GRAHAM GREENE BIRTHPLACE TRUST

FRIENDS' NEWSLETTER
SPRING 1999

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PLANS FOR ANOTHER EXCITING FESTIVAL

Plans for the 1999 Graham Greene Festival are at an advanced stage, *reports Roger Watkins, the Festival Organiser.* We are putting together a programme which will present a variety of events reflecting Greene's achievements but, as in last year's Festival, we shall explore a particular theme in greater depth. This year we focus on Greene struggling with matters of faith and action, a convert to Catholicism exploring the pain and sometimes the tragedy of evil challenged by good.

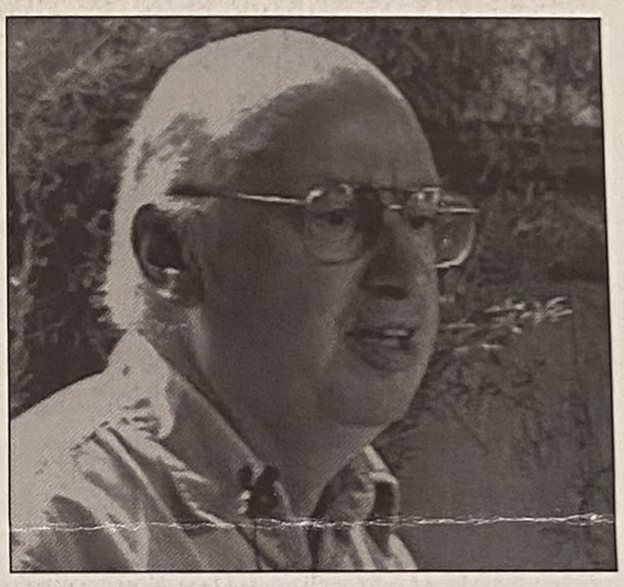
We start our Festival on the evening of Thursday 30 September with a screening of *Brighton Rock* at the Kodak cinema, introduced by Quentin Falk. Next day there will be a coach trip to Brighton for a tour of the surviving locations mentioned in the novel with an expert guide Maire McQueeney. We return swiftly to Berkhamsted to meet Roy Boulting who produced the film version (with his brother directing) from a screenplay written by Graham Greene and Terence Rattigan. That will be followed by a lecture by Professor Cedric Watts on *Darkest Greeneland!*



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The following day we celebrate Greene's birthday in a remarkable way. Father Leopoldo Duran who was the writer's close confidant in his last years and the inspiration for his last great novel *Monsignor Quixote,* will be coming from Spain to describe their journeys together and their conversations. That session will be chaired by Roger Bolton of the BBC's *Sunday* programme. Later that day we shall be addressed by Michael Meyer, the literary biographer, on forty years of friendship with Graham Greene. Michael Meyer knew Greene intimately and is a brilliant speaker.

On Sunday we plan sessions with two more overseas speakers: Nicholas Scheetz is the librarian in charge of the Special Collections Department at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. which houses not only a vast collection of Greene's manuscripts, letters, appointment books, and 'travel diaries' but also those of his intimate friends such as Evelyn Waugh and Catherine Walston to whom he wrote more than a thousand powerful love letters. Dr. Scheetz is a mine of information on Greene and his literary contemporaries. Catherine Rendon, an academic from Guatemala has, with the help of the British Council, retraced the journey Greene took across Mexico which gave rise to his great novel of modern martyrdom, *The Power and the Glory* and the story of his travels *The Lawless Roads*. Catherine will have many insights (and photographs) to share with us.



Neil Sinyard

That is the story so far. I am attempting to negotiate even more events, some of which are perhaps too ambitious to come off this year, but we shall see. . . .

THE COMIC SENSE OF GRAHAM GREENE
Lecture by
Neil Sinyard
Head of English,
University of Hull
WEDNESDAY 21 APRIL 1999
7.30 for 8.00pm
Deans' Hall,
Berkhamsted Collegiate School

We are delighted Neil has agreed to return to Berkhamsted to look at the humour in Greene's writing as well as his famed reputation as a practical joker. Tickets £3 in advance from Berkhamsted Library or by post from the Trust Office. (Please enclose a Stamped Addressed envelope.)

FOLLOW THAT!

A review of the first Graham Greene Festival

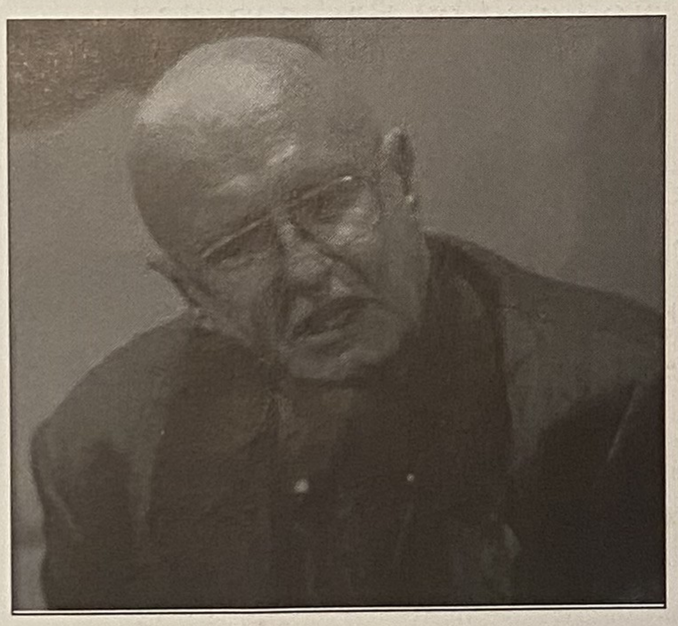
by Yan Christensen

The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust was launched in 1997; only a year later we were enjoying the first Festival with a varied programme of entertainments and talks. Attendance was good, and included visitors from overseas. Graham Greene's daughter and other members of his family showed their interest by their presence at several events. At the end the Trust was left with one main question: 'How do you follow that?'.

An exhibition of watercolours by Paul Hogarth, whose illustrations are well known from the front covers of many Penguin editions of Greene, was arranged at Berkhamsted Collegiate School and *Illustrating Graham Greene* was the title of the first event of the Festival. This took the form of a conversation between Paul Hogarth and Nigel Lewis, writer and broadcaster, both of whom knew Graham Greene personally. Hogarth had not only illustrated the covers but had also travelled widely to paint the places mentioned in the books, presenting the result of his expeditions in his book *Graham Greene Country*. Paul Hogarth fascinated the audience with his account of how the cover illustrations evolved over time.

Most of Greene's fiction has been filmed, but his most successful screenplay is without question *The Third Man*. The next Festival event was a screening of the film at the Kodak private cinema. Quentin Falk, author of *'Travels in Greeneland : The Cinema of Graham Greene'*, introduced the film, providing a great deal of background including the information that the original choice for Harry Lime was Noel Coward! The film itself stands the test of time wonderfully well: casting, acting, direction and not least photography lend it a quality that makes it arguably the best British film ever made. A real treat! If commercial cinemas realised the advantages of having a film introduced by a knowledgeable speaker, it might revolutionise cinema-going.

Our Man in Havana was a film made from the novel, rather than an original film-script. It was introduced by Neil Sinyard, Head of English at Hull University and a writer of many books on films to his credit. He was able to tell us something of the background to the film, e.g. how difficult it was to film in post-revolutionary Cuba. For authenticity the old police uniforms were used, but during filming they caused quite a stir among the people whose memories of them were far from happy. The film itself was well worth seeing, although not of the quality of *The Third Man*. The performances were somewhat uneven - some superb, some misjudged - but nevertheless an interesting and enjoyable evening.



Philip French

October 2 was the focus of the Festival and we were invited to the Town Hall for the *Double Bill to Celebrate Graham Greene's Birthday.* The first part of the evening gave us *Greene and the Cinema* which was linked to the two preceding events: Philip French, writer and broadcaster, and Neil Sinyard suggested that no English writer of similar stature has ever been so deeply involved in writing about and contributing to the making of films. Not only did he understand the crafts of cinema, script-writing, camera work, and editing but he also recognised the importance of film in popular culture, singling out for praise the Marx Brothers and above all Charlie Chaplin.

To make it a proper birthday party, we drank a toast to Graham Greene, and returned to our seats for *May I suggest.....? - an Entertainment,* performed with great panache by Kate Bonney, Robin Lloyd, David Pearce and Roger Watkins. It consisted of selected passages from Greene's letters to the press, often in facetious mood. The evening was a very good mixture of information and fun.

Saturday morning found us back in the School at what for many was probably the highlight of the Festival. Entitled *Fallen Idol? The Literary Reputation of Graham Greene,* it consisted of contributions from Neil Sinyard and Martin Corner, principal lecturer in English at Kingston University. In a well attended session, Neil Sinyard spoke about Greene's development as a writer, disagreeing with the view of Antony Burgess that Greene had made a 'Faustian pact with commerce' and sold out to the blandishments of the thriller, coating his writing with Catholicism for effect. On the contrary, Sinyard argued that Greene became a great writer only when he adapted some of the characteristics of the cinema in his novels to explore the profound moral issues Catholicism identified for him.

Martin Corner explained the current lack of enthusiasm for Greene's fiction in many universities by the recent change in the assumed relationship between the verbal surface of the literary text, the words on the page, and what is taken to lie behind them. Post-modernist and post-structuralist readings have stressed the illusory nature of depth and of anything behind or below the surface: surface is all we have. Consequently writers like Greene who imply depth are complicit in an illusion from which readers need to be released!

The non-specialist rarely has the opportunity to listen to talks of this quality.



May I Suggest
Roger Watkins, Robin Lloyd and David Pearce

Following a tour of those parts of the School known to Greene, the *Graham Greene Trail* was launched by a civic cutting of ribbon. Guides then took us on parts of the Trail, a walk to sites in Berkhamsted of relevance to the author or described in his works. The Trail is set out in an illustrated leaflet which will be published shortly.

It was a week of variety, but the quality of talks and entertainments was uniformly excellent. Roger Watkins, the Festival Organiser, and the Trust are to be congratulated on a very successful Festival. It is to be hoped it was the first of many that will provide stimulus to the widespread interest in Greene's life and works and his connection with Berkhamsted. To subvert an old saying: 'He left Berkhamsted, but Berkhamsted never left him'.