

# THE NEW GLADSTONE REVIEW

*an occasional e-journal*

*July 2020*  
**Issue No. 9**

*Informal commentary, opinions, reviews, news, illustrations and poetry  
for bookish people of philanthropic inclination*

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## **Editorial**

*We cannot afford the creeping paralysis that destroys the effective will of democracy –  
the paralysis carried by hate and rancor, between class and class, person and person, party and  
party, as plague is carried through the streets of a town.*

Stephen Vincent Benét (1898-1943) USA poet

We are now at a point in history when many of the world's peoples are, if in little else, united in the perplexity that plagues their everyday lives: confused, bewildered or disorientated by a pandemic that threatens habitual lifestyles to an unprecedented degree. Others, unfortunately less surprisingly, simply hang on (or, worse, succumb) to impoverished lives long-since endured as innocent victims of warfare and/or the vast disparities of wealth and opportunity into which fate has cast them.

But, as declared in the above quotation, by someone whose poetry in his lifetime was more widely-read than that of T S Eliot, addressing the social injustice that many people experience is no less urgent than coping with the current viral threat. In the so-called 'developed world' most people are guilty of a 'creeping paralysis' in the face of the 'hate and rancour' fuelled by political leaders in both totalitarian regimes and certain, supposedly, 'democratic' societies.

In article 3 I suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic might provide a catalyst for renewing attitudes to global society in radical, humanitarian ways. This would surely entail understanding of the diversity of ethical motivations of people's actions, which are not only influenced by rational deliberation but are also, to a degree, inherent in our biological nature (article 6). The survival of humanity seems to call for more intelligence, compassion, sense of justice and humanity than ever needed before.

I am most grateful to Frances Thimann for her delightful review of a book (article 4) which is obviously both highly amusing but also timely in its underlying political critique.

*PS The rapid pace of social and political change means some articles will seem out-of-date.*

**BM**

## 2. GLADSTONE BOOKS UPDATE

Item 3 in the last issue of this Review outlined the plans for the future of Gladstone Books following the closure of the unit in the Newark Antiques Centre. At the time of writing, there was limited understanding of the scale or nature of the pandemic, and the extent to which it would impact on life for those unfortunate victims who contracted the disease or the wider socio-economic and geopolitical repercussions. The upshot is that there is very little to add to the comments made in the April Review, which I reproduce here for convenience:

*The current plan is for Gladstone Books to become, primarily, a means of selling books online to customers in the UK. This will entail preparing catalogues, with brief descriptions of each book, which will be posted on my website. As each new catalogue is published it will be advertised on the Sheppard's Confidential website, which is issued weekly and hosts several other, generally larger and more expensive, booksellers' catalogues. It will take some time to prepare catalogues, and if the current restrictions persist for long it may not be fully operative until later this year, even if then.*

*Apart from online sales, I intend to allow bona fide browsers, who will most likely be people living locally or visitors, to view my stock in a comfortable book room at a private location in Southwell, providing prior arrangements have been made. In this case, because it will greatly simplify the transactions, books will be offered at a substantial discount on the prices listed in the catalogues.*

In view of the advice for those 'older people with underlying health problems' I have been confined to home ever since, and opportunities to progress with the above plans have been largely put 'on hold.' I have been able to shelve most of the stock in the new book room but it has not been possible to achieve much else. I will advertise any significant developments on the website, and by email to those on my database.

### Some comments on Issue 8

Comments from readers are always welcome. The following ten anonymous excerpts are from emailed comments which are selected as representative of the general tone of the batch received.

- I look forward to the first catalogue - great discussion re virus too
- I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your last (Review)
- I have read your essay on bioethics (and). particularly enjoyed your article and also the article on the Stoics your son wrote. ... indicative of how little human nature has changed. It has certainly made me want to explore their thoughts in greater detail.
- Fabulous Ben.
- I also hope to be one of the privileged visitors to see your book stock at Southwell once we are through this awful time
- An interesting exercise (on pandemics), which our decision makers would benefit from perusing-and sooner rather than later.
- Thanks Ben for the latest Review. Any distraction in the current climate is welcome.
- I intend to slowly and thoroughly read (the Review) over the next few days but, from my reading so far, let me say that it has bucked up my spirits.
- Thank you Ben, these (Reviews) are always extremely interesting and enjoyable.
- What a delight to find ... the latest Gladstone Review. The idea of an exclusive book room ...sounds like paradise...

*The identity of correspondents is never disclosed without their express permission*

### 3. Post-pandemic global society, the *naturalistic fallacy* & *Eutopia*<sup>1</sup>

For many months now, broadcast news bulletins and public discussions have been dominated by seemingly endless debates about the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and possible means of their mitigation. In the face of a rampant disease with few comparable precedents with which to prepare us to effectively nullify its effects, politicians world-wide have clutched at straws to control the outbreak and calm their anxious populations. Most governments have sought to find refuge in invoking the authority of ‘science-led decisions,’ and at press conferences in the UK the government minister assigned to chairing this rotating duty has usually been flanked by two ‘experts’ from the leading scientific, medical or nursing organisations.

The problem with passing the buck to science – and hence to leading establishment scientists – is that it assumes that we can logically deduce what actions we ought to take from the prevailing consensus on the relevant scientific *facts*. As philosopher David Hume (shown below) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century argued, science is about establishing the facts of a matter (what *is* the case), whereas decisions about how one *ought to act* in the light of such facts involve ethical questions. To assume that the facts always, or even often, determine *the ethically right* course of action is logically flawed. G E Moore in the early 20th century labelled this the ‘naturalistic fallacy’ – in essence ‘you can’t get an *ought* from an *is*.’

But the problems do not end there, for not only do different scientists, both within a country and between different countries, advance very different recommendations for action, as is plainly evident in the wide range of policies adopted by the governments of different countries, and their markedly different degrees of success, but the economic and social consequences of policies are clearly matters that demand serious attention as well as the direct effects on morbidity and mortality.



To illustrate this it is only necessary to refer to a series of crises encountered in the UK since the pandemic was identified, such as the lack of adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) to many at-risk people, the tardy and ineffective response to the threats posed to residents and staff in care homes, the long delay in making any serious efforts to establish testing to assess the extent and location of people who have contracted the virus, the greatly increased death rates of non-Covid-19 patients not presenting for medical treatment, and the virtual absence of any monitoring of the health status of people entering the UK from abroad for many months. It is an alarming fact that currently the death rate from Covid-19 is the worst in Europe, and (at one time) the second in the world, after the USA, despite the much vaunted expertise of our scientific community.<sup>2</sup>

I want to suggest that, in the highly complex situation that the world’s 7.8 billion people now face, making political decisions on how to proceed must not be assumed to be a purely scientific matter, even if, which is far from the case, all leading scientists agreed on the scientific facts. In the heat of the moment, when even the best-intentioned recommendations are made, some mistakes are almost certain to occur. But in the longer term, when we emerge from the current prolonged state of emergency, it is surely imperative that the soundest course of action should be that recommended as a result of serious deliberation informed by appreciation of the wide range of humanity’s cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Written in late May/early June, 2020

<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps appropriate to note that, after gaining a PhD in biochemistry at a Cambridge research institute, I was appointed to a lectureship in physiology at Nottingham University. There, I established the Centre for Applied Bioethics, was appointed to a special professorship in that academic discipline, and subsequently served on a government biotechnology commission and several other EU and UK scientific committees.

perspectives. For how often do we hear, most convincingly from those with a reputation for wisdom, that global society from now on will not, and indeed must not, return to its pre-pandemic status? Indeed many people, throughout the world, must feel acutely that the crisis presents humanity with an opportunity to rebuild the social fabric of international development. As Edward Fitzgerald's version of the *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1568, verse 108) put it in lyrical style:

Ah Love! could you and I with Fate conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire  
Would we not shatter it to bits – and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

In fact, the common assumption that science provides the objective evidence for choosing the *ethically right* courses of action is exposed as patently untenable by considering the ways scientists have for long reached different conclusions on how to *use* scientific knowledge in practical ways. Modern biotechnology (e.g. encompassing genomics, gene manipulation and reproductive technologies) provides a prime example of the diverse opinions adopted by equally-qualified scientists on the benefits and risks of this esteemed (and even 'glamorous') branch of science.

In a paper presented at an international conference in the UK, which I and colleagues organised in 1993, Sheldon Krinsky, a sociologist of science of Tufts University, USA, characterised the debates over biotechnology then being vigorously promoted in terms of competing *mythologies*,<sup>3</sup> He stressed that the term *myth* was being used judiciously, not to denigrate one side or the other – but to signify a cultural story that embodies hope, expectations, moral attitudes, fears or positive visions of modernity. Such myths are '*mental constructions that transcend the real world into a virtual world of expectations.*' He noted that '*political debates on biotechnology are essentially about the control over techno-mythmaking, which is defined as the shaping of social expectations, through the association with technology of symbolic powers and simple moral values.*' Krinsky proceeded as follows: *Propositions contributing to the mythmaking potential of Biotechnology (with the counterclaims in brackets) are that it:*

- *provides natural (unnatural) products*
- *offers greater (less) control over nature*
- *will contribute to greater (less) biodiversity*
- *will be friendly (unfriendly) to the environment*
- *will (will not) feed the world's hungry people*
- *will (will not) provide cures for the world's major diseases*
- *will (will not) lead us to renewable resource economies*

His subsequent analysis provides an illuminating insight into the validity of our notions of reality – compelling us to recognise that even *scientific* knowledge (esteemed by the vast majority of scientists and many non-scientists alike) makes assumptions concerning the nature of 'knowledge' which need to be treated with much caution. Since there is no firm basis of knowledge from which we are able to deduce truth by the exercise of logic, we need to incorporate other cultural factors into our reasoning – and recognise that there is almost inevitably a role for some degree of intuition - what the physical scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi termed 'tacit knowledge.'<sup>4</sup> Certainly, this insight does not guarantee a route to 'truth,' but subjecting hypotheses to a broader range of perspectives and to rigorous examination may provide sounder grounds for decision-making .

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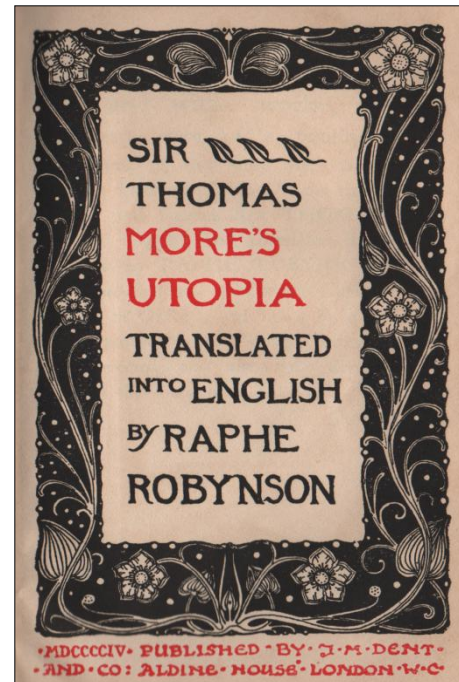
<sup>3</sup> *Issues in Agricultural Bioethics*, 1995, Nottingham University Press pp. 1-18

<sup>4</sup> Michael Polanyi *Personal Knowledge*, Routledge, 1958

Throughout history the urge to devise a plan to ensure that humans live in peace and harmony has inspired many thinkers and politicians. Notably, Sir Thomas More in<sup>5</sup> 1561 invented *Utopia* (literally, from the Greek, meaning ‘Nowhere’) – an ideal land where such conditions prevailed.

Idealistic it certainly seemed to be, witness the following excerpt: *where all things be common to every man, it is not to be doubted that any man shal lacke anye thing necessary for his private uses: so that the common store houses and barnes be sufficiently stored. For there nothinge is distributed after a nyggyshe sorte, neither is there any poore man or beggar.* More’s objective in writing *Utopia* is far from certain, but it seems likely that, despite the claim that it referred to a mythical *ideal* society, it was primarily a satirical essay that debunked the notion that human beings *can* be organised to achieve an ideal state.

Even so, devastating, destabilising and dismal as the pandemic has proved to be, several of its consequences on those not closely affected by the disease itself have revealed markedly different, often favourable, impacts on social relationships, personal assessments of what is most important in human life and environmental sustainability.



*From my copy of the 1904 edition*

For example:

- greater appreciation of the roles of doctors, nurses, health care workers and others (many from abroad) who have risked personal safety in dutifully pursuing their routine jobs (e.g. supermarket workers and bus drivers ) has challenged the attitudes of many people who valued others largely for their British citizenship and/or wealth
- reduced use of cars and aeroplanes has greatly decreased greenhouse gas emissions, air and noise pollution and vehicle accidents
- public health has improved through greater use of walking and cycling, while people have often adopted physical exercise as a rewarding way of filling their spare time
- increased consumption of locally-produced food has reduced ‘food miles’ and supported neighbourhood industry
- the closure of public houses has reduced inebriation and led to fewer crimes being committed
- social contacts by telephone, email, texting and other electronic means have burgeoned, replacing the normal cursory greetings between neighbours, colleagues and previously-ignored strangers
- many more people have found fulfilment in enjoying music, reading and creative arts, as flexible use of time has allowed previously suppressed-ambitions to be realised

Doubtless, many more examples could be cited; but the downsides of people suffering loneliness from excessive isolation; of patients with serious conditions like cancer missing medical treatment; of many workers who have lost or are liable to lose their jobs, of restricted access to important items due to panic buying etc, etc – all these may be thought to rule out any net gains. But surely, the opportunity for wholesale reformation presents us with the challenge of devising, not a utopian but, a *better* world

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<sup>5</sup> In the 1966 film *A Man for All Seasons*, Thomas More was the person so described (played by Paul Scofield)



– acknowledging that ideal societies will probably always remain *objectives*, the natures of which are intrinsically qualitative and not achievable in scientifically-endorsed quantitative terms. Realisation of the positive gains of the enforced lockdown suggests *win-win* outcomes are not mere fantasy.

This approach was perhaps most clearly described by Aristotle in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when he defined human virtues as those traits of character which sought a middle way between excess and deficiency. For example, the virtue of *courage* was a mid-point between rashness and cowardice, while that of *temperance* avoided the extremes of self-indulgence and insensibility. More recently, theories advanced in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries stipulated principles for ethical action, such as Kant’s *categorical imperatives* and Bentham’s utilitarian *cost/benefit* analyses. In the multicultural world we all now inhabit, the urgent deliberations necessary to ensure that we achieve as equitable and sustainable existence as possible for the global population will necessarily involve collaboration between people of acknowledged wisdom from an exceedingly wide range of cultures. To build on Aristotle’s claim that the aim of ethics was the achievement of *eudaimonia* (of which a rough translation might be ‘happiness’ or ‘flourishing,’ as the Greek ‘eu’ refers to wellbeing) it might well be that the best we can hope for is, not More’s Utopia but, *Eutopia*<sup>6</sup> – a state of universal wellbeing.

Even so, conceptual tools to facilitate discussion are required, and since I devised one called the *ethical matrix* about 25 years ago<sup>7</sup>, which has since been used by others in a wide range of contexts, it is reproduced here as an example of how it might structure discussions of global scenarios in the post-pandemic world. A chapter on the *matrix* in my book *Bioethics* is freely accessible on the Oxford University Press website via *The Gladstone Books* website.

|                                     | <b>Well-being</b>                        | <b>Autonomy</b>                         | <b>Justice</b>                       |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Treated organism</b>             | e.g. Animal welfare                      | e.g. Behavioural freedom                | Respect for <i>telos</i>             |
| <b>Producers<br/>(e.g. farmers)</b> | Adequate income and working conditions   | Freedom to adopt or not adopt           | Fair treatment in trade and law      |
| <b>Consumers</b>                    | Availability of safe food, acceptability | Respect for consumer choice (labelling) | Universal affordability of food      |
| <b>Biota</b>                        | Conservation of the biota                | Maintenance of biodiversity             | Sustainability of biotic populations |

*An ethical matrix proposed for deliberation on the prospective use of genetically modified food animals, identifying prominent ethical principles (respect for wellbeing, autonomy and justice) as they might be interpreted for different ‘interest groups’*

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<sup>6</sup> The fact that the Greek ‘eu’ matches the abbreviation for the European Union is pure coincidence!

<sup>7</sup> The table shown is from my chapter published in *Food Ethics* (1996) which I also edited. It was selected, along with papers by distinguished philosophers such as Bernard Williams, Peter Singer, Hans Jonas and Amartya Sen, for re-publication in *Applied Ethics: critical concepts in philosophy* (edited by R Chadwick and D Schroeder; 2002, Routledge), which examined how: ‘the field of applied ethics has developed over the last 50 years, by bringing together those articles that have been seminal in the development of the subject.’

#### 4. *ELLA MINNOW PEA* by Mark Dunn: a review by Frances Thimann

Methuen pb. 2003. (First published in USA 2001)

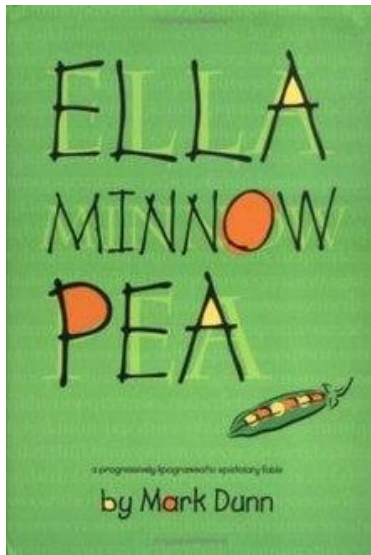
*What is a pangram?*

*What is a lipogram?*

*Where is Nollop, and why are those terms of special importance there?*

You will find the answers to these and other vital questions when you read this book, described by its author on the title page as ‘a progressively lipogrammatic<sup>8</sup> epistolary fable.’ You will also laugh, be delighted by brilliant play with words, and admire the ingenious resolution of the plot at the very last minute. But you will also reflect soberly on the importance of language to freedom and democracy, and on the various parallels to this story, but lacking its brilliance and fun, that will spring to your mind.

##### **The Quick Brown Fox Jumps Over The Lazy Dog**



In a little-known corner of the world, the small independent island nation of Nollop, situated just off South Carolina, USA, honours its native son Neville Nollop, who, it seems, invented the pangram noted above. A pangram (of course) is a sentence containing all the letters of the alphabet. Because of the significance of this contribution to the English-speaking world, language, the arts and scholarship have been elevated to huge importance in the nation – the citizens love words and delight in using them inventively. ‘*I... watch the shapings of the clouds and feel the caress of our soft, late-summer windwispes,*’ writes one citizen to her cousin. They coin terms like ‘*sweet pureplicity,*’ ‘*leapdash urgency*’ and ‘*thug-uglies*’...

At the centre of Nollopton there is cenotaph with a statue honouring the great man and featuring his remarkable invention.

Unfortunately, one of the tiles forming this phrase falls off one evening and shatters at the base of the cenotaph. This tile features the letter Z. The bureaucrats in charge of the Council, in their blind devotion to their founder and with their desire to interpret his wishes, decree that henceforth that letter is banned from all correspondence and speech, as that must indeed be the great Nollop’s wish. Gradually, more and more letters fall; the Council continues to enforce their blind and rigid rulings. Not only speech and correspondence, but books too are included in the ruling. Books are burned, the library is closed, education rendered difficult and limited, the local newspaper is shut down; the local radio plays music only. And meanwhile, other letters fall – Q... then J... then others...

Violations of the Council’s rulings are severely punished. Post is officially inspected, correspondence censored. Neighbours spy on each other, reporting their misspeakings, officials spy on neighbours. Domestic and family tensions surface. Some of the islanders stop writing or speaking completely as fear of retribution mounts; some emigrate. Businesses close; stress and misery mount.

And when the letter D falls, the islanders realise that all their history is threatened, as the past tense is obliterated from their language.

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<sup>8</sup> A lipogram is a form of writing which uses words where one or more letters of the alphabet are avoided.

The Council interpret what they see as the divine wishes of Nollop - his will be done! – they make accusations of wrong-thinking and blasphemy. Scientists on the mainland are able by chemical analysis to test the adhesive of the falling tiles and state that it is very weak due to the age of the statue, and point out that therefore there is no divine will involved at all: it is the fixative, not God! But the Council suggest that, on the contrary, it is Nollop *working through science*. (As more letters disappear, the Council decrees that the days of the week must be written ‘*Monty, Toes, Wetty, Thurby, Fribs... ’*)

But after witnessing the ever-more severe punishments meted out to their community, at last the remaining citizens plan insurrection, the reclamation of their society. It is agreed with the Council that if they can come up with a new pangram, even better than Nollop’s – and it must be 32 letters or less (Nollop’s has 35) - the rulings will be reversed, for it will be clear that Nollop is not the genius they thought him.

So now the race against time is on! And it is a cliffhanger! They have six weeks – while their lives disintegrate around them, letters continue to fall from the cenotaph and communication is harder and harder. Their correspondence becomes more and more inventive and funny, brave and touching as they circumnavigate the forbidden letters and coin strange new forms of words with what they have left. The fight (Enterprise 32) is led by Ella Minnow Pea, and at the end, those are the only letters left that can be used for communication – LMNOP.

There follows a desperate series of efforts, as they try to achieve the perfect pangram and so preserve their civilisation and their freedom. ‘*Back in my quaint garden, jaunty zinnias vie with flaunting phlox*’ is one example, but of course, it is far too long.

And at last, just in time, the perfect pangram is produced (which I will not reproduce here)... And the solution comes as a surprise; it was not even written by any scholar or learned person, Nollop was proved not to be so divine, unique, or even bright, after all, and his works do not deserve the adulation they have previously received.

This is a novel told through letters, in both meanings of the word. It is a fable about language and democracy, the idiocies of blind bureaucracy, state control and religious intolerance. It is about the spying of the state on citizens and of neighbours on each other; about censorship, the control of language. Yet it is also very funny.

At the end, in her triumphal letter, Ella writes that they will all celebrate their victory with ‘*jugs... piled high, toppling over, corks popping, liquor flowing. Disorder to match the clutter and chaos of our marvellous language. Words upon words, piled high, toppling over, thoughts popping, correspondence and conversation overflowing.*’

As a kind of appendix, the book also contains other pangrams by others beyond the Nollopian shores, including one brilliant contribution consisting of 26 letters only!

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And now readers of this article might like to try their own pangram...

Frances graduated from the Nottingham Trent University Writing MA course in 2006, and since then has published three collections of short stories. She contributed several pieces to the Southwell Folio magazine, and has strong connections with Southwell.



## 5. Clerihews

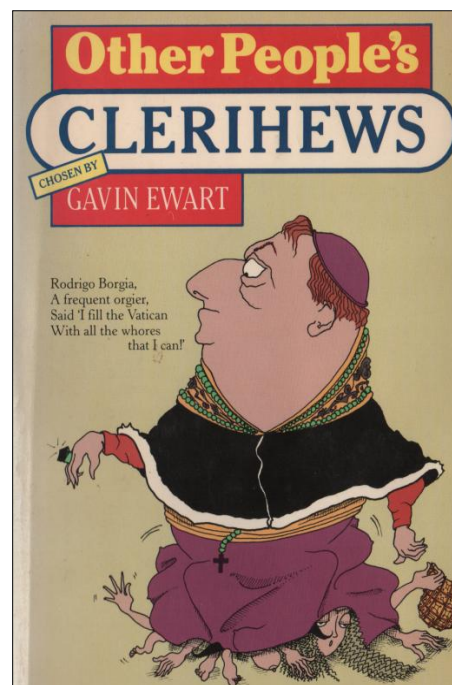
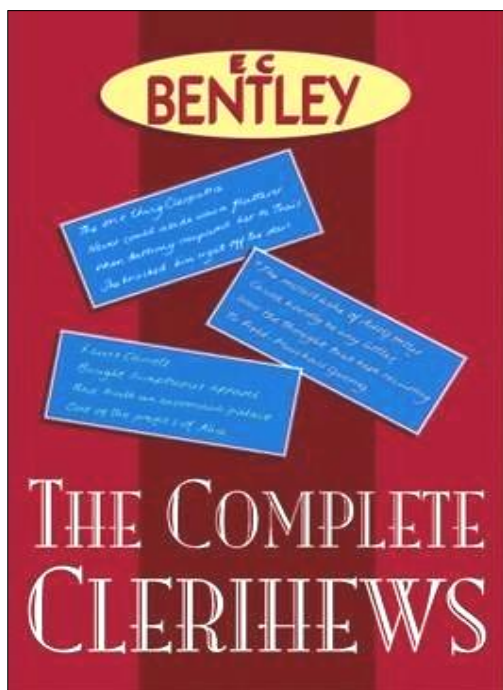
### *witty pseudo-biographical four-line verses*<sup>9</sup>

When reading, I sometimes find that a passing comment in the text leads to me to another book, which is sometimes more interesting than that in hand. Recently, a reference to *clerihews* got me hunting for a book on my shelves on that very subject, which obviously caught my fancy when I bought it but had not attracted my attention ever since. Ah-the joys of serendipity! Then it occurred to me that a brief article on this would provide a little levity to assuage the currently unremitting gloom.

A clerihew is a humorous four-line verse that usually refers to a notable person in the first line and then proceeds to put the subject in an absurd light by adopting a whimsical tone which concludes with an unmistakable jibe. The rhyme structure is AABB. If that sounds complex, a demonstration quickly dispels the illusion. Thus the first clerihew written, in 1905, was apparently:

Humphry Davy  
Abominated gravy.  
He lived in the odium  
Of having discovered sodium

The verse form was invented by Edmund Clerihew Bentley when he was a 16-year-old pupil at St Paul's School in London and, reputedly, the above poem occurred to him during a science lesson there. Along with friends, he subsequently compiled a notebook full of examples. Bentley's son, Nicolas,<sup>10</sup> who became a noted Punch cartoonist, published three volumes of his father's poems (described as *edited by E. Clerihew*) – to which others have added many other examples.



To quote Wikipedia, *Clerihews are not satirical or abusive, but they target famous individuals and reposition them in an absurd, anachronistic or commonplace setting, often giving them an oversimplified and slightly garbled description.*

<sup>9</sup> Longman Dictionary of the English Language

<sup>10</sup> N Bentley's most famous drawings were those illustrating T S Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*

A complete collection of Bentley's clerihews was published in 1981, with illustrations by his lifelong friend, the eminent critic and author G K Chesterton. The subjects of the poems were an assortment of over a hundred notable figures, including Karl Marx, Jane Austen, Mussolini, Henry VIII, Tennyson, Leonardo da Vinci, Keats, Cleopatra and Lewis Carroll. The following examples are drawn from a book compiled by Gavin Ewart, who commented (in Dr Johnson's phrase): *the lack of them would tend to eclipse the gaiety of nations and impoverish the stock of human pleasure*.

Here are a few more examples (with their, sometimes famous, authors) to whet the appetite:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>William Blake<br/>Found Newton hard to take<br/>And was not enormously taken<br/>With Francis Bacon</p> <p><i>W H Auden</i></p>          | <p>Sir Donald Bradman<br/>Would have been a very glad man<br/>If his test average had been 0.06 more<br/>than 99.94</p> <p><i>T N E Smith</i></p>                 |
| <p>Rupert Brooke<br/>Sure did look<br/>Pale, beautiful and good<br/>As young poets should</p> <p><i>Wendy Cope</i></p>                      | <p>Fanny Craddock<br/>Couldn't endure haddock<br/>Even <i>un tout petit peu</i><br/>Unless it was cordon bleu –</p> <p><i>Gavin Ewart</i></p>                     |
| <p>Margaret Drabble<br/>Isn't read by the rabble<br/>Though popular enough<br/>They prefer Cartland's stuff</p> <p><i>Sarah Lawson</i></p>  | <p>George Gordon, Lord Byron<br/>Never had the fire on –<br/>He slept warm with a great Dane, a cockatoo<br/>And a mistress or two</p> <p><i>Joyce Sugg</i></p>   |
| <p>The Arabian Knights<br/>Give you fictional delights<br/>The Arabian nations<br/>Give you real palpitations</p> <p><i>Mark Adlard</i></p> | <p>Margaret Thatcher<br/>Sat in the House and tried to hatch a<br/>Plan to win her Cabinet's approval<br/>Before her removal</p> <p><i>Tom Smith (age 11)</i></p> |

I couldn't resist the temptation to try my hand at it. The result:

A dyed-in-the-wool Tory called Boris  
Assumed politics was like quoting Horace  
But contracting Covid-19 made him sad  
Until he found socialism wasn't *that bad*!

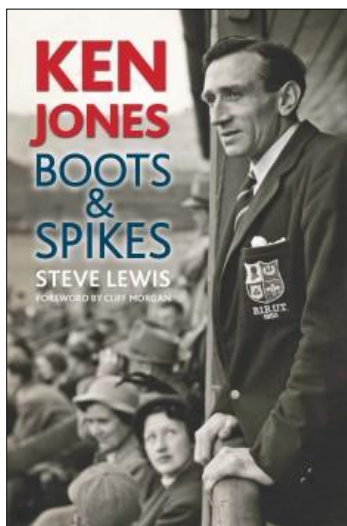
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*Invitation* Perhaps readers would care to submit entries for the next issue!

## 6. Reflections on Rugby: life and the death of a sport?

*In our postmodern age ...the human subject has become a postman circulating postcards in an endless communications network without sender and without addressee. In this respect, the most fitting answer to the question 'who is the author or agent?' is to 'tell the story of a life' (H Arendt).<sup>11</sup>*

Covid-19 has caused many of us to reflect on aspects of our lives which now seem more significant than formerly realised, the churning of memories providing a catalyst for assessing how the strange new future might affect us. Claiming no privileged insights, my aim here is to explore the role of rugby football as it affected my developing perspectives on team sport, first in adolescence and then later, in more reflective years. I suspect few people now would guess from my stooped physique and habitually pensive demeanour, that I was once a keen rugby player and supporter of my local team. But if I add that I grew up in post-war South Wales the revelation would perhaps seem more credible. My father followed Newport County, a soccer team that languished in the Third Division (South), and I accompanied him to some matches at Somerton Park,<sup>12</sup> joining the bustling parade that trooped passed our house on Saturdays: few soccer-supporters owned cars in the 1940s. But I started watching



the Newport rugby union team, along with my, older, brother when I was about ten years old. My primary school headmaster was Vince Griffiths, a stocky former-international player, who was one of the 'Big Five' that is, the selectors of the Welsh national team.

### *The 1950s*

From my early days at the Newport High School for Boys I was drawn to rugby as a sport in which I could put my athleticism to a more thrilling activity than on the running track. What sealed the bond was my chance allocation on entry to the school at eleven to a class of which the form master was one Ken Jones, the noted international player for Wales and Olympic medallist, who was the idol of many boys throughout the school. I recall Vince Griffiths telling me that he would ask Ken Jones to excuse me from cross country running, because, as the fastest sprinter at the primary school, it would 'spoil my wind'!

Along with Cliff Morgan and Bleddyn Williams, Ken Jones was one of the outstanding Welsh players of the 1950s. His match-winning try in 1953 at Cardiff was the *last time* that Wales beat New Zealand; but his sprinting ability, which, along with many other awards, resulted in a silver medal in the 1948 Olympic Games, was no less impressive. The author of this 2011 biography of Ken Jones, argued that, for his outstanding skills in both rugby and athletics, he deserved the title of the Greatest Welsh Sportsman of all-time – so he could hardly have been a greater source of inspiration to me as a boy. He played for Newport from 1946 to 1958, amassing over 400 points (old style) for the side.

But the Newport side has long fallen from its former golden era, for in my youth it had several invincible seasons – which meant beating local rivals Cardiff four times in a season. One distinct recollection is watching the South African touring side play Newport in 1952. On my own and too short to see much of the game between the shoulders of the surrounding crowd on the terraces, I caught only snatches of the action – but was left with the memorable impression of the bronzed Springbok three quarters moving like a well-oiled machine as they powered towards the try line.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Kearns (2002) 'Ethics and the Narrative Self' in *Between philosophy and poetry* pp 91-98 (edited by M Verdicchio and R Burch: Continuum)

<sup>12</sup> As I later wrote: 'a down-at heel stadium, with its ash-strewn and smoke-laden (i.e. with tobacco) terraces.'

My enthusiasm was, however, greatly restrained when the family moved to Worcestershire, and I to a soccer-playing grammar school. My athletic abilities were still evident, as I was junior *victor ludorum* there in 1954, breaking two records, but I never enjoyed soccer. For my 6<sup>th</sup> form studies I transferred to Worcester Royal Grammar School, founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and replete with ancient traditions, like grace said in Latin, boaters worn in summer and some other rather bizarre activities - but its saving grace was that they played rugby. My skills on the pitch were soon recognised, with the sports master's comments on the first XV in the school magazine describing me as '*fast and fearless.*'

But at the beginning of the 1957-8 season the team's optimism was seriously dampened by a tragic event on the pitch when we were playing a needle match against our arch rivals, Kings School Worcester. One of our players, an outstanding scholar destined for high academic achievement, went into a tackle from which he failed to get up, for he died there and then of a heart attack. The scene is etched in my memory – his father, who happened to be the senior classics master, kneeling over his son's motionless body and the colour visibly draining from the boy's face. A number of us formed a makeshift stretcher as we carried him off the field to the pavilion. It so happened that my parents were away from home at that time, and with no telephone at either address I went back, in my grief, to an empty house. I wrote a poem about the event, which I retain to this day. The team took some weeks to recover from the shock, and return to winning ways. In other matches I captained the house team, but with few boys really interested or talented in the game I often found myself trying to compensate for inadequacies by over-exerting myself, to the extent that I ended many games physically exhausted.

***In this photo, I am 2<sup>nd</sup> from the right in the back row. Central in the row is the sports master, dwarfed by most of the boys.***

The exhilaration from again playing was, however, short lived. My move to University College London presented a wealth of activities that pushed most sport into the background. The exceptions were table tennis and squash, which I could play at college without prior preparation.

### ***The 1960s and later***



But experiencing sharp pains in my shoulder and neck when playing squash, I avoided that activity and was 'too busy' with my studies to see a doctor. Although I was studying physiology, I had many lectures with the medical students at University College, which familiarised me with diseases of the nervous system – and led to fears that something was awry with my spine. To cut a long story short, on graduation I saw a local doctor and was finally directed to St Thomas Hospital in London, where I was diagnosed with an osteochondroma (a benign tumour on fifth cervical vertebra in the neck). This was duly, and skilfully, removed by the distinguished surgeon, Mr Harvey Jackson, whose talents were apparently in demand all over the world; and for me on the NHS! With a hole in my spine the size of an 'old penny,' I asked him what would happen if someone gave me a welcoming slap on the back, to which he replied, laconically, 'You must choose your friends.' So – no more rugby. My involvement from then on has been simply as a spectator, on the TV screen. But despite the very limited period of playing rugby, I have retained a keen interest, so that I still look forward international matches, and reveal a quite indefensible bias when interpreting events on the pitch!



## *Is rugby football more than just an exhilarating form of exercise?*

Despite the ‘wisdom’ we flatter ourselves should be assigned to our species as *Homo sapiens*, the lofty intellectual heights that are sometimes attained are underpinned by instincts of a less exalted nature, which in evolutionary terms are all about survival. Some instincts encourage us to assist our kith and kin as a way of maintaining our collective security from hostile factors – either environmental or social – while others lead us to combative behaviour as protection from invasive forces, some of which are from perceived ‘enemies.’ Physiology suggests that these contrary reactions are largely mediated by hormones, chemicals secreted into the bloodstream which have widespread effects on us mentally and physically. For example, the hormone oxytocin is associated with trust, warm feelings and sexual attraction, while testosterone is strongly associated with aggression in both attack and defence from opposing forces. While, in prehistory, life may have been ‘nasty, brutish and short,’ to quote philosopher Thomas Hobbes, civilisation has undoubtedly curbed the excesses of such biological urges, so that exerting physical force on others without strictly defined justification is treated as criminality, often punished by imprisonment and other severe restrictions of liberty.

And yet - a few hundred years of penal reform cannot expunge from human nature the deep-seated drive to behave tribally and competitively. This is, arguably, where physical contact sport has proved its cultural worth, as a safety valve for basic human motivations by competing, with innocent pleasure, and gaining social standing for widely-acknowledged skills. Even so, a fine line needs to be



observed, and good referees rightly enforce the laws with both rigour and tact. Winston Churchill’s comment that ‘*jaw, jaw is better than war, war*’ is a quip transferrable to other fields of human interaction. How about ‘*scrum, scrum is better than boom, boom*’?

Human inventiveness has transformed rugby from its original knock-about character to, at best, a sport of artful strategy and skilful execution. For who, if they witnessed it, could ever forget what some have dubbed ‘the greatest try ever’ – that scored by Gareth Edwards (shown here) playing for the Barbarians against New Zealand on 27 January 1973. Involving many players, drawn from all the British sides, it was nothing short of spectacular. As Gerald Davies, who had left the pitch with an injury described it: *That try, I think, expresses rugby at its best. The agile, the fleet of foot, the Will-o'-the-wisp, and the whole magic of a movement that starts on your own line and ending at the far end with Gareth, majestically, diving over in the corner.* So my answer to the emboldened question above is ‘Yes, rugby is a sport that expresses important cultural, aesthetic and social qualities – that might symbolise those of some forms of harmonious communal life. Even so, I fear that more recently it has often suffered, both as a spectacle and as a character-building pursuit. The professionalization of the game was probably a root cause of the changes, but it has also become more physical than skilful: a battering ram approach replacing elusive running and deft passing.

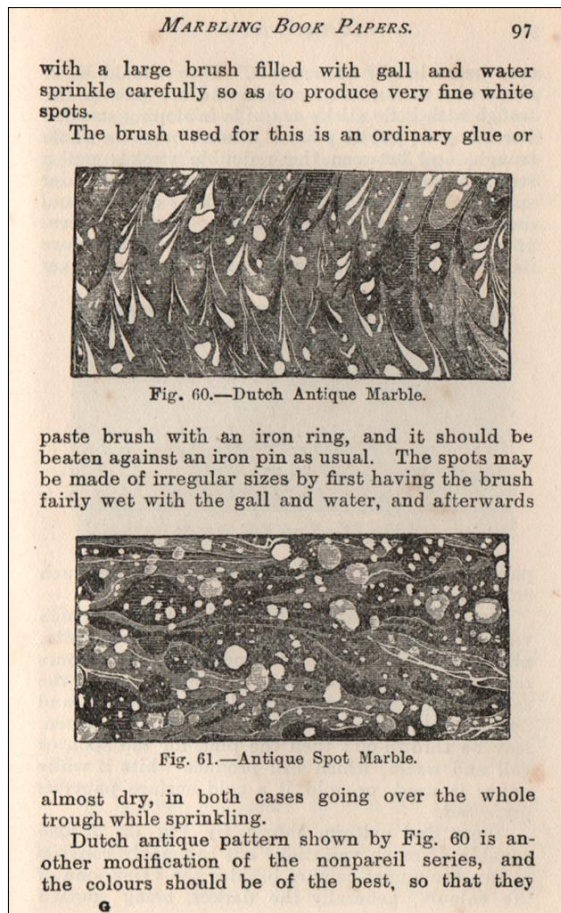
Now, Covid-19 poses a more serious, even existential, threat. Despite speculations as to how the rules of the game might be changed to accommodate new public health measures it is very hard to see how rugby could ever again be played as the challenging and attractive sport it once was. Moreover, maintaining public attendance at matches (and hence the financial survival of many clubs) is likely to be greatly undermined by ‘social distancing’ rules. Perhaps something like ‘touch rugby’ (with gloves but no tackles, scrums or rucks) might emerge, but few would consider that to be a worthy substitute.

PS And yet, at the time of writing, it was reported that rugby matches had resumed in New Zealand!



## 7. Paper-Marbling: marks of distinction

In the last issue of the Review I expressed appreciation of ways that, in the past, some books have been made into attractively distinctive objects by leather binding and the embossing of their covers with images and symbols. Although I used not to pay much attention to such adornments, it's probably a sign of old age that I now often value these qualities, and take pleasure in handling books to which skilful craftsmanship has been devoted.

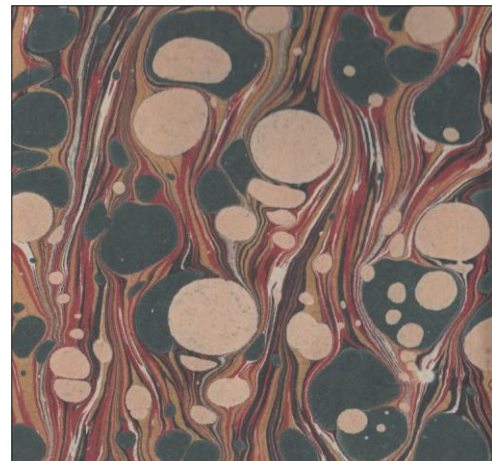
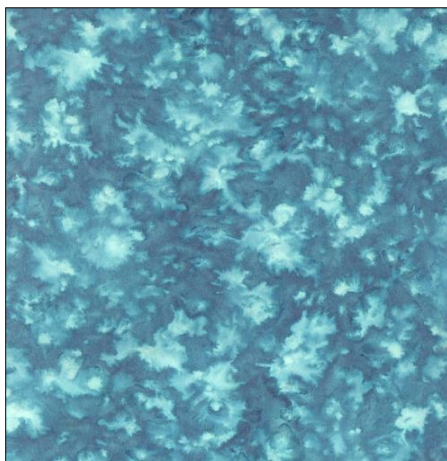


I have recently discovered another feature which has long escaped my attention but now adds to the aesthetic quality of books – the practice of paper-marbling. A chance reference to it as a ‘dying art’ led me to search my own shelves and do some research on its history

*This page is from one of the chapters devoted to the technique of marbling in ‘Bookbinding’ by P N Hasluck (Cassell, 1907). Such prominence suggests it was then a popular craft*

Marbling is an ‘aqueous surface design’ in which patterns are produced that are reminiscent of those often observed on smooth marble and other stones. Their creation involves floating colours composed of various pigments, such as extracts of moss, seaweeds and gums, on plain water or, more usually, a viscous mucilage, known as *size*. Typically, the colours are dropped onto the size, one after the other, until a dense pattern is produced. Then, employing mild disturbance e.g. by use of straws or gentle blowing, spontaneous patterns are produced, which can be carefully transferred to the surface of paper or other material

to dry and then be preserved. It’s a gentile form of ‘kinetic art’ – without the thrown paint tins and bicycle tyre marks!

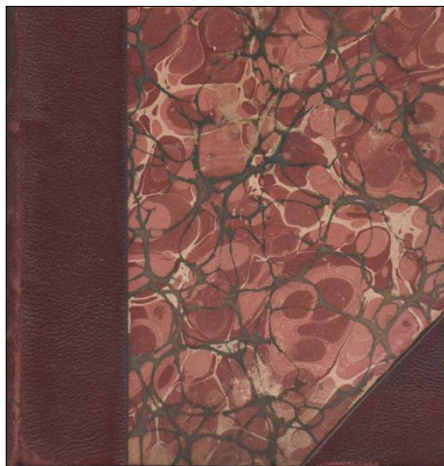


*Left: Roget’s Thesaurus (Longman, 1936): Right: Macaulay’s ‘Essays’ (Longman, 1846)*

Marbling was practised in Japan as early as 1118, but it seems likely that it was first used for decorating books by the Persians. It was employed in Holland before 1600, but it was another 50 years before it was applied to the design of end papers of books in France and Britain.<sup>13</sup>

For me, a particular fascination is the spontaneous generation of images which can be associated with my own impressions of the contents and style of the books they embellish. In a general way, they are reminiscent of shifting cloud formations, or of the world I was familiar with in my student days, when peering down a microscope was an engrossing practical activity.

Most commonly, marbled papers are used for the end papers of books, but occasionally they are also employed on the outer book covers. An example is that shown on the left below, where the illustration includes part of the leather spine of a book which was *half-bound*, that is, the spine and outer corners are of leather.



***Left: from Emerson's essays' (George Bell, 1888)***

***Right: from F Prochaska's 'The Memoirs of Walter Bagehot' (Yale University Press, 2013)***

The dates of most of the books illustrated here (from the 19<sup>th</sup> century) might suggest that marbling is a process that, in our utilitarian age, has long past its time. And yet, on the brink of a new post-pandemic era, when we all probably need to reassess our life's priorities, it may be that appreciating simple pleasures is a key to the wholesome, sustainable world that is now being realised has become an imperative. And pleasures that do not entail air travel, expensive equipment or exploitative procedures surely ought to be encouraged. With Blake, in *Auguries of Innocence*, our aim might be:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour

To find some evidence that the craft has not been completely abandoned, I hastily scanned my shelves for some proof to the contrary – and, without too much effort, found a book with splendidly vigorous marbled end papers, which was published in 2013 (as shown above, on the right).<sup>14</sup> (But such are now the capabilities of technology that I am not certain it is the genuine article.)

BM

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<sup>13</sup> John Carter (revised by N Barker) *The ABC for Book Collectors*. Werner Shaw (1994)

<sup>14</sup> All illustrations shown are from books in my personal library



## 8 Gladstone and Slavery: a response to critics

To quote John Cowper Powys (as in item 3 of Review No. 8)  
*If by the time we're sixty we haven't learnt what a knot of paradox and contradiction life is, and how exquisitely the good and bad are mingled in every action we take ...we haven't grown old to much purpose*

In today's world, 'news' largely consists of 'flashes' – stark utterances, often as –'tweets,' which gather embellishment as they permeate the air waves. Often, the resulting item is coloured by prejudice, distortion or emotional-charge. But one news item that has had justifiably dramatic impacts has now spawned a global *Black Lives Matter* response. For if there is a single event which illustrates the force of Powys's claim (above) it is the way in which the brutal killing of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis, USA, with no hint of compassion or shame, has brought to the boil the outrage felt throughout the world at the persistent toleration by many in positions of political power of such acts of 'man's inhumanity to man.'

Sadly, among those who in earlier times committed outrageous racially-motivated acts such as slave-trading, there were some who were clearly far less-guilty but have been subjected to disproportionate condemnation. These include William Gladstone, such that a Hall of Residence named after him at Liverpool University has been re-named and calls made for statues of him to be removed. My own adoption of his name as the that of my book business and of this Review were, of course, considered highly appropriate because of his strong bibliophilic interests, including a personal library of about 30,000 books (most of which, we know from his diaries, he had read) coupled with the fact that from 1832, at the age of 23, until 1845 he was an MP for the constituency of Newark on Trent, where Gladstone Books was established in 2002.

I have been aware since then, through reading biographies by distinguished authors, such as Roy Jenkins, Richard Shannon and others in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of his tenuous links with the slave trade through the business activities of his father, like many others during William's youth. But since no one chooses their



parents, and the fact that for most of his mature political life he was utterly opposed to slavery, have led me to reject the proposals that his name should be erased from the historical records.

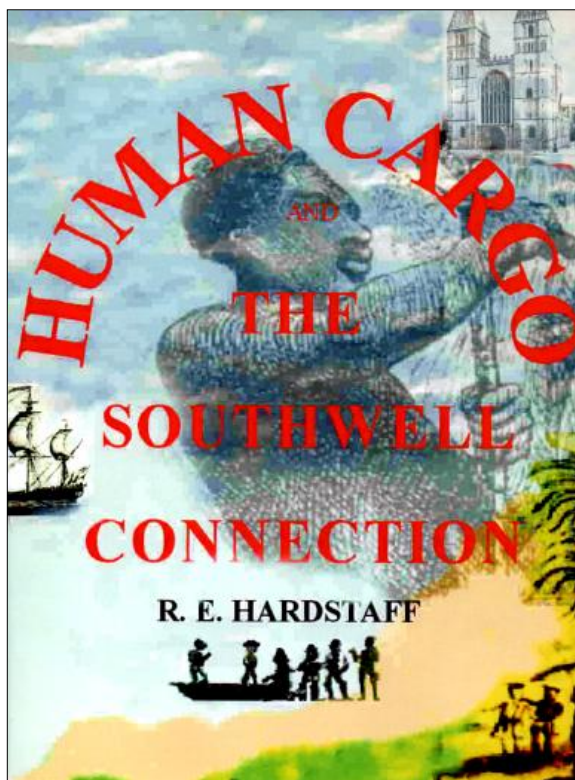
Responding to the calls for removal of the statue of Gladstone at Hawarden in Flintshire, North Wales, the present-day site of *Gladstone's Library*,<sup>15</sup> Peter Francis, its warden and director, has issued a statement (with a 'Charlie Gladstone') which states that '*if it was the democratic will, after due process, to remove statues of the founder, William Gladstone, the library would not object. Nor, he*

<sup>15</sup> This photograph of the Library as taken by Michael D Beckwith. Own work, CC0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=53931273>

*thought would have Gladstone.*<sup>16</sup> The full statement is accessible via the Library's website, and because it fairly closely matches my own views on the issue, I quote from it here extensively<sup>17</sup>.

Francis claimed that the library staff, at the core of their existence, believe that *Black Lives Matter*: But chiefly they consider that what now matters is how we live today, our values, democratic process and political involvement. He went on to say that William Gladstone, whose politics were strikingly different to those of his father (John), *was the first British politician to lead a left-leaning government and to institute dramatic democratic changes, when he introduced secret ballots, universal education and foreign policy based on freedom and liberty and not the aggrandisement of Empire.*

During the early 19th century, John Gladstone owned land in the West Indies and South America that employed slave labour, and he received substantial so-called 'compensation' when slavery was abolished. It is true that, as a 23 year-old MP for Newark in 1831, and in his maiden speech in the House of Commons (and probably still in thrall to his father), William spoke in favour of compensation for slave owners. However, Peter Francis claims that by 1850, William Gladstone was 'a changed man,' who described slavery as *by far the foulest crime that taints the history of mankind in any Christian or pagan country.*



Moreover, he claimed that Gladstone's record of public office was one of almost unequalled service. *He was the driving force behind the emergence of the Liberal party, he was a humanitarian, (and) one could even celebrate him as one of the founders of the modern concept of human rights. He was passionate about education for all rather than just the elite. His was a career worth celebrating, he said, but we memorialise it best by being politically involved, humane and tolerant.* In fact, towards the end of his life, Gladstone cited the abolition of slavery as one of the great political issues in which the masses had been right and the politicians wrong, claiming he *was brought up to hate and fear liberty, but came to love it.*

Clearly, in reviewing past events, historiography<sup>18</sup> is all-important. The assumptions and beliefs of the time were often firmly held by whole generations; and acknowledging as much helps us to understand but not excuse the most mistaken of them.

To bring that message home, in the Minster town where this Review is published, a book written in 2004 by an amateur historian<sup>19</sup> details the strong connections between certain local families and the slave trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is worth reflecting that some of the town's prosperity and architectural heritage may well be a legacy of the profits of its former trade in *human cargo*.

*BM*

<sup>16</sup> In 1895, Gladstone bequeathed to the library the equivalent of £3m today, and much of his own collection.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gladstoneslibrary.org>. Direct quotes from the website are italicised.

<sup>18</sup> The principles, theory, and history of historical writing.

<sup>19</sup> Published by R E Hardstaff (2004) Southwell and District Local History Society.