

THE OLD JUDDIAN WHO NEVER WAS

1 It is, we suspect, an occupational hazard of editors of Old Boys' Newsletters that they feel starved of good copy. The news that X has retired to a bungalow near Ilfracombe or that Y is now a manager for Barclays Bank in Redhill may well be of passing interest to their contemporaries, but is hardly designed to grab the attention of the general readership. It may be that there is a Z who is serving a 10-year prison sentence in Flagstaff Arizona for cattle rustling or multiple bigamy, but he is unlikely to write to the Newsletter about his circumstances - nor, possibly, would his letter be published even if he did. Yet, the editor thinks, there must somewhere out there be stories that fall between the mundane on one hand and the over-sensational on the other if only he could find them. It was no doubt with thoughts such as these in mind that [name], the then editor of the Old Juddian Newsletter, placed the following note in the issue of [date: possibly 1956]:

[Print verbatim appeal for news of Old Juddians who had "been to out-of-the-way places or done unusual things"].

This brief appeal was, unwittingly, the spark that led to the case of The Old Juddian Who Never Was.

2 In the autumn of 1957 we were both at Emmanuel College Cambridge. Ian Hollands was studying Swahili for a year before going to Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) as a District Officer, and Tim Johns was in his third year of reading Modern History. At Judd Ian had been Tim's senior by two years, but our paths had crossed at various times. Ian had been the Liberal candidate and Tim the Labour candidate in the school's mock election of 1950, while in Journey's End, the school play for 1953, Ian had played the part of Mason the comic cook, and Tim had been a walk-on soldier. At Cambridge Ian got into the habit of dropping into Tim's rooms in college once or twice a week (in the first place mainly so that he could use them as a left luggage office), and it was natural that our conversation should turn occasionally to our old school. In particular, we had noticed the appeal in the Newsletter, and regretted that it had not produced the desired response. The thought followed that if genuine Old Juddians could not supply what the editor was looking for it would be necessary to invent one who would.

3 At this point, it is necessary to explain that practical joking was a favourite extra-curricular activity among some Juddians in the 1950's. Tim had taken part in the Reply-paid-postcard Operation of 1954, while Ian had brought off a number of coups both at school and afterwards at Oxford. The 1954 effort was a practical joke that depended for its comic effect on the gradual realisation by the victim that the natural order of things had somehow become disturbed: Ian was a specialist in the subtle art of the hoax, which involves a suspension of disbelief by the victim. A hoax can be

evaluated by the extent to which the suspension of disbelief is achieved against all common sense, something which requires a readiness on the part of the hoaxed to be deceived, and the construction by the hoaxer of an alternative reality which pushes that readiness to the very limit. This implies a degree of collaboration between the two sides - a collaboration that in the case of The Old Juddian Who Never Was became so close that in the end it was, as we shall see, difficult to tell exactly who was the hoaxer and who the hoaxed. The hoax involves something else besides, as it would otherwise be impossible to distinguish it from the confidence trick or the activities of the advertising industry: if there is any material benefit from a hoax or from any other form of practical joke, that must be to the victim and not to the hoaxer. The benefit is not always fully appreciated (in the 1954 example, the victim may not have managed or even wanted to eat the sackloads of free Weetabix samples he found arriving by every post), but the general principle is clear. As far as the hoax described here is concerned, the benefit was, we were glad to learn, much appreciated and remained so for some years.

4 To return to our decision to create an Old Juddian for the Newsletter, it was necessary first of all to flesh him out. The name we finally hit upon was Leonard Vernon Trumble, which seemed to strike the right balance between the refined and the down-to-earth ¹. He had just returned to Britain after many years in Kenya where he had been working as a Tropical Engineer ². While in Africa his two passions had been big game hunting and clearing cricket pitches in the virgin bush so that he could teach the noble game to the local tribesmen ³. As we filled in the details ("the local chief turned out to have a natural googly!") we got a clearer picture of his appearance (rather stout, small white moustache, and a florid complexion as a result of the consumption of innumerable gin-and-tonics at the Nairobi cricket club), and also of his personality. Somewhat fuddled by so many days in the tropical sun, he was extremely garrulous, with the bore's tendency to repeat the same stories over and again, the details getting increasingly confused from one telling to the next. However, he retained an innocent zest for life, and was particularly excited by the prospect of renewing contact with the school he loved. Looking back over nearly forty years, in which time we have reached approximately the same age as Trumble when we created him, we realise that we put a good deal of ourselves into our creation, and have no doubt that we have in our turn become noticeably more Trumblish with the passage of time.

5 The first letter from Trumble to the Newsletter required careful drafting to capture the right tone of voice (characterised by a liberal splattering of exclamation marks) and the right mixture of the plausible and the implausible. In this, we were assisted by oral tradition in the Hollands household as Ian's father was also an Old Juddian. We were thus able to refer correctly not only to the names of long-gone masters but also to their nicknames, and to add to the spurious contemporaries whom Trumble remembered (eg "Pommie" Granitt) some genuine Old Juddians (particularly OJ's who still lived in Tonbridge). A friend in Stevenage agreed to let his address be used for the letter, which was despatched in time to be included in the next issue.

6 After a week or two of anxious waiting, the Newsletter arrived - and there was Trumble's letter, printed in its entirety:

[Here we should give the first Trumble letter verbatim].

7 With Trumble's letter published, we could, perhaps, have let the matter rest there. Our instinct then was quite otherwise: having achieved an initial suspension of disbelief we wanted to find out how far we could go. To coin a metaphor, we had hooked our fish: but could we land it? We immediately got down to drafting a second letter ...

[My recollections are a little hazy here. There certainly WAS a second letter, the main point being that it simply repeated, with variations, what was in the first letter: for example the story of the boy who was expelled on the spot for throwing a peach stone at the Chairman of Governors on Speech Day ("He was due to leave the school the following day anyway!") was re-told, only this time the missile was an apple core. I can't remember whether it was published: however, a little research in the OJ Newsletter should settle the matter.]

8 Having made the first contact, Trumble was eager to help his old school in whatever way he could. He joined the Old Juddian Association, and joined also a panel of Old Juddians prepared to offer advice to school-leavers on careers. His letter, which recommended Tropical Engineering to "any young man with a sense of initiative who is able and willing to take on responsibility for others" was notably short on concrete details as to what Tropical Engineering entailed, and what qualifications were required or how they could be obtained, but high on the personal qualities required, and on the rewards it offered in terms of opportunities for travel. This part of the letter was, in fact, copied almost word-for-word from a recruiting advertisement for the RAF which, we felt, hit exactly the right note of manly aspiration and endeavour. Fortunately, no leaver asked for advice during the short time Trumble was available to give it, and we are not sure how we would have replied if one had done so.

[Attempt to identify the advertisement from back issues of the Daily Telegraph for 1958?]

9 The letter offering to join the careers panel elicited a note of thanks from the Headmaster Mr. F.H. Taylor. Frank Taylor was nobody's fool, and we realised that if we had, indeed, established Trumble's credibility with him, the fish was already halfway reeled in. Trumble's next letter was to the Headmaster. It went over much familiar ground, but also struck a more sentimental note than those which had gone before. He confessed how much he longed to see again "the Garden of England as Shakespeare called it" and said that he hoped to be able to make a visit to the school: "Don't be surprised if you see a strange figure [? funny old codger] wandering about [? poking around] among the dustbins!". The threat of a Trumble on the loose filled the Headmaster with some alarm, and he wrote by return asking LVT to let the

Deputy Headmaster Mr. Buisseret know when he intended to arrive so that he could be given a proper guided tour. The thought of the two together gave us much pleasure: Leonard Trumble, bleary-eyed with emotion, endlessly repeating his stories of happenings at Judd in the years before the First World War, and Peter Buisseret indicating noteworthy features of the school with the elaborate gestures he used to dismiss each form in turn at the end of School Assembly.

10 By late Spring 1958, with Tim's Part II examinations approaching and Ian's course coming to an end, it was clear that we would have to get out the landing-net. Trumble bought a ticket for the Old Juddian dinner on [check date!], and Plan A was that one of us should in heavy disguise attend as the man himself, at a crucial moment tearing the disguise off and shouting "It was me all along!". However, a little consideration showed that this was wholly impractical: with the best disguise in the world, it was unlikely that either of us would pass muster for more than a second, and the effect of any self-revelation would be totally lost. Plan B was that Trumble should send a telegram saying that an old tropical complaint had laid him low, and that he would to his great regret be unable to attend the dinner. We would then arrange for him to expire painlessly, bequeathing to the school a memorial that it would be difficult in the circumstances to refuse. It was Plan B that we decided to implement.

11 Once we had sent the necessary telegram, the next step was to find something that would serve as a lasting memento of Leonard Vernon Trumble, and proof - if proof were needed - that he had indeed existed. After some debate ("Even if we could find the stuffed head of a rhinoceros, we certainly couldn't afford it"), we bought for under a pound a very small electro-plated nickel silver sports cup insecurely attached to a black bakelite base. The shop agreed for a small additional fee to engrave "L.V. Trumble 1911"4 on the side. The major problem was that the cup looked not only very cheap, but also very new, and we judged that only if it could be aged artificially could it be passed off as being over 40 years old. We hit it a few times with whatever blunt instrument came to hand to give it some authentic-looking dents, but abandoned the experiment when the cup proved remarkably resistant to such treatment, fearing that a more vigorous assault might wreck it completely. Our attempt to give the cup some sort of patina was rather more successful: we covered it with a thin layer of chlorophyll toothpaste which, when dried, gave an approximate imitation of verdigris. The application of toothpaste had the disadvantage that the cup smelled strongly of peppermint, but we were by now getting reckless. If inventions such as Tropical Engineering, googly-bowling African chiefs, and "Pommie" Granitt had failed to blow Trumble's cover, we were surely in no danger from a minty sports trophy.

12 The prepared cup was wrapped carefully in corrugated paper, and posted to the Headmaster with a letter from Mrs. Trumble written on notepaper purloined from the Strand Palace Hotel. (The friend in Stevenage had by this time started to get cold feet, and was worried that at any moment the police would

arrive to arrest him as an accessory to whatever unnamable crime we might be committing). Mrs. Trumble's letter said that her husband had passed away suddenly but peacefully, and that following the cremation at Golder's Green she was staying at the hotel on her way to join her relatives in South Africa. She told the Headmaster how much Leonard had enjoyed his return to Britain, and in particular the opportunity to re-establish contact with his old school. The enclosed cup, she explained, had been one of his most prized possessions as it had been a special award by the Chairman of Governors for the best junior cricketer in the school. If the school could make any use of it, she knew he would have been delighted. The occasion of the original award of the cup was, of course, carefully chosen, as it reflected not only LVT's passionate commitment to cricket, but also our knowledge that there was not in 1958 a trophy for best junior cricketer, and we considered that one was needed.

[I've left out of the account here the facts that

1. The letter was written, left-handed, by Ian's current girl-friend (later Mrs. Hollands?).
 2. It was carefully sprinkled with drops of water to simulate Mrs. T's tears.]
- 13 The parcel with its precious load having been posted to the school, Mrs. Trumble wrote to the Strand Palace Hotel asking it to forward any post that arrived for her. The letter from Mr. Taylor, when it arrived, was most beautifully written. It expressed his deepest sympathy for her in her sad loss, and said that he and many others had been impressed by her husband's youthful enthusiasm - even those who had never met him had felt that they had come to know him. The school would be honoured to accept the cup in her husband's memory: it would be known as "The L.V. Trumble Junior Cricket Cup" and would be awarded annually in his memory. We were quietly jubilant, for now the fish lay flapping on the shore, and it was one worth catching.
- 14 At the same time we learned that there was someone who remembered Trumble. Mrs. Trumble received another letter of condolence. This one was from the secretary of the Old Juddian Association, who referred especially to one Old Juddian (the one, as it happens, who had had the most mentions in Trumble's letters) who had been looking forward to having a drink with his old friend and a chat about old times at the OJ dinner.
- [Note: I'm sure that this letter existed - the OJ was Bert Hazelden - but I'm not certain it wasn't sent to Trumble himself after the dinner. If so, that would give a slightly better shape to the account].
- 15 At Sports Day on [check date] the L.V. Trumble Junior Cricket Cup duly appeared on the table of trophies to be awarded, much overshadowed by its larger and more imposing companions. When the moment came "Snowy" White the sports master made (or, more accurately, muttered) a short announcement that this was the first presentation of a cup that had been left to the school by an Old Juddian: and when Mrs. Hornby, the wife of the local Member of

Parliament, picked it up to hand it over to [name], the first winner, the base promptly fell off.

- 16 The cup continued to be awarded until [date: check school magazine]. The full list of winners is as follows:

[Get list from back-numbers of the school magazine. It would be interesting to discover if it was in the year following the last presentation replaced by another trophy for best junior cricketer: also if any winner went on to attain distinction as a cricketer - try to contact them via the OJA? That would also allow us to find out if any of them realised that there was anything unusual about the cup].

To any former winners who read this we offer our belated congratulations and also our apologies that as a result of limited resources we had not been able to purchase something that more grandly reflected their achievements.

- 17 That is almost, but not quite, the end of the story of The Old Juddian Who Never Was. On [date: this was after the presentation] the Kent and Sussex Courier carried the following short report:

[Kent & Sussex Courier held on microfilm at Tunbridge Wells reference library (0892 522352). Open 9.30 am - 7.00 pm Mon/Tues/Thurs/Fri & Wed/Sat 9.30 am - 5.00 pm. Contact reference librarian before going down so materials can be got ready].

The sting is, of course, in the last sentence, which effectively destroys the rest of the report. Once it had been discovered that there was no mention of Trumble in the school records, it is hard to believe that the various clues we had so generously provided did not then fall into place, and the realisation dawn that a hoax had taken place. There were also enough of our contemporaries who were in the know to make it quite possible that one of them had let on that there was something fishy about Leonard Vernon. Seen in this light, the baldness of the newspaper report can be interpreted as a signal from the school to whoever had been responsible that Trumble had been rumbled. If so, that raises a question that is, at this point of time, difficult to answer: why did the cup continue to be awarded for so many years after it had been discovered to be spurious?

- 18 One answer to the question posed in the last paragraph is that those in authority found it easier to keep quiet than to own up that they had been deceived. On balance, we are inclined to a rather different explanation, which depends on our memory of and affection for Frank Taylor. He had a jaunty sense of humour and was well aware of the more mischievous tendencies of his senior pupils. His reaction was not to attempt to stamp out practical joking at the school, but to make sure that it was carried on within some basic rules of propriety. Thus when the Reply-paid-postcard Operation was uncovered, it was clear that he had no great difficulty with the Weetabix,

but that he drew the line at the dozens of corset catalogues sent to the victim's wife. The culprits made a suitable apology, and the matter was allowed to rest there. We strongly suspect that, forewarned by such experiences, he saw through Trumble well before the denouement. In this scenario, he decided to play along with the hoax to see how far we would try to take it. The letter to Mrs. Trumble fits this interpretation just as well as it fits that in which he was an innocent dupe, the reference to Trumble's "youthful enthusiasm" being intended to show that he had a shrewd suspicion as to the authorship of the Trumble correspondence and the origin of the cup. The attentive reader may have noticed other clues in this narrative that point in the same direction. If we are correct, the cup continued to be presented because the Headmaster had in effect switched sides: he had left the ranks of the hoaxed and allowed himself to join the hoaxers.

[Almost certainly this paragraph will have to be revised in the light of whatever information is available from people who were at Judd at the time, FHT's next of kin, etc.]

- 19 [Conclusion: by IDH? I have largely avoided the language of guilt and apology in the narrative, but at this point we might say how we feel now about the disgraceful activities of our younger selves, the hope that we are not setting a poor example to a later generation of Juddians, etc. Reference might be made to Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (appropriately enough, the school play for 1955, TFJ playing the part of Sir Andrew Aguecheek), which contains one of the best-known, and cruellest, examples of a hoax in English literature: compared with the gulling of Malvolio, the gulling of Judd was a relatively innocuous affair].

Footnotes

- 1 In the general election the Attlee government was returned with a greatly reduced majority, while the school election was a landslide victory for David Williams, the Conservative candidate. At the age of 13, Tim found it difficult to live up to the hyperbole of his posters ("Vote for Johns and Save the Peace of the World"), and he barely saved his deposit.
- 2 According to Hanks and Hodge A Dictionary of Surnames (Oxford University Press, 1988), the name Trumble (together with its variants Trumball, Trimble and Tremble) is Old English in origin, being composed of the elements *trum* (strong, firm) and *beald* (bold, brave) - a description which seems about right for our Old Juddian. Reaney and Wilson A Dictionary of English Surnames (Routledge, 3rd ed. 1991) date the first recorded use of the name in this form - an Elizabeth Trumble living in Suffolk - to 1568. We wish we could say that we knew all this at the time, but we didn't.
- 3 There is, of course, no such profession, although it is a little surprising that it has not been re-invented in recent years as a way of attracting overseas students and funding to university departments of engineering.

[A more elaborate footnote could quote from a lecture by Martin Snaith at Birmingham on "the old colonial buffers who used the British Standard Heel

Test" to show that the concept of Tropical Engineering as practised by L.V. Trumble was not so far from the truth].

- 4 Trumble's passion for cricket may have been inspired by the example of his namesake Hugh Trumble (1867-1938), the outstanding Australian bowler at the turn of the century whose 141 wickets in England-Australia tests remained a record until it was overtaken by Dennis Lillee in 1981. In its obituary Wisden described Hugh Trumble's style as follows:

Exceptionally tall, he made the most of his height by bringing the ball over at the full extent of his right arm so that "flighting", a new term since his days, came in the natural delivery. Length, with either leg or off-break, and pace slightly varied to medium were the means employed by Trumble and experience enabled him to deceive the best batsmen on perfect pitches while, given any help from the state of the turf, he was deadly.

- 5 This is a detail on which we are a little hazy: it is just possible that the date was 1912. [It may be of course, that the cup is still at the school, in which case the question would be solved if we can get to see it]
- 6 Chlorophyll was heavily promoted in the 1950's as a magic ingredient that could remove unwanted smells. The truth was probably closer to the following verse that was popular at the time:

Why stinks the cow on yonder hill?
It feeds all day on chlorophyll.

[It might be worth writing to Colgate-Palmolive and Gibbs to check whether chlorophyll toothpaste is still manufactured, and, if not, when it was withdrawn].