

# THE SIGNAL

A Community Newsletter for  
**KINNERSLEY-SARNESFIELD-LETTON-NORTON CANON-BROBURY**  
**STAUNTON-ON-WYE-MONNINGTON-ON-WYE-MOORHAMPTON**

NO.52

OCTOBER 1986

PRICE 12p

## Local schools under threat

The closure of primary schools in Norton Canon and Staunton-on-Wye is suggested in a review by the County Council. The review, which is really of secondary education, projects that Weobley Secondary School will go down in numbers of pupils from 418 in September 1985 to 300 in 1990. As Weobley's catchment area includes Credenhill, the review indicates that alternative provision is easy, i.e. close Weobley Secondary School and transfer the pupils to Lady Hawkins at Kington and Whitecross in Hereford. Then create a new primary school on the vacated Weobley site and transfer the pupils from the present primary schools of Weobley, Norton Canon, Staunton-on-Wye, Dilwyn and Canon Pyon. The review does not actually indicate how many places would be available at Weobley but it appears that this would need to be in the region of 200 to 250.

The review suggests that children from the present catchment areas of Credenhill, Canon Pyon and Staunton-on-Wye could go to Whitecross to alleviate the effect of falling rolls on that school. It also comments that although housing development has taken place in the Whitecross catchment area, the school has not benefitted in terms of extra pupils as parents have preferred to send their children to other schools in Hereford City.

The review does not give the reason for the parental preference, simply that without any changes the decline in pupils would in percentage terms be greater than any other secondary school.

The review also refers to closing the sixth form facilities at Lady Hawkins, Kington.

It also indicates that the alternative to closures could be:-

- a) Reduction in subjects taught.
- b) Strict enforcement of admission limits in Hereford High Schools.
- c) Staffing the small rural high schools to a level sufficient only for a basic range of subjects.
- d) Co-operation between small village schools.

PLEASE NOTE THAT COPY FOR THE NOVEMBER ISSUE OF 'SIGNAL' SHOULD  
REACH TRISANNA, STAUNTON-ON-WYE (PHONE MOCCAS 517) NOT LATER THAN  
MONDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 1986.

The above, according to the review, would involve additional costs, but there is no estimate of the cost of retaining the existing facilities nor of the cost or saving of the closure option.

The County Council wants comments on the review, apparently by Christmas.

Our Parish Councils now have a subject worthy of a public meeting. Perhaps a County Council Officer could be asked to attend to explain the report; no doubt your Parish Councillors would like to know whether you would attend a meeting.

## **Norton Canon Ladies' Social Club**

WHY so few members at the September meeting? Some of us still had summer guests; some were still on holiday in warmer climates; some were busy preparing children for the new term; and a few were under the weather with various colds, aches and pains.

But those who did reach the village hall that evening really enjoyed Mrs Jennifer Wilson's display of Carla pottery. There was a large selection of kitchen equipment, ornaments and table lamps among the items displayed by Mrs Wilson. All the prices were very reasonable and members bought enough to qualify for £7 worth of free gifts - sufficient to provide several raffle prizes in the coming months.

It was, in fact, a very jolly evening in spite of there being only about eleven members there. On October 13th at 8 pm in the village hall there will be either a talk, illustrated by slides, on the history of Weobley by Mr W.Dyer and Mr Norman, or a talk on cider making, with samples, by Mr John Worle, or an illustrated talk 'A holiday in Turkey' by Mavis Stevenson. Raffle and refreshments as usual.

Sheila Evans

## **Country Car Service**

This service is now in operation and aims to give a friendly, personal approach towards the needs of the local community. The proprietor is Nigel Harries, who comes to the area with over ten years experience in driving tuition, including coaching advanced drivers. Joining him here in Weobley are his wife and two young daughters. 1982 was a special year for the Harries family, when Nigel entered the National Safe Driver of the Year competition and won the South West and Wales Region before going on to become runner-up nationwide, so you will be in safe hands. If you are in need of a mini-cab or would like to take driving lessons, please ring and he will offer a very fair rate, whether it be from village to village or to anywhere in the U.K.

Phone: Weobley 318720  
Prop: Nigel F. Harries, MOT. ADI.  
MIAM. ROAD

We have received a letter from a reader about what appears to be a crowing cockerel in Weobley called 'Gadaffi'. As the letter has neither signature nor address we regret we are unable to publish it as it is not our policy to publish unsigned letters.

### **ARROWVALE WINE CLUB**

What's with September? It's a 'neither this nor that' month - people seem either to be on holidays, recovering from them, busy in their gardens, or preparing themselves for the long, dark evenings ahead. Whatever it is they do they sure don't attend monthly meetings, so it was a pity that fewer than twenty people were at the September meeting to enjoy a most interesting slide presentation and discussion on the work of the Forestry Commission given by Mr Andrew Coombes. Even his Scottish accent quickly became understandable and the questions he provoked must have convinced him that he was successfully getting across to his audience.

Gareth Evans



# Children's essay competition

AS announced in the August issue, 'Signal' gave support to the Weobley and District Annual Ploughing Match held on September 17th by sponsoring a special children's essay competition on the subject 'My Best Day'. The participants were divided into two age groups - under 7 and under 11 - with prizes of £3, £2 and £1 for the best three entries in each section.

Some twenty entries were received, all from Weobley Primary School pupils, and the judges awarded the prizes as follows:-

## Under 11

- 1st Glen Tommy (10 years 11 months)
- 2nd Stephanie Baker (10 years 7 months)
- 3rd Melanie Murgatroyd (8 years)

## Under 7

- 1st Kelly Bowen (5 years)
- 2nd Andrew Bell (7 years)
- 3rd Suzanne Price (6 years 5 months)

The two first-prize-winning essays are printed below and the second and third prize-winning entries will appear in the November issue.

### MY BEST DAY, by Glen Tommy

It was going to be a special day I could feel it in my bones. I could hear a slight patter of the morning drizzle on the window pane. I crawled out of bed, staggered to the bathroom, washed my face and brushed my teeth, squirting out a long striped line from the half-used tooth-paste tube. My Mum shouted up the stairs to hurry up so I raced into my room grabbed some jeans and a tee-shirt and hastily dressed. I then slid down the banister and joined my Mum and Dad at the breakfast table.

My Mum was no super chef but her bacon and eggs were good enough for me. After the meal Mum told me to get anything I wanted to take with me. She said we were going to Devon for the day as it was Dad's day off. I thought this sounded very boring but I did as she said and got a few books to read. As I walked out of the house I saw a droplet of dew slide down the edge of a spider's web and then fall with a plop to the ground. It looked like the Sun would never come out as I glanced at the sky which was crammed full of grey clouds. That was all the more reason for it to be a boring day. I made my way towards the car where Dad was loading a picnic basket into the boot. When we were all seated, the car came to life with a cough and we started our journey to Devon that miserable morning.

We had been to Devon many times before. That was probably partly why I found it so boring. I never enjoyed car journeys and that day was no exception. I kept on fidgeting and twiddling my fingers. I can never do one thing for more than ten minutes at a time: one minute I was reading a book, the next I was just looking at the countryside.

At long last we came to Devon but when we got to the spot where we usually stopped Dad went straight on. It looked like we were going to a different place this time. Dad then turned onto a mud track with overhanging trees making it gloomier than before. After what seemed to be half an hour we finally came to a clearing. As we got out of the car the sun came out and shone brightly. I looked around and saw that the stream flowed swiftly. In the distance I could see fields of barley swishing like the sea in the light breeze. I told my parents that I was going to take a short walk while they were preparing the picnic. I saw a path that led into a wood next to the stream and after Mum told me the usual things about "do not fall into the stream and take care of yourself" I set off in that direction for my leisurely stroll.

It was not a big wood and did not have that many trees but I enjoyed the walk a lot as there was a lot to look at. Pine needles adorned the ground and rushes were all along the stream. Rabbits darted across my path nearly tripping me up. I now and again would pick up a pine cone and put it in my pocket. I saw a small island in the centre of the stream with stepping-stones. It looked a very comfortable place to lie so I decided to cross over to it. I waded through the reeds and then walked carefully across the stepping-stones. There was only enough room for two people on that small island. I took off my shoes and socks and dabbed my feet in the water and threw a pebble now and again. The Sun was really high in the sky now and I was just dozing off when I heard Dad calling. So I put on my shoes and socks and made my way back to the car.

The picnic was of sausage rolls, jam tarts and lots of other things which I really liked. Sometimes I can still taste those jam tarts. We read for about half an hour until our food had digested and then had a quick game of French cricket in which I did pretty well.

We were just going to leave when I remembered that I had left my jumper on the island. I went to get it but had not gone far when I heard a noise in the under-growth. Not long after a small cat came running out to me. I called to Dad and started walking back to the car and the kitten followed. Dad could not think where it had come from as the nearest farm was at least ten miles away. So after a lot of pleading from me Dad allowed me to keep it. After giving it a few tit-bits left over from the picnic we set off home. The kitten licked my hand and then fell asleep in my lap. It had been a special day after all as my feelings in the morning had told me. In fact, it had been my best day as I had gained something I had always longed for and I felt a deep gladness as I pondered over what name to call my cat.

#### THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE by Kelly Bowen

The best day of my life was when I went to Borth. This was the day I played with my brother in the sea. We splashed about and paddled. The water was cold and tickled our toes, it was whole family day except that dad didn't come. Poor daddy had to work.

The number of entries submitted was disappointingly small and of the schools circularised only Weobley Primary School took part in the competition. Nevertheless the judges commented on the very high calibre of the entries.

#### JUMBLE SALE

Staunton-on-Wye Ladies' Club. Saturday, October 11th at 2.30 pm at Staunton-on-Wye Village Hall, with various other side stalls.

#### SARNESFIELD BARBECUE

The Bar-B-Que held on August 9th at The Batch in aid of St. Mary's church, Sarnesfield, proved to be a great success. The glorious warm and dry summer evening attracted a large number of people who supported all the side shows and stalls most generously.

The result of the evening was a profit of \$692.57. Thanks to everyone for their help and support.

Gwen Phillips

#### FOR SALE

Sheepdog pups for sale. Will work or make excellent pets. Higginson, phone Eardisley 471.

Welcome to Mr Frank A. Evans, M.B.E. and his wife Mildred who moved from Banstead in Surrey to 'Hillcrest', Staunton-on-Wye on September 11th. We hope they will be very happy in their new home.

Bigamy is having one husband too many. Monogamy is the same.

Anon.

The trouble with her is that she lacks the power of conversation but not the power of speech.

George Bernard Shaw



# October in the garden

ALREADY the autumn is bringing a change to the garden and we are getting air frosts and the occasional ground frost which will decimate a lot of our summer colour. Cloches are very useful at this time and can be used to cover lettuces sown in late July or August. Cover spinach sown in August or early September to give good pickings in late autumn. A few parsley plants will respond to cloche protection. Dwarf French beans sown in July will do much better and crop much longer if protected from mid-September.

Onions should be well ripened before storing. Ripening outdoor tomatoes is difficult at the end of the season. If you have spare cloches cut the ties on single stemmed tomatoes, lay the plants down and cover, but watch for slugs. If you cannot protect the plants listen to the weather forecast and if hard frosts are predicted make sure you pick the fruit and continue the ripening process inside.

Unfortunately most of my outdoor crop has been ruined by blight. In July I advised spraying potatoes and tomatoes against blight; the potato crop is fine but having sprayed the tomatoes on two occasions I omitted repeating the process at three-weekly intervals. This is the second time my tomato crop has been affected and two years ago both potato and tomato crop were lost. Last year - no problem; this year tomatoes were affected. I think the wet summer may have been a factor. However, I think in the circumstances a more suitable non-de-plume would be 'One blighted finger.'

In this area it should be possible to have lettuces maturing in late March by planting seeds in cold frames or under cloches in the first half of October. Use the recommended winter variety of seed and keep the slugs at bay. Plant spring cabbages; cut down asparagus and Jerusalem artichoke stems; thin turnips sown in July and August to three inches apart; thin winter spinach to four inches apart. If you have space in your cold frame sow cauliflowers to mature in June and overwinter in the frame for planting out in March. You can also sow broad beans to overwinter, but I prefer to start mine indoors early in the new year to plant out when hardened off.

Having now advised you of the jobs that need your attention in the vegetable garden in October I will try once again to catch up with all the work I said should have been carried out in August and September.

One Green Finger

## READER'S LETTERS

I should like to thank the committee and all who donated to make it possible for me to have a wheelchair kitchen, also to the children and postmen who gave up their time to swim and walk to raise money. It is hard to put into words just how much this has meant to me.

This kitchen has been the means of giving me independence and help in trying to lead as normal a life as possible, which could not have been achieved without your kindness. I have also been moved by all your messages and kindness, not only to me but to my family, during my long stays in Oswestry and Oxford, and we all thank you most sincerely.

I do appreciate all the hard work and time that has gone into making the kitchen possible. The total raised by everyone amounted to £1,550.43, plus a reclining garden chair from the children which has given me great pleasure.

No words can really convey how grateful I am to you all for your loyalty and support throughout my illness.

Pat Austin

You know you're flying faster than sound on Concorde when the stewardess slaps your face before you've said what you're thinking.

Frank Sinatra

# A suit for all occasions

CME evening a newly-commissioned sub-lieutenant was having a drink in the ward-room when one of his friends complimented him on the cut, style and general fit of his uniform. With a barely concealed smirk he replied that he had had to pay over £400 to a firm in Savile Row - a fact which explained its high quality.

They had a few more drinks together and then his friend plucked up enough courage to remark 'Hope you don't think me rude if I point out a slight flaw. It looks as if your left trouser leg is slightly longer than the right.'

Careful checking proved this to be true so next morning the sub-lieutenant stormed furiously into his Savile Row tailors. They listened patiently to his outburst and then explained how small alterations could so easily ruin a suit's style and cut. As there was only an inch in it why not, they suggested, when next in the wardrobe 'Just put your left foot on the bar and hold your right trouser leg. Nothing will then be noticed'.

Next evening he took up this position at the bar and was again pleased to be complimented on the smartness of his uniform. A few drinks however again encouraged frankness - this time to reveal that his left sleeve was longer than his right.

Once more the sub-lieutenant stormed back to Savile Row only to receive the same warning regarding the disadvantage of small alterations. This time the tailor came forward with the valuable suggestion that, when next at the bar, he should hold his drink in the left hand, lean slightly forward and pull his shorter sleeve down below his cuff.

He followed this advice to the letter and two nights later was pleased to be complimented by his commander on the quality and cut of his uniform. The sub-lieutenant again preened himself as he mentioned the price tag of over £400 but was later more than a little disconcerted when the commander referred to a slight ruff in the collar of the jacket.

In high fury the sub-lieutenant stormed back once more to the tailors only to be reassured that it was not at all uncommon for such small ruffs to appear. All he had to do was to keep his head slightly lowered for the next two weeks and so give time for his jacket collar to settle down.

The following evening he was having his customary drink in the wardrobe with his left foot lodged on the bar rail, his right trouser leg hoisted, his drink in his left hand, his elbows on the bar, his sleeve drawn below his cuff and his head bent forward. In this position he was approached by a midshipman friend who, after complimenting him on the quality and cut of his uniform, went on to remark 'You know, George, there's one more point I'd like to make. You may not know that I had one hell of a job being accepted by the Navy - and all because one of my feet was a little flat. So what absolutely beats me is how a cripple like yourself with one short leg, a deformed left arm and a humped back could ever have been considered in the first place. It's flaming well not fair'.

(From Oxfam's book of short stories 'Pass the Port')

Children are a great comfort in your old age - and they help you reach it faster, too.

Lionel Kaufman

The bible contains much that is relevant to-day - like Noah taking 40 days to park.

Buy old masters. They fetch a much better price than old mistresses.

Lord Beaverbrook

The automobile did not put the adventure of travel within reach of the common man. Instead, it first gave him the opportunity to make himself more and more common.

John Ketas

She's the sort of woman who lives for others - you can always tell the others by their hunted expression.

C.S.Lewis



# Church Notices

## October Services

### Sarnesfield

10 am 12th Holy Communion  
26th Morning Prayer

### Norton Canon

9 am 5th Holy Communion  
12th Morning Prayer  
19th Holy Communion  
(Preacher: Canon Paul Iles)

26th Family Service

### Staunton-on-Wye

11 am 5th Holy Communion  
12th Morning Prayer  
19th Holy Communion

### Byford

6.30 pm 5th Harvest Festival  
(Preacher: Mr Boyan Love)  
11.00 am 19th Morning Prayer  
10.00 am 16th Family Service

### Monnington-on-Wye

9.30 am 12th Holy Communion  
6.30 pm 26th Harvest Festival  
(Preacher: Revd Harry Chappell)

### Letton

11.00 am 12th Family Communion  
6.00 pm 26th Evening Prayer

### Kinnersley

6.30 pm 5th Harvest Festival  
Preacher, Rev.S.Prior  
10 am 12th Morning Prayer  
15th Holy Communion  
26th Family Service  
Nov. 2nd Holy Communion

### Other dates

3rd 7 pm Sarnesfield Harvest Festival. Preacher: Rev. George Usher.  
7th 7.45 pm Norton Canon Charity Festival. Preacher: Canon Len Moss.  
10th 7.30 pm Norton Canon Harvest Festival. Preacher: Canon Len Moss.  
14th 7.45 pm Norton Canon School Governors  
15th 7.30 pm Celebration of Christian Healing - Cathedral.

Preacher: Revd. Peter Hancock.

17th 7.30 pm Concert in Weobley Church with Stephen Gilling and others (Cathedral Appeal)  
25th 10 - 4 Africa Day at Bishop Mascall Centre Ludlow with Tanzania team and Nigeria Bishop

### Youth Club for Norton Canon?

Young People and parents are invited to come to a meeting in the Village Hall at 10.30 am on Saturday 4th October to discuss what is needed, and then on Saturday October 11th at 10.30 am to meet Mr Des Roderick.

## BIRTHDAYS

A very happy 18th birthday to Julie Griffiths of Norton Canon on October 3rd - and happy birthdays to:-

Norton Canon  
Bryn Evans 5th Oct.  
Karen Austin 10th "  
Hannah Gittins 11th "  
Christopher Knight 15th "

### Kinnersley

Louise Parish 1st Oct.  
Tom Corbett (Sallies) 31st "

### Mansel Lacy

Mark Edwards 17th Oct.

### Staunton-on-Wye

Jason Jenkins 7th Oct.  
Martyn Price 7th "  
Nicholas Price 7th "  
Bryan Powles 15th "  
Jason Bradford 16th "  
Tracey Chamberlain 27th "

## WEOBLEY AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The first of the winter lectures will be given in the Willow Gallery, Weobley, on Wednesday October 22nd at 7.30 pm by Mr H.Cooper who will talk on the History of Criminal Courts. Newcomers as well as current members will be most welcome.

## NEW BOOKS.....

SLOW BOATS TO CHINA and SLOW BOATS HOME, by Gavin Young, £3.95 each

FOR most of my life I have been lucky enough to travel and I suppose it is only natural that I should love reading books on the subject. Not all travel books, however. Not ones, for instance, which concentrate only on personal interests in great detail, e.g. architectural forms, obscure tribal customs and such like. I prefer travellers' tales which tell of peculiar personal odysseys and which demand for their achievement high orders of individual initiative and imagination.

Into this latter category I would definitely place these two books. Aircraft flight has wonders of its own and, in many senses, has helped to reduce the world to the size of an orange but, for so many of us, it has also unfortunately removed much of the glamour of travel. In my youth the most common way to get to, say, America or India was by boat, and Gavin Young's self-appointed task was to see if he could, in the 1980s, do the same. In both directions - going east and returning westwards - he failed in this endeavour, but for reasons which only add glamour to his tale.

If I recommend these books as an excellent Christmas gift of 'under a tenner' it is with the assurance that I have no shares in Penguins.

Gareth Evans

### ATTENTION - ALL READERS:

September is admittedly a 'betwixt and between' month with contributors having matters on their minds other than writing for 'Signal'. This has meant that, for this issue, we have had to a certain extent to fall back on our reserves and resort to using articles unconnected with local affairs- and in the main humorous.

This contributory lull gives us the chance to ask for your opinions. Do you think we should continue to focus on subjects of local interest or would you prefer us to venture further afield? What, for instance, do you think of our sense of humour? Are there any new subjects which you would like us to explore? Is there anything in the past to which you have objected? Whatever you think please don't stop writing - we really do need your help.

'Signal' Editorial Board

## Obituary

We regret to announce the death of Mrs Louisa Hills of Morning Watch, Norton Canon, who died peacefully at home after a brave fight against illness. We extend our sympathy and condolences to her family.

Congratulations to Mr and Mrs Geoff Jay of Moorhampton on the birth of their son Jack on September 2nd.

### WOBLEY GARDENING SOCIETY

The society is holding an Open Evening on Wednesday, October 8th at 7.30 pm at the Hopelands Village Hall. The celebrity speaker will be Mr J.M.Garsten, who is the Public Relations Officer of the Royal Horticultural Society, and he will be talking, with slides, on 'Shrubs for the Small Garden'.

All are invited, and the charge for non-members is 50 p, which includes refreshments at the end of the evening.

J.A.Haylar, Secretary  
Wobley 318294

Whoever called it 'necking' was a poor judge of anatomy. Groucho Marx

Here lies the mother of children seven,  
Four on earth and three in heaven -  
The three in heaven preferring rather  
To die with mother than live with father.

Epitaph

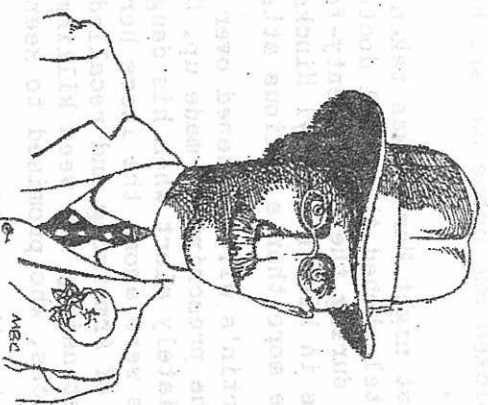
I bought my mother-in-law a chair  
for Christmas, but my wife wouldn't  
let me plug it in.

Anon



# The murderous major

by  
M. B. COLLINGWOOD



HIDDEN away in its wooded valley on the Welsh border, the small village of Cusop lies in one of the most scenic parts of Herefordshire. The steep northern slopes of the Black Mountains hem it in on all sides and the scattered houses of the village line the banks of the Dulais brook which constitutes the boundary between England and Wales. These houses are for the most part substantial villas built at the end of the last century for the more affluent citizens of adjacent Hay-on-Wye.

In one of these villas, a somewhat flamboyant building called Mayfield, there lived in 1921, shortly after the end of World War I, one of Hay's leading citizens. Major Herbert Rowse Armstrong, T.D., M.A., was a solicitor, clerk to the Hay magistrates' court, a prominent freemason and a leading light in ex-servicemen's organisations. Although he had served in France for a short period during the war he had seen no action, but had nevertheless been allowed to retain his rank, a concession of which he was very proud - he was in fact known in the district as 'The Major' and was generally held in high esteem. Although below average height he held himself very erect and his waxed moustache, bright blue eyes behind spectacles, his spruce appearance and the riding breeches, cavalry boots and officer's British warm greatcoat he normally affected gave him an appropriately military air.

He had been married, but his wife had died in February of 1921 and he had lived on at Mayfield with his three children and servants. It was well-known in the neighbourhood that the major, although a man of consequence in Hay, had been far from the same in his own home - in fact he had, according to popular rumour, been somewhat henpecked by his formidable wife - so it was rather improbable that her death had affected him to any great extent. In short, he gave the impression of being a sound citizen and successful businessman, if a trifle undemonstrative by nature.

But there was one small cloud on his horizon - small at the moment, but liable to build up to a considerable threat. He was not the only solicitor in Hay, for there had been another practitioner, Robert Griffiths, who, shortly before his death in 1919, had taken on a partner, Oswald Martin. Griffiths had been an easy-going man who had never at any time posed a serious threat to Armstrong, but Martin was a very different proposition. He was young, active and ambitious and before very long he was making serious inroads into Armstrong's business. The major had recently lost an important contract to him and he soon realised that something would have to be done to rally his declining fortunes. His plan was startlingly simple - he decided to remove Martin.

Of course, he gave no hint to his rival that he was planning his demise. On the contrary, he went out of his way to be friendly. He asked Martin to take tea with him in his office on several occasions and eventually, on October 26th, 1921, Martin accepted the invitation. The major was courteous and affable and offered his guest tea and buttered scones. Oddly enough, he did not pass him the plate

but picked one scone out and handed it to Martin with the apology, 'Excuse fingers'.

That night Martin was taken ill. He was violently sick several times and his wife telephoned the local doctor, Thomas Hincks. After asking Martin what he had eaten during the past twenty-four hours (Martin included Armstrong's buttered scones in his inventory) Hincks concluded that his patient was suffering from little more than a bilious attack and prescribed accordingly.

Martin's wife hastened over to her father, the Hay chemist John Davies, to get the prescription made up. Davies was a shrewd, competent practitioner who was immediately alert when his daughter informed him that the major's buttered scones were among the items her husband had eaten. Davies had no very high opinion of Armstrong and recalled that he had made several sales to him of arsenic, ostensibly for weed killing. He lost no time in confiding his suspicions to Dr Hincks, who promised to keep in mind what Davies had said.

Davies then visited Mr and Mrs Martin and again voiced his suspicions about Armstrong. He then learned something that increased his disquiet. About a month previously Martin had received a small parcel in the post which, on being opened, turned out to be a box of chocolates. There was no indication of who had sent it, but Martin had nevertheless eaten one or two without any ill effect. But when he offered some to visiting relations a few days later one of them, his sister-in-law Dorothy, was violently sick the same night, although she very soon recovered.

Davies decided to get the remainder of the chocolates analysed. He and Dr Hincks sent the box to a London analyst who reported that two of the chocolates filled with a white powder which proved to be arsenic.

Although the matter had by this time been brought to the notice of the police who at once commenced detailed investigations, it proved impossible to discover where the chocolates had been purchased, but suspicion of Armstrong was rapidly snowballing. When his affairs were gone into it was found that Mrs Armstrong's will had left everything to her husband and that he had recently applied for a passport. After this the net closed rapidly and on December 31st Armstrong was arrested and charged with administering arsenic to Oswald Martin on October 26th.

## Canon Motors

(Brian Robbins)

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- Repairs
- Roofing
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- Chimney Repairs

Post Office, Norton Canon

Phone: (0544) 318825



On January 2nd, the same day on which Armstrong made his first appearance before the magistrates in his own court at Hay, his wife's body was exhumed from her grave in Cusop churchyard. A post-mortem examination by the renowned forensic expert Dr Bernard Spilsbury revealed that it was full of arsenic, some 208 milligrams in all being found.

Armstrong had been consigned to Worcester gaol after the Hay proceedings had been adjourned and he was now charged with the murder of his wife. His trial at Hereford immediately became a cause célèbre and I can still remember how, as a schoolboy stealing surreptitious readings of my father's newspapers, I followed its dramatic course, eagerly lapping up the more sensational revelations. Many of Herefordshire's older inhabitants no doubt have similar memories. The trial of such a local bigwig was a tremendous sensation in the normally quiet countryside, for although murder today is such an everyday occurrence that it seldom rates headlines, in the 1920s it was front-page news. Whole columns would be given over to cross-examinations by such legal luminaries as Sir Henry Curtis Bennett and Norman Birkett and the Armstrong case was no exception, particularly as many local people found it difficult to credit that such a respected personality as could be guilty of murder. But he was in fact found guilty and was hanged at Gloucester prison on May 31st, 1922, the only British solicitor to have been hanged for murder. He made no confession of guilt.

Looking back on the case with the hindsight of over sixty years the first thing that strikes one, in an age when murder is carried with an ingenuity which becomes more fiendishly efficient every day, is what a naive bungler Armstrong was. Here was a man who had managed to poison his wife without the slightest suspicion being attached to him (Dr Hincks's death certificate stated that she had died from gastritis and heart disease) yet he nevertheless tried the same thing on Oswald Martin in a way that was bound to bring suspicion straight to his door. Dosing his intended victim with poisoned scones - even going so far as selecting a particular one and placing it on his plate to ensure he ate one which was doctored - seems the height of folly. One can only assume that the success of his first essay in murder had made him over-confident.

There remains the reason why Armstrong murdered his wife. Although nothing really definite came out at the trial it was discovered that the little major

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had several lady friends and one in particular whom it is possible he was considering marrying after a decent interval had elapsed after his wife's death. It is also probable, too, that he was relying on his wife's death to help relieve his financial problems for it was proved that the signature on her will - the will which left everything to her husband - was a forgery. But it seems fairly certain that his main reason was that he wanted to put an end to the prolonged humiliations - often inflicted in public - which he had suffered through his wife's domineering personality.

His Cusop house, Mayfield, still stands, although its name has since been changed, but Mrs Armstrong's grave - the grave past which her husband walked every Sunday on his way to church - has long since been levelled and made anonymous as a protection against morbid sightseers.

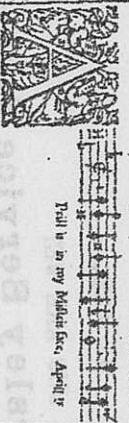
#### APPOINTMENT IN SAMARRA

(Preface by W.Somerset Maugham to the book by John O'Hara of the same name)

There was once a merchant of Baghdad who sent his servant to the market place to buy provisions and prepare a meal for an important guest. But in a short space the servant returned, white and trembling, to stutter 'Master! Master! Just now when I was in the market place I felt myself jostled in the crowd and turning in anger I found it was Death who had accosted me. He looked without pity and made a threatening gesture'.

In anguish the servant continued, 'Dear master, please lend me your horse so that I may ride away from this accursed city and go to Samarra where Death cannot find me'. The merchant agreed to the request and the servant, digging his spurs into the horses's flanks, rode away at a gallop.

The merchant, much vexed at the loss of his trusted servant, decided to go down at once to the market place. When he espied Death he asked bitterly, 'Why did you make such a threatening gesture to my servant when you met him here this morning?' But Death looked puzzled and replied, 'I am sorry because it was not my intention to cause him alarm. He must have misinterpreted my reaction which was one of genuine surprise. You see, my friend, I was astonished to find him here in Baghdad because tonight I have an appointment with him in Samarra'.



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