

Festivals, Carnivals and Celebrations and Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

December, 2023.

An elderly lady, well not quite a lady, but neither an old woman occupied a chair in the upstairs dining room of the “Cornwallis” in St. Martin’s Lane, Great Aunt Roberta was studying the luncheon menu. Dressed in black and a black hat, her coat placed on a chair next to her and with just a little white blouse showing at her neck and cuffs, she had only a short walk to Trafalgar Square where she planned to go after luncheon. Although it was early November, actually the 13th November, the weather was surprisingly mild for the time of year, and after selecting from the bill of fayre she pondered whether to visit the National Gallery or to walk in Green Park and St. James Park.



Great-aunt Roberta was not all she seemed, the visit to the “Cornwallis” was a special treat she had allowed herself. Whilst reasonably well dressed, her clothes had seen better days, and her speech betrayed her social standing, not an old woman but not quite an elderly lady. For her age, she was then in her sixty-fifth year, physically she appeared fit and strong. The youngest daughter of Albert and Isobella Ashbourne, she was born on the 15th September, 1822, always the wayward, headstrong and wilful child Roberta was

known for her evil temper tantrums and any amount of correction and punishment both physical and emotional made not the slightest bit of difference to her general aggressive attitude. Her grandfather, James Ashbourne had established the business of Carriage hire in 1790 and the following year married Isobella Jones, the daughter of a local farmer. The business prospered hiring light carriages to the gentlemen and their ladies visiting the Wye Valley, the then alternative to Continental travel which had become far too dangerous with the wholesale murder and general rape and pillage taking place across the English Channel following the total collapse of any form of law and order especially in France.

Unfortunately, on the 11th July, 1850, on what promised to be a warm summers day, Isobella set out to deliver a message to a customer of her husbands who lived just beyond Linton where the road climbed up from the ridge towards Upton Bishop. It was a long walk, but the sky was bright blue with large puffy white clouds, and nothing seemed likely to spoil the pleasant afternoon stroll along the country lanes, not even the sound of a locomotive's steam whistle to disturb the stillness. Having delivered the message and parcel and making her way home along Linton Ridge the sky suddenly clouded over and rain descended from the heavens in torrents. Dressed in a light cotton summer dress with a poke bonnet also of cotton she was very quickly completely soaked, and it was a few miles yet to walk home. She eventually arrived wet through and retired to rest. That night Isobella was feverish, and the severe cold did not abate the following morning but became far worse. Dr. Bumble was called, a rotund little man with bald pate, tall black coat, yellow waistcoat and blue breeches, fashionable a good thirty years earlier as befitted his rather advanced age. The fever did not leave her but developed into pneumonia of such severity that Isobella died on the third day.

The family tragedy could hardly have been greater and with the death of his beloved wife Albert was struck down with inconsolable grief. Isobella was only forty-seven years of age, not young, but being healthy whilst her petite figure concealed a hidden strength was expected to live for many years. She had born Albert six children, but only three had survived, Roberta, Jane, and William, and of these Jane died in 1851 of childbirth after eleven months of marriage. At the time of their mother's demise Roberta, the eldest was twenty-eight years of age, but had quite literally gone, vanished. William was then fourteen years of age, and attending the British and Foreign School in Ross, whilst his younger sister Jane had just attained her eighteen birthday and married two months previously. For the business to survive William had to conclude schooling and assist his father.

Roberta, the awkward child who constantly quarrelled with her parents, but mainly her mother: at the age of fifteen their father had taken the whole family to Gloucester in a wagonette, and although only fifteen miles, was a journey of some three hours before the advent of the railway. Whilst there they visited the cathedral and marvelled at the soaring columns supporting the roof, the tomb of King Edward II and the ancient cloisters, Roberta sulked. After dining at the "King's Head" Albert took them to visit the docks. It was here that Roberta vanished. One moment she was there and the next gone. Afterwards William said he thought he saw her talking in a very friendly way with one of the sailors, but nothing more.

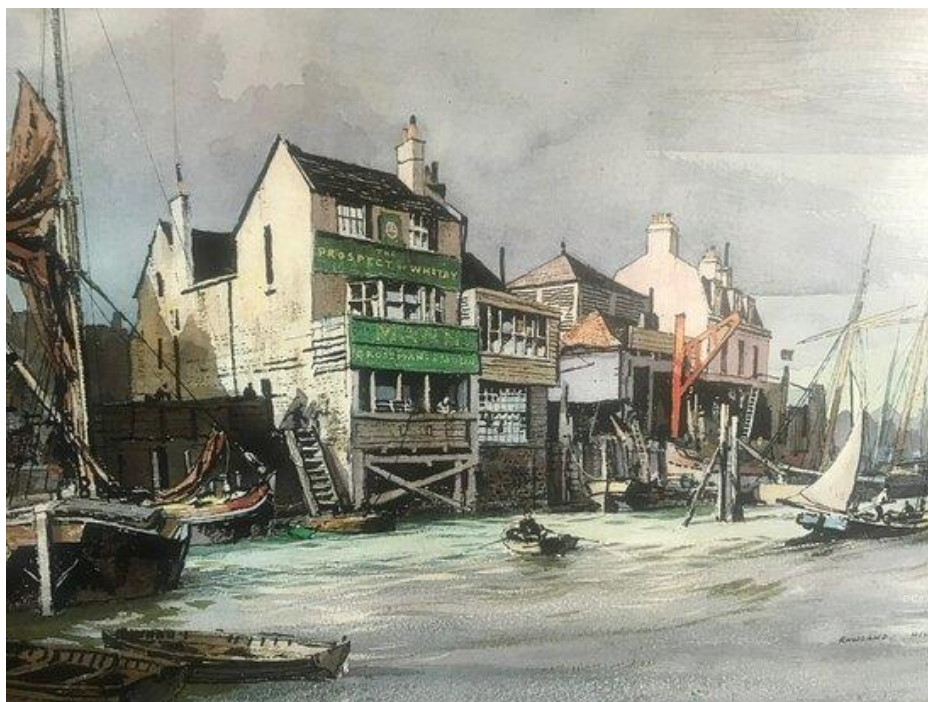
Jack McGregor had indeed made friendly overtures to Roberta who had slipped behind a stack of packing cases and crates and was thus concealed from view. Jack, a deck hand on the "Silver Cloud" was busy entertaining Roberta with stories of the exciting places the ship had called at, San Sebastian, Vera Cruz, Cape Town, Bombay and many more, to Roberta who had spent the whole of her life so far in and around Ross on the river Wye, this was exciting beyond belief. She quickly imagined herself sailing the oceans with Jack at the helm of one of the splendid ships in the dock and be done with boring farm hands. No more rude ploughboys, strong in the arm and thick in the head. One day Jack would have his own ship, a three masted fully rigged ship with billowing white sails sweeping across the seas, and Jack was not slow at encouraging such romantic notions of life at sea.

When questioned much later Roberta could or preferred not to remember anything of what occurred the day she met Jack McGregor. Realising that if he was to enjoy her company,

and desirably herself he would have to act fast and take her somewhere secluded. He chose a public house in a very undesirable part of Gloucester, secured a private chamber on the second floor, and gave the publican a half sovereign both for the room and his compliance, whilst collecting a bottle of champagne and another of cognac on the way as the pair mounted the stairs. Roberta's appearance did not match her personality, certainly as her family knew her, but to her beau she was charm, loving sweetness, and beauty itself. Inspired by Jack's easy-going manner and stories of colourful foreign countries, and daring deeds on the rolling deep she gave herself to him willingly, forgetting her mother's advice about how a girl could not be too careful. In that none too clean a chamber with worn drugget on the floor covering the rough floorboards Jack undressed his willing angel revealing her perfect white flesh, blue eyes and pure blond hair crowning her head whilst from the lower part of her flat belly and between the top of her legs there was a wisp of blond hair so fine as to be almost invisible. Roberta's surrender was as complete as it was enthusiastic perfectly matching the ardour of Jack's desire, doubtless encouraged by the bottle of champagne the pair had consumed on arrival in the chamber.

Long after darkness had descended on Gloucester Jack awoke and perceiving Roberta lying naked at his side, he drew the covers over her, not to cover her delightful form but to avoid her catching cold. Early morning she dressed in a daze and allowed herself to be conducted from the Public House, via deserted streets to where a group of wagons were parked awaiting departure at first light. Negotiating with a friendly waggoneer bound for Bristol, the pair clambered in and made themselves as comfortable as possible under a pile of sacks. Years later Jack would wonder why he had gone to so much trouble, he could have left her in the public, and rejoined the "Silver Cloud", but at the time she seemed too good to ignore, to his mind the "Venus of Gloucester" and the "Angel of all feminine earthly delight."

Conscious that he could be in trouble for abduction and believing it would be wisest to be as far away from Gloucester, where any search would be concentrated, as possible on arrival in Bristol, Jack arranged passage on a barge travelling on the Kennet and Avon Canal to London where he was sure Roberta would not be discovered. Initially Jack thought he could find lodgings for his pretty country lass and obtain employment on one of the many ships sailing from London. However, life is never so simple. Roberta would not suffer any such suggestion and he was hired as a barman by the "Prospect of Whitby", a rather run down haunt beside the Thames at Wapping, but amongst the seething mass of humanity that was the great metropolis they could both vanish.



The Prospect of Whitby at it may have looked when Jack worked there.

Jack obtained lodgings overlooking the Thames a little downstream of the “Prospect of Whitby” in a very dilapidated house, the lower floor of which had been converted to use as a warehouse, and it was here that their first child was born in 1839, a boy Roberta named Albert after her father. It was not long before tragedy struck, a combination of damp, mist and the foul stench from the river polluted by animal and human waste soon took their toll and baby Albert died before he reached his eighth week of age.

They moved away from the river, but number 36, Poplar Rents, a court development, with eight terraced buildings on three floors divided into twelve dwellings of one room each surrounding a central court in which stood a privy block, containing six booths with flimsy partitions and without running water the waste fell into a pit which was emptied periodically, the whole for ninety-six households: this was worse if anything than by the river.

There was a narrow entrance wide enough for a hand barrow, a cartway, under the properties along Cable Street in give access to Poplar Rents. Jack promised they would not be there for very long and that he had been offered a much better job as manager of the “Duke of Marlborough” and Roberta believed him. He introduced her to gin and little else. The stink from the privy was worse if anything than the river especially in the heat of summer, it was now mid-July, whilst without drainage, the filth flooded the area at times of heavy rainfall.

As can only be expected the couple argued constantly and both blamed each other for the predicament they were in and themselves for their stupidity. There was another baby on the way, but it would not survive, the little girl died before her first birthday. The managership at the “Marlborough” had lasted three weeks and one morning Jack was told on arrival that he would no longer be required. There was a smart cocky chap there whom Jack had not seen before, and who had clearly taken his place.

After the “Marlborough” Jack tried a variety of means of earning money, but either the bosses did not want him or there were no vacancies. The conditions at Poplar Rents were appalling, water and coal had to be carried up two flights of stairs, there was a rudimentary cooking range and just a bucket for washing. In summer without the cooking range in operation, which made the room far too hot, there was no means of heating water or cooking. Neither of them could stand the situation much longer. Roberta thought of her parent’s home in Herefordshire and Jack thought of life at sea. Being part Irish and part Scots, he was too inclined to flare up and his temper did not help with home life or improve his employment prospects. On the 28th October, 1842 Jack left as usual in the early morning and did not return. Unbeknown to Roberta he walked eastwards to the West India Dock and signed on as fourth officer on a clipper ship sailing for the South Australian port of Adalaide with a mixed cargo of manufactured goods, crockery, and linen. On the return voyage they would deliver a cargo of wool to Hull. The pay would be more than Jack could earn in two years as a day labourer in London, enough to move to much better accommodation, and live comfortably. He did not tell Roberta as he was sure she would object, but it was almost six months before he returned to London and Roberta had gone.

When Jack did not return to Popular Rents Roberta waited patiently at first, but after dark she became concerned, and the following morning made enquiries at the few charity hospitals without success. Most of the men avoided her, though they admired her physic, the women openly called her “stuck-up” and referred to her as “lady laa-di-dar”, although there was one exception, Mrs. Ruddles who lived at number 64. Her speech was not as sweet as Roberta, and Mrs R could swear with the best of them, but she was far more knowledgeable about the ways of the world, and at one time had worked in a good class shop, been employed as a parlour maid in Belgravia, and an under manageress in a Music Hall. One day passing Roberta in the yard and exchanging the usual friendly greeting, in answer to her enquiry regarding Jack, Roberta admitted that she did not expect to see him again. “Ai’nt none o’ my bis’nis I’s knows, but you wiv yer good looks an’ sweet voice,

yer cane ern righ' good money jus' as yer are, wiv none o' that 'ard work." Roberta was inclined to dismiss the woman for her impertinence, but something intrigued her: she desperately needed money, and money without hard work? She stopped to know more. In an inquisitive voice Roberta asked how it could be achieved. "Why lass, yous take yerself up town, them thear's is always lookin' ou' fer good lookers like you – course yer might git a nice gen'leman whats sweet on yer. Set yer up in one o' 'em pri'ee li'll 'ouses up west end – live like a proper lady then yer would, no more carryin' yer own coal." Roberta was shocked. "You mean I should sell myself, go on the game some of them call it, is that what you are suggesting I should do!"

"No ducks, nuffin like that, yous much be'er 'an them ol' slags. I meant tha' ther'er Britannia what's jus' opened in Hoxton 's advertisin' fer blond gels for the chorus. I've 'erd yer, I knos yer can do it. I've 'erd yer singin on good days. Hoxton ai'nt very far, an' you'll do well fer yerself. Go on luv give' it a go."

"Well, I don't know, I'll think it over." And with that the country lass retired to the rat-infested room she called home. However, thirty minutes later, after she had washed as best possible, and dressed in the best clothes she had she set off to walk the few miles to Hoxton, in search of the Britannia Theatre in the High Street. On arrival at the newly built theatre in a part of London which even then could not be considered desirable, with courage born out of adversity, matters could hardly get worse so devil may care, she marched into the theatre manager's office and announced she had come to take up the chorus girl position advertised.

"And why do you suppose I shall not have you thrown out." Was the managers response. Oh well, in for penny in for a pound thought Roberta as she replied, "Because I'm the best!"

"Really." Replied the manager with a quizzical expression. "Let me hear you perform before I have you evicted."

The girl from Herefordshire casually, although she felt far from casual, picked up a leaf of sheet music, and, unaccompanied, began to sing in the sweetest voice the manager had ever heard, and when she came to the end of the song, he no longer displayed an annoyed countenance, but smiling commanded Roberta to remove her shawl, the better to observe how she would appear on stage.

"When can you start? We need girls for rehearsals tomorrow, shall we say 9.30 sharp? Come to the rear entrance," and taking a blank sheet of paper said "Here, write your address here."

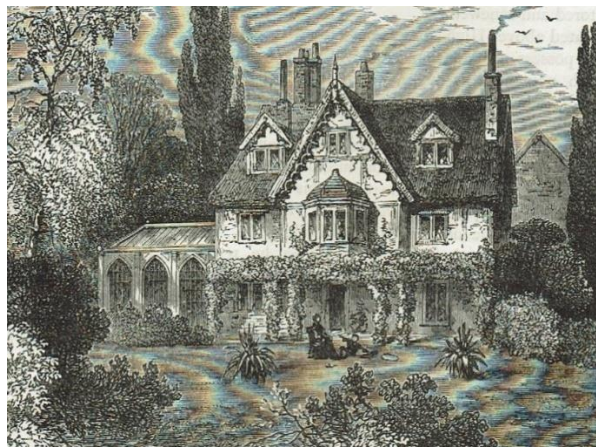
The manager wanted to know if she could read and write, and was a little surprised when she achieved both, although he raised his eyebrows on seeing the address she had written down, Poplar Rents, Cable Street, Wapping was, he knew, a putrid slum. However, Roberta had realised her address would not be well received, and quickly explained that she was only there on arriving in London. She had come to visit a girl who had been employed in the big house near her father's home, not realising how awful it would be. She was seeking lodgings nearer to the theatre.

Thus, it was that the Herefordshire maid launched her stage career, a very successful career playing in numerous music halls and variety theatres in the Metropolitan Capital including the "Cole Hole", the "Cyder Cellars", the "Canterbury Hall" in Lambeth, "Weston's Music Hall", the "Oxford" in Holborn, "Wilton's Music Hall", "Collins' Music Hall" in Islington and the "Alambra Variety Theatre" at Leicester Square. She gradually and with great skill and presence of mind worked her way up the slippery pole that is the theatre, but it was not a steady progression in an upward direction, there were setbacks, mistakes, and blind alleys. Whilst during one of the many periods without a theatre part she took employment in a public in Holborn where she was employed as a barmaid. Not a desirable establishment, frequented by old men who took ages drinking their gin and hot



The Alhambra Variety Theatre at Leicester Square, 1874.

water whilst leering at her and passing crude remarks, although even these were better than the public women (prostitutes) with their foul tongues and stench of unwashed humanity. Then one evening a smart gentleman came in. He came again the next day and sat at the bar talking, a refined speech, and civil conversation. Two days later he was back again and offered her employment at a Wine Bar he owned in the Strand at double the wages. Roberta accepted immediately, but soon found that it was not as she had foreseen, there were four waitresses there already, and three private rooms on the first floor. It was part of the girl's job to entertain the customers, who were all well healed gentlemen, by encouraging them to consume more wine or spirits, and if the gentleman desired to take him upstairs to one of the private bedrooms. There was however a silver lining, a smart London swell, Baron James de la Motte, who was a frequent visitor, offered to set her up in a house of her own in St. John's Wood, north of Regent's Park. He was a clean, rich, cultivated gentleman as Roberta already knew, and at that time having no other prospects she accepted.

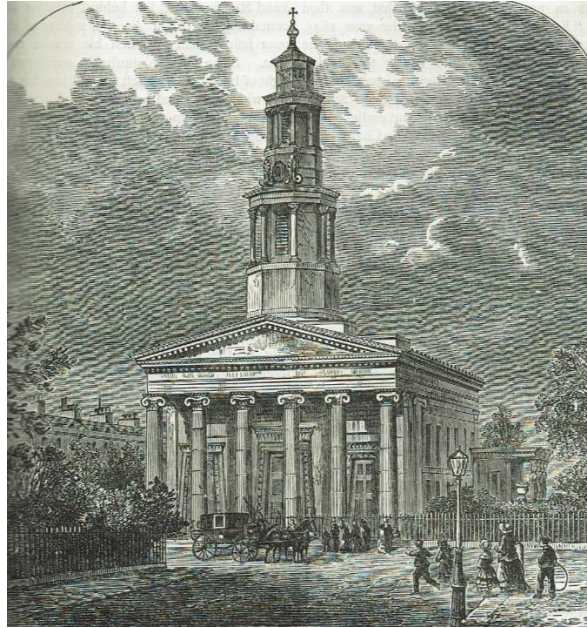


In a house of her own in St. John's Wood.

Standing at the bar dressed in light blue trousers, a canary yellow waistcoat with gold watch and chain flowing from the waistcoat pockets, a dark blue velvet tailcoat and a black silk top hat, he completely captivated her heart. The Baron, at first, was very amiable, saying that she was free to follow her stage career, although expecting that as his mistress in luxurious accommodation in a smart part of London, near to the West End, but also within easy reach of the country, having her own carriage and servants she would be happy. He had not reckoned with Roberta's rebellious nature, and whilst the kept woman was content initially with the arrangement, and de la Motte was not unduly demanding, in time she became bored and longed for the adulation of the theatre audience. It was over twenty months before trouble manifest itself, and Roberta informed her patron that she would be taking up an offer she had received from the Adelphi, omitting to mention that she had applied for the place in "The Maid Servant." An armed truce was the outcome which lasted for almost six years, partly because her beau travelled to India, Argentina, and Constantinople on business. In the meantime, Roberta had secured a follow-on part at the Cole Hole, a small theatre in the Covent Garden area, which after an interval of a few months was replaced by a stage booking at Wilton's Music Hall. Matters could have continued on this basis, except that on returning from Constantinople when the "PS Petra" called at Gibraltar Baron James wrote to his mistress to inform her that he would be returning to London on the 28th September. The ship put into Plymouth a day earlier than anticipated and rather than continue aboard the "PS Petra" the Baron disembarked and boarding a "Great Western" express arrived at Paddington three days earlier than anticipated. Roberta had decided to hold a soiree for her theatre friends and acquaintances on the 26th September, believing that her lord and master would be on the high seas, and was never more surprised when he walked in, and furiously sent the crowd of revellers flying, and Roberta followed the very next day.

Roberta merely continued her stage career. and whilst she was already an accomplished singer, with a beautiful mezzo soprano voice, she applied herself to drama, and the task of remembering her lines. Also, through diligent application and practice she became proficient at dancing including the polka, quadrille, waltz, ballet and can-can. The latter was particularly beneficial when, whilst at the "Alambra Music Hall", the management obtained a dancing licence, and after the interval each evening ballet was performed, which proved very popular with the gentlemen. Popularity was enhanced by the skimpiness of the ballerina's costume. Later when the cancan was introduced, and the girls were allowed to meet the gentlemen of the audience in the interval, in their revealing costumes the scope for meaningful introductions greatly increased, and it was here that Roberta met the gentleman who, after he proposed, became her husband. As the audience took their seats for the second half, the orchestra struck up with Jacques Offenbach's rousing overture to the operetta "Orpheus in the Underworld" and as the stage curtains swept aside to reveal the cancan dancing girls performing with a boisterously enthusiastic celebration of joie de vivre the theatre audience erupted in appreciation. Performing with the troop of dancers was a development most welcome to Roberta as her youthful bloom was beginning to fade and she was having to increase the use of grease paint to disguise the ravages of time. The costumes the can-can girls wore consisted of two layers of muslin, and sometimes very little if any undergarments. The muslin so thin that even with two layers it was almost transparent and so revealing that although very popular the theatre forfeited its dancing licence.

At an early stage in her theatrical career Roberta decided to adopt a stage name. She considered Sapphire Sally, based on the successful courtesan Cora Pearl, and when someone informed her that a June Longman already used the same name, she adopted Miss Ruby Rose, using the initial of her Christian name, Roberta.



St. Pancras Greek revival Church in Euston Road.

Archibald Humphrey Garside, a stage door Johnny in his younger days, proposed to Roberta in the Bellevue Rooms where he had taken her to dine after a performance at the “Alambra Music Hall”. They married at St. Pancras Church in Euston Road, a Greek revival building completed in 1822, which the bride believed would auger good luck as completion coincided with her year of birth. The bridegroom was nineteen years her senior, already an old man and conveniently without any surviving family. The pair married on the 5th March, 1879, a year that, as it transpired was littered with disasters. At the beginning of the year on the 22nd January a substantial force, part of Lord Chelmsford’s overall command was wiped out by Zulus armed only with assegais or the shorter iklwa or ixwa (spears), which was followed by another disaster in the Zulu war at Intombe on the 12th March. In the same war the Prince Imperial, Louis Napoleon, only son of Napoleon III was killed by Zulus on the 1st June, causing great embarrassment. The summer of 1879 (June to August) was the wettest since 1766 and the coldest since 1659. In November a fog descended on the capital which lasted until March 1880, the longest on record. The year was also the coldest since 1740 with an annual average temperature of only 45.39 degrees fahrenheit or 7.44 degrees centigrade. Then, just after Christmas, on the 28th December the recently constructed “North British” railway bridge across the Firth of Tay collapsed in an almighty storm just as a passenger train was crossing bound for Dundee on the northern side. The event sent shares of the railway company into hostile territory wiping thousands of pounds from their value on the London Stock Exchange. Neither did the year prove beneficial for Archibald Garside who did not have long to enjoy his, by comparison, young and energetic wife, he died of a heart attack or cardiac failure as the death certificate stated on the 8th August, 1881 leaving Roberta an inheritance consisting of a portfolio of gilts and equities plus his house in Hampstead, and a smaller property in Brighton. Unfortunately, both properties were so heavily Mortgaged that the total encumbrance exceeded their combined value and Roberta had no choice other than to sell the houses and the equities to settle the debt. The residue invested in 2.5% Consols provided an annual income in the order of £325.00 which enabled her to live moderately comfortably if frugally and by securing a tenancy on a small flat in a house adjacent to but not within the Rookery that was St. Giles Circus she was able to preserve a modicum of independence. It may not have been as peaceful and salubrious as Hampstead, which was renowned for its health, but it was where the theatres are, and central to Roberta’s life in London.

Unfortunately, although she was physically strong, the high life she had been living in the city which was at the centre of the world, the late nights, tobacco smoke, wines and spirits and a generally riotous time were taking their toll, her memory was fading, and she would

not have been able to remember her lines had she been offered a part at a theatre. She sat in the “Cornwallis” and wondered what she was doing there, then after a mental struggle, which occurred all too frequently, she remembered, and rose to leave. At the foot of the stairs the assistant manager stopped her to enquire if she had forgotten anything,

“Certainly not my man!” was the curt response.

“Are you sure, Madam, there is a little matter of the bill to be settled.”

“No!” replied Mrs. Garside “I am sure I have already paid.”

“Madam, I think not, but would Madam prefer me to call the police?” As the assistant manager was joined by a waiter and waitress.

“My dear man, if business is so bad you insist on charging me twice, here’s your rotten money!” With which she thrust a half sovereign into the much-maligned man’s hand and stalked out of the restaurant. Walking along St. Martin’s Lane towards Trafalgar Square she became aware of a general rumpus going on in the adjacent streets, and on gaining the square with its commemorative column to the great naval hero, she witnesses a general melee taking place. There were men and women carrying banners surging forward from the various roads leading into and converging on Trafalgar Square, shouting, and screaming at various police cordons who were trying to prevent the mob gaining access, and then the crowd turned very anegre and resorted to violence which provoked a police response. All this was too much for Roberta to contend with and she fled home.



Bloody Sunday, 13th November, 1887.

Protest against unemployment and the Irish Coercion Acts.

Over the next few weeks Roberta hardly went out at all, even groceries were delivered, and both the milkman and baker always called. Although she did not know it and was very far from accepting that anything was amiss, she was gradually going mad, suffering from, as yet, mild insanity.

Then on the 19th December she took it into her head that both her father, mother and young brother were likely to die and needed to be looked after. Three days later, on the 21st December she hastily packed a gladstone bag, and by a combination of trams and the Metropolitan Underground Railway Roberta arrived at Paddington Railway Station. She had forty-eight minutes to wait for the next train to Gloucester, then a stopping local train to Western-under-Penyard. Fortunately for Roberta, although she was against writing, preferring to just arrive, she did have enough precepts of mind to consider the possibility that they, her relatives, may not be in the little house at Mitcheldean Road, the railway station for Lea. She now knew the present address and thus was able to march up to the house a few minutes after the late afternoon train drew into the Halt.

There was a loud rapping on the main door to the house, which the daily answered, to receive an aggressive demand “And who do you think you are my woman, where is my father, mother and brother?”

“I’m Mrs Jones, ma’am, the daily, how can I help?”

“Oh well I suppose you will do! Take me to your mistress, I have been kept waiting quite enough today.”

When Emily arrived, there was more aggressive questioning, and not until the whole house had been upset, and general turmoil ensued that Aunt Roberta, as she was known, partially satisfied. As Annabel expressed the sentiment later “She will never be satisfied.”

It promised to be an unhappy Christmas for one and all, and plans were made to absent the house as far as possible. George wrote to his brother Edward to say he should not come home while the old witch stayed with them, meaning Aunt Roberta, George and William found much extra that required their attention at the carriage works in Ross, while Annabel visited an old school friend and obtained an invitation to stay. Grandfather Albert shut himself away in the library. All this time Aunt Roberta continued to cause trouble and could not understand why her mother Isobella was not there, she declared she had only come to see mother and did not seem capable of understanding that she died almost thirty years ago. George told Roberta one evening when they could not stand any more of her demanding aggressive behaviour. “If you had not cleared off in Gloucester when you did you would have been here when mother died!” That only produced more temper tantrums. Then suddenly, just when they all thought Aunt Roberta had become a very undesirable permanent fixture, she vanished, and Annabel wondered if she had been real or a bad dream from which she had just awoken. That was on Christmas Eve of 1887.

The Ashbourne family in Western-under-Penyard enjoyed a perfect Christmas, even if they did have to wait for Aunt Roberta to depart, an event that was as much of a surprise as it was a welcome relief. On Christmas morning they all, except Edward, walked to the Church of St. Lawrence, leaving Mrs Jones at home to prepare a light luncheon, and afterwards there was the traditional exchange of gifts, and party games of which George excelled at charades and Annabelle won the pass-the-parcel. Come evening Dinner was served by Mrs Jones who received compliments on her cuisine from all the family. They all retired for the night supremely happy, and on Boxing Day it would be Mrs Jones and the employees at the carriage works who would be fed and entertained by the family.

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Edward at Lansdorf in Elbenshausen.

In East Prussia, Edward was having a very enjoyable time at the Martinkus family home at Lansdorf, near the village of Elbenshausen. Alexandra was only too happy to show him the surrounding country, although this was as much for her benefit visiting places she wished to see but which her father would not have permitted her to go to her own; with a beau permission was granted. They went southwest to see the battlefield of Eylau, the event depicted in the steel engraving now hanging in their drawing room in which Napoleon is shown defeating the Prussians in a landscape covered in deep snow. From there Alexandra took Edward to the Masurian Lakes, a vast area of some two thousand lakes covering an area of twenty thousand square miles, and since the 18th century connected by a series of canals and rivers. They also, on a separate occasion, travelled north to Tilsit on the banks of the river Nemen to sample and purchase some Tilsit or Tilsiter cheese, a pale-yellow cheese produced by the Westphal family. Also, the location on the river where for the meeting between Czar Alexandra and the Emperor Napoleon a raft was moored in the river for the two to settle the terms of their 1807 treaty. Although Christmas was celebrated, the more important festival is St. Nicholas.



Tilsit Cheese.

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Author's Acknowledgement:

Reference to the Ashbourne family including Aunt Roberta and the people she meets, but not the theatres, the Martinkus family, their house and village are pure invention, otherwise every attempt has been made to ensure historical accuracy, and all illustrations are correct to the period. In this narrative I attempt to mentally and emotionally transport you, my dear reader, to the world of the late nineteenth century, but what I cannot do is to transport you physically, and neither would you wish me to so do.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets

Another post card from the Author's private collection.



By Charles Dana Gibson, the longest recorded farewell.

Trailer for next month.

It is now January of 1888, and the house in Western-under-Penyard has settled to its normal rhythm of life, in the flat near St. Giles Circus in London all is not well though Aunt Roberta does not seem to know. Though the mists of time she sees again the love of her life, or believe she has, whilst in East Prussia Edward experiences a winter of unbelievable severity.

The story of the Ashbourne family having developed into “The Ashbourne Family Saga”, will continue to be published only in the “Chimes Online” in monthly instalments, and next month will appear under the story title as chapter IX. Chapter I was published in May, 2023.

Historical Talks.

In addition to writing these articles or “blogs” for the Chimes, I am available to give illustrated power point talks on a variety of historical subjects. To see the complete list please email to me at brockswoodfs@yahoo.co.uk, or telephone 01989 780634.

Dorian Osborne

1st December, 2023.