

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 81

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.

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.

On This Day – 29th March

1792 – King Gustav III of Sweden dies after being shot in the back at a midnight masquerade ball at Stockholm's Royal Opera 13 days earlier.

1809 – King Gustav IV Adolf of Sweden abdicates after a coup d'état.

1974 – Terracotta Army was discovered in Shaanxi province, China.

2014 – The first same-sex marriages in England and Wales are performed.

2017 – Prime Minister Theresa May invokes Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, formally beginning the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

It's Boganda Day (Central African Republic)

Commemoration of the 1947 Rebellion (Madagascar)

Day of the Young Combatant (Chile)

Youth Day (Taiwan)

Births

1935 – Ruby Murray

1943 – Eric Idle

1960 – Jo Nesbø

1961 – Amy Sedaris

1968 – Lucy Lawless

Deaths

1891 – Georges Seurat

1972 – J. Arthur Rank

2016 – Patty Duke

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1983 - Duran Duran - Is There Something I Should Know

Number 1 album in 2002 - Nickleback - Silver Side Up

Number 1 compilation album in 2015 - Various Move On Up - The Very Best Of Northern Soul

#vss365

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

I had been on the run for what seemed like forever. Now I was cornered. I wouldn't be able to wriggle out of this one.

Part of me was relieved, I was tired of running. I turned to face them only to see the #butt of a soldier's rifle smash into my face.

It all went dark.

#vss365

Joke

A guy is fishing when he finally hooks a massive salmon, he pulls it on the shore and is about whack it on the head when the salmon shouts "don't kill me". The guy is shocked "Fuck me a talking fish". The fish says, "Hello my name is Rusty, please don't kill me!" The guy decides to put the fish back and let him live, and soon forgets about his experience. A few years later the same guy pulls out another large fish and is about to hit it on the head and have it for his tea. "Don't kill me" says the fish "Fuck me is that you Rusty?" asks the man. "Where have you been?" The fish replies "I have been swimming around the Arctic and set up home next to the wreck of a big cruise liner, whilst there I have been writing poetry and have published a book." "Oh, what's it called?" replied the man. "The Titanic Verses" by Salmon Rusty.

Drabble

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

The Eyes Have It

He looked bereft as he sat there alone, a silent sad island in the middle of the maelstrom. Seemingly unable to speak, and unwilling to make eye contact with any of the other mourners.

But his eyes were shifting, moving as if looking for something. A way out perhaps, away from them all and the unsaid questions they must have. Questions they were too polite to ask at the funeral of all his family members.

Before I asked him anything I would get proof. I knew he was guilty of murdering them all, and I would nail him for it.

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.

Windows To The Soul

He had sunglasses on.

Again. In the middle of the dance floor. At half one in the morning. In a night club. He always had sunglasses on. I had never seen him without them. It made me wonder about him, and whether he even had eyes. Saying that, I was sure he wasn't blind. He walked with too much confidence for that. Sashaying between people as if he were liquid, never bumping anyone or anything. I couldn't see properly in the middle of the dingy dance floor at the best of times, let alone after a dozen drinks, and with dark glasses hindering my sight.

Everyone seemed to know him, or perhaps they all just knew of him. I had seen scores of people walk up to him and amiably chat to him. He would have women all around him, all of them wanting to take his sunglasses off him and wear them themselves. Others had taken to copying him, only for the bouncers to come and tell them to take the sunglasses off. There were signs on the door and in strategic places around the club. In big letters they all said,

"NO SUNGLASSES."

And yet the bouncers never approached him and never stopped him from wearing them.

He would always be out with a subset of the same group of people. They would all drink ridiculous amounts of any kind of alcohol. Bottles of beers or alcopops, quadruple vodkas, and red roosters (the local variant of red bull), champagne,

anything they could get their hands on. They weren't students unlike the rest of us in there and I suppose that made it seem like money was no object to them. And no matter how much he drank he never left the dance floor.

I did see someone take the sunglasses off him once. It was one of his friends. Shouting at him to take those fucking glasses off. And what was under them? Another pair of sunglasses. Amusingly his friend was going berserk at this. I was just staring with my mouth open catching flies in disbelief, two layers to see through in the dark. Did he use radar to move around.

And the second pair were removed as well. Finally, people would see his eyes. But no, it shouldn't be possible, but there sat pair number three. Mirrored round, John Lennon style sunglasses. And at this the friend stopped being mad and just burst out laughing, the annoyance washed away by the lunacy of it all.

The other pairs were given back, and he put them back on over the remaining pair of sunglasses and he went back to dancing.

I saw him one night after the club had closed and kicked everyone out. He was in the kebab shop, surrounded by people again. An old man was pointing at him and asking what he had to hide. What was it in his eyes that he didn't want people to see, didn't he know that the eyes were the windows to the soul? The eyes shouldn't be hidden away in this fashion. And he leant over and whispered something in the old man's ear, and as he did the old man's face went white.

"I don't believe you."

Said the old man, and he took the old man to a corner of the kebab shop and with his back to everyone else in there he took his sunglasses off. Four pairs of them in all. And he stooped to the level of the old man and made eye contact with the old man.

I will never forget the sound of the scream that left the old man's lips. He couldn't get away from him quick enough. He ran from the back corner of the kebab shop, not bothering with the door, but crashing straight through the plate glass window and out into the street. The old man didn't stop there, he continued running, out into the main road and straight into the path of a double decker bus speeding along on their way back to the depot.

And whilst the old man did that, he just put his sunglasses back on, and didn't look in the old man's direction at all, ignoring the smashing glass and screech of brakes and screams. He just ordered his kebab and left.

I never looked at him in the same light again. In fact, I tried to avoid looking in his direction at all. The curiosity of what was behind the sunglasses was gone for good.

I didn't want to know now.

It wasn't going to be anything good.

Leicestershire

Baronets of Wanlip Hall

The Hudson, later Palmer Baronetcy, of Wanlip Hall in the County of Leicester, was created in the Baronetage of Great Britain on 28 July 1791 for Charles Grave Hudson, a Director of the South Sea Company, and High Sheriff of Leicestershire in 1784. In 1813 the second Baronet assumed by Royal sign-manual the surname of Palmer in lieu of his patronymic on succeeding to the estates of his maternal grandfather, Henry Palmer, of Wanlip. The title vests in its ninth holder.

Sir Charles Hudson, 1st Baronet (1791 – 1813)

Sir Charles Grave Hudson, 1st Baronet FRS (3 April 1730 – 24 October 1813) married well and became the owner of Wanlip Hall in Leicestershire. He was a director of the South Sea Company and became a High Sheriff of Leicestershire in 1783. He became a baronet on 21 June 1791.

Hudson was born in Tunis in 1730 to Joseph Hudson, a Dutch consul, and Sarah (born Plowman). Charles was the second and last child and only son. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1757 as a "curious enquirer into natural philosophy".

Hudson married Catherine Susanna Palmer and he and his wife inherited Wanlip Hall in Leicestershire as his wife was a co-heiress (and eldest of four daughters). Their new home had been built in about 1750. Because of the hall, Hudson had to make payments to his wife's sisters to balance the inheritance from his father-in-law, Henry Palmer. Hudson extended and improved this imposing building that stood beside the River Soar. Together they had eight children before Catherine died and Hudson married again.

Hudson had interest in slave plantations in Surinam. He was also a director of the South Sea Company. He became a High Sheriff of Leicestershire in 1784 and a baronet in 1791. Hudson died in Wanlip in 1813.

Sir Charles Thomas Hudson Palmer, 2nd Baronet (1813 – 1827)

Sir Charles Thomas Hudson Palmer, 2nd Baronet (20 May 1771 – 30 April 1827). His family seat was in Wanlip Hall in Leicestershire.

Charles Thomas Hudson was born on 20 May 1771 to Sir Charles Hudson, 1st Baronet of Wanlip Hall and his wife Catherine Palmer. In 1805 Palmer married Harriet Pepperell who was one of the three daughters of the Anglo-American Sir William Pepperell of Boston and Elizabeth the daughter of Isaac Royall. She was born on 17 December 1773. A portrait of William Pepperell and his three daughters and short-lived son was painted by John Singleton Copley in 1778. Hudson's marriage was important as it linked his family not only to the Pepperell family inheritance, but it also gave him a connection to the American Royall family. The Royalls had become rich due to their Antiguan slave plantations. Both Isaac Royall and Hudson's father had interest in slave plantations in Surinam.

In 1803 Charles and Harriett had Louisa and in 1806 came Mary Ann. Caroline Harriet was born in 1809 and his heir George Joseph was born in 1811. His final two children were Charles Axdale and William Henry. After his father's death in 1813, his 1812 will was successfully challenged after it was considered by the Law Lords. The Master of the Rolls considered that his request that his executors pass on his wealth (2,500 pounds) to the children that were surviving 28 years after his death was too vague and remote. Under the terms of his maternal grandfather's will, he changed his name to Palmer and his father's Hudson baronetcy became the Palmer baronetcy of Wanlip Hall.

One of his daughters was Caroline Harriet Abraham. She feared that she would die a spinster after spending time nursing her mother. She went to New Zealand as the wife of Bishop Charles Abraham, and she became an amateur noted artist.

Palmer died in Wanlip in 1827.

Sir George Joseph Palmer, 3rd Baronet (1827 - 1866)

Sir George Joseph Palmer, 3rd Baronet (20th December 1811 – 22nd February 1866), eldest son of Charles Thomas Hudson Palmer, 2nd Baronet and Harriet Pepperell.

Married Emily Holford in 1836, and had three children, Emily Francis Palmer, Sir George Palmer, 5th Baronet, Sir Archdale Palmer, 4th Baronet.

He was given the name of George Joseph Hudson at birth. On 13 November 1813, his name was legally changed to George Joseph Palmer. He succeeded as the 3rd Baronet Hudson, of Wanlip Hall, on 30 April 1827. He held the office of High Sheriff of Leicestershire.

Sir Archdale Robert Palmer, 4th Baronet (1866 – 1906)

Sir Archdale Robert Palmer, 4th Baronet (1st November 1838 – 26th July 1906), eldest son of Sir George Joseph Palmer, 3rd Baronet and Emily Holford.

He married Lady Augusta Amelia Shirley, daughter of Washington Sewallis Shirley, 9th Earl Ferrers and Lady Augusta Annabella Chichester, on 19 August 1873.¹ He died on 26 July 1906 at age 67, without issue.

He was educated at Eton College, Windsor, Berkshire. He gained the rank of Lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade. He succeeded as the 4th Baronet Hudson, of Wanlip Hall, on 22 February 1866. He held the office of Justice of the Peace (J.P.) for Leicestershire.

Sir George Hudson Palmer, 5th Baronet (1906 – 1919)

Sir George Hudson Palmer, 5th Baronet (August 9th, 1841 – 23rd October 1919), youngest son of Sir George Joseph Palmer, 3rd Baronet and Emily Holford. Succeeded his brother to the title.

He lived at Eton College, Windsor, Berkshire, England. He graduated from Balliol College, Oxford University, Oxford, Oxfordshire, with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) He was admitted to Lincoln's Inn entitled to practise as a barrister. He succeeded as the 5th Baronet Hudson, of Wanlip Hall, on 26 July 1906.

Sir Frederick Archdale Palmer, 6th Baronet (1919 – 1933)

Sir Frederick Archdale Palmer, 6th Baronet (25th August 1857 – 17th November 1933), son of Reverend Charles Archdale Palmer (son of Sir Charles Thomas Hudson Palmer, 2nd Baronet) and Elizabeth Julia Simpson.

Married Lillian Somerset and had three children - Sir John Archdale Palmer, 7th Baronet: Edward Ducarel Palmer and Philip Somerset Palmer. He succeeded as the 6th Baronet Hudson, of Wanlip Hall, on 23 October 1919 as eldest surviving heir of his grandfather after his cousins had both died without issue.

Sir John Archdale Palmer, 7th Baronet (1933 – 1963)

Sir John Archdale Palmer, 7th Baronet (10th November 1894 – 24th June 1963), son of Sir Frederick Archdale Palmer, 6th Baronet and Lillian Somerset.

He married Kathleen Smith, daughter of Herbert Smith, on 20 September 1922 They had two children: Sir John Edward Somerset Palmer, 8th Baronet and Robert Archdale Palmer.

He was educated at Reading School. He succeeded as the 7th Baronet Hudson, of Wanlip Hall, on 17 November 1933. He was appointed Commander, Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem (C.St.J.) He fought in the Second World War, in the Royal Artillery. He held the office of Deputy Lieutenant (D.L.) of Gloucestershire in 1956.

Sir John Edward Somerset Palmer, 8th Baronet (1963 – 2018)

Sir John Edward Somerset Palmer, 8th Baronet (27th October 1926 – 7th June 2018), son of Sir John Archdale Palmer, 7th Baronet and Kathleen Smith.

He married Dione Catharine Skinner, daughter of Charles Duncan Skinner, on 8 September 1956. They had two children - Harriet Alyson Ducarel Palmer and Sir Robert John Hudson Palmer, 9th Baronet.

He was educated at Canford School, Wimborne, Dorset. He gained the rank of Lieutenant in 1945 in the Royal Artillery. He graduated from Pembroke College, Cambridge University, Cambridge, in 1951 with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) He was with the North Nigeria Civil Service between 1952 and 1961. He graduated from Durham University, Durham in 1953 with a Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Agricultural Engineering.

He graduated from Pembroke College, Cambridge University, in 1957 with a Master of Arts (M.A.) in Agriculture. He was with R. A. Lister & Company between 1962 and 1963. He succeeded as the 8th Baronet Hudson, of Wanlip Hall, on 24 June 1963. He was with the Overseas Liaison Unit, National Institute of Agricultural Engineering between 1964 and 1968. He was a consultant director of W. S. Atkins (Agriculture) between 1979 and 1987. He lived in 2003 at Court Barton, Feniton, Devon.

Sir Robert John Hudson Palmer, 9th Baronet (2018 -)

Sir Robert John Hudson Palmer, 9th Baronet (born 20th December 1960), son of Sir John Edward Somerset Palmer, 8th Baronet. and Dione Catharine Skinner.

He married Lucinda Margaret Barker, daughter of Michael Barker, in 1990, and they have two children - Charles Henry Somerset Palmer and Alice Harriet Palmer.

He was educated at St. Edward's School, Oxford. He graduated from Durham University, Durham, with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) He graduated from Cambridge University, Cambridge, with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) He succeeded as the 9th Baronet Palmer, of Wanlip Hall, on 7 June 2018.

Heather

Heather is a village west of Ibstock in Northwest Leicestershire, England. The population of the civil parish was 949 at the 2001 census reducing to 920 at the 2011 census. In the Domesday Book of 1086, its name is recorded as Hadre, meaning "the heathland".

There was an Iron Age settlement immediately northwest of the village. As part of an open cast coal mining application, this was excavated in 1990. It identified a settlement from the late second century BC through to early second century A.D.

The parish church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, was "established" in the 12th century as a chapel for the Knights Hospitallers of the adjacent Heather Preceptory which was founded before 1199. The current church dates from the early 14th-century, and is a Grade II* Listed Building.

The coal mine at Heather opened in 1874 though some coal had been worked there even earlier. Brick making followed during the 20th century. In the 1970s and 1980s two huge open cast coal mines were opened. The Coalville Farm

opencast coal mine, between 1982 and 1996, extracted around eight million tons of coal. This area was subsequently restored to become the Sence Valley Country Park.

Following the refusal of a 1990 British Coal application for massive further open cast works, its successor, UK Coal applied for consent for a much smaller scheme. To the north of the village, it was called the Long Moor open cast coal mine. Over a three-year period from 2007 to 2010 they extracted 725,000 tons of coal. Following restoration, the seventy-six hectares (190 acres) mine site was acquired by the Woodland Trust. With adjoining agricultural land this was promoted as the Flagship Diamond Wood of their campaign to create sixty new woods of sixty acres or more. It is a 186 hectares (460 acres) new woodland called Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Wood, and celebrated the 2012 Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

Heather Preceptory was a preceptory of the Knights Hospitaller, established in the village of Heather, Leicestershire, United Kingdom.

Heather preceptory was established as a preceptory (monastery) of the Knights Hospitaller, and was founded by Ralph de Greseley as early the reign of King John (1199–1216).

Heather was an independent preceptory until around 1338, when it was reduced to the status of a "camera", a lesser establishment dependent upon another. Heather was integrated with another preceptory of the Knights Hospitaller in Leicestershire, Dalby. The two were then referred to as the "Dalby and Heather Preceptory". Dalby seems to have taken the leading role, as it was where the joint preceptory was administered from and where the Preceptor was based. Rothley Preceptory was similarly merged before 1371.

The Knights Templar also owned the manor of Heather, and by the 14th-century were renting it and its associated lands, only directly farming their lands at Dalby and Rothley Preceptories.

From around 1500 the land at all three preceptories, Dalby, Heather and Rothley, appears to have been rented out. In 1535, the three combined preceptories are recorded as providing the order with a sizable annual income of £231. 7s. 10d.

The three preceptories were dissolved in 1540. The land belonging to the preceptory at Heather was granted to Oliver St. John and Robert Thornton.

The site of the preceptory is currently occupied by a Georgian manor house. Nothing of the preceptory stands above ground; however, the manor's cellars incorporate remains of medieval walls. Medieval paving stones have also been found in the area.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

Turning Thirteen

Childhood birthdays come and go in what seems to us now as a blink of an eye. I couldn't tell you what I was doing on my eleventh, twelfth, fourteenth, fifteenth birthdays, let alone, six, seven, eight, nine, or ten. But thirteen was different. And not because it was me becoming a teenager, but because of where we were.

It was nearing the end of my second year at senior school, and along with nearly fifty others we were on the school trip to France. Six days staying in a youth hostel type of place in Etretat on the Normandy coast.

I started the week as what you might call one of the girly swots, sat on the second row of the coach just behind the teachers. OK, I was a bit of a swot, but my main reason for sitting there was I could easily lean out and stare out of the front window which helped as I got coach sick. Trains, buses, planes, and boats were all fine, but something about the motion on a coach, mixed with the smell of fabric upholstery had me wanting to upchuck, even after dosing up on travel sickness pills. Some things never change.

I spent a lot of the time early in the trip by myself. I didn't integrate very well. The two prime examples were first, in Paris, when we were given an hour free time, despite the warnings, I went off by myself and looked around Notre Dame, and there wasn't a hunchback in sight. Secondly, on our free day in Etretat I went and wrote down the number plate of every car in town, and went to all the car showrooms, getting every pamphlet and catalogue going. Everyone had to do a project about the trip and mine was going to be about French cars. I'd gotten a map with all the registration districts on so I could colour code them against how many cars I saw from each one on the trip.

It is strange to think that the trip would be the career high point of both my ability with the French language and with my interest in cars. A year later I would be trying to give up doing French (which the lying bastards at my school wouldn't let me do as they told me I had to take a language as one of my options if I wanted to get into university), and my knowledge of cars nowadays runs to the level of what colour it is.

But as the week wore on, I got dragged into more activity with the others. At table football I was in demand as I was good being the keeper and defenders. And on the pool table no one could knock me off when playing winner stays on. And they found I knew a lot about music and sports and other fun stuff, not just history, French, geography, and maths. I started migrating further back on the bus. And I was popular as there was a mini party for my birthday as I was the only one on the trip whose birthday fell whilst we were in France, and the others got to stay out a bit longer before being packed off to their dorm rooms.

And then there was the evening I snuck off and broke curfew. One of the girls had struck up a friendship with a local boy, but wasn't able to go and meet up, so I went and passed on the message and took one back. Getting to the girls' window was easy enough as they were on the ground floor. Getting back to my room was trickier. The boys were on the second floor, accessible by outside stairs only and the teachers were patrolling the foot of the stairs. But up the fire escape I went and along the ledge to get in our window, it was a bit hairy. Especially with my fear of heights, but I made it. The teachers knew I wasn't in the room at curfew, but couldn't work out how I was later.

By the return journey I was on the back seat and sitting with girls. There would have been long odds of that happening on day one of the trip. And there was more excitement to come on the ferry back from Dieppe to Newhaven. I was playing on an arcade game, a pool playing one, something I was good at. Too good apparently for an impatient kid from another school who was waiting to play and took to nudging me or trying to push buttons to make me miss. Until I turned around and lamped him one and gave him a bloody nose. He ran off and came back with half his school.

If it had been on the ferry on the way out it was highly likely that I'd have been mincemeat, and got a proper kicking. But I was pleasantly surprised to find I had backup, and the mass assembly of kids in the same place attracted the attention of teachers from both schools who came and shepherded everyone off in different directions.

And the last few days of the school year were different as well. I was being included in lots of things. Only for the summer break to come four days later and for normal service to return when we returned for our third years in the August.

Poetry Corner

What A Wonderful World

What a wonderful world
Have you gone mad?
Everything's in a swirl
And good's gone bad

Politicians tell us lies
The media are worse
All ignoring our cries
Quoting chapter and verse

Prices are rising fast
But nothing on shelves
We should be aghast
Only caring for themselves

Empathy has been forgotten
Care's a dirty word
Everything is turning rotten
Time to be heard

What a wonderful world
You must be joking
Banners should be unfurled
Stop the world choking

Plastic in the sea
Dioxide in the air
Pesticides killing the bee
Billions of us despair

And yet another war
To sate a megalomaniac
Polar ice caps thaw
Yet buy another Cadillac

The rich are greedy
They must have more
The poor are needy
But shown the door

What a wonderful world
It used to be
Humans poisoned the pearl
Despoiled by their gluttony

The green and blue
Now black and brown
We can only rue
And in reflection frown

The end is nigh
The air is unclean
The waters too high
Our time has been

It's time to ban
The humans, they're insane
So the world can
Be wonderful once again

Did I Really Blog That?

A Walk In The Country

On a lovely Saturday afternoon we decided to take Charlie out somewhere different for a walk for a change. It would give us the opportunity to try one of the walks from one of the "AA 50 Walks In..." books that I had picked up in a charity shop a few weeks before. The Kent, Surrey and Sussex books were sat on the Kitchen table awaiting perusal, you would have thought that living in Sussex, that one would make the most sense, but when looking at the walks in the Surrey book, you come to realise just how close Crawley is to the Surrey/Sussex border.

We were going to go early afternoon, and had picked a nice circular route around Oxted, but a few hours were lost to the sofa and reading and watching TV stole more time than planned, so a shorter walk was picked instead. A four-mile walk starting and ending in Charlwood, it was marked as an easy route, and good for dogs.

Alarm bells should have been ringing though, as the starting point for the walk was at The Rising Sun pub, which is no longer a pub, but is an Indian restaurant instead. We parked down the road at The Greyhound and headed off for the first part of the walk in the book. A turn in to Chapel Lane led us down past the Providence Chapel, a lovely building that looks as if it has been transported directly from middle America in the nineteenth century, not something anyone would expect to find at the end of a small road in a small English country village.

Of course, being this close, the peace and tranquillity of the country village setting is regularly interrupted by planes taking off from Gatwick just a couple of miles away.

The houses in the village were built in many assorted styles, some going back to the middle ages, one had a sign on it saying 1497, which unfortunately was when it was built and not the sale price. Some of the houses did have for sale signs on, and we made a mental note to remember the estate agents' names so that we could have a laugh at the prices once we got home. Yes, there really wouldn't be much change from a million quid.

Just after the chapel we were out into the actual countryside, along footpaths and bridleways, meaning that Charlie could come off the lead and chase after balls. After a flat start, we got to a sharp turn, and started up a hill – Stan Hill – which led out to the main road the other side of Charlwood, meaning it was back on the lead time.

The route took us up a quieter road, without any real verges for most of it, so had to walk against the sporadic oncoming traffic. Charlie, being the awkward little sod he normally is, strained against the lead the whole time, trying to pull us diagonally across the road to the other side, and was very reluctant to get back to the minimal verge and stand still for any passing traffic; a trait he kept up for the whole day, on every stretch of road that we happened to have to walk on.

On the couple of occasions we were on the opposite side of the road, he took to pulling off in the opposite direction, to head back to the side he'd been so eager to escape from just seconds before.

On the plus side, every single driver gave us plenty of room and consideration as they drove past us, the total opposite of what we see every day when walking or driving around Crawley.

Eventually a foot path appeared by the side of the road, and we instantly took to it for safety, even though we could see the next turn off on our route coming up ahead. This was the turn into the wonderfully named Beggarshouse Lane, which started off as a tarmacked road, gradually changing the further along it we went, first to gravel, to wide earthen track with ruts either side from farm vehicles, to a muddy footpath, and finally to a single file trail, overgrown by the local flora.

Overgrown footpaths would come to be another theme for the day, Mole Valley Council don't appear to be one for keeping on top of maintaining their footpaths and bridleways. Or even keeping them open for that matter. The obvious route was over the style; it was a little rickety, Charlie struggled to get through, and Helen found it a bit tricky, so shifting my immobile bulk over it was entertaining to say the least. But having to turn round and come back over it again wasn't what anyone needed, however, the trail on the other side of the style was blocked off at both ends by the farm it crossed.

By the end of the day's walk we had found at least four other such footpaths or bridleways no longer open. Granted, it may have been the case that in the fifteen years since the guidebook was published that some do get reclaimed, but some looked like the farmer / landowner had just decided to block the right of way to see if anyone complained about it.

At this point in proceedings, I can hear anybody reading this asking why on earth would you rely on a fifteen-year-old guidebook for the whole accurate route. Well, I did try and dig out the appropriate Ordnance Survey map for the area, we did have one, but we found that it was another ten years older than the guidebook, and anyway, we all have maps on our phones now. Right?

Anyhow, we were forced to go around and to the road, and a longer walk along the road that the original route's seventy-five yards. The markings for the next footpath were virtually non-existent, and the single file path into Glover's Wood was the most overgrown one of the day, but once into the wood, it opened out into a lovely wide path.

Well the path we followed this, just what the path on the actual route in the book did is anyone's guess, the sharp turn from the path into the woods led us to believe we should have been following the main path through them, but we were at least ninety degrees out, and so the problems started.

The stroll through the woods was great, flat firm ground on a nice wide path, plenty of sticks for Charlie to chase, but at the far end of the path we were on a road, which was the start of Russ Hill (which led me to wonder if he was Stan's brother), at the point where the road had just changed from being Charlwood Road. According to the guidebook, we should have had some open land to walk across, past the site of Gatwick Zoo, something that had been closed for many a year, and we would have been able to see the re-sited Lowfield Heath Windmill, as we came out to be at the junction of Russ Hill and Rectory Road. We hadn't been close to the first, or had any sight of the second.

Plus there was no footpath opposite where we came out, so we wandered along the road in the general direction of Charlwood, and after not too much walking found a style over a fence to a footpath. Charlie was through it in no time, and Helen managed to carefully negotiate it in one piece, but there was no hope in hell that I was going to make it in one piece.

It made the previous style we had tangled with seem like a modern concrete and steel wonder style. Rickety didn't even start to cover it. I put a foot on it and the plank jumped off its support on the other side and the side supports wobbled. There was no way that the style and I would survive the attempt without one of us ending up in a damaged heap on the floor, and to be honest it was likely we both would.

In hindsight it was probably a blessing that the style was that bad, as we would have been more likely to have got to lfield than to Charlwood if we had taken the footpath that led off from that style.

We were a bit disorientated, so I got the phone out and opened Google maps. It found where we were quickly enough – a lot further away from Charlwood than we should have been – but only gave us roads and buildings. It would appear that Google maps doesn't know about, or more likely doesn't care about what a footpath or bridle way is.

We continued along Russ Hill (seriously, was it Stan's brother), passing the hotel bearing its name, a concrete monstrosity amongst all the other lovely buildings in the area. It would appear that the concrete encouraged other

unsightly events to happen, as there was an abandoned microwave in a ditch next to it. I had visions of someone shoving it out the back of their car as they careered around a bend, in the style of minis flying out the back of the coach in *The Italian Job*.

Not long after the hotel we happened across another footpath, no styles to this one either; and it appeared to lead in Charlwood's general direction without taking the road all the way around, and promisingly, it was opposite a path coming out from the woods, so it gave the impression that we were back on the right track. The fact that we still hadn't passed the windmill, and couldn't see a church should have been a big hint and a half we weren't, but by this time it looked like it would cut off a corner, and it was already later than the expected time to finish the walk.

The footpath took a meandering route through a lot of horse country; dressage arenas, show jumping stables, and obviously horses; including a black one with the longest mane and tail I've ever seen on a horse. I'm sure that it could be used as a getaway horse, as it could easily use its tail to sweep away its tracks as it wandered along.

We were soon back onto tarmac, passing a magnificent large brick Edwardian style manor building, sadly not very well cared for, before passing a very nice country hotel, which we continued past until we found ourselves on a different Charlwood Road. This time, it was the one that we had driven down hours before on our way to start the walk.

We were also probably closer to Crawley than Charlwood, which would have been fine if we didn't need the car, and so we began the long trek back to Charlwood to get that. We passed by the end of the runway at Gatwick as we did so, as the planes thundered off overhead to various other parts of the world.

Along the layby sat a solitary man in a car. For a plane spotter he had the perfect spot, directly in line with the end of the runway, a small gap in the hedge in front of his open driver's door, giving him a direct view for his camera to snap all outgoing planes from inside the comfort of his ancient red Fiesta.

A journey that had taken five minutes in the car earlier in the day, took an hour on foot, around every corner was the false hope that we were nearly there, until finally the tell-tale thirty MPH sign appeared, with a sign underneath saying Mole Valley welcomes careful drivers. It was a sign that appeared to miss out the bit about it doesn't give a shit about pedestrians though. It also missed out the bit about welcoming fly-tippers, asking them to deposit their random rubbish anywhere by the side of the road or in woods where they could access and carry their stuff to.

It was still another five minutes before a footpath appeared at the side of the road, and the continual battle to stop Charlie heading diagonally to the opposite verge was finally at an end.

We had missed a fair few landmarks on the route, and when the sports ground appeared we cut across it, finally actually taking a bit of a corner off the distance of the route; a cut across that didn't add mileage to the length of the walk. Charlie had the last chase of a ball and freedom from the lead, and we finally got back to the car in the late evening twilight.

It had been a lot longer walk than we had intended, but it had been a good walk, and serious lessons were learnt, mainly around getting decent up to date maps, and not trusting Google as far as you could throw them (quite some distance if it's a phone).

And when we eventually for home, what do you reckon was the first thing that Charlie wanted to do? Chase a ball! Seriously, just how the hell do you wear a springer spaniel out?

Story Time

X Marks The Spot

X marks the spot. That is the phrase that you often hear. The treasure is always buried where there is an X on the map. In books, on TV, and in films, it is always a case of look for where the X is (well apart from in 'It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Word, when it was a big W instead, so only the one letter out).

But what happens when there is no X? when there isn't even a map? How do you find the treasure then? What if you're not sure exactly what the treasure is? is the treasure the same for everyone? Different people have different values. Something physical isn't going to have the same worth to everyone. Someone's treasure might be intangible to others. To be loved, to have a family, to be happy.

Let me assure you though, the treasure I was after was definitely physical. Well, I say that now, but when I started out seriously looking for it, I wasn't sure. Nor was anyone else looking for it. It was mythical, a rumour at best. More like the

ghost of a rumour. Something that may have only been present in one person's imagination. But the thought of it was enough to entice me into the hunt. And I wasn't the only one. Lots of people who were just like me were on the hunt for it as well.

I should probably introduce myself and explain what I do. My name is Rob Cooper, and I'm a record collector. The rarer the better. But I don't just collect for myself, I get paid to find records for others as well. It can be a lucrative business if you know what you are doing. And I do, I'm one of the best.

For a long time, everyone (well, in my world anyway) has been aware that the rarest and most expensive record is an original copy of Frank Wilson's "Do I Love You (Indeed I Do)" on the Soul label. Only two are said to exist after Motown supremo Berry Gordy ordered all copies destroyed because the single hadn't been authorised by him, and he wanted Chris Clark's version releasing instead. The last time one of these two copies (pretty much unplayable now) changed hands it was for £70,000. (It is rumoured a third copy exists, ironically in Berry Gordy's personal collection.)

Yet the rumour floating around was there was supposed to be something out there that was rarer still. Just a single copy. No proper label. Not even a confirmed line up of who was performing on the record. A conglomeration of stars from the Motown stable in 1964 calling themselves the X-Factor many decades before the dire Simon Cowell behemoth existed. And the track was rumoured to be called 'X Marks The Spot.'

There was nothing in the official Motown archives. Berry Gordy had denied all knowledge, although as could be seen from the Frank Wilson single, he wasn't infallible. No one had ever directly said the song existed. Even if a record hadn't been made by this X-Factor conglomerate, the song itself would have usually seen the light somewhere else. A B-side, or an album track by one of the Motown roster. Back then half a dozen artists would have a go at a song, vying for the version Berry Gordy would give the thumbs up to releasing as a single. But 'X Marks The Spot' hadn't seen the light of day anywhere.

All there was were hints at it. Comments from those who supposedly had been part of X-Factor, and all of them dead now. Marvin Gaye, Levi Stubbs, David Ruffin, Florence Ballard, Mary Wells, Sandra Tilley, Lamont Dozier, Wanda Young, Earl van Dyke, Joe Hunter, and most recently Barrett Strong.

It was an interview a few days before Barrett Strong's death that really set the hares running. When asked what the best song he ever wrote was he was reported to have laughed before giving the answer 'I'm not sure if it exists. I remember being involved and being there with all these stars and some of the house band when they sang it, but no one will have heard it since unless those sneaky engineers really did make a copy.'

And so that was how I came to be in Detroit at the Roberts Riverwalk Hotel along with about thirty other collectors. In total there were more than two hundred others in various hotels across the city. The most ruthless bunch of desperate record hunters known to man or beast. All of us determined to find a record that may not even exist.

Doors were knocked on, and sometimes when not answered, knocked in, we were terrible. The locals were all getting involved. Kids were raiding their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents house, bringing any record without a cover and without a name on it to our hotels. Someone had offered a \$50,000 finder's fee, and it had got madder. People were turning up with labels bleached back to white, (and still stinking of ammonia) or with labels peeled off. Run-out grooves' etchings scratched out, trying to disguise what the record had been.

Hotel lobbies had half a dozen record players set up in them to play whatever came through the door, but week three we weren't leaving the hotel, everything was coming to us.

And there were some genuine rarities in amongst the defaced and the dross. Test pressings, mislabelled oddities, and a demo version of the Supremes' classic "Where Did Our Love Go," where Diana Ross is heard singing 'where did my gloves go' in the fade out. I wondered how that ever got pressed, but we must have seen over twenty copies of that come through the door.

Whenever a decent possibility turned up a hush would descend across whichever hotel lobby it was in. The needle would be placed onto the record and seconds later a disappointed groan would come out once the intro kicked in and the song was recognised.

I was one of the lucky ones. It was my hotel she walked into. Dolores Jones, who as it turned out was the sister-in-law of one of the sound engineers on the day in question. She must have been ninety, and she looked frail and lost as she shuffled in unnoticed by any of us. And then came out a loud confident voice in stark contrast to how she looked.

"I believe all of you are looking for this."

And in her hand in a plain white paper sleeve with some writing on I couldn't make out, was a record. No label or marks, just a little red sticker with 45rpm on it on one side, and a yellow sticker with just an 'X' on the other. She continued to speak.

"I'm tired, those left of my friends are tired, my family is tired. Tired of all of y'all. So, I brought this here to play, and once is has been, y'all can all get lost, get out of Detroit, and out of our lives."

Spinner McKinley was the first to react and he tried to guide Dolores to his Bang & Olufsen deck only to be shouted at.

"That ain't no use boy, too damn modern, need one of those old Dansettes over there. Need a proper old needle to lay shellac you fool."

That was a surprise, I couldn't remember ever seeing a shellac 7" single before. Shellac for records was a dying breed before the 7" format really took off, let alone one being made in the mid-sixties.

Dolores found what she wanted and took the record out of the sleeve and placed it down, she dropped the needle on the run in of the record and hit play. There was complete silence in the lobby as the slight crackle of the play in came through the speaker, and then the music started.

Grown men stood with mouths agape. There were broad smiles and there were tears. It was amazing. The beat, the bass, the horns, and oh my, the vocals. Three minutes of unadulterated bliss as far as I was concerned. And as the fade out started so did the clamour.

"Play it again."

"Play it louder."

"Wow."

"Amazing."

And then came the offer, Spinner was first to go for it again.

"Fifty thousand."

"Sixty." Came another voice.

I heard myself yell "One hundred."

The impromptu auction was above half a million within seconds before Dolores yelled.

"Silence."

And there was immediately, and she continued.

"I said I was going to play the record and then y'all were all to leave. I never once said I was going to sell it. certainly not to any of you reprobates."

And as she lifted the record off the Dansette, Spinner shouted,

"One million dollars."

Dolores just glared at him.

"What part of no sale didn't you understand sonny."

"Two million. Please."

"No, no, no, no, no. Never. Not for all the money in the world."

There are quite a few versions going around of what happened next. I'm going to tell you what I saw from less than six feet away.

Spinner had lost his mind. He ran forward and made a grab for the record. He missed. Despite her age and apparently frailty, she was too quick for him, almost as if she had been expected someone to try it. She moved out of the way, and he sailed past and over the back of one of the sofas.

There was no accident as has been reported. It was quite deliberate. Dolores stood there with fury burning in her eyes and threw the record with a might her age and frame suggested wasn't possible down on the parquet floor. It didn't drop, or slip from her hand. It was thrown.

If it had been made of vinyl it might have survived, but shellac was never going to make it. The record hit the floor and shattered into hundreds, if not thousands of pieces, and as those pieces flew in all directions Dolores shouted.

“Get out of my city you leeches.”

And so, the rarest record in the world, the greatest song I have ever heard, was gone forever. As it turns out I have several pieces of it. I found them hours later. It turns out I was standing close enough for pieces to bounce and settle in the turn up of my chinos.

I kept the pieces.

I have them in a frame upon my wall. I made them out into the rough shape of an 'X,' and I stop to look closely at them every day, often more than once. And each time I do I play the memory of the song in my head. A reminder of the greatest song that 99.9999995% of the world's population has never heard and will never hear.

That was three months ago. This morning I had an e-mail from Spinner McKinley's wife. He's in prison. In the aftermath of the smashed record, he lost it even more and ended up assaulting poor old Dolores. She got a few hits in of her own, and Spinner would have been singing soprano for a while afterwards. Even so, she refused to drop charges, and no one was defending what Spinner did.

Anyway, the e-mail was to say that there is another copy out there apparently.

I was up and packing before the message had fully sunk in, and I passed the frame. And I stopped. If there is another copy, so be it. Someone else can find it. Others can listen to it. I've heard it and I have an X of it on my wall. And to me that is priceless, it is my treasure.

Chapter and Verse

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

The Repsuli Deception – Chapter 4

I knew where Wynne would be at lunch. In that respect he was a creature of habit. He went for lunch at the same time every day; he went to the same café, sat in the same seat, and ordered the same food. Today, for me that would be a good thing. I got to the Forthsas Café with plenty of time to spare, I sat at the table Wynne always sits at and ordered three lots of toast and two sodas. They would be a good start to help with the hangover.

The waitress took my order and told me I would have to be out of this seat by one as it was a regular's table. I told her I knew that, it would be fine; I was here to speak to Wynne anyway. She muttered something about it being my lookout anyway, and went off to put my order in. The sodas turned up first, and I'd finished one of them when the toast turned up. I ordered another to replace the one I'd drunk. The toast and sodas barely seemed to touch the sides, but my head had stopped pounding as much.

I was worried about having the client in tow on this case. It wasn't so much from the viewpoint that I was concerned about them looking over my shoulder and inspecting everything I was doing for them. That didn't worry me at all. It was more a case of they might not like what they might hear from me whilst I was investigating. I wasn't any good at keeping my mouth shut, and a lot of the time the truth hurt.

There was so much about this case that bothered me I didn't know where to start. I sent a message to Vipond to load everything possible about Repsuli, its people, customs, history, physiology and more. Everything he could extract and load to the ship. I needed to know more than I did already. I could ask my client, but I would feel better if it came from a neutral source. Vipond responded with his usual lack of good grace. He moaned about everything, but I knew he would do it anyway. Then I thought of something else to get the data on. I wanted everything on Frantech, and especially if they had any presence on Earth. He could moan some more now.

I ordered more sodas and a couple of burgers and fries. I might be the size of a small moon when I left the café, but I would feel better.

“You do realise you're sitting at my table, don't you?”

It was Wynne, at least he was smiling.

"And you do know that I don't really care, and that you really ought to mix it up from time to time." I smiled back.

"Heavy night Brodie?"

"From what I remember of it."

"That good then?"

I just grunted.

"I take it recovery food and drink isn't the only reason for you invading my table and disturbing my lunch, you usually go for the rat burger special around the corner from your pallacious offices."

"Sarcasm doesn't become you Wynne, but yes I have ulterior motives for being here."

"As long as they don't put me off my lunch, I think I can put up with you being sat there."

The waitress arrived with my second lot of food and more sodas, and she took Wynne's order. I didn't know why she bothered, it was probably already cooked and waiting to come out. All smiles she was for dealing with Wynne, before leaving the table giving me a withering stare.

"She really didn't want me to sit here you know."

"Probably heard about your reputation for lousy tipping."

I let that slide, mainly because there may be some truth in the remark. I started on the questions before tucking into a burger.

"What do you know about Repsulis?"

"They come from Repsuli."

Everybody's a comedian these days.

"And?"

"They keep themselves to themselves on the whole, extraordinarily little off world interaction. Pretty much unique in having an odd number of limbs, and that the number of arms and legs is different for males and females. Strange colouring too."

"When was the last time you saw one on Tomazin?"

"Now that's a question Brodie. I'm not sure if I ever have."

"What would you say if I told you there was one in my office this morning, hiring me to work on a case for her?"

"Probably that you'd had too much to drink last night and were hallucinating this morning."

"I wish. Furthermore, what if I told you they said that I had been recommended to them by the space corps?"

Wynne almost choked on his drink.

"Are you trying to kill me Brodie? That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard come out of your mouth, and it comes in the face of some fierce opposition."

"You might want to hold fire on your drink for a couple of minutes while I continue then."

Wynne nodded.

"The Repsuli female turns out to be Tarrega Opsulate, heir to the Repsuli throne."

"Just what were you drinking last night Brodie; I've got to try some for myself."

"I haven't finished yet. Her husband disappeared on Earth, and I've been hired to find him."

"I think you're in the wrong profession Brodie, you should be a fiction writer rather than a private detective, that's the most outlandish tale I've heard in a long time."

"Seriously Wynne, you know me, and my lack of affinity with lying, I'm being straight with you here."

"Then in my professional opinion, you're royally screwed. Pun definitely intended."

"Thanks for that, nice to know I'm not the only one thinking that way."

"Have you had many dealings with the Repsuli before yourself?"

"Until this morning no, they freak me out, it's the whole eye licking thing."

"I haven't either, but some of the other LEO's have. They're a secretive lot and not great at dealing with criticism. Which would suggest they might not be great in dealing with your particular brand of truth telling?"

I groaned, even though this was expected.

"If this client of yours is who she says she is, then someone in the corps has done you up like a kipper by sending her to you. If it were still possible to say no, I would, but if you've already taken money, you're stuck with it. The other main thing I've heard of the Repsulis is that they are sticklers to keeping to deals or contracts."

I forced the last of the fries into my mouth, although I definitely wasn't feeling hungry now.

"Is there any positive advice you can give me?"

"Positively do not take the client with you, whatever you do."

Wynne must have read the look on my face.

"You are joking aren't you Brodie, you've already agreed to take the client with you?"

"Yes, it was a late stipulation. I was hungover and the money was in my account."

"For a clever man Brodie, you aren't half a bloody idiot at times. Are you going in your hunk of junk?"

"As opposed to what?"

"Hasn't the royalty got their own craft?"

"I don't know, it never came up in conversation."

"Jeez Brodie, isn't Vipond around to help you out with this kind of stuff?"

"He tends to disappear when I've got potential clients; he feels that his metal head will scare them off."

"In some cases that might be a good thing for both of your sakes, and this is definitely one of them."

"Well, it's too late for any of that, have you got anything else for me? Any advice or some pearls of wisdom for me?"

"Only this, I'll pray for you Brodie, you're going to need all the help you can get."

Wynne's food finally turned up, as if they had been waiting until our conversation was ending before bringing it over. He told the waitress he'd pay for my tab as well. I mumbled some thanks.

"It's fine Brodie, think of it as a farewell gift. If you ever make it back, you can buy for me next time, just not in your rat burger establishment."

With those comforting words still echoing around in my head, I headed back to the office.

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 and earn me a couple of cents. <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 Twitter, 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, now on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/onetruekev/>

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

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