# A Sort of NEWSLETTER

Spring 2006

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GRAHAM GREENE BIRTHPLACE TRUST

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**Web site**
Do not forget to visit the web site of the Trust which is on
**www.grahamgreenebt.org**

# Editorial

Spring is here and May Day saw some early birds at St. Peter's Church to hear the Madrigals - a Berkhamsted tradition.

Some of you will have renewal reminders with this issue, and we all hope you will not only renew but also recommend that your literary friends take out subscriptions to keep this Newsletter going. As you know, being a Friend of the Trust ensures cheaper tickets for the Festival too.

The Festival! Yes, Mike Hill has been working hard and has arranged a very interesting programme, including no fewer than two members of the House of Lords. Do look at the website for the press release and other details of what is coming. You surely know how to find it, but here is a reminder:

www.grahamgreenebt.org

I am just back from the AGM in Bath of the Alliance of Literary Societies where I went to represent The Trust. Lots to see in that ancient city so with a couple of friends I spent a few days exploring. The event was organised jointly by the Jane Austen and the Fanny Burney Societies and the absolute highlight of the organised weekend was the dramatised reading of texts from both authors by the actress Angela Barlow, a gifted performer indeed, and clearly a major asset to the Jane Austen Society.

Yan Christensen

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Your comments and letters are always welcome.

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

## REVIEWS

# *The Libertine* and Graham Greene

by Frances H. Assa

Before the release of *The Libertine*, starring Johnny Depp, few people would have been able to identify the seventeenth century second Earl of Rochester, John Wilmot, debauched poet and friend of the similarly debauched King Charles II. Yet Wilmot's media potential was noticed in the 1930s by a twenty-eight year old writer of suspense novels who would become not only a great critic of the cinema, but one of its best screen writers as well - Graham Greene. Greene wrote the screenplay for the Orson Welles classic *The Third Man*, and many of his novels were made into popular movies. Greene did not write a script about Wilmot, or even a novel. Instead, while under great pressure to write a popular novel - he was under obligation to his publisher to pay back advances on two poorly selling books - Greene suddenly began squandering precious time by writing what seemed to be a useless biography of Lord Rochester.

What possessed him to take this foolhardy detour from his fiction, at a time when he could least afford it? Greene biographer(sic) and critic Cedric Watts has written that 'Greene was in debt to the publishers and he had rashly devoted time to the biography of the aesthetic libertine poet John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, only to see it rejected by Heinemann.' Watts gives no explanation for this peculiar venture. Greene's biography of Lord Rochester had to wait until Greene was seventy and at the height of his stature before a publisher would find it interesting enough to release as *Lord Rochester's Monkey.*

Far from a rash act, the biography of Wilmot was critical to Greene at this time of his life. By understanding the young Wilmot, Greene made a difficult but necessary attempt at self-discovery. Greene knew that, despite the difference of centuries, there were many parallels between himself and this literary wunderkind who died at thirty three, the victim of profligate living. Remarkably (did he foresee them?) many more parallels between himself and Wilmot would emerge through the rest of Greene's long and eventful life.

Greene begins his biography with a discussion of Wilmot's parents, quickly dismissing the dissolute father, and concentrating on the mother. Lady Rochester, he writes, 'was never a woman to find pleasure in the life of a Court, and Charles's Court at this time gave pleasure to neither the moralist nor the luxurious'. She preferred the quiet life at her country manor near Oxford to 'this dancing and foolery'. Greene discovers the side of Rochester that was drawn to the solid country life of his puritan mother. He shows that Wilmot needed periodically to ditch his reckless life and return to that pastoral place that nourished his peaceful childhood. Greene observes:

'...the country was establishing a hold on John Wilmot's affections that the city was never completely to eradicate. The city was to mean the clouded merriment of drink, the intrigues of the theatre, the half-hearted friendships with professional poets, affairs of love and lust, quarrels at Court, the friendship of the King whom he despised, the brothels of Whetstone Park, disease and its remedy, Mrs. Fourcard's baths. The country was to be peace, even a kind of purity, finally the place to die in'.



*Lord Rochester*



Greene readers will recognize the theme of lost innocence and the quest for peace that occupied all of his imaginative and autobiographical work. He creates a touching image of Wilmot emerging from childhood upon the death of his father to face a future that will leave the peace of the countryside and mother for the tempest at Court.

Rochester, like Greene, went to study at Oxford. He was admitted to Wadham College at the age of thirteen. Greene, whose own college was Balliol, writes about the temptations the youngster would have confronted at college.

While at Balliol, Greene attempted to spend an entire semester perpetually drunk. He divulged nothing about other forms of debauchery that may have preoccupied him there. Perhaps he was short of funds as well.

Like Greene, Wilmot grew into a good-looking young man of enormous personal appeal. His wit made him a favourite of King Charles even while he skewered the King with his devilishly funny barbs. Greene provides a description of Wilmot through the eyes of a contemporary:

'His person was graceful, tho' tall and slender, his mien and shape having something extremely engaging; and for his mind, it discover'd charms not to be withstood. His wit was strong, subtle, sublime, and sprightly; he was perfectly well-bred, and adorned with a natural modesty which extremely became him'.

Contemporaries of Greene were impressed by similar attributes. The author and editor Michael Korda was an adolescent when he first met Greene aboard the yacht of his uncle, the film director Alexander Korda. It was 1948 and Greene was forty-three.

'The Graham Greene I knew best was the private man, and on my part it was love - or at any rate besotted admiration - at first sight.
'Even at the age of fifteen, I could tell that he was attractive to women, both because he genuinely enjoyed their company - rare for an Englishman of his age and class - and because there was, beneath the charm and wit and superb intelligence, a feline love of gossip and an unmistakable, unapologetic interest in sex'.

Eight years later the writer Christopher Isherwood confided in his diary after meeting Greene for a drink that '...Graham looked quite sleek & handsome - much younger than his photographs. He said that this was because he is always photographed when he has a hangover.'

Greene's biography of Wilmot tends to de-emphasize the rake and tease out the generous, serious side of Rochester. Greene shows how Rochester, while indulging in wild escapades and outrageous behaviour, nevertheless was obsessed with a quest for peace, love, and a search for meaning in his life. These preoccupations mirror Greene's own legendary obsessions.

Rochester fell in love with Elizabeth Mallet, an heiress. Having more social position than wealth, his chances of success were slim when he began a campaign for the heart and hand of the clever and independent-thinking Mallet. The young couple was beautifully matched - both were young, handsome, intelligent and high-spirited; however Wilmot had a severe handicap - his rivals in matrimony were rich. Eventually the king, who had a soft spot in his heart for the couple, helped him win Mallet's hand in marriage. 'At the time of his marriage Rochester was nearly twenty' writes Greene, which was precisely the age at which he pursued, and later married Vivien Dayrell-Browning. Like Rochester, Greene also pursued his love against all odds. Greene's own biographer, Norman Sherry, details the amazing lengths he went to win her: he converted to

Catholicism, began his writing career, wrote her hundreds of love letters and, most amazingly, promised her a celibate marriage, if that was her preference. It was the latter promise that cinched the deal.

The parallels between Greene and Rochester up to the point of marriage are clear. But to explain the mystery of why, suddenly, in 1932, Greene began to work on this biography when he should have turned all his efforts towards producing a good selling novel, we need to turn to his diary and letters. Despite a close and loving relationship, (Vivien did not prefer celibacy after all), Greene was never entirely faithful to Vivien and it seems that they had an understanding about this. His pre-marital letters to her show that while they considered a celibate marriage, there was no discussion of celibacy *outside* the marriage for Graham. Indeed there was reference to 'keeping his peccadilloes in Paris'. Prostitutes and working class girls figure throughout his books, and it is they we must thank for giving him the real life experiences that anchor his fiction. This sincerely Catholic, almost Victorian young couple seemed to have found for a while a happy balance for their love, his sex drive, and their consciences. This balance kept their marriage afloat until the end of the Second World War, but it had begun to slide seriously in 1932 by the time he started his biography of Rochester.

Greene's diary shows that during the trips he took to London to research the biography, he would drop in on a woman referred to as Annette. Sherry details how Greene tore out some diary entries about Annette and rewrote them to cover his tracks. This material was too harmful for Vivien to see. His infatuation with Annette was so powerful that he transposed certain experiences with her whole-cloth into his next novel *England Made Me*, without even changing her name. In that novel, the hero, Anthony Farrant, has been in love with Annette, a 'tart', who has dropped him. In his autobiography, *Ways of Escape*, Greene admits that he had based Anthony's infatuation on his own experience: 'I had known Annette, the young tart whom Anthony loved. I had walked up those forbidding stairs and found [some notes left on the door] with the same emotion...' Like Anthony, Greene waited for Annette's return for hours on the stairs outside her door. Like Anthony, he waited in vain, and he never forgot the experience.

Norman Sherry points out that despite Annette and other dalliances, at this point in time Greene's love for Vivien had not faltered. In fact he dedicated *England Made Me* to Vivien, 'with ten years love 1925-1935.' Nevertheless, something fundamental had changed. The affair with Annette was the first time, and certainly not the last, that he found himself in love with someone other than his wife. It was the first time that a sexual escapade had taken root in his heart and it put him in crisis. He knew that Rochester, his double in so many ways, had been there.

Rochester loved his wife, but he was also in love with his mistress, Elizabeth Barry, whom he visited in London. According to Greene, Rochester had an understanding with his wife. Greene describes the relationship of Rochester and his wife and he could have been writing about himself and Vivien. Greene quotes at length from a poem written by Rochester for his wife in that 'beautiful, but no longer carefree expression'. Wilmot's anguish at his moral weakness and need for his wife is clear:

Absent from you I languish still,
Then ask me not, when I return?
The straying fool 'twill plainly kill
To wish all day, all night to mourn,
Dear, from thine arms then let me fly,
That my fantastic mind may prove
The torments it deserves to try,
That tears my fixt heart from my love.
When wearied with a world of woe,
To thy safe bosom I retire,
Where love and peace and truth does flow,
May I contented there expire.Lest once more
wandring from that Heav'n,
I fall on some base heart unblest;
Faithless to thee, false, unforgiven,
And lose my everlasting rest.

Rochester's poetry gave Greene much delight, and probably some comfort. In it he found his pleasures and struggles animated in gorgeous song. In this poem Rochester is anything but his usual erotic, witty, scatological self. He mourns two things - the loss of 'love and peace and truth' and the adultery that could cost him his 'everlasting rest'. This was the twin horror that Greene faced. He realized that, like Rochester, he sometimes believed and sometimes did not believe in the Christian promise of a hereafter for

those who were forgiven. Rochester was a non-believer who questioned his own doubt. Greene was the Catholic who questioned his belief.

Greene's biography relates how Rochester, suffering a major physical breakdown, began to doubt his religious scepticism when he read Dr. Burnet's *History of the Reformation*. He began to communicate with Burnet, and the two began a dialogue about Rochester's objections to the Christian religion. Dr. Burnet set out to return Rochester to the fold. Feeling his health recovered, Rochester rejected Burnet's arguments for belief.

Greene would have considered how Rochester's arguments applied to his own 'free use of wine and women'. Years later he would make Querry, the hero of *A Burnt-out Case*, paraphrase Rochester's arguments when he says 'Why did he [God] give us genitals then if he wanted us to think clearly?' and when Querry, reflects on his self-exile in the Congo, 'I shall do no more harm'. The parallels between Rochester and Greene extended to their deaths. Rochester on his deathbed was surrounded by his loved ones and priests. Rochester officially repented and took the Sacraments. After his death Burnet, who was Rochester's confessor, wrote a biography of him. At the end of his life, Greene had been debating his faith with his friend and confessor Father Duran. He died surrounded by his loved ones, and having received the last rites from Duran. After his death Duran wrote a biography *(sic)* of him.

Although Greene's biography aroused no interest in publishers at the time it was written, it served its purpose. Whatever guidance Greene may have found in the life of Lord Rochester is a matter of conjecture. But this adventure in biography is one more proof that Greene, infallibly, could recognize a great story.

Frances H. Assa

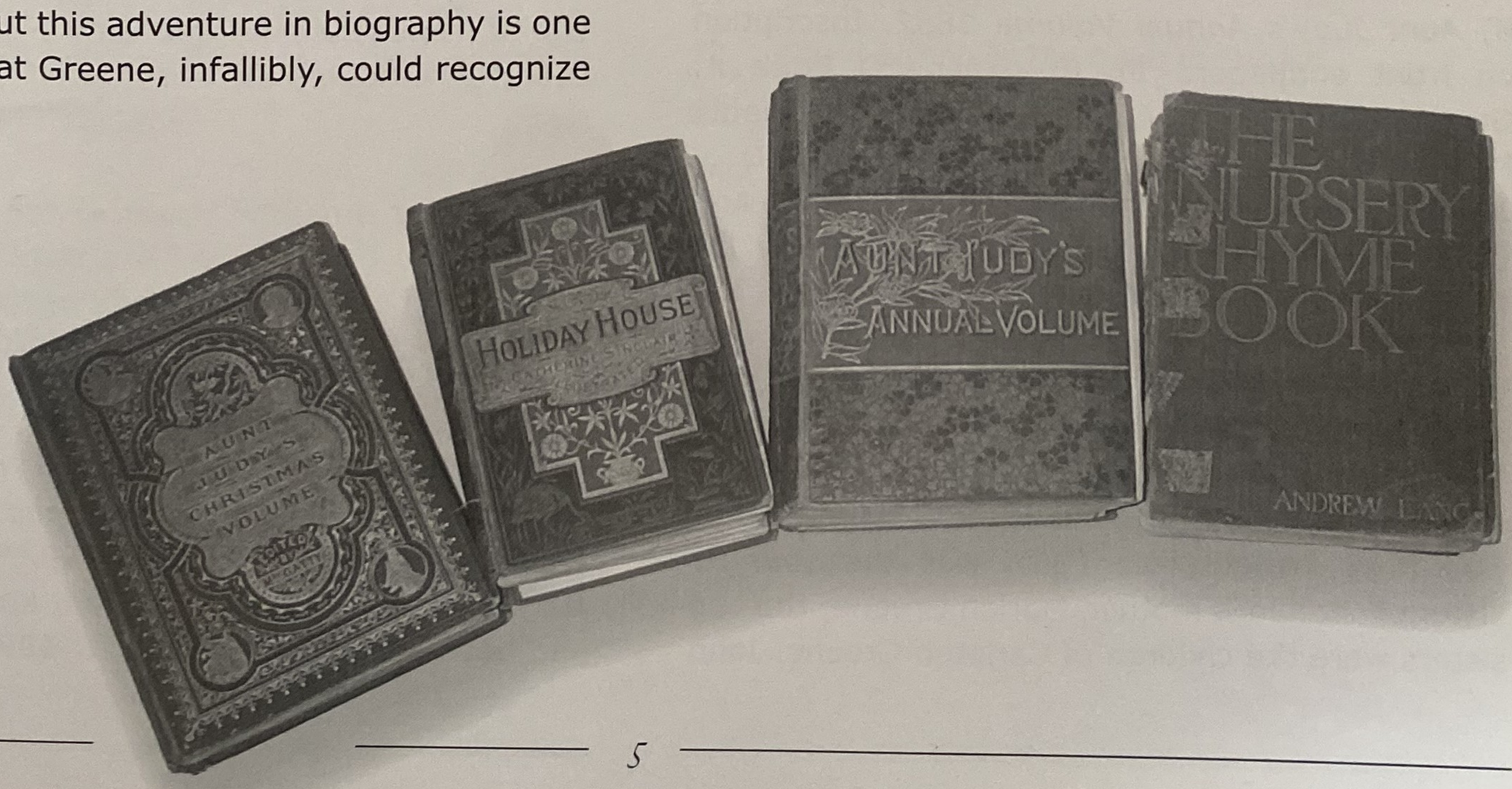
# MISCELLANY

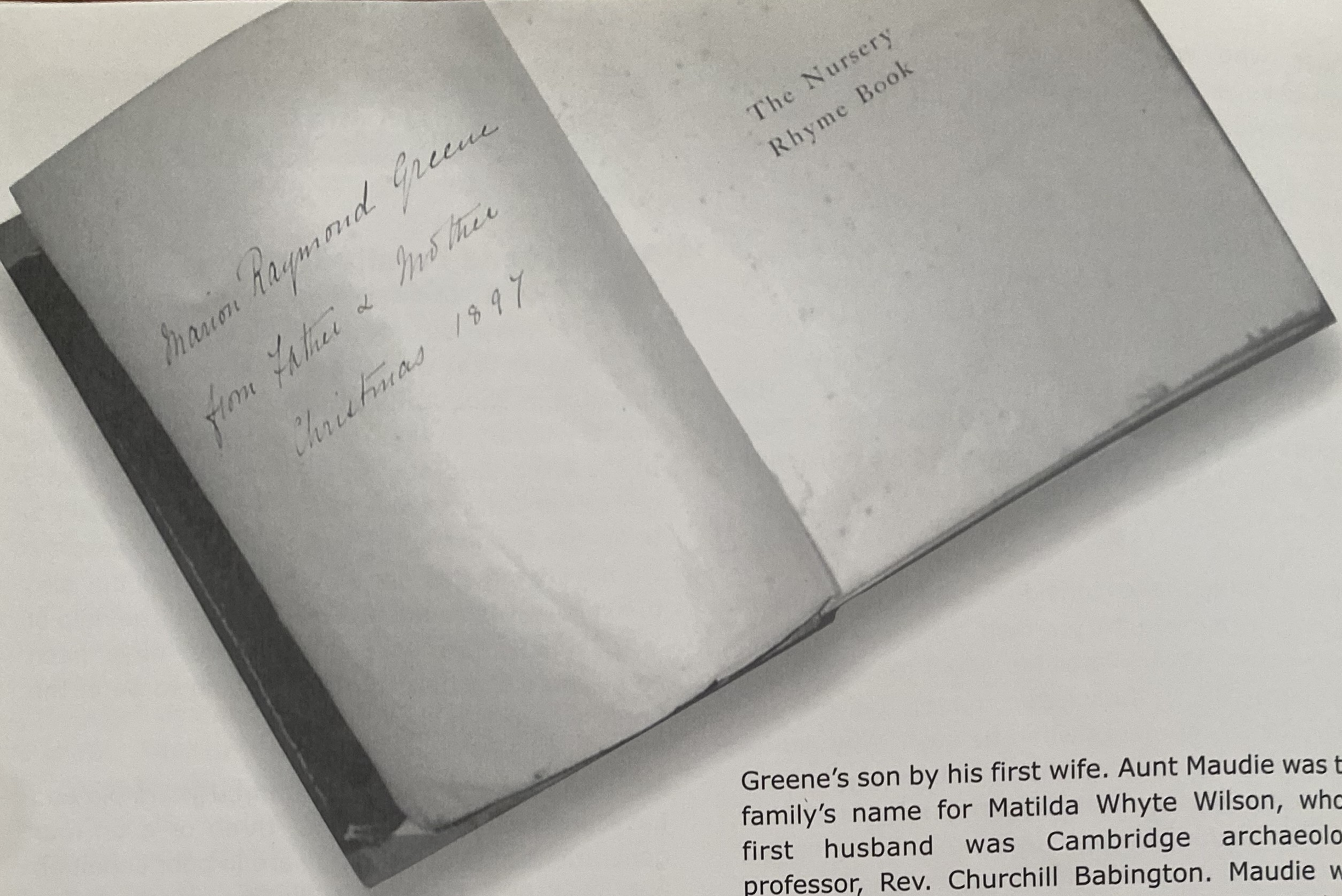
## The Greene Family Nursery

Most of what we know about the Greene family nursery may be found in Graham Greene's autobiographical works. However in at least one instance he tantalisingly hid information about the nursery library in the middle of a novel - *The End of the Affair*. Recently, as the result of a centenary gift to the Trust Archive of four books that used to be in the Greene nursery library at Berkhamsted, we have been able not only to prove this but also to examine the books themselves. With the help of John Walker, Graham's nephew, we have been able to find out how the books came to be in the nursery library in the first place.

All four books are over one hundred years old and have been well used by two, three or even four generations of Greenes. They are in poor condition but have now been carefully preserved in the Dacorum Heritage Trust Museum Store where our archive is kept. It would be possible to restore them but the cost would be well over £100 and it has been decided that it would be better to leave them in their present condition; they are unlikely to be read, although one day somebody may wish to examine them to see if they can identify the childish scribbles - especially those in the Andrew Lang Nursery Rhyme book.

Two of the books appear to have been given to Marion Greene before her marriage to Charles, and one to Marion's sister, Maud. They probably all had their place on the nursery bookshelf at St John's and later at School House. We do not know





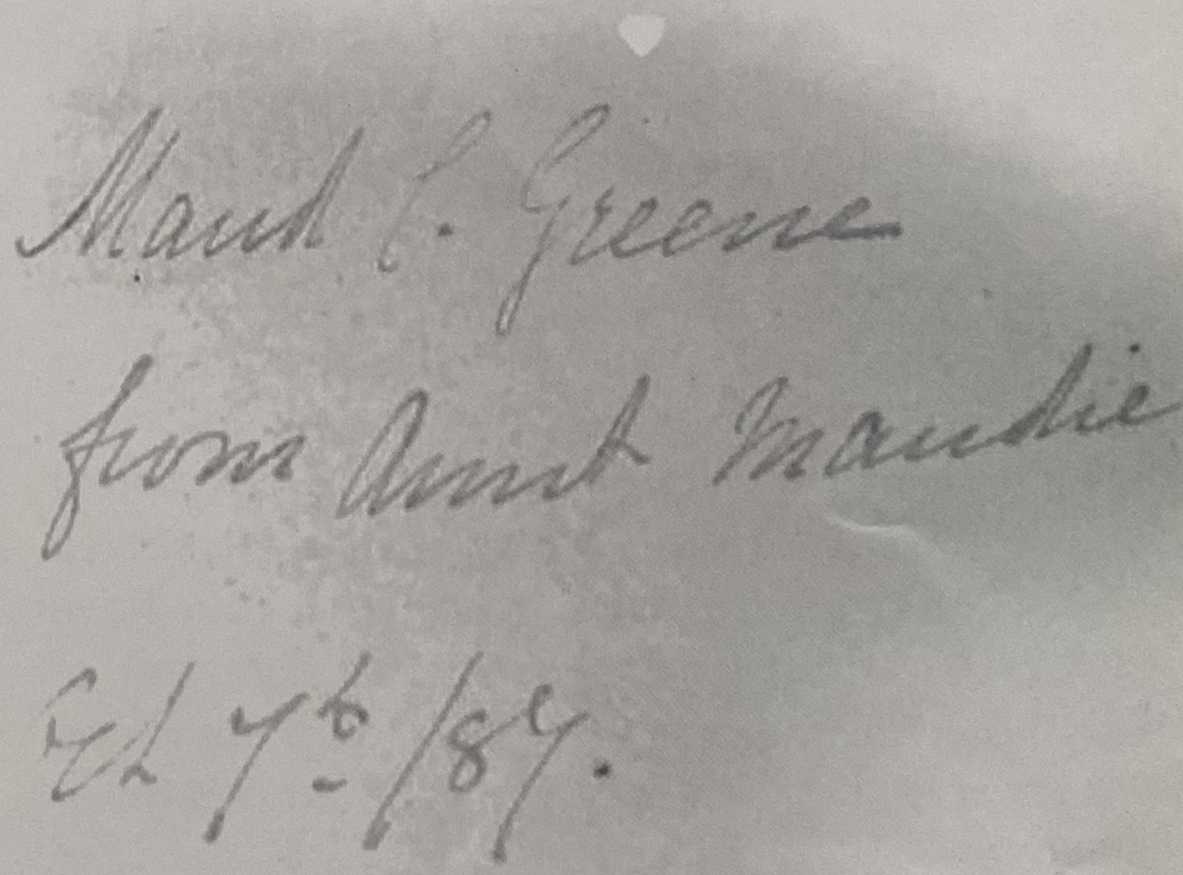

when they were given to Vivien and Graham. They may have been moved to Crowborough on Charles's retirement in 1927 and given to Vivien and Graham when their first child was born some six years later or following Marion's death in 1959.

**The books concerned are:**

A) *Aunt Judy's Christmas volume for young people, 1869*. It has the book label of Katharine Greene. Katharine (née Raymond 1822-1874) was the second wife of John Greene, son of Benjamin Greene III, the founder of the Greene King brewery. John was Graham's maternal great-grandfather (John's younger brother, William, was Graham's paternal grandfather).

B) *Aunt Judy's Annual Volume 1882*. Inscription on front endpaper: 'M. C. Greene & Edith A. Greene 1885.' M. C. Greene was probably Margaretta Catherine Greene (1837-1889) – John's eldest daughter by his first wife. Edith Ann (1856-1912) was John's eldest daughter by his second wife.

C) *Holiday House* by Catherine Sinclair. Inscription on front endpaper 'Maud C. Greene from Aunt Maudie October 7th 1887'. Maud Churchill Greene (1874-1956), who later lived at 103 High Street (now 125), was the younger sister of Graham's mother, Marion Greene; the two sisters were the children of Carleton Greene, John Greene's son by his first wife. Aunt Maudie was the family's name for Matilda Whyte Wilson, whose first husband was Cambridge archaeology professor, Rev. Churchill Babington. Maudie was the elder sister of Janie Wilson who was Marion's and Maud's mother.




D) *The Nursery Rhyme Book 1897*. Some childish pencilled scribbles. *Inscription on reverse side of front endpaper:- 'Marion Raymond Greene from Father and Mother Christmas 1897,'* Charles's and Marion's first child, Alice Marion, known as Molly, had been born on 30 December 1896.

The reference in *The End of the Affair* to nursery books may be found towards the end. Sarah has died and Bendrix has moved into the guest room on the North Side of the Common to keep Henry company. Greene writes: 'It was a few days afterwards that I pulled open a cupboard in my bedroom and found a pile of old children's books. Henry must have looted this cupboard for Parkis's boy. There were several of Andrew Lang's fairy books in their coloured covers.....'

Bendrix also found some other books, many of which had obviously belonged to Sarah: 'Many Beatrix Potters, *The Children of the New Forest,* and *The Golliwog at the North Pole* and one or two older books such as *Captain Scott's last expedition*'. I am puzzled why Greene described the last book as 'older' – did he mean 'for older children'?

Ken Sherwood March 2006

## *The Power and the Glory* front covers

For this year's festival, James Mackay has again agreed to put together a display of front covers of various editions of a Greene novel – this time, *The Power and the Glory*, which features in two talks this year. James has as ever gone about this very enthusiastically, and has gathered together a great many images – principally, Penguin and Vintage Classics editions. He'd now like to add to the collection, and I'd like to enlist the help of *Newsletter* readers in this. In particular, does anyone have *The Power and the Glory* in the 1970s Collected Edition (green dustjacket), or any unusual front covers of the novel – perhaps foreign language editions?

If so, please get in touch with me by email at m i k e @ m i c h a e l h i l l . p l u s . c o m Ideally, the image should be scanned at 600dpi and sent electronically; if this is a problem, get in touch with me to sort out an alternative.

Mike Hill

## THE QUIZ

### GGBT Spring Quiz Answers

The winner this time is Mike Hill. If it all seems rather incestuous to some of you, you only have yourselves to blame. Although there were some very good entries, there were not many at all, and it is obvious that with more competitors it would not seem such a small circle of quiz-minded people. Do you at least enjoy reading and privately attempting the annual quiz?

1. Clara in *The Honorary Consul*
2. Oliver Chant in *The Name of Action*
3 Myatt in *Stamboul Train*
4 Bernay, the pawnbroker in *It's a Battlefield*
5 Kill the Assistant Commissioner
6 Anne-Marie Demassener in *The Name of Action*
7 Anthony and Kate in *England Made Me*
8 A 1914 Baedeker in *Stamboul Train*
9 Dr Czinner in *Stamboul Train*
10 Querry
11 Architect
12 *J'Accuse*
13 Knuckledusters in *England Made Me*
14 Nordahl Grieg
15 Ingrid Bergman
16 Pinkie
17 Bread and butter and tea in *The Man Within*
18 A spider in *England Made Me*
19 Psychiatrist
20 *The Last Word*
21 Beatrix Potter
22 David Bishop in *The News in English*
23 Rollo
24 Alexander Korda
25 Nigerian
26 *People who say Goodbye P Y Betts*
27 *Babbling April*
28 Vera Cruz
29 Freetown
30 John Gielgud (first English performance)

## 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.

Graham Greene is well known for using few adjectives and "no beastly adverbs". On the other hand one can admire his use of similes and this has made me wonder whether skilful use of original similes makes adjectives less important. Does anyone know of books that analyse and discuss this aspect of literature?

Alan Porteous

An interesting letter from Tony Price involving a lengthy quotation and a bit of a puzzle is being held over until next issue for lack of space. Ed.

## IN THE PRESS

The Editor cannot keep up with the entire International Press, so please help by sending any press cuttings you would like to see reported. An English précis in case of the more exotic languages would be appreciated.

*The Times, The Telegraph* and *Washington Post* carried lengthy obituaries of Alida Valli who played Anna in *The Third Man*. She died in Rome at the age of 84 after an acting career that had started in the late 'thirties. She went to Hollywood under contract to David O. Selznick, but apart from *The Third Man* her stay there did not produce anything of much note. She returned to Italy to continue a distinguished screen and stage career. In the early 'fifties she had one more brush with the work of Graham Greene when she and Trevor Howard were in *The Stranger's Hand*, a melodrama from a story by him. But *The Times* clearly considers that her finest performance in English was as Anna in *The Third Man*.

Another death was that of Dame Muriel Spark, who was supported financially by Graham Greene early in her career on condition she neither thanked him nor prayed for him!

As always there are constant mentions of and quotations from GG in the press. A great many film and book reviews refer to GG as a standard in papers all over the English speaking world, e.g. 'could be a plot from GG' and *Chicago Sun Times*: 'Dan Brown (*Da Vinci Code*) is no Graham Greene'. The following are some of the GG quotations used – *Hindustani Times*, India 'Fear is indivisible from hate'. *Sooke News Mirror*, Canada 'destruction is a form of creation'. *Toronto Star* quotes from *The End of the Affair* 'hatred seems to operate the same glands as love...'. *Daily Nation, Kenya* from *Ways of Escape*: 'the main character in a novel must necessarily have some kinship to the author...' and *Business Standard*, India recalls GG's advice to a rookie reporter to put his 'soul on ice'. *The Telegraph* (UK) recalls Greene's review that described Ingrid Bergman as entering with a 'highlight gleaming on her nose-tip' (cf Quiz). *icWales* lists new classics among which are *The Power and the Glory*. Among others *Indianapolis Star* mentions Jocelyn Rickards' 1987 autobiography *The Painted Banques: My Life and Loves* about her romantic liaisons with i.a. Greene.

*Camden New Journal* draws attention to an address in Camden associated with writers and where GG claimed he 'left his virginity behind'. *The Telegraph* carried an article about *The Human Factor* drawing parallels with Greene's life. *The Spectator* brings GG into an article about Beatrice Potter, and *The Times* of 18 March 2006 has an article about *Brighton Rock.*

Finally *Times Online* brings news of a forthcoming biography of Graham Greene by Jeremy Lewis.

## THE TRUST

### Book gift

Earlier this year the Trust received a gift of 140 books from Laurence Pollinger Ltd, Graham's former literary agent. More than 80 books have been added to the Trust Library and the balance which are duplicates will be on sale at Festival 2006. A list of the books on sale may be obtained by sending a large stamped addressed envelope (35p second class) to:

Ken Sherwood
Rhenigidale, Ivy House Lane,
Berkhamsted, HP4 2PP.

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