

Gladstone Review

Issue 24: July 2026

Associated with Gladstone Books

a free e-journal published approx bimonthly

CONTENTS

1. Editorial : a re-launch
2. Barbara Masters-Mepham: a brief memoir on a well-lived life
3. Tales my father taught by Osbert Sitwell book review (Penny Young)
4. Octgenial Reflections
5. A clutch of eponyms
6. Reading rots the mind?: a defence of bibliophilia
7. A small selection of recently-acquired books in the Library

EDITORIAL: A RE-LAUNCH

I started building my library when I was 16 years old - and although many books have been sold, bought or donated over the past 70 years (and now amount to about 5000 volumes) it has proved to be a priceless investment - giving me convenient access to a personally unique collection which provides a wide range of knowledge, amusement and philosophical ideas - and sometimes the tactile pleasure of handling attractive leather-bound antiquarian volumes - which occasionally bear fascinating hand-written notes scribbled perhaps 200 years ago. In future, this Review will place more emphasis on reporting new developments in the *Library*.

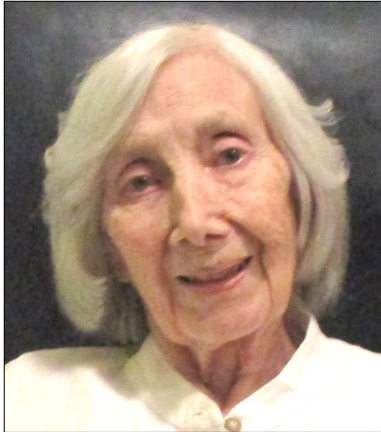
Recently, I experienced a serious injury (from a fall) which led to a cerebral haemorrhage and, without the expert surgery performed at QMC Nottingham, almost certain death. And earlier this year, my dear wife Barbara died after five years in a nursing home - and our marriage of almost 45 years. Few of us know with any



certainty when we shall meet our end, but in my case I believe that it can't but be quite soon. These events have led me, firstly, to donate all profits to improving the lives of the most innocent and needy, namely, children on a global scale (i.e. to UNICEF) and secondly, to substantially reduce all book prices for both personal and altruistic motives. As evident from the photographs, structural changes to the Library now allow more space for browsing in a peaceful environment, which I think both old and new browsers will appreciate - but as stated previously, visitors to the Library should not feel obliged to make any purchases although some will be priced at only a pound.

BARBARA MASTERS-MEPHAM: A BRIEF MEMOIR ON A WELL-LIVED LIFE

The death of my wife Barbara in January has prompted me to record a brief memoir of the lives we spent together over the 45 years of our marriage. Although, typically, she didn't make a show of it, her support for me in establishing Gladstone Books was invaluable. We were both raised in working class homes, and with our parents' support, encouraged to gain entrance to grammar schools and pursue occupations (teaching and lecturing in our cases) that would benefit society not only by teaching pupils to pass examinations but also to develop a moral compass in making life's choices. We shared left-leaning political views, and believed in education's intrinsic value and that it was not just about making money.



When we first met, she, recently widowed and with young adult daughter and son, had just completed training to be a primary school teacher and her first job was at the school in the Leicestershire village of Wymeswold. Soon after arriving at the school, my wife, Ann, tragically died from cancer at just 34 - leaving me a single-parent for nine years with three children, aged 7, 5 and 2, at the school. Subsequently, after our marriage, Barbara and I enjoyed a simple life style- walking, gardening, reading, and theatre going- but no extravagant holidays, although occasionally overseas conferences were extended as holidays.

Recently looking through some of her old papers I had never seen before, I found a letter written by a head teacher when she was applying for another post. It is full of compliments such as: *she takes delight in meeting new people because stimulated by their personalities and ideas; she is an utterly dependable teacher with boundless energy and determination, her understanding of the importance of form as well as content in developing the intellect is a factor underpinning her great interest in Art.* Perhaps, with Blake, she *could see the world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour.*

After we moved to Southwell, she pursued that interest as a mature student at Newark College, an example of which was her exhibition of photographs taken at the site of a demolished former power station, where oxidation and other chemical reactions had produced some intriguing coloured images. That interest is also evident in the many paintings gracing the walls of our house and the way ordinary objects are often portrayed through an *artistic prism* in her quirky collections of old keys, thimbles, pebbles, wood carvings and minerals - which complement my extensive library. In seeing the artistic dimensions of *the ordinary*, she often uncovered the inner, perhaps spiritual, qualities of art. This, together with her pragmatic approach to life's limitations, reminds me of Walter Landor's lines: *Nature I loved and, next to Nature, Art: I warmed both hands before the fire of life. It sinks and I am ready to depart.*

Barbara also took on several roles that served the town's social activities, for example as honorary treasurer of the Civic Society and in establishing the photographic archive *Caught in Time*. She was also very popular with her fellow teachers, many of whom were a generation younger. Although she and I were often pursuing quite different work programmes, we developed a strong bond that withstood the ups and downs that are almost inevitable in so long a marriage. On the evening when she died at the nursing home where she had spent five years, I chatted briefly with some of the nurses and carers about her character and courage. One remarked that, being recently married, she and her husband were inspired by Barbara's sweet nature-always grateful and always gracious -which they hoped to emulate in their marriage. I am privileged to have lived with her over so many happy years- and will continue to miss her deeply for my remaining time. For despite our grief, we all must surely celebrate her life, which was so *well-lived* with *wisdom, warmth and wit.* I suspect that readers of this who knew her would share these impressions. **BM**

TALES MY FATHER TAUGHT ME: A REVIEW

by Penny Young

Once upon a time I happened to be in a second-hand/antiquarian bookshop when I spotted a book by Sir Osbert Sitwell. Having at that time recently visited Renishaw Hall, I was interested in reading his book. Also, growing up in Derby I'd developed a sort of romanticised proprietorial interest in the Sitwells, knowing nothing about them other than their being Derbyshire people and having streets in the town named after them.

Tales My Father Taught Me was published in 1962, after the completion of Osbert's five-volume autobiography *Left Hand, Right Hand; The Scarlet Tree; Great Morning; Laughter in the Next Room; Noble Essences*. It consists of those memories of his father that had been omitted from the first five volumes, and presents a portrait of his father in encapsulated form.

Autobiographies are notoriously difficult to write: how to be even-handed with those being written about, getting the tone right and, above all, not whinging. Osbert Sitwell, who (reading between the lines) had perhaps plenty to whinge about, does not. In scene after scene he deftly nails the character and quirks of his father, Sir George Reresby Sitwell, and, writing with wry humour, leaves the reader to imagine what it must have been like for the young Osbert, intelligent and sensitive, living with a father totally lacking in self-awareness and with a delusional sense of his invaluable importance to the nation.

The snippets of conversation he recounts give a good indication of the bizarre workings of Sir George's mind, including his frequent dispensing of advice and discouragement (both at the same time), and also the trait of seeing himself as a source of all knowledge; when hearing of someone's plans having gone awry – even those of the Government – his usual refrain was, 'Such a pity not to consult *me!*'

To be even-handed, Osbert does point out his father's good qualities – more usually not



noticeable to his long-suffering wife and offspring. He was a man of many enthusiasms and projects, the majority of them left uncompleted: 'his energies,' recognises Osbert, 'were dissipated over a field too broad for their employment.' And time 'too short for him in his span of eighty-three years' – in spite of the fact that when embarking on a project 'he spared no pain, either to himself or to others – it would often have been, in result, better if he had.' However, one project which he did complete was the publication of his book *On the Making of Gardens*, the gardens at Renishaw and gardens in general being his particular enthusiasm, and one about which he could claim to be knowledgeable. Although published to no great fanfare, it came to be acknowledged as an authoritative work.

Osbert Sitwell's early life belongs to a world long gone, but he conjures up that world in such clear prose that reading him can be like looking at the past through translucent glass. He did; in fact, see the reigns of six monarchs – Victoria, Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII, George VI, Elizabeth II – with all the social and cultural changes encompassed within those different eras, changes which his father would not have countenanced, preferring to inhabit a bygone, gothic age. Osbert himself lived until the end of the 'Swinging' Sixties, which does bring him nearer to our own times.



Renishaw Hall,

Revisiting this largely overlooked author would be well worth anyone's while, particularly those who appreciate perfect prose. I don't think anyone could have described so well the disastrous dinner party given by Sir George at his Italian home, Montegufoni, on the occasion of the annual International Festival of Modern Music held in Siena: one of his little set pieces he was fond of that went spectacularly, and embarrassingly, wrong.

Penny Young

Penny, a regular contributor to the Review, whose book reviews are always models of clarity and wit, was formerly the editor of Folio, the local literary publication.



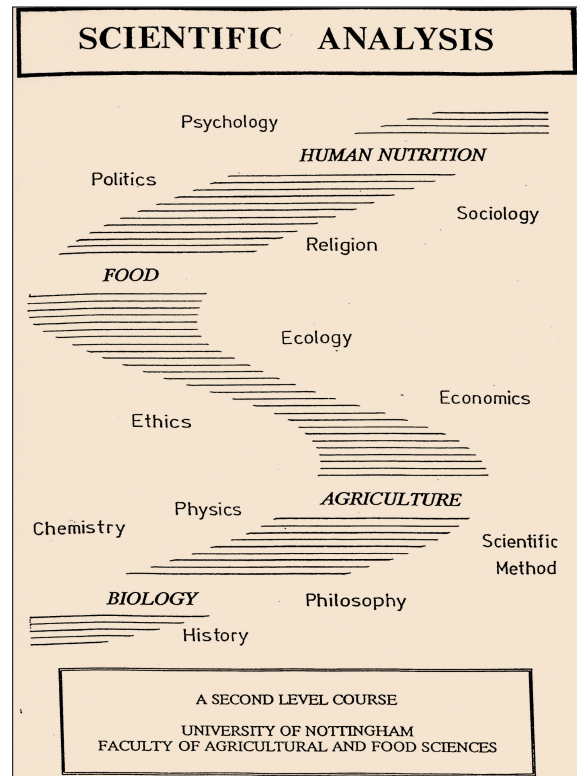
OCTOGENERIAL REFLECTIONS (PART 4)

1985-1995

I concluded the last entry in this series with the words: *The rationale for this disquisition is to examine the impact of experiences and beliefs in my considered convictions as to the nature of I - that mysterious entity we believe defines each one of us. Unsurprisingly, developments in this quest were quite limited., because at the time, as a single parent, my work, which encompassed lecturing and research together with almost full-time care of three children, were the foremost priorities. But, subliminally, I must have been turning over, and making notes of, ideas concerning my central I question, which were often only appreciated in retrospect.*

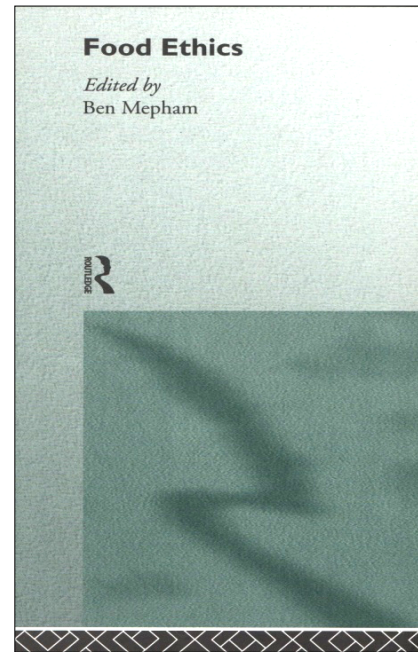
In fact, my philosophical reasoning at this stage took on a much more practical focus, quite separate from the metaphysics of earlier deliberations. Doubtless, this reflected the changed priorities in my lecturing, which culminated in the introduction of undergraduate courses in the history, philosophy and social implications of science. I had long thought that much science teaching was too focused on facts and current theories, adopting a sort of *silo mentality*, whereas full appreciation of the nature and value of scientific knowledge (especially for applied sciences) necessitated students considering how current ideas were arrived at and what were the social impacts of the resulting technological developments. The booklet cover here of an introductory course, which was kindly designed by my wife Barbara, nicely encapsulates the way that, in the applied sciences concerning food, authentic understanding needs to be interrelated with several other concerns and disciplines.

My proposals for such radical changes in the curriculum were not immediately welcomed either by staff or students, but - to cut a long story short - with several professorial and other staff giving support, and sometimes contributing to the courses, I succeeded in establishing courses, subsequently, and still, called *Applied Bioethics* for second and final year students. After some early hesitation, numbers electing to take these courses soon increased to over 20 p.a.. Seminars in which all students were encouraged to participate were greatly appreciated, and, with all students being examined by professors from other universities, the approval ratings from students and external examiners were very favourable.



Although I had a long-standing interest in this academic field, starting from scratch in mounting such original courses almost single-handedly involved much reading, writing, examining and organising, and was a formidable challenge. But teaching is only a part of academic life and the research element came to fill virtually all my hours. In 1993, I and two colleagues organised the first international conference held in this country on agricultural bioethics. Over about four days there were 24 verbal presentations which were all published in the proceedings of the conference. Contributors, all experts in their fields, came from several countries abroad, including seven from the USA.

From this point, urgent invitations arrived to edit, and contribute to, this book called *Food Ethics* (Routledge, 1995), present and submit papers to the Royal Society of Medicine and the British Medical Journal on the health impacts of the genetically-produced (GM) hormone BST in animal agriculture, contribute a historical analysis in the journal *Medical History* of attempts to devise infant formulae as substitutes to breastfeeding - and numerous invitations to become a member of EU committees concerning the impacts of GM medicine, the consequences of the Foot and Mouth disease outbreak on food production, and to contribute chapters to encyclopedias of applied ethics



Caveat

Above, in attempting not to clutter the main thesis with marginal issues, I implied that practical ethics could be considered without paying attention to more theoretical (metaphysical) concerns. But, I need to clarify this point. Briefly, two major theories are employed, consciously or unconsciously in addressing ethical questions, namely:

1. Utilitarian ethics seeks to maximise happiness and minimise misery. This cost/benefit rule is based on predictions of the consequences of actions - which might prove to be flawed. Other problems concern who and what to include in this notional procedure and over what time period.
2. Deontological ethics is about human duties to others, which are based on principles called categorical imperatives, e.g. do not harm, steal or cheat. In essence '*Do as you would be done by*'. It is about personal intentions - not consequences

But both have their weaknesses. For example, for 1) only rarely can we be certain of the accuracy of the *facts*. For 2) implementing one or more categorical imperatives might contradict others. This means that there are usually no simple routes to making sound ethical judgments.

The most notable subsequent developments in applied bioethics occupied later time periods and will be described in future issues of the Review. But, in retrospect, I now believe that introducing the philosophical dimensions of science to science students who would not otherwise have been aware of them was by far the most rewarding aspect of my whole career in academia.

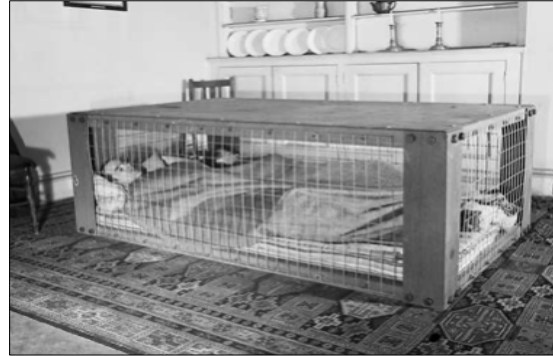
BM

A CLUTCH OF EPONYMS

Definition words derived from people's names

Continuing my *Words Words* series for wordsmiths, I have selected a few less- known examples, sometimes with personal associations.

Morrison Shelter An indoor air-raid innovation used in the 1938-45 world war, serving as a steel table top for meals and with wired sides (from memory), about five feet square and two feet high, which I and my brother and sister (8 and 6 years older) had to squeeze under when the air raid sirens were sounded in Newport, South Wales.



They were named after Herbert Morrison (later Baron) a member of Churchill's War Cabinet (1942-45). His grandson is the now infamous Peter Mandelson.

Fuchsia The name of a genus of ornamental shrubs and herbs native to Central and South America. they are named after Leonhard Fuchs (1501-1566), a German botanist who was a professor of medicine at the University of Tubingen



Morse Code is a telegraphic system of signalling (Morse key shown) in which letters are represented by dots and dashes.

Invented by the American artist Samuel Morse (1791-1872). I remember my father



telling me, as a designated telephonist, that he used it to transmit coded messages. when in Belgium during the first world war. Somewhat incongruously he also often then rode horseback. I witnessed the use of morse with flashing torches transmitted from neighbouring mountain tops, when camping in the 1950s with my boy scout troop in the

Brecon Beacons..

Malapropism An unintentional and inappropriate confusion of words which produces a ridiculous effect. It is the name of a character (Mrs Malaprop) in Sheridan's play in 1775, of that name which misapplies words on several occasions. For example, *under the influence of alcohol and teutonic ulcers*.

Rubiks Cube named after its inventor (Hungarian Henry, born 1944) this is recreational puzzle consisting of nine small coloured squares which can rotate around a central square with the aim of arranging for the whole of each face showing only one colour. After its demonstration at a mathematical congress in 1978 it became a global craze. Apparently, the total number positions that can be reached on the cube is: 43, 252, 003, 274, 489, 856,000.

Morris chair named after its designer William Morris (1834-96), this is an adjustable chair with large loose cushions. He was an English poet, artist and socialist writer, who in 1861 established a firm of designers and decorators of furniture, wallpaper and stained glass with a distinctive style.



He is also noted for setting up the private Kelmscott Press for his poetry, and prose writings and for establishing the Socialist League in England.

Catherine Wheel is a spinning, burning firework named after St Catherine of Alexandria, a martyr who was destined to be tortured by being broken on a spiked wheel in about AD 307. Allegedly, she miraculously survived the torture - which broke the wheel. But she was then beheaded.



Bloomers They are named after th American feminist Jenks Bloomer (1818-1894) The original garment was an entire costume with Turkish style trousers This caused much controversy by challenging the commonly accepted etiquette that trousers should only be worn by

men..

Orwellian- George Orwell was a British writer (e.g *Animal Farm*) who revolutionized the dystopian genre. His novel *1984* led to use of the adjective Orwellian to describe something potentially totalitarian and threatening to free society.



[Drawn from several sources]

BM

READING ROTTS THE MIND : a defence of bibliophilia

Bibliophilia is defined in the Merriam –Webster Dictionary as **a great or excessive love of books** and also as an *enthusiastic or extreme interest in collecting books*. Some define it, less flatteringly, as *pedantic or detached from the real world*. The phrase ‘*Reading rots the mind*’ seems to be in the same vein. It was a saying that Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the genetic code, for which he was awarded a Nobel Prize, displayed on a wall of the Cambridge office he shared with another Nobel Laureate, Sydney Brenner - to suggest that being too influenced by other people’s ideas might inhibit your own original thoughts. (Even so, Crick read widely, and wrote several books! And Brenner attributed much of his own scientific achievement to his habit of frequent random browsing in bookshops).

But despite a long-standing regard for books as sources of wisdom, knowledge and pleasure, I’m certainly not enchanted by them *simply* as a medium of communication (which would include many shallow novelettes and ghost-written ‘celebrity’ biographies). Nor am I oblivious to the dangers of addiction to certain books as an escape from reality, in which they serve as ‘literary sedatives.’ I suspect like all who would accept the title, my bibliophilia is very selective. We are drawn to certain categories of book, the natures of which are highly diverse. In the case of someone *selling* books, as I do, this gives rise to two separate ‘collections’ – those of personal interest and those which appear to have intrinsic value to some people, but are usually not in one’s own field of interest. There is, of course some overlap between the two – and that serves as one of the more gratifying aspects of book-selling, in which one can share a common interest with a customer.

But, for me, the value of most of the books I seek out is that they are sources of *ideas*. Works of philosophy are clearly prominent, but the category also includes many books that might be shelved, in a public or academic library, under *science, history, technology, politics, essays, theology, arts* etc. Perhaps the omission from that list of *poetry* would not be surprising; but I think it would be regrettable to exclude it from the class of *ideas*. In the case of books sold through Gladstone Books, this motive is still evident; for as someone has remarked on the Book Guide website: *Great to find this gem of a bookshop, full of books to make you think, across a range of topics.*

But I can no longer avoid focusing on my real motive for collecting books, namely, that the ideas laid out within them provide the seed corn for my own original thoughts. As Dr Johnson put it in the quotation below, serious reflection is fuelled by ideas that may have lain dormant in the subliminal strata of the mind – only to *imperceptibly advance* in a new guise in a novel mental environment.

The more accessible, and more diverse, this mental seed corn, the better equipped one is to address new challenges. Of course, on deeper reflection, many of one’s original ideas are abandoned. But some survive that later sifting, or human understanding would never advance.

Dr Johnson on the value of reading in *Adventurer* 137 (February 26, 1754)

Books have always a secret influence on the understanding; we cannot at pleasure obliterate ideas: he that reads books of science, though without any fixed desire of improvement, will grow more knowing; he that entertains himself with moral or religious treatises, will imperceptibly advance in goodness; the ideas which are often offered to the mind, will at last find a lucky moment when it is disposed to receive them."

A SMALL SELECTION OF RECENTLY-ACQUIRED BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY

One of the deficiencies of the way I organise my time spent on Gladstone Books is the failure to produce a publically-accessible catalogue.. The excuse is lack of time to do so. But sales made are often a consequence of chance findings in a wide variety of previously unknown books. And, as for other sales, all money paid will be sent to support UNICEF's important work.

Even so, in this issue I have produced a list of ten recently acquired books which might whet some people's appetites. [All are in very good condition and offered at *sale* prices.]

- ❖ William Morris (1996) *Hope and Fears for Art*. William Morris Library 422pp pb £3.50
[Many more titles in the same series]
- ❖ Beryl Cook (1996) *The Bumper Edition* Ted Smart 200pp, hb (colour illus) £4.00
- ❖ Jenny Uglow ((2005) *A Little history of British Gardening* Pimlico 342 pp hb.£3.00.
- ❖ K Hartley (2007) *Warhol: life and death* National Gallery of Edinburgh 112pp card cover £3.00
- ❖ K O Morgan (2007) *A life of Michael Foot*. Harper. 568pp. hb £5.00
- ❖ R Hattersley (2002) *John Wesley: a brand from the burning* Little Brown 452pp hb£4.00
- ❖ K Ward (1993) *The case for Religion* One World 246 pp hb £3.00
- ❖ John Updike (1993) *Collected Poems 1953-1993* H Hamilton 388pp £3.50
- ❖ Jared Diamond (2005) *Collapse : how societies choose to fail or survive* Allen Lane 575 hb pp £300
- ❖ R S Thomas (1993) *Collected Poems 1945-1990* Phoenix 548 pp pb ££3.50

BM