

DESIGN!

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW CLUB • No.163 • MAY 2020

Rex Whistler

Ali Hartley on the tragically short but productive life of this artist, designer and Bright Young Thing

Being Kathryn Best

Inside the world of the Club's resident Egyptologist

Sheridan TV

As the lockdown continues, Oliver Lane will attempt to deliver this month's talk via YouTube. What could possibly go wrong?



The New Sheridan Club traditionally meets in the upstairs room of The Wheatsheaf, just off Oxford Street. The Wheatsheaf is one of Fitzrovia's historic pubs, a one-time haunt of Dylan Thomas, George Orwell, Augustus John and Julian Maclaren-Ross. In fact Thomas met his wife Caitlin in The Wheatsheaf and, legend has it, he was known to flash at women there as well. Fitzrovia's associations with literature go back to the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century both Woolf and Shaw lived in Fitzroy Square; Pound and Lewis launched *Blast!* at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel in Percy Street. John Buchan lived in Portland Place and in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* Richard Hannay has a flat there. Both Lawrences (D.H. and T.E.) took rooms there, as did Aleister Crowley, Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke and Katherine Mansfield.

The Next Meeting

The next Club Meeting *would have* taken place on **Wednesday 6th May** in the upstairs room at The Wheatsheaf, 25 Rathbone Place, London W1T 1JB, from 7pm until 11pm. However, the pub is closed and we must all stay at home. Consequently, Luca Jellinek's scheduled address on *What's So Great About Art Deco?* (already postponed once already due to illness) has been pushed on again.

Instead Oliver Lane will deliver a virtual lecture from his eyrie in Devon, entitled *Rum, Sodomy and the Kriegsmarine, or Absolutely Not a Blow-by-Blow Account of the Battle of the River Plate*.

Mr Lane will give a magic lantern show attempting to avoid the very boring bits of military history but investigating instead the particular circumstances and strange coincidences that link two of the most spectacular and strategically important naval battles in history. **This will be delivered by YouTube livestream to the URL <https://youtu.be/UPd0OkRXSl8> at 8pm.**

There is also a Facebook event at <https://www.facebook.com/events/235056557614647>, which might be useful to keep an eye on if we have technical problems and need to change the plan, or create a new URL.

Tune into YouTube on Wednesday to learn all you need to know about the Battle of the River Plate



The Last Meeting

The lockdown was already in force by the time of our last meeting, so Mrs H. kindly stepped in at short notice with a livestream lecture on the life and works of Rex Whistler—an essay version of this begins on page 4. Because we could not physically meet up at the Wheatsheaf, there are none of the usual photos, but we did ask Members viewing online to send us snaps of themselves, which you can see opposite. We even followed the talk with a brief Zoom meeting for some post-match analysis—see the screenshot bottom right.



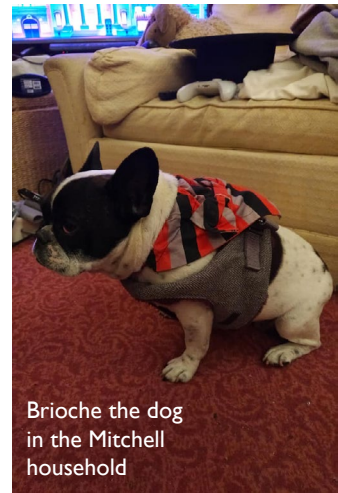
Stephen Myhill



Stuart Turner



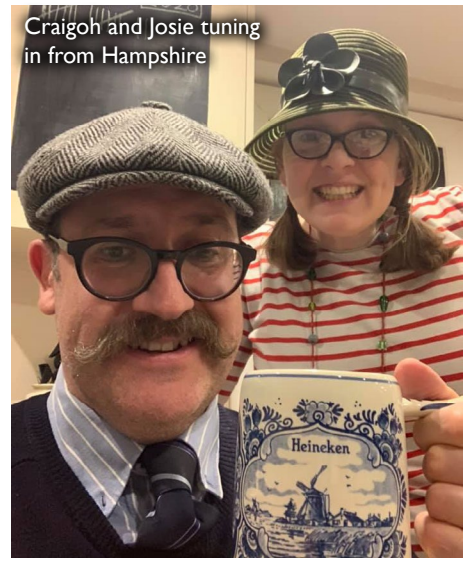
E.Tory Laitila, all the way from Hawaii



Brioche the dog in the Mitchell household



David and Sara Smith, with Ali on TV in the background and a brace of Nil Desperandum cocktails



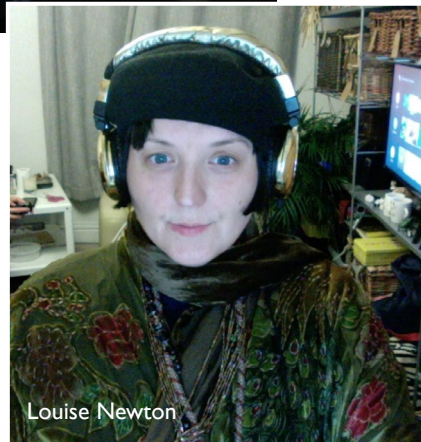
Craigoh and Josie tuning in from Hampshire



The Earl of Essex



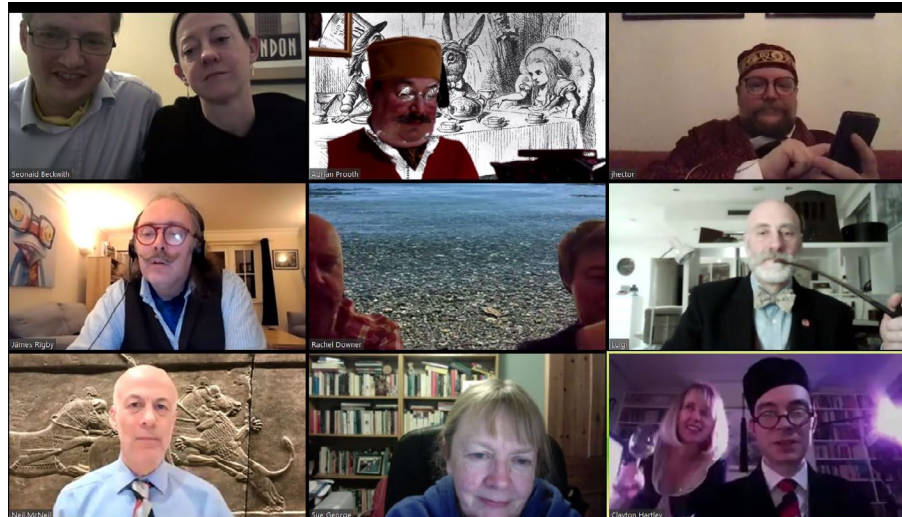
Gabriel Ratchitt



Louise Newton



Frances Mitchell (don't ask)



Seonaid Beckett

Rachel Downer

Frederic

James Rigby

Rachel Downer

Neil Mitchell

Sue George

Clayton Hartley

Rex Whistler

Mrs H. on the short, productive life of a Bright Young Thing

REX WHISTLER WAS BORN in Eltham, south-east London, on 24th June 1905. He was christened Reginald John, but was always intended to be called Rex—his mother liked its regal sound. That mother, Helen, was a vicar's daughter who had married a builder, and this meant the family's social position was somewhat uncertain. They don't seem to have had many friends, and this may have made the older children's relationships especially close. The oldest was Jessie ("Jessy"); Denis ("Denny") was next; then Rex, only 18 months younger; and Laurence was the baby, arriving more than six years after Rex.

Both parents could draw and paint and encouraged their children to do the same, but without pressuring them to perform or any thought that art would be a career. Denny and Rex loved to draw, and did so whenever they could. Rex's aunt Dorothy gave him a new sketchbook every time he produced a full one. Both boys had talent which was recognised by early teachers, who recommended that they join the Royal Drawing Society; it held an annual exhibition ("The Children's Royal Academy") and handed out certificates and awards. Rex first entered drawings for the exhibition when he was seven and won a prize 12 years in a row. The Society wanted to encourage children to draw as a means of sharpening their powers of observation and memory, and in Rex's case these aims were amply fulfilled. In 1915, his entry in an exhibition of children's war art (Fig. 1) demonstrated not only his precocious ability to imagine a complex scene, and render it in great detail and proper perspective, but also, reassuringly, a small boy's enthusiasm for death

Fig. 1 Report in an unidentified newspaper of a 1915 exhibition of children's drawings of war. *An Action at Sea* by Rex Whistler (aged 10) is at the top.

Fig. 2 Bookplate for Ronald Fuller, 1925. When he saw the printed plate Rex was embarrassed by it and begged Ronald to burn it.

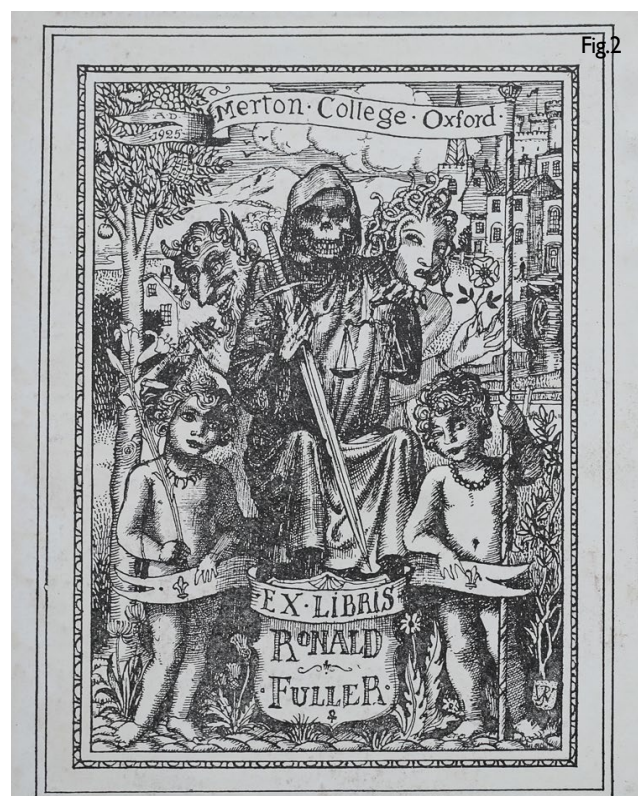
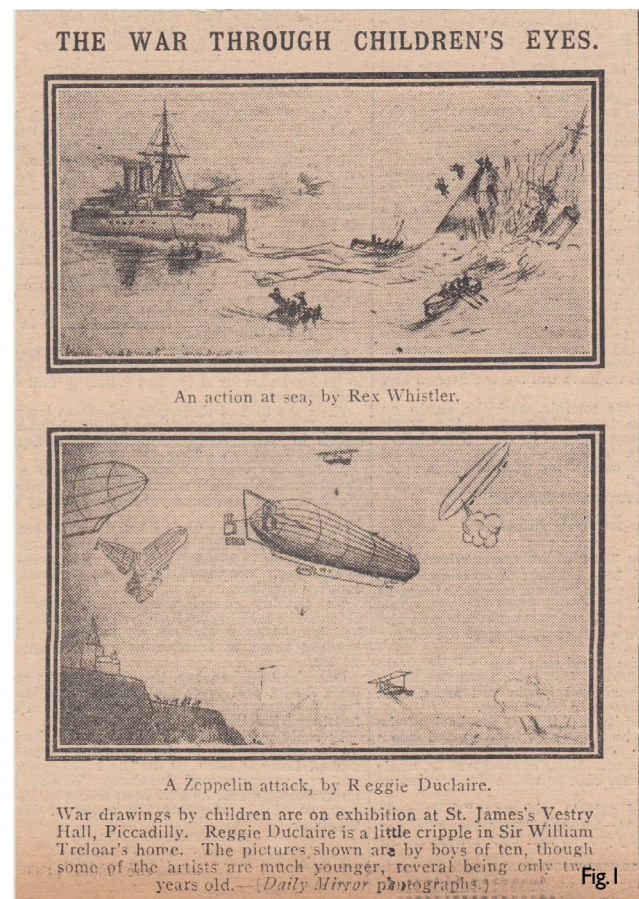


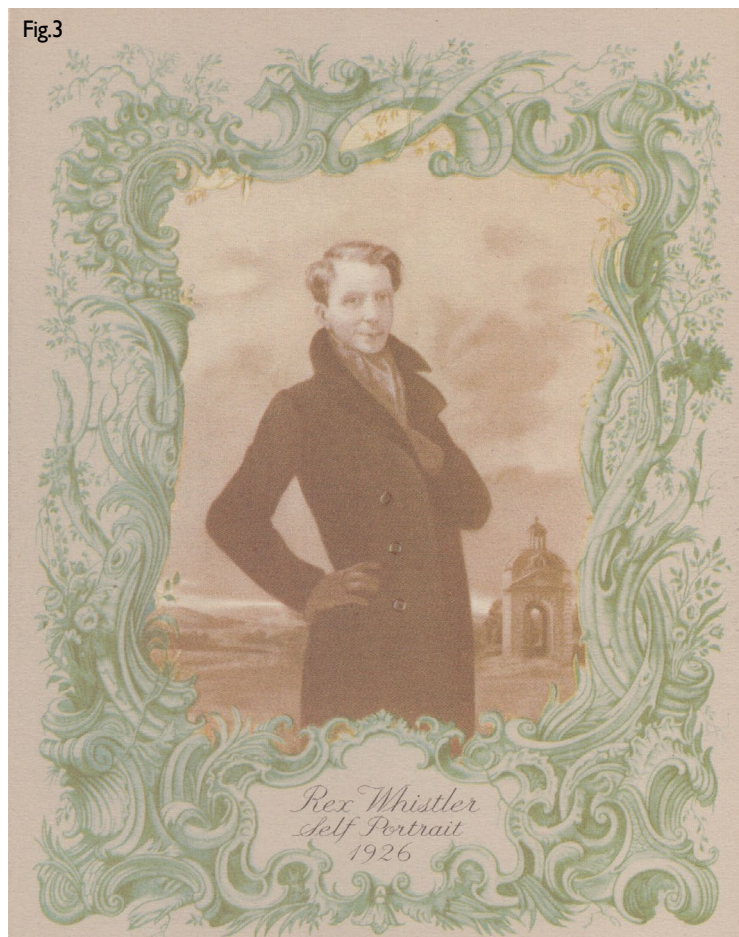
Fig.3 Rex Whistler, *Self-portrait*, c.1933 (Tate, NO5865). Reproduced on the cover of a 1954 guide to the Tate Gallery mural. One of the Boycott Pavilions at Stowe is in the background.

and destruction.

Both Rex and Denny filled their sketchbooks with gruesome weaponry and torture machines, and in later life Rex's drawings and doodles often featured impaled or decapitated heads, skulls and bones and other morbid imagery. A melancholy, even fatalistic strain in his character—

which became more pronounced when he was older—may have developed after Denny died of measles complicated by pneumonia in 1913, at the age of 11.

Rex had to wait for Laurence “to grow up and be companionable”, and later they were very close, but until then he seems to have been fairly self-sufficient in terms of childhood friendships. Haileybury, the minor public school to which he was sent at 14, was obsessed with sport and petty rules, in neither of which did Rex take any interest, although good at rugby. (He broke his nose playing one school game, accounting for a profile that someone later said made him resemble a goat.) But he could impress the boys there—and sometimes even the more sensitive masters—by producing satirical drawings for them and facilitating practical jokes (for example, he once faked a broken pane in the sanatorium window). He did learn to love poetry while at Haileybury, and through this shared enthusiasm made a close friend of Ronald Fuller, a slightly older boy. The two produced ambitious illustrated books of poetry and history together and Rex designed a bookplate for Fuller when the latter went to Merton College,



Oxford (Fig. 2). Although very clumsy by his later standards it does illustrate the friends' shared love for gothic horrors.

Other early influences on Rex's art were the illustrators Arthur Rackham and Edmond Dulac, as well as comic strips. A visit to Stowe School, where Laurence was a pupil, may have been the root of Rex's admiration for the 18th century. Stowe had recently been founded in a stately pile formerly belonging

to the Dukes of Buckingham and Chandos, and he fell in love with the Palladian buildings on the estate there (Fig. 3). He seems to have had a highly retentive, almost photographic visual memory, especially for architecture.

Laurence later wrote that Rex was not “idle at Haileybury (except in class)”, and at 16 he was not considered likely to pass the School Certificate. By this time his parents had come round to the idea that he might become a professional artist and after consulting the painter Eric Kennington (about whom our own Jonathon Black curated an exhibition: see page 17 of issue 58 of this magazine) who lived nearby they supported Rex in applying to the Royal Academy Schools. Although completely self-taught—the way he drew, with his hand in a fist, was never corrected—he gained a probationary place at the Schools, their youngest student. Rex floundered. He found the total lack of instruction on offer demoralising, did little work and failed his first assessment. After years of consistent praise this failure was a wake-up call that Rex heeded; he worked hard at his art for the rest of his days. He reapplied to enter the Slade School of Art, and this was to prove a



Fig.4

pivotal decision for his life and career.

The Slade was run by Henry Tonks, a former surgeon turned draughtsman whose best-known drawings are those he made of First World War soldiers with facial disfigurements. Tonks was generally an austere and sometimes terrifying teacher but in Rex he saw someone special, one of only one or two “natural draughtsmen” he had ever encountered, he said. He also liked Rex’s self-deprecating sense of humour when, at his interview, he admitted he had been “sacked for incompetence” from the RA Schools.

Rex seems to have become a favourite of Tonks immediately. He was allowed to circumvent those parts of the curriculum that did not suit him, nevertheless winning prizes and later a travel scholarship that took him to Italy. It was Tonks who recommended Rex for the job of decorating the Tate Gallery’s refreshment room, in the basement of its Millbank building, a project sponsored by the famous art dealer Joseph Duveen. Rex was only 20 when he won the commission in 1925. His fantastical panorama, through which an eccentric group of people travel *In Pursuit of Rare Meats* (Fig.4), was a triumphant success when it opened in late 1927, dubbed “the most entertaining room in Europe”. Rex’s career was well and truly launched, although his new work nearly met an immediate and sticky end when, in January 1928, the Thames burst its banks and flooded the Tate’s basement. Because Rex had painted it in pigment mixed with wax his decoration survived. The room is now the restaurant that bears his name.

Fig.4 Detail of *In Pursuit of Rare Meats*, 1926–7, Rex’s mural in the Tate Gallery refreshment room, as reproduced in a 1954 guide.

Fig.5 Cecil Beaton, photograph of Stephen Tennant, William Walton, Georgia Sitwell, Theresa Jungmann, Rex Whistler, Cecil Beaton at Wilsford, 1927.

Fig.6 Bookplate for Duff Cooper, 1931. His wife, Lady Diana Cooper, appears as a classical bust of her namesake goddess, with champagne bottles and government red boxes below.

The second significant development in Rex’s life that came with his choice of the Slade School was his introduction to Society. He became friends with another Slade student, the wealthy, eccentric Stephen Tennant (with whom he shared a love of fairy stories and poetry) and through him was drawn into the world of the “Bright Young Things”, the group of upper-class friends whose constant round of partygoing and high jinks in fancy dress kept the gossip columns filled in the late 1920s and 1930s. Tonks had foreseen and feared that Rex would be distracted by the entertainments offered by his new friends. He need not have worried too much. Rex enjoyed this scene, up to a point, and appears in many photographs of *fêtes champêtre* in Wiltshire (Fig.5), but like Cecil Beaton, whom he also got to know at this time, he was not of the same class as most of the Bright Young Things—he and Cecil were both middle-class boys who had to rely on their own talents to get on in the world, and worked extremely hard, often for the very people they were socialising with. This last circumstance was both an advantage for an artist, in terms of a ready supply of eager and wealthy clients, but also a disadvantage for someone like Rex who was not able to separate business from pleasure. He

was often glad to get away from all the partying and spend weekends at the Daye House on the Wilton estate with Edith Olivier.

Edith, whom Rex met in 1925 while on holiday with Stephen Tennant, was a remarkable figure whose relationship with him is treated fully in *A Curious Friendship: The Story of a Bluestocking and a Bright Young Thing* by Anna Thomasson (Macmillan, 2015). All I have space to say about her here is that she was more than 30 years older than Rex and his friends and yet, after the death of her sister, with whom she had been leading an exemplary spinster life, she shingled her hair, began writing novels, and threw herself into the Bright Young Things' social scene (her neighbours in Wiltshire included Tennant

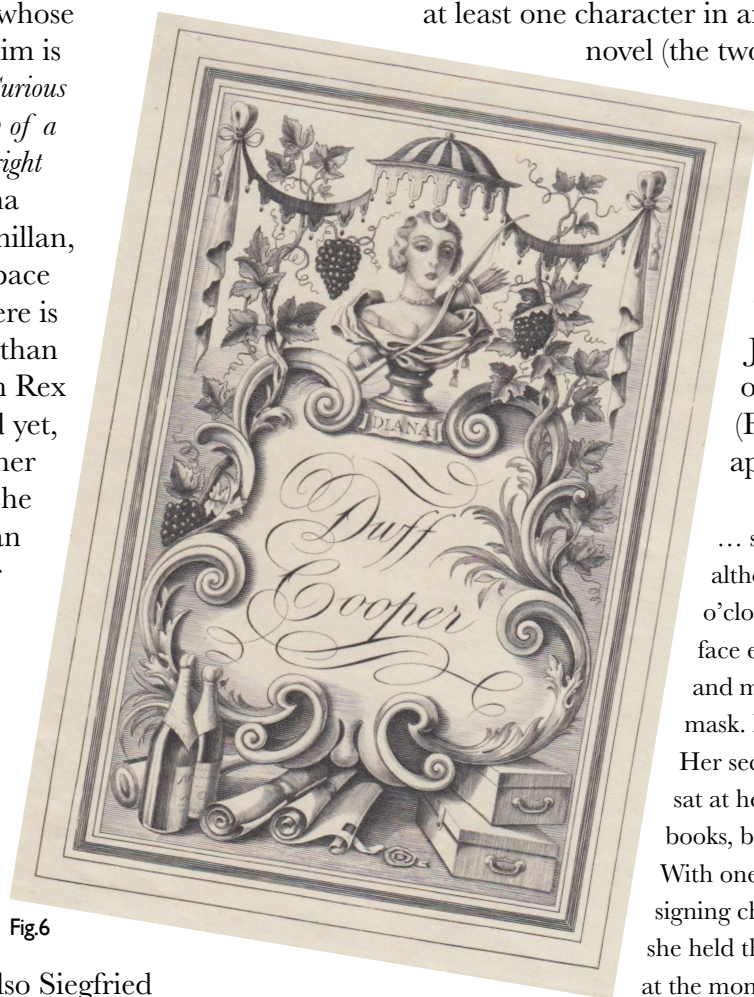


Fig.6

and Beaton, and also Siegfried Sassoon). It is clear that she loved Rex—almost romantically, almost maternally, certainly intensely—and she became his most reliable and supportive friend.

Rex soon met many of the other key

personalities in this new set, including all the Sitwells, for whom he provided portraits, bookplates and the covers and illustrations for several books (see Fig.9), as well as William Walton and Beverley Nichols. Rex inspired at least one character in an Evelyn Waugh novel (the two men were barely

acquainted, but had mutual friends): there is no proof that Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited* is meant to be Rex but in *Scoop*, where Julia Stitch is modelled on Lady Diana Cooper (Fig.6), a familiar figure appears:

... she was still in bed although it was past eleven o'clock. Her normally mobile face encased in clay was rigid and menacing as an Aztec mask. But she was not resting. Her secretary, Miss Holloway, sat at her side with account books, bills, and correspondence. With one hand Mrs Stitch was signing cheques; with the other she held the telephone to which, at the moment, she was dictating details of the costumes for a charity

ballet. An elegant young man at the top of a step ladder was painting ruined castles on the ceiling. Josephine, the eight-year-old Stitch prodigy, sat on the foot of the bed construing her day's passage of Virgil. Mrs Stitch's maid, Brittling, was reading her the clues of the morning crossword. She had been hard at it since half-past seven.

...

Mrs Stitch turned her face of clay, in which only the eyes gave a suggestion of welcome, towards her visitor.

"Come in," she said, "I'm just going out. Why twenty pounds to Mrs Beaver?"

"That was for Lady Jean's wedding present," said Miss Holloway.

"I must have been insane. About the lion's head for the centurion's breastplate; there's a beautiful one over the gate of a house near Salisbury, called Twisbury Manor; copy that



Fig.5

as near as you can; ring up *Country Life* and ask for ‘back numbers’; there was a photograph of it about two years ago. You’re putting too much ivy on the turret, Arthur; the owl won’t show up unless you have him on the bare stone, and I’m particularly attached to the owl.”

The precocious Josephine thinks all Arthur’s work is “banal”.

True to Bright Young Thing form Rex also loved fast cars and being “amusing”, but the latter had more to do with his generous nature than wishing to outrage or impress. He designed and made costumes, scenery and props for his friends’ fancy dress parties, embellished their autograph and visitor books with elaborate drawings (for a minor example of a “gift” drawing, see Fig.7), and sent illustrated letters, birthday cards and books to their children. Over the years he also made a number of sensitive portraits of those children.

He was not very good at the business of being an artist, often underestimating how much he should charge for a project, or the amount of effort and time it would take him. He gave away drawings and neglected to retain valuable original designs. He covered his brother Laurence’s expenses as a student at Balliol and, later on, also supported their parents. All this, and the financial demands of his social life, meant he needed to work constantly. This he did just around the corner from NSC headquarters at the Wheatsheaf. He rented rooms at 20 Fitzroy Street (the building is no longer there) just after completing the Tate mural in 1927, and stayed until 1938. In the sparsely furnished studio he often worked furiously, fuelled by champagne and slices of ham. Beaton complained that he ignored the telephone and left letters unopened.

The murals that Rex Whistler produced after his Tate triumph are the works for which he is probably best known now, especially as three of them are in National Trust properties, Plas Newydd, Mottisfont and Dorneywood (although you

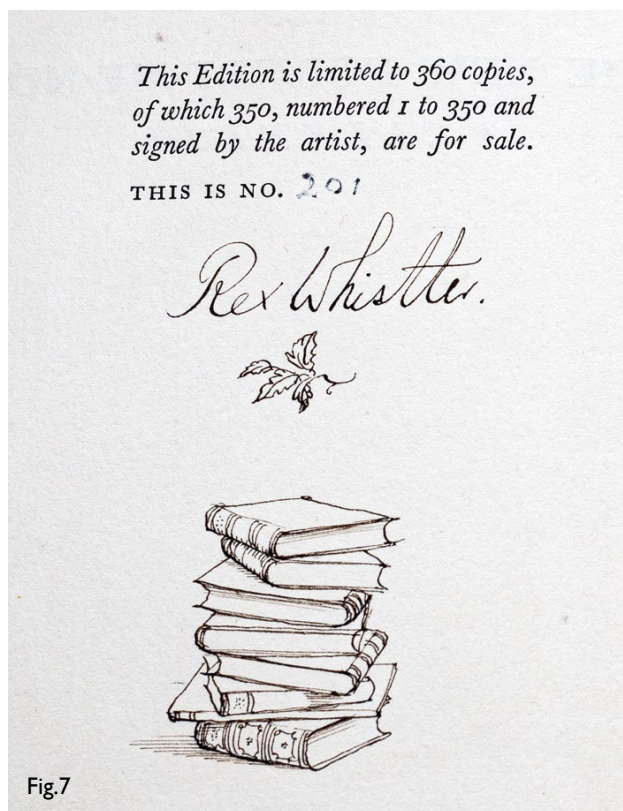




Fig.9

Fig.7 Rex's signature and impromptu drawing on the limitation page of *The New Forget-me-not*, 1929.

Fig.8 A detail of the central part of the Plas Newydd mural, 1936–8. It combines real and imagined buildings with a view of Snowdonia; the little red-sailed boat in this detail is said to carry Lady Caroline Paget, the object of Rex's frustrated adoration.

Fig.9 Two book jackets for the Sitwells: for Edith Sitwell, *Bath*, 1932 and Osbert Sitwell, *Brighton*, 1935. Rex designed other jackets for works by Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell, and painted portraits of all three siblings.

Fig.10 Three book jackets for a bestselling series: Beverley Nichols's *Down the Garden Path*, 1932, *A Thatched Roof*, 1933, and *A Village in a Valley*, 1934.

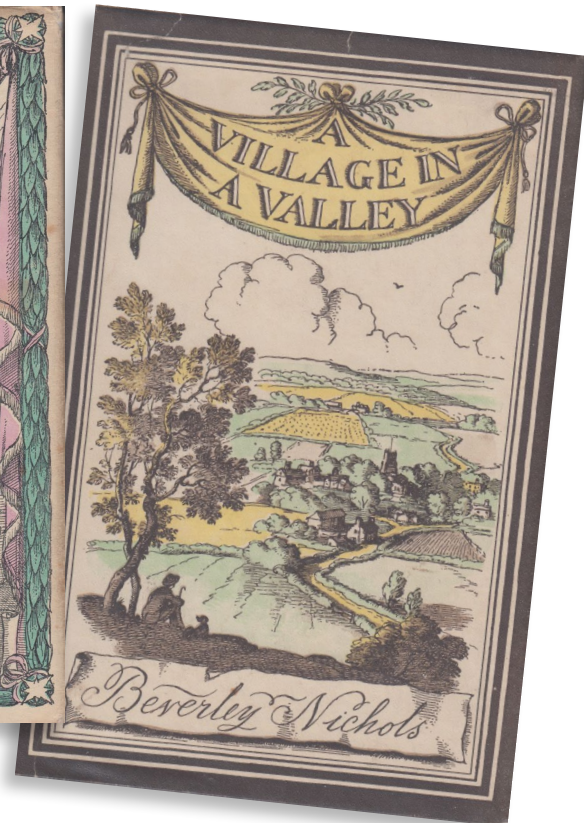
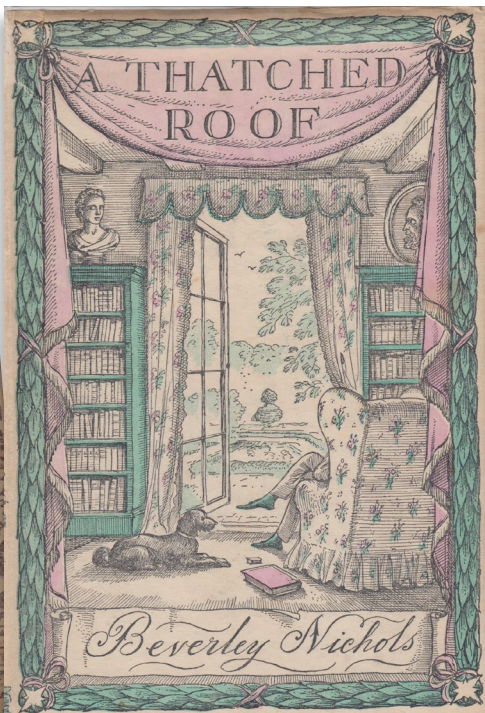
can only visit the house at Dorneywood on selected dates). Of these, the *Capriccio with a Mediterranean Seaport* at Plas Newydd on Anglesey is the largest and most spectacular, playing to all Rex's strengths—his virtuosity in the execution of trompe l'oeil effects, his love for historical architectural styles, his romanticism. The mural contains details allegorising his love for Lady Caroline Paget, the daughter of the house, just one of a number of hopeless infatuations that plagued his whole adult life (Fig.8). Laurence Whistler believed that Rex's lack of success in love "in his own eyes at last vitiated everything else", a rather tragic summation. One of the happier (because very short) episodes in Rex's love life was

his liaison with the notorious actress Tallulah Bankhead, with whom he holed up in the Hotel

Splendide in 1934.

Rex's frenetic work rate through the late 1920s and 1930s involved him in a very wide range of projects at all scales, from the murals to tiny bookplates. In 1960 Laurence Whistler and Ronald Fuller compiled a complete catalogue of his output, which lists dozens of covers and illustrations for books and magazines (Figs 9, 10, 11); designs for a score of revues, plays, ballets and operas, covering programmes, posters, sets and costumes (Fig.12, 13); more than 80 drawings (mostly unsigned) to advertise petrol for Shell and BP (Fig.14) and alcohol

Fig.10



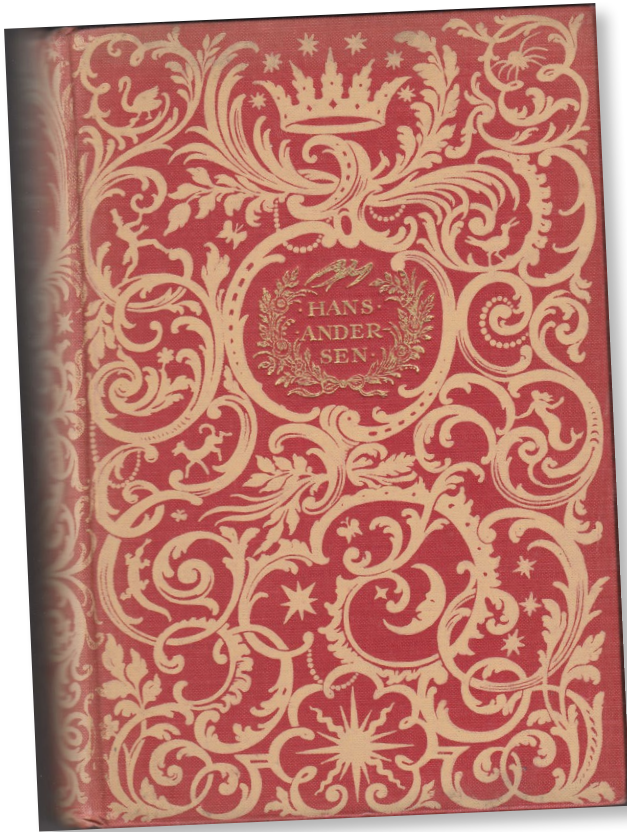


Fig.11



Fig.11 Rex's charming, humorous or macabre illustrations were a perfect fit for Hans Andersen's *Fairy Tales and Legends*, first published in 1935 and much reprinted. The limited edition of the book, in cream and gold, was so beautiful that Elizabeth Paget carried it at her wedding instead of a prayerbook.

for Guinness (Fig.15); and others to decorate catalogues for Fortnum & Mason (Fig.16). He produced the *Clovelly* textile design (later used on Wedgwood pottery) and a huge carpet for Surrealist patron Edward James; two greetings telegrams for the GPO (Fig.17), posters for exhibitions, and invitations and Christmas cards for various events and institutions (Fig.18). The catalogue even has a section for "Jeux d'Esprit". It was a workload that only someone with Rex's compulsion to draw and facility for endless invention could have sustained.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Rex found himself at Mottisfont in Hampshire, painting a trompe l'oeil Gothic saloon for Mrs

Maud Russell, who had proved a difficult client. High up on the wall he wrote, "I was painting this ermine curtain when Britain declared war on the Nazi tyrants. Sunday September 3rd 1939. RW." At 35 he did not have to join up but Rex knew immediately that he wanted to fight, prompted partly by simple patriotism but also by a growing disillusionment with his work—the feeling that what he did was not "real art". Although he was overlooked by the War Artists

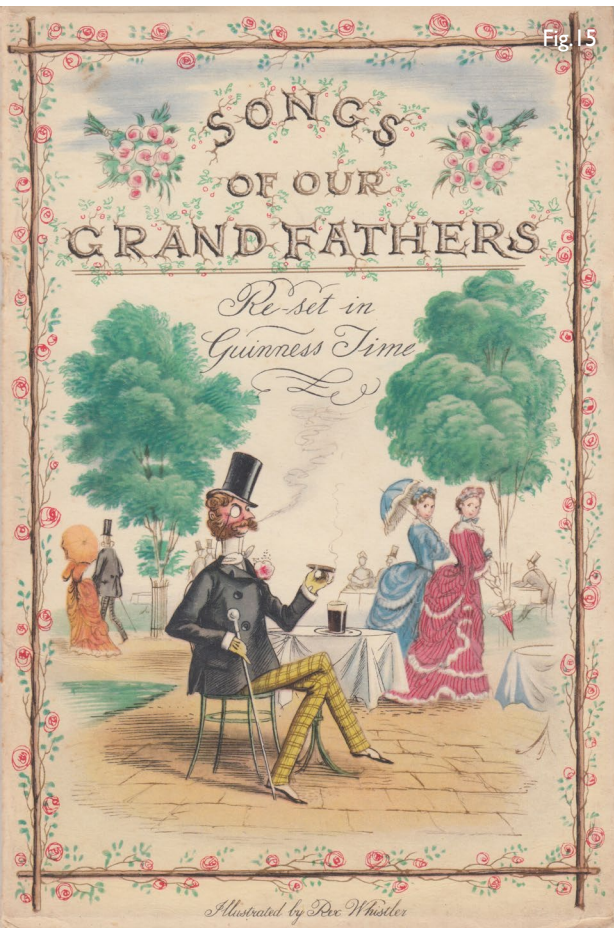


Fig. 15

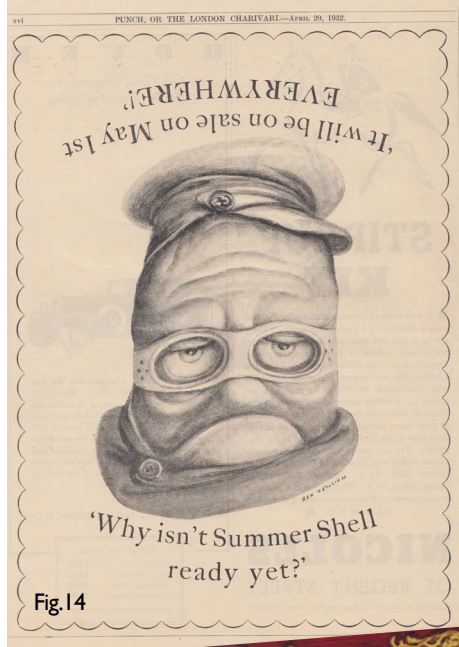


Fig. 14



Fig. 12 Rex designed the complete production of Laurence Housman's play *Victoria Regina*—twice. He sold his drawings for the 1935 Broadway show and had to redo them when the play opened in London in 1937.

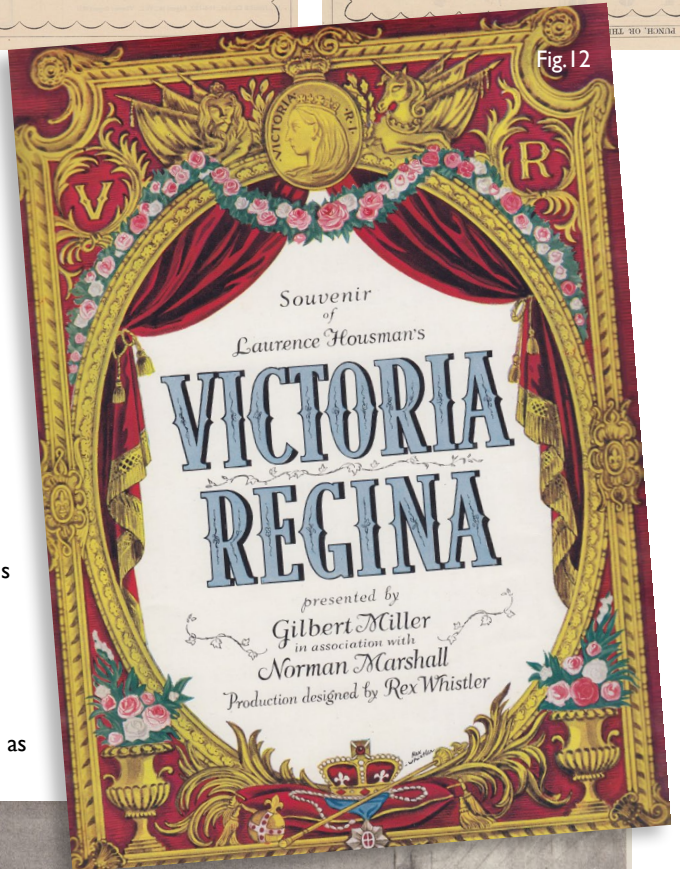


Fig. 12

Fig. 13 Design for the frontcloth for the ballet *The Rake's Progress*, 1935, re-created 1942. The original scenery and costumes were abandoned by the Sadler's Wells Co. when they fled the Netherlands ahead of the German invasion in 1940.

Fig. 14 One of a series of "Reversible Faces" used to advertise Shell Oil, 1931–2. These were repurposed by Laurence Whistler in the book *JOHO!*, 1946.

Fig. 15 *Songs of Our Grandfathers Re-set in Guinness Time*, 1936. The brewers Guinness produced a number of these humorous booklets as promotional gifts for doctors.



Fig. 13

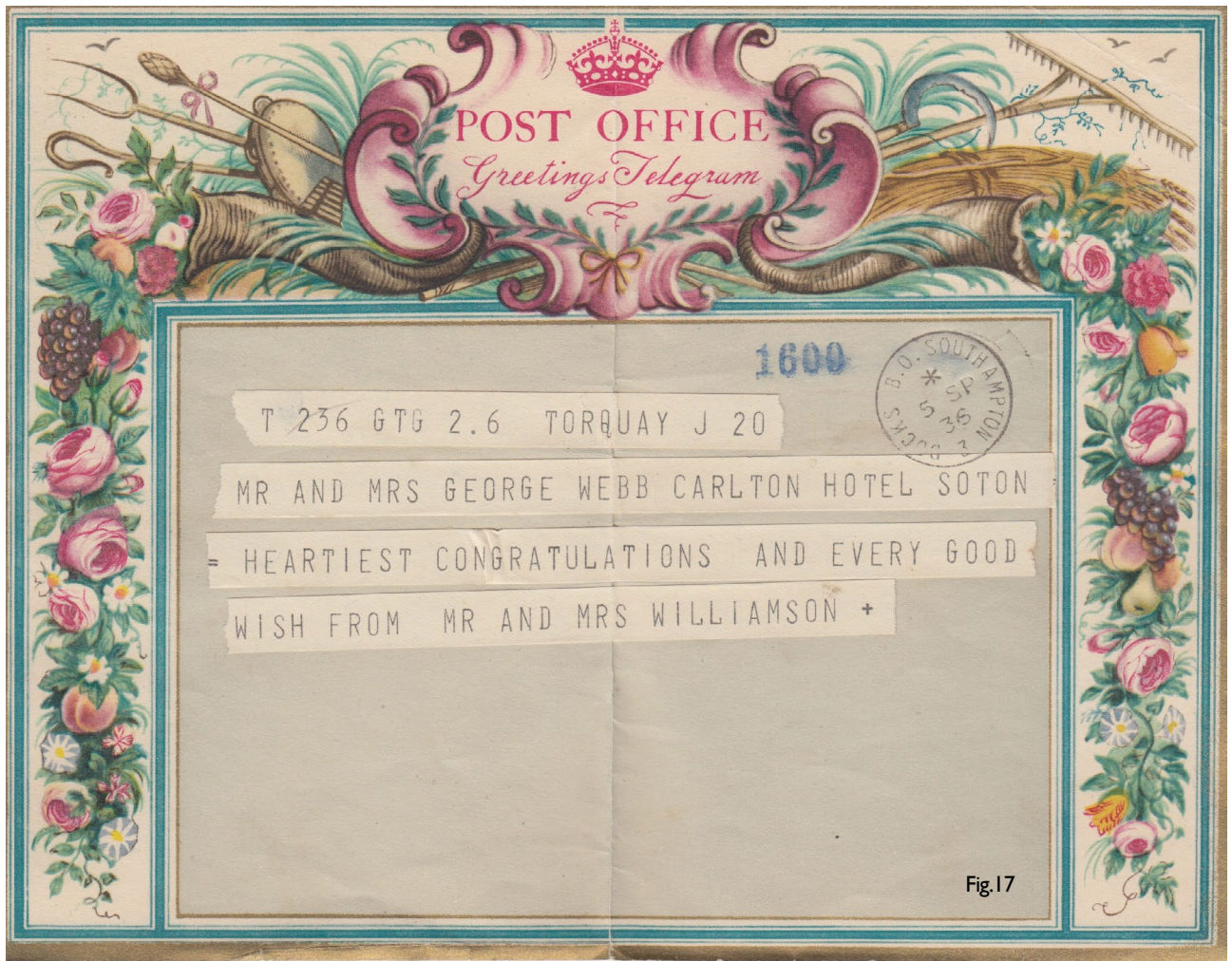


Fig.17



Fig.16



Fig.18

Fig.16 Rex drew the covers for the Fortnum & Mason Christmas catalogue between 1932 and 1936, and illustrated four other leaflets for the store.

Fig.17 The first illustrated "greetings telegram" produced for the GPO, 1936. The previous year Rex had designed the first such telegram for Valentine's Day—49,000 were sold.

Fig.18 A one-off commission from the booksellers J. & E. Bumpus, the invitation to the opening of the Lewis Carroll Centenary Exhibition, 1932.

Fig.19 Rex Whistler, *Self-portrait in Uniform*, 1940 (NAM, 1994-01-113-1). Canvases were scarce and this image was painted over an unfinished portrait of Cecil Beaton.

Fig.20 St George overcomes the dragon in a properly patriotic cover for *The Listener*, Christmas 1941.

Fig.21 A more eccentric contribution to the propaganda effort, a birthday card for Hitler, published in *Illustrated* magazine, 20 April 1940.

Advisory Committee, there was no shortage of people willing to find Rex a “safe” occupation, such as camouflage. But he was determined to see action, and eventually strings were pulled to get him a commission in the Welsh Guards. At this point Rex painted what is probably his best-known self-portrait at a friend’s flat overlooking Regent’s Park, wearing his newly arrived uniform, hesitating between two worlds (Fig.19).

And so Rex embarked on four long years learning to command a tank troop. “I know I shall make an idiotic soldier,” he wrote, but rather surprisingly he seems to have taken to army life, making conscientious notes of his training, albeit embellishing them with drawings of baroque tanks, and inspiring affection and loyalty in his men. Nor did the war necessarily curtail his professional artistic output. In this period he produced magazine covers (Fig.20) and cartoons (Fig.21), designs for two West End plays, four ballets and a film (*A Place of One’s Own*—after a story by Osbert Sitwell, who asked him to take on the job in the hope he



Fig.19

would be freed from military service in order to complete it; Fig.22), 12 book jackets and three fully illustrated books, and ten large illustrations to the novel *Konigsmark*, as a private commission from its author, A.E.W. Mason. These last

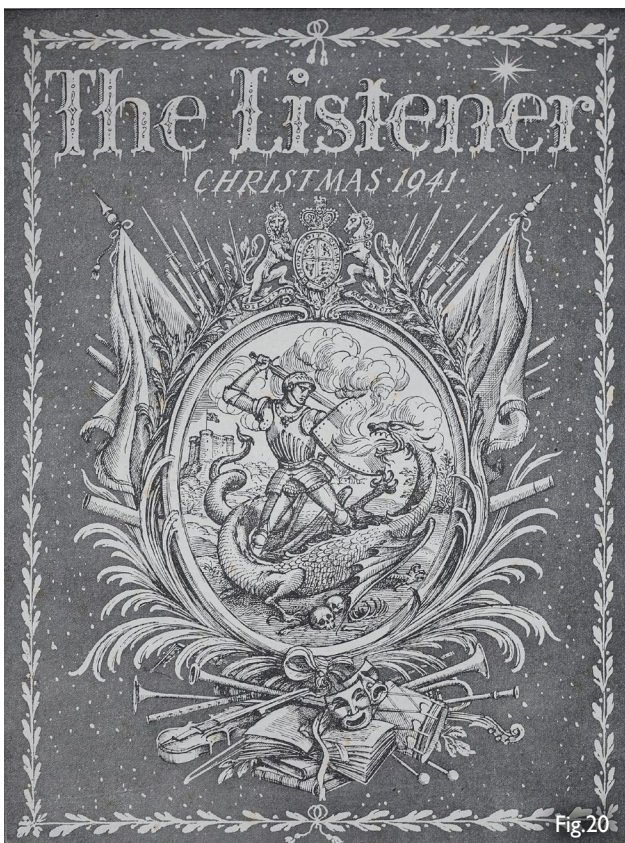


Fig.20



Fig.21



Fig.22

Fig.22 Design for the drawing-room set in the Eagle-Lion film *A Place of One's Own*, 1944. Rex annotated the drawing with precise details of decoration and props.

Fig.23 *The Daye House*, Wilton Park, from near the entrance gates, 21 June 1942 (Salisbury Museum). Edith Olivier stands on the sunny lawn; Rex's Hudson Terraplane is parked in the shade.

Fig.24 *The Master Cook*, 1940 (Regimental Headquarters, Welsh Guards). A portrait of Sergeant Cook J.W. Isaacs.

Figs 25, 26 *The Officers' Mess As It Is and As It Might Be*, 1942 (Regimental Headquarters, Welsh Guards). Rex enhanced his surroundings wherever he went, in this case Codford Camp on Salisbury Plain, where he provided the mess with 'old master' paintings and a stuffed fish in a glass case.



Fig.24



Fig.23



Fig.25



Fig.26

were finished in digs in Caterham. In his rare moments of leisure he also began to paint in a new way, producing small pictures of everyday but atmospheric scenes—often conjuring bright sunlight, very far from the silvery tones of his earlier romantic landscapes—and some impressive oil portraits of fellow soldiers (Figs

23, 24). As Stephen Calloway concludes, in this sense Rex did become an unofficial war artist.

Besides all this, he produced throwaway cartoons to amuse his men and redecorated the regiment's accommodation in various parts of the country, including the officers' mess at Codford Camp (Figs 25, 26). He also organised

a Christmas party for 300 children at Pickering in Yorkshire. His final billet in Brighton before embarking for Normandy received a makeover with fake chinoiserie wallpaper, a profile portrait of George IV and an allegory of *The Prince Regent awakening the Spirit of Brighton* (Fig.27)—his last painting, made in no more than three hours.

After years of waiting to “do his bit” Rex finally got to the war, via Brighton and Arramanches. The men of his tank crew welded a box on the rear of his Cromwell tank for Rex to keep his painting equipment in (Fig.28). After a couple of weeks in Normandy, during which he found time to send his mother and Edith Olivier a “bit of mistletoe from the tree above my bivvy”, and Edith a local cheese (Fig.29), his battalion engaged with the enemy for the first time on the afternoon of

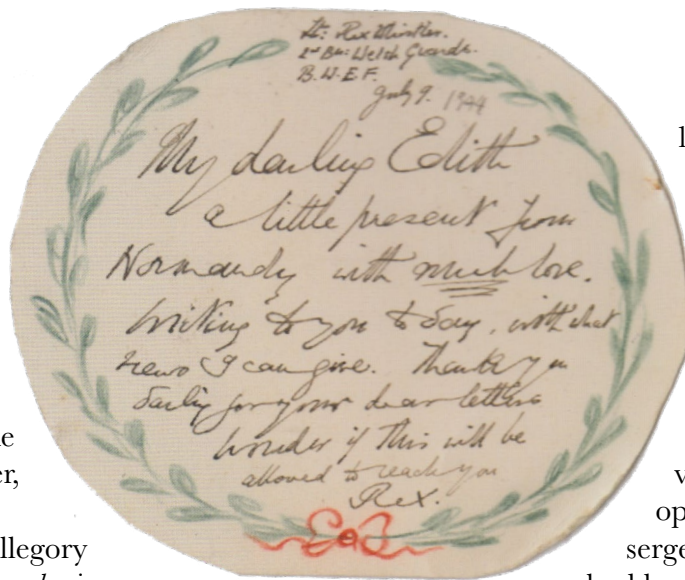


Fig.29

18th July 1944, as part of “Operation Goodwood”. Crossing a railway cutting near Caen his tank became caught in some wire. Rex and his crew got out to clear it, but came under fire from the nearby village. Rex ran across open ground to his troop sergeant’s tank to explain what

had happened and order him to deal with the attackers. As he jumped down from the tank for the return journey, a shell exploded nearby. He was thrown in the air by the force of the blast, and he fell dead, his neck broken. Sergeant Lewis Sherlock followed Rex’s orders and subdued the enemy in the village, then carried his unmarked body to a hedge under which it could lie until collected for burial later that evening. But it was found by an officer of another regiment (coincidentally an acquaintance of Laurence Whistler), who buried Rex in an Army blanket as “an unknown officer”. Lieutenant Rex John Whistler is

Fig.27 Allegory. HRH The Prince Regent awakening the Spirit of Brighton, 5–7th June 1944 (Brighton Museum and Art Gallery). Rex’s last painting, done in three hours on the wall of his final billet before embarkation.

Fig.28 Rex, with the “tough military moustache” he had grown, standing (centre) with his Cromwell tank and crew, in the grounds

of Pickering Castle, 1944. Sergeant Lewis Sherlock to the right. Fig.29 A letter accompanying some Normandy cheeses, the last gift Rex sent to Edith Olivier, July 1944.

Fig.30 “While of unsound mind”, undated sketch from a notebook. Reproduced as the final image in Laurence Whistler, Rex Whistler, *His Life and His Drawings*, 1948.

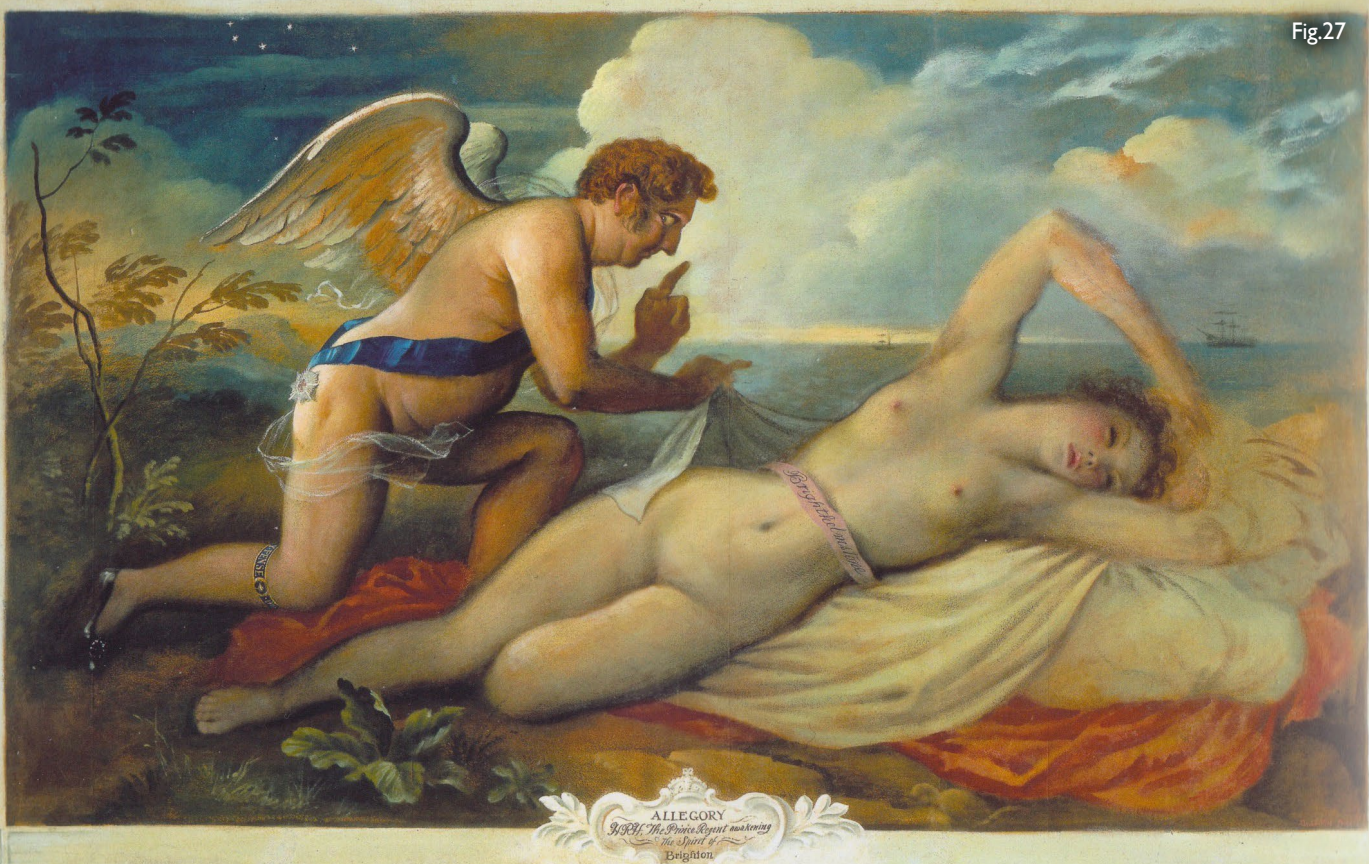


Fig.27

now buried at Banneville-La-Campagne War Cemetery, in plot III.F.22.

It is said, though I haven't been able to verify it, that of all the obituaries to appear in *The Times* during the Second World War, that for Rex Whistler prompted the most letters to the editor. He left a huge void in the lives of his family and friends, most

of all his brother, Laurence, who had idolised him. Laurence spent the rest of his long life preserving Rex's memory, preparing the catalogue mentioned above, writing two biographies of Rex and initiating exhibitions of his work. Thanks to these efforts, and those of more recent authors (see below), Rex has never slipped out of public consciousness. His complete lack of interest in the modernist art developments that were happening all around him, and the fact that, as Stephen Calloway points out, some of his best and most serious work was hidden in private properties or in expensive limited edition books such as *Gulliver's Travels* (1930) or *The Next Volume* (1932), may have led to his being overlooked in British art history: but his virtuosity, romanticism and sense of humour, the manner of his death and the poignancy of a career cut short, make him an artist of unique and enduring appeal (Fig.30).



Fig.28

Laurence Whistler wrote two biographies of his brother, Rex Whistler, *His Life and His Drawings* (Art & Technics, 1948) and *The Laughter and the Urn* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985); and a complete catalogue (with Ronald Fuller), *The Work of Rex Whistler* (Batsford, 1960). Stephen Calloway

curated an exhibition on Whistler for which he

also wrote a short catalogue, *The Triumph of*

Fancy (Brighton Museum, 2006). The

wartime work was covered in

an exhibition at the National

Army Museum in 1996, *Rex*

Whistler's War (Artist into

Tank Commander), with

a catalogue by Jenny

Spencer-Smith. Hugh

and Mirabel Cecil

gave Rex the coffee-

table treatment in

In Search of Rex

Whistler (Frances

Lincoln, 2012). In

2013, Salisbury

Museum acquired the Whistler family

archive of Rex's

letters, drawings

and sketchbooks, a

selection from which

can be seen at [www.salisburymuseum.org.uk/collecting/rex-whistler-](http://www.salisburymuseum.org.uk/collecting/rex-whistler-archive)

[archive.](http://www.salisburymuseum.org.uk/collecting/rex-whistler-archive)

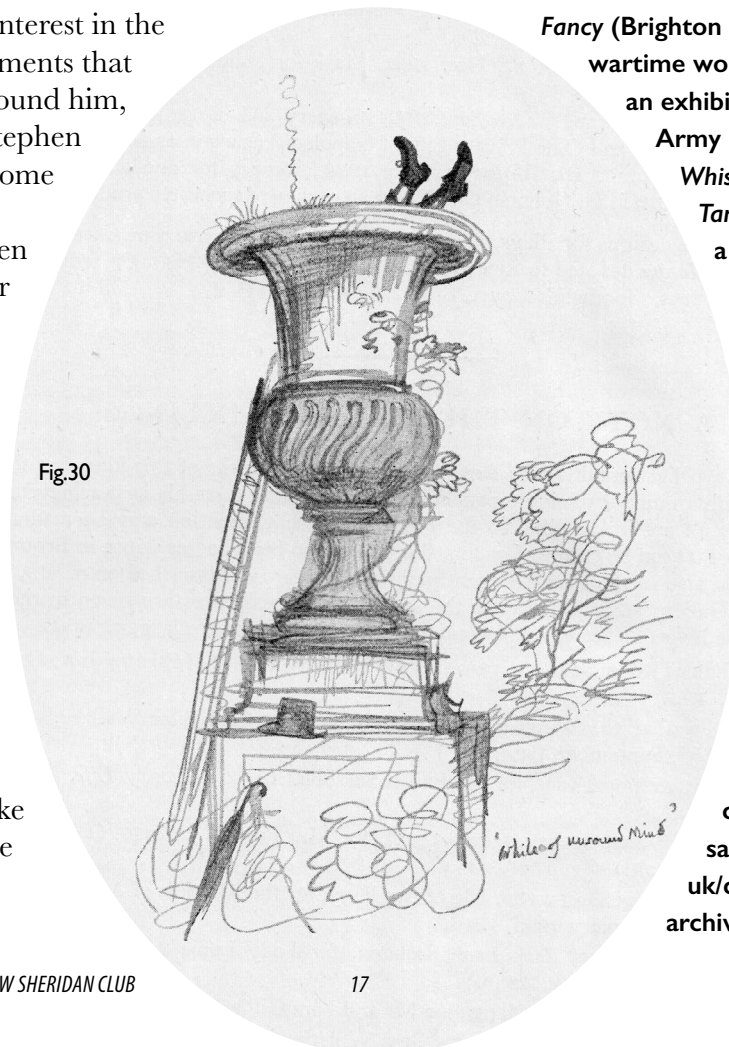


Fig.30



THE BROGUES GALLERY

WITH ARTEMIS SCARHEART



In which a Member of the New Sheridan Club is asked to introduce themselves to other Members so that those at Home and Across the Seas may all get to know fellow Club Members. No part of this interview may be used in court or bankruptcy proceedings.



Kathryn Best

Name or preferred name?

Kathryn Best

Why that nickname or nom de plume?

Apparently, my father had a crush on the actress and opera singer Kathryn Grayson, star of movie-musicals such as *Showboat* and frequently accompanied on set by legends such as Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly. My mother did not seem averse to the name—evidently the threat Grayson posed to the marriage was naught. It is also a

name with saintly associations, not that it brought much luck to the noted scholar and 4th-century martyr St Catherine of Alexandria. She was intended to be tortured to death on a spiked wheel by the Roman emperor Maxentius, but when she touched it, it broke, so she was instead beheaded.

The origins of the family name Best are from the days of the medieval courts where the troubadours—lyric poets—were granted great freedom of speech. They were charged with spreading stories of chivalry and courtly love, and acting out news of far-off lands and historical events, since it was long before the invention of theatres and newspapers. During the Crusades, the troubadour tradition led to a new and unprecedented interest in beautiful objects, elegant manners, poetry, music and literature. Eleanor of Aquitaine was the matriarch and worldwide patron of the troubadours and their “courts of love”. The other less noble origin of

the name, and the nickname I had given to me by rascals at school, was Beast—in French, *Beste*.

Where do you hail from?

From two locations: Cambridge Massachusetts, in the former colony of New England, and the Causeway Coast of Northern Ireland, in the region colonised by the British. Both Cambridge



Campari Soda bottle



Giving her NSC talk in July 2018

Favourite cocktail?

Campari Soda. Technically an aperitif, it is a reputable choice in advance of a meal, so technically it can be enjoyed before breakfast, lunch or dinner. Campari is a quintessential astringent and the backbone of a Negroni. It was invented in 1860 by Italian Gaspare Campari, popularised in the French Riviera and became the most requested drink in the Camparino Bar opened by the inventor in 1915.

(USA) and the Causeway Coast (NI) have rich histories. Cambridge was the headquarters of General George Washington during the American Revolution that ended the British Empire's presence there, for a while at least—there are now 700,000 “redcoats” in the USA (as the patriots used to call the British). The North of Ireland's Causeway Coast is famous for its stunning coastline, Bushmills Whiskey, *Game of Thrones* scenery and complicated history. During the so-called Plantation of Ulster in the 17th century, the indigenous Irish Chieftains had their lands confiscated by the Crown and resettled by Scottish and English planters—hence the dialect being somewhat unique on the island. I did spend many years in Edinburgh and Glasgow, allegedly at University, although I seem to have developed

The recipe is a closely guarded family secret—an infusion of bitter herbs, aromatic plants and fruit in alcohol and water—and up until 2006 its ingredients still included crushed insects. Now the distinctively brilliant scarlet colour is achieved by artificial means. It is still one of the most famous bitters in the world and the distinctive pre-mixed Campari Soda bottle, created in 1932 by the Italian futurist artist and designer Fortunato Depero, is still in production today. Observant Club members may detect a clever detail: the classic design is merely a reversal of the shape of the bitter glass.

Most Chappist skill?

I am obsessed with libraries. I rarely go looking for them; they seem to find me wherever I go. To paraphrase Jorge Luis Borges, I think it entirely sensible that Paradise should be a kind of library. From our family home in Northern Ireland you can see Mussenden Temple, modelled on the Temple of Vesta in Rome and built in 1774 to house the library of the eccentric Bishop of Derry and Earl of Bristol, Frederick Augustus Hervey. This “Bishops Palace” now stands in ruins on a cliff top with views of the beach where the Bishop would regularly challenge local clergymen to horseraces on the strand. I'm not sure being preoccupied with libraries is a skill, but perhaps a sign of having taken this particular proficiency too far would be to get upset thinking about the library at Alexandria.



PRICE SIXPENCE.

Don't:

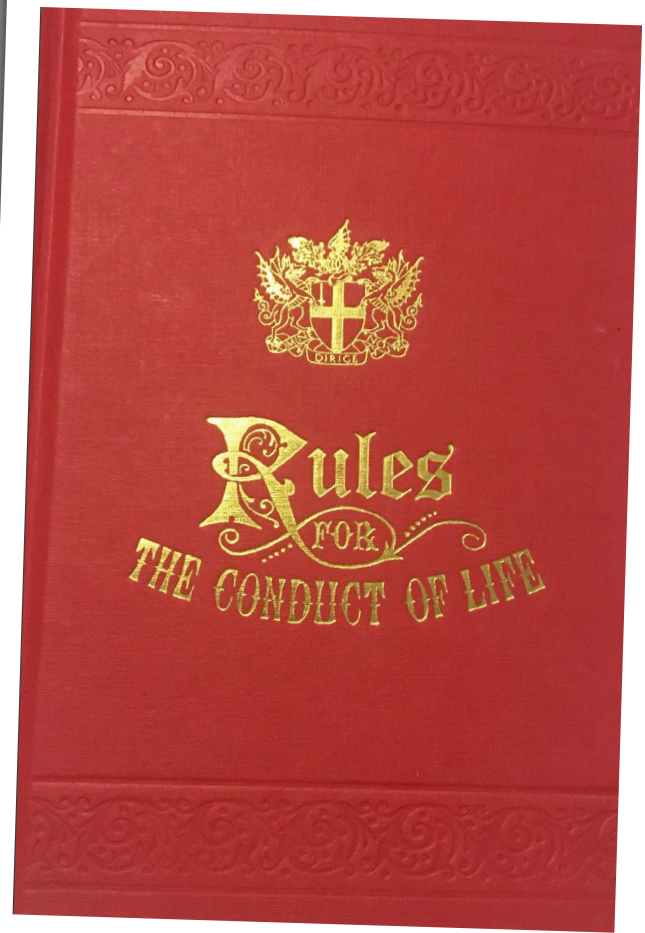
*A Manual of Mistakes and
Improprieties more or less
prevalent in Conduct
and Speech.*

If at the dinner-table, you are about to put your knife into your mouth—**DONT.**

If about to say "It is him," instead of "It is he," or "It is me," instead of "It is I," check yourself, and—**DONT.**

If, in accordance with an old-fashioned usage, you think it right to turn down the corner of a visiting-card when the lady you call upon is not at home—**DONT.**

London: WARD, LOCK & CO., Salisbury Square, E.C.



Most Chappist possession?

A concise reference book called *Don't: A Manual of Mistakes and Improprieties more or less prevalent in Conduct and Speech*, written by "Censor", the nom de plume for Oliver Bell Bunce, and published by Ward, Lock & Co. Ltd (London) in 1884. The book begins every sentence of its commentary on life and the etiquette of how to handle many situations with the word DON'T. By way of explanation, the author states that: "It so happens that most of the rules of society are prohibitory in character." Reassuringly, the Preface does offer some relief from all the "no-nos": "Anyone who carefully observes will find that nearly every rule given is frequently violated by persons of at least good social standing."

Personal Motto?

Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementia fuit: there has been no great wisdom without an element of madness.

Favourite Quotes?

DON'T be a slattern. Neatness and cleanliness are among the first requisites of a decent society.

Not a lot of people know this about me...

I was admitted into the Freedom of the City of

London

in 2011. Becoming a "Citizen of London" or "Freeman" originates from the medieval practice of granting respected citizens freedom from serfdom. More recent privileges still active in Victorian times included the rights to drive sheep and cattle over London Bridge; to the luxury of a silken rope (and therefore quick death) if condemned to be hanged; to carry an unsheathed sword in public; and if found drunk and disorderly in the City of London, to be bundled into a taxi by London Police and sent home rather than thrown into a cell. Originating in 1237 and held in the Chamberlains court at Guildhall, it is one of the oldest surviving traditional ceremonies still in existence. Freeman are given a beautifully inscribed parchment copy of their Freedom and a little red book entitled the "Rules for the Conduct of Life". Freeman are warned that "such Freedom must in no circumstances be used for self-publicity or business purposes". I trust the delicacy of this matter to the discretion of the honourable club members and ask that they forgive my immodest disclosure.



Cairo, 20

How long have you been involved with the NSC?
Since 2016.

How did you hear about the Club to begin with?

At the invitation of fellow member Francesca Albini, I joined a club outing to *The Sunken Treasures of Egypt* held at the British Museum. I was bemused by the goings on and taken aback by the number of pith helmets being worn. A Mr Hartley slipped me a rather intriguing card with the club details. The rest is history.

What one thing would you recommend to fellow Members and why (cocktail, night out, tailor, watchmaker, public house, etc.)?

The Café Royal in Edinburgh, a lofty, ornate and tile-adorned Victorian bar with real ales, whiskies, an oyster bar and other Scottish culinary delights.

Your three chosen dinner party guests from history or fiction and why?

Howard Carter, Lord Carnarvon and Tutankhamun. We can establish who is buried where, what is behind the wall of the boy king's tomb, and indeed inquire as to whether it was actually intended to be his tomb.

Did Lord Carnarvon really succumb to the Mummy's Curse, a rumour fuelled by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who suggested that his death was caused by elementals created by Tutankhamun's priests to guard the royal tomb. The epitaph on Carter's gravestone in Putney, taken from the Wishing Cup of Tutankhamun, reads: "May your spirits live, may you spend millions of years, you who love Thebes, sitting with your face to the north wind, your eyes beholding happiness." We can debate the merits of spirits and wind, happiness and Thebes, a fine conversation to document and contribute to the Institute for Alcoholic Experimentation—including full disclosure of each gentleman's preferred tippie. As the only living person, I presume I will be picking up the bill.

Favourite Member of the Glorious Committee?

Answer: Artemis Scarheart. Popular chap, I gather, as his name comes up here rather a lot.

Have you done a Turn yet? If so what was it on, if not what are you planning to do?

Yes, in July 2018. *Egypt through the Eyes of Some Adventurers*—from Bonaparte to Agatha Christie via Howard Carter and Florence Nightingale. Worthy of re-examination are the finely cut linen jackets and the bewildering blend of practicality, glamour and glitz as seen in Anthony Powell's Academy-Award-winning costume designs for Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* (1978).

Thank you for allowing yourself to be interviewed in the palatial surroundings of the NSC Club House. On behalf of the Members may I respectfully ask you to resign.





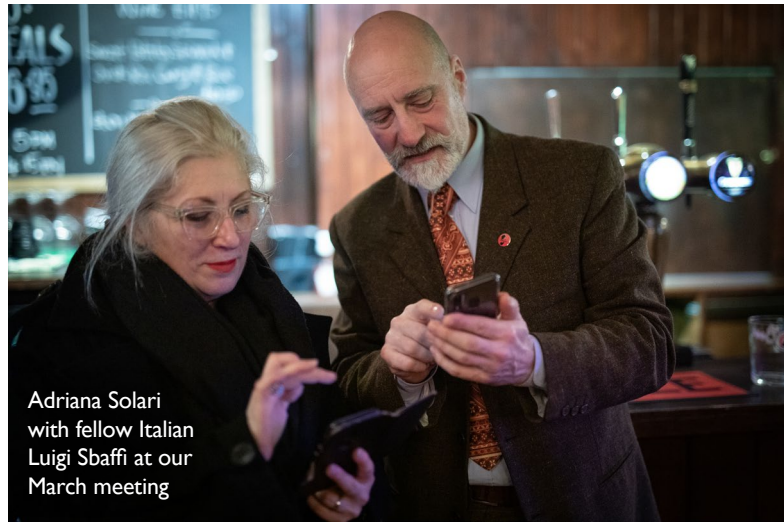
CLUB NOTES

New Member

IT SEEMS SUCH a long time ago now, but at our last corporeal meeting, two months ago, we gained a new Member, Adriana Solari. Although of Italian extraction, she lives in London these days and describes herself as a lute player, bicyclist, historical dancer and costume maker.

Club Tie Corner

A HEALTHY DOSE of actual ties to start off with this time—good to know that sartorial standards are not slipping during the lockdown. Clockwise from right: Mrs H. noticed this Club Tie in an episode of *A Touch of Frost*; of course we already knew that Captain Hastings in *Poirot* was NSC material (courtesy of Col. Cyrus Choke); a 1971 episode of *Colombo* from James Rigby; our page of detectives concludes with screen heavy Claude Mulvihill sporting Club silk in *Chinatown* (1974). Opposite page, clockwise from top left Mark Christopher offers Michel “Colouche” Colucci in the 1976 comedy film, *The Wing or the Thigh*; Adrian Prooth brings us this NSC bird with an NSC snake, painted by Maria

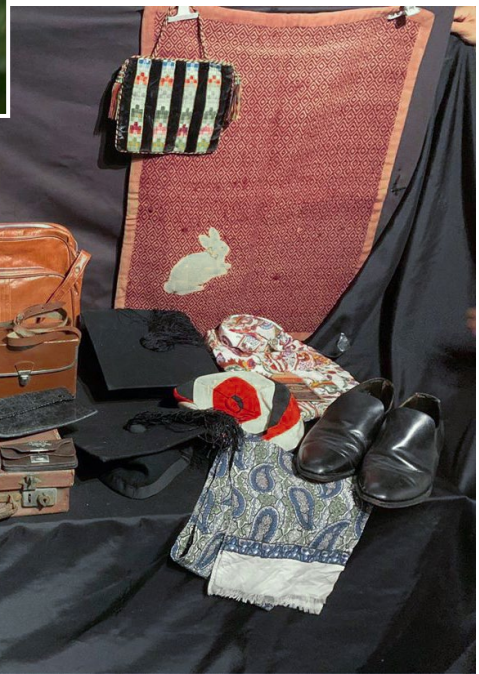
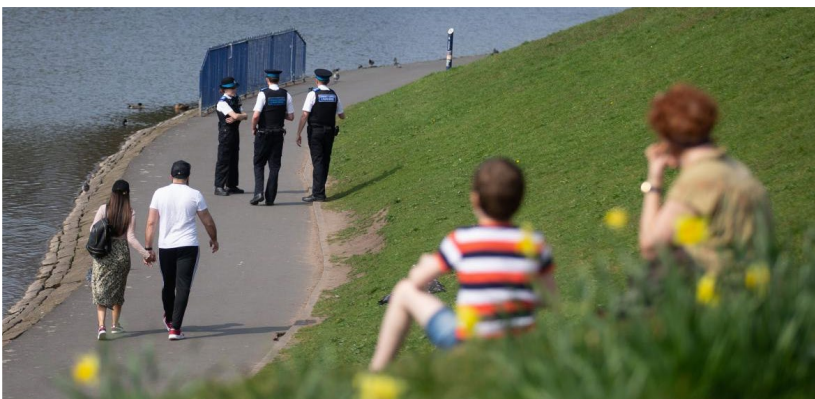


Adriana Solari with fellow Italian Luigi Sbaffi at our March meeting





Sibylla Merian (1647–1717); “I’ve just read in a book review that 95% of the colours mentioned in the Bible are black, white and red. That explains a lot,” says our Chairman Torquil; Tim Peake working his woggle, from *Actuarius*; Charlie Clench from the NFT stream of *One Man, Two Gwnors*; NSC prominence in *Ben Hur* (1959), from Col. Choke; more Bible-bashing, this time from a streamed production of *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, from Frances Mitchell.



Clockwise from top: Ivan Debono has discovered these Club-coloured audio accessories; Luca Jellinek spotted this stylishly relaxed Club look; Sean Longden was poking through Facebook marketplace and noticed this cap; Steven Smith grassed up this Club cadet for lockdown violation, and also noticed Kevin Day in this bold shirt (talking about Bob Monkhouse, apparently).



Forthcoming Events



BOTH OFFICIAL NSC JAUNTS (🎩) AND THIRD-PARTY WHEEZES WE THINK YOU MIGHT ENJOY

FOR THE LATEST developments, see the Events page at www.newsheridanclub.co.uk plus our Facebook page and the web forum.

Since it's likely that no face-to-face get-togethers will be allowed in the month of May, I will devote this section to online happenings and resources that may help you retain what goes for sanity in your household.

🎩 NSC Virtual Club Night

Wednesday 6th May

8pm BST

See page 2. In lieu of our normal monthly get-together, Oliver Lane will be livestreaming a talk on the Battle of the River Plate through the YouTube link <https://youtu.be/UPd0OkRXSl.s>.

For late-breaking news and legal disclaimers, see the Facebook event at <https://www.facebook.com/events/235056557614647>.

Virtual Pub Wednesdays: the Staying Inn

Every Wednesday

From 6pm (though many seem to start early)

www.facebook.com/events/2854780037923216

The Club's own Stuart Turner's virtual night in the pub has become a regular fixture in the lockdown calendar.

Tom Carradine's Self-Isolation Singalong

Every Thursday

8.30pm

www.facebook.com/events/651636078971942

Master of the Cockney singalong Tom Carradine brings his infamous knees-ups to cyberspace. So gather around the e-Joanna and commence caterwauling.

Marcel Lucont's Louche Lockdown Lounge

Every Thursday

9pm

Shows are broadcast via Marcel's YouTube page (www.youtube.com/marcellucont)

Admission: Free but PayPal tips welcome

Gallic raconteur Marcel Lucont offers a lockdown show of "badinage, competitions, opportunities to request chansons and poems



Be part of broadcasting history by tuning in at 8pm on Wednesday to witness the birth of Oliver Lane's media empire

and a Q&A session with the man himself". If you're on Marcel's mailing list you can enter a lottery to be part of the "audience" who seem to be able to interact with Marcel via Zoom. See the Facebook event for more details.

Jack Calloway on the wireless

Every Sunday

10am, 2pm, 6pm and 10pm

www.phonotoneclassic.com

Band leader Jack Calloway hosts his regular show on this internet radio station that plays dance music from 1925 to 1945. Jack's show



Check out the latest live recordings published to the Candlelight Club Soundcloud page, this time from the Hep Chaps

focuses on music from the 1930s. (And you can hear one of Jack's own performances on the Candlelight Club Soundcloud page below.)

Sugarpush Sundays

Every Sunday

Beginners 2pm, improvers 3pm

www.facebook.com/events/654137895419940

Dancer, dance teacher and DJ Holly France (a regular platter-spinner at the Candlelight Club) has ported her solo jazz and Charleston lesson online via Zoom. The class is free but donations via PayPal are welcome. All details on the Facebook event.

Online Dance Classes with Swing Patrol

Throughout the month

See schedule at <https://swingpatrollondon.dancecloud.com>

A variety of online classes, including Charleston, Lindy Hop, solo jazz and even Swing Dance Cardio. You buy a ticket through

the website and in return they send you a private YouTube link.

The Candlelight Club on Soundcloud

soundcloud.com/the-candlelight-club

Live recordings made of some of the bands who play at the Candlelight Club (currently some 211 tracks available to stream for free). The Candlelight Club itself (www.thecandlelightclub.com) will presumably be on hold while public gatherings are *verboden* so this is the next best thing for now. Ten new mixes from the Hep Chaps gig in July 2018 were added in the last few days.

Oliver Lane's Swing Playlist

open.spotify.com/playlist/1dfHBW91orRiD8Rf9GbZXe

Club Member Oliver Lane has been idly adding to this Spotify playlist for years and it now features some 90 songs. Fill your boots.



Can't stop those happy feet? Peruse the range of online dance classes from Swing Patrol

Samuel West on Soundcloud

<https://soundcloud.com/user-115260978>

If poetry is more your thing than music, this Soundcloud feed from actor and director Samuel West features readings by him and others.

The Arkham Hillbilly

www.facebook.com/arkhamhillbilly

Fans of H.P. Lovecraft, the 1920s horror writer and creator of the Cthulhu mythos, will be delighted to learn that the Club's own Darcy Sullivan has been spending these long weeks of self-isolation in the guise of country singer the Arkham



Hillbilly, the man who brought you the 'Miskatonic Blues', 'Jamboree at Innsmouth' and 'Doggone It, Dagon'. On this Facebook page you can see all his videos, where he sings down-home songs of the uncanny and the eldritch, as well as offering some good, old-fashioned advice about self-isolation itself. Sponsored by

Gibbous Moonshine™—the only liquor made in Arkham in a well. That sometimes glows at night.

If you're not on Facebook, check out his YouTube playlist.

Live storytelling: *Under the Pyramids* by H.P. Lovecraft

Monday 11th and Tuesday 12th May
8.30pm
Online via Zoom
Admission:
£5 per night or £9.50



Cynics might argue that the Arkham Hillbilly's output these days is as much about hyping his sponsors as it is about making music but, hell, with products as good as these you can't help wanting to make a fuss. The latest sponsors are Waite's Batrachian Crunchies™ and Eldritch Chaw, "The Chaw That Chews Back". (We are informed its secret is that it is "90% grown and 10% caught".)

for both nights (concs £3.50 and £6.50) via Eventbrite

Storyteller Jason Buck will read this Lovecraft tale across two nights (each session 40–60 minutes). *Under the Pyramids*, also published as *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*, is a first-person fictionalised account, set in Egypt in 1910, featuring (and commissioned by) escapologist Harry Houdini. Houdini finds himself kidnapped by a tour guide and thrown down a deep hole. While attempting to find his way out, he stumbles upon a gigantic ceremonial cavern and encounters the real-life deity that inspired the building of the Sphinx. "To create the authentic atmosphere and capture Lovecraft's poetic darkness, I shall be doing a prepared reading of the original text (with a few choice words removed or updated)," Jason explains. Suitable for ages 12+. More at the Facebook event.



**La tragedia del
Nova Scotia**

Terrificante testimonianza alle pagg. 12-13

DOMENICA DEL CORRIERE

**Una favola più
grande di lui**

Articolo di Dino Buzzati a pagina 5

Thanks to David Smith
for sending in this
Chappist vision of the
future, dating from the
1950s by the looks of it.
And is that an NSC tie
sported by the gentleman
in the red vehicle..?



In città gireremo così?

Ecco come potrebbe essere alleggerito, se non del tutto risolto, il problema del traffico nelle città: anziché le attuali ingombranti vetture, delle minuscole auto monoposto che occupano una minima superficie e che potrebbero essere battezzate «singolette». Walter Molino ha immaginato qui l'aspetto della stessa strada della prima tavola qualora venisse adottata su larga scala la nuova soluzione. **Serv. alle pagg. 6-7.**

