



About Larkin

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Ruth Siverns (formerly Bowman), who was engaged to Larkin between 1948 and 1950, died on the last day of 2012. As Larkin's first love she inspired such poems as 'Wedding-Wind', 'No Road' and 'Wild Oats'. Her friend in later years, Win Dawson (formerly Arnott), offers a tribute in this issue; James Booth's more formal obituary is online at www.guardian.co.uk/books.

It is our sad task also to record the death, on 29 October 2012, of Amber Allcroft, a generous and active member of the Society. She is remembered here by Paul Walker and Belinda Hakes. Maurice Rutherford's beautiful elegy for his wife Olive follows.

This issue opens with a fascinating piece by Simon Blackburn on the clasped hands in 'An Arundel Tomb'. It is interesting to know how comparatively rare the feature was in monuments and brasses. Professor Blackburn reflects on why Larkin should have been so certain that the Earl and Countess 'scarcely meant' this gesture. Philip Pullen presents an intriguing archival discovery. Apparently, Larkin began the notorious 'compartmentalising' of his life very early, writing sections of letters to his parents under a different name and in different handwriting. The poet's many-sided personality features also in Betty Mackereth's account of Hull University's Library in the years following her appointment as Larkin's secretary in 1957. We catch a glimpse of him, too, through the eyes of the late Margaret Thatcher, in recently released papers from 1982.

The analysis of Larkin's spectacles by Colin Vize, Consultant Ophthalmologist at the Hull and East Yorkshire Eye Hospital, is of primary biographical importance. The 'out of reach' light-filled vistas in such poems as 'High Windows' and 'Here' must surely owe something to Larkin's acute, lifelong myopia.

The issue also includes the second part of Joseph Bailey's study of Larkin and Cyril Connolly, and Terry Kelly's review of Richard Bradford's joint biography of Amis and Larkin, *The Odd Couple*. Finally, we include two 'unclassifiable' items (to use Larkin's own word): Douglas Porteous's topographical celebration of Howdenshire, Yokefleet and the 'harsh-named halts' of 'Here' and Layton Ring's zestful translation of La Fontaine's hatred-of-abroad poem 'Les Deux Pigeons'.

The 20th Century British Poets in Music Festival, sponsored in part by the Society, continued on 8 March 2013 with a recital by the Portumnus Ensemble of settings of and responses to Larkin's poetry, directed by Lee Tsang of the University's Music Department. This was followed by a concert in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Details of further events can be found on the Society's website.

The second half of 2012 saw three major Society events. From 5 to 7 of October we welcomed members of the Thomas Hardy Society to 'Friday (and Saturday and Sunday) in the Royal Station Hotel'. Tony Fincham, Chairman of the Hardy Society, recalls this memorable, convivial – and sunny – weekend. The final day, 7 October, saw the opening by Alan Johnson MP of the Larkin installation in the Hull and East Riding Eye Hospital, a truly inspired design achievement. Our final event of the year, held as usual on the poet's deathday, 2 December, was the unveiling of the seat opposite Martin Jennings' statue on Paragon Station. The chill temperature and loud train noise did nothing to depress the enthusiasm of the 80 and more people who attended.

James Booth
Janet Brennan

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About Larkin is produced twice yearly by The Philip Larkin Society.
The articles in the Journal reflect the personal opinions of the contributors
and not those of the Society as a whole.

Forthcoming Events

www.philiplarkin.com

The Alliance of Literary Societies AGM

Hosted by the Barbara Pym Society on Barbara Pym's 100th birthday

1–2 June 2013 St Hilda's College, Oxford

James Booth will be speaking on 'Larkin and Pym: An Elective Affinity'

www.barbara-pym.org



Philip Larkin Society Annual General Meeting

Saturday 8 June 2013: *The Lawns Centre, Cottingham*
AGM 12.00 noon, followed by a wine reception at 12.30, lunch 1.00pm
and at 2.30pm our distinguished guest lecturer

Archie Burnett: *Editing Philip Larkin*

Members free; non-members £5.00

Bridlington Poetry Festival

14–16 June 2013: Sewerby Hall, Bridlington

The Larkin & East Riding Poetry Prize: Judge: Jackie Kay

Closing Date: Monday 15 April 2013

www.bridlington-poetry-festival.com

20th Century British Poets in Music Festival

Sponsored by Beverley and East Yorkshire Concerts, Philip Larkin Society, University of Hull,
Chinese University of Hong Kong, Royal Musical Association

27 June 2013, 1.15pm: Beverley Minster: Portumnus Ensemble

Larkin in Song II: Free admission

A concert featuring new music by Raymond Yiu, Nathaniel Seaman,
Louis Johnson, Marcello Messina, and Chris Hutchings

www.hullsinfonietta.org.uk/Events.asp

Garden Musical Soirée at 105 Newland Park: 7.30pm onwards

Saturday 27 July 2013 (no children under 14)

Could members wishing to attend please inform Miriam Porter: 0207 248 3777 or 01482 343842

Larkin in Twenty-five Objects

An exhibition of photographs of Larkinalia by Dennis Low

4–20 September 2013, Hull Central Library, Albion St.

Heritage Open Day in Hull: A Sunday Session with Philip Larkin

15 September 2013: Hull Paragon Station Details to follow

Afternoon Tea with Betty Mackereth

2 December 2013 Details to follow

Ruth Siverns (Bowman)

born 15 May 1927; died 31 December 2012

Win Dawson

I first heard of Ruth's existence in 1952, when at a party Philip said to me in a rueful tone, 'I was engaged once, too.' It was forty years before I met her, and for another twenty I had the great pleasure of her friendship.



Photograph taken by Larkin in 1948
© Estate of PhilipLarkin

In my diary for December 3rd 1992 I wrote, 'Coffee with Ruth – in a quiet, calm, pretty house with four cats. Found her diffident, modest and charming.' The diffidence vanished with time, but my initial impression was absolutely right.

Ruth's early life is well-documented: her upbringing in Wellington, relationship with Philip beginning as a schoolgirl of 16, their falling in love, engagement and subsequent break-up. She later married, suffered tragic bereavement and gave birth to a posthumous son in 1960. Then followed her conversion to Catholicism, her career as a teacher of English in Wolverhampton until John was educated, and her final retirement to Romsey in Hampshire, to live near her cousin Isobel.

This must have been the happiest and calmest period of her life, lasting for many years until her final illness and death.

Ruth was a quiet woman, content in her pretty house with its books and cats, her garden, her friends and her Church not far away. Cats were her passion: she had been known to have as many as six at a time, and to her their personalities were as distinct as the unusual names she chose for them. They were mostly rescue cats, and even in her last years she acquired two, apparently smuggled from Romania where their deformed tails would have left them homeless. She had a large summerhouse constructed in her back garden with perches and ladders at different levels, so the cats could enjoy fresh air and sun without the dangers of traffic.

Like Larkin, she had no desire to travel. She had never driven a car or been on a plane, and she was always gratifyingly astonished at tales of other people's adventures, saying that the very thought made her feel tired!



© Suzuyo Kamitani

About Larkin

She loved local outings, and she and I had a yearly ritual of birthday and Christmas lunches. Visits from friends were greatly appreciated, yet one felt she would not have complained of loneliness or neglect if they had been fewer. She and her cousin met almost every day, and her son, later with his wife and eventually a grand-daughter, visited her as often as they could.

Ruth had a penetrating and critical mind, and she read widely and deeply, but with a particular interest in keeping up with modern fiction. She also loved detective stories; in 1981 she herself wrote a charming book about a cat detective, *Barlow Dale's Casebook*.

After Philip's death in 1985 she found herself a person of literary interest. But although she co-operated with Andrew Motion and other writers, her real delight was in getting to know some of his friends, especially Maeve Brennan, who as a devout Catholic was particularly congenial. They made visits to each other both in Romsey and Hull, and when Jean Hartley came down to stay with me in Winchester all four of us got together, not 'to compare notes on their lover', as Alan Bennett suggested, but to discuss far more interesting subjects! In fact, Ruth and I

scarcely ever mentioned Larkin. But I do remember, when Ruth was bemoaning her rather old-fashioned kitchen, saying, 'What this room needs, Ruth, is a FILLIP!' How she laughed, for she had a great sense of humour.

Her friends in Romsey knew little about Larkin and cared less. She knew how much of himself he had given her, but recognised that he would not have made her a good husband, and was content.

Although Ruth became frailer and moved to a smaller house about five years ago, she seemed cheerful and happy, and only her catastrophic fall down her steep stairs, after a slight stroke, changed the even tenor of her way. She had broken so many bones that she was never able to walk again, and spent the rest of her days in a care home. Even there her spirit did not falter, buoyed up by her religious faith. Fortunately it was an unusually pleasant Home, next door to her Church, so priests and nuns, though sadly not cats, were frequent visitors. She continued to read much and welcome friends, but gradually she grew weaker, until her death from pneumonia on the last day of 2012.

To the Editors, *About Larkin*, from John White

I was pleased to see the handsome photograph of Louis Armstrong on the cover of *AL* 34 (October 2012), and the publication of my article "The Great Oak": Philip Larkin on Louis Armstrong" [Part 2]. Unfortunately, by an editorial oversight, my 18 Endnotes are conspicuously absent. Most of the missing sources can be worked out from the text, but I can supply full details to any interested readers [John.White@hull.ac.uk].

I would, however, like to summarise three of the Endnote citations:

I thank Conrad Jones [*About Larkin*, No. 33] for his discovery of Larkin's previously uncollected review: "Well, hello Satchmo," *Guardian*, July 11, 1970, 8.

James Booth, discussing "Jazz, Race and Modernism: 1961-1971", in his forthcoming book, notes that Larkin does not explain the phrase "Negating western culture," which "could imply anything from simply freeing up white inhibitions through instinctive rhythms, to a more profound infusion of cultural perspectives, from the era of slavery, or even from our common African origins".

Larkin's assessments of Armstrong are quoted approvingly by Terry Teachout in his excellent biography: *Pops: The Wonderful World of Louis Armstrong* (JR Books, 2009).

Soon after his appointment as Librarian at Hull, Larkin purchased (and presumably enjoyed) Armstrong's second autobiography, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (1955). Writing to Monica Jones, Larkin had gleefully informed her: "Ordered Satchmo (Louis Armstrong) in the College bookshop - created a fine effect, like a Bateman drawing". Anthony Thwaite, editor: *Philip Larkin: Letters to Monica* (Faber & Faber, 2010), 156.

Yours sincerely,

John White

English Tombs and Larkin

Simon Blackburn

There are not many English mediæval tombs with the husband and wife clasping hands. Arthur Gardner lists alabaster tombs with this feature only at the following locations:

Warwick. Thomas Beauchamp d. 1371, and Katherine Mortimer. The tomb is probably later and due to his son.

Elford, Staffs. Sir Thomas Adams d. 1391, and Matilda Stafford. Like the Arundel tomb, this was much restored in the nineteenth century by Edward Richardson.

Strelley, Notts. Sir Samson de Strelley d. 1390 and wife. The tomb is dated a decade or so later.

Lowick, Northamptonshire. Sir Ralph Grene & Katharine Malley. Created 1420. This is the only tomb of the kind for which a contract and date exist.¹ The contract did not specify joined hands, but of course there may have been other communication with the sculptors.

Wimborne, Dorset. Duke and Duchess of Somerset (Beauforts) d. 1444.

Later examples are also at:

Macclesfield, Cheshire, and Warrington, Lancs.²

Crossley includes tombs of other stone than alabaster.³ But he only specifically mentions one more clasped-hands tomb than Gardner, namely the gilt tomb of Richard II in Westminster Abbey, showing hands joined with his wife Anne of Bohemia. This tomb was evidently commissioned by Richard for Anne and manufactured 1396–9. Richard died in 1400; the hands are again missing.

There are probably five fourteenth century brasses showing couples with clasped hands.⁴ One is of Sir John Harsick and his wife at Southwore, Norfolk, and is dated to 1384. Richard and Margaret Torrington dated c. 1356, in St. Peter's Berkhamsted, is interesting as being of "civilians", rather than of titled or ecclesiastical persons. A particularly fine hand-clasping brass of Sir John and Lady Joan de la Pole, at Chishall in Essex, is variously dated to 1370 and 1380.

¹ The contract is quoted under the entry for Lowick in Nikolaus Pevsner, *Northamptonshire*.

² Arthur Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, Cambridge University Press (1940), p. 39.

³ F. H. Crossley *English Church Memorials A.D. 1150–1550* Batsford Books (1921).

⁴ This is the number given in the authoritative listing of Herbert Haines, *A Manual of Monumental Brasses*, Oxford & London: J. H. & J. Parker (1861), p. lxi.



Sir John and Lady Joan de la Pole, at Chishall, Essex

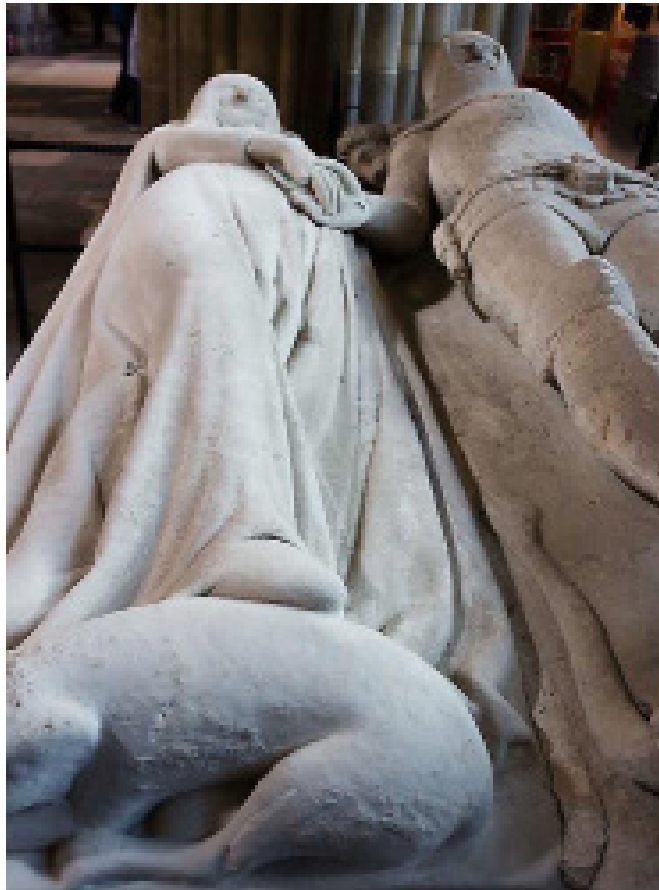
Apart from the brasses there seem to be fewer than five sculpted memorials from the late fourteenth and even the early fifteenth centuries in which hands are joined, compared with the hundreds showing hands clasped in prayer or otherwise disposed.

Thanks to Philip Larkin, the Arundel tomb in Chichester cathedral is by far the most famous of these. It is now generally agreed to be that of Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, and his wife Eleanor of Lancaster, also known as Eleanor Plantagenet. She died in 1372; he died in 1376. Assuming (provisionally, as we shall see) that the tomb is of around those dates, this makes it the earliest English tomb of this kind listed in the normal sources.

The plaque in the cathedral reads as follows:

The figures represent Richard Fitzalan III, 13th Earl of Arundel (ca 1307–1376) and his second wife Eleanor, who by his will of 1375 were to be buried together "without pomp" in the chapter house of Lewes Priory. The armour and dress suggest a date near 1375; the knight's attitude is typical of that time, but the lady's crossed legs, giving the effect of a turn towards her husband, are rare. The joined hands have been thought due to "restoration" by Edward Richardson (1812–69), but recent research has shown the feature to be original. If so, the monument must be one of the earliest showing the concession to affection where the husband was a knight rather than a civilian.

It is certainly true that Eleanor's sinuous turn towards her husband is rare and, if not due to Richardson, it is in fact unique among the five tombs of the period 1370–1420. It is also unlikely that it is due to Richardson, since in effect it would have meant his creating an entirely new statue, and this is not implied by contemporary descriptions of what he had done.



There is, however, one gorgeous early fourteenth century tomb figure of a very mobile lady, at Bedale in North Yorkshire. She is far from the plainness of the pre-Baroque; even the phlegmatic Pevsner describes her as agitated, and this is emphasised by her clutching a long, sinuous girdle, suggesting that her agitation has something to do with dressing, or undressing. Although she is now lying next to a similarly sculpted knight, he is in alabaster and she in stone, so it is not at all clear that they originally made a couple. The figures must have been beautifully executed; the knight even has a little dragon transfixed by, or eating, the bottom of his shield:



Bedale early 14th century: Knight and agitated Lady.

The Chichester plaque seems potentially misleading in supposing civilians to be more affectionate than knights and nobles. None of the medieval tombs listed in these books shows civilians and it seems very unlikely that anybody below the rank of knight (or bishop or other prince of the Church) could have afforded such a monument or would have been given the right to erect one.⁵ On the other hand, the one civilian brass already mentioned, of Richard and Margaret Torrington, shows a conventionally stiff couple. There is, indeed, a lovely suggestion of a turn towards her knight on the part of the lady in one of the later brasses, that of Sir John Harsick and his wife at Southacre:



The Southacre brass

Of course, Sir John was not a civilian and is not dressed as one. This brass is also mentioned in Foster, Brighton and Garland. It is surely later than the Arundel tomb.⁶ In any event, since, as mentioned already, Haines states that there are only five hand-clasping monumental brasses of the fourteenth century, there cannot be a significant

⁵ Herbert Haines, *op. cit.* p. ii makes this point.

⁶ Paul Foster, Trevor Brighton, and Patrick Garland, *An Arundel Tomb*, Otter Memorial Paper No. 1.

number of civilians in that posture, and probably none with added agitation.⁷ So it is unclear what the cathedral plaque could mean. Obviously, the three-dimensional twist is harder to show in brass than in statuary, but this difficulty is overcome triumphantly at Southacre.

The earliest mention of the Arundel tomb appears to be a description from 1635, which is silent about the linked hands. Brighton is also quite categorical that the tomb had been dismantled during the Reformation, and that the arms of the knight were entirely missing before Richardson's restoration. This may be so, although casual inspection suggests that if the knight's arms were entirely remodelled in the nineteenth century, the hands must have been replaced yet again, since there are clear breaks around the lower forearm or wrist and especially in the case of the knight – a distinct shift of colour and material at that point:



The Arundel hands

Of course, if only the lower forearms were missing, this would confirm the deduction Brighton ascribes to Richardson: "in laying the lady on the knight's right side he deduced that her right arm across her breast would have extended her hand towards his, assuming his original posture had not been one of hands held together in prayer". If it is this research that the cathedral plaque is relying upon, it is fairer to say that it suggests that the feature was original rather than that it shows that it was.

Brighton also mentions the much better executed and better preserved tomb at Lowick as a possible model for Richardson's restoration. The original Arundel tomb predates Lowick by up to 45 years. However, Lowick has exactly the trope of the left hand holding the empty right-hand gauntlet, which is much more clumsily executed at Chichester.

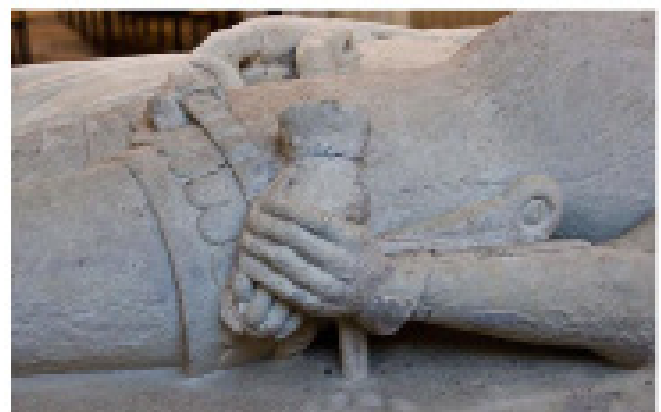
⁷ H. Haines, *op. cit.* p. clxv. Haines also states that there are only seven extant representations of women in any posture in brasses of before 1350. Stone effigies of women are relatively common.



The Lowick Tomb



The Lowick Gauntlet



The Arundel Gauntlet

About Larkin

We now turn to interpretation. The equivalent plaque placed by the church on the tomb of Thomas Beauchamp (Earl of Warwick) and Katherine Mortimer at St. Mary's at Warwick says that "their hands are clasped together indicating the joining of two great families and estates." Inquiry at the church failed to pinpoint the authority for this assertion, although it seems quite probable in itself. Dynastic reasons are, perhaps, more likely to have swayed the medieval aristocracy than the private romantic sentiments more beloved of the Victorians.

It is notable that there could easily have been similar reasons for the Arundel tomb: Richard Fitzalan's marriage to Eleanor of Lancaster is said to have helped to make him one of the richest men in England, but she was Richard's second wife, and they were only married by Papal dispensation. It may be significant that a son, Edward, was bastardised by the annulment of Richard's first marriage, so it might have been especially politic to symbolize the solidity of the later match (equally, Eleanor had a son by her first marriage, and the son of that son, John Beaumont, 4th Baron Beaumont (1361–1396) was very much alive at the time and, presumably, might have been bothered about his mother's legacy). Richard had left a will specifying that he should be buried "without pomp" in the chapter house of Lewes priory, by the side of his second wife. But it seems not to be known at what date the effigies were created, nor, if this will was expeditiously implemented, when they were brought from Lewes to Chichester. Richard's son, also Earl of Arundel and a Knight of the Garter, was, one imagines, well able to do what was necessary to protect his legacy. So it seems at least possible that the clasped hands were a dynastic statement on the part of one of Richard and Eleanor's descendants or heirs. If so, it would suggest an irony different from that of Larkin, but perhaps just as poignant, and certainly more defensible historically.

An interesting coincidence connecting three of these earliest tombs is that Richard II was the son of Edward, the Black Prince. Thomas Beauchamp I was also the guardian of the Black Prince at Crécy and Poitiers. Finally, Richard Fitzalan was one of the Black Prince's most trusted supporters, and at these same battles was also one of the principal English commanders. The Black Prince founded the Knights of the Garter, and Thomas Beauchamp was its third entrant. Richard Fitzalan's son was later admitted. Although it might take a Dan Brown to read anything positive into all this, it does seem unlikely that an extraordinarily uxorious disposition connected this trio of heavyweights with their spouses, when it connected so few others at the time.

There are several well-known puzzles raised by Larkin's

poem.⁸ The Arundel tomb in Chichester cathedral has no Latin around the base. Neither do the two figures have dogs under their feet: the lady has a vestigial lapdog, but the animal under the man's foot is unquestionably a lion.



This might suggest that Larkin was confusing two different tombs, or misremembering which one he had seen. However, quite apart from the title, there is decisive independent evidence that it was indeed the Arundel tomb that Larkin saw (although the poem "Church Going" shows that he also haunted other possible locations). In his biography of the poet, Motion describes how Larkin, together with his close friend Monica Jones, holidayed on the Isle of Wight in January 1956, immediately before creating early drafts of the poem, which was completed in February and eventually published in May that year.⁹ Chichester would have been a natural port of call *en route* to or from this destination. Furthermore, there is no other candidate that could be described in terms of an "Earl and Countess" lying in stone, nor ones which have such notably blurred figures (the term is perfect for Richardson's restoration, which, although admired at the time, is extremely disappointing today. This is perhaps partly due to the soft stone he used, but also perhaps partly due to his much-derided qualities as a sculptor). The matter of origin appears to be clinched when Larkin writes to Monica in May 1964:

The TV men are after the Arundel tomb in Chichester—I hope to God it's there & I didn't dream it. They want to know if it's free-standing, or against a wall. I hope all my descriptions are accurate – jointed armour, stiffened pleat, little dogs. I'm quite likely to have invented them. Do you remember it? I expect you do: total recall.¹⁰

Perhaps Larkin was right to be diffident about the accuracy of his memory, even for the few weeks that it

⁸ A full text is available at www.poculminter.com/best-poems/philip-larkin/an-earl-and-countess/

⁹ Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, New York: Farrar Straus (1993), p. 274

¹⁰ Anthony Thwaite, *Philip Larkin: Letters to Monica* London: Faber and Faber (2010), p. 334

took him to complete the poem. As well as the missing Latin and the wrong mammal, it is the right hand of the man that holds Ekanor's hand, so it is the right-hand gauntlet that is clasped empty in the left hand.¹¹

Of course, poets are not expected to be church guides. However, it is interesting that in the letter to Monica Larkin hopes that all the details are right. He is evidently not prepared to shelter behind "poetic licence". This in turn raises a much more interesting question. It is central to the poem that the trope of the clasped hands was not particularly important to the pair who are memorialised, just as it is also implied that it is they (and not, for instance, their descendants) who commissioned it, like wallpaper, from some sculptor's pattern book. Larkin imagines it was just "a detail friends would see", that the Latin around the base was more important, and hence there is the touching irony in this "hardly meant" gesture becoming their "final blazon". It is not clear why he thought these things, although they clearly deliver much of the poignancy (or cynicism) of the poem. One might suppose that little about an expensive medieval monument would have been casual or "hardly meant". Furthermore, Eleanor's turn towards Richard, with her right leg crossed over her other, surely belies this imputed nonchalance. As with the lady in Bedale, it certainly looks as if she cared; the question is what she cared about.¹²

All in all, then, in spite of this being one of the best-known poems of the twentieth century, questions remain.¹³ Was it just forgetfulness that made Larkin mis-describe the tomb? Why did he assume that the linked hands were "hardly meant"? Why did he ignore Ekanor's movement? Did Larkin have a glimmer of the dynastic reason that might have lain behind the joined hands, suggested by the motive of "prolonging the Latin names", although in fact there are no Latin names? And what, in any case, is the likely significance of these relatively rare gestures in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries?

¹¹ Larkin confesses to this mistake, which a correspondent pointed out to him. *Selected Letters*, ed. Anthony Thwaite, London: Faber & Faber, pp. 322–3.

¹² I owe thanks to James Booth for pointing out that Larkin's later reservations about this poem may be connected to its unnecessarily emphatic cynicism.

¹³ Presumably few of the lovers of the poem are entirely comfortable with Andrew Motion's view that in a number of poems, including this one, 'Larkin transforms a masturbatory impulse and an addiction to solitude into poems of great beauty and sociable truthfulness.' (Motion, *op. cit.* p. 234) The tomb, at least, shows nothing to encourage such impulses or addictions, which were surely outside Edward Richardson's repertoire.

Philip Larkin and Margaret Thatcher

Janet Brennan

Less than a month before her death on 8 April this year, the Margaret Thatcher Foundation published her 1982 papers. So, we now have not only Andrew Motion's account of the dinner Larkin attended on 26 October that year, but her version, too.¹

The dinner was hosted by Hugh Thomas, head of the government's Centre for Policy Studies. The released papers include a briefing note for the Prime Minister on all her 13 fellow guests: Stephen Spender (Has written his autobiography twice (?)); Anthony Quinton (Conservative philosopher. You liked his *Politics of Imperfection* and quoted it in the Airey Neave lecture.); Alfred Alvarez (Poet. Half American I think. Some works of criticism and general brooding eg on suicide); Anthony Powell (Conservative surely); Isaiah Berlin (No need to explain. Rumour has it that he voted Conservative in 1979. I would not dare to ask.); J H Plumb (Biographer of Walpole (last volume still not finished – ? or begun)...). Others attending were V.S. Naipaul, Tom Stoppard, V.S. Pritchett, Dan Jacobson, Nicholas Mosley, and Mario Vargas Llosa. A separate note on absences explains that Iris Murdoch [sic] 'will be in Scotland'. On Larkin, Thomas briefed: 'Poet, deeply conservative. Librarian at Hull University. The only guest not really known to me very well.'²

Thatcher wrote to Hugh and Vanessa Thomas the next day, partly in typescript and partly in her own handwriting [*italics here*]:

That was a marvellous evening last night. I enjoyed every minute and found the occasion extremely relaxing as well as being helpful. ...

I hope they enjoyed it. I was a little worried that Philip Larkin was so silent.

Yours ever

Margaret

Maybe Larkin was thinking:

'... of all the spare time that has flown

*Straight into nothingness by being filled
With forks and faces, rather than repaid
Under a lamp ...*

Or perhaps, as he told Andrew Motion, because of his deafness, he was simply 'not hearing much'.

¹ Motion describes the occasion in *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, London: Faber and Faber (1993), p.497.

² The briefing note (122951) and the letter (122909) can be found at: www.margaretthatcher.org

The Mysterious Mr Penn: Larkin writes home in 1942

Philip Pullen

Originality is being different from oneself, not others.

Philip Larkin: *Letters to Mowice*

Ever since the appearance of the *Selected Letters* in 1992, the significance of Philip Larkin's correspondence as a source of insight into his life and work has been acknowledged. The 2010 publication of *Letters to Mowice* added a further dimension to this picture. However, there is another, largely untapped area of Larkin's letter-writing: the letters written to his parents and, in particular, to his mother, Eva.

The Larkin archive at the Hull History Centre holds over 4000 pieces of correspondence between Philip and Sydney and Eva Larkin: letters, lettercards, postcards and the odd telegram. This comes from two sources: the numerous shoeboxes containing bundles of letters which Larkin retained, and the deposit made by Larkin's niece, Rosemary Parry, of the letters written by Larkin to his mother, father and sister, Kitty, and carefully preserved by Eva Larkin. The bulk of the letters were written between 1940, when Larkin went up to St John's College, Oxford, and 1972, when Eva entered a nursing home and began a rapid decline into dementia.

In June 2012, following a request made to the Philip Larkin Society by Judy Burg, the University of Hull Archivist, I began to assist in the task of cataloguing the Larkin family letters, a process started by Ivor Maw a few years ago. Ivor and I are painstakingly working our way through each bundle of correspondence, briefly recording the contents to make them more generally available to researchers. The picture emerging from this huge archive of material is a fascinating one, particularly when looked at alongside the published letters and biographies. The family letters provide a detailed chronicle of most of Larkin's life, and they also indicate along the way a significant number of small factual errors in the published biographical detail.

Recently, I was asked to work on the letters Larkin wrote to his parents in 1942, as this year appeared to have been overlooked at the start of the cataloguing process. Andrew Motion's biography reveals that 1942 proved an important year for Larkin. On New Year's Day he learned that he was not to be called up into the Army, having failed his medical: this meant that he was able to adopt a more settled, if not altogether enthusiastic, approach to his second year of studies at Oxford. Later on that year he developed his interest in the psychology

of the unconscious, began to write his 'dream diary' and became increasingly anxious about his future as a writer. Larkin had also entered into the first stage of his lifelong friendship with Kingsley Amis.

References to all these events can be found in Larkin's letters home and they provide some fascinating insights into this year of change. In many of the letters, Larkin presents his parents, and in particular his mother, to whom the bulk of these letters are addressed,¹ with a very detailed version of his day to day experiences, both trivial and significant. What intrigued me most, however, was the particular style of writing that Larkin adopted with his parents and the 'voice' with which he chose to address them. In a small number of letters, in fact, Larkin seemed to want to give the explicit impression that the voice being used was not necessarily his own.

Larkin's penchant for using different 'voices' in his writing has been well documented. Raymond Brett drew a comparison between Sartre and Larkin in terms of their adoption of different versions of themselves to cope with reality. Brett writes that in his correspondence Larkin constructed 'a series of personas to hide his real self:

Everyone who writes a letter adjusts his style and contents to meet the tastes and interests of the recipient, but with Larkin it went further than this. At one level it was simply a game he played with close friends like Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest, in which he created for himself an Alf Garnett character with outrageous views on race and politics.²

The 1942 correspondence with his parents seems to provide an unusual and intriguing example of this type of game playing.

The first clue came in a letter written on 26 April 1942 and addressed to 'My Dear Mrs Larkin'. This letter immediately stood out for me, because it was clearly not Larkin's usual salutation. He invariably began his letters home with a greeting of 'Dear Mop' or 'Dear Mop and Pop'. The letter itself, however, is typical of all the others

¹ Of the 82 letters and postcards written in 1942, 59 are addressed to Eva Larkin, 12 are addressed to both parents and 11 are written solely to Sydney.

² R.L. Brett, 'Philip Larkin: A Psycho-Literary Sketch', *About Larkin*, April 1999, p.5.

in its tone and content: it includes reference to the receipt of items from home that Larkin had asked to be sent to him in his previous letter and goes on to describe his new tutor, the aging Oxford Don, A.M.D. Hughes, with typically acerbic wit:

...ninety years old and blind, quite incapable of doing anything. He can't even see me, let alone read my essays. A case of the blind leading the blind.

But the end of the letter presents an enigma, for it is signed: 'Yours very truly, C.D. Penn.' There is no doubt that the letter is written in Larkin's hand, but why did he choose to sign off in this way?

Five letters on in the sequence the puzzling signature turns up again. In a letter written on the 10 May, this time addressed to 'Dear Mop & Pop,' Larkin reports on his increasingly exasperated attempts to get his poems into print, gives news of the whereabouts of his friend Jim Sutton, and expresses great satisfaction with a new pair of spectacles (an immense relief to him as it had taken over three weeks for his broken ones to be repaired). He ends the letter by telling his parents of the pressing need to get back to his studies of Old English:

Beowulf is now hissing at me from a corner, so I must end.

Ever with love,
Philip.

But this is not, in fact, the end of the letter. At the foot of the final page, and written in slightly different, smaller sized handwriting, there is a postscript:

My Dear Mrs Larkin,

Don't you worry about Warwick being razed, dear lady. Jerry has a lot more fish to fry yet, I'll be bound. I'd like to see him lay a finger on Oxford, either. He'd soon have a pretty mess about his ears, you mark my words.

Yours very sincerely, C.D. Penn M.A.

The context of these words is very easy to understand. The centre of Coventry had been destroyed in the November 1940 bombings. Although the Larkin family home in Manor Road, close to the city centre, had not been badly damaged, it was a dangerous area in which to live and, in June 1941, after initially evacuating Eva and daughter Kitty to stay with relatives in Lichfield, Sydney had purchased 73 Coten End, in the relative safety of Warwick, 10 miles away from Coventry.

Larkin wrote to his parents again on 16 May, apologising that his weekly letter is 'a trifle schoolboyish in plan' and telling them that he knows his postcards 'are too infrequent'. He thanks them for 'the fat little pipe' they have sent him: 'For some reason, it arouses disgust in all my friends, but I like it.' He also encourages his mother to: 'Tell Pop that a friend has found an unexpurgated version of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' behind the bookcases in his

digs. 'I am impatiently waiting for him (and his wife) to finish it.' This sharing of literary detail, particularly in so unexpurgated a fashion, is fascinating in itself but what intrigued me even more was the existence of another short section, written in pencil at the very end of the letter, immediately after Larkin's own signature and again purporting to be from 'C.D. Penn, M.A.':

Don't be nervous about this fellow Hitler - I'll wager he's sorry he ever crossed swords with us, eh?! The bells will ring, dear lady, very soon, but it won't be for an invasion, you mark my words. It'll be peace.

*Beowulf is now hissing
at me from a corner, so
I must end.
Ever with love,
Philip.*

*My dear Mrs. Larkin,
Don't you worry about Warwick
being razed, dear lady. Jerry has
a lot more fish to fry yet, I'll be
bound. I'd like to see him lay
a finger on Oxford, either. He'd
soon have a pretty mess about
his ears, you mark my words.
Yours very sincerely,
C.D. Penn. M.A.*

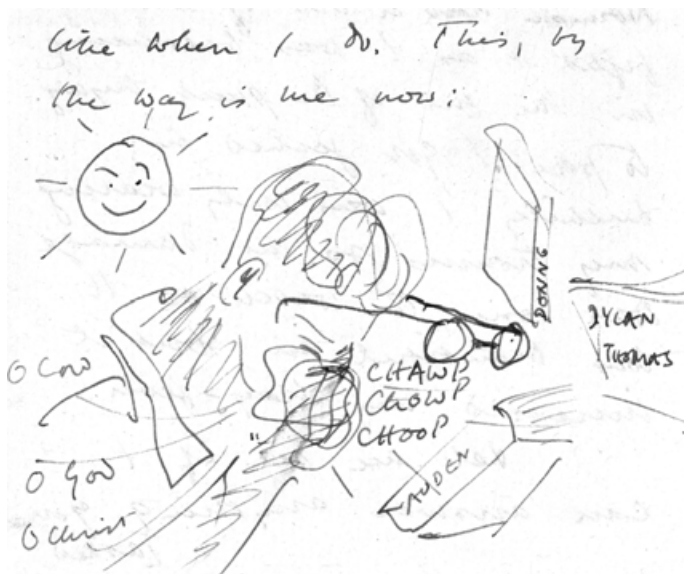
U DLN 1942-32 page 3

It is interesting to reflect on the slight difference in 'voice' in these two postscripts attributed to Mr Penn. They seem to mimic popular wartime dialogue, such as would have been heard, perhaps, on the radio or in film at that time. The tone is also typical of the thousands of letters Larkin was to write to his mother after she had become widowed and that he used as a means of chivvying her along during her frequent bouts of nervousness and anxiety. It suggests, perhaps, that Andrew Motion may have over-emphasised the shift in tone in Larkin's correspondence with his mother following Sydney's death in 1948. He suggested that the letters became more 'fuggy' and more consoling towards Eva as 'a way of telling her that their lives would always be cosy' (177). In fact, it would seem that these earlier letters already contain the seeds of such an approach.

But who is the mysterious C.D. Penn and why did Larkin choose to introduce him into his letters? Another letter in the sequence suggested an unlikely though theoretically possible answer.

About Larkin

In his letter dated 7th June, Philip begins by telling his parents that he is just sitting down for his 'Sunday morning session' of letter writing. The first page includes a typical Larkin sketch in which he is shown suffering from hay fever (a condition that plagued him throughout his life and which was to form a common topic in his correspondence every summer). A bout of sneezing has caused his spectacles to fly off as he desperately tries to read books by Auden, Donne and Dylan Thomas.



U DLN 1941-42 page 1

After a few discursive comments, Larkin gets down to the main business of the letter:

Let me see if I can answer anything you asked. *I had arranged that Kingsley (Mr - Penn) would read the essay.* [my emphasis]. But it was dead from the start, and it's no good trying to force things.

And so there it was! Could it be that the additional sections of the letters were, in fact, the work of Kingsley Amis? The dates certainly fitted. Although by then Amis had been called up into the Army, a check on his own published letters show that he was still in Oxford in June 1942. I had almost convinced myself that the 'C.D. Penn' sections were written in a different hand; certainly there are hints of this in the second letter. However, a comparison of handwriting styles shows that it is not Amis's writing and almost certainly is Larkin's, although, of course, Amis may still have influenced the content.

At the end of this letter, again after Larkin's own signature, Mr Penn makes a return and reveals himself to be a fellow hay-fever sufferer:

My Dear Mrs Larkin,

How is the sun finding you these days, eh? Don't forget to get out a bit, even if it's only for half an hour in the afternoons. My laundry troubles have been cleared up satisfactorily, but I am a little short of handkerchiefs,

you know, due to this pestilential hay fever. Augh!!

My regards to you and Mr Larkin.

Yours very sincerely

C.D. Penn

There are no further appearances of C.D. Penn in the remaining letters from 1942, nor, as far as I can tell, in any other letters written by Larkin or by his parents.³ I did find, however, some other evidence to suggest that C.D. Penn was, indeed, a real person in a real place.

Intrepid internet searching finally unearthed Christopher Denstone Penn, M.A., a school teacher at Ellesmere College, Shropshire and the author of a book on naval history, published in 1913. His book, *The Navy Under the Early Stuarts and its Influence on English History*, is still in print. There would have been a copy in the Bodleian which Larkin might have come across, but it might possibly also have graced the bookshelves at 73 Coten End. If either father or son had by chance read this book, its contents suggest that it may well have appealed to them. An online review of Penn's book tells us that:

One of the main points of the author's thesis is to shew [sic] that, as a result of maladministration and short-sighted policy at home, the Navy was frequently reduced to impotence and rarely able to exert much influence on the situation.⁴

This is the just the kind of treatise on the perils of poor administration that might have intrigued Sydney Larkin, the expert administrator. Moreover, the preface to Penn's book suggests that the author held a similar, 'glass half empty' view of life to that of Larkin:

...in our naval history, as in everything else, we must be prepared to find, as it were, the outer and inner side of the lining, the days of glory and renown, the gloomy days of despair and pessimism.

This is pure speculation, of course, and at the end of the day we are no closer to knowing why Larkin chose to introduce this persona for this brief period, nor what the implied link with Amis might have signified. What we do know, however, is that this kind of literary role-playing reflected a distinct feature of Larkin's personality and was soon to blossom in a much more astonishing way, with the emergence of Larkin's feminine alter-ego in the following year, when he began to write *Trouble At Willow Gables*. If only Brunette Colman had made a similar appearance in the family letters.

The Editors are grateful to The Society of Authors, on behalf of the Larkin Estate, for permission to publish the extracts and facsimiles above. © 2013 The Estate of Philip Larkin.

³Sadly, the letters written by Sydney and Eva Larkin to Philip in 1942 appear not to have survived.

⁴ www.navalandmaritimebooks.com

Early Days in Philip Larkin's Library

Betty Mackereth

My father was a timber merchant with a small family business. At the time I was born in 1924 we lived in Hamlyn Avenue off Anlaby High Road. But in 1937 when I was thirteen we moved to Hall Walk, Cottingham, where I still live today. I had a younger brother, John, who used to comment that it was the worst thing that parents can do for boy, to give him an older sister. He was the academic of the family: a gifted mathematician. He took an aeronautical course at Brough, went to Cranfield College of Aeronautics and then worked for various companies. At a time when such things were the stuff of science fiction, he asked me if I would like to see 'his computer'. There it was, ranged round the sides of a large room. Later, when I retired in 1984, he wanted me to buy a computer so that we could email each other. But email seems anti-social to me and I insisted that we talk on the phone for at least an hour every week. He died in 2008.

I attended Newland High School for Girls, leaving when I was 16 in 1940 with London Matric. I took shorthand typing at Wood's College, and my first job was as general dogsbody in Trinity House. It was wonderful. I could go anywhere I wanted in the house and grounds. Tradition was strong. On special occasions they would still strew rushes on the floor in the dining room.

In 1942 I was called up. I fancied myself as a Wren, but by this time there were no vacancies in the Services and the Labour Exchange could only offer me the Land Army or Industry. Well, I did not fancy milking a cow at six o'clock in the morning. So I opted for industry and went to the Government Training Centre at Leeds. Because I'd had a secondary school education rather than having left school at fourteen, I was put in the Inspection Department and spent three months going round to all the various milling and drilling machines on the vast factory floor. The Inspection Department would give me a blueprint of the components I was to inspect in order to test me on whether I could find and properly check the machines making them.

To qualify for the Inspectorate we had to learn the practicalities of the processes themselves. For example, we were given a lump of metal and had to saw out a square in the middle. Then we had to make a metal square to fit the space, filing and testing it for flatness: not pleasant work. I also learned arc-welding. Later, Philip Larkin was highly delighted to tell people at the University about this

unusual accomplishment of mine. I wish I had thought to bring home one of the bits of metal I'd welded! I passed the test and stayed on for another three months to become 'fully skilled' (if you failed you were 'semi-skilled'). I was amazed to find that, after only six months, I was as qualified as men who had completed five years' apprenticeship.



Betty Mackereth at 20

Just after Christmas 1942 I was sent to work in the Inspection Department in Sperry Gyroscope, down in Gloucestershire. The factory was in a condemned woollen mill which had been converted and, during the night shifts, rats used to run about on the ledges and pipes round the walls. I used to patrol the shop floor with my Vernier caliper and my micrometer, ready to stop machines if they were failing to produce components within the specified 5 microns tolerance.

Then, in 1945, the war ended, and many of the workers transferred to the factory in Stroud. But I thought: 'I want

About Larkin

to go home'. Back in Hull they told me at the Labour Exchange: 'You can be a clippie on the buses.' Imagine that, running up and down the steps, and in all weathers! So I said: 'I am not yet 21. You cannot redirect me to war work.' (Looking back, I must have been quite feisty.) 'No,' I said, 'I want to go into an office.' So instead of being a clippie, I went to the Corporation Transport Department which had been bombed out of Hull City Centre and had offices at 21 Newland Park.

It happened that I used to cycle to work with Philip's former secretary, Hilary Penwill, and when she left to get married, she suggested that I applied for her job. Well, it was something of a dead end at the Transport Department, so I thought I would go for it. Philip told me later that, after the interview, the Assistant Registrar said: 'If you take the other one you'll have to appoint a new secretary in a couple of years. But this one is a stayer.' He was right, though at the time I didn't expect to stay as long as I did!

The campus was in an early stage of post-war development, with many makeshift huts dotted around. The Library was still housed on the ground and second (top) floor of one of the two impressive red-brick 1920s blocks which front the Cottingham Road. It faced the identical Administration (now 'Venn') Building across a huge sunken lawn. Some of the shelving stacks were fifteen feet high, and required skilful ladder climbing. (No talk then of 'Health and Safety at Work'.) There was a very friendly atmosphere; even the porters were on first-name terms with us. We didn't have a dedicated library porter, and used the University porters as they were available. The Library Assistant, Mary Judd, who was always going away for walking weekends, would bring her haversack with her on a Friday morning and, as a practical joke, the porters would hide it fifteen feet up on the top shelf.

When I first arrived I was shocked. At the Transport Department we had worked very hard. We had letters to write, and time-schedules to convey to the Traffic Commissioners at Leeds. But in the University it was all hanging around chatting: chat-chat-chat, chat-chat-chat. I found myself asking: 'What am I to do now?' And Philip would be evasive. In the early months he found a book in the Institute of Education that we did not have in the main Library. He borrowed it and told me: 'Copy this book and I'll have it bound.' So I spent days typing it. But I doubt whether he really did ever have it bound. It was just something to keep me occupied.

Philip's room was on the ground floor, overlooking the lawn between the two buildings, now dotted with trees, but then an open space known as the 'soup-plate'. It faces south, and in the summer, when the students lay around in the sun, Philip would bring out two lenses and hold them at different distances from his eye to look over the women students. After I'd been there a while I joined in the joke about his fascination with a particularly well-built student called 'Miss Porter'. When

we moved into the new building, we christened a room furnished with a couch for members of staff who were feeling unwell, 'Miss Porter's room'. But I think 'Miss Porter' herself had already left by then. Philip took an annual group photograph of the staff in the 'soup bowl'. He would set up his camera on a tripod, set the delayed shutter-release, and then dash back to take his place in the group.

When he was making up his estimates, he asked me if there was anything I thought necessary. I suggested a Dictaphone. But he was emphatically against the idea: 'I cannot possibly dictate to an inanimate object!' However, when we moved to the new library in 1959, a Dictaphone was automatically supplied and, in later years, he came to rely on it. One day he came rushing in from Senate at half past five as I was preparing to leave. 'Hold on, there's an office memo to go out, and...' Then he stopped himself and said: 'No, I'll do it on the Dictaphone.'

The move from the old building took place in August 1959, and we all had to have our holidays early so that we could be on duty at that time. Philip was very, very meticulous and had everything planned. He had boxes made by the University workshop, three feet long, to take a single shelf full of books. These were listed and checked off before being taken across the campus in a van hired from Hammonds, the department store. Philip was stationed at the receiving end, systematically directing the books to their destinations. Mr Wood, the Deputy Librarian, was stationed in the old library. He had been appointed by Philip's predecessor, Miss Cuming, and Philip was very satirical about him.



Catalogue Hall. From the Official Opening Booklet 1960.
© University of Hull

The new Library was in red brick, matching the original University buildings. It was three storeys high with a mezzanine. I remember the architect, L. R. Foreman:

a pleasant Edwardian sort of man from London, rather formal and old-fashioned. He gave the Librarian a choice of interior colours. Philip chose pink and blue for the book stack-ends, purple for the Law library, yellow for the Maps and Manuscripts room. He also chose the elegant striped wallpaper for his own room and the Committee Room. I was aware of some strange colour clashes. Philip took a great deal of time over dictation, choosing exactly the right word and, as he paced to and fro, I would find myself idly noticing that he was wearing, perhaps, a yellow sweater and pink socks. The carpet had to be replaced after only a few years. The architects of the subsequent Phase 2 extension, Castle, Park, Dean and Hook, gave Philip no choice of colour scheme. Everything was grey.

In the new building everything was more convenient and close at hand. For the first time, a University photographer, Alan Marshall, was appointed, and we had a dedicated Library Porter. The issue desk, with a staff of four, faced the front door as you entered. There was a separate reading room on the second floor, with desks and high windows. In addition to the main office, the Librarian's suite consisted of a Committee room, the Deputy Librarian's office and my room. There was a private *en suite* toilet outside the Committee room towards which Philip took a proprietorial attitude. When his office was used as the Queen Mother's retiring room during the official opening ceremonies, he bought special *de luxe* Izal paper.

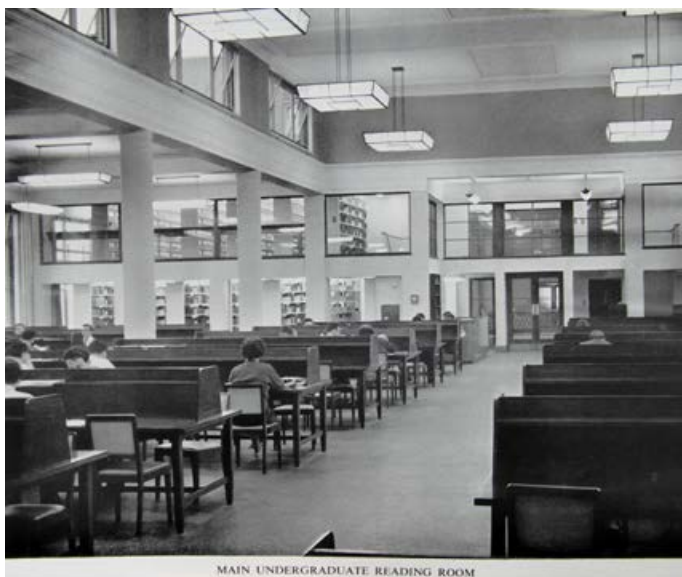
the Library Assistant, Mary Judd, and I am told that it was a reference to a novel by E. R. Braithwaite, *To Sir, with Love*, though I haven't read the book myself.



Photograph taken by Alan Marshall, © University of Hull

Mary was very lively, and had literary interests. I was aware that he used to go and see her at her home. One amusing episode came when the Library acquired the books from Busby Hall in North Yorkshire. The University van was sent, and the staff travelled separately to catalogue the material. At this time I was one of the few members of staff on the campus who could drive. So we hired a car, and I took Philip, Mary Judd and another Library Assistant, Wendy Mann, up to the Moors. On the way we stopped somewhere out on a country road with no traffic to have a bite to eat (I remember that Mary always took the leg of a chicken with her on her jaunts, and would throw the bone casually over her shoulder.) As we walked along, the button came off Mary's trousers and, as Wendy and I looked on, Philip knelt down in the road and fixed it with a safety pin. On the way back we stopped at Beverley and went to a café, where he bought us tea and cakes.

After a year or two Mary got married, and Philip and I were godparents to her daughter Helen, born shortly before the family moved from Hull to Northampton.



Undergraduate Reading Room, looking towards the main entrance. From the Official Opening Booklet 1960.

© University of Hull

The work atmosphere was casual, although everyone was aware that Philip was the one who ran things. It was his library. The staff respected him. He interviewed each of them when they were first appointed, and remembered who they were. When he walked into the staff room in the basement, he would greet everyone by name. But he was generally referred to as 'sir'. This practice was started by

Larkin with Hardy 5 – 7 October 2012

Tony Fincham

Hon. Chairman, the Thomas Hardy Society

Friday 5th October

What are days for?
Days are where we live.

That particular afternoon saw me ‘Coming up England by a different line / For once’, hastened by train – a form of transport which Larkin made peculiarly his own – from the ‘unfenced existence’ of the English Channel to the nocturnal ‘surprise of a large town’. Stumbling out onto the railway platform, I first encounter a larger-than-life-size image of a gray Larkin leaning precariously towards me. Before I have recovered from my astonishment, I am hurried down a back alley and through a darkened doorway to find myself in the brightly illuminated remains of the Royal Station Hotel. Having dealt over the years with many salesmen from Leeds, in vain I seek their ‘full ashtrays’ but instead of ‘empty chairs’ and ‘larger loneliness’ I, in disillusion, encounter ‘a crowd of craps’ who turn out to be our genial hosts, the Philip Larkin Society. Sadly I note that Hardy Society members are thin on the ground – seven only counted as opposed to twenty or more PLS people who made it south to Dorset in 2010.

Although I arrive nearly thirty minutes late, the evening event has yet to get under way – I am immediately struck by the refreshing bluntness of the Yorkshire humour as the introductions and announcements are made. We may be more subtly cynical in the south but not half as direct: more East Riding than Larkin, but an aspect of the Society which I appreciate increasingly as the weekend progressed. John White, retired academic and jazz enthusiast, delivers an absorbing talk on Larkin’s love of jazz, enlivened with many personal memories and anecdotes, illustrated by three of the records Larkin chose for his slot on Desert Island Discs. After a long day and journey north, I miss some of the subtleties but gain considerable insight into that ‘Crescent City ... where your speech alone is understood’.

As ‘light spreads darkly downwards from the high / Clusters of lights’ I stumble along ‘shoeless corridors’ to the darkened plastic comfort of Room 214 ‘a joyous shot at how things ought to be’. Sleeping well, I wake to cold bright northern sunshine – a striking contrast to the dull humid cloudy south I’ve left behind me – a sunshine which was to warm us Wessex folk all the long day.

Saturday 6th October

Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster
Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water

Saturday morning in the Mercure Hull Royal Hotel begins with – ‘Here’, Larkin’s beautifully evocative description of Hull, dated 8th October 1961, read by James Booth beside the reception desk – site of plaque 1/25 of the superb Larkin Trail, along the central section of which Don Lee now guides us. The plaques are wonderful – bold and informative – why can’t we manage the equivalent for Hardy in Dorchester? Finance mainly – and it is a question of scale. Having previously visited Hull, I know it to be a large prosperous elegant and lively city – in sharp contrast to the impression given by the middle two stanzas of Larkin’s ‘Here’. Dorchester is a small county town – a little changed from the days of Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge* but with a population of just over 18,000. Hull is a city with a population of 263,000 plus – this is not in any way to belittle the tremendous efforts of Larkin25 but similar funding is not likely to be found in West Dorset.

Don leads us rapidly onward from one plaque poem to the next, pausing *en route* at Thearne Pet Food Store – a site without a plaque but one which will raise a lively discussion on Larkin’s attitude towards animals – ‘Take one home for the Kiddies’, ‘The Mower’ etc. At the City Hall, James Booth brought to ‘Broadcast’ to life: ‘Your hands, tiny in all that air, applauding,’ moving me in a way that that poem had never done before. We bypass ‘The Large Cool Store’ so as not to obstruct ‘the cut-price crowd’ pushing through the ‘plate-glass swing doors to their desires’. Two days later the *Daily Telegraph* carries a half-page colour advertisement from M&S illustrating those ‘Modes for Night’ exactly matching Larkin’s description from 51 years ago. We pass through Trinity Square, pausing for a Marvell poem and thence onto the pier – Larkin toilets – ‘Bridge for the Living’ – and Don, who really felt this should have been a whole-day walk, steps up the pace to accelerate us past the dry dock to various ‘signed’ pubs – and our lunch-stop, the History Centre.

But the fine October sun is shining on the tidal mud, the wild flowers, the dancing gulls enticing us to linger back and lose our leader and ‘Within a terminate and fishy-smelling / Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum’: the statue of William Wilberforce, outside his house of

his birth, with delightful garden stretching down to the banks of the River Hull and two magnificent mulberry trees. Passing one or two colourful toads, we eventually reach the History Centre for a welcome lunch, prepared by members of the PLS, and a chance to admire the airy design of the History Centre.

James Booth kindly gives up his afternoon to lead some of the Hardy Society contingent by bus ‘down Cemetery Road’ to Cottingham. Compared with Casterbridge ‘compact as a box of dominoes’, the suburban sprawl is impressive – the ‘raw estates’ ‘where only salesmen and relations come’ - ‘and out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges’ Larkin’s simple memorial. James points out Maeve’s grave – she had cunningly acquired a (shared) plot closer to Larkin’s than Monica’s more distant one – and Maeve’s memorial bench, ‘what will survive of us is love’, perhaps fulfilling a Proustian assertion that jealousy is the more potent force. But for Larkin, pre-eminent was ‘the wish to be alone’: ‘Beneath it all, desire of oblivion runs’. We note the grave of Brynmor Jones before catching a bus to the University Campus, where James conducts us around the Brynmor Jones library: ‘New eyes each year / Find old books here / And new books too, / Old eyes renew’ – and thence up to the fifth floor for fine views over Hull and the Humber.

Dinner – good and solid, like the hotel – followed by a Larkin / Hardy quiz, compiled by Carole Collinson – great fun and, gratifyingly, the top score went to a Hardy Society delegate. Then an open poetry reading from both camps, highlight amongst which is Win Dawson reading ‘The Trees’, Larkin’s birthday poem for Hardy, to be topped only by Eddie Dawes reading ‘Administration’:

And girls you have to tell to pull their socks up
Are those whose pants you’d most like to pull down.

A fitting end to a wonderful day.

Sunday 7th October

Our almost instinct almost true
What will survive of us is love.

Sunday morning begins with a rare treat – a brilliantly well-informed lecture by Professor Tom McAlindon, entitled ‘Cathedral Musing: Thornton Wilder and Philip Larkin’ – concentrating on the links between ‘An Arundel Tomb’ and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, but covering a host of beautifully cross-referenced topics – an academic *tour de force*. He strikes a Hardyian note when discussing the permanence of change and ‘the tragic fragility of human identity’. Hardy would also have concurred with his statement that ‘The whole purpose of literature is the notation of the human heart’. Both Larkin and Wilder acknowledged that you ‘cannot attempt to escape the finality of death through the transcendence of art.’

At gatherings of the Hardy Society, I have occasionally met people who were briefly acquainted with Hardy but never anyone with a long-term knowledge of the man. The PLS is still replete with members who knew Larkin over many years: though sadly as time rolls on, even these are becoming a diminished band – so it is an honour to sit beside Win Dawson as we are driven towards ‘The Building’: more stark than I have long imagined it, but certainly ‘higher than the handsomest hotel’ and a ‘clean-sliced cliff’: that twentieth-century monument to our ‘struggle to transcend / The thought of dying ...’ What a fitting site for a permanent display of artwork and photographs related to Larkin – officially opened in our presence by Alan Johnson MP – and including in a display case (it is the eye clinic) three pairs of Larkin’s spectacles and plentiful toads in the children’s section. If only Dorchester would treat its most famous poet / son with such respect! Goodbyes and thanks to the PLS for arranging such a memorable weekend. We part with talk of a joint THS / PLS venture in Christminster (Oxford) in 2014. But for now ‘Nothing to be Said’ – just a return to the station to try and re-enact ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ as ‘a slow and stopping curve southward we kept’ – no weddings to witness today – but a feeling of fulfilment and enrichment – thanks to our hosts the PLS, to the City of Hull and to Philip Larkin.



Pennie Thompson, Helen Lange and Tony Fincham at Larkin’s grave in Cottingham. Photo © James Booth

Friday Night (& Saturday & Sunday) in the Royal Station Hotel



Don Lee explains a point, Helen Lange (THS) and Susan Kirkpatrick to his left, and Graham Charters to his right



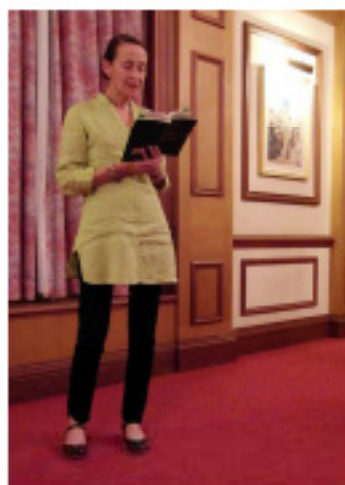
John White



*Faerie Thompson, Fiv Gabbie, Mary Kelly,
Win Dawson, Tony Fitcham and Mike Nixon*



Tom McAlister



Janet Brown



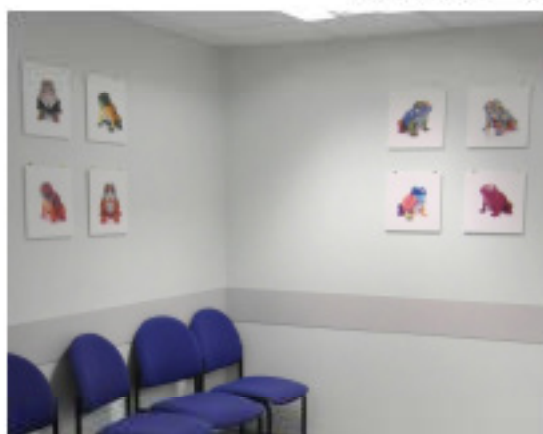
*A moving moment during the reading:
Win Dawson and Phil Bacon*

More photographs at www.philiparkin.com

The Larkin Installation at the Hull and East Riding Eye Hospital



Colin Fize, Alan Johnson MP and Graham Chesters



The Children's Waiting room, with touch



Alan Johnson MP opens the installation



The Building



Colin Fize

Larkin's Glasses at the Eye Hospital, Anlaby Rd. Hull

Graham Chesters



This framing of three pairs of Philip Larkin's spectacles was undertaken by the Philip Larkin Society in partnership with Hull & East Yorkshire Eye Hospital as part of their enhancement of the Waiting Hall. The exhibit is now on permanent loan to the Hospital.

The glasses are taken from the collection of Larkinalia which the Society acquired after the death of Monica Jones in 2001 (now under the stewardship of the Hull History Centre). The Master Inventory of the artefacts, compiled by James Booth, records the details as follows:

257W Rounded shiny black frames with two silver rivets showing at hinges and grey-blue cloth marked: P. H. DOWNS, F.B.O.A., (HONS.) F.S.M.C./ 160, HALLGATE, COTTINGHAM./ Tel. 45056./ Please ask for another when this cleaner is exhausted; in black case; blank white paper label with rounded ends pasted on inner lid.

258W Round gold frames with plastic sheathing over ears and grey cloth marked: Rayner (ornamental lettering) / 17 Albion Street/ HULL/ Hull Central 15364/ Please ask for another when this cleaner is exhausted; in red unmarked case; white paper label with rounded ends pasted on inner lid: 'P.A. LARKIN' in blue-black ink.

262W Massive thick black rectangular frames; in soft plastic brown sheath, marked 'Norlite' in ornamental lettering. (Apparently the glasses on the cover of *Required Writing*.)

The three photographs are intended to illustrate the three pairs of glasses, although there can be no absolute certainty about the identifications. The first photograph is dated around 1946/47 – yet the cloth found with the glasses naming a Cottingham optician suggests continued use some time after his arrival in Hull in 1955. The gold pair is linked with his early years in Hull (by 1958 he was wearing black glasses again). The large black pair is associated with his later years; as the Inventory notes, he is wearing them on the cover picture (taken by Phil Sayer) of *Required Writing* (1983).

The poem, 'Long Sight in Age', was written by Larkin in June 1955, shortly after his arrival in Hull. It remained unpublished in Larkin's lifetime. Different editors, faced with unclear handwriting in the manuscript, have proposed different readings of certain lines; 'wheeling', for example, appears as 'wrinkling' in *Collected Poems* (ed. Anthony Thwaite 1988), and as 'wincing' in *The Complete Poems* (ed. Archie Burnett) respectively.

Larkin's Refraction

Colin Vize MBBS, FRCOphth

Consultant Ophthalmologist, Hull and East Yorkshire Eye Hospital

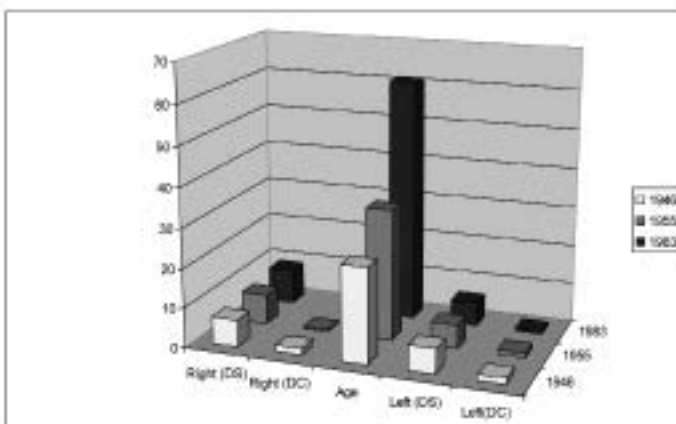
Early in 2012 the Larkin Society embarked on a joint project with the Hull and East Yorkshire Eye Hospital to create an installation at the outpatients' clinic, based on a Larkin theme. The project evolved organically and, as part of the work, three pairs of spectacles were retrieved from the archive for examination. By referring to photographs, it was possible to date the periods when Larkin wore these glasses with reasonable accuracy, so we can see how his prescription changed between his mid-twenties and early sixties.

The glasses were examined with a focimeter, a device that measures lens power in 'dioptres' (D). The 'DS' reading ('Dioptres Sphere') shows the main diagnosis of near or far-sightedness (myopia or hyperopia), while the 'DC' reading ('Dioptres Cylindrical') shows further adjustments for astigmatism, the blurring usually caused by irregularity in the curvature of the cornea. The results are shown in Table 1 and graphically in Figure 1.

Table 1

	Right (DS)	Right (DC)	Age	Left (DS)	Left DC)
1946	-6.75	-1.75	24	-6.25	-1.5
1955	-7.5	-0.5	33	-6	-1.25
1983	-8.75	--	61	-6	-1.75

Figure 1

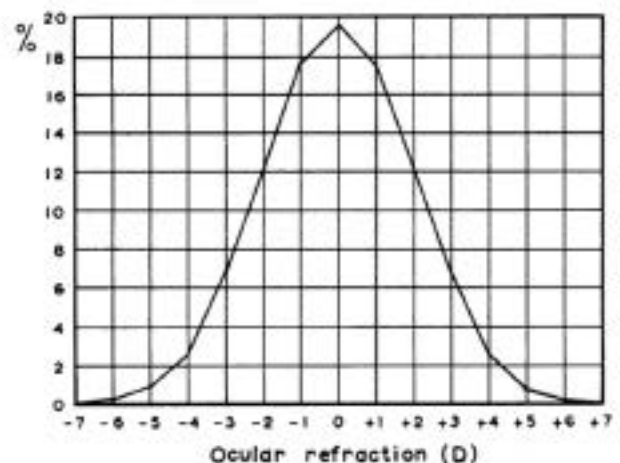


As can be seen, Larkin's prescription indicates severe myopia (short-sightedness), increasing with age. His

level of astigmatism, reflected in the (DC) column, was quite variable, although this is a common finding.

The third pair of spectacles, dated 1983, was bifocal in nature, reflecting the development of presbyopia (far-sightedness) resulting from loss of elasticity in the crystalline lens with age. The near addition prescribed was 2.25 dioptres, relatively strong power compared to standard prescriptions of an age-matched peer.

Figure 2



British Journal of Ophthalmology, 1981, 65, 805-811.

Figure 2 demonstrates the normal distribution of ocular refraction. It can be clearly seen that less than 1% of the population exhibit short-sightedness of the magnitude experienced by Larkin, whose DS readings range from -6 to -8.75.

When Larkin mysteriously collapsed at a Library Committee meeting on Monday 6 March 1961,¹ the doctors dismissed his suggestion that his new spectacles had induced dizzy spells. Although more psychological reasons for this collapse are plausible, it is just possible that Larkin was right and that a rogue prescription was indeed responsible for his disorientation.¹

¹ Motion, *A Writer's Life* (311). Motion gives the date incorrectly.

Digitising Larkinalia

Graham Chesters

In 2010, as part of the Larkin25 celebrations, there was a rich exhibition of Larkinalia, the artefacts retrieved from 105 Newland Park after Monica Jones's death in 2001 and deposited by the Larkin Society in the hands of Hull City Museums Service. Shortly after, under severe pressure of space, the Museum asked the Society to find another home for them. Fortunately, they have now been stored in the Hull History Centre, where they have been reunited with the Larkin Literary Archive.



The move gave the Society the opportunity to take digital photographs of each artefact, carefully displayed and captured in very high resolution so as to comply with best conservation practice. The Museums Service offered the time and expertise of an experienced curator, Vanessa Salter; the University provided funding for the professional photographer, Dennis Low, and the History Centre staff gave advice on the best use that could be made of the outcomes in terms of archive use and public accessibility.

The results are extremely pleasing. Not only is there now a professional record of the objects but there is also a source of artistic pleasure in the beauty of some of the photographs. In time, all will be made available on the Society's website and a selection will be for sale on premium quality paper, including a limited edition. The first public showing of about 25 of the most attractive prints will be in the Central Library, Albion Street, Hull, 4–20 September 2013 in an exhibition curated by James Booth and Graham Chesters in association with Dennis Low.



Amber Mary Allcroft (1945-2012)

Paul Walker and Belinda Hakes



Amber Allcroft with Belinda Hakes and Paul Walker at a joint meeting of the Betjeman and John Clare Societies in Helpston. Photograph © Terry Hakes

We are deeply saddened to report the premature death from a brain tumour of our dear friend Amber Allcroft. Amber died on 29 October last year in the Valley Nursing Home, Scunthorpe, at the age of just 67.

Amber was a member of the Philip Larkin Society from shortly after its inception, but will be best remembered as Committee Member and Merchandising Officer from 2003 to 2006. During that time she transformed merchandising from a passive sales activity to a proactive marketing initiative, introducing postcards, notelets, bookmarks, CDs and DVDs, and vigorously promoting sales of 'Listen' audio tapes and Larkin Society publications, most notably Jean Hartley's *Philip Larkin's Hull and East Yorkshire*.

Amber's link with Larkin, however, went back a further 40 years when, as a shy nervous teenager, she was interviewed in May 1963 for the post of library assistant in the Brynmor Jones Library by Larkin himself. Amber recalled that Larkin was at pains to put her at ease, and saw enough in her to appoint her to a position in Periodicals and Bookbinding, where she worked, alongside Margaret Fowler and Anne Jones.¹

Amber's boss was Maeve Brennan, with whom she was to enjoy a lifetime's friendship, ending with Maeve's death in 2003. Amber was the first speaker in the Commemoration Service for Maeve in October 2003.

¹To see Amber as a teenager, see Plate 13 in Maeve Brennan's *The Philip Larkin I Knew*. Amber is second from the left on the front row.

As a naïve teenager, Amber thought how nice it was of Mister Larkin to pop his head in and say 'goodnight' to Miss Brennan at the end of each working day. 'When eventually the penny dropped, she soon learned to make herself scarce!' She confirmed the view of Larkin held by many other library employees as a kindly and considerate boss with a genuine concern for the well-being of his staff. As the friendship with Maeve developed, Maeve would visit Amber in the bedsit in her parents' house. Larkin frequently arrived to pick Maeve up by taxi before he learned to drive, and would often spend time chatting to Amber's parents in a relaxed way.

Amber confirmed how much Larkin used to enjoy the library parties. She recalled how he would direct his dancing partner to use his 'good ear', and how he would join in the drunken conga round the library stacks.

One evening she was on duty on the library issue desk with a colleague when the phone rang. Neither girl felt comfortable answering the phone, so a student friend picked up the receiver and said 'Hello, City Morgue.' Unfortunately, it was the Vice-Chancellor on the phone, and the incident resulted in a serious telling-off from Larkin.

One day, while walking through the car park, Amber happened to notice that the road fund licence in Larkin's car had expired. She drew this to his attention, and was rewarded with a charming 'thank you' card and a book token. It's little wonder that Amber remembered Larkin with affection.

Amber always claimed to know the identity of the subject of 'Administration'. A rather attractive colleague was conducting a particularly amorous courtship with her student boyfriend in the stacks when she was supposed to be shelving books. The inevitable telling-off from Larkin followed. 'Administration' was written shortly after the incident, on 3 March 1965.

After three years in the library, Amber decided that librarianship was not for her and left to attend Endsleigh Teacher Training College, after which she began a lifetime's career in teaching. She taught English in a number of Hull Schools, and her passion for poetry imparted a love of the subject to many a Hull teenager. As well as studying the works of prescribed poets, she also introduced them to the delights of e e cummings, Jacques Prévert, Dylan Thomas

About Larkin

and Vernon Watkins. She also taught English in France for a year, becoming fluent in French in the process.

As well as the Philip Larkin Society, Amber was also a member of the Betjeman and Dylan Thomas Societies. One of the highlights of her year was the week spent in her beloved South Wales at the annual Dylan Thomas Festival. Amber's other great passion was opera and classical music. She was a regular attender at the Edinburgh and Buxton Festivals, and Sheffield Music In The Round.



*Amber in Larkinesque pose at Coldstream, on the way back from the Edinburgh Festival.
Photograph © Paul Walker*

Amber was a wonderful friend. She will be greatly missed for her warmth, intelligence, quick wit and wicked, iconoclastic sense of humour – in turn satirical, scathing and scatological – but then, she was a teacher! She was a deeply loyal and generous friend who was, quite simply, fun to be with.

Amber was given a humanist funeral and a woodland burial. She is laid to rest in Brightwater Green Burial Meadow, Owmbly-by-Spital, Lincolnshire. The Larkin Society was represented at the funeral by Paul Walker and Belinda Hakes.

View across the Bay in memoriam Olive Rutherford 1918–2012

How long since first we walked this cliff-top path,
you, Dear, and I? What dreams we clung to then
before the seeding of these meadowlands!

Flax, buttercup and common centuary,
knapweed and more repeat their names each year
while Yorkshire pays due poundage to the sea.

Abandoned now, the dreams, but you remain
with bedstraw, betony, corn marigold
where skylarks string their grace notes to the wind.

In summer sun, the view across the bay
compels the eyes to lift, from St John's wort,
selfheal and sainfoin, to the blues beyond

cornflowered fields where, on an August day,
three generations joined my own to share
your flair with scarfs and hats, your vaudeville.

Some brought their memories from distant towns
and diverse times; all spoke one name, and left
love flourishing, with yarrow, fescues, vetch.

Today I come alone, repeating love
from family and friends, cry out your name
And homeward hear it strung above the wind.

Sewerby Fields Wildflower Meadows
Maurice Rutherford



*East Riding scene, photographed by Larkin.
© Estate of Philip Larkin*

Larkin and Connolly – the resonance of their despair: Part II

Joseph Bailey

I always get involved in wars but I admired the way you did not. It would be wrong for me not to fight but would be many times righter for you to do exactly what you did... Cyril, we were born into almost the worst fucking time that there has ever been. And yet we have had almost as much fun as anyone ever had.

(Ernest Hemingway, letter to Cyril Connolly, March 1948)

Sir, you formed me!

(Philip Larkin to Cyril Connolly, at the memorial service for W. H. Auden, October 1973)



Photograph © *The Times*

Not everyone liked Cyril Connolly. Virginia Woolf trumped most of his detractors when she declared 'I do not like that Smartyboots Cyril Connolly', thus providing a generation of *litterateurs* with a stick with which to beat the well-known editor and journalist.¹ Henry Miller, the American writer of *Tropic of Capricorn*, called him a 'goddam snob, a pretentious sort of cad, a cheap wise-cracking bastard'.² However, he, at least, changed his mind, admiring Connolly's ability to produce 'startlingly beautiful phrases' and praised *The Rock Pool*, Connolly's novel, which he saw as a kind of self-portrait, writing 'To have put yourself down with such utter truthfulness, seems to me to be heroic, considering what your background has been.'³

Philip Larkin thought it a 'fine and understated achievement' and apparently often re-read it. While Aldous Huxley did not seem to be affected by Connolly's

send-up of his *Eyeless in Gaza*, and led applause when Connolly brilliantly declared, at a dinner arranged for Huxley, that 'Longevity is the revenge of talent upon genius'.⁴ Evelyn Waugh's love-hate relationship with Connolly was marked by alternating admiration for Connolly's fine editorship and criticism, and savage asides about Connolly's complicated private life and finances. Married three times and often in debt, Connolly was meat and drink to the conservative Catholic and wealthy novelist that Waugh became. Notwithstanding this, Waugh was to admit to mutual friends that he 'loved the man'. Connolly's friends often seemed indistinguishable from his enemies.

His biographer, Jeremy Lewis says that, as the 1940s wore on, writing in the *Partisan Review* – as a stand-in for George Orwell – Connolly had 'noted how the writers he met at London literary parties tended to be in their forties or over; and most of them combined writing with jobs in publishing, the BBC or the British Council, the effect of which was 'gradually to extinguish the creative spark'.⁵ And [d]emoralised by his failure to write the books he felt he had within him, unhappily aware of the encroachments of middle age, increasingly bored by *Horizon*, he was both sickened by, and central to, the time-wasting, incestuous, backbiting swirl of the literary merry-go-round.'

This was nowhere more illustrated than in his short story 'Happy Deathbeds' with its pen-portraits of himself as editor and publisher, his assistant Sonia Brownell, soon to be Sonia Orwell, and his friend Peter Quennell. And as Lewis says, Connolly's portrayal of his old friend Quennell as a sulphurous Regency rake who has seemingly succumbed to almost all the enemies of promise mirrors his own demoralisation and despair about the life he was leading and the company he was keeping.⁶

Philip Larkin and his friend Kingsley Amis were just about getting going at this time, having both attended Oxford in the early 1940s. Both had literary ambitions and both would not suffer fools gladly, or they thought they wouldn't. Larkin published *The North Ship* in 1945, and two novels, *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter* in 1946 and 1947. Amis admitted to 'anger and grief and envy' at his friend's triumphs. Nevertheless, as he writes in his *Memoirs*, 'The solitary creature, unable to get through

the day without spending a large part of it by himself ... was invisible to me then', although he qualifies this: 'most likely, I was not looking hard enough?'

It should have been clear then to anyone who knew him that Larkin preferred to devote a large portion of his spare time to his own study and writing. He wrote: 'the things I want to do are essentially undoable'. He needed a friend who 'consciously accepts mystery at the bottom of things... the kind of artist who is perpetually kneeling in his heart – who gives no fuck for anything except this mystery at the bottom of things... and for that gives every fuck there is.'⁸ This letter was written to his friend Jim Sutton. Had it been written to Kingsley Amis it would have elicited a raucous response.

The twin influences of Yeats and Hardy have been seen by writers such as Andrew Motion as 'an unresolved dialectic which generates something new and original'. And it is perhaps with lovers of their work that his early efforts resonated. Charles Madge, who had worked on Mass Observation during the war and later became Professor of Sociology at Birmingham University, had admired *The North Ship* at the time of its publication and Larkin had appreciated this: he told Sutton: 'He is quite likely to give me a shove into some kind of literary success. By God, I could do with a bit.'⁹ Larkin visited Madge in Birmingham, invited Madge to Leicester, where he was working, sent him copies of thirteen new poems and corresponded with him over several years.

But it is his move to the Library of Queen's University, Belfast that provided the next stimulus to Larkin's aesthetic sensibility and his most comfortable living conditions. He was to say that Belfast gave him the best writing conditions he ever had. The first part of the evening he would devote to his writing or reading, the second part to socialising. 'I could look forward to the second part with a clear conscience because I had done my two hours.'¹⁰ Larkin associated with new friends in Northern Ireland, and he transferred his affections to new women partners. The production of his privately printed *XX Poems* in 1951 led to a comic error when he inadvertently sent out copies of this work to well-known persons who, he thought 'might be interested' in them; unaware that postage rates had just increased. He imagined the recipients being hauled out of bed to pay the excess amount owing on the packages.

It is not known whether Cyril Connolly was annoyed by receiving *his* package or its contents. By this time his indigence had obliged him to move on to another career. He was installed as a permanent reviewer at the *Sunday Times*, his editorship of *Horizon* having ended with the magazine's closure at the end of 1949. Connolly must have pondered his friend Maurice Bowra's caustic remark about him: 'Coming man, hasn't come yet', while Evelyn Waugh wrote with evident glee on the news of

George Orwell's death in 1950 to Nancy Mitford: 'G. Orwell is dead and Mrs Orwell presumably a rich widow. Will Cyril marry her?'¹¹ His cynicism was misplaced, as Sonia Orwell did not become well-off through the Orwell estate until many years afterwards, when the paperback editions of her late husband's works became widespread.

In 1952 Connolly published a book about the missing British diplomats Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean who had left England in June 1951 and disappeared. He became fascinated by the scandal of their defection to Moscow. He may have felt that his entire generation, even those innocent of involvement, was somehow implicated in the event, given that so many of them had friends in common. Connolly had known both Burgess and Maclean. He had met Guy Burgess during the Spanish War and afterwards. But he knew Donald Maclean better, giving him a bed for the night when he turned up the worse for wear at Connolly's house in London in May 1951, a few weeks before he left the country permanently. Connolly's account was first published in the *Sunday Times*. It was based on rumour, anecdote and personal biography, with a large element of Freudian self-analysis. Connolly concluded that 'before we can hurt the fatherland we must hate the fathers.'

Connolly's biographer, Clive Fisher, felt that 'as the truth gradually emerged the flight of the diplomats developed beyond an establishment scandal into a paradigm of national self-doubt: 'if the sons of the most ancient schools and universities could no longer believe in the system from which they had sprung, where might doubt and disaffection not end?''¹² Evelyn Waugh's novelistic trilogy 'Sword of Honour', beginning in 1952 with 'Men at Arms', was informed by this theme of betrayal, although Cyril Connolly's review did not uncritically admire his friend's portrait of this betrayal.

Philip Larkin's third collection, *The Less Deceived* (1955), put him at the centre of the literary canon. I take the title as a personal reference to himself, Philip Larkin, as being less deceived; i.e. deceived, as we all are, by the world around us, but 'less so' because he is guarded about his situation. When Hamlet declares to Ophelia that he has never loved her, she replies that she has been 'the more deceived', Larkin is, in contrast, 'less deceived', and therefore willing to shoulder more of the blame for his inability to commit himself to one partner. Larkin is no longer included within 'The Movement' as he used to be, partly because he has little directly in common with many of those grouped within it. Even Kingsley Amis's work seems less like that produced by Larkin than it used to. Moreover, Larkin, Amis, Thom Gunn, D. J. Enright, Donald Davie, John Wain and Elizabeth Jennings have little more in common than that they all wrote at the same time.

Larkin's primary commitment, it appears, is to the perception itself and to the preservation of the experience. 'I write poems to preserve things I have seen/thought /felt (if I may so indicate a composite and complex experience) both for myself and for others, though I feel my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake'.¹³ He assumes that little conceptual apparatus is needed between the reader and the writer. Small wonder he had little in common with the army of interpreters and moral entrepreneurs who were contemporaneous with or came just after him.

In 1986, the American academic Charles Rawson commented that the most influential of people writing about literature in the earlier part of the 20th century and before were writers first and critics second. Rawson lists: Yeats, Arthur Symons, George Moore, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Foster, Middleton Murray, D. H. Lawrence, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot and William Empson (the latter as an 'amphibious case') and writer-critics such as Hazlitt, Macaulay, Ford Madox Ford and Orwell (and he might have added Cyril Connolly). It must be obvious that a class of academic interpreter succeeding the writer-critics has increasingly held sway since the middle part of the last century.¹⁴ A cursory look at the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, under the general editorship of H. B. Nisbet, published in successive volumes from 1990 onwards, confirms this shift. Its later volumes were taken up with philosophical and psychological, formalistic and postmodernist themes.¹⁵

For Larkin, something as perspicuous as a poem does not need much explanation by a third party. Larkin passed up most opportunities to discuss, interpret or even read his work, concurring only when he felt he could not reasonably refuse. And as Rawson comments, we have moved since World War II to a new phase in the institutionalisation of literary criticism and we may add, sadly, reading itself. Literature departments in the universities in the West, and especially its English-speaking regions, have expanded to such an extent that discourse about literature has become a systematic occupation and full-time career. This has created a public that tends to regard reading not as a natural activity for all thinking people, but as a professional task.

And this, in turn, has affected the primary texts which are written. It helps to explain not only the large number of novels about universities but also the production of a new poetry and prose that seemed designed for classroom explication and which cannot be easily decoded without it. While this latter has been related to the economics of publishing, the massive fictions of postmodernist novelists are a case in point, not only in their difficulty, allusive density and 'simpering air of in-

group donnishness, but also in their bulky appearance and learned showmanship, reminiscent of dissertations'. From the high windows of Pearson Park, Larkin saw this all happening through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. His attitude towards these developments can be seen in the portraits of Jake Balokowsky, and the rather creepy interlocutor speeding over the Thames to greet Professor Lal, 'who once met Morgan Forster', with his lecture pages based on a Third Programme talk, to be recycled for his tour to Berkeley, California.

But it is not just his opposition to the corporatisation of literature which Larkin registered. He worried that the time he personally devoted to his writing and reading was being encroached upon by social life, which had inevitably become more onerous as he became more well-known. Another poem, 'Vers de Société' describes his concern at this waste of time, 'whether or not you use it'. Virtue is seen as social; he is obliged to respond to offers of hospitality. And this bores him with the need for small talk. His excuse is that 'The time is shorter now for company' and this displacement activity at least brings him relief from 'other things' which haunt him as he grows older.

Cyril Connolly had few such qualms, it seems, continuing to live in the world of country houses and in the cosmopolitan literary circles for which he had been such a hub since before World War II. As the 1950s came and went, his regrets were limited to his failure to write more interesting books than *Ideas and Places* (1953) and selections from his past work in *Golden Horizon* (1953) and *Previous Convictions* (1963). One thing did change for Connolly, however, and that was that he became a father for the first time, when he married again in 1959. This seemed to confirm his conviction that his creative ability had been abridged, if not extinguished. Critics, such as the poet Ian Hamilton, have seen all this as a thorough-going life-style and work-style. Accusing Connolly of 'a true vocation of scoring points as a literary socialite' and in observing the dinner-table impact of lordly non-producers like Logan Pearsall Smith and Desmond McCarthy, Connolly had realised, early on, that failure, if worked on, could handsomely pay off.¹⁶ One is inclined to answer this with a *tu quoque* reply. (Hamilton might well have conceded the point.) But it doesn't really explain the weakness of Connolly's will or his kind of despair. Maybe we should look closer to our own time for that.

Philip Larkin's last two collections *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974) showed, famously, that he 'did not develop' as a poet. But did he need to? Larkin's aesthetic was well formed by this time and he was only half-joking when he quoted Oscar Wilde to the effect that 'only mediocrities develop'.

About Larkin

There has been a huge growth in the publication of books. Critics analyse the writers' skill, and some have begun to address the larger question of the quality of the reading experience. Cultural historians such as Stefan Collini have recently explored the evidence that the quality of reading has been diluted: that readers have been compartmentalised into different levels.¹⁷

What I think Connolly and Larkin had in common, beside an abiding belief in the morality of art, was a commitment to its public aspect, and its general availability. The arts in general, and literature in particular, should not be squeezed into an empyrean beyond the reach of the common reader. Both Connolly and Larkin deplore the bureaucratisation and bowdlerisation of art by contact with literary critics, arts commentators and cultural organisations. Larkin and Connolly saw such developments for what they are: a diminution in the space given to literary art in modern culture. The Irish poet and children's writer Pat Ingoldsby has written with anger about this:

Everyone has taken over something
The Irish language
Poetry
Anything to do with James Joyce
The Arts
Theatre

Everyone has taken over something
They think they own it

They will keep you in your place

You must go to them
Through them
Be cleared by them
Approved by them
Sanctioned by them

Get permission from them

Most of the time this works
Because people desperately want
Something from them...¹⁸

Literacy, literature and the internet are related to one another in complex sociological ways, which we cannot go into here. But if poetry can 'communicate before it is understood,' Connolly's last article for the *Sunday Times* in December 1974, published a week after his death, 'Poetry – My First and Last Love', was prescient. 'Poetry,' he says, 'even the best, holds no brevet of immortality and is no more lasting than man's other creations. As civilizations die they become incomprehensible; every language will one day be a dead language and we ourselves wear out ... and lose

our zest for our memories. For this reason the poetry of mortality has the edge on the poetry of love; for the sentiment of transience remains with us longer, together with an abiding love of nature.'¹⁹

And what poet has been more abject in speaking of these subjects than Philip Larkin? This, perhaps, is why Larkin, the poet and Cyril Connolly, the critic to whom Larkin confided that he had formed him as an artist, stay with us: each in his own, individual despair.

¹ As recounted by A. J. Ayer in his autobiography *Part of My Life* (Collins, 1977), p.248.

² Clive Fisher, *Cyril Connolly: a Nostalgic Life* (Macmillan, 1995), p.144.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fisher, p.294.

⁵ Jeremy Lewis, *Cyril Connolly: A Life* (Jonathan Cape, 1997), p. 422

⁶ Lewis, pp. 422-24.

⁷ Ian Hamilton in a review article, 'Sorry to go on like this', of *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*, ed. Zachary Leader, in *London Review of Books*, 1 June 2000; accessed January 2013.

⁸ Anthony Thwaite, *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin* (Faber, 1992), p.106.

⁹ *Selected Letters*, p161.

¹⁰ Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writers Life* (Faber 1993), p.203.

¹¹ Fisher, p. 291.

¹² Fisher, pp. 307-308.

¹³ 'Statement', in *Poets of the 1950s*, ed. D. J.Enright. *Required Writing: 1955-1982* (Faber 1983), p.79.

¹⁴ Charles Rawson, review article, 'Before the Professors Took Over', of René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950*, *New York Times*, 30 March 1986, accessed February 2013 from the NYT website.

¹⁵ H.B. Nisbet, General Editor, *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge University Press), Vol. 8, *From Formalism to Poststructuralism* (1995) and Vol. 9 *Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (2001).

¹⁶ Ian Hamilton, review article, 'The least you can do is read it' of Jeremy Lewis's *Cyril Connolly A Life*, *London Review of Books*, 2 Oct. 1997; accessed February 2013 from the LRB website.

¹⁷ Stefan Collini, 'From Belles-Lettres to Eng-Lit: Criticism and its Publics', lecture given at the University of Edinburgh on 24 May 2012; accessed January 2013, YouTube.

¹⁸ Pat Ingoldsby, extract from *Me and My Life*. Copyright with the author and Willow Publications 1999.

¹⁹ Fisher, p. 411.



Soul Brothers

Terry Kelly

Richard Bradford: *The Odd Couple – The Curious Friendship between Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin*
(Robson Press, 2012), 373pp. ISBN 978-1-84954-375-0

Richard Bradford is not a man for critical half-measures. Laying his cards firmly on the table in the opening line of his introduction to *The Odd Couple*, he declares: 'During a thirty-year period between the 1950s and the 1980s, Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin produced, respectively, the finest fiction and poetry of the era.' While the second half of this statement would doubtless find ready assent among readers of *About Larkin*, the first half is surely more problematic. Bradford's critical certitude is again in evidence when he takes up the cudgels against those in the literary establishment who turned against Larkin after the publication of, firstly, the *Selected Letters* (1992) and, later, Andrew Motion's *Philip Larkin – A Writer's Life* (1993). Resolutely anti-modernist in his approach, Bradford feels Amis's comic writing is wrongly downgraded by academics in favour of what he calls the 'surreal speculation on the absurdities of the intellect that finds its way into the work of Joyce, Beckett, Pinter and their successors', adding defiantly: 'His work is serious *because* it is funny.' Similarly, with Larkin, Bradford's broadsides in defence of the poet can sound shrill: 'Academics and other members of the literary establishment dislike writing that is self-evidently beautiful but which does not, like modernism, demand their services as explicators.' Arguing in defence of what he calls 'formal conservatism', Bradford plays the literary reactionary, echoing Amis at his most curmudgeonly: 'Moreover, they show that the successful command of traditional techniques requires far more skill and intellectual investment than the tired and predictable practices of experiment...In the latter half of the twentieth century they were the torch bearers for writing that tested the intellect and sensibility of its readers without resorting to the self-obsessed preoccupations of modernism.'

This kind of broad-stroke critical approach is a feature of *The Odd Couple*, which drew criticism from Christopher Tayler, in the *London Review of Books* (Vol. 34, No. 24, 20 December 2012): 'Even some of Bradford's esoteric interpretations could have been made to look more plausible by a less clumsy writer, and the book is hard to fault on detail. The main problem is one of emphasis: Bradford isn't good with humour, and his narrative requirements make him put too much on the idea of Larkin as the surly underdog... If Amis took more from Larkin than Larkin did from him, maybe Larkin had

more to give.' Although reviewers have generally been kind to *The Odd Couple*, commending the book for its detailed analysis of the Amis-Larkin friendship, eagle-eyed satirist Craig Brown excoriated the book for blatant self-plagiarism in *The Mail on Sunday*, in the kind of withering review which would force most authors into hiding. Calling the book 'a triumph of cut and paste,' Brown accuses Bradford of taking both reader and his publishers 'for a ride', by reproducing verbatim chunks from his previous books on Amis and Larkin. Slamming *The Odd Couple* as 'a shameless exercise in marketing old rope', Brown demonstrates how often only the linking passages between previously published text are new, cheekily speculating whether 'self-plagiarism is an offence in academia?' And Bradford's wholesale recycling can have other, unintended consequences, when previous unforced errors are not picked up. Reviewing Bradford's *First Boredom, Then Fear – The Life of Philip Larkin in About Larkin 20* (Autumn 2005), this writer noted that the earlier book had the poet being interviewed – posthumously – by Melvyn Bragg in 1986. Unfortunately, the self-same error appears in *The Odd Couple*, surrounded by the same recycled prose Craig Brown enjoyed lampooning.

But for all its cutting and pasting, *The Odd Couple* does present a very detailed picture of the Amis-Larkin relationship, from its beginnings at St John's College, Oxford, in May 1941, to its sad and muted conclusion, with Larkin's death in 1985. Bradford reasonably observes that the largely epistolary friendship of Amis and Larkin 'energised, sometimes even shaped, much of their finest writing.' But he cannot resist drawing apparently definitive aesthetic conclusions from literary evidence. So we are told that '*Lucky Jim*, the novel that launched Amis's career, could not have been written without Larkin', and that while Amis apparently 'exploited their intimacy for his writing, Larkin's mature poetry was largely a reaction against it.' But Bradford does avoid some of the self-plagiarism charges by featuring unpublished material from the archives, including previously unseen documents from the Hull History Centre and the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

From the moment Larkin spotted Amis faking a gunshot wound and collapsing on some laundry bags outside St John's College, their lives were drawn together. The friendship blossomed in the beery context of 'The

About Larkin

Seven,' a kind of disrespectful, debunking literary gang. Both agnostics, Amis and Larkin came from similar social and educational backgrounds. They shared a scabrous, casually obscene sense of humour, a passion for traditional jazz, drink and sex – or, in Larkin's case, fantasizing about sex. And they also shared a secret, coded language in an almost hermetically sealed private world. In terms of literary *nous*, Amis considered Larkin 'the senior partner', with the latter encouraging his friend to read Auden, Flann O'Brien and Henry Green. The pair peppered their private world with scurrilous, parodic and obscene verses. The Amis-Larkin relationship presented a stiff index finger to academic or literary propriety. Bradford notes: 'It was as though both were in private able to enjoy breaking down the institutionalised borders between comic irreverence and high culture, while in their attempts to produce proper literature they deferred to the humourless conventions of the latter.' But although the bond between the two friends was strong, their literary tastes often diverged. Amis, for example, never shared Larkin's admiration for D.H. Lawrence or his attachment to the psychological theories of John Layard.

Though their friendship endured for more than 40 years, the Amis-Larkin relationship was largely based on letters. Larkin was never keen for Amis to visit Hull, perhaps anxious to conceal the mundanity of his working life or his intimate relationships. Their correspondence was sparked when Amis was conscripted into the Army, while poor eyesight exempted Larkin. Bradford pinpoints this as a turning point in their friendship, calling their letters 'unique in the history of literature,' adding: 'Their correspondence provides an index not only to the progress of their relationship but also to each of them as individual writers.' Bradford draws parallels between certain Larkin poems and specific passages in the voluminous, often sexually graphic correspondence. So he considers a letter by Larkin, dating from February 1947, about his crumbling relationship with Ruth Bowman, a 'prose version' of *Wild Oats*. But some readers may demur at some of Bradford's parallels. For instance, he suggests *The Old Fools* is simply 'Larkin's response' to the bleak fictional landscape of Amis's novel, *Ending Up*. The poem has far more complex roots than this. And apart from such simplistic literary interpretations, Bradford can also be accused of overstepping the limits of biography. After quoting a famous Larkin letter to Maeve Brennan in December 1975 – 'I am very close to Monica and very fond of her... But it's you I love; you're the one I want' – he states unequivocally: 'He was lying. Within three years their relationship would be over, forever.' Bradford fails to acknowledge the inconsistencies and complexities of the human heart. Moreover, the reader may reasonably ask, 'How does Bradford know Larkin was lying?'

Arguably the central chapter of *The Odd Couple* is that concerned with the development of the classic Amis

novel, *Lucky Jim*. Bradford explores Larkin's influence on and inspiration for the book, and Amis's apparently lifelong antipathy to Monica Jones. According to Bradford's reading of the novel's gestation, Amis was 'scrupulously harvesting key aspects of his friendship with Larkin for the novel.' He believes Larkin was complicit in the creation of the character of Margaret Peel, which is widely considered to be based on Monica, his novelist friend making 'disparaging comments' about the woman who was apparently his soul-mate, while allowing Amis to believe the relationship was far more casual. For Bradford, Monica was 'a threat... to the... unique and confidential partnership' between Amis and Larkin. But even as *Lucky Jim* was taking shape, Monica was actually displacing Amis as Larkin's 'most trusted adviser on his poems-in-progress'. But after a rejected first book, *The Legacy*, Amis seemed to find his way again with the novel form *via* Larkin's letters, which he found much funnier than his own.

Bradford considers the Amis-Larkin correspondence a rich literary storehouse, providing many of the comic set pieces in the novel. Amis called his poet-friend his 'inner audience' and drew inspiration from their private, epistolary style, which remained mostly inaccessible to the outside world. In effect, Amis found a way back into fiction by transforming his private correspondence with Larkin into public literary currency. Echoing Pound editing Eliot's original manuscript *He Do The Police In Different Voices* into *The Waste Land*, Larkin cast a cold critical eye over 150,000 words of the nascent *Lucky Jim* and helped shape the book. But Bradford believes Larkin came to regret his part in its creation, accusing his old friend of plagiarism: 'Sometimes he disclosed his feelings to others but never to Amis, even much later when their friendship appeared to be mutating into quiet antagonism.'

Given his teasing out of the many links sparked by the famous literary friendship, it's surprising that Bradford fails to acknowledge a perhaps veiled or submerged Amis caricature in Larkin's satirical poem, *The Life with a Hole in it*. Yet for all its recycling and often unsubtle readings, *The Odd Couple* still provides a wealth of detail about the interlinked lives of two highly complex, hugely talented literary figures. What is also clear is that real love underpinned the Amis-Larkin relationship. As Martin Amis commented in his introduction to his selected Larkin, *Poems* (2011): 'It was always clear to everyone that Kingsley loved Philip with a near-physical passion.' But Amis *filis* also recalled his father's comment on his return from Larkin's funeral, after finally getting to visit his old friend in Hull: 'It sounds odd, but I sometimes wonder if I ever really knew him.' Just before he died, Larkin was forced to dictate his final letter to Amis on to a tape recorder, which meant dispensing with their traditional, slightly rude but still affectionate and wholly typical valediction of 'bum'.

The Two Pigeons

(Jean de la Fontaine, *Fables*, Bk IX, 2)

Translated by Layton Ring

Two pigeons loved each other tenderly,
 One, bored sick with being at home,
 Was crazy enough to take on a
 Journey to a far far country.
 The other "Why, where are you going?
 Why leave your partner? Absence
 – Though not for you, cruel one –
 Is the greatest of evils –
 At very least may the travails
 The dangers, the cares of voyaging
 Change your heart a little,
 Again, let the season be advanced
 – Wait for the west wind – Who
 Urges you? – Just now I conjured
 A crow announcing disaster
 To some bird – a finery end
 Whether falcon or net – Alas, I say,
 It rains – my companion,
 Has he not supper, good roof and the nest?"
 Such discourse rattled the resolve
 Of our imprudent traveller,
 But the desire to see plus a
 Restless humour still carried
 Him away – "Cry no more –
 Three days at most will satisfy
 My soul: I will soon return to tell
 My stories to my partner
 Point by point: I'll thrill him
 To the core: who sees but little
 Can prattle but little.
 My travelling so described
 Will bring joy unqualified
 I will say 'I was there –
 It happened to me' – you'll
 Believe you had been there yourself."
 At these words, both birds moved,
 It was "bye-bye" in tones:
 The traveller departs; and now
 A cloud obliges him to take shelter
 Helter-skelter in the nearest tree
 Whose foliage offers scant protection
 Against the storm's declared intention:
 The air calmed down; chilled to the bone,
 His body sodden with rain,
 In a nearby corn-filled field, he sees
 Another pigeon, giving him hope –
 He flies there, is taken; a trap

Crop-covered lies under the grain
 – The traitor-kne is never quite plain –
 It's a worn-out snare – he breaks it
 With wing, claws, beak – some feathers lost –
 By trick of fate, a certain vulture,
 Cruel-clawed, espied him
 Looking like felon escaped,
 Dragging chains and bits of remains –
 The creature hastened to seize him,
 Clouds parted – a wide-winged eagle
 Lay waiting: the pigeon escaping
 – profiting by conflict of thieves
 (As one does) –
 Crashed into a hovel hard by, and thought
 His bad luck over at last.
 But a rascally child (no pity at this age)
 Took a stick and struck,
 Half-killed the bird, who
 Cursing his cecity (as one does)
 Dragging wing, half-dead, half-paralysed,
 For better, for worse, returned home,
 No further adventure preventing,
 Cured of his longing to roam.
 I leave you to judge with what joy
 They pleased themselves for their pains.

Lovers, happy lovers, would you travel?
 May it be only to nearby shores –
 Be to each other a world forever
 Beautiful, varied and new.
 Hold all together in zest
 Count for nothing the rest.
 I have sometime loved;
 I would not therefore exchange
 For the treasures of the Louvre,
 Or the heavenly vault on high,
 The woods and places honoured
 By the steps, enlightened
 Through the eyes of the lovesome
 Youthful shepherdess whom
 Under Cupid, Cythera's son,
 I served according to my oath.
 Alas, when will such a moment
 Come again? Will so many
 Sweet charming objects allow me
 To live in the cruel bonfires
 Of my restless desires?
 Ah, if my heart would dare reawaken
 Might I no longer feel the allure
 That once stopped me short in my tracks?
 Am I past the time for loving?

CLR: Dec 2011

The Unveiling of the Philip Larkin Bench

Jackie Sewell

2nd December 2012 marked the 27th anniversary of the passing of Philip Larkin or, as he put it, the moment when he went to 'the inevitable'. The 25th anniversary in 2010 had been celebrated with the unveiling of Martin Jennings' elegant statue on Hull's Paragon Station. The 26th anniversary had been marked by the unveiling of five slate roundels around the statue, each engraved with a line of his poetry. How then to commemorate the 27th anniversary? Carole Collinson came up with an idea: 'How about a bench, then people can sit and look at the statue while they wait for their train?'

After rejecting a very expensive quote from a well-known carver of furniture we chose, after much research, *Chic Teak* in Basingstoke for the project. The bench had to be circular to fit round a post, and there would be a carved quotation on the back rest. Permission was obtained from the authorities and it was arranged for the bench to be delivered on 30 November and stored on the Station. *Chic Teak* assured us that it was easy to assemble and we arranged for help to be at hand at 9 a.m. to do the job. Everything was going to plan.



Jackie Sewell at the unveiling. Photograph © James Booth

However, every event has to have a drama. At 10 am the bench was still safe in the storeroom. Station Security could not find the key. Nor the spare key. Minutes passed as tools were fetched and the lock broken. Fortunately *Chic Teak's* promise held good. The bench was indeed quickly assembled and ready for the ceremony.

By 12 noon over sixty guests had assembled and Carole Collinson, Chairman of the Larkin 25 Statue committee

welcomed everyone and expressed the hope that the bench would become a place for people to sit, wait for their trains, rest their legs, put down their bags, and take a relaxed look at the statue. As she remarked, the statue has become very much a feature of Hull's cityscape. Many people have their photographs taken alongside it. Now they will have a place to linger if they wish.

Then the Lord Mayor of Hull, Daniel Brown, introduced the event, saying that the bench would be another enhancement to a distinctive and much-loved station, and another recognition of the link between the poet and one of his favourite places in Hull. It would be one of the city's 'sudden elegancies' to use Larkin's phrase. He noted that though 'Larkin was not born in Hull' he found himself staying here, as so many do, and 'his poetry links him to this city in quite straightforward ways.'

Mrs Mary Rose Barker read part of 'Bridge for the Living' but unfortunately at this point, someone decided that the train standing behind the barrier, needed to be warmed up. From this point on the speakers had to compete with the noise of the engine. Many in the assembled crowd had to exercise their lip-reading skills in the attempt to hear what was said.

The Lord Lieutenant of the County, Hon. Mrs Susan Cunliffe-Lister gave a fluent reading of the first stanza of 'The Whitsun Weddings' and pulled back the black veil to reveal the words 'All sense of being in a hurry gone', an apt phrase at this point for more than one reason. Graham Chesters, Vice President of the Society followed with a reading of 'Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel'. Professor Edwin Dawes, our Chairman, thanked all present for their support. He pointed out that the bench seat is a less direct tribute to Larkin than the statue and the roundels. But, he noted, *Chic Teak* had made similar seats for Lord's Cricket Ground, home of the MCC, of which Philip was a proud member.

Professor Dawes concluded that events like this don't 'just happen' – they involve meticulous planning. He thanked Carole Collinson, Chairman of our Appeal Committee and her colleagues, Jackie Sewell and Graham Chesters, for their efforts.

The guests returned to the Station Hotel for light refreshments, and to discuss the quotation on the bench, which had been kept a secret until the unveiling. There was also an exchange of views on what the Society might propose for the same time in 2013.

'All sense of being in a hurry gone'



Carole Collinson



Attentive over the noise of the train. Front: the Lord Mayor Danny Brown, his wife Lynda, the Hon. Susan Cunliffe-Lister and Betty Mackereth



Eddie Dawes



The Hon. Mrs Susan Cunliffe-Lister, Lord Lieutenant of East Yorkshire



Photographs © James Booth

Hemlock, Motherdie

Douglas Porteous

Many of Larkin's poems, shorn of specific geographic location or persona, allow the reader to climb inside and be borne along. The amateur peruser can identify, interpret and enjoy without the aid of the professional critic. Reading the letters, however, does sometimes help to provide a deeper interpretive understanding.

What matters to me is whether the poems and other texts work with my own knowledge and experience to generate personal pleasure and insight. Here I provide a personal reading which might be worth sharing. It's an incident in which my experience of a certain landscape, as kept in memory, and Larkin's experience of that same landscape, as related to Monica and perhaps later evoked in *Cut Grass*, came together in a meaningful way to engender in me an almost-epiphany, almost-true.

It's June 2012 and I'm reading *Letters to Monica* (2010) straight through. Larkin's performative persona for Monica, or perhaps their mutual slant, was to undersell pleasure and oversell dullness. Whether describing life or landscape, Larkin's most common adjectives seem to be 'dull', 'boring', 'tedious', and so on. On a very few occasions he uses 'lovely', specifically in relation to Sark, Bellingham Show, country lanes around Belfast, and a sweep of fields outside Cottingham.

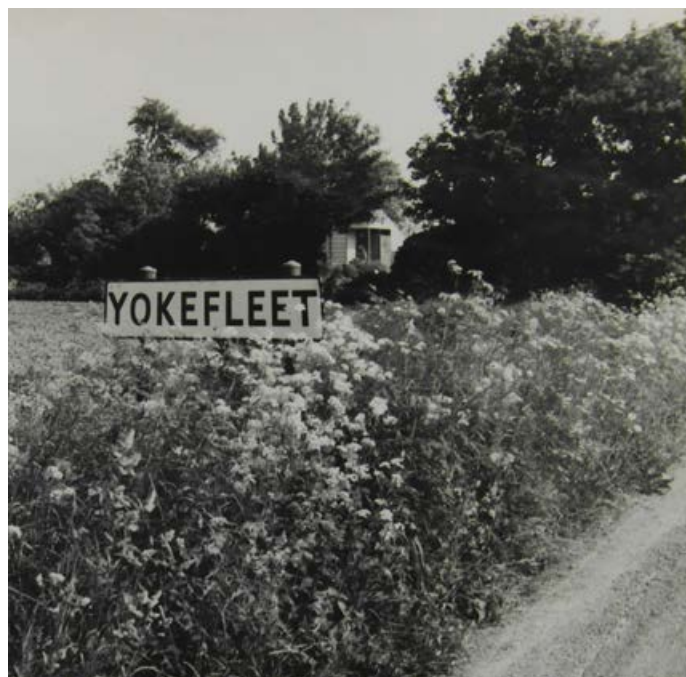
Imagine my surprise, then, to discover one use of 'beautiful', towards the back on page 400, to which he adds, in the same letter, 'exciting', 'wonderful' and 'marvellous', echoes of Handel's *Messiah*. And then the even greater astonishment of finding that the area he calls beautiful, exciting, wonderful and marvellous is the small riverside region of southern Howdenshire in which I were born and bred. Aye, na' then.

Larkin is simply looking for ambiguous old William Empson's birthplace at Yokefleet, on the north bank of the River Ouse (not Humber), but in June 1969 he finds an unexpected rural England which charms him beyond measure. He writes from Hull on 8 June 1969:

It was a brilliant day ... I turned down rather late, at Balkholme; went through Kilpin & then down to Saltmarshe; then back & along to Laxton, Yokefleet, Blacktoft and Faxfleet, & then up to the main road again, and wonderful it was. *Very* quiet: lanes all lined shoulder high with cow parsley: huge trees in their first full freshness; & the villages – hardly more than collections of houses – made Clunbury and Clun seem

like Manhattan. No inns – or hardly any – a church or two ... The river mostly invisible, behind high banks, but sometimes a gliding ship appeared ... O it was beautiful!

This little *pays*, an 'ordinary landscape', the area between the Boothferry Bridge and Brough, was replete with Housmaniac 'quietest places under the sun', and not far off in Shropshire but just down the road from Hull. Sad, perhaps, for Larkin, in that he had been meaning to go to Yokefleet for fourteen years. And almost everyone else has missed it, because they have shrugged off Howdenshire as the fields 'thin and thistled', with 'harsh-named halts' of the Goole to Hull railway line in *Here*, and gone on to embrace equally beautiful Holderness.



Larkin seems enamoured with this nameless region, which I have always called, affectionately, the Back of Beyond. It has what he likes: quiet, trees, river, peaceful summertime swathes of fields. I know it to be yet another spot, like Hull, where 'only salesmen and relations come.' I went with an agricultural salesman on his rounds in this area, and sometimes visited relations at Balkholme, Blacktoft and Broomfleet. But Larkin has come as a poet, he sees the place poetically in both diction and reference, and in the letter, as so often in the poems, there's the usual doubleness of vision. He describes Blacktoft village hall: '... inside I could see trestle tables laid for tea, as if for some outing that never came.' Along the lanes: '...always the rare *white* of early summer: hawthorn, chestnut candles,

cowparsley, nettle-flowers, so soon lost....’ And, back in Hull: ‘It was a day among days: I’m sure it’ll never be so fine again.’ The old trope of absence, of time’s winged chariot Hullyng us off to doomsville, pops out even in the recollection of a happy day amidst the bliss of solitude. Yet his jokiness remains, for on the subject of the white vegetation’s transitoriness he corrects himself and adds: ‘(I expect they go on till autumn really.)’

What just might have come out of Larkin’s 1969 trip to Ordinaryland is *Cut Grass* (1971). This poem is almost central within the last great spate of poetry which issued from Larkin in the period from late 1969 to 1973, with the almost-celebratory poems of *To the Sea* (1969) and *Show Saturday* (1973) as bookends. He tells us that ‘happiness writes white’, yet here’s a positive poem about whiteness, as a contrast to *Sympathy in White Major* (1967). Read the letter and note the almost-similar itemization in this poem:

... the white hours
Of young-leafed June
With chestnut flowers,
With hedges snowlike strewn,

White lilac bowed,
Lost lanes of Queen Anne’s Lace,
And that high-built cloud
Moving at summer’s pace.

It’s obvious that this poem, like so many others, is shorn of locational and personal particularity and thus universal and therefore able to be analysed in any-angled light. It’s generally seen as a languorous, seasonally rhythmic poem, yet still crying out against ultimate doom. Edward Thomas lurks on the grass verges. The Biblical ‘All flesh is as grass’ seems pretty obvious. Alternatively, and postmodernly, I’m quite happy to admit that Larkin may have been recording that great Wolds walk from Cottam to Cowlam, or that cut grass may be cut glass to a deaf person or on an East Asian tongue, or that the high-builtness recalls Larkin’s hospitals, and so on ad infinitum. Perhaps his use of ‘marvellous’ in the letter betokens Captain Marvell, famous seventeenth-century adventure-comic poet and MP for Hull. Queen Anne’s Lace makes me think of her tying her corset and all those dead babies. And I’ve taught enough geopolitics to provide an Islamist reading. But let’s not get ridiculous.

I haven’t seen the workbooks, wherein may be discovered perhaps a longer gestation for *Cut Grass* than 1969–71. And I’m aware that Larkin may not have produced what he wanted to achieve, for in a later letter to Monica he deprecates his lyrical elegy as merely Elgar-like “‘music,” i.e. pointless crap.’ But whatever the authorial intentionality, and whatever anyone else’s interpretation, postmodernity tells us that the reader is the master, and right now the reader is me.

Larkin likes lanes, especially white summer ones, which

appear again in *Bridge for the Living* (1975). I was happy walking, biking, and driving along those, or similar, back lanes, some of them dead ends to match what Larkin thought of his own poem. But we locals never used the term ‘Queen Anne’s Lace’; far too lahdidah. Nor did we, as in Larkin’s letter, call it cow parsley. Larkin probably changed the wording in the poem because cow parsley is a rough locution for such a soft poem, and because parsley has a perfect rhyme only with ‘sparsely’, hardly a useful adverb in such a lush and luxuriant landscape. No fields ‘thin and thistled’ here. What we called it was ‘hemlock’, very Socratic, or, even more sinisterly, ‘motherdie’. It’s a poisonous plant.

Or so I was told as a child, and not until sixty years later did I look up the Umbelliferae, to find a confusion of several species which look alike – water hemlock, poison hemlock, cow parsnip, wild carrot (Queen Anne’s Lace) – only some of which are toxic. Make a pipe out of a toxic hollow stalk, however, and you may well die. Larkin wasn’t a botanist, and nor am I, so I have to admit that all my life I have been in the wrong, albeit unpoisoned. But I am glad to report that it’s unlikely that Larkin placed a toxic plant deliberately inside such a fly-Elgaric, soft country lyric. Nevertheless, now we’ve got the word, could you stomach an article about Larkin’s life on the theme of ‘Motherdie’? What I can say that’s not untrue and not unkind, unless I’m the most deceived, is that as a reader of this poem and this letter, I have had a multilayered serendipitous sequence of joys – the sensitivity and even sentimentality of the poem itself, the epiphany of the connection of Larkin’s letter with my personal life and landscape, the I’ve-got-to-run-to-the-bookshelf-and-check-something experience that I hope all readers sometimes have, and even the strange thought of poison avoided. Best of all, there’s my pleasure that Philip Larkin had pleasure in a landscape that gave and still gives me pleasure, and now may give yet more deeply.



Photographs by Philip Larkin. © The Estate of Philip Larkin

Notes on Contributors

For reasons of space, some frequent contributors are omitted.

Joseph Bailey is a founder member of the Philip Larkin Society and works for a law firm in London. He has written several articles for *About Larkin*.

Simon Blackburn retired as Bertrand Russell Professor of philosophy in Cambridge in 2011. He continues to work part of the year at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and at the New College of the Humanities in London. His many books include *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Princeton University Press will publish *Because You're Worth It*, a philosophical meditation on L'Oréal, next year. He is a keen amateur photographer. Website: www.phil.cam.ac.uk/~swb20/.

Winifred Dawson met Philip Larkin in the early 1950s when she was a Library Assistant in Queen's University, Belfast. She is the 'young lady' with the photograph album to whom the poet addressed his famous 'Lines'. Her own life, as she celebrates it in her poem 'Photograph Albums Revisited' (*AL* 13, April 2002) has been quite different from that of the poet, full of 'Husbands, children, stepchildren, grandchildren, friends, / Cousins, cats, cars, canals, a cornucopia of pleasures'.

Tony Finckham, current Chairman of the Thomas Hardy Society, works as a General Practitioner in rural West Kent. His English PhD thesis (University of Kent) was published as *Hardy the Physician: Medical Aspects of the Wessex Tradition* in 2008, followed by *Hardy's Landscape Revisited* (2010). Tony, a longstanding member of the PLS, is at present working on his first novel – a medically orientated love story.

Belinda Hakes has shared her love of Larkin's writing with generations of students during twenty years as Head of English at Wylke Sixth Form College in Hull. A graduate of Newcastle University, she moved to Hull for her MA and PGCE, and was a founder member of the PLS. She has acted as the Society's Membership Secretary, Merchandising Officer and Editor of *About Larkin* (issues 17-21, 2004-6). She is currently our Education Officer. In 2008 Belinda published *When Critical Thinking Met English Literature*, and is writing a commissioned book on the teaching of creative writing. She is a member of the Hardy, Marlowe, Brontë and Clare societies.

Terry Kelly works as a journalist in South Tyne-side. He contributed to *AL* 15; a review of *Early Poems and Jervais* to *AL* 19; and an interview with Larkin biographer Richard Bradford and a review of his *First Born: John Ford: The Life of Philip Larkin* to *AL* 20. Another passion is Bob Dylan and he is a regular contributor to the UK fanzine *The Bridge*. www.two-tidiers.co.uk

Betty MacLaren was Philip Larkin's secretary from 1957 until her retirement in 1984. In 1975-76 she became the subject of his late love poems, 'Morning at last: there in the snow', 'When first we faced, and touching shroued', 'Dear Jake', and 'We met at the end of the party'.

Douglas Parteous lives on the Pacific island known to Gulliver as Brobdingnag. His latest books are *Environwards!*

Aesthetics; ideas, politics and planning, and Domicide: the global destruction of homes.

Philip Pullen was born and brought up in Coventry and is familiar with most of the haunts of the young Philip Larkin. He now lives in Lincoln. He has spent most of his working life teaching in further and higher education and from 2001 until his retirement in 2011 was an HMI with Ofsted. Although his academic background is in the social sciences, he has had a lifelong passion for English literature. He is currently researching the relationship between Philip and Eva Larkin as revealed in their extensive correspondence.

Layton Ring was born in Auckland, New Zealand, on 31 July 1922, a few days before Larkin. After war service he came to England to study early music with the Delmetzsch family, where he became proficient on the harpsichord, clavichord, recorder and viola, being appointed harpsichordist to the Northern Sinfonia in Newcastle in the 1960s. He has discovered music by William Lawes, Purcell, Geminiani and Alessandro Scarlatti, and orchestrated Delius's Cello Sonata and Violin/Piano Sonata No 3. He has published eight volumes of poetry.

Maurice Rutherford was born in Hull in 1922. His first poetry collection, *Slipping the Tracks*, was published by Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts in 1982. Two later collections, from Peterloo Poets, *This Day Dances* and *Love is a Four-Letter Word*, are both available from the Society. A pamphlet, *After the Parade* (1960), was published by Shoestring Press which has also published his *And Saturday is Christmas: New and Selected Poems* (2011), and *Flip Side to Philip Larkin* (2012).

Jackie Sewell was born in Rugby, grew up in Leicester and obtained her B.Ed. from Sheffield City College (now Sheffield Hallam University). Her teaching career included posts in Rotherham, East Hull, Cottingham and Pocklington, where she was headteacher at Pocklington Infants. Following retirement, Jackie took on the role of Treasurer of the Society and has been closely involved in its programme of events raising money for the statue of Philip Larkin.

Colin Vire is a Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon and Senior Clinical Tutor at the Hull and East Yorkshire Eye Hospital. He has published extensively in ophthalmic clinical literature, but his essay in the current issue of *About Larkin* is his first foray into the field of social science.

Paul Walker graduated in History and Swedish from the University of Hull in 1968. As an undergraduate he developed a deep love of Hull, Hull Brewery bitter and Philip Larkin. Following a career in financial management with British Rail and Royal Mail, he now lives in hectic retirement pursuing his interests in preservation railways, heritage, CAMRA, politics, cricket, rugby league, art, music, opera and literature. He is a member of the Bejerman and Dylan Thomas Societies and was a founder member and sometime Treasurer of the Larkin Society.

The Philip Larkin Society

Publications and Merchandise

For further information visit: www.philiplarkin.com

Purchases may be made from our website using **PayPal**

Submissions to *About Larkin*

We welcome contributions to the journal from Society members. Copy should be sent by email attachment to j.booth@hull.ac.uk or in hard copy to: The Editors, *About Larkin*, 8 Alpha Terrace, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5PT.

The copy deadline for *About Larkin* 36 is 31 August 2013.

Publications

All prices include postage and packing. For prices in US dollars and euros, please contact the Merchandising Officer, Andy Bagley. Please make cheques for all Society publications payable to 'The Philip Larkin Society' and send to:

Philip Larkin Society Publications
Andy Bagley
33 Newland Park
Hull HU5 2DN

***About Larkin*: Journal back issues:** £8.00each.

Issues containing important Larkin works are: Letter to Eva (2); 'The Library I came to' (3); 1943 Letter to his parents (4); 'Story 1' (10 – out of print); 'Peter' (11); 'An Incident in the English Camp' (12); Schoolboy writings (13); 'We met at the end of the party'; prose and poetry from 1940* (14); 'Apples on a Christmas Tree' (20); 'Biographical Details: Oxford 1' (23); 'Biographical Details: Oxford 2' (24); 'New Brooms'; 'Poem for Penelope'; early letters* (25); Dream Diary (1942–3) Part 1 (27); Dream Diary (1942–3) Part 2 (28). Those asterisked contain a large quantity of significant material.

Books

Maevie Brennan, *The Philip Larkin I Knew* (Manchester University Press: Philip Larkin Society Monograph 3) £15.50

A unique memoir of the poet, deeply personal and revealing.

A.T. Tolley, *Larkin at Work: A Study of Larkin's mode of composition as seen in his workbooks* (Larkin Society Monograph 1) £8.00

Jean Hartley, *Philip Larkin, The Marvell Press and me* £10.50

'Jean Hartley's story is a vital piece of evidence for anyone curious about Larkin's life.' Andrew Motion, *The Observer*.

Jean Hartley, *Philip Larkin's Hull and East Yorkshire* £7.50

The second edition of this popular topographical and walking guide to the area, home to Larkin for 30 years.

Graham Chesters (ed.), *The Making of Larkin's Statue* £10.00

Dedicated to the memory of Dr Jean Hartley, this book tells the inside story of the statue, from commissioning to installation

Geoffrey Waters, *The Larkin Trail* (Kingston Press) £13.50

Crammed with art work and accompanying narrative, this makes an excellent companion to *Philip Larkin's Hull and East Yorkshire*.

Andrew McKeown and Charles Holdefer (eds.), *Philip Larkin and the Poetics of Resistance* (Paris: l'Harmattan) £8.25

The proceedings of the 2004 conference held in Poitiers, France.

Old City, New Rumours, an anthology edited by Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens (Five Leaves Press/ the Philip Larkin Society) £6.99

Contributors include: Douglas Dunn, Roger McGough, Andrew Motion, Sean O'Brien and Maurice Rutherford.

Poetry by Maurice Rutherford

Love is a Four Letter World (Peterloo Poets, 1994) £8.25

Observations about childhood, wartime service, and retirement. Hull and its poets, including Philip Larkin, are major presences.

This Day Dawning (Peterloo Poets, 1989) £4.50

An original and funny offering from the renowned Hull-born poet.

Larkin Society Audiotapes: £4.00 each

Winifred Dawson: *Love and Larkin* (2001)

Zachary Leader: *Editing Kingsley Amis's Letters* (2001)

Alan Plater: *By the tide of Humber I fell among poets* (1998)

Dale Salwak: *Philip Larkin: An American View* (1997)

CDs

An Evening with Maureen Lipman CBE: £8.00

Maureen Lipman was the distinguished guest at a dinner and auction which raised £9,000 towards the Larkin statue. Recorded on 2 September 2010, the CD captures the wit and humour of this successful event.

John White: Philip Larkin: *Funny Man:* £8.50

John White's marvellously observed and informed presentation at the University Staff House on 23 January 2010 takes us as close as we can to spending an hour in Larkin's company.

Anne Fine: Philip Larkin: *A Personal View* £10.00

Anne Fine's challenging, witty and personal presentation to the Annual General Meeting, June 2004.

All Night North £11.50

12 contemporary folk, pop and rock songs featuring the poems of Philip Larkin

DVDs

Jean Hartley A Tribute: £10.00

A recording of Jean Hartley: An Appreciation of the Writer, Artist, Friend and Publisher of Philip Larkin's *The Less Deceived* — James Booth's Lecture at the Society's 2012 AGM.

The Unveiling of the Philip Larkin Statue: £10.00

This DVD captures the atmosphere of the unveiling of the Philip Larkin statue on 2 December 2010.

Required Performance. Professor Edwin Dawes, our Chairman, works his magic at the Annual General Meeting 2006: £10.00

T-shirts

Medium, large and extra-large sizes, in two styles, featuring iconic images of Philip Larkin, and printed on good quality cotton. £15.00

Philip Larkin Poster (A2)

From a 1964 photograph during the filming of the Monitor television programme (© 1964 Anne James) £8.00

Stationery

Notelets (pack of 5): £3.20; Postcards (set of 4): £2.00.

Bookmarks (5): £2.00

Monitor stationery

Pack of two notelets (and envelopes): £1.50

Set of four postcards: £2.00

These items feature images of both Philip Larkin and John Betjeman from the 1964 BBC Monitor documentary programme 'Down Cemetery Road'. (Photographs © 1964 Anne James)

Fridge magnets

Three different black and white photographs of Larkin £2.40 each; set of three £5.50

Wotlarx Enterprises: David Pattison, *This Was Mr Bleaney's Bike* £6.99'... a good and ingenious plot...' Alan Plater

