

REGN!

THE NEWSLETTER OF

174 • APRIL 2021

RAISING OBELISKS

Kathryn Best
uncovers a long-lost
ancient Egyptian
invention

Duel fuel

Torquil Arbuthnot on
the short but
swashbuckling life of
Mikhail Lermontov

Born Shawn

A glimpse into the world
of Canadian clubman
Shawn Maurice Wade

Gorey story

Darcy Sullivan on
making the least scary
Dracula movie ever



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 will take place on **Wednesday 7th April**.

Marking a full year of virtual Club Nights, your speaker this month is Club Secretary Clayton Hartley, on the perky subject of *The Rise and Fall of Izzy and Moe*. They may look like vaudevillians but, with no training, Izzy Einstein and Moe Smith became the most successful enforcement agents of Prohibition in the US in the 1920s. Despite working to uphold an unpopular law that most Americans were happy to break, such was the playfulness and ingenuity of their methods (including a bizarre array of disguises) that Izzy and Moe became immensely popular with the public—something that would ultimately lead to their downfall.

The talk will be delivered online via YouTube at 8pm: use the link <https://youtu.be/cSHbaqtncPw>.

As usual there will also be a Zoom meeting for social purposes, running from 7pm and resuming after the lecture for as long as folk feel inclined. The link for that is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84010621191?pwd=QU5RSmhi>



Izzy and Moe, Prohibition's most unlikely enforcers

[cmx5WkZyQTdTUFp6SXhwUT09](https://www.facebook.com/events/2347759275367489) (meeting ID: 840 1062 1191, passcode: 842596).

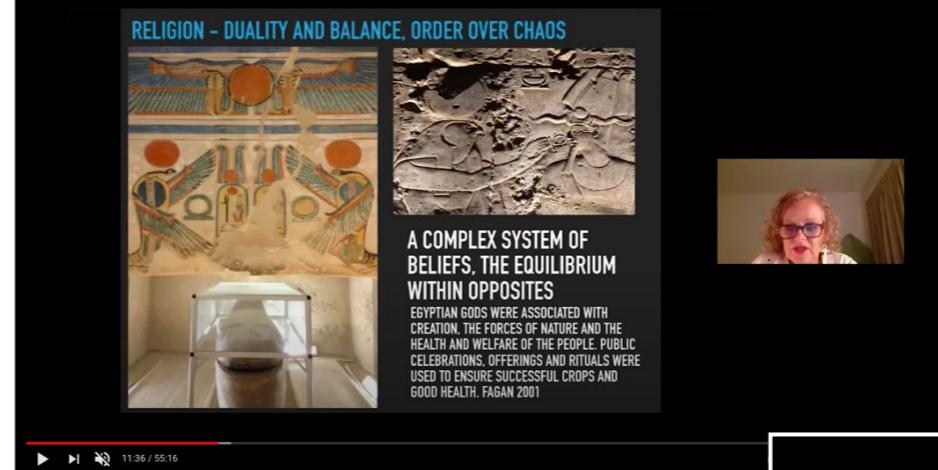
There is also a Facebook event at <https://www.facebook.com/events/2347759275367489> which might be useful to keep an eye on if we have technical problems and need to change the plan or create a new URL.

The Last Meeting

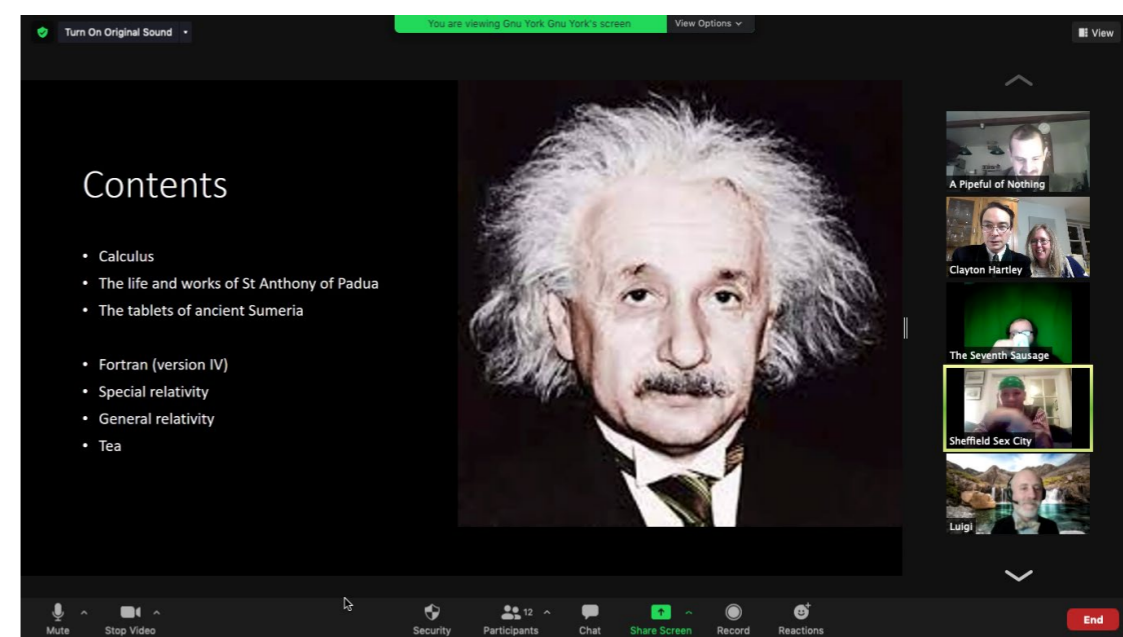
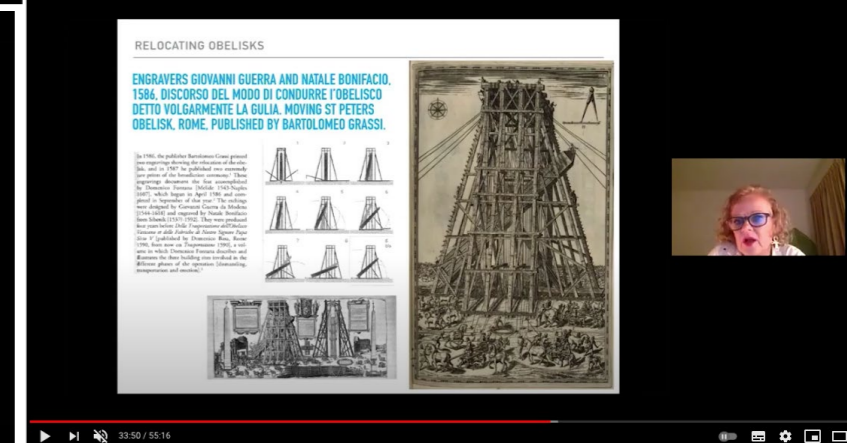
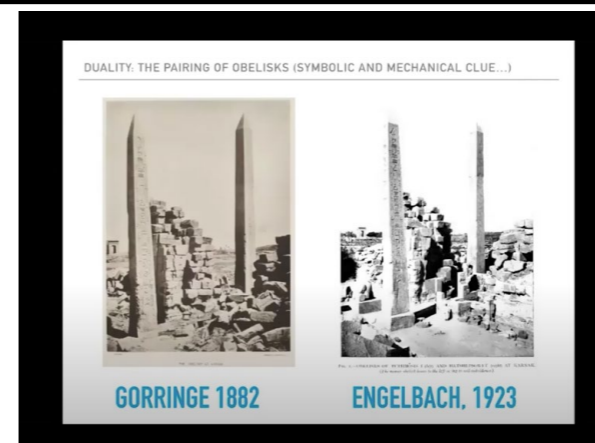
Our speaker last month was Kathryn Best, with a talk on the subject of how ancient Egyptians raised obelisks. She and her friend Mahmoud Al-Hashash have written a book on the subject, using clues as diverse as the Egyptian belief in cycles, balance and harmony and the fact that intact sites always have obelisks in pairs, not singly. It led them to believe that current theories about how obelisks were raised might be wrong; Mahmoud has even shown, in a scaled-down experiment, how the weight of two obelisks can be balanced against each other to raise them

both in a way that needs less elaborate construction and machinery than that required by previous theories.

An essay version of this talk begins on page 4.



Stills from Kathryn's Zoom address about her theories on how the Ancient Egyptians raised obelisks. You can see a video record of the talk on the Club's YouTube channel (55 minutes including some questions at the end) at <https://youtu.be/KH42usplqzw>. On the channel you can also see videos of almost all the online talks we've had, plus the Earl of Essex's talk last September on Nazis on the Riviera, which was delivered to a live audience at the Wheatsheaf but simultaneously streamed and recorded.



(Left) Our weekly Zoom pub quizzes continue: here you can see a typical list of rounds from Tony Reid—obviously he was going easy on us to get us warmed up. Only joking. The actual subjects included poisonous plants, Mills and Boon novel titles and things Tony's dad doesn't like.

RAISING OBELISKS

Unearthing a long-forgotten Ancient Egyptian invention

FOR CENTURIES, people have wondered how the ancient Egyptians built their magnificent pyramids and temples, and how their colossal statues and obelisks were erected using the primitive methods available at the time. Colossal statues and obelisks in particular trigger acute fascination owing to the enormous challenges presented by monuments of such a large scale. Obelisks are among some of the most well-known wonders of engineering in terms of their formation, transportation and

**By Kathryn Best with
Mahmoud Hassaan
Al-Hashash**

erection at important sites throughout Egypt. Like other researchers before us, our curiosity was triggered by the phenomenon of the obelisk, and so began our explorative research journey. How were the obelisks raised in ancient Egypt? Is it of significance that obelisks were

frequently found in pairs at major sites? Do historical assumptions misguide the search for an answer as to how obelisks were raised? Were the ancient Egyptians in actual fact not primitive thinkers but *systems thinkers*?

Why are Egyptian Obelisks a Mystery?

At the time of ancient Egypt, and according to Labib Habachi, it was the ability of obelisks to embody a complexity of meanings that ensured they held great significance in the lives of the people. Since that time, the question of how the obelisks were raised grew to be a marvellous and peculiar riddle that has continued to baffle people for centuries. Even today, and despite global interest and numerous theoretical explanations and practical attempts, researchers are still not clear on how it was achieved.

An obelisk is a rectangular stone pillar with a tapered top in the shape of a small pyramid. It was the Greek historian Herodotus who coined the name, although the Egyptians called them *techn(u)* or *tekhen(u)*—“to pierce” (the sky). Author Joshua

Hatshepsut's Obelisk at Karnak Temple. Built in 1457 BC, the obelisk is 97 feet tall and weighs 357 tons



Commissioned by Hatshepsut, this monolith was intended to be 137 feet high and 1,170 tons in weight. Had it not cracked and been abandoned, this obelisk would have been the largest and heaviest obelisk ever erected in Egypt.

Mark points out that “although many cultures around the world...employed the obelisk form, only ancient Egypt worked in monolithic stone”. Obelisks were commonly found standing on a base or pedestal in temple complexes, in pairs that were almost identical in size, weight and height. They varied in size from small funerary stones to towering monoliths made of red Aswan granite. Referring to the obelisk at Luxor Temple, classical scholar George Long gives us an idea of their powerful presence: “Of all the works of Egyptian art which, by the simplicity of their form, their colossal size and unity, and the beauty of their sculptured decorations that

excite our wonder and admiration, none can be put in comparison with obelisks.”

To the ancient Egyptians who invented the form, obelisks were a solar cult symbol that glorified the powerful importance of the sun. At Heliopolis, twin obelisks were built to honour the sun gods, with the pyramidon tops capped in gold to symbolise both the sun's splendour and making contact with the divine. Each obelisk was carefully raised and positioned so the first and last light of day would touch their lofty peaks. Symbolically, obelisks also embodied the creation myth of Heliopolis, a story that describes how the sun god Atum called out for life and light while standing on a primordial

mound that emerged from a formless swamp of raw potential. The pyramid-shaped top of the obelisk represents this moment of creation—the birth of the world. Further, and according to Brian Curran, obelisks were also a symbol of the Pharaoh's right to rule and connection to the divine. It was their geometric genius, stylistic perfection, monumental dimensions and precision engineering that ensured obelisks were adopted by the pharaohs, royal authorities and priesthood as important tools to assert their status.

Obelisks are still considered wonders of engineering today. Weighing up to four hundred tons, they were cut from the bedrock as a single stone block, shaped and smoothly finished, and transported and erected at important sites throughout Egypt—a remarkable achievement when considering the simple technologies available in ancient times.

For astronomer Gerald Hawkins, their singular nature was of significant importance: “The obelisk had to have been made in one piece, monolithic, because it was levered up into position as a telephone pole might be set up in a hole in the ground.”

“Mystery creates wonder, and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand.”

**—Neil Armstrong,
Astronaut**

No doubt the Egyptians learned about the practical need to work within the limitations of granite through trial and error so as to avoid cracking the monolith. For the last three

In *The Problem of Obelisks* (1923), English engineer Reginald Engelbach proposed several obelisk-raising ideas. One theory involved dragging an obelisk up a ramp using rollers and a sled and lowering it down into a funnel-shaped pit where, aided by stabilising ropes, it came to rest on a pedestal



millennia, these obelisks stood tall and strong and proved, even by today's standards of technology, that they "still bear witness to their former skill, might and piety", as stated by Labib Habachi. It is likely that the ancient Greeks, upon first encountering obelisks in Egypt, shared the same awe and admiration that we still feel for these marvels of civilisation today. Out of the original 20 obelisks in Luxor's Karnak Temple, only three remain standing on site today.

Raising Obelisks: A Historical Review

Making and moving an object of this size is a highly challenging undertaking, and for centuries it has been unclear as to how it was achieved. From theoretical speculation to practical experimentation, in back gardens and commercial quarries, and using a variety of materials and approaches, scholarly investigators and maverick engineers have researched and developed their ideas with one goal in mind—to

funnel into which they were dropped. Reginald Engelbach believed that, apart from their religion, the ancient Egyptians were essentially practical men, and proposed two possible

“Our ancestors decided to hand us a masterpiece of engineering wrapped in a puzzle. Perhaps out of a wry sense of humour, a challenge to future generations of humankind, or maybe out of sheer modesty as if they were saying: there is nothing to it.”

—Hussein Baher, *A Portrait of Egyptian Civilization*

obelisk-raising theories that stood out as being reasonable: firstly, using lever thinking, and secondly, building an enormous ramp. These theoretical proposals by Engelbach were followed by those of other egyptologists and engineers such as Cevrier, Habachi, Choisy, Shiells, Arnold and Tasker.

In addition, a number of practical experiments have been conducted by more contemporary researchers, many backed up by the substantial resources required to re-enact and record the raising of an obelisk—physical man power, financial investment and a large production team. Despite this, the practical erection attempts were unable to demonstrate conclusively how the obelisk was positioned at the top of the ramp in the first place. Arguably, this is the hardest task in the whole process, and since this manoeuvre

answer conclusively the question: *How did the ancient Egyptians raise their colossal obelisks?*

Historically, and according to Brian Curran, most obelisk-raising theories involve mechanical advantage, or significant man power, or a combination of both, and fall into three categories. Firstly, using levers; secondly, pulling with ropes; and thirdly, drawing the obelisks up a ramp-like incline to a

requires so much force to move the body of the obelisk upwards from its horizontal, stationary position on the ground, that it does beg the question of the actual point of using such great effort. These practical attempts can be seen in the PBS NOVA documentary *Secrets of Lost Empires: Obelisks* (Barnes, Lehner, Hopkins, Whitby; WGBH1994) and the sequel, *Secrets of Lost Empires II: Pharaoh's Obelisk* (Cort, Handhouse Studio; WGBH, 2000), as well as smaller budget attempts by Michel Michel and later Gordon Pipes.

One unusual attempt worthy of note was that of academic Morteza Gharib who helped Maureen Clemmons develop her obelisk-raising idea—an idea which was inspired by a hieroglyphic inscription. In the inscription, men are holding what Clemmons believes are ropes that lead, via some kind of mechanical system, to a giant bird in the sky. She proposed that the bird was actually a giant kite, and men were using the kite to lift a heavy object. According to Joshua J. Mark, the idea was put to the test: “The team raised a 6,900-pound obelisk using kites, a pulley system and a support frame. Harnessing wind power and calculating leverage needed for the pulley system carefully, the obelisk was raised in 25 seconds.” Although Gharib asserts that this was the method the ancient Egyptians used, it remains speculative as no evidence of kites being used in the past has been found.

Raising Obelisks: Our Hypothesis

Conceived in 1999, our theory was slowly brought to life conceptually and experimentally over the following years. We reviewed previous research, publications, resources and documentaries, and immersed ourselves in the remarkable nature of this ancient civilization, the historical significance of obelisks, and previous obelisk-raising theories and attempts. What became clear was that to the best of our knowledge, no solution had been proposed that conclusively answered the question of how obelisks were raised in ancient Egypt. Indeed, we recognised that some theories ended up raising more questions than providing answers, and that previous expertise on the subject tended to suffer from many historical and theoretical assumptions. Our insights into existing phenomena lead us to three

breakthroughs in our thinking around the raising of obelisks.

Firstly: Duality as represented by a set of scales. Pharaohs were all too familiar with the dualistic nature of life, demonstrated in their kingship of the two lands of Upper and Lower Egypt and their twofold existence as divine and human. Egyptian beliefs also held that opposing polarities of light and dark could be brought into balance in the face of chaos and disorder, and in this way stability and order were maintained. Of significance to our theory is the fact that obelisks throughout Egypt were most frequently found at major sites in pairs—even if they now stand separately around the world in far-off locations such as London, Paris, Rome and New York.



The making of strong rope from the triple twining of palm tree fibres can still be seen in Egypt today

Secondly: Simplicity as represented by a feather. Using systems thinking, we identified a holistic yet simple method, a technique not misguided by complicated engineering or historical assumptions but guided by the principles of *ma'at* in action. We identified the many ways in which the goddess Ma'at (truth, simplicity, beauty and balance) and the moral code of *ma'at* (right order in life; balance and perfection) were present in Egyptians' lives, duties and business relations. A sense of *ma'at* ensured the harmonious balancing of opposites which was essential to the daily, worldly and other-worldly sense of overall stability and cosmic order.

Thirdly: Circularity as represented by the divine order of life. Ancient Egypt was a practical and inventive culture that made the most of locally available materials. For example, the common palm tree was a valuable resource

for shelter, shade, food and household articles, as well as being used to make ropes and rollers to move large objects. We hypothesized that an incredibly strong rope net, coiled and woven from date palm fronds, could have played a key role in raising obelisks, particularly when used alongside lever thinking, counterpoise and the natural laws of gravity.

By broadening our context, we began to see the ways in which every aspect, detail, part, whole and interdependency of Egyptians' lives was considered to perfection, on a micro and macro level, from the commonly available date palm tree to the monumental act of raising the obelisks, to the eventual building of an extraordinary civilization. The technique for raising obelisks that we propose is simple, even obvious in nature, and might be better described as a long-forgotten ancient Egyptian

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

A total of 28 obelisks were discovered in Egypt and today eight remain. The rest—either removed by foreign nations or gifted away by the Egyptian government—now stand in Italy (13), United Kingdom, France, Israel, Poland, Turkey and the United States.

invention. Indeed, its simplicity could alter the preconceptions we hold about the ancient Egyptian mindset and the knowledge, engineering and systems thinking abilities they possessed at that time. As we continued to find supporting evidence, we evolved a mental image of our hypothesis. The big challenge was

becoming clear. If we conducted a real life, at scale experiment, would it work in practice?

Raising Obelisks: The Experiment

It was clear to us that what had been overlooked is the fact that there were almost always a pair of nearly identical colossi or obelisks standing next to each other. Our hypothesis is anchored in this first vitally significant key. Engelbach, for example, draws our attention to an Egyptian called Dhuinty who describes (in

his tomb inscription in Thebes) that he erected two obelisks of 108 cubits in length, and it is, arguably, more often the case than not that evidence on obelisks from ancient times refers to their being in pairs. It is our belief that the pairing of obelisks itself is the main *modus operandi* of how the obelisks were raised and made to stand upright. Two obelisks could be raised together in one simple process, with each obelisk's weight and the force of gravity used as a counterpoise throughout a mechanical process such that each obelisk would resist and balance the weight and gravity of the other. In this way, the erection process is achieved in a much simpler way than presented in previous proposals on the raising of obelisks.

The *second* critical key to our hypothesis lay in the use of a giant net of ropes which, with almost no additional assistance, could easily lift the two obelisks upwards using the counterpoise of each obelisk, the principles of lever thinking, and the natural force of gravity. Coiled and woven from date palm fronds, this incredibly strong rope netting was key to raising the obelisks into their standing positions. It is well known that palm trees were used for rollers and for ropes, and it would appear that many researchers have overlooked the strength of the palm fibre when woven. Indeed, the making of strong rope from palm fibres can still be seen in Egypt today.

But Would It Work?

In order to put our ideas to the test, we devised a series of practical experiments. Archaeology is the model for a form of historical research that brings to light unremembered facts from the past. Our intention was to use *applied* research and build three different scales of working models to demonstrate and evidence our ideas in action, using only the materials available during ancient Egyptian times. The first experiment was conducted in 2016, and this and each successive experiment was visually recorded. The successful results proved that the method works in practice, at scale, to raise obelisks, and we believe this process was the one used in ancient times to raise full-size Egyptian obelisks. To the best of our knowledge, this process has not previously been attempted, and it is our ambition to conduct a full-scale experiment. This is not without complication and with sufficient support, we hope to put our ideas to the test at full scale.

It was the role of the pharaoh to commission and build architectural and engineering wonders in honor of the gods (glory), to reign over the two kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt

Raising Obelisks

Unearthing a Long Forgotten Ancient Egyptian Invention



KATHRYN BEST
AND
MAHMOUD HASSAAN AL HASHASH

(unity), and to ensure the harmony of opposites (duality) throughout the two lands—so preserving and reflecting *ma'at* in everything that occurred as a manifestation of *heaven on earth*. It is our assertion that the ancient Egyptians were systems thinkers and had more know-how than currently assigned within Egyptology. But is the method we propose the definitive technique used in ancient Egypt to raise obelisks? Mahmoud and I welcome open-minded critical debate

on the matter and since no records exist on how obelisks were raised, perhaps no one will ever conclusively answer this tantalising riddle. Club members are welcome to volunteer their own alternative theories and uncanny speculations, however peculiar, and indeed join us in Egypt one day to raise a pair of full-size obelisks. We invite you to obtain a copy of the book, *Raising Obelisks*, available on Amazon, and if you feel so inclined, please do leave us a review.

BOOK DETAILS

Raising Obelisks: Unearthing a Long Forgotten Ancient Egyptian Invention, by Kathryn Best (academic, author, architect) and Mahmoud Al Hashash (independent Egyptologist) offers a thought-provoking account of their recent investigation into how obelisks were raised in ancient Egypt, a story which concludes with the raising of several obelisks at scale in Luxor, Upper Egypt, using only the resources, materials and technologies available in the past. By offering a fresh perspective on the exceedingly difficult task of obelisk-raising, the authors also hope to spark curious interest and further investigation into the assumptions we hold about the ancient Egyptians and the level of knowledge and skills they possessed at the time. The book is available on Amazon UK at <https://amzn.to/3gS2Pzc>.

Mahmoud experiments with raising two obelisks simultaneously



MIKHAIL LERMONTOV

By Torquil Arbuthnot

MIKHAIL LERMONTOV WAS BORN in Moscow in 1814, the son of a retired army captain. He was descended from George Learmont, a Scottish officer who entered the Russian service in the early 17th century. When Lermontov was three years old his mother died, and he was brought up, rather spoiled, by his grandmother on her estate in Penzenskaya province. As a child he was often ill, and was taken to spas in the Caucasus, where the exotic landscapes created lasting impressions on him. In 1827 he returned to Moscow for his schooling, and became acquainted with the poetry of Pushkin and Byron. He became known as something of a wit, though renowned also for a cruel humour that expressed itself in caricatures (he was a talented artist) and wounding comments.

He entered Moscow University in 1830, where he was remembered for his aloofness and haughtiness, his proficiency with the violin, and for playing pranks on the professors. "Everyone could see that Lermontov was obnoxious, rough and daring, and yet there was something alluring in his firm moroseness," said a fellow



"What of it? If I die, I die. It will be no great loss to the world, and I am thoroughly bored with life. I am like a man yawning at a ball; the only reason he does not go home to bed is that his carriage has not arrived yet."

– *A Hero of Our Time*

student. His attitudes (common among students at the time) of dislike of the tyrannical tsarist state and its treatment of the serfs caused him to quarrel with a fageyish professor, and he left the university in 1832, entering a cadet school in St Petersburg.

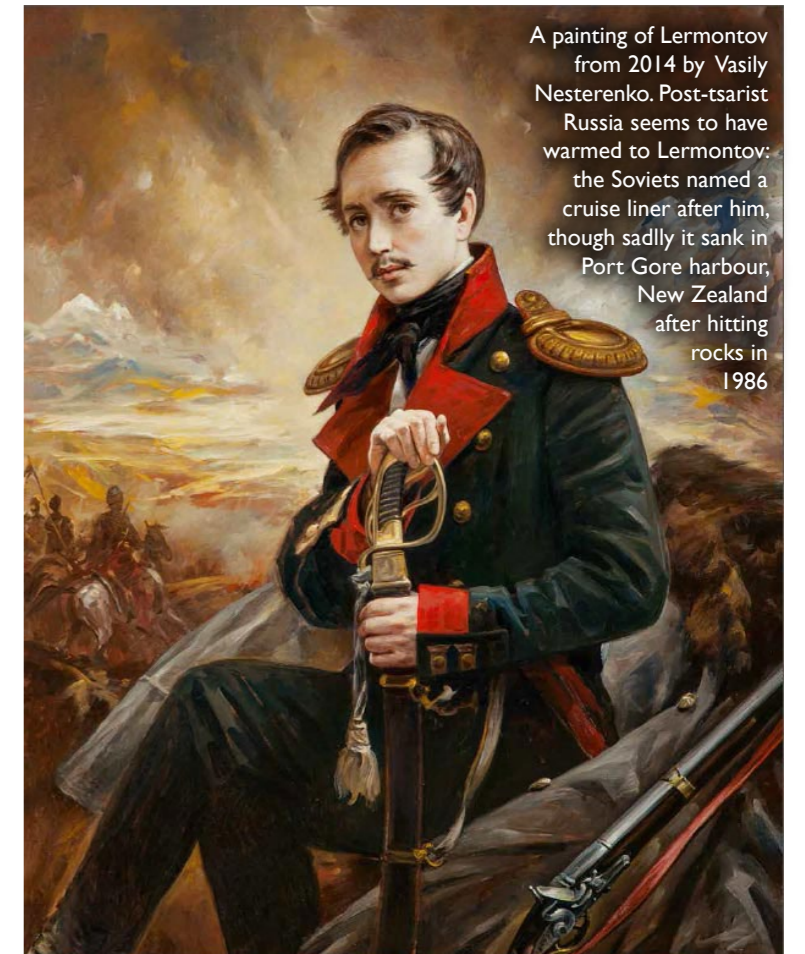
In 1834 he joined one of the smartest regiments, the Life Guard Hussars, with the rank of cornet, and was stationed near St Petersburg. He appears to have spent a good deal of his time attending balls and dances, and producing poems and plays that often satirised aristocratic life. In 1837 one of Lermontov's heroes, Pushkin, challenged his wife's alleged lover to a duel and was killed. Lermontov's reaction was to write an elegy, "The Death of a Poet", which accused the Tsar and his court of complicity in, and being the cause of, Pushkin's death. Because of this poem Tsar

Nicholas I exiled Lermontov to a regiment in the Caucasus.

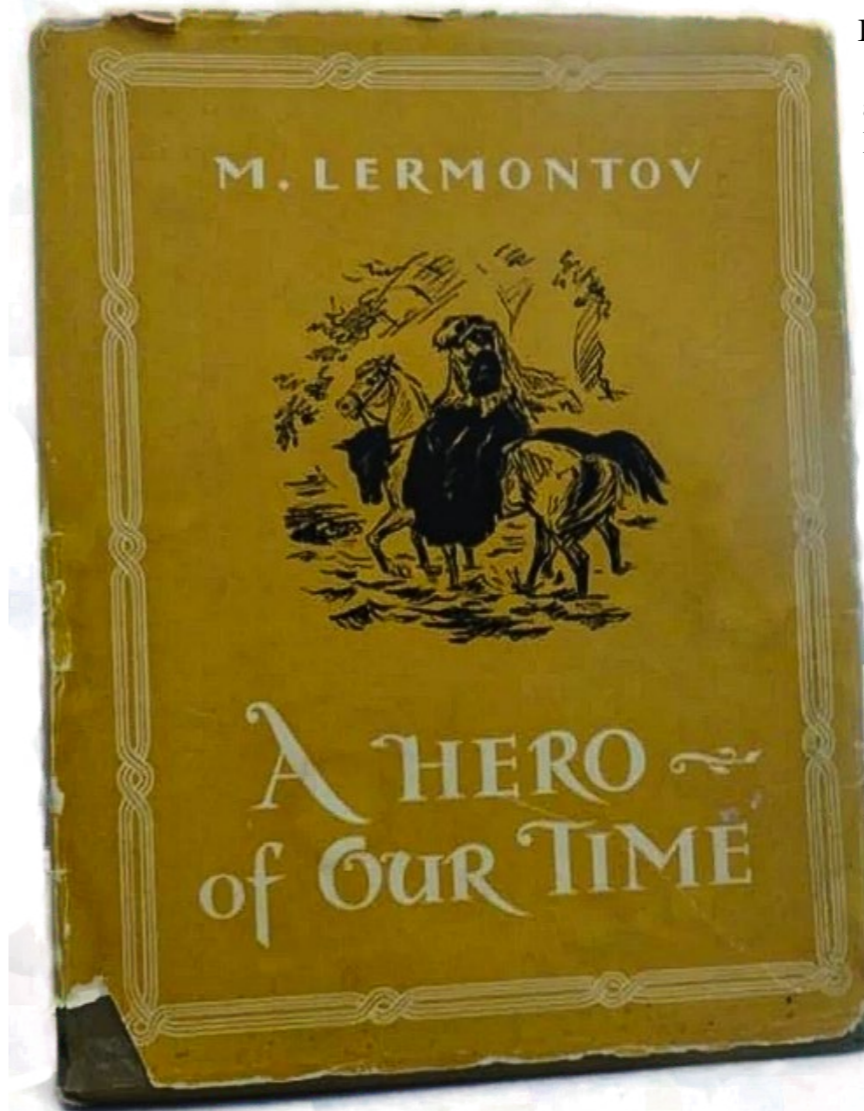
Lermontov was allowed to return to Moscow in 1838, during which period he published his masterpiece, the novel *A Hero of Our Time*. In January 1840, at a ball, Lermontov quarrelled with the son of the French Ambassador,

a quarrel that resulted in a duel in which Lermontov was slightly wounded. Lermontov was once again exiled to the Caucasus where Russia was fighting an expansionist war. In many ways Lermontov was in his element, in a regiment made up of aristocratic officers who had blotted their copybooks, others out for a bit of adventure, and Poles suspected of separatist activities. He distinguished himself in skirmishes against insurgents, and was by all accounts extremely physically brave in hand-to-hand fighting. However, the Tsar had taken a particular dislike to Lermontov and wouldn't allow him to receive the medals for gallantry for which he'd been recommended.

A Hero of Our Time is divided into six short novellas (mostly set in the Caucasus and featuring smugglers, Cossacks, brigands, duelling soldiers and aristocratic femmes fatales). They concern the exploits of a



A painting of Lermontov from 2014 by Vasily Nesterenko. Post-tsarist Russia seems to have warmed to Lermontov: the Soviets named a cruise liner after him, though sadly it sank in Port Gore harbour, New Zealand after hitting rocks in 1986



Byronic soldier called Pechorin, a proud and wilful man who'll engage in any adventure (military or amorous) to relieve his ennui, and who leaves a string of broken hearts behind him.

The novel also prophetically describes the duel that killed Lermontov. In 1841 Lermontov, against orders, went to the spa town of Pyatigorsk on the grounds that he needed to recover his health. He said of the town that one was "enflamed by the ladies during the days, and the bed-bugs at night". At a party a fellow officer, Nicholas Martynov, took issue with Lermontov's jokes and witticisms, and challenged Lermontov to a duel. The duel took place at the foot of Mount Mashuk on 27th July 1841. Lermontov, it is alleged, said he would shoot into the air. Martynov, however, had the first shot and Lermontov was killed instantly with a bullet to the heart. He was 26. Many of his best poems were discovered posthumously in a pocket-book found on his body.

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.



Shawn Wade

Name or preferred name?

Shawn Maurice Wade.

Why that nickname or nom de plume?

Shawn is my name. Some call me the Duke of Burnaby. I also have a few other nicknames: they are polite but I'll keep them between myself and those friends who call me by them.

Where do you hail from?

I am of British Descent but I live in British Columbia Canada in Burnaby which is part of Greater Vancouver.

Favourite cocktail?

I am not a huge drinker but I do like a Gin and Tonic and I love Champagne. Donations welcome! Especially Champagne.

Most Chappist skill?

I used to have this trick where I'd whip out my pocket watch on the dance floor with a flourish and look at the time and snap it back in one motion. Useful if you don't want to be late for your next important date. I also do calligraphy so I have made my own signs and cards.

Most Chappist possession?

Probably you want me to say something snappy like family heirloom opium pipe or Great Grandfather's captured German Bayonet, but I'm going to go for my pocket watch (I have several) and my fountain pen (I have literally dozens). They are practical and used by me everyday.

Personal Motto?

"Never Give In" is my motto.

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

...but I started out writing left-handed and got switched. I can still use both hands for most things, including handling chopsticks which I use for many things including eating spaghetti.

How long have you been involved with the NSC?

Assuming you don't kick me out after this I have been a member of the NSC for a little over one year.

How did you hear about the Club to begin with?

A friend of mine introduced me to the club. He has yet to join but he subscribes to *The Chap* magazine.

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

Being in Canada I'm not sure which of my old haunts in London is still open. I do enjoy the restaurant in Fortnum and Mason's, the one by the Food Hall. They do a nice tea and I had some lovely quail eggs there. My shirtmakers seem to have fallen on hard times (Pink and Lewin) but Thomas Pink may come back yet. I love to watch the New Guard and Band tune up outside of Wellington Barracks most days when I'm in London. The best free show in town.

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

Sir Winston Churchill, Jesus Christ and Fred Astaire. Sir Winston is my political idol. I want to hear his after-



dinner stories and ask him some questions. Jesus Christ is the most amazing and perfect human who ever lived—I'd love to talk to him. Fred Astaire is my dancing idol and I'd love to talk choreography with him. Sir Winston was also a fan so the two of them would have lots to talk about in case Jesus and I got hot and heavy into theology.

Favourite Member of the Glorious Committee?

Answer: Artemis Scarheart.

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

I can do turns on many things. Most people seem to like my talk on the Statute of Westminster. Although I also get good marks for my talk on The Battle of Waterloo. Perhaps it's my Duke of Wellington costume they like!

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.



DRACULA HAS RISEN

FROM THE

CARDBOARD BOX

Celebrated auteur **Darcy Sullivan** describes how he created his latest masterpiece

I HAVE BEEN GIVEN the Edward Gorey Dracula Toy Theatre not once, but twice. That's understandable, as I love horror and I love Edward Gorey, whose finely etched gothic characters would be right at home in the NSC scrapbook. The first time I got this kit—which is based on Gorey's actual stage and Tony-winning costume designs for a 1977 Broadway production of *Dracula*, with Frank Langella as the Count—I wrote a silly script and performed it with my children.

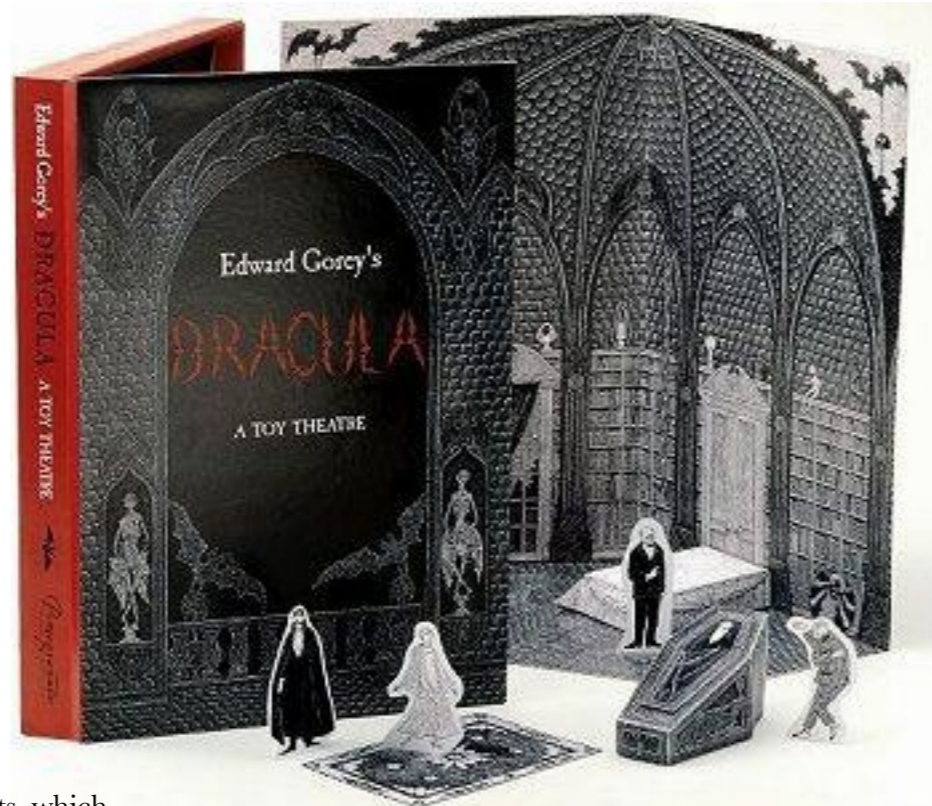
That was 15 years ago. The second time I got this gift was December 2020, and again I was inspired, this time to create a video from my old script, using friends and family as the cast.

Lockdown will do that to you—give you the ambition for grand projects, which are slowly suffocated by lethargy, Zoom gloom and Netflix. This, though, is the story of one such lockdown project that was completed, along with handy tips for anyone who wants to make movies using everyday objects lying around the house, PowerPoint and the remarkable patience of friends.

Casting

The Edward Gorey Dracula Toy Theatre comes with eight characters, three sets and a synopsis of what happens in each act. I'd already written the script using the synopsis—the six named characters all had substantial parts, and I'd expanded the role of the Maid into an inveterate liar who pops up at the worst possible times to chirp, "Biscuit?" (Of course, there are no bad times to be offered a biscuit.)

My son and daughter (both in their 20s, both



with acting experience, both Edward Gorey and horror fans) and my wife were in. For deadpan Dr Seward, I had in mind one individual only: the editor of this very publication, Clayton Hartley. Clayton suggested his wife Ali would be glad to play along, so she became mad Renfield, a bit of gender-blind casting for which I expect to carry home the trophies come awards season.

But who could be Dracula? "You know who would be great?" I said to my wife. "Robert Lloyd Parry." Robert is an actor and performer best known for his readings in character as M.R. James and has appeared in, for instance, Mark Gatiss's recent documentary about James. I've met him on several occasions, and it was a thrill when he agreed to be in *Dracula*. He told me he doesn't do a lot of accents, and was likely to sound like a Hungarian club bouncer, which made him even more perfect for the role.



Recording

The entire cast recording was done on a Zoom call, which would later pose some problems. People in the same room had different amounts of echo; one person's mic picked up every "p" and "t" as a small sonic boom. Only Robert recorded separately, using the Zoom call for reference.

My one directorial note to the cast was to play it straight, like a radio melodrama, and not to try to make the jokes funny. They did this admirably, which made it all much funnier.

Filming

I toyed with the idea of using stop motion animation, like Ray Harryhausen or the Aardman folks. For about two seconds. Stop motion involves moving each character a little bit, photographing the scene, then moving it a bit more and photographing it again. Not only would this take ages, it would require a locked-down camera or fancy software. The simpler alternative was just to film the characters on the sets from multiple angles to create the scenes,

and use simple motion in my video software.

Focusing on the characters with my phone's camera threw the background of the set into soft focus, creating a nice 3D effect. However, I couldn't shoot close-ups this way because the camera couldn't focus on something that close to it. Instead, I shot each character against a neutral background, and shot the sets with no characters. In PowerPoint, I used the Remove Background feature on the photo of a character, cropped it to just their head and shoulders, and superimposed the "close-up" on the shot of the set, which I blurred to create the 3D effect. An advantage of this approach is that I could also flip a character horizontally, so that they could be looking the other direction if needed, to create the conversation scenes.

Every character in the set has a thick white outline, as well as a tiny cardboard "stand" inserted crossways into their feet. I could have removed these but decided part of the fun was the cardboard cut-out nature of the production.



Animating

Once I'd photographed everything, I imported the shots into PowerPoint, one photo per slide, and arranged them to create each scene. My video software has basic "move image" functions, so I could use that to create some motion. (Because Renfield is a nervous character, every



scene with Renfield has some motion.)

However, a handful of scenes required actual movement within an image, such as heads ducking behind a sofa and the maid keeling over. These I created in PPT by superimposing elements (characters, the sofa) on a photo of the set, then animating the elements in PPT; once the timing was set up, I saved the result as a Windows Media Video (WMV).

The biggest “animation” challenge was the last two words of the script, a stage direction: “Everyone dances.” How? I finally decided to combine the dancing with the credits, to make it like the end of a play, where actors take their bows in groups, according to their prominence. I placed two characters at a time in the foreground, with the others in the background, then inserted a knife beneath the stage and jiggled it to simulate a dancing effect. So that end sequence is a series of actual videos, edited together in PPT, saved out as a WMV and imported into the video software.

Once I had all the static slides sized, I saved them out as JPEGs, then uploaded the JPEGs and the WMV files into the video software, HD Movie Maker PRO, the PRO version costing all of £20 or so. One of the transition effects between images (JPEGs) is called Saturation, and to my delight it looked like lightning, which I used at opportune moments. Most of the “special effects” were created using old-school movie trickery. To create Dracula dissolving into ash, I took a single image in PowerPoint and then used the Artistic Effects and Correction features to create progressively blurred and fragmented versions of his face, put these in order in

HD Movie Maker PRO and used Fade transitions to do the kind of “lap dissolve” that created the transformation scenes in 1941’s *The Wolfman*.

Sound and Music

My daughter had introduced me to a programme called Audacity, which I use for my musical project the Arkham Hillbilly. I imported the audio file from the Zoom call, and the separate recording I got from Robert Lloyd Parry, then removed as many of the background noises as possible and tightened up the timing by removing gaps between lines.

I needed music, but didn’t want to run into problems with copyrights, so the music would have to be either old or obscure or both. In the former category, I used different bits of the overture from Gilbert & Sullivan’s gothic romance pastiche *Ruddigore* to open each scene. (*Ruddigore* is a comic light opera, but some of the music is surprisingly sober; at least one critic complained Sullivan had made the principal ghostly number, “When the Night Wind Howls”, too scary.)

I thought if I used old film music cues I could evade the copyright cops. The first thing I did was pull down an old Rhino Records box set of science fiction film music, *Brain in a Box*. As it turned out, this was all that was needed. From about 20 tracks I reviewed, I ended up choosing pieces of just two. Don’t tell the lawyers, but the spooky, ominous music for scenes with Dracula and the jumpy, tense music for scenes with Renfield are parts of Bernard Hermann’s theme from *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. I also needed a couple of dramatic “build-



up” cues, and both of these came from the 1954 giant-ant classic *Them!* (Bronislau Kaper).

For the dance sequence at the end, I wanted something jaunty, with a 1920s/1930s feel (anachronistic for the novel, of course, but representing the period when the first Dracula movies were made). I used a creative problem-solving tactic favoured by artists worldwide: I went with the first idea that popped into my head. I heard “Sweet Georgia Brown”, and specifically the whistling, finger-snapping version used by the Harlem Globetrotters, the famous comedy basketball team. (This did trigger a copyright claim when I loaded the video into YouTube, but the copyright owner’s rules allowed me to post the video as long as I didn’t monetise it.)

Once I had all the tracks for a given act assembled and given a rough mix, I turned them over to Clayton, who did the final mix. Clayton has experience in sound mixing, good equipment and a terrific ear, combined with a penchant for oddball projects. He’s like the NSC’s own Phil Spector. Minus the wig. And the murder.

Promotion

While still assembling the videos of each act, I decided to create a trailer for it, which you can also see on YouTube and Facebook. The trailer was patterned after the bombastic trailers used for Universal horror movies in the 1930s (which set the style for horror film trailers for decades), with lots of text and flamboyant promises. The 1931 *Dracula* trailer, for example, opens with the onscreen words, “In all the annals of living HORROR...ONE NAME stands out as the epitome of EVIL!” (Why “living” horror? Where are these annals?)

Our Dracula trailer screams:

SEE! The unholy fiend who stalks the night for his victims!

SEE! The madman who does his wicked bidding!

SEE! Young lovers torn apart by an ancient evil!

Technically, all of these things happen in our *Dracula*, but as with most horror film trailers they promise a spectacle far beyond what the film delivers. IT’S CALLED SHOW BIZ. (To hear just how overblown TV and radio ads could be, Google the radio ad for The Astro-Zombies, which includes the come-on “Watch

it and you die a thousand deaths!”)

Because it had a combination of text animation and moving specific elements of a slide around, the trailer would have meant creating and importing multiple WMV videos in HD Movie Maker PRO. I decided to skip that step and just create the whole sequence as a single PPT “slideshow”, which I then saved as one WMV and married with the audio in HD Movie Maker PRO.

By now, some of you may be wondering, “Why didn’t you just use Photoshop?” Yeah, well, you see, thing is, I’m not a graphic designer by trade, so I don’t have Photoshop or any other of that good software. I have PowerPoint. But I have it on good authority that James Cameron made his first movies in PowerPoint. Hey, Sally Potter made her first films in Excel, so at least I’m one up there.

This motion picture is so shocking,
the producers are offering

\$10,000
to the first person who
DIES OF FRIGHT
while watching DRACULA!*

*Void where prohibited by law or common sense.**

Terms and conditions apply.*

***There is no \$10,000.

Reception

How was this phantasmagoria of bluntly animated cardboard received? As I write this, the official release date is tomorrow, one week before this issue hits your inbox. So the reception is up to you. You can watch it and let me know on the NSC Facebook page. (Because the video is marked Made for Kids, YouTube disabled comments.)

Watch the video: <https://youtu.be/qcXdSmbgCd4>

The Edward Gorey Dracula Toy Theatre is available from Amazon and The Gorey Store (goreystore.com)



Milady Sweetpea's Postal Service

By Priya Kalia

Good afternoon! Lady Sweetpea is currently recruiting new pen friends for her favourite endeavour, Milady Sweetpea's Postal Service, a hub for penpals to exchange handwritten letters (see issue 126 of *Resign!*). Unsurprisingly my dear chumrades, there is now clear evidence that handwriting is good for you—it stimulates the brain and improves memory! A good reason to ditch the device and pick up a fountain pen and cloth-bound notebook more often.

Write an esoteric mail message to miladysweetpea@gmail.com in the first instance for more details, and check out her Ladyship's website: <https://miladysweetpps907729441.wordpress.com>.

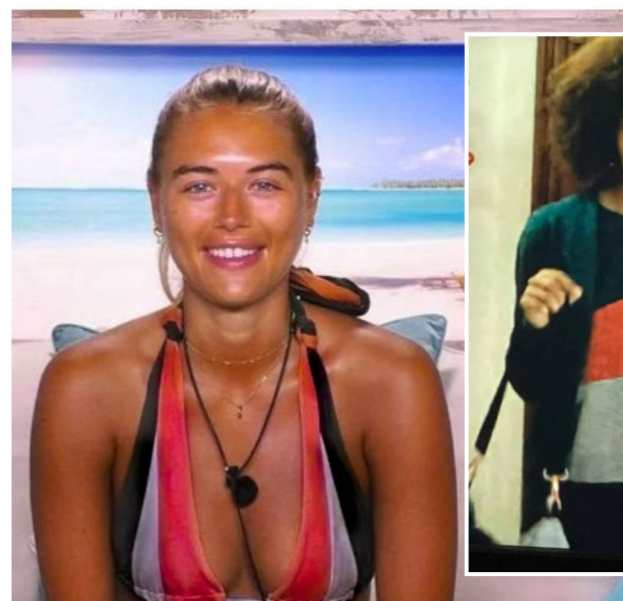
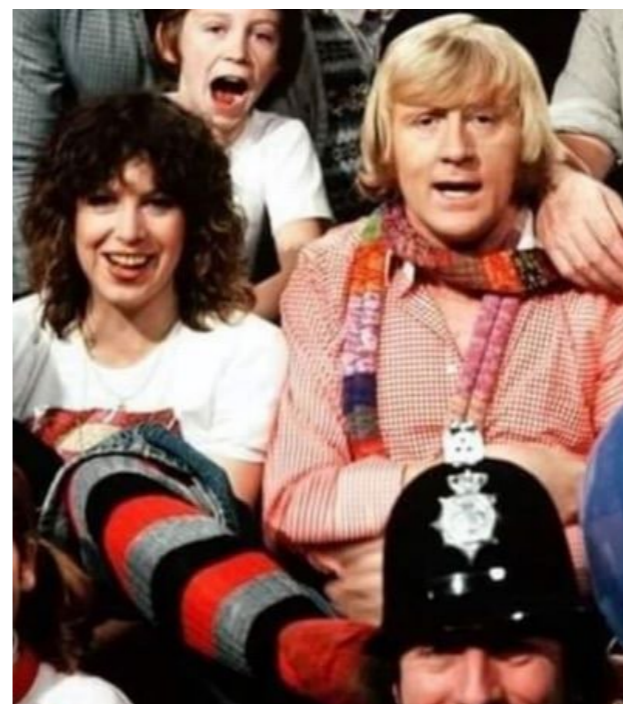
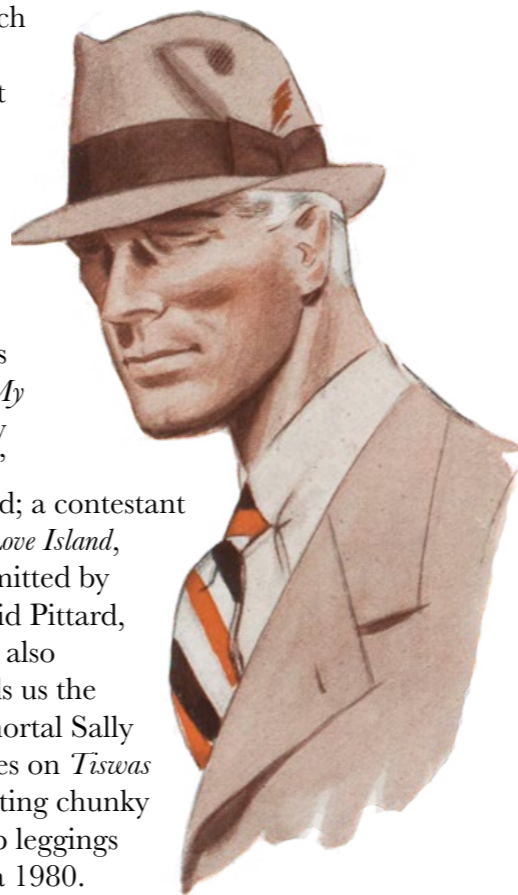


CLUB NOTES

Club Tie Corner

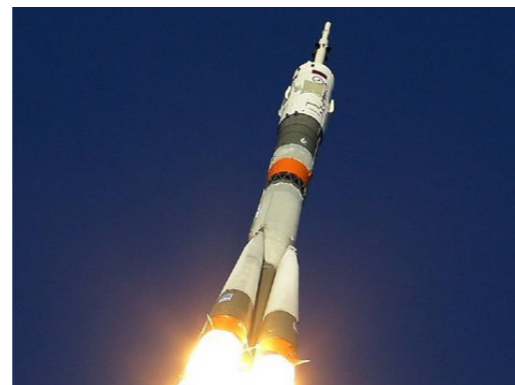
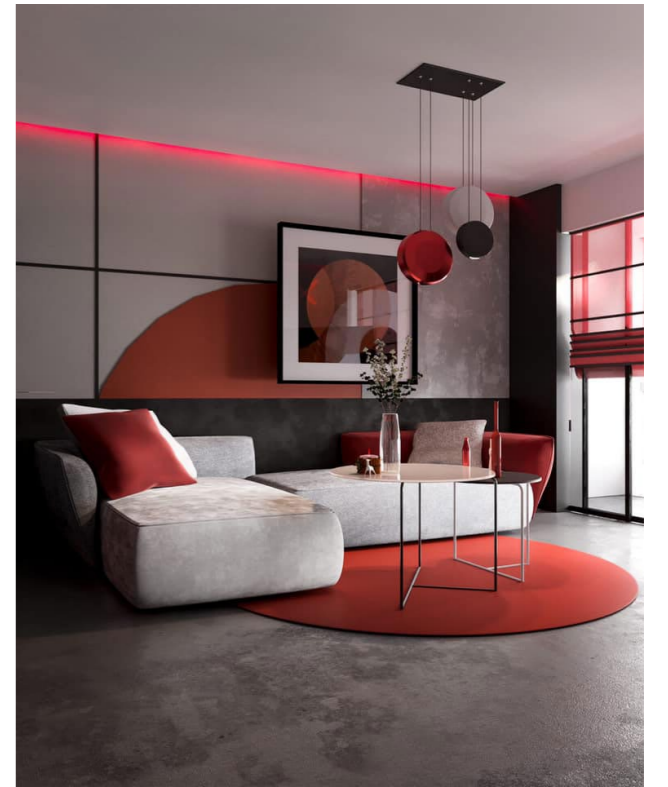
A BUMPER CROP of Club colour spottings this month. Let's start with some actual ties before it gets really weird. Below, Sean Longden discovered both this dapper chap in a French advert from 1935, and this snapshot of a young Nick Cave—despite the monochrome, I think we can safely assume those are NSC stripes.

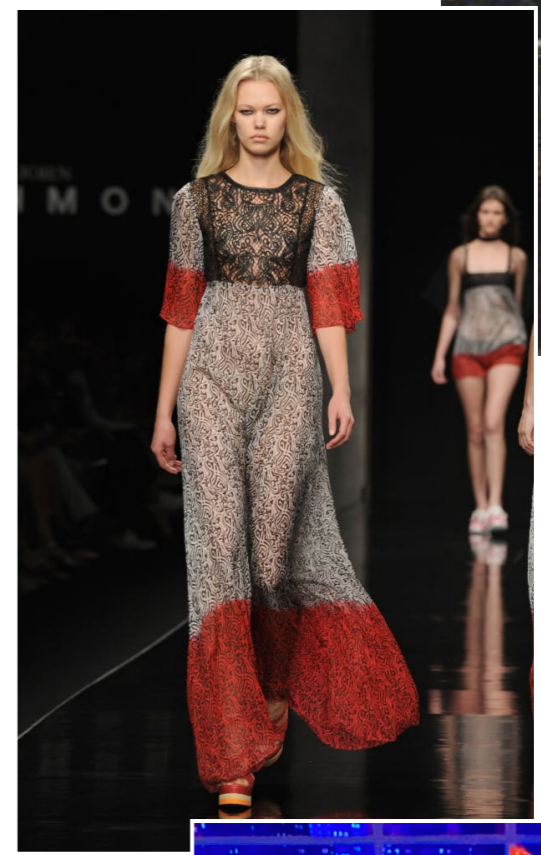
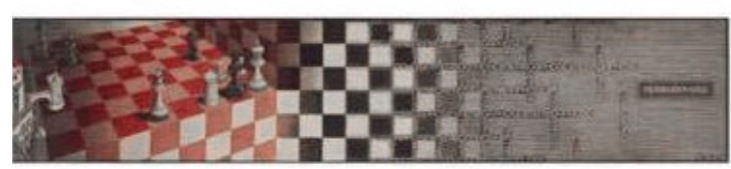
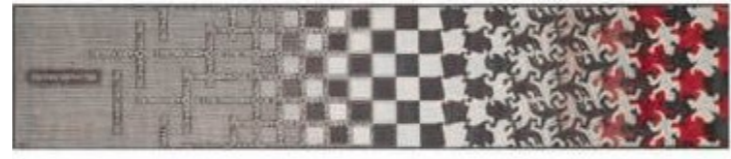
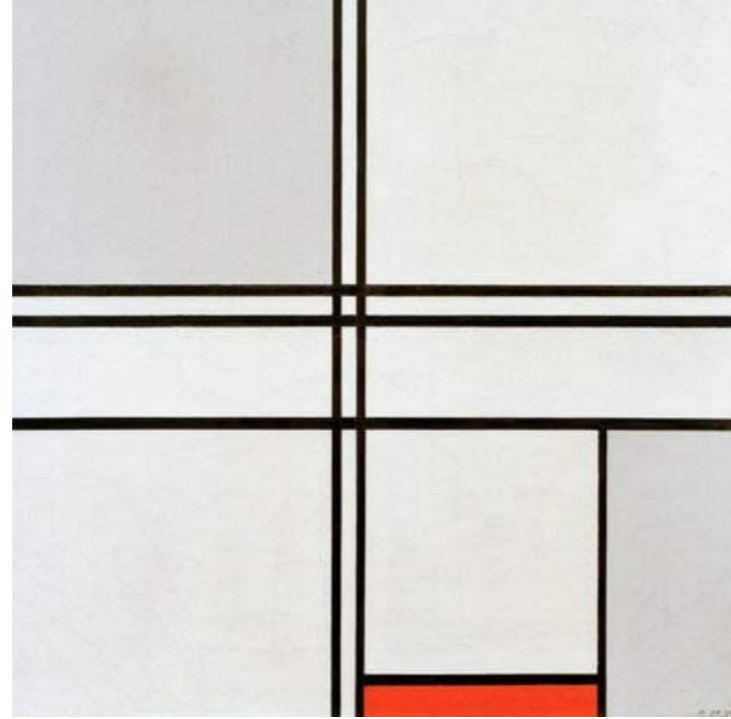
Facing page, clockwise from top left: Seth Thévoz brings us Michael Denison as a Sheridanite reporter giving the epitaph at the conclusion of John Boulting's *The Magic Box* (1951), a star-studded biopic of cinema pioneer William Friese-Greene made for the Festival of Britain; Benjamin K. Arthur, GOP Presidential Nominee in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) from Col. Cyrus Choke; MP Sir Desmond Swayne from Matthew Howard; more “honourable members” on the Treasury Bench circa 1990, from Viscount Rushen; Victoria Coren-Mitchell from fanboy James Rigby; Stéfi Celma as Sofia in *Call My Agent*, courtesy of “Chuckles” Younghusband; a contestant on *Love Island*, submitted by David Pittard, who also sends us the immortal Sally James on *Tiswas* sporting chunky Club leggings circa 1980.





(Facing page, clockwise from top left) Planes, trains and automobiles: this snap of the latest addition to the Committee's fleet of official vehicles comes, unsurprisingly, from Actuarius. "Far be it from me to deny the Committee their well-deserved luxury yachts," says Ivan Debono, "but might they spare some Club funds to purchase an outboard motor for the Other Ranks boat?" It is also Debono who welcomes you aboard Sheridan Airlines Flight 666; pesky Actuarius once more, this time noticing the Committee fleeing creditors *again*; Stuart Turner submits his design for the livery of the Committee's motorcade outriders; Luca Jellinek has found archival evidence that the Committee's prudent procurement of transport has a long and respectable tradition. (This page, clockwise from right) Will Smith has been putting the finishing touches on the Committee's grace-and-favour penthouse; Chris Choy has sourced a sofa for reception; Stuart Mitchell has released the first ale from the Club brewery, though I'm not sure about the name; Col. Choke has found himself an elegant vesta case; Torquil has had a very successful meeting with São Paulo police about a subcontracting proposal; Chuckles spotted this clue in a crack den in *True Detective*; and Debono has finished outfitting the Committee's video conferencing suite





The Committee thought you'd like to see what we've been spending the art budget on. Note that this is the last time you'll see these before they are removed to the Committee members' homes "for safekeeping". (Clockwise from above) A Rothko courtesy of Suzanne Coles; a Jackson Pollock, also from Suzanne; a Mondrian, from Suzanne again; an artwork that Col. Choke insists is by Escher, entitled *Metomorphosis to Sheridan*; Suzanne again, this time with a Gilbert and George. Facing page: fashion news (clockwise from top left): from Col. Choke, "by Paulus Moreelse: they never could prove she poisoned her lover"; what Debono describes at the "Golden Age"; a "17th-century Sheridanite out for a stroll", from Col. Choke again; Debono unveils the NSC Autumn/Winter 2021 collection; Paloma Faith flying the NSC flag, spotted by Stephen Myhill; "despite the obvious clue, this lawyer in an episode of *Midsomer Murders* turned out not to be the villain," says Stephen Smith; Suzanne Coles spots club waggis at the Basel Fasnacht Easter parade



(Clockwise from above) Things get stranger: the NSC suite on the Hindenberg airship, from Stephen Smith; the latest proposal from the Club's new Doctor Moreau Memorial Life Sciences Laboratory; a draft advertisement for the Club's promising Algerian vineyards, from Torquil; Debono has finally tracked down the Club Snail after it slipped its shackles a few weeks ago—how it got as far as Venezuela is anyone's guess; aside from the subtle Club colours on the cushion, this pile for sale in Shoreham-by-Sea, spotted by Fiona Mosley, also comes with a portrait of our Chairman Torquil



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 we're still under a lockdown for most social activity, scheduled physical events may be cancelled so do check.

🇨🇪 NSC Virtual Club Night

Wednesday 7th April

7pm GMT

See page 2. Clayton Hartley will talk to you about *The Rise and Fall of Izzy and Moe*.

This time the talk will be delivered by YouTube: the link is <https://youtu.be/cSHbaqtncPw>. The talk itself will begin at 8pm, but there will be a Zoom chat running from 7pm and also after the talk for as long as people wish: the link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84010621191?pwd=QU5RSmhicmx5WkZyQTdTUkFp6SxhwUT09>.

There is also a Facebook event at

<https://www.facebook.com/events/2347759275367489>.

The History of Taxidermy

Thursday 8th April

7.30–9pm

Online via Zoom

Admission: £4.77–11.04 donation via Eventbrite

Seemingly a repeat of the same talk from last month (doubtless back by popular demand—either that or it was postponed), this will examine the history and development of taxidermy, searching Europe for the oldest stuffed animals, commenting on the use of arsenic and reviewing styles and methods of the 19th and early 20th century, with a brief comparison to developments

in American taxidermy. It will consider the taxidermist's customers, from huntsmen to bird collectors and householders, and contrast bad taxidermy with the work of professionals. The speaker, Dr Pat Morris, was Senior Lecturer in Zoology at Royal Holloway, University of London, before retiring early in 2002 to spend more time with his taxidermy.

Swing Paradise 2021 Online Edition

Friday 9th–Sunday 11th April

Online (see swingparadise.lt)

Admission €10–100

An annual swing-dance festival in Vilnius. The physical get-together had to be cancelled in 2020 and now again in 2021, so they are having a virtual version, featuring a webcast live band



on Friday night, dance classes on Saturday and Sunday and a dance competition on Saturday night. I'm not sure if everything is ticketed or just the classes but see the website of the Facebook event for details.

M.R. James Fireside Ghost Stories

Sunday 11th April

9–10.30pm

Online via Zoom

Admission: £4.77–11.04 from www.eventbrite.co.uk

Perhaps the most famous ghost story writer in the English language, M.R. James penned his tales to read them to his friends at Christmas. Now you can hear “Canon Alberic's Scrap Book”, plus one other bonus story, read live by



Hot Club of Jupiter Vs London Launch

Launch Gig
Friday 16th April
7.30pm
Online via Facebook and YouTube
Admission: Free

Hot Club of Jupiter are a gypsy jazz quartet, originally put together to record music for a Renault car advert. (If you don't know what gypsy jazz is, think Django Reinhardt or the theme tune to the TV Jeeves and Wooster.) They're having a gig to launch their new album Vs London, which is all about London, and, while we're not yet in a position where you can physically attend, they will be streaming it live via Facebook and YouTube. Streaming it from the London Transport Museum, it says here. See the Facebook event.

Robert Lloyd Parry, who has been specialising in James ghost story readings in character since 2005. A Viktor Wynd joint, this event is ticketed by donation, so give what you can.

NSC Quiz Night

Wednesday 14th April
8pm
Online via Zoom go to <https://bit.ly/39Mipcl>
Admission: Free

Our virtual pub quizzes continue, held via Zoom meeting and hosted by a different Club Member each time. You'll need the (free) Zoom app installed, which should launch automatically when you click on the meeting's weblink. (You can go directly via Zoom: the meeting ID is 874 3390 9450 and the passcode is 439442.) The meeting starts about 15 minutes early to allow people to register their teams if they haven't already done so. The quiz will have six rounds with an interval, and each team can play their joker on one round in advance, which doubles the points they receive for that round.

Clerkenwell Vintage Fashion Fair

Sunday 18th April
11am-5pm
On Instagram at @clerkenwellvint
Admission: Free

Normally a physical fair full of stallholders in a civic hall, for the sixth month this event will go online via Instagram. The organisers explain: "Check out our instagram grid the day before our fair. There will be a post for each of our traders. Scroll through the posts to see if there is anything you like. Click through our posts to the trader's own instagram page and stories to view more items for sale and comment to purchase. *All purchases are between the seller and buyer.*"

So Last Century Vintage Market

Sunday 18th April
10am-5pm
The Mansion, Beckenham Place Park,
Beckenham BR3 1SY
Admission: Free

Some 30 vintage (seemingly mostly mid-century) traders operating both outside and inside the ground floor of the Mansion in Beckenham Place Park. There will also be a range of street food stalls, a café (takeaway only), a basement bar offering craft ales, plus live New Orleans music from the six-piece Alvar Treefrogs, busking outside. See www.solastcenturyfair.co.uk for more details.

A Day in the Life of a Bomber Crew

Thursday 22nd April
6pm
Online
Admission: Free

A free Zoom lecture hosted by the Spirit of Wartime Sherwood project. Taking us back to the summer of 1943, where a 10 Squadron Halifax bomber crew are preparing for their first raid on Germany, the talk will introduce the individual crew members, and explore their training, their respective roles on board the aircraft, and what it was like to

face Luftwaffe nightfighters, anti-aircraft fire and the risk of technical failure, knowing that you had less than a 50% chance of surviving. Admission is free, but you'll need to book your place via Eventbrite.co.uk to get the Zoom link.



Mid-century madness in Beckenham on the 18th



Find out about life as a bomber crewman on 22nd April

Whitstable Castle Antiques and Vintage Fair

Sunday 2nd May
10am-4pm
Whitstable Castle,
Tower Hill, Kent
CT5 2BW
Admission: Free

Antiques and vintage fair in the grounds of Whitstable Castle. Parking available within the grounds, plus a tea room (currently only for outside refreshment and takeaway).

Thoroughly modern-looking flappers from 1927, the height of Prohibition. Learn about two of the strangest characters from this era, Izzy and Moe, in this month's live-streamed talk



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