

The following article was written, probably, for "The Wykehamist" but has never been published. The South Kensington museum referred to is now the Victoria and Albert museum. There are other references which would only be recognisable to the 'men' (boys) of the college.

"Wally"

Notes of appreciation written by C G Stevens, Winchester College 1917-1922

At about the time of Waterloo the Warden and Fellows came to the conclusion that too much wind and rain was coming in through the chapel windows and something had to be done about it. The 14th C glass was examined and found to be in a miserable condition after four hundred years exposure to the weather and the east window had also been damaged by gun shooting in the Warden's garden. The Shrewsbury firm of Betton and Evans were engaged to restore the windows. It may be assumed that the Warden and Fellows retired to their studies and left the firm to do its work. They did so but in a way which has given posterity some cause for indignation. They did not restore. They removed. All the old glass was taken out and replaced by modern copies in colours which are still, after another century, garish and inappropriate.

Years later, Headmaster Oakshott recovered some panels of the old glass and set them in a window under the tower.

The connecting link between the rape and the return of the windows was poor old Wally.

Wally was a Jersey man. His real name was John Dorbel le Couteur and he was the last descendant of the Dorbel family of Gros Puits, St Saviour. Starting as a bank clerk he became a keen antiquarian and finally a renowned expert on medieval stained glass, particularly that in Winchester Cathedral and College. He lived at 7 St Cross Road and, at the early age of 42, died a few doors down at no 12 on 13th August 1925 of neuritis and spinal dislocation following a drive in a Ford car. He was the only son of Philip Edward le Couteur of Jersey.

We first became aware of him as a sort of local curiosity. His tall figure with obese stomach, a face of unhealthy pallor, the binoculars always across his shoulder, the waking stick carried with its handle in his pocket: all these combined to make him a notion. In some notes I made at the time he is of "weird shape", and further on he is "one of the seven wonders of the world". To see what would happen one of us took off his hat to Wally one day, he removed his with a curious jerky notion, which was carefully noted for future mimicry. And then it became a notion to make Wally jerk off his hat by uncovering to him. Then inevitably we got into conversation with him and found he spoke rapidly in a high voice and was nervously gushing and polite. All this was imitated, but what began as a joke ended in mutual esteem and a firm friendship, based on archaeological research, between Wally and many of the men in college. He had us to tea in the Norman Palace tearooms and we had him back. Le Couteur became Le Touceur, then Wally Tooker and finally Wally. He was a great favourite with us, and when we realised the scope and quality of his work, and the great modesty and sincerity of his nature, we all admired him.

In 1921 the quality of Betton and Evans work also became manifest, and their glass began to decay. College Mill was converted into a workshop and one by one the windows of chapel were brought down, laid on trestles, repaired and completely re-leaded. Wally was in charge. We often visited him

there and the work was fascinating to watch. In the course of it he discovered that a few sections of the original glass had escaped Betton and Evans and were still in the windows and he made careful note of them, restoring where necessary. He constantly drew our attention to the inferior colour of the new glass in comparison with the old. It became one of his great ambitions to trace the remainder of the lost glass. Some, he knew, would have been broken up, but he knew that most of it had been taken to Shrewsbury and sold privately, when the new copy had been made. It was known that two panels were on view in the South Kensington Museum: there were other pieces in Mancetter¹ church: some were in America: and there was a tale that fragments had been found in the conservatory of two old ladies in Sussex. In those days I was up and down England a lot on a motor cycle, pursuing antiquity, and Wally gave me a watching brief for chapel glass. Anything remotely like it, I had to draw and send him a full description. He was most appreciative and replied at length in friendly letters of which there is a sample below². It reflects the trouble he had with publishers, mentions our mutual friend, Dean Hutton, and sportingly records that he posed for a caricature by Hawkes in the Thule frieze. A photograph of this famous painting will be found in these papers³, and show that Wally's simile of "pontoons" for the Bobber's boots is well chosen.

Obituaries in the Times and Hampshire Chronicle show the esteem and affection in which this pathetic, lonely man was held and by how many people and I hope that the cheerful companionship he received made amends for our early mockery. I seldom met a man with more disadvantages of appearance and address or one who so pluckily overcame them. It seemed absurd at first to a teenager to be addressed by this man as "My dear Sir" but we realised that this and other mannerisms were only a cloak for shyness. They were also the result, perhaps, the result of illness, for Wally was one of the most unhealthy people I ever knew and his early death indicates that he was never really fit. But he was the kind of man who would never embarrass you with complaints of his own inconvenience or discomfort and we shall never know how much of this he was called upon to endure. Apart from this I think he was a happy man not least on account of the improbable and boisterous friendship which had sprung up between him and the men in the College.

¹ Mancetter church is in Warwickshire, near Atherstone

² There was no sample attached.

³ A photograph appears in the text above