



***CECIL
TORR***

***SMALL TALK
AT WREYLAND.
SECOND
SERIES***

Cecil Torr

Small Talk at Wreyland. Second Series

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PREFACE

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IN case this volume should be read by anyone who has not read its predecessor, I am quoting these three paragraphs from that by way of explanation.

And first, about the place itself,

Wreyland is land by the Wrey, a little stream in Devonshire. The Wrey flows into the Bovey, and the Bovey into the Teign, and the Teign flows out into the sea at Teignmouth. The land is on the east side of the Wrey, just opposite the village of Lustleigh. It forms a manor, and gives its name to a hamlet of six houses, of which this is one.

Secondly, about my writing all these things,

Down here, when any of the older natives die, I hear people lamenting that so much local knowledge has died with them, and saying that they should have written things down. Fearing that this might soon be said of me, I got a book last Christmas—1916—and began to write things down. I meant to keep to local matters, but have gone much further than I meant.

Thirdly, about my publishing what I had written,

I wrote this little book for private circulation; and it was actually in type, and ready for printing, before its publication was suggested. I feel some diffidence in inviting strangers to read what I intended only for my personal friends. But it all seems to hang together, and I have not omitted anything.

Since that was published I have gone on writing things down in the same way as before. And now I find that I have

written enough to make another volume of the same extent; and I hope it is no worse.

CECIL TORR.

YONDER WREYLAND,

LUSTLEIGH,

DEVON.

SMALL TALK AT WREYLAND

II

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THIS valley has seen another innovation since I last wrote things down. An aeroplane passed over here, 9 September 1918. It was only a friendly aeroplane, just out for exercise; but nothing of the kind had ever been seen from here before, not even a balloon.

The first time that a motor-car was seen here (which was not so very long ago) it stopped just opposite the cottage of an invalid old man. He heard somethin' there a-buzzin' like a swarm o' bees, and he went out to look, although he had not been outside his door since Martinmas. It was a big car, and he said that it was like a railway-carriage on wheels. I can myself remember the first railway-train that came here—that was in 1866—and I knew old people who said that they remembered the first cart. Before the days of carts, they carried things on horses with pack-saddles.

These old people's recollections are confirmed by Moore. His *History of Devonshire* came out in 1829, and he says there, vol. 1, page 426—"Fifty years ago a pair of wheels was

scarcely to be seen on a farm in the county, and at present the use of pack-horses still prevails, though on the decline.... Hay, corn, fuel, stones, dung, lime, etc., and the produce of the fields, are all conveyed on horseback: sledges, or sledge-carts, are also used in harvest time, drawn chiefly by oxen." The pack-saddles have vanished now, and the oxen also; but sledges may still be seen at work on very steep fields.

Rights of way "with all manner of carriages" are mentioned in 1719 and 1729 in title-deeds of land here; but 'carriages' was then a word of wider meaning, and would include all instruments of transport. I would not even argue from those deeds that there were carriages of any kind down here so long ago, any more than I would argue that hawking was still practised here as late as 1752, merely because there is a deed of that date reserving rights "to hunt, hawk, fish, or fowle." A lawyer will copy clauses into documents without considering whether they apply. I know a lease that binds the tenant to maintain the thatching on a roof which had its thatch replaced by slate quite thirty years ago, and another one that binds the tenant to clear out the gutterings, down-pipes, drains and gullies of buildings which have never had such things at all.

The old pack-saddle roads were paved for a width of about two feet in the middle, to give foothold for the horses, and then sloped up on either side, just giving room enough for the packs but none to spare for anyone to pass. One of these roads runs up the hill behind this house, and is of some antiquity, as it leads past the remnants of a way-side cross with the coat-of-arms of bishop Grandisson, who held

the see of Exeter from 1327 to 1369. In 1437, and perhaps a good deal earlier, there was a King's Highway passing through the end of Wreyland Manor at Kelly, and thus coinciding with the present road from Newton up to Moreton. On the Court Rolls of the Manor there are complaints that it required repair, 11 October 1437 and many later dates. Possibly the highway was not used for wheels until long after it was made. But the old Roman Road would have been built to carry wheels.

There is a Roman milestone at Saint Hilary, about fifteen miles this side of Land's End, and there is another at Tintagel; and these, I believe, are the only Roman milestones west of Exeter. The inscription is clear enough on the Saint Hilary stone, and shows that it was erected in the reign of Constantine. On the Tintagel stone there is not much inscription left, but the name of Licinius is unmistakable. He reigned concurrently with Constantine from 307 to 323, and probably the road was made then. In the Antonine Itinerary, which is a few years earlier, there is no road west of Exeter.

These milestones are not in their original places: one is built into the lich-gate of Tintagel churchyard, and the other was built into Saint Hilary church, and did not come to light until that was burnt down in 1853. Assuming that they were not fetched from any great distances, there is a question of whether Tintagel was on the Land's End road or on a branch from it. In one case the road would probably go round the north of Dartmoor and of Bodmin Moor, and in the other it would keep south of them. The southern line seems more likely for a road from Exeter to Land's End; but it implies a

branch road to Tintagel, and there was not much to tempt the Romans there. No doubt, Tintagel was a strong position; but it commanded nothing and could only be a base for a retreating force, not a base for an invading force, as there was no sufficient harbour. Possibly some Britons stood out against the Romans there, and thus gave it importance.

There is a road from Exeter to Teignbridge that would lead on round the south of Dartmoor, and parts of this are marked upon the Ordnance map as Roman Road. I do not myself know of any clear proof that it was Roman, or that Teignbridge was Roman either. The present bridge was built in 1815; and underneath the old bridge there were the remains of an older bridge, built of red sandstone, and underneath this the remains of a still older bridge, built of fine white freestone, but there were not any Roman bricks or other things to show conclusively that it was Roman. However that may be, the bridge itself and those pieces of the road from Exeter are on a line that would just suit the Roman road to Land's End.

There was a bridge there in 1086 at any rate: it comes into Domesday as Taignebrige or Tanebrige. It is six or seven miles from here, below the confluence of the Teign and Bovey; and within a mile of here, above the confluence of the Bovey and Wrey, there is a bridge across the Bovey carrying wheeled traffic. This appears as Drakeford bridge in documents, but is known to everyone as New bridge. And there is an inscription on it, showing how very new it is —“This bridg was repaired 1684.” Some other bridges in this district were ‘repared’ soon after this, and these all take traffic on wheels.

There really must have been wheeled traffic hereabouts long before the memory of the oldest folk I ever knew. When they said that they remembered the first cart, I think they must have meant the first cart used for farm-work on the fields. And in the passage I have quoted, Moore only says that a pair of wheels was scarcely to be seen on a farm in the county, not, scarcely to be seen on the roads. But so long as farmers used pack-saddles on their fields, they would use them on the roads as well; and in an agricultural district there would not be much other traffic.

The ancient Britons had wagons of some sort in this part of England long before the Romans came here. They used them for bringing down the ingots from the tin mines to the coast, though these ingots went on pack-horses across France to Marseilles. In narrating this, Diodoros says (v. 22) that the ingots were cast in the shape of an astragalos; and an ingot of about that shape was found in Falmouth harbour, and is now in the Museum at Truro. It would hook on to a pack-saddle, and it weighs about 160 lbs., so that a pair would make a load.

A century ago a tramway was laid down for bringing granite from the Haytor quarries to the head of the Teigngrace canal, where the granite was transferred to barges and went on to Teignmouth to be shipped. The quarries are about 1200 feet above the head of the canal, and the distance is about six miles in a straight line: so the tramway goes winding round upon an easier gradient, and thus comes within two miles of here. The lines are formed of granite slabs of no fixed size, but usually four or five feet long and one to two feet wide; and they are put down

lengthways, with nothing in between them to impede the horses. Each slab has a level surface, about six inches wide, as a track for the wheels, and an upright surface, two or three inches high, to prevent their running off the track; but the remainder of the slab is rough. The gauge is fifty inches between the out-sides of the upright surfaces, and therefore fifty inches between the in-sides of the wheels. This tramway was completed in 1820, and carried down granite for London Bridge, the British Museum, the General Post Office, and other buildings of that time. But it was abandoned when the quarries failed, and now its slabs are used for building or broken up for mending roads.

The great roads over Dartmoor were not completed until about 150 years ago. One of them runs north-eastward from Plymouth to Moreton, and so to Exeter and London, and the other runs south-eastward from Tavistock to Ashburton. They cross each other at Two Bridges in the middle of the moor, and at some points they are nearly 1500 feet above the level of the sea. About three miles out from Moreton on the Plymouth road there is a road from Ashburton to Chagford; and at the crossing of these roads the highwaymen were hanged in chains, when caught. At least, my father and my grandfather both told me so; and such things might have happened even in my father's time, as hanging in chains was not abolished until 1834.

In the old days of practical joking it was one of the stock jokes to go out to some cross-road in the middle of the night, dig up the sign-post, turn it round a right-angle, and fix it down again with its arms all pointing the wrong way. There were two men whom I remember very well—old

friends of my father's—and he told me that these two did this on Dartmoor several times, usually in snowstorms, as the snow soon covered up all traces of their work. But he thought the best part of the joke was in their going out on the bleak moorland in the snow to do a thing like that.

It certainly was no joke riding out at night with a pair of lanterns fixed on underneath your stirrups to guide you in the dark. But travelling by coach was not so very much better. In his diary down here, Friday 5 February 1836, my father notes—“snow up the country, so that the Tuesday coaches could not come in until Thursday.” Writing to him from London after a journey up, 7 April 1839, an old friend of his exclaims—“Oh that Salisbury Plain, thirty-five miles of a wet windy night outside a coach, by god, sir, 'tis no joke.” The same friend writes to him from Sidmouth, 11 January 1841, after coming from Southampton to Honiton by coach—“We had six horses nearly all the way, and soon after passing Ringwood (I believe it was) our road was covered with and cut thro' snow which was at least four feet deep on each side.... We got capsized into a high bank on descending one hill, but it was managed so very quietly that we were not thrown off and were able to dismount quietly and get the coach properly on her legs again.”

On the London and Exeter coaches the tips came to about a quarter of the fare: one to the guard, three to the drivers—drivers being changed at the supper and breakfast stops—and two to the ostlers at each end. On the 14 July 1839 my father writes to my grandfather that railway fares are comparatively low and no 'fees,' that is, tips: also that the 'first rate' carriages are good.

My father notes in his diary, 3 May 1840—"Yesterday in London I could scarcely get credited when I said that twenty-four hours previously I was in Brussels. Having steam the whole way, it is a very quick journey." He left Brussels by rail at 4.15, reached Ostend at 9.0, left by steamer at midnight, and at 1.0 next afternoon "made fast at Tower Stairs."

Crossing by Dover and Calais in 1843, he writes on 15 July—"Started at 4.0 by the new railway from London Bridge to Folkestone, arriving at the latter at $\frac{1}{2}$ p. 8: coaches waiting to take on to Dover. They were more than an hour in loading and getting the passengers. Reached Dover at $\frac{1}{2}$ p. 10." Next morning, "the tide being low, the English mail steamer had left the harbour and was riding at anchor in the roadstead, waiting for the mail. I put out in a boat at 6, but it was more than $\frac{1}{2}$ p. 7 before we started, the letter bags being only that instant sent on board. We arrived off Calais at $\frac{1}{2}$ p. 10; but, the tide being low, the steamer anchored in the roads, and the passengers were landed in the boats which took the mail bags." Returning on 13 October, he found the tide high but the sea rough, and the crossing took close upon four hours: then, coach to Folkestone, and on to London by the train.

A friend writes to him from Exeter, 8 April 1844—"Our railway will be sufficiently complete for an engine to travel here tomorrow, and I suppose will be completed about the first week in May." It was opened on 1 May, and another friend writes on 17 September—"From Bristol to Exeter we experienced the shaking of the carriages exceedingly, and were really obliged, as I have before said, to hold by the

side of the carriage to endeavour to steady ourselves.” Yet this line was on the broad gauge, and that was much less jerky than the narrow. I remember people saying that they would never go up by the South Western, as the Great Western shook them less.

My grandmother writes to my father, 13 September 1845 —“When in Exeter four weeks since, I went to see the trains go off for London: the first time of my seeing anything of the kind.” My grandfather writes to him, 16 May 1852—“I hope we shall have a fine day, as your mother never was at Torquay, and I not for near thirty years.” He was sixty-three then, and she was seventy. Torquay is fifteen miles from here, and neither of them had ever lived more than thirty miles away.

Such immobility seemed strange to me not many years ago, but now I have come down to it myself. I have not been out of Devon since 1914, or rather, I have not been out of Devon ‘ceptin’ Axter town, as people used to say. Henry the Eighth took Exeter out of Devon and made it a county by itself. In old conveyances of land in Devon, e.g. of part of Lower Wreyland in 1728, the covenant for Further Assurance often has the words “so as for the doing thereof the persons comprehended within this covenant be not compelled or compellable to travel out of the county of Devon unless it be to the citie of Exon.”

When my grandfather went anywhere, it was to London or abroad. Like everybody else, he went up for the Great Exhibition and thoroughly enjoyed it, but he had grave doubts beforehand. He writes to my father, 3 April 1851—“I see both Houses of Parliament are rather uneasy about so

many foreigners being in London. They appear to be of the very worst stamp.... Hope all will go off well, but to my mind an ill-judged thing and not likely to answer any good purpose, this Great Exhibition." There was plenty of such talk just then, and some little reason for it. England was sheltering a good many foreigners who had rebelled against their governments in 1848, and some of these foreigners had a notion of paying for their shelter by organising a rebellion here, beginning with assassinations at the opening of the Exhibition on May Day. With the wisdom that comes after the event, *Punch* made fun of it, 10 May, but was not so very sure of it three weeks before.

As a small boy I read *Punch* diligently, and thereby stocked my memory with facts that history-books ignore. My brother had read it more diligently still; but my grandfather did not see the value of it, though my father did. In a letter of 12 June 1853 my grandfather explains—"My object in giving him the Bible was to get rid of *Punch* out of his head. *Punch* may be well enough for grown people, but surely very improper as a foundation for a young child." But he found that a young child asked more embarrassing questions after studying the Bible than after studying *Punch*.

In a letter of 17 July 1852 he mentions that my sister had just received a present of a doll "nicely dressed in the Bloomer fashion," that is, short skirts with trousers underneath, and other male things to match. Without those caricatures of it in *Punch* few people now would know what Bloomerism was.

Somebody made me a present of an air-ball when I was very young. This was at a house near town; and, as the

drawing-room was empty, I took it in there, and was playing with it on the hearth-rug, when a draught caught it away from me and carried it up the chimney. I went out to watch the chimney-top, but was very soon fetched in again to be introduced to some old ladies who had come to call. They found the room a little draughty, so a door was shut, and thereupon the air-ball came down from the chimney, with a layer of soot all over it. It alighted on the hearth-rug, rose again, and made a series of jumps, each lower and shorter than the last, but all in a straight line towards one of those old ladies. I was just reckoning that two more jumps would land it in her lap, when she gave a shriek, upset her chair, and retreated backwards to the draughty door, forgetting that it had been shut. And she came up against the door so hard that she sat down upon the floor, with that little black devil still jumping on towards her.

Another old lady whom we knew, had heaps of very nice lace; and she wore dresses that would make the most of it. Seated in a bergère chair before her drawing-room fire, she was a sight to see. One day she was not in her accustomed place, and she told us what had happened. Her next-door neighbours had not had their kitchen-chimney swept, and it caught fire most alarmingly. It was next to her drawing-room chimney; and in the clouds of smoke the firemen mistook the two, and poured their buckets down hers. A torrent of sooty water burst forth from the fire-place and overwhelmed her in her chair.

I never saw the chimney-sweeping boys go up the chimneys here, though my brother had seen them going up; but he was here a great deal more than I was. There was

never any difficulty or danger in going up the chimneys here, as they are big enough for full-grown men: when the Hall House was being renovated seven years ago, some passers-by were much surprised by a mason putting his head out of a chimney-top and asking them to take a message to the village for him. The chimneys are built of unsquared stones held together by cement: the modern sweeping-brushes often bring down bits of the cement, leaving crannies that fill up with soot: some day the soot bursts into flame, and sets fire to the woodwork near the chimney; and that is why so many old houses have been burnt in recent years.

Writing from here on 3 February 1845, my grandfather tells my father that "Mr ***** came on Saturday, his two little dogs with him, which so worried little Gracey that she ran under the clock, and on the dogs approaching, she ran up the chain as far as she works and stopped the clock." (When the mouse ran up the clock, it probably went up the chain, as Gracey did, not up outside the case, as shown in certain picture-books.) "On taking away the dogs, I opened the door of the clock, and she jumped out and away and would not come near the house for some time." It was a 'grandfather' clock, and Gracey was a cat. There was always a cat called Gracey here. My brother made a pedigree of Gracies, showing the descent in female line with the collateral branches; and this 'little' Gracey comes in there as 'Peter's niece.'

My sister writes to my grandmother, 29 January 1851, "Brother Henry and I went to a party on Tuesday evening. We danced and saw a magic lantern, and there was a

German tree, and many nice things to eat. We enjoyed it all very much, and did not get ill after it." At that date a Christmas tree was still a novelty, and was called a German tree, as the fashion came from Germany.

Christmas also brought snapdragons; and, after seeing the Blue Grotto at Capri, my brother described it as "a large hollow in one of the cliffs, with about a quarter of an acre of water of the colour of a snapdragon fire." And that, I think, is really quite a good description of it, though I have never seen it described in similar terms elsewhere.

There were immense plum puddings here at Christmas and also on all birthdays. My grandfather usually mentions them in his letters to my father. Thus, 26 December 1858, "The men were here yesterday: goose and plum pudding as usual. Bob had the key of the cider cellar and was butler; so, depend on it, there was no lack of cider. However, they all left in good order." Again, 4 January 1846, "They were invited in yesterday on a famous piece of roasted pork and plum pudding, and drank the little creature's good health. I believe they would be glad if Baby's birthday came every month." And again, 3 January 1869, "Plum puddings have followed pretty quick of late, but there will be a cessation till April, if my life is spared till that time: if not, of course, no pudding."

My grandfather writes to my father, 18 March 1844, "I remember going to see old ***** of Crediton about some business, and was sitting down by the fire talking with him, when a great coarse country maid came in and disturbed us. The old man was quite in a rage to see the maid tumbling everything over, and asked what she wanted. She