A Sort of NEWSLETTER

Early Spring 2002

THE GRAHAM GREENE BIRTHPLACE TRUST

£1.50
Free to Friends

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Do not forget to visit the Trust web site on www.grahamgreene.bt.org

Editorial

The days are getting longer and bulbs and bushes are beginning to think it is spring in Berkhamsted. Although the weather is mild it is still dreary and grey, but this time of year the Trustees are cheered to hear once more from the Festival Director, David Pearce, that plans are well in hand for the Fifth Festival in September, and there are treats in store.

You should also note your diary with the date of the Spring Event - see details below - which is another chance to see one of the highlights of the first Festival.

The long article generously made available by Norman Sherry was started in an earlier issue, and continues within. We are now looking forward with considerable interest to the third and last volume of Norman Sherry's biography of Graham Greene, which we understand will be published very soon.

Yan Christensen

SPRING EVENT

"MAY I SUGGEST....."

A dramatic presentation of some of Graham Greene's letters to the Press (originally presented at the 1998 Festival)

At 20:00 in Berkhamsted Town Hall

Wednesday 24 April 2002

Jointly with Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Free entry for Friends and members of BCA

No responsibility will be accepted for any errors or omissions, or comments made by writers or interviewees. Views expressed are not necessarily the views of The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust



SPECIAL FEATURE

You will recall that in an earlier issue we published part of an article by Graham Greene's official biographer, Professor Norman Sherry. Space did not permit us to print the whole piece, and here is the second instalment, following on the description of Pinkie's instructions to Rose for the 'suicide pact'.

Such is the power of this scene that one feels that Greene is living out his own instructions to himself when, at twenty, he inserted a gun into his own ear. Let's go back to the quite astonishing series of incidents which took place in his early student years at Balliol College, Oxford - his flirting with death by experimenting with Russian roulette. He described how he would walk out from Headington towards Elsfield, which was then a sodden unfrequented country lane: 'The revolver would be whipped behind my back, the chamber twisted, the muzzle quickly and surreptitiously inserted in my ear...the trigger pulled.'

The cool objectivity in describing so terrible an action against himself is astonishing. It is as if someone else were doing this to him or the revolver had a will of its own, exacting a penalty from this particular ear. Greene tells that he did this five times in five months and on the fifth occasion, did it again, and decided to twirl the chambers round once more to hear the familiar empty click as the chambers shifted - six times in five months. It was worse than Greene describes. Robin Turton told me in hushed tones, fifty-two years after the event, that he and Robert Scott (later Sir Robert Scott) insisted that Greene put no more than two shots in a six chamber revolver.

We need to ask ourselves, why would he even attempt to commit the rash act of Russian roulette? Greene would answer that such actions reinforced life by the propinquity of death. He was always trying to move towards that feeling which comes when 'his seated heart knocked against its ribs'. It is an example of living on the dangerous edge of things.

That was the response he gave me. Perhaps a better answer appears in an unpublished letter to his wife: 'If I analyse it, it's the liver or something, but my mind's like a bubble and it's getting bigger and bigger and if it bursts I feel I shall simply shriek and shriek and not be able to stop. How I want to be dead, or asleep, or blind drunk or anything so that I can't think.'

Here is something of the nature of Greene. No writer was more successful than Greene, yet his was an unhappiness beyond riches. He was amazingly contradictory. He was never expected to die naturally. Michael Meyer, asking Edward Sackville West what Greene would be like in his late sixties, received the answer: 'He'll have committed suicide by then.' In order to deal with his profound depressions, which he softened for the general public by speaking of his boredom, his days were organised. His need to travel - a conditioned reflex.

Why was he so irrepressibly restless, he who sat as still as stone in my interviews with him? Let the fundamental 'why' hang in the air for a moment. We know he not only travelled more than Marco Polo but that he was often more in the air travelling, incessantly travelling, this earth than he was on the ground. Was this restlessness a means of escaping from a deep-seated personal disturbance, a fall in spirits of an unalterable intensity, a kind of plague spot which harrowed him? We know that after extreme mental activity, he had moments of such despair followed by self-hatred, that inescapably we must conclude he carried within his breast a formidable desire for self-annihilation.

Greene had experienced a still earlier period of despair. It lasted from his thirteenth to his sixteenth year. He came to understand the meaning of his life. It was a particular person who brought about his despair. He first mentioned his *bête noire* in 'Lost Childhood' an article appearing in 1947, when he thought (wrongly as I discovered) his tormentor was dead. Speaking of Marjorie Bowen's *The Viper of Milan* - a children's adventure story - he tells how the book helped him as a youngster to understand his world. He compares *The Viper of Milan* with a particular boy: 'As for Visconti, with his beauty, his patience, and his genius for evil, I had watched him pass by many a time in his black Sunday suit smelling of

mothballs. His name was Carter. Goodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there.'

Bowen had given Greene some understanding of evil in his early teens because he saw the evil in the novel's world unexpectedly reflected in his school. 'She had given me my pattern - religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there - perfecting evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again.'

What Carter realised was that Greene could be easily humiliated. Greene, after all, was in a difficult position as the headmaster's son. From photographs I found, Carter looked young (he was only a few months older than Greene) and inoffensive. He appeared blithely innocent, but was in fact utterly ruthless. He recognised Greene's need to be loyal to his father and his conflicting desire (very real in Greene) to befriend the boys of his school. Carter was like some dark magician, able to shut down Greene's contacts, halt a friendship, put a barrier around him so that on entering a classroom, Greene sensed the undertone of mockery from the chorus of Carter's friends. Even the hand swooping suddenly down and whisking away his private diary where he'd expressed his fear of being humiliated and Carter holding up the stolen diary shouting 'I'll read you some. It's priceless - Beastly unhappy. Everyone teasing. Diddums then.' It was this last that brought Greene to crisis. He was different from the pack. He had a rather funny voice, a bit of a lisp; the headmaster's son who could be suspected of being a spy and driven out.

Isolated, disliked, distrusted, and fearing humiliation, young Greene saw death as a release from an impossible situation. He tried first to saw open his knee and when that failed, he swallowed different potions in order to poison himself; including, hyposulphite, hay-fever drops, a whole tin of hair pomade, and even a bottle of eyedrops. He picked the deadly nightshade plant and survived the eating of it. When nothing worked, he took fourteen aspirins and swam in the school pool. He recalled his legs feeling like lead - but he did not drown. His desperate unhappiness in youth, as with Dickens, was the essential spur to underlying genius. Such experiences released basic drives of his character and ambition. He did not know then but he had found his theme for his greatest novels and stories:

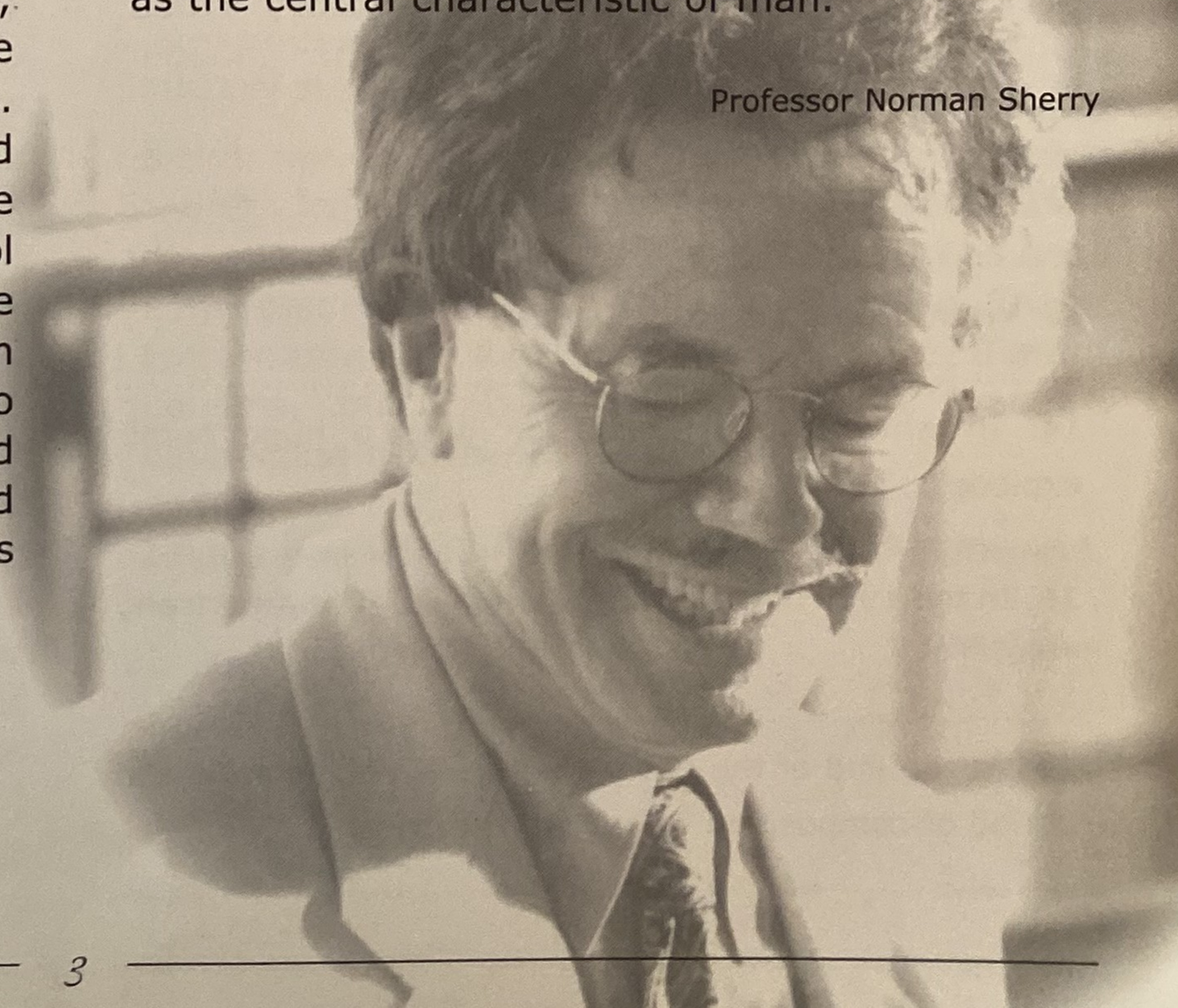
'In the lost boyhood of Judas
Christ was betrayed.'

Finally, he ran away from school, leaving a note saying he had tried in vain to poison himself, and that he would not go back to school, had gone away and they should not see him again. Greene's parents thought he might have attempted to drown himself and searched the canal, but this was not so and he was found without difficulty and a promise made that he need not return to school as a boarder. But Greene's psychological troubles began after he had returned to his home, the crucial dart was about to be lodged in his soul.

By clever questioning, Greene's father winkled out of him the name of his mental torturer. Greene had weathered three years and had never complained to him about Carter. Finally he committed his first betrayal. He had been softened up and overcome by his father's gentle grilling. Carter was withdrawn from the school, never entered the sixth form, never went to university, his future career a failure. Greene never forgave himself. It was something unforgivable in the catechism of Greene, to divulge a secret. It had two effects on Greene's life. In school was born his deep concern for the underdog (for so he felt himself to be), the hunted man and the downtrodden everywhere. It is the staple of his fiction.

The second change that took place might be called a death urge; that perpetual returning to dangerous experiences, or the seeking out of dangerous experiences in order to relive the heightened but disturbed previous existence. This became the basic pattern of his mind, moving from domestic existence to the dangers of the world, from the quiet to the active sectors of the line, because it meant he was returning to his experience of the Carters out there in the dangerous world. And this movement became a compulsion. Greene had betrayed someone at sixteen, become unwittingly an informer, and he sought in his world confirmation of betrayal almost as the central characteristic of man.

Professor Norman Sherry





MISCELLANY

THE GRAHAM GREENE QUIZ 2002

Mike Hill has again very kindly set the Quiz - he claims it is not quite so hard this year, and it is certainly a bit shorter, with a few extra questions for those who like a challenge. The Quiz focuses on three novels.
The winners (first two correct answers - drawn by lots if more than two) will receive two complimentary tickets to the Saturday birthday event at this year's Festival; alternatively any three occasional papers.

ENGLAND MADE ME

1. What is the opening sentence of the novel?

.....

2. Who are the twins who form central characters in the novel?

.....

3. What nationality is the millionaire Erik Krogh?

.....

4. What is the profession of the character Minty?

.....

5. What old school tie does Anthony Farrant falsely wear?

.....

6. With whom does Anthony Farrant have an affair?

.....

7. Which Berkhamsted-born actor played Minty in the 1972 film of the novel?

.....

8. How many novels (including two he subsequently suppressed) did Greene publish before England Made Me?

.....

THE QUIET AMERICAN

9. To which two people is the novel dedicated?

.....

10. Who is the 'I' of the novel?

.....

11. Who is trying to establish a 'Third Force' in Vietnam?

.....

12. Who is Fowler's mistress?

.....

13. What drug does Fowler smoke?

.....

14. In which square in Saigon does a huge bomb explode?

.....

15. In the 1957 film version, who played 'The American', Pyle?

.....

16. At the end of the novel are two dates, showing the period of composition. What are the dates?

.....

THE HUMAN FACTOR

17. In which year was the novel first published in Britain?

.....

18. To whom is the novel dedicated?

.....

19. According to the epigraph, what has entered into the soul of 'he who forms a tie'?

.....

20. Castle's usual train from Euston is at 6.35; at what time does this punctually bring him to Berkhamsted?

.....

21. What is the name of Castle's wife?

.....

22. Who is Castle's colleague who is murdered by his own employers?

.....

23. What is the code name of the operation being co-ordinated by the BOSS man, Cornelius Muller?

.....

24. Where is Castle at the end of the novel when the telephone line to his wife goes dead?

.....

25. Who was the producer/director of the 1979 film of the novel?

.....

EXTRAS.....

Not part of the Quiz, and with no prizes, a few tough questions for those who like a challenge:-

A. What was the American title of Greene's *The Lawless Roads* when it was published in 1939?

.....

B. To whom, in an open letter published in the *New Statesman,* did Greene refer as 'the screen's finest artist' and 'one of the greatest liberals of our day'?

.....

C. In 1977, Greene wrote a foreword to the book *Pavilions by the Sea: the Memoirs of a Hotel-keeper.* Who wrote the book?

.....

D. In which novel does this sentence appear?
'There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.'?

.....

E. Which Greene novel has the title *Titkos Megbizatas* in Hungary?

.....

Answers by 1st April to: Mike Hill, The Fairways Keighley Road, Denholme, Bradford, BD13 4JT

THE GREENE FAMILY IN BERKHAMSTED

The Greene King Brewery in Bury St Edmunds was founded about 1800 by Benjamin Greene III. Benjamin had four sons and four daughters. Graham (through his father Charles Henry Greene) was the grandson of the youngest of the sons, William, and (through his mother Marion Raymond Greene) the great grandson of the second son, John.

As readers of *'A Sort of Life'* will remember Graham's parents and their six children were known in Berkhamsted as the 'Intellectual Greenes' while Charles Henry's younger brother, Edward, and his family were called the 'Rich Greenes'. Graham also mentions his mother's younger sister, Maud, who lived in Berkhamsted until her death in 1956.

There were other Greenes with Berkhamsted links who are not mentioned by Graham in *A Sort of Life*. These were the children of Edward Greene, MP, the third son of Benjamin Greene III. Edward's second daughter, Julia married in 1876 Dr. Thomas Fry. Dr Fry served as headmaster of Berkhamsted School from 1888 to 1910 when he was appointed Dean of Lincoln. He was succeeded by Graham's father, Charles Henry, who was Julia's first cousin. According to the School History Dr Fry was very generous to the School, much of his generosity reputedly coming from the Greene family fortune.

Edward Greene's elder daughter, Emily, may have been responsible for suggesting Berkhamsted as a school for her grandson Richard Isherwood. Richard joined the Junior School in September 1919 just before his 8th birthday and left at the age of 12. According to Christopher Isherwood's (Richard's elder brother) biography of his parents* Richard lived with his Nanny at lodgings in the town. He was only a year younger than Graham's brother, Hugh. It would seem likely that Charles Henry would have been aware of Richard being at the School but whether Richard ever visited his cousins in the Headmaster's house is not known.

Edward Greene's only son, Walter, who was created a baronet in 1900, lived at Nether Hall near Bury St Edmunds. There is no record of Graham visiting Nether Hall but it is likely a visit was made since Victor Rhodes, the joking dentist in Graham's play, *The Complaisant Lover*, seems to have been based partly on Walter. According to Christopher Isherwood*, recalling a visit to his great uncle at Nether Hall in 1908 when he was four years old, 'Walter was a practical joker of the kind called infantile by those who are not amused and surrealistic by those who enjoy seeing others made ridiculous'. 'The Smoking Room at Nether offered explosive cigars and trick lighters'. 'And there was a stuffed rabbit which a concealed gamekeeper would drag across the lawn on a wire. "There's that confounded rabbit again" Walter would exclaim, when the drawing-room was full at teatime; whereupon the male guests excused themselves, ran to the Gun-Room for weapons and blazed away.' *(Christopher Isherwood, *Kathleen and Frank*, Methuen 1971).

Ken Sherwood

CORRESPONDENCE

Please use these columns to express views, discuss themes, comment on the news and views of others, or simply to tell us you are there.

.....

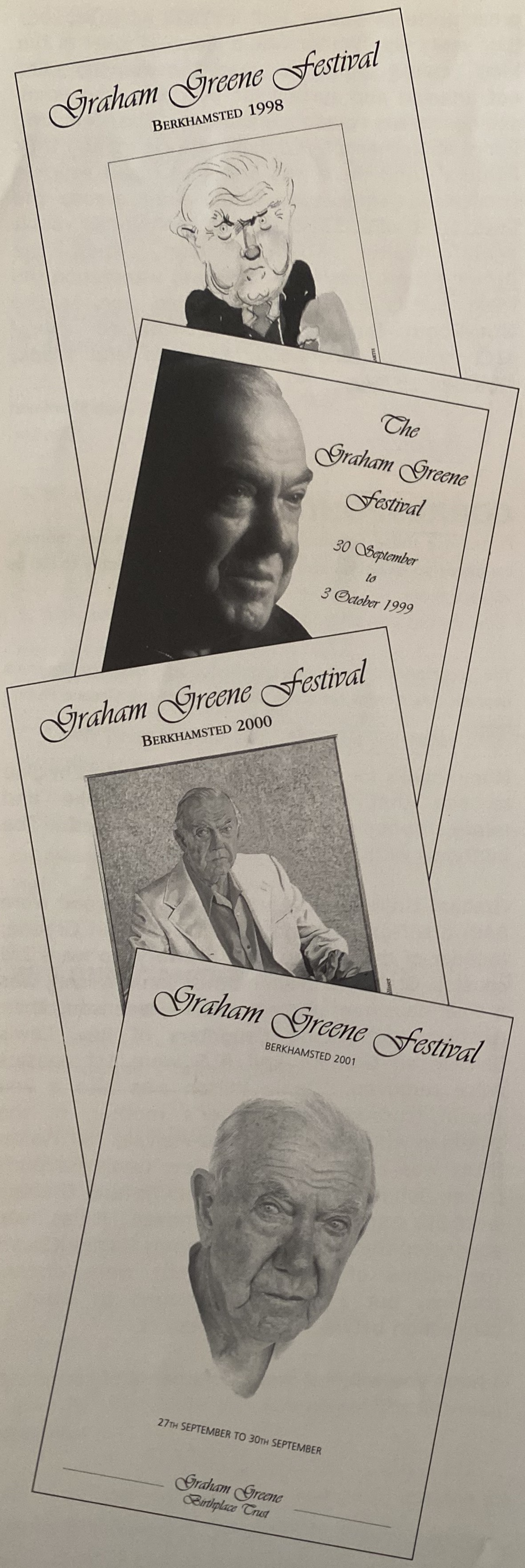
The Secretary has had correspondence with Graham Greene,s nephew (the son of his sister Molly) about the Greene Family tree.

Many thanks for sending the newsletters; I'm glad to see that Aunt Maud's seed cake and mini-scrapbooks are still remembered. The interview with Mrs Welch is interesting.

Graham Greene and Christopher Isherwood were both great-great-grandsons of Benjamin Greene, founder of the Greene King Brewery, so were 3rd cousins. Graham's grandmother, Janie Wilson, was a first cousin of Robert Louis Stevenson, their mothers both being daughters of Rev. Lewis Balfour, so Graham and RLS were 1st cousins twice removed. Janie Wilson was also a 2nd cousin, through her father's mother, of the Victorian writer George Whyte-Melville. Sir Walter Scott was a 5th cousin of Rev. Lewis Balfour's father, John Balfour of Pilrig, so he and Graham were 5th cousins five times removed. It has been suggested that Graham and 'James Hadley Chase' (pen-name of Rene Raymond) were distant cousins, but I haven't managed to trace a connection between their ancestors.

I hope you will find these comments of some use.

John Walker



IN THE PRESS

The March 2002 issue of the publication *British Heritage* carries a long article about Graham Greene. It is by Barbara Roisman-Cooper, LA based writer and researcher, whose three-page article gives a fairly thorough outline of Greene's life. The writer also came to Berkhamsted and met several of the Trustees; unfortunately a number of errors crept into her report of that meeting, but on balance the article is interesting and well worth looking out for.

Films are not really 'press', but it is worth mentioning that a film based on a Greene story was shown at the Barbican arts centre in London at the end of January. *Went the Day Well* (1942; dir. Alberto Calvancanti) was part of a William Walton season because of the score. Despite its age, the film stood up well as an example of Ealing Studios' non-comic, non-horror output of British films.

By courtesy of Donna Osthaus, a Friend of the Trust, we have been advised of two articles in recent issues of the *Washington Post*. One concerns the vexed issue of material kept at Georgetown University, to which Norman Sherry has exclusive access. Because of the delays, another author, Christopher Hawtree, is becoming impatient. Sherry's publishers, Penguin, predict that the third volume will not be in bookshops for another two years.

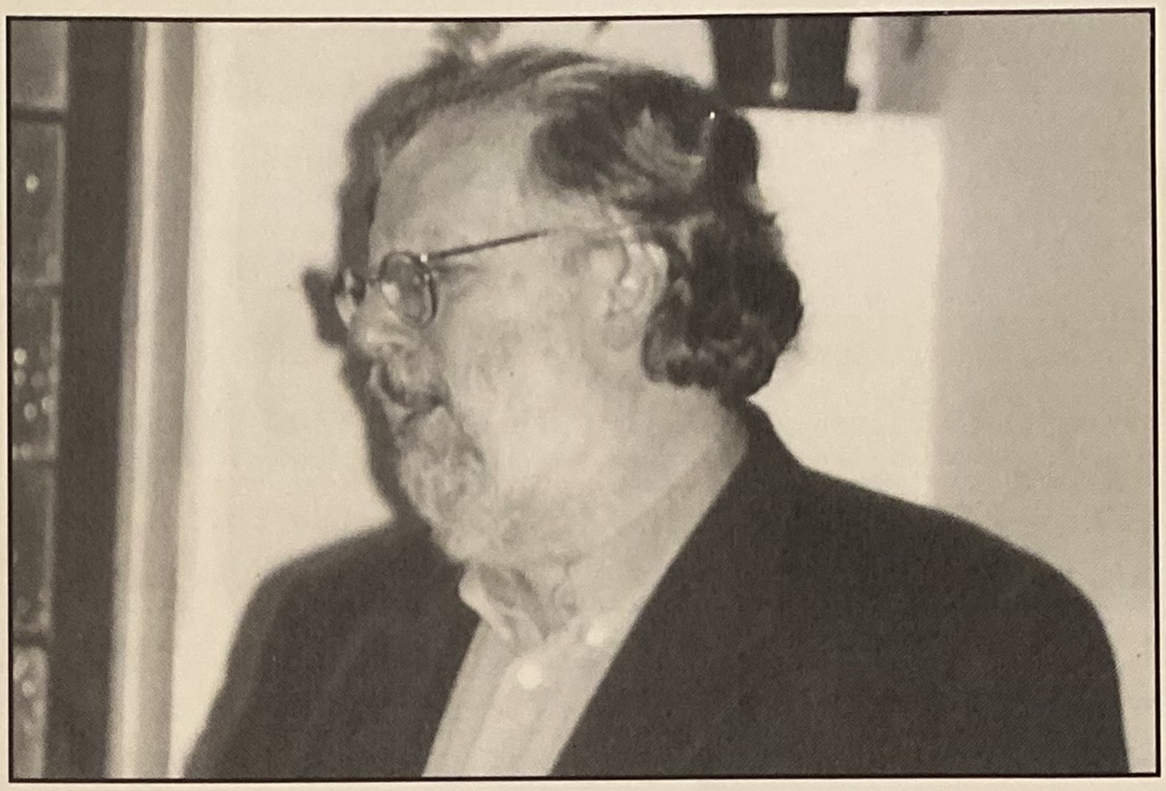
The second item is an interview with Julia Llewellyn Smith, speaker at last year's Festival, and author of *Travels Without My Aunt*. She talks about the changes that have taken place in Sierra Leone since Greene's day, and speculates that if he were alive to-day he would be likely to visit Sudan next. At the end of the interview she says: 'There is nothing about Graham Greene I find endearing. I share his curiosity and his desire to pick at the scab of human existence to see what the nastier side of life can be all about'.

NEWS OF FRIENDS

The sad fact is that you have not provided any! Do write in with news of any 'Greene' activities as well as details of published material, which we shall be glad to mention.

Pictures From The Graham Greene Festival 2001

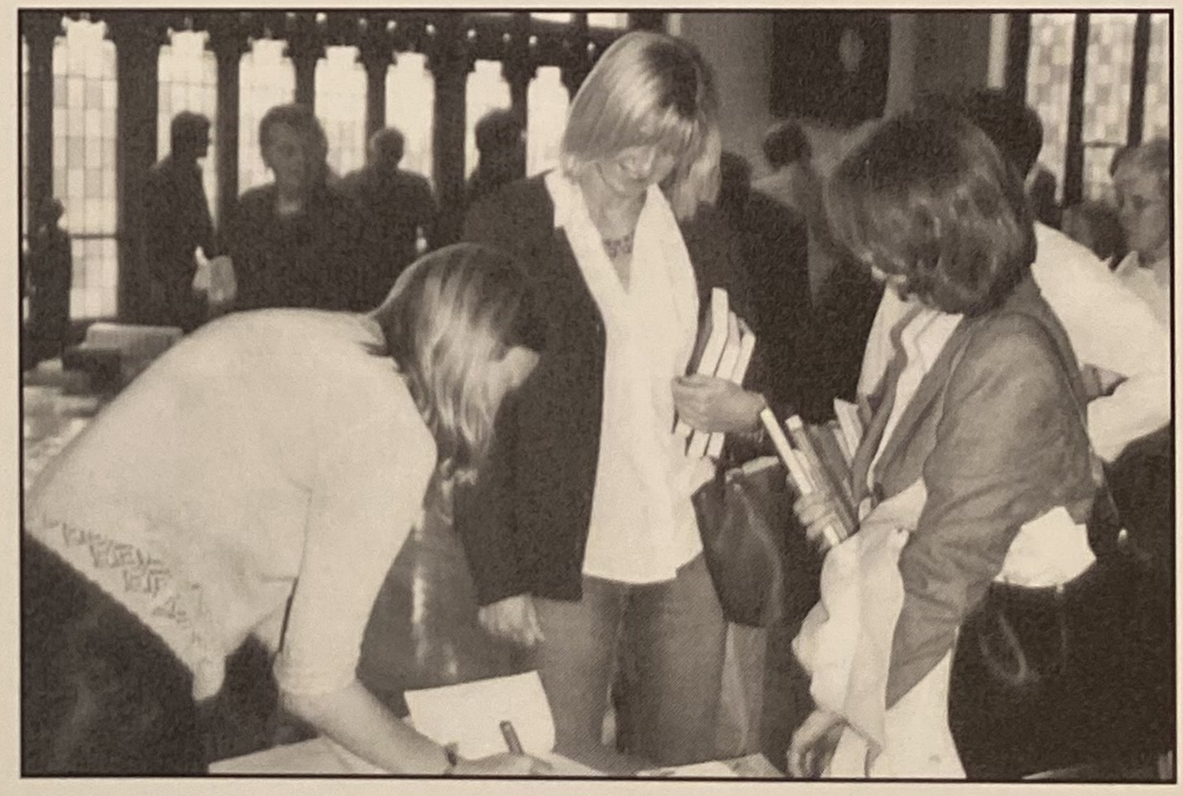


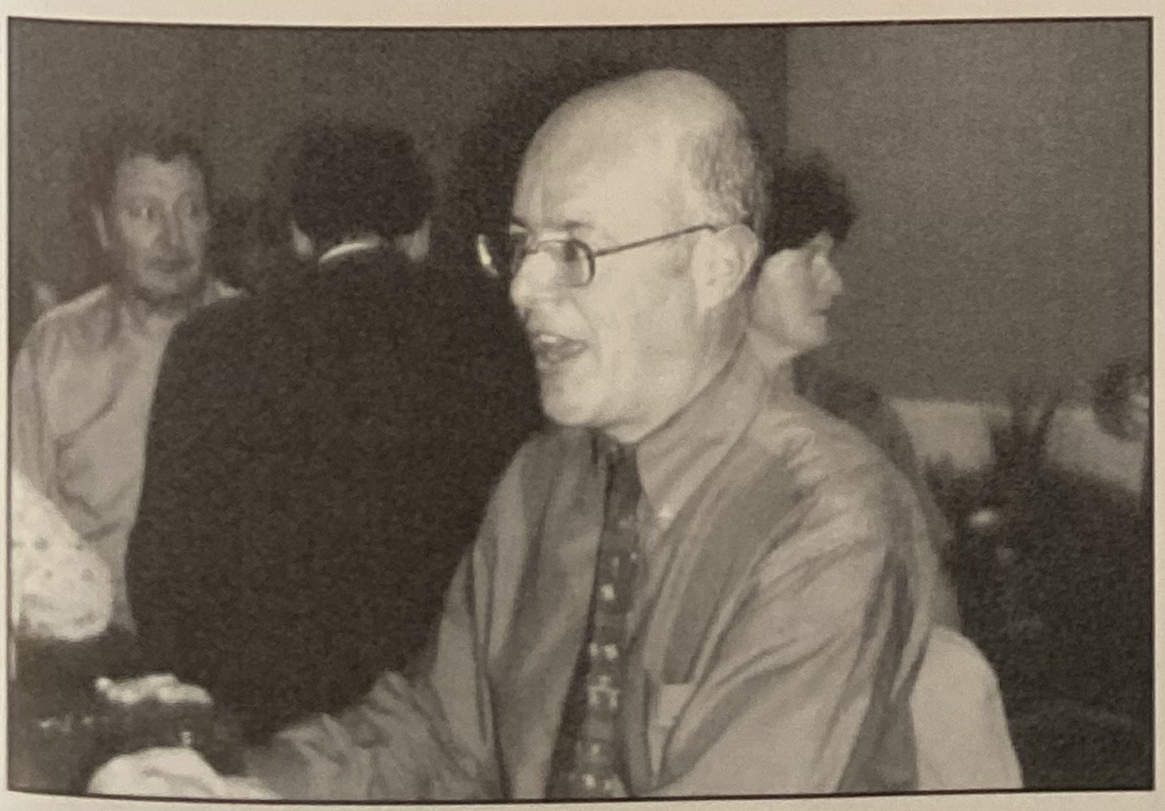












FRIENDS

Clockwise from top left:

1. Festival goers
2. Rick Gekowski
3. Peter Duffell & Quentin Falk
4. Julian Llewellyn Smith signing books
5. Patrick Salmon
6. Birthday toast
7. Cedric Watts

Graham Greene Festival

BERKHAMSTED 1998



29TH SEPTEMBER TO 3RD OCTOBER

Graham Greene
Birthplace Trust

Painting by Paul Hogarth

OBITUARY

It is with regret that we record the death of Paul Hogarth, the artist whose Penguin front covers are so well known to all of us. The Trust was delighted to be able to show his work at an exhibition in connection with the first Festival at which Paul Hogarth was also a speaker. A gifted artist and illustrator he gave us among other works *Graham Greene Country*, his diary and illustrations chronicling his journeys in the footsteps of Graham Greene and his novels.

OCCASIONAL PAPERS et al

The following are available from the Trust Office @ £2.50 (incl. Postage) for the papers; others as priced. See below for address.

Bill West's Inaugural Lecture
Graham Greene and the Berkhamsted Connection
by John Davison

The Comic Sense of Graham Greene
by Neil Sinyard

Darkest Greeneland: Brighton Rock
by Cedric Watts

The Craft of Graham Greene
by Neil Sinyard

The Berkhamsted GG Trail (25p)

Compact Disc:
The Voice of Graham Greene (£10)

Video of 1998 (£8) and 1999 (£10) Festivals

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Spring Event
(jointly with Berkhamsted Citizens Association)
Wednesday 24 April 2002

Future Festivals
2002 Thursday 26 - Sunday 29 September

2003 Thursday 2 - Sunday 5 October

2004 Thursday 30 September - Sunday 3 October

COMMUNICATIONS

Visit the web site at
www.grahamgreene.bt.org

e-mail address of the Trust Secretary
secretary@grahamgreene.bt.org



The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust is a member of the Berkhamsted Arts Trust which is financially supported by Dacorum Borough Council
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