Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 92

Introduction

The first rule of Flanagan's Running Club is everyone should be telling everyone they know about Flanagan's Running Club! After all, sharing is caring. Details of how to sign up is in the epilogue.

There is no need to panic, there is no actual running involved, it is not a running club in that sense. The title is made up from extending the title of my favourite book – Flanagan's Run by Tom McNab.

So, sit back, grab a cup of coffee (or beer, wine, rum, port, Pepsi, or whatever), and enjoy the read.

I've only just about managed to squeeze this into quarter two.

On This Day – 30th June

1859 – French acrobat Charles Blondin crosses Niagara Falls on a tightrope.
1905 – Albert Einstein sends the article On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies, in which he introduces special relativity, for publication in Annalen der Physik.
1916 – World War I: In "the day Sussex died", elements of the Royal Sussex Regiment take heavy casualties in the Battle of the Boar's Head at Richebourg-l'Avoué in France.
1934 – The Night of the Long Knives, Adolf Hitler's violent purge of his political rivals in Germany, takes place.
1937 – The world's first emergency telephone number, 999, is introduced in London.

Asteroid Day
General Prayer Day (Central African Republic)
Philippine–Spanish Friendship Day (Philippines)
Revolution Day (Sudan)
Teachers' Day (Dominican Republic)

Births

1943 – Florence Ballard
1965 – Gary Pallister
1966 – Mike Tyson
1975 – Ralf Schumacher
1983 – Katherine Ryan
1985 – Michael Phelps

Deaths

1966 – Giuseppe Farina
1973 – Nancy Mitford
2017 – Barry Norman

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1970 – Mungo Jerry – In The Summertime
Number 1 album in 1994 – The Cranberries – Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?
Number 1 compilation album in 2002 – Various – The Very Best Of MTV Unplugged

#vss365

A short story in 280 characters or less, based on a prompt word on Twitter

At the market there was #nix for her. She went from stall to stall in desperation. None of them had cabbages. They'd all been snapped up earlier.

It was the only food her son could eat.

Arriving home she found the house full of cabbages; her husband had bought them all.

#vss365

Joke

A Protestant died and was sent to hell. A few seconds after arriving, the Devil appeared in a cloud of smoke and said, "Hey Bill, Welcome to Hell! Here's the keys to your Porsche. Let's go visit your beach house!" Before the befuddled man could answer, the Devil whisked him into the Porsche and off they went. Arriving at the beach house, the man could only stare in awe at the magnificent mansion before him. The Devil handed the keys to the mansion and the sportscar to the man whose mouth was hanging open in amazement and said, " Well, Bill, I'll check up on you in two weeks. Enjoy!" And as suddenly as he had appeared, the devil disappeared. His incredulity fading somewhat, Bill went into the mansion and found everything to be first class with running servants, an indoor pool ... the whole nine yards. For two weeks, he lived like a king. After two weeks had elapsed, the Devil suddenly appeared and asked the man, "Well, Bill, how is Hell treating you? Great place isn't it! By the way, I have another client to see so I can't stay. Any problems? We aim to please down here in Hell." Bill replied that he certainly was having a grand time and that he'd not been prepared for such royal treatment. In fact, he had been expecting Dante's Inferno or something similar. The Devil laughingly replied "No, Bill. Those are just old wife's tales. This is the way Hell really is! Great place, isn't it?" Bill then said that everything was fine except that at night, he'd been hearing these terrible blood-curdling screams emanating from the nearby island out in the ocean. This was so disturbing that he'd had to take an occasional sleeping pill. He then leaned over and whispered to the Devil, "Tell me really. Is that what's in store for me? After all, this IS Hell." The Devil could not stop laughing at this and with tears streaming down his eyes, he said, "No, you've got it all wrong. Those people on the island are the Catholics. They DEMAND it!"

Drabble

A drabble is a complete story that is exactly one hundred words long.

The Final Concert

The crowd was restless, they'd been waiting for hours for something, anything to happen. A lot of money had been spent to be here and see his final concert.

He made his way on stage, took the mic, and walked off. Well, ran. The plan was complete; he'd taken the money and ran.

The crowd were confused, surely that wasn't it, surely, he'd return and give them all the final concert they had paid for. But he was gone. He hadn't stopped running, continuing through the labyrinth of corridors backstage and into the waiting car.

Never to be seen again.

Flash Fiction

Something between the 100-word shortness of a Drabble, and the short story, these are works of fiction somewhere between five hundred and seven hundred words.

Road Guards

They weren't doing much. The mead had been flowing and now instead of being out protecting the road to the citadel, they were lounging in the shade of one of the few gigantic ancient trees left on this dry and arid planet.

The shade was a good defence against the heat of the day, and they saw nothing wrong in taking a rest from the heat. Surely no one or nothing would be stupid enough to approach the citadel in the bright light and overbearing heat of the day.

Their weapons and armour lay scattered around the clearing under the tree, and they had started a small fire to cook some meat. Yes, it was only the skinny frames of the desert rats whose numbers were off the scale here. But it was free food and better than the scant rations they received from the citadel for guarding the roads.

Not that any of their rag tag group cared a jot for the citadel or its rulers. If it were possible they cared less for the citadel's elite than the elite cared for those they ruled over. Their endless rituals were all the elite cared about. They

didn't see how much the rest of the population struggled to survive. With a lack of food or water. There was always plenty of mead available, which they supposed was to help keep them all compliant. And so in return for the lack of care shown to them, a lot of the groups of road guards did what at best could be called a half-arsed job.

And most of the road guards stayed away from the citadel as much as possible usually. The praetorian guard at the citadel freaked most people out. Their long sharp overlapping fangs and strange diagonal eyes weren't quite terran. Coupled with the snake emblems adorning their shields, they praetorian guard gave off an almost reptilian feel.

As the group lounged, hidden in the shade of the giant tree they missed the approach of the interlopers. Although to be fair to them, even if they had been out on the road like they were supposed to be, they would still as likely as not have missed the approach of the Dryloks.

None of them had ever seen a Drylok. They had only ever heard the legend of them. Spindly creatures, with long pointed noses and unusual shaped red eyes. They were said to be able to appear as if by magic directly out of the sand or the rocks of the dry wastes of the planet.

But if their approach had have been witnessed, then they would have known this magical apparition to not be the case. They came riding in through the sky on the backs of massive hornets, three times the size of any terran.

And so as they sat in the shade roasting their desert rat meals and swigging from their containers of mead, the Dryloks swarmed into the citadel. Reducing the much-vaunted praetorian guards to a pile of dismembered limbs, heads, and body parts.

The city's elite fared no better, and the first the road guards knew about the Dryloks' attack was when one of them had lazily looked out into the desert and seen plumes of smoke coming from the towers of the citadel. After all the killing the Dryloks had set the whole place on fire.

The group of road guards wouldn't return to the citadel. There was nothing there for them. It was beyond saving and anyway, they didn't care enough to try anyway.

All they knew now was that they would need to move on, find somewhere else on this dry husk of a planet to find work. But that was something for another day.

Leicestershire

Prestwold Hall

Prestwold Hall is a country house in Leicestershire, England, standing in 2,500 acres of land in the parish of Prestwold. It is both a private home and a venue for weddings and events.

Prestwold Hall was, for many years, the seat of the Packe family. Before that time, it was the home of the Skipwith family. After the death of Major Robert Christopher Packe (born c.1783) - one time Aide-de-camp to King George III - who was killed during the Battle of Waterloo, the hall passed to his nephew George Hussey Packe who held the hall and estate until his death in 1874.

Prestwold Hall has been the seat of the Packe family for over 360 years since it was acquired by Sir Christopher Packe (1595 – 1682) in 1649, shortly after the death of Charles I. He was nominated by Cromwell to be one of the sixty who were to create a new senate, and he introduced the Humble Petition and Advice to Parliament, being an offer of hereditary monarchy to Cromwell. This was the apex of his rise to fame and fortune. The Restoration came, however, and it was remembered that Christopher, 'Lord Packe,' late Lord Mayor of London, had been one of the aldermen who proclaimed the abolition of the monarchy in May 1649. Regicides had been among his intimate friends. In August 1660, Packe was disqualified from holding any public office, and retired to Prestwold, where he lived to the age of eighty-seven.

In the 1760s, Charles James Packe (1726 – 1816) rebuilt the Hall, and soon after created the park around it. Standing on the northern part of the East Lawn runs a line of cedars, already in 1780 said to be of notable size. Five years after Charles William Packe (1792 – 1867) inherited Prestwold in 1837, the house was largely remodelled by the defining Scottish architect William Burn. One of his earliest English commissions, it is one of the finest examples of a William Burn house in the neoclassical style. The interior of the house is noted for its exceptional marbled plaster work in the Italian style, remarkable for both the scale and the quality of the work. Within the house, there is a notable collection of twentieth century portraiture and of eighteenth-century English and European furniture. Prestwold Hall passed to the Drury-Lowe family in 1936 when Penelope Mary, the daughter of Sir Edward Hussey Packe, married John Drury Boteler Drury-Lowe (1905-1960). Drury-Lowe adopted the additional surname of Packe – his son, Simon Jasper Packe-Drury-Lowe, inherited the house and estate in 1938.

Prestwold Hall remains to this day the home of the Packe-Drury-Lowe family.

The Hall was remodelled by architect William Burn in 1842–1844, incorporating the fabric of a mid-18th-century H-plan house. It was Grade I listed in 1951.

One of the finest rooms inside the house is the Entrance Hall with its richly coloured marbled plaster work in the Italian style. The painted ceiling was inspired by Raphael's Vatican grotesques and incorporates miniature landscapes, showing the house before and after its remodelling between 1842 and 1844. Below the ceiling, wreathing the room, are small medallion busts of the poets from Chaucer to Scott, positioned in the spandrels and are likely inspired by Alberti's external arcade at the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini. An arcade opens on to a vaulted corridor leading to a top lit inner hall: these spaces also marbled. Off the corridor, the cantilevered stone staircase survives from the eighteenth-century house, and was given its bracketed brass balusters by William Wilkins (1751-1815) in 1805.

The Dining Room, added by Wilkins in 1805, was incorporated into the remodelling undertaken by the Scottish architect William Burn in 1842. The room is overlooked by two dramatic full-length portraits of Sir Edward Hussey Packe, KBE (1878 – 1946) and the Hon. Lady Mary Sydney Packe (née Colebrooke, 1890 – 1973) by the painter Glyn Philpot RA (1844 – 1947). The portrait of Lady Packe, painted in 1911, was described by the art historian Robin Gibson OBE as an 'amazing feat of virtuosity'. Its elongated elegance and introspective characterisation is totally without the fashion-plate vulgarity of much Edwardian portraiture. Other portraits hang in this room of the Packe family including a painting of Sir Christopher Packe (1595 – 1682) who purchased the house in the 17th century painted by Cornelis Janssens van Ceulen (1593 –1661).

The library extends nearly the entire length of the house when the large doors that separate it from the drawing room are opened, connecting the two rooms. With clever use of constructional steel, William Burn was able to create these long adjoining rooms. The windows rise from floor level and open onto the garden which enhances the notion that Prestwold was designed in the style of an Italian classical villa. The doors and bookcases in library were made for George Hussey Packe (1846–1908) by Gillows of Lancaster and London in 1875.

A conservatory fills the recessed central bay at the front of the house, and projects out towards the garden. Behind the glass and elegant Doric pilasters, are well planted raised beds with a number of exotic plants and flowers.

Before Burn's reworking of the gardens in 1842 the house was set on an informal lawn with shrubberies and trees to north, east and west, and with the main entrance to the south. This arrangement was probably established when Charles James Packe (1726 – 1816) had the park laid out c 1770. The author and antiquary, John Nichols, commended Charles James Packe's 'extensive planting' which, 'bosomed [the house] in calm serenity.' During the restyling of the house Burn added the porte cochère and entrance to the west and created the garden that now lies to the south, with its well planted beds reflecting the classical symmetry of the house. The garden runs to a stone-balustraded parapet with views south onto the park. The parapet continues east to define the boundaries of the East Lawn, which extends for one hundred yards east of the house with a grass terrace and a line of cedars, already in 1780 said to be of 'notable' size.

From the house are views south, across the gently rising parkland. In the 1760s Charles James Packe, rebuilt the Hall and soon after created the park around it. As John Nichols writes in The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester, Volume III, Part I, published in 1800:

'The grounds before [the house] are spacious, and possess much of a park-like appearance; and the house, in every point of view shews itself delightfully shaded with wood, being ornamented with large plantations of forest-trees; Mr Packe having, perhaps, planted and raised within the last thirty years, more trees than any gentleman in this county.'
Near the house stands the Grade II* listed church of St Andrew, a medieval parish church largely rebuilt in 1890 by the architect Sir A Blomfield. It is all that remains of the medieval village of Prestwold, which was demolished during the enclosure of the estate.

The Prestwold Estate extends over one thousand hectares of farmland and includes Wymeswold Airfield.

Wymeswold Airfield has one of the longest runways in the county, second to the East Midlands International Airport. The airfield was used during The Second World War for training bomber pilots. Wellington bombers, which were operated from the airfield, are very large planes without a great deal of propulsion, hence the requirement for 2000 yards of tarmac. Today, the airfield's primary use is for motor sports, on the purpose-built motor circuit that snakes around the airfield.

A number of events are held on the Estate through the year, ranging from festivals to Cross Country Championships.
Much in the tradition of the Victorian stately home, modern technology still plays a part in the running of the house today. Electricity for the house is provided by two rows, one hundred yards long, of photovoltaic panels in the walled garden producing 50 kW of energy. The heating for the house is supplied by a biomass boiler situated near the panels which provides hot water with a series of flow and return pipes to the house. This means the house is lit and heated efficiently and predominantly from renewable energy sources.

The photovoltaic cells positioned on 150 acres of land at Wymeswold Airfield form one of the largest solar farms in Europe and upon its completion Wymeswold Solar Farm was the largest in the United Kingdom. The panels were connected to the National Grid in 2013, and the 130,000 panels produce enough energy to power approximately 7,500 homes. The cells are expected to produce emission-free energy for the next 25 years.

Six Hills

If the examples of meeting places given by Jeremy Harte in his article in this issue are generally remote from Mercia, then this article explores the same concept of open-air moots at one specific site on the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire border. Six Hills, on the Fosse Way (now A46), offers tantalising and confusing hints of some singular Anglo-Saxon activities.

The confusion commences with the name 'Six Hills'. There are no hills here, rather a plateau-like area just over 350 feet above sea level. On early maps the name is shown as 'Seggs (or Segs) Hill' (note singular). Various antiquarian commentators have proposed that 'seggs' is a corruption of a supposed dialect word for 'sheep'.

H.S.A. Fox drew attention to the unusual spoke-like pattern of parish boundaries which have their hub at Six Hills, with the area in the immediate vicinity of Six Hills being extra-parochial (until parish boundaries were 'tidied up' at the end of the nineteenth century). Willoughby on the Wolds is in Nottinghamshire; the other seven parishes are in Leicestershire. Kingston Brook, which forms the boundary between Willoughby and Wymeswold, is also the county boundary, although of indirect interest the boundary between the present-day Sees of Canterbury and York. Before the boundary changes of 1974 the situation was slightly different to the present arrangement, as a finger of Nottinghamshire (the land between the Fosse Way and Kingston Brook) stretched down to Six Hills.

Today at Six Hills there is a small wood extending into an area of scrub regenerating into woodland; a modern hotel, The Six Hills Hotel, which replaces earlier inns on the site; a road interchange linking the dual-carriageway A46 (Fosse Way) with the B676, and a lane running south-west to Barrow on Soar. There is no village at Six Hills, only isolated farms, and the villages associated with the eight parishes are all situated towards the 'rim' of the wheel-like arrangement. The lane to Barrow, together with the continuation of the B676 running north-east and on, as an unclassified road, to the Belvoir escarpment, follows the route of an ancient trackway, known as the Saltway, which was almost certainly used as a Roman road. The present-day Fosse Way was definitely a major Roman road from Leicester to Newark on Trent and occupies the high ground of the ridge to the south of Six Hills and is also a probable prehistoric track, later engineered into a Roman highway. The B676 running west to Burton on the Wolds may be comparatively recent.

Six Hills, therefore, is at the crossroads of two tracks, both almost certainly pre-Roman in origin and in use during the Roman occupation. Although not systematically maintained as they would have been during the Roman period, these routes remained in use during the Anglo-Saxon and Viking periods through to the medieval period and beyond, although we know that by the eighteenth century the Fosse Way had become severely neglected along much of its length. It is reasonable to suppose that the east-west route, and perhaps also the Fosse Way, remained in use as drovers' routes in the post-medieval period. The presence of a substantial area of extra-parochial land would allow animals to be grazed overnight, with the Kingston Brook meeting the needs for water. The nineteenth century inn at Six Hills was known until recent years as the Durham Ox, a name which might reflect its earlier use by drovers.

The radial arrangement of parishes around Six Hills strongly suggests that the centre had particular significance and was perhaps the moot site for administration. Unfortunately, there is no other evidence for regarding the parishes as a 'unit' and we must assume that the present arrangement came into existence no earlier than the seventh or eighth century. This could be interpreted as a continuation of a Roman or even pre-Roman land unit but there is no other evidence in north Leicestershire or south Nottinghamshire for such continuity (although between Newark and Lincoln the Fosse Way cuts through a series of parish land units, suggesting that the road post-dates the unit(s) that later became parishes.

The presence of a mound at the meeting place is not surprising. As observed by Margaret Gelling, 'It now appears that the Anglo-Saxons were accustomed to construct artificial mounds which would serve as markers for meeting-places'. The best evidence for this comes from Buckinghamshire, where a known medieval moot mound was excavated, in advance of the construction of central Milton Keynes. According to the excavation report there was no direct or indirect evidence of burials, and the only purpose could have been as a meeting place for the court of the hundred. Eleven other Anglo-Saxon mounds without burials have been excavated; seven of these have names ending in '-low'.

Many hundred names end in '-low' (from the Old English hlaw meaning 'mound'), suggesting that their original meeting places (now lost) were at a special hlaw or mound - just as even more hundred names end in '-tre' or '-tree', also suggesting a significant landmark as the customary meeting place.

The moot site for the local Anglo-Saxon administration, Goscote Hundred, has never been satisfactorily located. Goscote Hundred included, with other parishes, all the Leicestershire parishes focused on Six Hills. It later split into separate East and West Goscote Hundreds.

Interestingly, the Milton Keynes mound was known as Secklow, but also spelt 'Seg(g)low'. From Segg Low to Seggs Hill is but a small step for placenames and would seem to offer indirect support for the presence of a moot mound at Seggs Hill, i.e. Six Hills. The word 'seg' (or 'segg' or 'seggs') is best considered a corruption of an Anglo-Saxon personal names Segga or Secca. Sir Frank Markham states without any supporting argument that Secklow derives from the Old English for 'warrior's low'.

The time-honoured place-name authority, Ekwall, offers only three placenames of relevance. Seckington (just over the Leicestershire border in modern Warwickshire but historically Staffordshire) and Seckford (Suffolk) are derived from Secca's (personal name) dun and Secca's ford.

In Northumberland there is the close parallel of Seghill, which Ekwall derives from *sige, a possible stream name meaning slow moving. Given the close proximity of Kingston Brook this appears to fit, although there is no conspicuous natural hill.

More interesting still, the Old English secg is a frequently used word for sword and used in various compounds, such as secg-rof, meaning a host of (sword-bearing) men. The Viking term for Hundred was Wapentake, which translates as 'show of weapons'. It is still current practice in the Swiss farming town of Appenzel, at an annual meeting of all townspeople, that only the men may vote - and only then if they are wearing a sword. Is this a shadow of a practice which one appertained at wapentakes?

Given the nature of Anglo-Saxon and Viking moots implied in the word wapentake then Seggs Hill may be a corruption of 'secg hill', implying a moot mound used for meetings of sword-bearing men. Sir Frank Markham may have, unwittingly, been closer to the truth than be supposed at first sight.

Place-name evidence brings out some other intriguing aspects to Six Hills. Just along the B676 to the west of Six Hills can be found Harrow Farm. Although this could be a recent appellation derived from the common agricultural implement, there seem to be very few examples of farms named after such a common item. An older origin is suggested when it is noted that one of the medieval great fields of Wymeswold is recorded as 'Arrow Field'. The small watercourse known now grandly as the River Mantle has its source close by and the upper reaches were once known as the River Arrow. Harrow Farm is on the edge of the Arrow Field and close to the source of the river.

'Harrow' placenames raise considerable controversy but in a number of instances can be confirmed to derive from the Old English hearg, 'pagan shrine' or 'temple'. David Wilson has argued that a typical hearg site 'occupied a prominent position on high land and was a communal place of worship for a specific group of people, a tribe or a folk group, perhaps at particular times of year.' Although Harrow Farm and the Arrow Field are not 'prominent' from the Six Hills direction they are on a wide spur of land which has good views towards Charnwood and the west. Wilson's suggestion that hearg were communal places of worship fits in well with the notion of Six Hills being a moot site. Harrow Farm is over a mile-and-a-half from Six Hills, but the original hearg which gave its name to the Arrow Field may have been closer to the crossroads - perhaps at the source of the River Arrow/Mantle or on a locally prominent rise.

The parish adjoining both Wymeswold and Willoughby is Wysall. This has been consistently regarded by place-name scholars as embodying the Old English weoh, also meaning 'pagan shrine' or 'temple'. (A further example of weoh can also be found in north Leicestershire, at Wyfordby). Wilson finds differences between heorg and weoh sites. 'Although some [weoh sites] are on high land, it was clearly not obligatory for them to be so. . . . They also differ from hearg sites in that the majority of them are situated very close to ancient routeways, never as much as a mile away, and usually virtually alongside.' Wilson himself notes that Wysall is about three miles from the Fosse Way, although twelve out of sixteen examples he discusses fall within a mile of a Roman road.

Wilson considers that some of these weoh sites were in personal ownership, or were an individual's responsibility. 'It seems likely that, in contrast to the hill-top, tribal association of the hearg, the weoh was a small, wayside shrine, accessible to the traveller.'

The church at Wysall sits on a distinct mound in the centre of the small settlement and is the most likely candidate for the site of the weoh. In accordance with Wilson's expectations, it is not on high or prominent ground.

There is also have evidence for an important prehistoric sacred site and an Anglo-Saxon successor just at the edge of the 'wheel' of parishes encircling Six Hills. Northwards along the Fosse Way, at the post-1974 county boundary, is another crossroads (649252). This is almost certainly the location of the Roman town of Vernemetum, although no extensive archaeological fieldwork has been so far undertaken. A rescue dig in 1964-68, in advance of the construction of an overbridge, revealed a late-fifth to early-seventh century Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery which, in part, both abuts and overlies the original Roman road surface [16]. The Anglo-Saxon burials some high-status individuals, with

the most prestigious being buried with a horse, a funerary ritual restricted to Anglian areas of middle and eastern England.
Evidence of Roman occupation was present, but it is very doubtful if the area excavated represents the main settlement. There was a small burial mound, the Crosshill tumulus (now under the overbridge). Dating was difficult but probably the mound is also Anglo-Saxon. Although clear evidence of secondary burials were present at this mound, they could be the remains of medieval felons executed on the gallows which is known to have stood on the mound. If this is indeed the case, then the original mound would seem to have been non-sepulchral, as with Secklow.

Some significance should be given to the liminal nature of this cemetery. This seems to be two-fold. Firstly, the Roman Fosse Way seems to be acting as a boundary for the cemetery on the west; secondly, the site is on the northern 'rim' of the 'wheel' of parishes encircling Six Hills. In the pagan Anglo-Saxon period, indeed also in the Iron Age, burials and religious sites are normally found in the border areas between tribes or communities. Those individuals buried at Vernemetum may, therefore, have lived in settlements within the Six Hills 'wheel'. However, apart from three burials to the west of the present village of Wymeswold, there is little or no evidence of other Anglo-Saxon burial or settlement in this area.

What is more interesting is the derivation of the name Vernemetum. This translates as 'great (or especially) sacred grove' and must refer to an Iron Age sacred site in the vicinity. Again, no other evidence of Iron Age activity is known in the vicinity. However, studies of Iron Age shrines elsewhere have revealed that these tend to be located on boundaries between tribal areas.

Nichols informs us that the ruins of an Anglo-Saxon church had been visible near here, at a place known as 'The Wells'. Recent discoveries of a substantial number of decorated Anglo-Saxon strap ends, from a frequently-damp part of the field, appear to point to the probable location of the burials associated with this church. The fairly regular spacing of known early Anglo-Saxon minster churches in Leicestershire leaves a gap in the north of the county - it has already been suggested that the church at Vernemetum fulfilled the function of the 'missing' minster.

It is unclear whether the Anglo-Saxon church site continues the sanctity of the Iron Age grove. There seems no compelling reason to suppose any break and, given the association with a natural spring, the recent finds of Anglo-Saxon strap ends may be sufficient evidence for supposing this to be also the Iron Age Great Sacred Grove.

Despite all these tantalising clues of interesting activities in the 'wheel' of parishes around Six Hills, there is no direct evidence that it was used as a moot site.

In 1870-72, John Marius Wilson's Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales described Six Hills like this:

SIXHILLS, or Segshill, a place in Dalby-on-the-Wolds parish, Leicester; near the Fosse way, seven miles WNW of Melton-Mowbray. Many barrows and high earthworks are here; and the adjacent part of the Fosse way is high-ridged and paved.

Life’s What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

A New Bike, Monkeys, And No Brakes

Was it an adventure? Not to most I am sure, but to boys of a certain age it would certainly feel like one. It started off innocently enough, get on our bikes and pedal away. Nothing else to do on a summer Saturday afternoon.

I had bought the bike off a friend for four quid the day before, or at least that was the official line. I’d been given four pound to buy it, but my friend had ended up giving it to me for nothing, so I had an extra four quid to spend surreptitiously over the next few weeks.

It was a ten-gear racer. Or at least it was supposed to be. But it was old, and the gear cables didn’t work. It was pick a gear and stick with it. the only way to change fear was to get off and physically more the chain onto a different cog by hand.

I had set it in the highest gear possible, fine for the flat or downhill, but it made going uphill a bit of a bastard. And besides, what hills would I be going up today? Oh, what a stupid question. Lots of them. It was only meant to be a short ride around to get used to the new bike, and with my younger brother in tow, there’s no way we should have been out in the Leicestershire wilds, up hill, down hill, and around the bend, miles from civilisation. And randomly stopping at pubs. Well, the latter would come on a regular basis, but not for at least another five or six years.

The ride had started out sedately enough. I had made it further than my last cycle out had. That one had only gotten to the end of my street before I had been hit by a car and my old bike had been rendered unusable with the frame and wheels unable to work at those kinds of mangles angles.

We had headed out of Belgrave and up the Melton Road and through Rushey Mead before heading over the line of the city limits and through Thurmaston village, and then over the footbridge across the dual carriageway and down the other side into Syston, passing a whole host of pubs in doing so which I would be a regular of in years to come.

And when we got to the end of Syston we didn't stop and turn around and go back the way we had come as any sane child might have done. No, we continued outwards, still following the Melton Road as the house numbers got to be in the thousands instead of the hundreds, and we got to Queniborough. That's where the road stopped being Melton Road and became Leicester Road, and it was where we turned. Not back the way we had come, but instead we headed east, through winding country lanes devoid of most traffic. Apart from the occasional tractor, or lunatic in an open top car speeding their way through the countryside sunshine.

Then we found ourselves at the Malt Shovel at Barkby. Dumping the bikes on the ground outside the pub we wandered into the gardens and found the monkeys. Yes, actual monkeys. For reasons unknown to us then, and still a mystery now, at the bottom of the pub beer garden was a full-on monkey enclosure with dozens of little hyperactive furry bastards, high on cigarette smoke and appropriated beer, screeching away at the injustice of their ludicrous captivity.

When it was found that we didn't belong to any of the beer swilling adults we were escorted from the premises, and we picked up our bikes and continued. Not directly back to Leicester. No, that would be too sensible, instead it was more easterly towards Keyham. We hadn't noticed how far up we had climbed until we got to the crest of a hill and saw the narrow road wind its long way down the hill to the even narrower humpback bridge over the River Sense at the bottom before it climbed its way back up into Keyham.

The thing about being kids is the lack of fear about the speed picked up going down a hill such as this. Pedalling like hell to reach terminal velocity and then letting my weight and gravity propel me down the hill at more than breakneck speed. I saw the car coming the other way and worked out in my strange little brain that it was likely to arrive at the humpback bridge at the same time I would. Which wouldn't be good for anyone. So I pulled on the brakes, only to find they now worked just as well as the gear cables did. So that will be not at all then. Doing what must have been at least fifty miles an hour I squeezed through the gap which wasn't really there between the stone wall of the bridge and the lime green metal of the Triumph Herald convertible and its swearing, screaming driver and passengers.

Knowing the brakes weren't working would mean it was time to head for home. Well, if I were in the slightest bit same it would have done, but no one ever accused me of that, and so we continued as if everything were fine. We rode through Keyham and then turned and headed to Scraptoft, and then Thurnby before coming back into the city and into Thurnby Lodge. From there we went up the hill and through Humberstone Village and over the top near the Humberstone Heights golf course, and down past the Tower lunatic asylum (where I may well have been in the right frame of mind to take up residency), and through the junction with Victoria Road East leaving a trail of horn honking cars in my wake as I shot through it to carry on along the Gipsy Lane and back to our house.

We had made it in one piece, only for my blabbermouth brother to drop me in it big time with the chatter about monkeys seen, and failed brakes and Leicestershire countryside.

It was a great adventure he shrilled. Only mum wasn't as thrilled. Nor was I after the hour-long lecture either.

Poetry Corner

Join Us

The voice whispers insidiously
From the shadows
Both on the street
And of your mind
Subtle as can be
So quiet no one else can hear
Only you have their frequency
One you can't tune out from
Jabbing away at your psyche
Becoming ever more insistent
Listen to us
Open your ears
Open your mind
You belong with us

Trying to shake it off
Pretending you cannot hear
But the voices are like water
Constantly dipping inside your head
Until you cannot ignore it anymore
And you give in to their chant
Join us, join us, join us

Did I Really Blog That?

Another Four Day Weekend

Yes, we had managed to tag a day's holiday to the Bank Holiday weekend again and to avoid confusion at least they had left this one as a Monday. But before four days off, Thursday had to be survived.

I started on Squirrel watch, one of my favourites, first thing in the morning as I come around, activities. I could see the squirrel on the end fence half a dozen gardens away to my left. Happily racing along the similar fence panels all the gardens share, only to come to an abrupt halt as it reaches our garden. It was already a foot lower than anyone else's before the storms came. Now there is a gap where the gate was, as it lies on its side, only there to prevent Charlie from escaping, and the rest of the fence leans precariously against the shed. As the squirrel stops it turns its head and looks at our house as if to say, "for crying out loud mend your bloody fence." The pause is only temporary, and the squirrel easily jumps the gap and carries on upon its journey. I laugh to myself, just wait until the little sod gets to the house three doors down to the right, the one with orange plastic netting as its fence. Let's see how you go with that you judgemental little rodent.

I'm not sure what I was doing to be away from my screen for more than ten minutes, but the screensaver came up. One of the messages on it was about practising social distancing, and do you? Well I can say that I see plenty of people practising this social distancing malarkey, and I can state without a shadow of a doubt, that they need to practice it a hell of a lot more as none of them are any bleeding good at it.

I did the shopping Thursday evening, Sainsbury's had a long queue, but it is so much saner in there than as Asda, a nice calm shopping trip all told, and only took an hour. However, when you buy a loaf of wholemeal bread, this isn't exactly the kind of hole you are expecting in the bread.

Someone asked about the garden and whether I was green fingered. After stopping laughing I pointed out that the only way I was going to get green fingers was if I picked my nose.

Every time someone mentions the word "furlough" I can't help but think of the word furlong instead. And then I think that wouldn't be a bad thing to relate to social distancing. If everyone stayed a furlong away from everyone else, it would be great. It would be amusing to try and watch people trying to work out exactly how far two hundred and twenty yards was though.

The back fence had been doing fine for a couple of months since the February storms. However with it being quite windy on Friday, they went again. In doing so it broke the restraining plank at the bottom, and then took to falling over every time someone breathed on it too heavily. After four times of propping it back up on Friday and Saturday morning it got to the point of sod it, just send Charlie out into the back garden with an armed guard to prevent him from escaping into the park.

Friday saw us take a picnic and get out of the parish for an afternoon. Full details are on the previous blog post

https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/2020/05/24/bramber-castle/

Saturday was a little bit changeable weather wise. The wind blew the fence over again, bright sunshine, thunder and lightning, rivers running down the street and ponds in the back garden, and then marble sized hailstones setting off car

alarms up and down the street. All that in an hour as I welded myself to the sofa. We had a second attempt at one of these online quizzes hosted on zoom. But, as with the first attempt, we weren't really impressed, and not sure we'll be doing another one.

A nice relaxing start to Sunday was shattered; first by the neighbours hammering and sawing away at something (not our fence unfortunately), and then by a phone call from my mum. Not for anything important, only to ask for help with half a dozen crossword clues. Seriously, who rings someone up to ask them for answers to crossword clues at ten in the morning on a Sunday?

With it being a Bank Holiday weekend, what else is there to do apart from going to a garden centre now that they're open again. And not just one, not two, but three of the bloody places. The first had quite a queue snaking around the car park, which I waited in only to get into the shop to find they only had 8ft long arm thick poles, which weren't really what I needed to prop the fence up. I came out to find Helen waiting in the car for me, which was a nice surprise, seeing as it was now turning ridiculously hot. We went to garden centre two, who had no wooden poles at all. Which meant it was off to location three, where we should have gone in the first place; Dove's Barn always has what is needed in stock, and lots of random plants for Helen to pick up as well.

Despite the previous day's flash floods the ground is still bulletproof, but there are six stakes hammered into the ground to prop the fence up, and it is now safe to let the dog back out unsupervised. We'll see how long this lasts for.

Meanwhile the cat is being a P.I.T.A. Every time there needs to be a new pack of butter, the butter dish is washed up, and the new pack is placed by the side of the toaster still covered so we can use it until the butter dish is clean and dry. This is on the next part of work surface to where the cat has his bowl. But he's not interested in his cat food, oh no, as soon as our backs are turned, he's there trying to open the wrapping to the butter to lick the hell out of it. Every single time. It wouldn't be so bad if he ate the cat food, but he just eats the jelly and leaves the meat bits. We probably end up having to throw away more meat than he eats. We could give it to the doggy dustbin Charlie, but it doesn't necessarily agree with his stomach.

Speaking of the doggy dustbin, although he was done at an early age, Charlie still likes to have a good session. To prevent him ripping carpets up, and destroying pillows and cushions, we got him a massive teddy bear from one of the charity shops. It works a treat; he takes out all his urges on the teddy bear. He is on bear two, and to be fair, we're not sure how he keeps getting the stuffing out of the bear, but all that is left is this. When the charity shops reopen, bear number three is the first thing on the shopping list.

On Monday I was only nipping out to take a few photos of some road signs. I thought I would go out whilst it was still in the morning, which would leave the rest of the day for relaxation. Of course, I got carried away. I ended up taking photos of forty-seven road signs across five different themes, three pubs and five churches over the course of three hours and eight miles of walking. Even my fat-bit got excited, damn near shaking my arm off to celebrate me walking ten thousand steps in a day for the first time since returning from the US. But, as I sorted the pictures out the following night, I found I'd managed to miss some streets, despite ticking them off on the list I had, so I only had one complete set – artists.

And it was hot, which meant that three hours in the sun lead to a lobster faced Kev. We didn't need to use the grill to do the halloumi; just put them on my forehead for twenty seconds and they were done. Then they were able to slide down my face and straight into my mouth. The after effects of the sun exposure meant that there was a role reversal in the house on Tuesday. Helen is in shorts and t-shirt, and I'm shivering despite being in jeans, t-shirt, and hoodie, with the hood up.

Tuesday – eeurgh. It doesn't matter how many days you have off, whether it is a standard two-day weekend, a four-day weekend, or three weeks, when you come back to work it feels like running into a brick wall as fast as you can. You bounce back, fall on the floor, and feel broken. I logged on at 8:30 only to find I'd missed a meeting at 8:00 that was only requested on Friday. I refer back to previous blogs – sociopaths. Everywhere. By 11:14 I had officially lost the will to live and I'm sure I could hear my bed calling from five feet above where I sat looking distraught in front of my monitor. I'd love to be able to go a single workday without having to deal with some kind of annual leave scheme / time account / quota drama. Just one day. Not much to ask for surely.

I'm not saying the day got to me, but, when I went to go to nip up to the shop, I went into the cupboard to get myself a bag. We have a bag of bags hanging on the back of the cupboard door. I put my hand in the bag and pulled something out and went to leave the house. Only to realise I was holding a coat hanger. I'd gone into the wrong bag hanging on the back of the door. Attempt two was more successful.

Wednesday morning I was rudely awakened at Jumbo Jet time (7:47) by the sound of a chainsaw in the park at the back of the house. I calmed down once I realised it was the council trimming the hedges around the kids play area, and not some random lunatic wrecking what is left of the fence.

Story Time

Invisibly Grey

The hoodie and the blanket the man was wrapped up in was as drab and grey as the rain ravaged dirty concrete and tarmac surroundings. Everything about the man and the vista around him was grey. Including his pallor, which was not one of a healthy man. The whole look of him sat there under his coverings gave off an air of being camouflaged within the urban environment.

Nobody looked at the odd shaped pile huddled up against the concrete bollard. No one noticed the sharp grey eyes peering out from the gloom beneath the man's hood. People would naturally veer away from his scrunched-up form on the pavement. Afraid of what may lie beneath the pile of tattered rags covering it. those who didn't veer far enough away would catch a less than fragrant waft from his direction if the wind were blowing their way. They would wrinkle their noses and increase their pace to get away from where the man sat unmoving in what had been constant drizzle, almost afraid that whatever the issue was with the man, it might be contagious.

No one would be able to say when the man had taken up his spot in the square, or how long he had been there now. Nobody had spoken to him. No one had bothered to ask the man his name. He just sat there. Had he eaten? Had he drunk anything? Had he gone to the toilet? Or was that stench which emanated from him an indication he had been where he was, and he was just sat in his own filth? The man didn't speak to any passerby. There was no bowl, or hat, or tin out in front of him trying to elicit donations from the soft hearted of those who walked his way. There was no roughly hewn piece of cardboard with a form of words scrawled upon it entreating people to treat him. And so he was left alone, unmolested, and unnoticed.

And that was exactly what the man wanted. It was no accident he looked like he did and acted as he did. Everything the man did was a deliberate action, all part of his plan. To him this was the ideal disguise, and it allowed him this position, close to the centre of the bustling town, but not where he would be in the way, or in danger of being moved on by the

police, or overly officious security guards, or well meaning, but uninformed council officers. He wasn't placed in a shop doorway, preventing access, or making it difficult for a business trying to attract passing trade. He hadn't picked a spot blocking a building's fire exit. No. this bollard he was backed up against bordered a large open square. There was no passing traffic, none of the entrances or exits to the square were close by, and it wasn't on a direct route between any of those entrances or exits. And from the spot he had chosen at least ninety-five percent of the foot traffic in, out, and through the square happened within his eyeline.

The man didn't miss a thing. Although he caught all the movement, and a lot through his peripheral vision, his main focus was on the four-storey identikit concrete, chrome, and glass office building taking up a third of one side of the square. It was the corporate headquarters of a company called Eezysoft. A nice non-descript, safe kind of name, which would suggest to anyone even the slightest bit curious about it, that it was one of the seemingly endless plethora of software companies that abounded around this commuter belt town. Their logo would give credence to that view as well, it looked as if it had a screen upon it, in that almost comic, cartoon way that so many logos of the time had. Those going in and coming out of the building would give an impression of being a software house. The more modern, casual dress of the start-up mentality. Jeans, trainers, hoodies, long hair, beards, retro NHS style glasses. But it was all carefully curated, a disguise to throw any casual observer off the scent of what they really did there. Hiding in plain sight. The irony of which wasn't lost on the man who used to work there and was sat watching them. It was exactly what he was doing now.

The man knew what Eezysoft really was, and what they really did. And that it was far from the comfortable, cosy software house image they portrayed. There was nothing easy or soft about them at all. The man knew this from experience. He had been remarkably successful for them, even if he did say so himself. Right up until the moment they had decided that he was surplus to their requirements, and that he was a loose end which needed tying off. Permanently.

When they came for him, the man had been expecting it. Ever since the Minsk assignment he had felt the shift in attitude towards him. He knew why, and the cold, calculating, lizard part of his brain understood why as well. But that didn't mean he was going to let them just waltz in and assassinate him.

They hadn't even sent anyone half competent to deal with him. It had obviously been sub-contracted out, and in all likelihood, sub-sub-contracted as well. The man knew the orders will have been to make it look like an accident. After all, how many accidents had he been responsible for over the years. But rigging his flat to explode in a supposed gas leak was amateur time. The disregard for collateral damage of those in the other flats in his block was almost unforgiveable. But the carnage it would cause gave him the chance to disappear. He felt a pang of regret for the homeless man he had swapped lives with that night. That poor soul didn't deserve to be incinerated at anyone else's will, but the two clowns sent to do the job definitely did.

And now it was a case of playing a waiting game. He knew the boss of Eezysoft would turn up at the office at some point. It might be today, it could be tomorrow, it may well be a month away, but the boss man would be here at some point, and the man could wait. He had all the time in the world, and he had all he needed with him. Patience. And his gun.

He valued his gun more than anything else left in his life. It had earned him a lot of money over the years, and earned him a reputation. Which is why Eezysoft had come to him with the offer of work. Sir John Barrington-Smyth had set up the company in the noughties as government agencies came under scrutiny, both for their methods, and their budgets. Sir John had seen the opportunity to move into a lucrative, if now somewhat fragmented market. Originally patriotism was Sir John's raison d'etre, but the money soon overtook that. And wherever there was conflict, wherever there were unexpected or unexplained deaths, there was a good chance Sir John had his pudgy little fingers involved. Playing all sides against the middle. But Belarus had backfired. The order to kill the opposition leader had been revoked, but it was too late for Sir John to get the message to the man, and as the man had completed the job, Sir John had gone for the arse covering excuse of a rogue operative, and given the word that clearing house would follow.

The man had felt it coming the day he got back to the office, and had spent the day there making arrangements before the inevitable. And now he was sat outside unnoticed by anyone he had worked with. He had been there five days now without so much of a sniff of a sighting of Sir John. Until an hour ago all it had done was rain, but now there was a gap in the constant cover of grey clouds. That briefest stop in the rain had tempted the busker out who was playing away to the left of the square. The man found it interesting that passersby weren't giving him such a wide berth as before, as they didn't want to go too close to the busker either. No one wanted to be seen encouraging the poor bastard to be murdering more songs than he already had.

When Sir John did make an appearance, looking thoroughly uncomfortable in jeans and a hoodie, and flanked by two brick shithouses, the man was glad the busker was there. Even though he had a suppressor on his gun, it didn't mean it was silent. But the terrible guitar playing would be enough to drown out the cough of bullets from the gun.

Hidden beneath the blankets, it sat pointing at the door to the office building. Perfectly lined up and ready to go. The man hadn't been entirely happy that he would be shooting Sir John in the back, he would much prefer to get up close and personal and put the bullet between his eyes, but as for most assignments, discretion was by far the better of valour.

But it would seem Sir John felt being shot in the back wasn't the way to go either. He turned as if to look for someone, possibly the man himself, as he got to the door, and therefore ended up taking the three bullets fired to the chest and stomach.

There was a delayed reaction as Sir John slowly crumpled to the floor and the two meatheads looked at Sir John in shock before pulling out guns and ineffectually wave them around looking for a shooter somewhere above them, in or on top of the buildings surrounding the square. They didn't so much as look in the direction of the grey swathed homeless man sat on the ground. A passerby screamed as they saw the guns, and the busker stopped mid chord thankfully ending his torture of The Jam's "Going Underground."

The doors to the office flew open and in the next few minutes the dozen or so staff came out to join the ever-growing throng of people in the square. The police took their time arriving, and when they did their car struggled to get into the square and across to the crime scene, trying to force its way through all the bodies. The ambulance came soon after and had even less joy getting through. And all the while the man sat where he had been for the last five days, watching, still unmoving, as the police finally managed to get a cordon around the stricken form of Sir John.

One of the officers made their way through the crowd and headed straight towards the man, the first person to even notice him there. The man still didn't move, waiting until the officer was just a few steps away from him, and then he pressed the button on the detonator.

It wasn't a large, indiscriminate device. There would be no collateral damage. Only the Eezysoft building, complete with its secure servers, would cease to be of any use. Apart from a couple of sheets of glass, the façade onto the square remained intact, but the rest of the building would be beyond repair.

The officer stopped at the sound and turned and ran back towards the explosion, showing he was braver than he looked. And as chaos descended in the square, the man got up from his place against the bollard, and shuffled off with them, taking everything with him, and not to be seen again, slipping anonymously away into the grey shadows.

Chapter and Verse

A chapter from one of my completed books, works in progress, or novella length short stories.

The Talisman – Chapter 24

Hodson slowly came round in the morning; the sun was shining on his left hand, the only part of him not shaded by the ridge he was laying against. Something was digging into the small of his back, making it ache. He sat up, only to find that most of him ached, either from the exertions of the previous night of bumps received whilst in the water. He found that the ache in his back was being caused by one of the jars in his belt digging into him, so he undid the belt and took it off. He looked through it and found to his surprise that all the jars, and the other items he had put in it yesterday morning were still in the pockets, and still intact, even if they were a little damp.

The water pouch was still attached, and he opened it and took a few large gulps of water. His mouth and throat were very dry, and there had been a salty taste in his mouth from the various times he had swallowed water last night, and he was glad the pouch had survived intact as well.

He looked around for his pack, taking a few moments to remember that it was gone, carried away by a rogue branch in the water; that had almost carried him away as well. All his food was gone, along with any spare clothes, but at least he had transferred his money to the belt before setting off yesterday. Once he got his bearings he would be able to find and get to Crawster today, and he could get food once there.

He moved to sit on the ridge overlooking the beach, there were no houses in sight as he looked inland, and no signs of a road either. He looked along the beach, making out the cliffs he had floated past last night away to his right, and just more beach away to his left, he was sure he was on the west side of the southern peninsula and therefore needed to head northeast to get to Crawster. He looked down to his legs and feet, to find no sandal on his right foot, plus a long tear up the lower leg of his trousers; both probably an outcome of him hitting whatever it was under the water whilst being pulled by the branch,

He took off his left sandal and threw it across the beach to the water, falling short of the water level as it sat at the moment, but it was below the high tide mark, so the sea would claim it at some point to reunite it with its partner. He took another swig of water, and put the pouch back on the belt, and the belt back around his waist before heading off across the country.

Despite being open ground, Hodson found the going heavier and slower than at any point since Bayleigh, the night's fun and games in the river and the sea had really taken it out of him. He was really looking forward to getting to Crawster, finding the inn, and just resting up for a couple of days, his body was telling him it was needed. He just kept going,

plodding forward, and putting one foot in front of the other, concentrating on the ground in front of him, making sure that he didn't trip over anything; feeling that if he did hit the ground, he just might not get back up again.

He had been walking for a long time, the sun had swung round in the sky, when he came to a halt as he saw the road a few paces in front of him. He lifted his head and automatically looked away to his right, expecting to see Crawster somewhere in the distance, but there was nothing to be seen apart from green fields, a few trees, and the road snaking through them. His shoulders drooped, disappointed that he still had so far to go, and started to walk along the road before he even thought to look back the other way.

Behind him, less than a league away stood a village, which down on this peninsula could only be Crawster; he had almost walked straight past it without ever seeing it there. He straightened up, at once energised that he was nearly at his destination, and he picked up his pace again as he strode along the road to the village; ignoring the aches and pains he could feel.

Hodson got to the outskirts of the village only to be met by a couple of militia, something he hadn't been expecting. They stopped him and looked him up and down, checking against some papers they had with them. He quickly scanned the two of them seeing if he recognised them at all, but they appeared to be ones he hadn't trained; he wasn't too surprised, it had been over three years since his last stint training the Nessanville militia.

"Conch, do you reckon he looks like this picture?"

"A bit, Bill, but so have half a dozen other men in the last week."

Bill turned to him and showed him the picture, it was the same one the boy had got him in Foreston, and they had come out to Crawster with them after all, "What do you reckon mister? Do you think you look like this picture?"

Hodson made a show of screwing his eyes up as he looked at the picture, before laughing as he replied, "I suppose so, on one of my bad days, looks a bit uglier than the last time I saw my reflection."

The two militia laughed a bit as well, before Bill responded, "By the looks of you, I don't think you've seen a mirror in quite a while."

"Yeah, looks like you've been drinking for a week." Conch chipped in.

"Can we see your stamp?" Bill continued.

Hodson didn't have to act to look confused, he genuinely had no idea what they were on about, "What stamp?"

"The one you get when you leave Nessanville."

"Never had one of those before, been to Nessanville loads of times in the past, never had to have a stamp."

"It's new, the last week or so, anyone exiting Nessanville has to have a stamp."

Hodson breathed deeply, the Chief was really going for it, putting in measures like that. "No wonder I haven't heard of it then, I haven't been to Nessanville in months, though it is likely to be my next destination."

"Where have you come from then?"

"Malimiston."

"Malimiston? That's quite a trek for a man with no pack and no shoes."

"I did have a pack and shoes until I was leaving Macalster, but I got jumped by a couple of men who left the village at the same time as me, they smacked me over the head with something and when I came round I didn't have a pack, and they'd taken my sandals. Fortunately, they couldn't have been too bright as they left my belt."

"They left you your necklace as well, apparently there is a big business in necklaces around here at the moment, and everyone is looking for them"

Hodson felt for the talisman automatically, remembering it was now hidden when he touched the hide. "I doubt anyone is interested in a ruined sheep hide one."

"True enough. On your way mister."

Hodson started walking again, not tempting fate by looking back over his shoulder, walking through the village until he found the inn. Before he went through the door, he got a few coins from his stash in his belt, he could do without prying eyes seeing the contents of his belt, and it would be useful to have money to hand, the innkeeper may have him back out of the door whilst he looked like he did as quick as talk to him.

He opened the door to the inn, and a few men sat in various seats around the room, Hodson avoided making eye contact with any of them and headed to the bar where a grey-haired rotund man sat to the other side scanning the room. The man got up and leant on the bar as Hodson approached.

“We don’t want no vagabonds here mister, I suggest you keep on walking back out of the door.”

Hodson glared at the man, and put two of the coins down on the bar. The innkeeper glanced at the coins and back at Hodson.

“What do you want?”

“A room,” Hodson replied as he rattled the other coins in his hand.

The innkeeper looked at the coins on the bar, and then at Hodson’s hand, before looking back at Hodson.

“You look in a bad way, and have no pack, I’m not sure you are the type of clientele we need here.”

Hodson made a show of looking around the inn before replying. “By the looks of it you need all the business you can get; Crawster isn’t exactly on a main route to anywhere now, is it?”

The innkeeper snorted, and Hodson carried on before he could reply.

“The money on the bar is more than enough for a couple of nights, there is more money here for items I need to buy, commission to be made if an agent was to help me find the items I need whilst I am here.”

The innkeeper was trying to remain calm, to give the impression that he didn’t need the business, but his eyes were shining and wide, giving the game away, he was going to say yes to pretty much anything.

“I suppose I could find a room for you, and I’m sure that I may know people who could help you out…. At the right price of course.”

Hodson sighed; he’d seen this so many times before from innkeepers, they would rent a room to a horse if it could pay them, they just liked to pretend they were upstanding citizens.

“Good, I’ll take a room for two nights, all meals included, and I need to be able to get some new clothes and some new sandals before I leave, plus a pack to put them in, do you think you can handle all of that.”

The innkeeper’s eyes went wider; Hodson could see the money dancing in them.

“Yes, I think that can be arranged, come this way and I’ll get you a key.”

Hodson followed the innkeeper, who picked up a key, and said something to one of the maids he had working behind the bar. The innkeeper came out from behind the bar and off to a door to the side; on the other side of the door was a short flight of stairs, and then another doubling back on the first flight, before they came to a corridor with a number of doors off it on either side. The innkeeper stopped before one named Ananessan, and opened the door with the key. Hodson quickly looked at the door opposite; it would appear the rooms were all named after Hexate towns, certainly different from simple room numbers. Hodson then followed the innkeeper into the room. There was a large bed, a chair and a cupboard in the room, and a stone bowl stood in the corner with some water in. The innkeeper had started talking “There is a bath and a toilet at the end of the corridor, fresh water is put out in the morning before breakfast, and in the evening before dinner. A maid will be up with some dinner in a few minutes, there is only one other person staying at the moment, so the water should be clean for you after dinner. I will sort out appointments for clothes and shoes for you for tomorrow and let you know at breakfast.”

The innkeeper handed Hodson the key and left the room closing the door behind him. Hodson took his belt off and put it in the cupboard, as he did finding a mirror in it. He took a quick look and was surprised at the difference he saw with nearly a week’s worth of beard growth. It wouldn’t take him too much work to change his appearance enough to be a different man from the pictures.

He was still looking at himself in the mirror when there was a knock on the door, he walked across the room and opened it to find a maid with a bowl of stew and a mug of ale, and she put it on the bed and left him alone. He wondered why there was no table at all in the room, and started on the food; hot and delicious, it seemed like the best meal he had

ever had after six days of cold food eaten outdoors, and it was gone in a matter of moments. He had a couple of mouthfuls of ale before placing it on the cupboard and lying down. He had intended to take a bath, but once he was lying on the bed, there was no way he would be moving that evening, he closed his eyes and went to sleep.

Books

After years of prevaricating, I have finally gotten around to self-publishing some books. Since the last issue of this I now have three books available. The first is the novel which spent many years available on the Inkitt website. “Where The Lights Shine Brightest”, this is available on Amazon at https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1738539601 .

Next up is a collection of drabbles, three hundred and sixty six of the little hundred word stories, under the title of “A Drabble A Day Keeps The Psychoanalyst Away”, this is available on Amazon at https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/173853961X .

Finally, there is an autobiographical work, released under my alter ego of Kevin Rodriguez-Sanchez, which covers a two-year period in the early noughties when I lived in Manchester – “Five Go Mad In Manchester.” Again, this is available on Amazon at https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1738539628

They are all available as paperback or eBook. And if you have Kindle Unlimited then they are available on there to read whenever. Please buy / read / leave reviews.

Epilogue – Where To Find More Of My Writing

To get people to sign up, point them in the direction of my website’s homepage of http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/ scroll down past the menu and then enter their e-mail address and select whether they want Flanagan’s Running Club or blog post updates or both and then hit submit.

If you want to catch up on old issues, go to the website at http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/frc.php where all the issues are available.

For blog posts go to https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/ which will have the most current post and the ability to scroll back in time.

Lots of stuff on my Medium page, clap, comment, or highlight any article. https://medium.com/@onetruekev

There are various short story competition entries on my Reedsy prompts page at https://blog.reedsy.com/creative-writing-prompts/author/kev-neylon/

For all previous works including the old Surerandomality pieces go to https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/else/ where pretty much everything I’ve written before is linked through to.

I’ve recently been submitting to Paragraph Planet and have had some pieces published there, they will be in the archive somewhere, one piece a month from me since June. https://www.paragraphplanet.com/index.php

You can also follow me on X, where I will occasionally put up some micro fiction or micro poems, my Twitter handle is @Onetruekev – https://twitter.com/onetruekev

You can also follow all my writing on the Facebook page Onetruekev which is at https://www.facebook.com/Onetruekev-102649357993650/

And also, now on LinkedIn at https://www.linkedin.com/in/onetruekev/

I have two Mastodon accounts, one on the central server, and one on the Medium server.

Recently I’ve added accounts on Threads https://www.threads.net/@onetruekev

And BlueSky https://bsky.spp/profile/onetruekev.bsky.social

E-mail any ideas or suggestions to kev@onetruekev.co.uk

To Unsubscribe click on the word