseen by denizens of life's impenetrable growths;
Those carnivorous animals of civilized domains;
That thick entangling human forest, endless Mardi gras,
Which rushes, whirls, encircles, tourbillonery gyrates.
The furiously ceaseless movement slackens not nor halts
And tortured mind is aggravated, tortured frame insensed,
While one is in a seething mass, lonely but not alone.

Death would appear quite terrorless, and there is far more fear
Attached to life's illimitable drear uncertainty.
Success is worthless, failure naught, if one has not the will,
(C'est à dire que sa raison d'être est perdue et sa vie
Ne contient que la misère). Initiative is gone;
Uncertainty deposes hope; dismay destroys belief,
And life without respect for one's own self is valueless.

There rests but one resort at length in willing man's own hands
And time must come when this reflects no terror in his heart,
For spirit moribund is quite as noxious as dead flesh.
Man's fear of the hereafter is but born of future hopes
Which, once destroyed, must certainly remove all cowardice,
A coward being one who is afraid of the unknown,
And dying life will always be preferred to living death.

Longmoor, 1948

*[Produced in the despair of my first blighted love
affair. The fourth stanza provided the title for my
only published novel.]*

RITA



She came and it was light:
The light of countless twinkles in a champagne glass.
She spoke and all was bright:
The brightness of the sunset in a narrow pass.

What matters how she came or what she said?
Of small importance, now, the cause of strife.
But when she went I wished that I were dead,
For all the light departed from my life.

Longmoor 1948

*[A failed relationship, the consequence of a
misunderstanding based on a weird coincidence,
proved the inspiration behind much of my early
verse].*

THE STATESMAN

Prosaic'ly he plods the path of peace,
Avoiding pitfalls when the dusk is nigh
By treading warily. Does not release
In gay abandonment a heartfelt sigh
Such as the vagabond of Nature's road
Permits himself when shades of darkness fall;
For he has not to carry such a load,
And is but one of many that make all.

Longmoor, 1948

*[This short verse, according to Stella Blend, showed
that I had true poetic ability that needed study,
application and honing.]*

WHAT?

What does life mean?
A few warm tears
And possibly some sixty years
Of making ends meet, it appears.
What does life mean?

And what is truth?
A man-made rule
Instilled when one is yet at school;
Hypocrisy in ridicule.
For that is truth.

Can it be said
That life has aim
Beyond the individual's game
To win immediate acclaim?
Can that be said?

And if it's so,
Why then create
The mind of man with such a spate
Of sentiments that complicate?
If it is so.

Is there a God,
Completely good?
Or is His presence merely food
For thought – and thought for masterhood?
Is there a God?

Or is God Man,
Innate with rife
Emotions and a constant strife
To get some goodness from this life?
Is God then Man?

Longmoor, 1949

POT POURRI

(i)

Success has not been slow forthcoming
In that sphere of less importance;
Pride, however, wanes in ever
Widening circles of discontent.
Talent certainly does not bear revelation
And despite times of unmitigated joy
There has never failed to come eventual
Realisation in the rational light of dawn.

An inner longing fills my spirit;
my whole frame burns with the sense
of something missing – a vast yearning
for mental and physical satisfaction.
That symbolism of the missing substance,
quality, or what you will,
dares not escape me. It recurs
at all too frequent intervals
to be misunderstood.
It is the desire
for absolute, unequivocal, sexual gratification,
not merely in that narrow limited sphere
of moral disbelief,
but something over and above.

It is as if I grasped for something
far above my head;
the farther that my eager groping
hand does reach, the less the satisfaction,
until finally naught else can grant relief

save complete ecstasy of soul and frame;
which ecstasy by not forthcoming,
disillusionment creeps in;
and not just that, but vast disgust
in mine own self, which is refracted
and superimposed upon the other members
of society.

My quarrel is not with them
nor yet with certain individuals
on whom I must from time to time give vent,
but it is with myself
and with my angry mood of discontentment.

(ii)

And now some empty pages testify
to a period of renewed activity,
to a casting-off of the cloak of stagnation
and a donning of the mantle of relief.
The individual has at last asserted
his instinctive impulses; for once unfettered
and released from moral servitude,
the mind indulges in such promiscuity
as can be satisfied by physical device.

Llanely – town of limitless spiritual freedom.
No convention, no morality, save that which is inspired
by a fierce quality of righteousness
proceeding from a frame unleashed
and unrestricted by the bounds of Nature.
No longer does one share the deep respect
that formerly could words alone inspire,

but action, liveliness and doing
the act, instead of merely talking,
thinking and hoping.
The expulsion of all
that had died, decayed and rotted
and lay about in memory and in mind,
was now washed clean by the purity
of satisfaction.

Oh! how can this relief
be held by such a number in contempt
and felt to be unclean?
And how can they,
with egotism born of sheer hypocrisy,
desiring though unconsciously themselves,
condemn an act which Nature does invite?
That Nature which they hold in high regard
and use with subtle arguments to prove
the unreality of change.
A Nature which must be itself committed
To all forms of abandonment.

Oh, aching flesh and ecstasy
of soul.
Oh burning tender passion
now relieved.

I have been granted what I most desired
in breadth of scope
and unlimited mental freedom.

(iii)

Alas the tides run out;
the conflict ebbs and flows
yet never ceases,
for change is interminable.
I have a goal, I have a starting post,
but how to find the safest route between?
My goal the attainment of all I hold dear;
I start with half the race already run.
But I had not anticipated competitive force
of such magnitude.

To go where one desires to be
may cause but only momentary gain,
for he also loses who gains.

A life, a hope, a living dream.
These things are not important in themselves,
but what they stand for,
what they represent:
emotions, feelings, instincts that comprise
the mental individual.
They are the inner substance;
the hard core of resistance.
These are they which suffer
if one does not succeed.

(iv)

This incessant bickering,
this petty argument,
values changing overnight:
loss, gain, accumulation
of annoyance piled on annoyance.
“Such a small thing,” you may say,
but how these trivialities expand
and take on great importance in our minds.
Necessity, expenditure, durability;
just words, conveying little in themselves;
language divorced from its context
and, in the process, losing
any semblance of sense.
In manner similar to this
the mind picks up its fragmentations;
enlarges on it and contracts,
but alters.
For nothing is static but change.

Man himself is continually changing,
developing in physical and mental growth.
But man, the individual - the inner self:
unconscious, a-moral, never satisfied -
appears fixated; as if caught in the grasp
of something stronger than himself;
and yet retains the lack of scope
in differentiating right from wrong:
the worthless thought from the important.

The inner self must be a child,
demonstrative and eager to discard
all adulthood's responsibilities.

And so as life unfolds its weary span,
these doubts and apprehensions must recur
and one can only strive tenaciously
to subdue the little devil in the breast.

Longmoor, 1949

[Initially begun as a diary, and gradually expanded.]

COMMENTARY ON LATER VERSE SECTION

The 1950s marked a huge transition period for me. University combined with a highly diverse set of intimate relationships and a change of direction for my literary and creative endeavours was marked by a sparsity of verse production.

My creative output during my undergraduate years at LSE went into essay-writing on the academic front and song-writing, prose and play-writing on the creative side.

The few pieces of verse reproduced in this section are probably not the true extent of my efforts during this period, but they are all I have been able to locate, suggesting that anything else may have been of little worth. This begs the question, I realise, whether any of the other material was really worth retaining. But, we won't go there.

All other attempts at poetry seem to suggest that my major effort in that sphere was in the direction of comic verse and parodies until finally, and more recently, I embarked on more serious and longer verse projects. Three marriages, three children, the best part of ten years living abroad, and a total commitment (some might suggest an unhealthy commitment) towards work, might account for the absence of an output of verse. But creative writing in other forms persisted throughout the period, as the Drama section of Bibliography (page 2) testifies.



(2)
LATER VERSE

This section comprises a selection of verse
written from the 1950s, through the 1980s.

Poem

How sickening to be alone and desolate;
to suffer mental torture by the act
of merely thinking.

To grope
and, groping, not to find,
or finding, not to recognise.

What is it that revolts in me;
that booms and cannonades against my mind?
I think I could turn and live like Walt Whitman,
he is so certain and self-explained.

Yet it is far from easy
to face one's past misdeeds;
for the mental censor holds them down,
distorts them, yet allows
the nausea to percolate,
escape and soil the brain;
disfigure and eliminate
the true, the clear, clean pain.

What is it that I want to say?
I probe, I seek, I stoop
to depths so base that even I,
the writer, player, perpetrator
of the piece, admits disgust.
But never will I let myself
achieve the end result;
an end to simple in itself,
so torturous to reach.

To tell the truth, naught else.
To whisper, shout, or preach the truth,
but more important yet:
admit it to myself;
to face that which I will not own.

Oh to be in April, now that May is here,
for the change from month to month is but
the van of year to year,
and though years that lie behind
evoke no pride in me; it's clear
that the years which lie ahead
hold naught else for me but fear.

London, 1950s

CONCUPISCENCE

Night interdiction -
the mind won't allow
acceptance.
The spirit yearns for that bodily release.
Rejection!

But frailty of frame,
excess of desire,
force of response
conspire!

We put it from our minds,
but how to put it from our flesh?
Disparage it? Spurn it? Disavow?
What results?
The feeble, grasping, clutching wish –
master to the deed.

And then in retrospect we think:
it's really not too bad,
nor too disgusting,
nor sick.

Rationalisation!
It is all those things
and more besides.
But still we crave it.

London, 1950s

FRIGHTS AND FEARS

When that which once was wont my eyes
To please does now dismay
As much as that now-lost surmise
Does tease my mind away,
Then feel I with a wild release
A surge of sympathy,
And find I the astounding ease
Of generosity.

When fears, which hitherto my heart
Did pain, no more do fright;
Or darkneses from storms did start
And rain, yet now delight;
Then I give thanks to know again
What I had known before
And thought that I had sought in vain
And would find nevermore.

When sights and sounds and sentiments
Once real have lost their worth;
And when those fragile elements
Lie dust-like on the earth,
Then shall my heart no more conceal
What it would most express;
And shall I come at last to feel
That unaccustomed bliss.

Switzerland, 1962

REVERIE

I dreamed. I know no longer how
Or why that dream occurred.
I dreamed, and in my ear there came
An unexpected word:
A voice that whispered, murmured on,
Insistent to be heard.

I slept, for how else but in sleep
Could I that love have known?
I slept, for only sleep-borne could
That tenderness be shown;
A joy so rarefied must grace
The peaks of sleep alone.

I wept. The tears of passion fell
Unwonted on my cheek.
I wept and it was right to see
Virility made weak,
For tears give voice where otherwise
To spoil would be to speak.

I moaned. How could this pleasure-pain
Insensate I inflame?
I moaned to feel fulfilment's hand
So warm within my frame.
And when it passed I knew that it
Had cleansed away my shame.

And yet it was not dreams alone
That caused this love to start.
And yet it was not sleep that brought
Completion to my heart;
For you dreamed there beside me and
Your magic did impart.

And so I did not weep in vain
To shed my tears for thee.
And so I did not moan without
The blessed memory
Of your own tears and your desire
To stay and comfort me.

I dreamed of riches bounteous
And found them there to take.
I slept with placid restfulness
And gathered in its wake
A bounty rich beyond all prize.
I slept, yet was awake.

Switzerland, 1962

ORGASM

My brain too long has had the sound
and shape and nerve
of breathless requiems.

I want to feel my own rebirth
in time and space come throbbing through
the tips of each finger,
flooding my dry veins with rich green sap
and giving me new sight
to every sense;
making me whole again.

I want to feel my spirit as before
rippling with joy
and dancing through my skull
so that, merged in adoration with my soul,
I may once more have that power
to fill my cup of life and love
and find this consummation
in her arms.

London, 1980s

CAME THE DAWN

Morning came.
The wanly tepid sun
From out the mist did creep
Yet chilled but more the coldness in my heart.

Night was o'er
And love its course had run.
We woke up from our sleep
Despairingly aware that we must part.

Daylight brought
The terror of our thoughts
And ache of throbbing flesh
And knowledge that from out of love comes grief.

Autumn's gift:
The message it imports,
The pain and bitter crush
Of ending joy; yet promising relief.

Come there must
Another wak'ning day,
The promise of a hope
That this too eager flesh will yet unite

In the Spring
The well-tide of our gay
And sacrificial stream.
Naught else but this can fancies thoughts ignite.

London, 1984

TWO POEMS

(i)

What shall I say?
Ah Ines!
Fear has confounded all.

The bright gloss of our love
Is foully soiled.

The wanton wallowing
In fond delights
And am'rous dallying
Has dusked the fairest splendour of our soul.

*** **

Nothing now left but carcass, loathsome, foul . . .

London, 1980s

(ii)

I was given
a glimpse of heaven
and then
was most cruelly blinded.

I was granted
a sip of nectar
and then
was the cup dashed from my lips.

Bite back passion.
summer now ends.

Watch!
Little by little the night
turns round.

Echoes in the heart;
want to go in;
dare not.
A glow behind the screen;
wish to go through;
cannot.

London, 1980s

COMMENTARY ON PARODIES SECTION

The NAAFI Tragedy is, for me, a nice reminder of a period of enjoyable intellectual relief from the four-letter conversation of many of my fellow sappers, thanks to the friendship of Sapper Stanley (whose first name eludes memory) who collaborated on this verse, and with whom I shared the occasional dinner at the hotel in neighbouring Liphook. He also pleased me with his playing of the organ, and regularly played for the Sunday church service in Liss – another neighbourhood town. He taught me to play tennis, which remained my sport of choice throughout my physically active life.

Amazingly he not only enjoyed jazz, but knew of my uncle, Spike Hornett, and the bands with which he had played.

I am happy to provide this tribute to a charming, mild-mannered, and wonderful companion during a period of my life when such attributes were in somewhat short supply.

But the parody that has given me more satisfaction than any other is *The Song of Hiawalpole* that represents achievement on so many levels. It maintains the consistency of style of Longfellow's original work, it introduces a cast of characters that perfectly suit the theme, it uses the individual names in a way that conveys a sense of the dramatic action, it carries a blend of humour and drama. Finally it was produced in a "live" version, recited to a musical accompaniment.



(3) PARODIES

This section comprises parodies of well-known verse, written throughout my life, and generally appropriate to the time and place to which they refer.

THE NAAFI TRAGEDY

(Apologies to Longfellow's "Excelsior")

The shades of night were falling fast
As to the Naafi bar there passed
A sapper with more flesh than bones,
Who cried in faint and famished tones,
"Ten jam tarts".

His heart was going pitter-pat,
He'd just been caught without a hat;
And as he staggered to his seat,
They heard his feeble voice repeat
"Ten jam tarts".

Said dear Agnes in despair:
"You must be made, I do declare,
I've been here now for many a year
And known not even Les to clear
Ten jam tarts".

"Rats!" cried the youth. "I'll hve some ham,
Some pickles and a jar of jam.
Those banburies look quite all right,
And quick, don't keep me here all night –
Ten jam tarts."

"Try not the tarts," his comrades said,
"Already you have overfed,
And no more room remains inside."
But loud that clarion voice replied:
"Ten jam tarts."

When all his dainties hove in sight,
He danced the tango with delight;
With tunic buttons all undone,
He then demolished one by one
Ten jam tarts.

Alas his inner man was packed,
His vital organs failed to act,
And with a wild and startled cry,
He sank, weighed down in anguish by
Ten jam tarts.

There in the Naafi, on the mat,
Writhing in agony, he sat,
And ere his eyelids closed in death,
He murmured with his latest breath:
“Ten jam tarts.”

In collaboration with Sapper Stanley,
Longmoor, September 1948

THE SALESMAN SANS LESSEE

(With apologies to John Keats)

Oh what can ail thy arms at night
When you've spent all day loitering?
The icing's melted on the cake.
There's a fine thing!

Oh what can ail thy arms at night
Now that another month has gone?
Your Parker fountain pen is full
And no report is done.

I see you really want to know
With wrinkled brow, what there was new
As Sinclair got more adipose
In Hong Kong's zoo.

I met a client in Taipei,
Of horse manure the braggart filled;
His thirst was long, his purse was tight,
Cor, I was wild!

I made a beeline for Bangkok
And Borneo – the Tropic Zone,
They treated me as one bereft
And gave me moan.

I set forth then by SIA
And travelled all day long,
Hoping to find better things
Back in Hong Kong.

But all I got were aching feet
and sinal pains (and earache too –
For sure a language strange they speak
In Hong Kong's zoo).

So then I took me to a spot
Where people meet, in Singapore,
Hoping they could me advise
What I worked for.

And found myself in Bugis Street
Midst drag-dressed beauties – woe betide! –
Who would not lease a single box
Or an open side.

I saw pale Lines and agents too,
Pale clients – death pale were they all.
They cried: The Salesman sans Lessee
Has come to call.

I saw their vast ships in the port
With empty sails all gaped wide,
Then I awoke and found me here
On London side.

And that is why I write so rare
And spend my time a-loitering.
Though the icing's melted on the cake.
There's a fine thing.

[On a flight from Singapore to London, March 1981]

THE HONG KONG EXPAT TO HIS LOVE
(With apologies to Christopher Marlowe)



Come bide with me, and be my bride,
And we'll roam Hong Kong side by side;
That concrete jungle, asphalt field
May all of its detritus yield.

And we will sit upon Blake Pier
And breathe the noxious atmosphere
Which MTR beneath exhumes,
While diesel taxis spew their fumes.

Where over all great Mammon reigns,
And we must clearly go to pains
To spend and spend ridiculously
On goods consumed conspicuously.

Where judgement passed shall not be budged
By judges who may not be judged;
And wealth and dirt accumulate,
And passers-by expectorate.

Assisted by dear Elsie E,
With lance a-tilt quixotically,
If you would truly understand,
Come dwell with me and take my hand.

And read of police brutality,
Of CAPO and I.C.A.C,
Of boat people and refugees,
And visiting inept M.Ps.

Where buses crash and rentals soar,
And filth piles up upon the shore.
If you would thus corruption prove,
Come live with me, and be my love.

Hong Kong, 1979

[I spent five years from 1976 to 1981, based in Hong Kong and travelling regularly throughout the Far East as Marketing Manager for the prestigious Sea Containers Inc. Hong Kong was a mess, both environmentally and politically.]

ODE TO A DYING PUB

(Anent the resolution to rebuild the Hong Kong Club)



The Club, the Club, my local pub,
They mean to tear you down;
Another high monstrosity
Instead will grace this town.
For beauty is regarded as
No substitute for coin.

The Club, the Club, my local pub
Will never be the same,
The voting cast to kill the past
Enjoyed two-thirds acclaim,
For style and grace take second place
In Hong Kong's money game.

They each arose and struck a pose
And said: "I love this place,
But when you say that I must pay
For it, that's a disgrace,
And insults my philosophy,
I'd rather lose my face."

For each man kills the thing he loves,
A greater poet said,
So we would choose our past to lose
And gain the cash instead.
Yes, each man kills the thing he loves,
And so my pub is dead.

Hong Kong, 1979

[It was good to be voted into membership of the traditional bastion of Hong Kong "society". The club premises were redolent of the best of 19th century architecture and design, of which very little remained in the Crown Colony. Alas, this monument too was to vanish when the membership voted to replace it by another "skyscraper" that could earn rental income to help subsidise costs to members. My verse was published in the South China Morning Post.

Hong Kong, alas, had no John Betjeman.]

ONE LINE OF PROSE

(Apologies to Dorothy Parker)

A single line he sent me. Without sweat.
And splendidly his messenger he chose.
By AOL, no blue-black ink still wet.
Just perfect prose.

I knew the language of the true insiders.
“My ball-pen leaks” it said, “I’ll thus dispose
This missive by my internet providers” –
Just perfect prose.

Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect verse of love, do you suppose?
Ah no, it’s always just my luck to get
A line of prose.

London, 1980s

THE SONG OF HIAWALPOLE

(With apologies to Longfellow)

[Written as a tribute to Audrey Walpole, retiring Chairperson of the
Barnet Thirty-Plus Social Group]

Should you ask me, whence these members?
Whence these spinsters and divorcees,
With their stories of betrayals,
With their sorrows and their hang-ups,
Whence these newly separated,
With the fret and fume of break-ups,
And the bachelor contingent,
With their deep-laid egocentrics,
As of whistling in the kitchens?
I should answer, I should tell you,
“From the cities and the suburbs,
From the bounds of the Great North Ways,
From the land of the New Southgates,
From the land of the Cockfosters,
From the commons, ponds and parkways,
Where the hero, the Bob-Kurschner,
Feeds among the pubs and taverns,
I repeat them as I heard them
From the lips of Jay-the-Linden,
The musician, the sweet singer.”
Should you ask where Jay-the-Linden
Found these songs, so wild and wayward,
Found these legends and traditions,
I should answer, I should tell you,
“In the midst of Epping Forest,
In the mumblings of the rambler,
In the hoof-prints of the Houghton,

In the eyrie of the Eckett!
 "All the sad-folk sang them to him,
 In the Meadways and the Burroughs,
 From the melancholy Marcias;
 Don-the-Bake, the consort, sang them,
 Pete-the-Loon, the wild-Gwen, Wawa,
 The blue hero, Bob-the-Kurschner,
 And the grouse, the John-the-Rayner!"
 If still further you should ask me,
 Saying, "Who was Jay-the-Linden?
 Tell us of this Jay-the-Linden."
 I should answer your enquiries
 Straightway in such words as follows.
 "In the vale of Barnet's centre,
 In the green and silent valley,
 By the pleasant picnic-parties,
 Dwelt the singer Jay-the-Linden.
 Round about the Barnet village
 Spread the members and prospectives,
 And beyond them stood the forest,
 Stood the hordes of singing outcasts,
 Brown in Summer, blue in Winter,
 Ever sighing, ever singing.
 "And the pleasant meeting places,
 You could trace them through the borough,
 By the Red Lion in the Spring-time,
 By the Green Man in the Summer,
 By the White Horse in the Autumn,
 By the Black Bull in the Winter;
 And beside them dwelt the singer,
 In the vale of Barnet's centre,
 In the green and silent borough.
 "There he sang of Hiawalpole,

Sang the song of Hiawalpole,
Sang her wondrous birth and being,
How she chaired and how she voted,
How she ruled, and toiled, and harried,
That the Thirty-plus might prosper,
That she might advance her members!"
Ye who love the haunts of Barnet,
Love the sunshine of the Southgate,
Love the shadow of the Whetstone,
Love the wind among the Ponders,
And the Potters and the Bushey,
And the rushing of great traffic
Through the palisades of zebras,
And the thunder in High Loughton,
Whose innumerable echoes
Flap like Ecketts in their eyries; -
Listen to these wild traditions,
To this Song of Hiawalpole!
Ye who love a "single's" legends,
Love the ballads of a circle,
That like voices from afar off
Call to us to pause and listen,
Speak in tones so plain and childlike,
Scarcely can the ear distinguish
Whether they are sung or spoken; -
Listen to this Barnet Legend,
To this Song of Hiawalpole.
Ye who sometimes in your rambles
Through the Green-slades of the county,
Where the tangled barberry-wardles
Hang their tufts of crimson Beryls
Over stone walls grey with Husseys,
Pause by some neglected tavern,
For a while to muse, and ponder

On a half-effaced graffito,
Written with little skill of song-craft,
Homely phrases, but each letter
Full of hope and yet of heart-break,
Full of all the tender pathos
Of the insecure, and weirdness; -
Stay and read this rude graffiti,
Read this Song of Hiawalpole.

I. THE PEACE PIPE

On the Moat Mount of the Arkley,
On the Mill Hill Stoney Quarry,
Wendy Sturgess, she the Founder,
She the Thirty-Plus envisioned;
Midst the local small ad columns
Placed an ad and called a meeting,
Called the Barnet tribes together.

* * * * *

And they met there on the Meadway,
With their hang-ups and obsessions,
Painted like the leave of Autumn,
Painted like the sky of morning,
Wildly glaring at each other;
In their faces stern defiance,
In heir hearts the feuds of ages,
The hereditary sex-war,
Spited spouseful thirst of vengeance.
Wendy Sturgess, she the Founder,
The creator of the circle,
Looked upon them with compassion,

With maternal love and pity;
Looked upon their fears and tremors
But as worries among children,
But as doubts and frights of children!
“Oh my children! My poor Children!
Listen to the words of wisdom,
Listen to the words of warning
From the lips of the Great Founder,
From the Creator who made you!
“I will send a Prophet to you,
A Chairperson of the Singles,
Who shall guide you and shall teach you,
Who shall toil and suffer with you.
If you listen to his counsels
You will multiply and prosper;
If his warnings pass unheeded,
You will fade away and perish!”

II. THE FOUR WINDS

“Honour be to Merville Potter!”
Cried the members, cried the first ones,
When he was in triumph chosen
By the sacred twelve of Barnet,
From the regions of the North-West,
From the kingdom of the Herts-Lands,
From the land of the Two Brewers.
“Honour be to Merville Potter!”
With a shout exclaimed the members.
“Honour be to Merville Potter!
Henceforth shall he be the Chairman,
And hereafter and for ever
Shall he hold supreme dominion

Over every kind of member.
Call him no more Merville Potter,
Call him Chairman, El Supremo!”
Thus was Merville Potter chosen
Chairman of the Club Committee,
He himself the El-Supremo
Gave some honours to his children;
Unto Jean he gave the kitchen,
Gave the purse to Peter Clinton,
And the minutes, so demanding,
To the pleasant Beryl Summons.
Thus the places were divided;
Thus the children of the Chairman
Had their stations in the Circle,
At the centre of the Circle,
For himself, as El Supremo,
Stayed the mighty Merville Potter.

III HIAWALPOLE’S CHILDREN

Downward through the Barnet twilight,
In the days that are forgotten,
In the unremembered Minutes,
From the highest fell the Stovell,
Fell the loyal Joy-the-Stovell,
She the one above all others.
Thus was born the Hiawalpole,
Thus was born the new Supremo;
But the loyal Joy-the-Stovell,
Hiawalpole’s gentle sponsor,
In her turn expired, deserted
By the former El Supremo,
By the mighty Merville Potter.

By the shores of South Herts Golf Course,
By the shining Stray-of-Whetsone,
Stood the wigwam of the Stovell,
The Supremo, Joy-the-Stovell.
Dark behind it rose the High Street,
Rose the black and gloomy Woodside,
Rose the Tally-Ho of corners,
Bright before it beat South Finchley,
Beat the clear and sunny Glebe Land,
Beat the shining Stray-of-Whetstone.
There the retired Joy-the-Stovell
Nursed the little Hiawalpole,
Rocked her in the Linden Gardens,
Bedded soft in picnic-parties,
Safely bound with wines and cheeses.
Many things the Stovell taught her
Of the form of Constitution;
Showed how major Club proposals
Had to be supplied in writing;
Showed how booking-in for functions
Had to have sufficient notice,
How, if members had to cancel,
Promptness showed consideration.
In the club on summer evenings
Joined the little Hiawalpole,
Joined the eat-outs and the dances,
Heart the slap-slap-cock of shuttle,
Sounds of music, words of wonder;
Of all functions learned the language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How to price the social evenings,
Where to hold the monthly dances,
How to play the card and board games,
Why some members were so timid,

Talked with them where'er she met them:
Called them "Hiawalpole's Children".
Then the Pillock, the great boaster,
He the marvellous story-teller,
He the traveller and the talker,
He the friend of Joy-the-Stovell,
Made a diary for the Circle;
From a Christmas gift he made it,
Will a ball-point made the entries,
Touched with tongue and pressed with blotter,
Which he gave to Hiawalpole.

[IV – V - omitted]

VI HIAWALPOLE'S FRIENDS

Most beloved by Hiawalpole,
Singled out from all the others,
Bound to her in closest union,
And to whom she gave the right hand
Of her heart, in joy and sorrow,
Was the gentle Don-the Baker.
Straight between them ran the pathway,
Never grew the grass upon it;
Singing-birds, that utter falsehoods,
Story-tellers, mischief-makers,
Found no eager ear to listen,
Could not breed ill-will between them,
For they kept each other's counsel,
Spake with naked hearts together,
Pondering much, and much contriving
How the Barnet tribes might prosper.
Then the singer, Jay-the-Linden,
Jay-the-Linden, the musician,

He the best of all musicians,
When he sang the members listened;
All the members read his programmes,
All the menfolk gathered round him,
All the women came to hear him;
Now he stirred their souls to passion,
Now he melted them to pity.
From the diary notes he fashioned
Paragraphs so sweet and mellow,
That Jill Dilks and Vera Fisher,
Ceased to murmur in the Wood Street,
That the Woodhams ceased from singing,
And the Sybil, she the Ashton,
Ceased her chatter in the Oakwood,
And the Roberts and the Lemos
Sat upright to look and listen.
Yes, the cook, the Smith of Southgate,
Pausing, said, "O Jay-the-Linden,
Teach my quiches to melt the tastebuds,
Softly as your words the programme!"
Yes the jay-bird, he the Aubrey,
Envious, said, "O Jay-the-Linden,
Teach me words as wild and wayward,
Teach me jokes as full of frenzy!"
All the many social evenings
Borrowed lustre from his writing;
All the members' hearts were softened
By the weirdness of his humour;
For he wrote of treasure-hunting,
Wrote of sports days, films and dancing;
Wrote his "bitsas" and gave mention
To the former event-givers,
In the kingdom of the Kurschner,

In the land of Pete-the-Pillock.
Very dear to Hiawalpole
Was the singer Jay-the-Linden,
Dear, too, unto Hiawalpole
Was the strong man, Don-the-Baker,
He the strongest of all mortals,
He the mightiest among many;
For his very strength she loved him,
For his strength allied to goodness.

* * * * *

VII HIAWALPOLE'S SAILING

“Give me of your trust, O Barnet!
Of your full support, O Barnet!
Rambles by the Lea Green River,
Lakeside concerts in the valley!
I a singles group will build me,
Build a sturdy club for sailing,
That shall float upon the current,
Like a Bargery in Autumn,
Like a Stephen Winter Woolley!
“Lay aside your punch, O Barnet!
Lay aside your hot fork suppers,
For the Summer-time is coming,
And the sun is warm in Hendon,
And you need no hot fork suppers!”
Thus aloud cried Hiawalpole
In the ears of Gwen-the-Forrest,
By the rushing Pauline Fletcher,
With the spinsters singing gaily,
All the widowers were singing,

And Gibson, from sleep awaking,
Started up and said, "Behold me!
Jesus!" said Gibson, "Behold me!"
And the Group, with all its members,
Rustled and gave up its mourning,
Giving (for a small donation),
"These events, O Hiawalpole!"
"Give me of your pubs, O Kurschner!
Of your great and flowing taverns,
My club members now to succour,
Make more pliable to heed me."
Through the mouth of Bob-the-Kurschner
Came a sound, a cry of horror,
Came a murmur of resistance,
But it whispered, breathing bitter,
"Take my pubs, O Hiawalpole!"
"Give me pork to carve, O Findlay!
Of the Orange Tree, O Brenner!
My own group to bind together,
So that we may feed together,
That the Vegan may not enter,
That the Beth Din may not get me!"
And the Brenner and the Findlay
Put aside their air of mourning,
Tugged at forelock, pulled at tassels,
Said together, "Come tomorrow,
Eat-outs, yours, O Hiawalpole!"
"Give me of your tapes, O Freestone!
Of your Beatles and your Abba,
So that we may dance together,
That the loneliness not enter,
That the hard rock sound may get me!"
And the Freestone, tall and sombre,

Sobbed through all its ancient cassettes,
Rattled like an Art Garfunkle,
Answered rocking, answered rolling,
“Take the lot, O Hiawalpole!”
“Give me of your plants, O Evans!
All your plants, O Pat-the-Evans!
I will make a swop-shop of them,
Take some cuttings for my members,
And some roots to deck their gardens!”
From East Barnet, Pat-the-Evans
‘neath her floppy hat looked at her,
Shot her rose-bush barbs, like arrows,
Saying, with an earthy rumble,
Through the tangle of her shrubland,
“Take my plants, O Hiawalpole!”
Thus the Barnet-group was builded
By the Shepherd, by the Tinkler,
In the bosom of Gwen Forrest;
And the borough’s life was in it,
All its sports days and its tennis,
All the lightness of the Clifford,
All the toughness of the Williams,
All the Greenslade’s supple sinews;
And it floated on the current
Like a Bargery in Autumn,
Like a Winter Stephen Woolley.
And thus sailed the Hiawalpole,
Down the rushing road of Edgware,
Sailed through Hendon Way and Fryent,
Sailed through Colindeep and Harrow,
While her friend, strong Don-the-Baker,
Made the teas, and bread he buttered.

XIV PICTURE WRITING

In those days, said Hiawalpole,
“Lo! how all things fade and perish!
From the memory of the members,
Fade away the great occasions,
The achievements of the sportsmen,
The adventures of the walkers,
All the wisdom of the Scrabblers,
All the craft of solo players,
All the marvellous Lakeside concerts
Of the Findlays, Primes and Perrys!
“Great times pass and are forgotten,
Goldman speaks; his words of wisdom
Perish in the ears of Chapman,
Do not reach the Barnet stations
Where the Philistines are waiting,
Or the fastness of East Finchley,
(Mensa corpore non sano . . .).
In the programmes of our Founders
Are no hints, no details given,
Who attended them we know not,
Only know they were our Founders.
From what streets they came, and districts,
In what old ancestral tavern,
Be it beaver, Bell or Badger,
They did tipple, this we know not;
Only know they were our Founders.
One day Hiawalpole walking
On the hills of Hadley Common,
Pondering, musing on the common,
On the welfare of her members.
From her bag she took her colours,

Felt-tipped pens of different colours.
On the smooth walls of a toilet
Painted many pithy figures,
Like unto the Cistern Chapel.
Flushed with pride she viewed the figures,
Each depicting event-givers.
Eddie Bargery, the Mighty,
He the Dance-at-Hatfield giver,
With his belly thus projecting
To the four winds of theborough.
Everywhere the great beer spirit
Was the meaning of this symbol.
Franklin, Monica-the-Mighty,
She the outside-events maker,
At the Serpentine depicted,
With the Davis, she the Swimmer,
Very breasty, very crawly,
And the spirit of the freestyle
Was the meaning of this symbol.
Max-and-Norma drawn as counters
On a scrabble-board were painted,
Max white-haired and Norma darker;
Triple-worded, double-lettered,
The most faithful event-givers.
For eat-outs she drew a meat pie,
With a little mustard on it;
Smiling faces for the parties
And the Stella Lemos dances;
And for rain and cloudy weather,
Ron Higgs with his card games evenings.
Footprints pointing towards a wigwam
Were a sign of invitation
To the Avenue of Princes;

Bloody hands with bats uplifted
Were a sign of table tennis:
Ping-pong players soft and simple.

XXI THE WHITE MAN'S FOOT

From his wanderings to the East End,
From the regions west of Wapping,
From the Essex land of Ilford,
Westward now returned the Pillock,
The great traveller, the great boaster,
Full of new prospective members,
Trustful all, the many females.
And the members of the circle
Listened to him as he told them
Of his marvellous adventures,
Full of awe, declaimed in this wise:
“Gosh! It is indeed the Pillock!
No one else attracts such females!”
He had seen, he said, a tavern
Bigger than the Railway Tavern,
Gayer than the Jolly Brewers,
Bitter such as none had tasted!
At each other looked the members,
Looked the drinkers at each other,
Smiled, and said, “It cannot be so!
Garn!” they said, “It cannot be so!”
Also, said he, in a snack bar
Was a great machine with pistons,
A machine with liquid steaming,
Hotter than the hottest tea urn,
Stronger than the strongest coffee!
And the tea and coffee drinkers

Looked and tittered at each other.
“Coo!” they said, “we don’t believe it!”
From its spout, he said, to warm one
Came a dark brown steaming liquid
Which the natives called espresso,
Stronger than the best Nescafe,
Tastier than Brooke Bone’s tea bags.
“Cor!” they said, “what tales you tell us!
Do not think that we believe them!”
Only Hiawalpole laughed not,
But she gravely spoke and answered
To their doubting and their jeering,
“True is all the Pillock tells us;
I had had it in a snack bar
From the great machine with pistons,
Seen it warm the palest faces
From the regions east of Wapping,
And the far off land of Kilburn.
“Let us welcome, then, these strangers,
These prospective eastern members,
Hold out Barnet’s hand of friendship
To them when they come to see us,
For they may have much to teach us,
And we need some new blood in us,
Now before the old ones leave us
Like the withered leaves of Autumn!”

XXII HIAWALPOLE’S DEPARTURE

Heavy with the weight of office
Grew the heart of Hiawalpole,
As the joyful-sounding members
Frolicked round her Kingsbury wigwam;
Though she tried hard to disguise it

At her monthly social evenings.
From the kitchen, shrill and ceaseless,
Spake the candidate, Penn-Sayers,
While the guests of Hiawalpole,
Weary of electioneering,
Frolicked in the Kingsbury wigwam.
From her place rose Hiawalpole,
Went to speak to B. Penn-Sayers,
Spake in whispers, spake in this wise,
Not to worry guests that frolicked.
“I am going, O Penn-Sayers,
On a long and distant journey,
Far beyond the bounds of Barnet,
But these guests I leave behind me,
In your watch and ward I leave them;
See they have their share of dances,
See that boredom never face them,
Never blank dates on the programme,
Never want for picnic parties,
In the Barnet Singles’ Circle!”
Back into the parlour went she,
Bade farewell to all the spinsters,
Bade farewell to all the old men,
Spake persuading, spake in this wise:
“I am going, O my Members,
On a long and distant journey;
Many walks and many sports days
Will have come and will have vanished
Ere I may again hold office.
But you have a new committee;
Listen to their words of wisdom,
Read the programmes that they give you
When the G.P.O. has brought them
From the last collating evening.”

At the door stood Hiawalpole,
Waved her hand at guests departing.
In the Avenue of Princes,
Derek Snell despatched his Volvo
From the edges of the kerbside,
Shoved it into fourth and top gear;
Whispered to it: "Homeward, homeward!"
And with speed it darted forward.
And the party guests departing,
Set the road on fire with rear lights,
Turned the avenue to crimson,
As they left the Leader's wigwam,
Left her to her dreams of splendour
As a foremost party-giver,
Left their noble Hiawalpole,
Drove into the depths of Barnet,
Drove into the Stray of Whetstone,
Drove into the Mount of Arkley.
And the Thirty-plus of Barnet
Had their voting evening meeting,
And the new committee chosen
Lifted high the Salisbury splendour,
Till it sank into the beer fumes.
And the old ones, more than holy,
Took the line of least resistance.
And they said, "Farewell to Edna!"
Said, "Farewell, O Hiawalpole!"
And Gwen Forrest took the programme
And prepared her countless footnotes,
Sighing, "Farewell, Jay-the-Linden!"
And with notes upon the margin,
Jean-the-Taylor took up office,
Sobbing, "Farewell, Don-the-Baker!"

While the hero, Bob-the-Kurschner,
From his perch among the beer-mugs,
Screched: "I'll still control the members!"
Then Penn-Sayers-B the prophet,
Paid her tribute to the Leader,
Saying that, "With her permission
We may find some virgin members."
And the Allison, the dealer
In the new enquiry section,
Took the mantle of the Gibson,
Took up, too, relations public.
And the members answered, saying:
"We have listened to your statements,
WE have heard your words of wisdom,
Now let's drink another bitter,
It is well for us, O Brothers,
That we haven't far to get it!"
Then they rose up and departed,
Each one homeward to his wigwam,
Musing, all the men and women,
On the strange new club committee
Which they had, in wisdom, voted
To protect the tribes of Barnet.
Thus departed Hiawalpole,
Hiawalpole the Beloved,
In the glory of the Salisbury,
In the High Street of Old Barnet,
To the Avenue of Princes.
And the regions of the North-West,
And the lands of the Two Brewers,
And the kingdom of the Herts-Lands,
Vowed to honour her hereafter!

[Performed with musical accompaniment on July 17, 1985]

BRIAN BENNETT

Who could always be relied upon to go
where others did not dare to tread.
(In the style of Belloc's Nonsense Verse)

B. Bennett, from his early years,
Was clearly never cursed by fears.
When Mama said: "Now Brian, pet,
You must not get yourself upset
By ghosties, ghoulies, nightly screams
That may appear to haunt your dreams;"
He'd simply close his eyes awhile
And smile his beatific smile;
Then taking mental sword in hand
Prepare to battle with that band.
And so it was throughout his life
Which had more than its share of strife,
Until his courage earned reward
From Sea Containers' mighty Board.
"He is the man for us," said Turner;
"He'll make a perfect SC earner.
With his great pluck he will go far.
We'll send him to the Côte d'Ivoire."
"That's good," said Jim, "My master plan
Calls for a man in Abidjan,
Where, midst the gaudiest bandannas
He'll no doubt drive himself bananas."
And as his courage met the test
It brought from Brian all the best
Of his intrepid skills galore
In Hydrabad and Singapore.

He boasted that 'twas no disgrace
For such as he to know his place:
[Midst gun and bomb in Zanzibar,
Or drugs and Dons in Bogotà].
Alas the tides ran out and so
Behind a desk he had to go
Where hidden by the paper piles
You'd find him wreathed in friendly smiles,
Whilst proof-reading the latest gag
From GESeaCo's in-house mag.
Subjunctive tense and plural noun
Produced no forehead-creasing frown
(For sure he never lost the case
In Lagos – or some other place!)

*** **

For years to come they'll tell the story
Of BEB's resounding glory.

London, July 2001

*[I regularly contributed valedictory verse at the
farewell parties of retiring Sea Containers'
personnel. Most of them have vanished, but the
parody for Brian Bennett's retirement has remained.
Following a much-travelled career that matched my
own, he was given a more sedentary ante-retirement
position where, amongst other activities he proof-
read my regular SEACO Confidential newsletter.]*

COMMENTARY ON COMIC VERSE SECTION

Several of these were written for the wall newspaper of the north Hackney Young Communist League in the late 1940s, editorship of which I shared with the late and lovely Mike (Micky) Koslover, whose collaboration I have referred to elsewhere .

Thus, *The Big Umpteen* was written as a satire on a meeting being held in London of the leading statesmen of the “allied” nations. It was actually far longer than is portrayed here, but the extra stanzas have disappeared into the mists of time.

Lassie Come Home referred to the newspaper report of a court case in the United States, whereby the owner of the canine movie star was sued for divorce by his wife on the basis that he devoted more time to the dog than he did to herself.

And *Doctor Redux* was inspired by the Labour Government’s decision to insist on doctors being obliged to take refresher courses on the latest developments in medical science at regular intervals.



(4)

COMIC VERSE

This section comprises a selection of humorous verse.

THE BIG UMPTEEN

The big umpteen arrived on Mars in 1957
To frame a treaty of the stars
And plan the peace of Heaven.
But Molotov still obdurate
Extolled the Russian pattern
And said that we must liquidate
Financial rings round Saturn.
Then Bevin into anger burst
And swore that he'd resist 'em.
Although the Reds reached Saturn first
He said "The solar system
On democratic lines must be,
No power could absorb it."
Quoth Gandhi; "Satellites are free
To wander from their orbit.
The loveliest lights that space adorn
Are nourished, such the fact is,
Upon the milk of Capricorn
And not the Via Lactis.

London, 1947

LASSIE COME HOME

Ye parrots, monkeys, dogs and cats
And all ye other pet-made frats,
Take heed of what is here retold
That ye may never make so bold
To gain your master's love – his wife
May break up all their married life.
For Lassie's owner's wife would grouse,
"He spends more time with dog than spouse,"
And to his wife who wished to snog,
He'd say "To love me, love my dog".
With which retort of course, so crude,
Domestic turmoil then ensued.
And so to court, for decree nisi,
Where husband said, "It isn't easy
To find time for both wife and dog,
Affairs would soon be in a fog."
So he said, smiling at the court,
"Well then, judge, let's have your report."
Of course, the judge could but conclude
His fault lay in his lassie-tude.

London, March 1948

SWAN SONG

The breath of gloom is in the air,
Our day is o'er, our death complete.
Singapore could ne'er compare
With such a measure of defeat.

Grace's face is full of wrath,
And how droop Fry's moustaches,
For England have the sackcloth
And Australia – the Ashes.

Though greatness we have known of yore,
When we were masters of this game,
Never have we known before
A time of such deep grief and shame.

For Hobbs' lobs have ne'er known sloth
In all those past Test clashes.
But England has the sackcloth
And Australia – the Ashes.

Longmoor, August 1948

DOCTOR REDUX

I'll miss my doctor's ancient skill
Cascara and sweet coated pill
And antiquated tool
With which he checks my anxious throbbing heart,
For soon it seems our ways must part
When he goes back to school

London, 1948

COMMUNICATION

It's time methinks to set my hand to verse
Before my friends start getting any worse
At penning more than two entendres each line
To demonstrate the variants of divine,
Since divination never was my forte
(Or even sixty not out) since I am so sporty.

So once more let us to the old computer,
Engaging in iambic pentameter,
Or even lines of drivel, dross or doggerel:
(If I don't then I'm sure some other bugger will!)
In self defence . . . my honour is at stake.
(My God! I find it hard to stay awake!)

Alas poor Joe . . . no, that is just too bad –
A lass he's not, he's nothing but a lad,
Despite the passing years, the hearing loss,
And other failing faculties (who gives a toss?).
The spirit burns as brightly as of yore.
(Your what?) That's just one more pun to ignore.

Soon parted from his honey is a fool,
And I am no exception to this rule.
So honey, please stay close at hand;
And stay as quick, I beg, to reprimand
Those indiscretions which I am aware
Add constantly to all my friends' despair.

And now what inspiration may have come
Is vanishing with the approaching dawn.
And I am being rapidly struck dumb
As monstrous yawn succeeds each monstrous yawn,
To demonstrate that I've run out of time:
The change of form in this last stanza's rhyme.

(2)

I've finally considered every option
(And as not one has proved to be ideal,
Including all you've said on post-adoption)
I thought I'd tell you, Michael, how I feel.

Let's spread them as a hand of cards before us,
Awarding each a plus or minus score –
And let's ignore the negative dawn chorus:
“You *can't* do that – it's such a bloody bore!”

For, after all, what is communication?
(An obvious rhetorical request
Which really puts both sides of the equation,
While failing to suggest what is the best.)

So let's suppose we're on some lonely plateau,
Conversing by a campfire in the night.
And, since we're, more or less, in the same bateau,
We'll sink or swim with metaphoric might.

But that, of course, does not apply to Michael -
Or does it? It depends what he prefers.
As well to totter on a uni-cycle,
As for contact in the form of verse.

Communication is a messy muddle.
No one can really know what we're about.
We might as well just smile and touch and cuddle
Rather than talk, or kick and scream, or shout!

The phone and tom-tom are so unaesthetic;
The internet and e-mail are a bore.
Mind-reading is simply tele-pathetic
It's something that we safely can ignore.

Communication, then, is an illusion,
A dream, a joke, the sustenance of fools.
But true to form, we can effect a fusion
By application of NLP tools.

So body language goes as does mind reading
It's obvious I must *adopt* the *post*!
And turn my back on entry cues and leading
And let the Royal Mail become the host.

Dorset 1998

*[This was part of a three-way email exchange
between Sylvia Farley, Michael Mallows and myself.
We were all involved with NLP and Michael was
working at a post-adoption centre. This may help to
explain some references in the second poem.]*

A HOLE IN ONE

(Apologies to Kipling – The Betrothed)

A hole in one is only
The aim of a good walk spoiled
While the empty heart is lonely
And the raging spirit's boiled.

Yes a game is just a tourney
Or getting up to speed
And is just a wasted journey
But a good book is a read.

Cornwall, 2009

COMMENTARY ON NARRATIVE VERSE

Only two poems are included in this section, but they are long, highly polished, and represent much thought and socio-political comment.

Refuge is yet another poem that sprang out of my unhappiness with the baser human instincts that I became aware of in Hong Kong. The situation of the Vietnamese boat people during that period of my Hong Kong residence was totally appalling. My poem did not – to my mind – exaggerate the attitude of the majority of Hong Kong’s residents to this attempted influx of refugees who had been refused shelter in so many places; but, perhaps, never quite so callously.

The Hostages was written over a really prolonged period. As with *Refuge*, it sought to illustrate injustice and the difficulty of reconciling points of view which seem diametrically opposed and yet, in many ways, are not very different. The Tehran Embassy siege (1979-81) was its initiation, but I found this to be evocative of the Stockholm bank robbery of 1973 and subsequent siege that led to the expression *Stockholm Syndrome*.



(5)

NARRATIVE VERSE

Only two poems comprise this section, but they are conceivably my best - certainly the ones that took the greatest effort.

REFUGE



Morning came.
The sun, though wanly yet,
From out the clouds did creep,
And chilled but more the coldness in each heart.

Night had passed.
Their craft its course had set;
They roused themselves from sleep,
Despairingly aware this was the start.

*** **

And then within their breasts a wondrous joy:
“We are alive. Our pained heartbeat
Is Freedom’s precious blood;
Though fugitive, we plant our feet
On this uncertain road.
Reprieve, we pray, these victims of Hanoi.”

But what inexorable dream did drive
Them to this pass? Utopia . . . ?
Can desperation so
Produce a mass myopia?
Or did they simply show
A crass and rude desire to stay alive?

Freedom they sought and yet from freedom fled;
Their sorrow spent, alike their gold,
(Why give up gold for strife?)
Bewilderment assailed the old,
The rest were for their life
Content, who measured wealth by rice and bread.

This is no refuge for the older men.
Here Mammon reigns. Who dares offend
Its promissory trap?
The tree retains a bitter blend
That yet within its sap
Contains the best of threescore years and ten.

No sanctuary this; no lotus land
With blossoms sweet. Another scent
The fragrant harbour bears.
Its airs defeat their loud lament
And gives voice to their fears:
Retreat or here remain to make a stand.

Accumulated wealth; decay of man;
The evidence is all around:
This is cold comfort farm.
No penitents do here abound;
No charity; no charm.
“Dispense with it” some said “and change our plan.”

But still they stayed, and still more of them came
In constant hope: some few sanguine,
Some cynical, some scared;
The misanthrope and the benign,
Each really ill-prepared
To cope, alas, when menaced tongues declaim:

“You are not wanted here! You have no right
Our aims to thwart. We have our own
Philosophy to fill
An empty heart. Leave us alone
To line our pockets still.
Depart! Desist! This scene offends our sight.”

And whither shall they go when doors are locked
to them and barred? Another land?
Another sea serene
Yet still as hard? Forever banned;
Regarded as obscene;
Ill-starred, kept out, each avenue but blocked.

The days lay heavy on them, and the weeks
Marked mournful time; and endless nights
Of sleepless hours compose
No rest sublime. But lawful rights
And liberties opposed
By crime whose legal putrefaction reeks.

Pity those huddled masses in their hive
Of human pain. What choice had they
Beyond their selfish dream
To hope again? Perhaps to pray,
Or, with a piteous scream,
Complain once more: “We merely want to live!”

Was it not ever so, since the first dawn?
Did not our Lord (perchance, too, theirs)
Enjoy the same disdain?
(The same reward?) For what compares
With crucifix and pain
Of sword and scourge, save that one is reborn.

*** **

Winter brought
Another wakening day;
The menace of that dream:
Demoralizing symbol of their fears.

In the Spring
The well-tide of their gay
And sacrificial stream:
The flower must die before the fruit appears.

Hong Kong, December 1979

[This was inspired by the plight of the Vietnamese
boat people and the refusal of the Hong Kong
authorities to allow them to disembark.]

The Hostages

A paean to the Stockholm Syndrome



They came one hour before the dawn,
Each to himself complete;
Fanatic's face and stealthy pace
On canvas roughshod feet,
And each one knew what each must do,
His destiny to meet.

And some wore masks upon their heads
And on some heads were none;
And some held blades, and some grenades,
And in some hands a gun;
But, common to each one, upon
Their lips an orison.

It was not fear induced their prayer
(They were not so devout),
It was but pious callousness
That brought their prayer about;
The arrant beat of their conceit
Permitted of no doubt.

That they should seize, with perfect ease,
This symbol of the might
Of that great power in one short hour
Without the need to fight,
Naively and sufficient was
To fill them with delight.

But no one had considered that
There was a need to guard
The sanctuary of the house;
Tradition had assured
It would remain inviolate,
Thus were they ill-prepared.

And even less could they then guess
Their capture by default
In that bleak hour before the dawn
To dreams would call a halt,
Uncertain whether fear or smiles
Should greet this weird assault.

But never did they speak a word
Or pause to give a thought
To those whose confined air they shared
And whose respect they sought
Yet unaware of how much fear
Their nervous rage had brought.

The constant weight of dreaded hate,
Much heavier than gold
Held in the throes of daily woes
Lacked shelter from the cold
And bitter blame that hid their shame
Scant comfort for that fold.

“If it were in our power alone,
You know we’d set you free,
But we must on that greater power
Bestow our loyalty.
Our faith demands the principle
Of reciprocity.

“And you must know our charity
Is running out of time,
And all we ask – a simple task –
That you admit your crime
Against our great and noble State.
Confession is sublime.

But bit by bit and day by day
Anxiety increased.
The captives could not comprehend
Remaining unreleased.
And lacked the empathy that veiled
The hostile Middle East.

They disagreed between themselves
On what their captors sought.
There were a few who took the view
That they must lend support
To something that exemplified
How steadfastly they fought.

And for their part the captors too
Debated fervently.
Our fathers too believed as you
And lived lives decently
But we have learned by pain and strife
That these things cannot be.

But bit by bit their feelings changed
Quite subtly to and fro.
And what at first they would not face,
Became a need to know
The details of from whence they came
And where they hoped to go.

Is this the land your fathers loved
And toiled so hard to win?
Is this the freedom that they sought,
Those noble fellahin?
Do you not think these deeds disturb
The graves that they sleep in?

Do they not miss their families?
What holds them in such thrall?
Eternal and infinite bliss;
Is that the mighty pill?
Deliverance from worldly sin
And quick release from ill.

Our lives depend on your goodwill
And gaining your acclaim;
To guarantee survival must
Be our final aim.
Though it reflects so grievously
Our everlasting shame.

To find ourselves in bonding mode
Emotion'ly with those
Who seemed to pose the greatest threat
And had the most to lose
Seemed but the test of all the best
That we could then propose

Avoiding trauma and distress,
We need to change our course
As rivers often cannot help
Identify their source
We still believe we can relieve
The brutal use of force

Their cruelty from weakness sprang.
(They thought themselves humane:
Considerate to animals
And sparing children pain.)
But each one knew what each must do
Ere he saw home again.

“Justice for each is what we preach
Though it may terror breed;
That we may own what we have sown:
The produce of our seed.”
(The prejudice of ignorance
May yet fulfil their need.)

What irony their actions bear
As to achieve, they sought
Their violent needs with violent deeds,
And claimed for freedom fought,
Who were themselves to violence slaves.
How dear is freedom bought?

“The words we use indeed abuse,
But we have no regrets;
Corruption is the rotting fruit
That decadence begets,
And those who yet will of it eat
Deserve these epithets.”

Our motivation and our aims
Weigh much more heavily
Than simple arguments against
Abuse of family.
And we, with utmost trust, will still
Pursue it mightily.

To find relief in that belief
Their pleading did increase;
That that concern in turn might bring
Enlightenment and peace.
Yet still each knew what each must do
Before there came release.

The moral that this story bears
Will evermore abide . . .
That death did not discriminate
One from the other side;
When each one knew what each must do
And each one did . . . and died.

LYRICS, LIMERICKS AND CLERIHEWS

Three decades were spent in, or with, the Sea Containers Group of Companies. Those years were marked by a vast output of material mainly connected with the cabarets that were performed at our annual Christmas parties. I composed songs - mainly the lyrics to accompany popular melodies – sketches, and satirical verse lampooning members of the corporation, particularly in the form of limericks and clerihews.

One of my offerings, a satirical “cautionary tale” about General Manager Brian Bennett, has already appeared in these pages (page 80). This section features much more, all very light-hearted, and all of which has also graced the web pages of the Sea Containers Old Lags Doman (SCOLD) for which I have been, and remain at the time of writing, the webmaster.



(6)

LYRICS
LIMERICKS
AND CLERIHEWS

A light-hearted section comprising some of my more frivolous outpourings, mainly during the 30 year period of my association with the prestigious Sea Containers Group.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Sea Containers moved from its first premises at Old Jewry in the City of London to its first Mayfair address of Park Street. I had already started producing satirical parodies of popular songs such as (to the music of Dancing in the Dark):
*Leasing in the dark,
Sea Containers is
Leasing in the dark . . .*

And (based on Our Love is Here to Stay):
*It's very clear
The box is here to stay.
Leased by the year,
Or rented by the day.
In time the roofs may grow rusty,
The floors become dusty,
The lessee will have to pay
For that's what the contracts say.*

And then to the melody of The Mountains of Mourne:
Oh Morrie this Park Street is a wonderful sight,
With the people all leasing
By day and by night.
They rent their containers to every strange land
For a box in the bush
Is worth two in the hand.
They murdered an agent last week just for fun,
But no-one has found out yet
What they have done;
For except that he's not quite so much of a bore,
He doesn't seem any
More dead than before.*

*Oh Morrie these lessors have a wonderful style;
They've either no boxes,
Or else a great pile.
They won't lease to Brisbane though they buy from
Hong Kong
And they don't like the Yanks,
Though the French can't go wrong.
They rent a computer, it costs quite a whack,
And they got a great shock
When they opened the back.
For not a transistor or valve could be seen,
Only John Somerwill
With an adding machine.*

*Morrie Pinto was one of the original Sea Containers' shareholders

Subsequently a further verse was added to the original production. I would guess this was in 1973, given the reference to building our own containers, which must refer to the acquisition of the Yorkshire Marine Containers factory in 1974.:

*Oh Morrie they've started with ships and with
cranes;
(If the roundabout loses, the swing surely gains.)
They're even considering building their own,
The problem remaining is floating the loan.
Their ships have a warranty that's hard to beat,
They guarantee always its schedule to meet,
And if one of them suddenly develops flaws,
You'll find Tatham and Hume will be manning the
oars.*

One of the most consistently popular of my parodies,
and always in demand at the Christmas parties was
LITTLE BOXES*

*Little boxes in the depots,
Little boxes made of ticky-tacky;
Little boxes in the depots,
Little boxes all the same.*

*There's a red one, and a green one, and a blue one,
and an ORANGE ONE;
And they're all made out of ticky-tacky,
And they all look just the same.*

*And the people move their houses,
And they build things of great complexity,
And they all get put in boxes,
Little boxes all the same.*

*And there's half-heights, and there's open tops,
And there's reefers and collapsibles,
And they're all made out of ticky-tacky,
And they all look just the same.*

*And they move them in the terminals,
And they move them on the autobahns
And they move them in containerships
And they move them on the trains.*

*And they sometimes suffer damages
And are sent off to the refurbishers
And get fixed up with bits of ticky-tacky,
And come back looking just the same.*

*There's a red one, and a green one, and a blue one,
and an ORANGE ONE;
And they're all made out of ticky-tacky,
And they all look just the same.*

*The original "Little Boxes" was a song written by Malvina Reynolds in 1962, which became a hit for her friend Pete Seeger in 1963.

Only slightly less popular was a version of **The Twelve Days of Christmas**

*On the first day of Christmas Jim Sherwood gave to
me
A new agent in my territory.
On the 2nd -Two collapsibles
3rd -Three half-heights
4th - Four open tops
5th - Five fro-o-o-zen pounds*
6th - Six roofs rusting
7th - Seven ships sinking
8th - Eight cranes a-falling
9th - Nine debtors owing
10th - Ten shipyards failing
11th - Eleven tanks bursting
12th - Twelve reefers melting
[And a new agent in my territory]*

* For those who are too young to know, or too old to remember, in 1972 the British Government put a "freeze" on wage increases in an effort to curb inflation. Sea Containers awarded pay rises to staff, but "froze" them until the governmental restrictions were lifted.

MR SHERWOOD AND MR PINTO

*Oh Mr Sherwood,
Oh Mr Sherwood
I have heard that you've a problem of cash flow.
Would you take it by degrees,
And please set my mind at ease,
By explaining where it is the money goes.*

*Oh Mr Pinto
Oh Mr Pinto
It is really a straightforward recipe:
I just empty out my socks
And then buy another box.
[And your half-hose Mr Sherwood?]
Buys a half-height, Mr P.*

*Oh Mr Sherwood,
Oh Mr Sherwood,
Are your cranes as safe as they're cracked up to be?
Is there never a mistake?
Does a cable never break?
Have you never had a single tragedy?*

*Oh Mr Pinto
Oh Mr Pinto
To avoid it there's a simple remedy.
If a box falls to the ground
You had better give a bound.
[With a quick step, Mr Sherwood?]
With a tango, Mr P.**

* The Tango was the appellation given to one of the dockside container cranes the company marketed.

Oh Mr Sherwood
Oh Mr Sherwood
Are your reefer boxes really here to stay?
Can you send a side of beef
From Argyll to Tenerife
And satisfy the most austere gourmet?

Oh Mr Pinto
Oh Mr Pinto,
We've been known to have disasters, I agree,
Where the meat arrives quite bad
And the client's very sad.
[How disgusting, Mr Sherwood.]
Simply offal, Mr. P.

Oh Mr Sherwood,
Oh Mr Sherwood,
There's a rumour that you've really spread your
wings.
I deduce that if you can, you'll
Introduce an SC manual.
Can you please reveal the secret of such things.

Oh Mr Pinto
Oh Mr Pinto,
It is all part of SC philosophy:
Where you rent a special here
And return a reefer there.
[Metamorphosis, dear Sherwood?]
One-way leasing, Mr. P.

[This skit was based on an old vaudeville routine Mr
Gallagher and Mr Shean]

HIGH SOCIETY IN HONG KONG

The crowning cabaret achievement during my two decades long employment by Sea Containers was undoubtedly that of producing a 90 minute parody of the musical High Society describing the International Agents' Conference held two months earlier in Hong Kong in 1974. My secondment to a five year position in Hong Kong two years later was either my reward or my punishment.

INTRODUCTION - CALYPSO

Tonight in Hong Kong we're full of glee,
We're all part of one great family,
But come tomorrow you'll hear our fears:
We've now got 40 footers coming out of our ears.
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong Conference
(Get those depots cleared!)
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Conference.

The agents' contract's completely new,
There's something that we all have to do:
To get each agent relaxed on wine,
Then put the form before him and persuade him to sign.
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong Conference
(Allievi's signed!)
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Conference.

The first three deckships are building here,
We'd see one if we could find the pier,
But Tatham's left with the only map,
So ask the nearest rickshaw driver, there's a good chap.
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong Conference
(Get that barge afloat!)
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Conference.

We've come to Hong Kong to have some fun
Said Stracey, Scawn and O'Sullivan;
The salesmen may have come here to work,
But we control the purse strings and we're going to
shirk.
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong Conference
(No receivables)
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Conference.

There's stormy weather at times we're told,
Some agents brought their own brand of cold.
It seems we just missed typhoon Elaine,
But with Jim Sherwood here we're got our own
hurricane.
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong Conference
(Brewing up a storm)
In Hong Kong, oh Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Conference.

Based on the song **You're Sensational** I produced this number to describe the new container being designed by our Yorkshire Marine Container manufacturing facility. This was intended to be a way of collapsing a standard 20foot container so that several could be simultaneously fitted into one container slot.

YOU'RE COLLAPSIBLE

*Have you heard,
From Beverley has come the latest word
Which is "collapsible"?*

*And did you know
This is the umpteenth time we've had a go
At a collapsible*

*To make a start
Is quite an art,
If you undo
Just one wrong screw
It falls apart.*

*But if one day
Y.M.C.L. succeeds to make it stay
Erect, we'll say
That the collapsible's sensational
That's all, that's all, that's all.*

And then, based on the **Samantha** number came this response to the grumbling of agents at the production of a new agency agreement they were required to sign.

We love you, Jim Sherwood,
And our love will never die;
We'll fight like Ben Hur would
Just for S.C.I.

Remember, Jim Sherwood,
We're right by your side,
And like Quentin Durward
May you long preside.

Yes, we'll lease night and day
For the pittance you pay,
You can be sure we'll stay
Ever true.

Jim Sherwood, Oh, Jim Sherwood,
We will lease fo-or you.

Very tongue-in-cheek was this variation on **True Love**

*If you give to me, and I give to you,
Five percent, five percent,
That that would be, as you must agree,
Intelligent, intelligent.
For you and I are both S.C. agents
United by the same box,
So I lease through you, and you lease through me,
All our idle stocks*

Once again, it was impossible to find someone to represent Jim Sherwood in the **Who Wants to be a Millionaire** number, so it fell to me, once again ably supported by Andrew Lavey.

Who wants to be a millionaire?

[I do.]

And have an office in Mayfair?

[I do.]

Who wants to buy himself an enormous yacht?

[An enormous yacht is something I've got.]

Who wants to lease to Hapag Lloyd?

[I do.]

And see his rivals all destroyed?

[I do.]

Who wants to end on top of the heap?

[I do. Yes I do, so I depend on you.]

Who wants to be a millionaire?

[I do.]

And have this biennial affair?

[I do.]

Who wants to see the other lessors all foiled?

[My Strider class ships should coicle the woild.]

Who wants to drink in the best bars?

[I do.]

And lease his boxes to the stars?

[I do.]

Who wants to head the best lessor lists?

[I do. Yes I do, so I depend on you.]

The last item based on High Society was a version of **Well Did You Evah?** Much too involved and convoluted to be successfully reproduced here, I have provided some of the asides.

Have you heard Jim spill the beans,
We've leased a crane to the Phillipines.
And have you heard it's in the stars,
Next July we shall lease to Mars?

Have you heard about de Berc
Got run over in old Dunkirk.
(Don't worry. He's a game chap you know. Got right up
and leased a Tango!)

Have you heard that Robert Kulp
Lost six tanks of tomato pulp.
(Think they'll ketchup with him?)
(Only with Heinz sight.)

Have you heard that Bernie Bird
Is often shaken, but never stirred.
(That's the Pan-Am way, you know.)

And have you heard that Somerwill
Gave himself a peculiar thrill.
(Poor fellow stepped on a loose computer lead.)

And have you heard Jim Sherwood's plan,
The next affair will be in San Fran.
(Do you mean Frisco? We mean Frisco!)
Well did you evah,
What a swell conference, a swell conference,
A swelegant, elegant conference this was!

Two other numbers in the 1974 cabaret departed from High Society. First was based on the song **New Fangled Tango**, memorably associated with that great songstress Lena Horne. This was inspired by the company decision to name its container cranes after South American dances. The first was the Tango, followed later by the Samba. They were initially built by Liebherr in Ireland.

*Take our new-fangled Tango,
There's just nothing to it,
If you should employ one,
You may live to rue it,
They build it in Ireland
'midst bomb, blast and bang-o,
And that's why we call it
A most dangerous Tango.*

*It gets built in no time
From starting to show time;
If you want a go at it,
Just take a kit - meccano kit.
And if you can't lift 'er
Then try with a Shifter,
And you'll be no stranger
To danger.*

*There's always a ruction
When we start construction,
The workers are funny,
They want danger money;
But we've got the answer,
A young strip-tease dancer,
Complete with directions
For starting erections.*

*So agents go to it,
We know you can do it,
In each port where there's a train
Just lease a crane - a Tango crane.
You'll get no commission,
Except for permission
To just gain the treasure
Of pleasure.*

*Take out new-fangled Tango,
It's just made for leasing.
In Spain and Oporto
Our agents were taught so;
It's not that much trouble,
In six months it's rubble,
Then you can again go
And lease a new Tango.*

And then came the finale performed by the entire cast. This was based on Gilbert and Sullivan's *Modern Major General*, with more than a sideways glance at Tom Lehrer's *The Elements*, and included the name of every member of staff - several hundred. Quite a *tour de force* of which I am, not unreasonably, proud..

This number, plus musical accompaniment, may be located on the SCOLD website at www.conts.com/scold/Census.htm.

LIMERICKS AND CLERIHEWS

It would be unconscionable not to mention the late, much loved, and greatly missed Rob Ward, for so many years my colleague, boss, friend and supporter of my creative endeavours, who actively encouraged much of the following trivia based on our colleagues at Sea Containers House. Alas, the building that held so many of our hopes, dreams and industry no longer exists in its original form, having been redeveloped into a hotel and apartment building. But it's nice to think that, perhaps, some of the *geist* of this lampooned cast of characters still lurks within its foundations.

A thermostat expert named Lavey
With nonchalance learned in the navy,
When asked to test beef fer-
menting in a reefer
Said "No thanks, I like mine with gravy."

A colonel of lofty disdain
Was asked why he lived on a crane.
That sapper named Poynder
Then made this rejoinder:
"I'm frightened to come down again."

"With tanks I will never disgrasia,"
Said Kulp. "But we've got to replasia"
We answered, "with thanks,
We'll divorce you from tanks
And give you instead South East Asia."

With reckless abandon Don Turner
Announced to an SCI earner:
“The world is your oyster
If you can just foist a
30 foot bulk on some learner.”

Joe Sinclair is really quite sore
And complains that his height isn't more.
He says “I'd give the earth
To achieve suixante-neuf,
But I never get past sixty four.”

Such talents has Nigel J. Tatham,
A pity to just dissipate 'em,
With no new advances
Of ship leasing chances,
We'll just be obliged to create 'em.

Alas and alack Cyril Knowles;
So far from achieving his goals,
Such as who he can trust
To identify rust
Ere it disintegrates into holes..

To solve the plight of David Tingle
Needs a mind that's truly single.
The Security Council of the United Nations
Has questioned the sanctity of ISO regulations.

With welcome single-mindedness John Witton
Has proved himself a truly worthy Briton;
The idle rate of the United States
Has finally submerged without a trace.

Knowing nothing of life's tragic stings,
He left North Row on happy magic wings.
Alas, arrived at Park Street, David Young
Suddenly discovered he'd been stung.

In business big Jim Sherwood
Is tough as Quentin Durward.
The only vexations
Come from personal relations.

Mary Meikle
Is very fond of treacle,
Which makes her the perfect soul
To handle that very sticky box control.

Please don't confuse Jim White with Monsieur Blanc,
He's more at home with vodka than with plonk;
Apart from which his world is hardly Gallic:
His symbols are more agricultural than phallic.

It is said that Rob Ward
Is eternally bored
At the constantly self-defeating
Monday morning meeting.

If Arnault de Berc
Cared more for hard work,
Gallic containerisation
Could be a sensation.

At the end of the day Don Turner
Would clearly rather be a charcoal burner;
He says leasing containers
Is just for sustainers.

By all accounts Bob Baird
Cannot be spared
By his betters
To chase debtors.

The plight of Evan Sakellarios
Is proving to be quite hilarious;
He thought he'd put stems
Down in Kingston-on-Thames
But found it was Kingston Ontarios.

I've heard it said of Simon Broad
That he has turned out quite a fraud;
The errors on his debtors' list
Were clearly caused when he was inebriated.

If there were fewer
like Malcolm Brewer,
The status quo could be restored
By getting more like Simon Broad.

ENVOI

The following two paragraphs were part of my introduction to a section of my new book *You Don't Apologise for Chutzpah*. They strike me as particularly appropriate to this farewell to a collection, the compiling of which has brought back so many happy memories.

“Memory involves the mental act of receiving, processing, storing and retrieving information.

“Leo Tolstoy wrote⁽¹⁾ “In all our memories the middle disappears, and only the first and last impressions, especially the first one, remains.” Paradoxically, as we age, we frequently find that the earliest events in our lives start to burn more vividly, while occurrences sometimes merely minutes old may have vanished totally from our memory. At the time of writing this chronicle, in my middle eighties, I thankfully have little evidence of the latter; I am, however, simply by the act of having to revive the memory of early experiences, enjoying an amazing and vastly pleasing refulgence of some of my earliest recollections.”

I hope this reconstruction will give my readers at least some of the pleasure that its compilation has given the writer.

⁽¹⁾ *The History of Yesterday*, 1851.

