



NEWSLETTER

MAY 2006

The Queen's College of Guyana Association (UK)

(Registered Charity No. 801250)

No. 33

ANNUAL SUMMER REUNION: GARDEN PARTY—BARBECUE—DISCO

at St John's Nature Garden, 386 Clapham Road SW9

Sunday 16th July, 2 to 9 pm

Adults £15, Children £6 (over 6 to under 12)

Details of ticket sellers are given in the flyer (mailed separately)

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The results of the election to the Management Committee were reported in the previous *Newsletter* (No. 32, Dec 2005). At the first MC meeting, held on 23rd November last, the following appointments were agreed: **Ian Wishart** (re-appointed) Chairman, ('Friend' member) **Claire Carballo** Secretary, and **Praveen Hanoman** Treasurer. **Peter Fraser**, **Bruce Nóbrega** and **Lawrence Stewart** were co-opted. Committee contact details are given on the back page.

SALVETE

We welcome as a new *Life Member* Dr **David D Dabydeen** (QC 1967–9). A well-known author and poet, David is Professor of Literature at Warwick University.

VALETE

E H E ('Sonny') Barrow (QC 1922–4), *Member*, *d.* 9.3.06. **Oswald ('Ossie') Henry** (QC 1963–77), *d.* 2.4.06 in Regina, Canada. **C E ('Charlie') Lee-Ting** (QC 1949–55), *Life Member*, *b.* 21.11.37, *d.* 24.2.06; *Carmen Collegii Reginae* was sung by his fellow old boys at his funeral service on 7.3.06. **Alan John Lewis** (QC 1953–60), *d.* 11.5.2006 in Guyana (cousin of QCOSA President Laurie Lewis). **William Rutherford Alexander (Billy) Pilgrim** (QC 1930s), son of E O 'Bogus' Pilgrim, *b.* 27.8.1920, *d.* 17.4.06 in Guyana. **Maurice Yong** (QC late 50s/early 60s), *d.* March 06 in Guyana.

To the bereaved relatives, the Association extends its sincerest condolences.

The Association also extends its sympathy to the families of the late: Mrs **Irene Veronica Chunnillall** (née **Salamalay**), teacher at St Winifred's Primary School, subsequently in charge of the children's section (becoming Deputy Librarian) of the Georgetown Public Library to 1959 (during which time the library was opened to all children, having been previously restricted to pupils of certain schools), widow of former QC maths master, and mother of *Life Member* and former Secretary of the Association Dr Christopher Chunnillall, *d.* 23.3.06 in England; **Leslie Outram**, a Guyanese formerly with the Colonial Police Service, father of *Friend Life Member* Mrs Helen Nedham, *d.* 1.5.06 in Spain; Mrs **E (Waveney) Wharton**, for many years supplier of black pudding and other goodies for the Association's annual garden party, *d.* 20.12.05.

THANK YOU

Members **John Dodshon** and **Leila Persaud**, and Life Member **David Pollard** are thanked for their kind donations to the Association's funds.

FROM THE ARCHIVES (Newsletter No 5, June 1991)

I REMEMBER

by (VP and past President) **Lloyd Bascom**

Bernard, God rest his soul, was brave. He was also the comedian of the thirties at QC.

Old Queen's, in Brickdam, was separated from the Alms House [as The Palms was known in those politically incorrect days] by an alley with greenheart bollards at both ends to prevent the passage of vehicles through it. However, with some cycling skill, it was still possible to ride through the alley. The secret was to ride full tilt, and lift the handlebars just as you approached the bollards so that you were riding on the rear wheel only. You had to keep dead straight to ensure that the pedals were also clear of the bollards; the clearance was two inches.

I dared Bernard to do this, and he turned full speed into the attack, whooping as he sailed through the bollards at the Brickdam end of the alley. Full of confidence, he now headed for the Hadfield Street end where the bollards were slightly closer together. Unfortunately he mistimed it slightly and ended up in the gutter clutching the left half of the handlebar, while I searched for the left pedal.

Next day, imagine the sight as Bernard proceeded to College riding along Brickdam in the early morning sun. There was this strong, fourteen year-old boy astride half a bicycle, head held high like Mussolini, 'bug house' at a crazy angle, left leg trailing, right leg pedalling furiously, and, as a bit of finesse, the free left arm akimbo.

But alas, 'moon run till day catch um'. 'Nobby' beheld this apparition, and Bernard was summoned for some cautionary advice – six of the best!

HISTORY CORNER

THE PORK-KNOCKER

by **Vincent Roth**

(From *Roth's Pepper-Pot* published by The Daily Chronicle, 1958)

Few visitors to the Museum [then situated on the top floor of the Carnegie Building now entirely taken over by the Public Library] must have failed to notice and, if they be old bushmen, to chuckle at the life-size effigy of the pork-knocker in the Hall of Geology and Mining.

There he stands gripping his worn old pipe between his gold-filled teeth, his warishi, or basket knapsack, containing his hammock, sleeping clothes and food, slung over his shoulder together with the tools of his trade: pick, shovel and mattock; stuck in his belt, his cooking and eating implements; on his head, over his old felt hat or 'lime-skin', his batelle or gold pan. Carried thus, the metal protects his head from falling greenheart or mora seeds. In his hand grips his trusty cutlass, both weapon and tool.

The cotton band tied below the knee is rarely seen nowadays, but the old-time pork-knockers regarded this as a necessary part of their equipment. Made from native cotton, the band was worn either as a guard against rheumatism or/and to ensure good fortune, and was possibly adopted from similar use by the Amerindians as 'beenas' or charms. Recently, a visiting student from Ghana was greatly amused and interested when he saw the cotton band as, he remarked, his people still used it in West Africa for similar purposes.

The pork-knocker of British Guiana is the alluvial prospector and miner. A rugged individualist, he has been responsible for the majority of the great discoveries of gold and diamonds in the interior.

The authentic origin of the term 'pork-knocker' cannot now be traced with certainty, but the following explanations of local root are given:

- (a) the habit of knocking on the counter of the shop from which he obtains his supplies, for his ration of pork;
- (b) a corruption of *port-knocker*, a man who knocks about from port to port;
- (c) a corruption of *poke-knocker*, derived from 'poking' and 'knocking about' when prospecting for gold;
- (d) salt pork being his most expensive food item, he was chary in its use and always kept it tied to a piece of string, so that when his rice was finished cooking and had imbibed the flavour of the pork, he would pull the piece of pork out and knock it on the side of the pot to shake off any adhering rice grains, and put it back in his ration box for future use.

[Allsopp's *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* suggests *knocker* meant a prompt eater, hence a hungry eater of pickled/salted pork. Also, the pork was usually the meat of the bush hog or peccary.]

Pork-knockers are of many races, but the Negro has proved the hardiest, the majority of East Indian and other races being seldom robust enough to withstand the hardships and rough life of the diamond and gold fields.

Of course there were exceptions. Two Bovianders – mixtures of Negro and Amerindian – spent seven whole years prospecting the length of the Puruni River, during which time they subsisted on mouldy cassava bread and fish they caught. At length they struck it rich and made a fortune, which they speedily lost by the acquisition of the Bartica Hotel which they attempted to run themselves.

Another pork-knocker appeared one day at the Gold Office at Towakaima, staggering under a kerosene tin almost full of gold which he had found at some unspecified spot on the upper Barama. Having deposited his gold with the Sub-Warden, he set out to return for more, but was never seen again alive, his drowned and bloated body being found a week or so later by some Amerindians.

Then there was the pork-knocker at Five Stars on the Baraima who, lying in his hammock one moonlight night, remarked to his partner that he wished he could find a piece of gold as big as the moon. Next morning he found a crescent-shaped nugget weighing 222 ounces, the record nugget for British Guiana.

Not to be forgotten is the famous telegraphic message sent to his lady love by Ocean Shark, the bully of the bush and all-time toughest of pork-knockers. Arriving one day at Bartica from up river with a poke full of gold, he swaggered into the Post Office and delivered himself thus: "Hi Mista Postmasta. Knack de bakra wire* fo' me. Put um say: Ocean Shark to Angel Baby, Buxton. Expec' me dagmatically tamarra steama. Go Mista Booka order carriage, footman an' lap (-dog). Tell schoolmasta loose children one a'clack. Passin' through village four a'clack. No 'spansible who kill. If got no money, borrow – gold in abundance."

[*'Bakra' = white person. Telegraphic messages were sent in Morse code, hence 'knock the wire'. In Vincent Roth – *A Life in Guyana* (see review, p. 5) Roth relates that Angel Baby was one Matilda Dublin, 'proprietrix of a hostelry of questionable repute in Georgetown'. He also relates that Ocean Shark finally got his come-uppance (whether by curare-tipped arrows, we are not told) at the hands of two Macusi Indians whose mother and sisters he had raped.]

'THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS ...'

The disturbing, first-hand report that follows was written by the wife of a Guyanese from a well-known Portuguese family. Names have been changed. The scene is Florida 2005.

We for the past five years have lived next door to what can only be described as a very odd, evil, disturbed ex-marine who has made our lives miserable. Since we have had David the situation has been getting steadily worse, and basically most of the yard has been off limits for David and our pets.

The police have been called out on numerous occasions due to the neighbour: shooting out a window on our vehicle with a ball-bearing fired from a catapult, yelling and screaming at us for employing a nigger to help us do yard-work, telling me to make sure that I did not end up finding my baby in a dumpster, showing the local kids the gun he kept in his waistband, shooting doves off the telephone wire so that they landed at our feet as we passed by.

So, as you can see, he was a very sick person, but unfortunately the police were unable to do anything about him until he physically hurt someone,[!] so for the past couple of months Marvin the crazy neighbour had been escalating his taunts and jibes.

He would post notes on our fence: stupid things like how the US is wiping the arses of the British. [Kind of them, I thought it was the other way round – *Ed*]. [Husband] Bruce in all this time has kept his cool and informed the police of the situation, and generally let them know of our concerns just so that there was some sort of paper trail. Anyway, it's Friday, and we are due to leave next day on vacation. Bruce comes home from work, and I ask him if he can take David and the dog for a walk whilst I go to get a few last bits and pieces. We go to get a stroller from the back of the car, and find that Marvin has left another note on the fence. It says: 'OK bwana Guyana under water ha ha'.

We pay it no mind, and I go off. I come back 30 minutes later, and as I turn into the street I see flashing lights and the street cordoned off. I know instantly that whatever has occurred has Bruce and Marvin involved in it.

As I pull up to a police officer I am crying and asking what is going on, but he just keeps telling me that I cannot go down that street because they have a situation in progress. Finally I make him understand that it is my little yellow house where all those policemen have their guns drawn, and please tell me about my husband and son. He was unable to tell me a thing.

Now I am frantic when I see the the young man from the upstairs apartment heading my way. He is able to tell me that he has witnessed the whole incident and that, thank God, Bruce and David are ok. He also has a phone, and I manage to talk to Bruce who is briefly allowed out on the front porch where I can see him and David; they are ok. I am still way down the road, and all my neighbours who live directly behind us or within four houses of us are being evacuated.

I later found out what took place once I left for the supermarket.

Bruce took David and the dog down the alley where he came across Marvin putting up another note, so he went over and tore it up and threw it over the fence. At this point Marvin made some kind of comment and spat in Bruce's face.

Over the years Bruce had always turned the other cheek, but today he couldn't and he let go with a right hook. There followed a huge fight with lots of punching and kicking, and basically Bruce was getting the upper hand. Marvin apparently said ok we're good now, let's go.

Bruce wheels David into the yard and sees that the kids from over the road have witnessed it all and have called the police, as has Donald from the upstairs apartment. Then he sees Marvin come into the yard, so Bruce heads over that way, upon which Marvin pulls out a gun and shoots twice at Bruce, with David sitting

in his stroller ten feet away. Thank God Bruce danced backwards and was not hit, at which point Marvin goes back to his own yard. Bruce turns back to find the police have arrived. They wrestle him to the ground because they don't know if he is the shooter, but at that moment Marvin lets off two more rounds, and the police officer bundles Bruce and David into the house.

It is now considered that he has fired shots at the police, and it is no longer a neighbour dispute. This is where I came along. After ten minutes they allow Bruce to leave with David, and evacuate to the end of the block. Marvin has barricaded himself in his home and refuses police requests to come out. Two hours pass, and I am then allowed to leave the area to try and find my boys. I find David in the arms of a girl from across the street; he is fine, thirsty and hungry and oblivious of the situation. I am of course so happy to see his little face. Bruce is down the street helping the police by describing the layout of Marvin's house and yard.

Our house becomes an observation post where they can look into Marvin's dining room from our bedroom. So the Swat team is called in: snipers, negotiators, the whole nine yards. In the meantime I have taken David to a friend's house to get some food and rest. They have the local news on, and finally and sadly, after four hours, Marvin comes out into his yard and then into the alley with two handguns and a shotgun blazing indiscriminately, but then shoots at one of the snipers, whereupon the police fire back with two shots, killing him dead.

So it was finally over, and although I had wished him dead on many occasions, it was just so sad for him to have gone that way. He had apparently written a note to his wife saying 'I will go down fighting'.

So Bruce had to go down to the police station to give a sworn statement for the state attorney. He got home at 2.30 am, and we caught a couple of hours sleep before leaving for the airport.

BELATED BOOK REVIEW

***VINCENT ROTH – A LIFE IN GUYANA:
VOL 1 – A YOUNG MAN'S JOURNEY, 1889–1923
VOLUME 2 – THE LATER YEARS, 1923–1935***

Edited by Michael Bennett
[Peepal Tree Press, London, 2003]

Vincent Roth arrived in Guyana from his native Australia in 1907, an eighteen year old accompanying his father Walter who had accepted the post of Medical Officer and Magistrate in the Pomeroon. (Walter had been Protector of the Aborigines in North Queensland. He is remembered in Guyana as the person who laid the foundations of research into the anthropological and archaeological aspects of Amerindian life – the Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology, next to State House in Main Street, is named in his honour.)

After a brief foray into journalism, Vincent became a surveyor with the Lands & Mines Department, his duties subsequently expanding to include those of magistrate and sub-protector of Amerindians. He spent 30 years in the interior, until a second bout of blackwater fever very nearly killed him, thereafter contributing immensely to the development of Guyana as a journalist, naturalist, historian, rebuilders of the national museum (following the 1945 fire) and founder of the zoo in the Botanical Gardens. As the late Lloyd Searwar writes in the Foreword: 'At a time when creative writers such as A J Seymour and later Martin Carter were deepening the awareness of the Guyanese people of their country, Vincent Roth through his writings made them conscious of their vast hinterland, ... rich with history and resources.'

From an early age Vincent kept a detailed account of his experiences, and it was from these handwritten journals, edited by his son-in-law Michael Bennett, that this book was compiled. (Michael, an English engineer, married Vincent's second daughter Audrey – a BHS old girl – when he worked for the Public Works Department in Guyana in the late 50s–early 60s. Audrey told me that unedited the book would probably have run into four volumes!)

The first volume covers his early years as a child abandoned to relatives (Vincent's mother had died when he was ten months) in Switzerland, France, Scotland and London, his return to Australia to join his father and step-mother at the age of twelve, his arrival in Guyana, and his first fifteen years in the interior. Blessed with insatiable curiosity and a capacious and exacting memory, Vincent writes vividly of surveying expeditions up the Demerara River, in the North West District and in other areas in the interior. There are gripping descriptions of the hazards of river travel and fascinating accounts of the people of the interior: Amerindians, pork-knockers, balata bleeders, farmers and smugglers. Culture shock was an entirely alien concept to this man, either because of his early upbringing or because sociologists had not yet invented the term. He eats his labba, pepper-pot and cassava bread and drinks cassiri.

In this volume Vincent grows from callow youth to energetic and opinionated manhood, constantly getting under the skin of petty-minded colonial officials – and developing a deep, though sometimes exasperated, love for Guyana.

The second volume covers the years from late 1923 until his retirement from the interior in 1935. There are vivid accounts of Saturday night festivities which brought him into a world far from the proprieties of colonial Georgetown. Vincent was equally at home among the prospectors and the 'women of the fields' as he was having lunch or tea with the governor (Sir Edward Denham was fascinated by Vincent's experiences of life in the interior).

The book ends with a short epilogue written by Michael Bennett which takes the reader beyond the days of Vincent's journal to chronicle the contribution he made to Guyana.

This book is highly recommended.

Ian Wishart (with cribs from the book's publicity blurb)

[*A Life in Guyana* is obtainable in softback from Peepal Tree Press, 17 King's Avenue, Leeds LS6 1QS, tel: (0)113 245 1703, email: hannah@peepaltreepress.com, website: www.peepaltreepress.com.

Price £12.99 for each volume, p&p extra. **Royalties from sales will be donated to charities in Guyana.** The reviewer has put together some explanatory notes and a glossary of terms, obtainable electronically from wishartian1@yahoo.co.uk.]

QC WEBSITES (all prefaced www.)

queenscollege.org (Board of Governors);

qcosa.org (Old Students' Assoc, Guyana);

qcalumnifl.org (Florida Assoc);

qcguyana.org (New York Assoc);

qcalumitoronto.org

VISIT: DALGETY'S TEAS & HERBS www.dalgety.net.

QC masters 1929 and 1932



1929: Standing: H V Taitt, C I Drayton, J H Bevis, J C LaT Potter, Brownrigg, C A Savage, Chunnilall
Seated: F Daniel, E O Pilgrim, H A M Beckles



1932: Standing: Chunnilall, J N Chung, W W L Jones, J H Bevis, R V G Walker, C I Drayton
Seated: J C LaT Potter, H Nobbs, H A M Beckles, H V Taitt

DIARY DATES

- 18 JUNE BHS Association Mad Hatter's Tea Party (contact Claire Carballo – see Committee Contacts below)
- 8 JULY BHS Association day coach trip to Statford-upon-Avon (contact Claire Carballo)
- 16 JULY QCA SUMMER REUNION (see under masthead, and separate flyer)**
- 27 AUGUST QCA–BHSA CARNIVAL FÊTE at The Excelsior Club, 191–195 Balham High Rd SW12, 9 pm–3 am, disco by DJ Sherwin; £10**
- 2 SEPT St Rose's Alumni annual lunch, Vincent House, W2 (near Notting Hill Gate, contact Pam Walters, 01787 227316)
- 21 OCT QCA–BHSA DINNER-DANCE, New Connaught Rooms, 61–65 Great Queen St, WC2, 7.30 pm–3 am, £50 (inclusive of wine with dinner); disco by GT Promotion; black tie (optional)**
- 10 NOV QCA AGM & Social (£10), High Commission, 6.30 pm**
- 8 DEC QCA Annual Dinner, New Loon Fung Restaurant, 42–43 Gerrard St, W1, likely price £25.**

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