

HUMANLY SPORTS PAGES

SNOWMAN BUILDING

The car park of the Lakeside Country Club in Frimley Green, Surrey, became the focus of the world's attention this week as it hosted the 4th World Snowman Building Contest.

As in previous years, the event was well-attended, with teams this year flying in from as far afield as Australia, Nigeria, Egypt and the Bahamas, all pitting their ball-rolling skills against the established names from Sweden, Austria and the like.

The small, but enthusiastic band of spectators created a festive atmosphere, urging their favourites on with jangling cowbells and whispers of encouragement (shouting was banned lest it upset the Club members). Not even a delay in proceedings of a day and a half while the snow was being delivered could dampen their spirits - an impromptu concert by Sir Cliff Richard finally doing that.

Once under way, competition was fierce. Not surprisingly, the first round saw most of the warmer nations eliminated. Egypt and Nigeria put up brave fights, but had to retire with severe frostbite. The Bahamas fared better, reaching the quarter finals before having to withdraw after running out of carrots, while a fantastic display of ball moulding saw the Australians through to the semis, where they eventually lost out to the Norwegians, here defending the crown they took last year in controversial circumstances. No repeat this year, thankfully, of the heated glove allegations that dogged them in 2005.

Surprise packages of 2006 were undoubtedly the Japanese, who easily beat the USA, Canada and the Swedes, only to fall at the semi-final stage to the conquerors of the Great Britain team, Finland. The Japanese husband and wife pairing, Isoru and Nikita Sakapupu, took defeat in their typically good-natured way, despite being eliminated for having balls a mere two centimetres smaller than the regulation circumference of three metres.

"I'm always telling my husband that size isn't important," laughed Nikita. "Obviously, I was wrong." And so to the final, held under floodlights for the first time in the tournament's four year history due to a delay of three hours, during which the entire band of spectators had to be removed and frisked. An anonymous phone call claimed that a hair drier had been smuggled into the arena, but, after an exhaustive search of the car park, it was deemed to be a hoax. The organisers permitted the final to go ahead reasoning that anyone who did have a portable heating device would have

nowhere to plug it in. The testing conditions caused no undue problems for either team. The Norwegians taking an early lead with their rolling and patting technique proving superior to the Finns piling and shaping.

The theme of the final was national figures and as the contest progressed it could be seen that the Norwegians had chosen to fashion an icy Amundsen while the Finns had opted, somewhat bewilderingly, for a frozen Father Christmas. When it was politely pointed out later that he was a mythical character and, anyway, he lived at the North Pole, team member, Kikki Kikkimson replied, "He also has a holiday home in Lapland, which places him, at least partly, in my Homeland. As for him being mythical, why would tourists pay upwards of £1000.00 to go and see him if that were the case?"

Reluctantly, the organisers agreed and when it came to the judging, the Finnish entry was deemed the runaway winner. Explaining the decision, event Chairman, Dr Allun Phibes said, "In the end, the Finns creation was a faithful representation of a well-known character and easily recognisable. As no-one on the judging panel knows what Amundsen looks like, the Norwegian entry could've been anybody!"

The final word should go to Kikki's sister and snowman building partner, Nikki, who enthused, "We're both thrilled to have triumphed over such stern opposition and we're already looking forward to battling it out next year at the Council multi-storey in Slough to defend our title."

SHADOW BOXING

Dicky Darke the paperweight champion of West Sussex, will defend his title at noon tomorrow. The unique timing of his bouts being a tactic he has always used, and for which he has constantly had to refute claims of cowardice, as this is when his shadow is at its smallest. An indoor bout last night featuring A.A.Pounder and his shadows was stopped on a technical knockout. A.A., after a series of body punches, missed an almighty uppercut, that had it connected would have taken the roof off, and smashed the only source of light in the place. The bout and the arena were plunged into darkness.

After much groping for A.A.'s arm, the referee raised it and announced the unpopular verdict. The booing that greeted it was either a sign of disagreement or the by now desperate crowd were trying to scare themselves as they frantically searched for the only smoker for a light to help them find an exit.

The Inconsequential

There's always time for levity

Issue 4

Regular Features:

THE MAN THAT LOOKED UP

Fourth and final part

Page two

Fifth Column

Page four

Those Daft Soap Suds

The Lust Weekend

Page five

Those Ethics Girls

Consider War & Remembrance

Pages six & seven

Poo Corner

Page eight

Sharkey *Fights loneliness*

Page nine

Humanly Sports pages

Eleven & twelve

Page ten:

Exclusive Interview with Judas
Iscariot

THE MAN THAT LOOKED UP (part 4)

"Are you sure? We were due to start our meeting at nine thirty. We've lost eight minutes already."

"But what is eight minutes lost compared to a lifetime regained?" laughed Mr Clark.

"I'm not sure I follow."

"No, I didn't expect you to," said Mr Clark.

"Anyway, I'm sorry I'm late, but I was just chatting to someone I used to know. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must return home. I forgot something when I left the house this morning."

"Oh, and what was that?" asked Veronica tartly.

"My priorities," replied Mr Clark and with that, he turned his back to Veronica and the Bank, took another great lungful of air and walked off in the direction of town.

No-one at the Bank ever saw Mr Clark again. Rumours circulated telling how the stress of maintaining his perfect record had so strained his mind that it had caused him to have a breakdown and even now he was lying in a sanatorium bed somewhere. Or that he had set off for work as usual the next morning, but in a sudden spasm of mental anguish brought on by his inexcusable behaviour the previous day, he had thrown himself from the bridge parapet into the river below and been swept downstream, his body never to be recovered. No-one knew for certain what had happened to Mr Clark, but the speculation continued and grew ever more fanciful.

However, exactly one year later, a man bearing a striking resemblance to Mr Clark entered an exclusive restaurant on the Left Bank in Paris in the company of a woman wearing a gold pendant embellished with the single initial 'H'. They sat at a table by the window and ordered wine and hors-d'oeuvre and spoke affectionately of moonlit trips on the Seine and contented strolls in the warm, perfumed dusk.

Presently, the waiter was beckoned and the man was heard to ask his companion: "Would you like to order, darling?"

"Canard a l'orange, perhaps. Poulet? L'escargot? But no. You decide, my dear," she replied.

The man thought for a moment then a slow smile of satisfaction appeared on his lips. "Garçon," he said, "saumon pour deux, s'il vous plait."

THE END

2

YOUR STARS

AQUARIUS: All Aquarians will face hardship in the coming month; Beware of house cover salespeople, they'll lose your roof.

PISCES: Don't get in over your head this month, do not carp at your bad luck; rise above it and surf until your moon changes.

ARIES: Pull your finger out of your DIMM socket. Boost your connections; Up your RAMM. Use your power, act the goat.

TAURUS: Don't take any more bull. Insist on the truth. You will feel worse but at least you'll feel enlightened. Beware number 3.14

GEMINI: You've strung so many folks along last month, expect them to get knotted. Learn to be on your own, with your twin.

CANCER: You'll take great steps sideways. Come out of your shell but don't snap at people, otherwise you will be in hot water.

LEO: Be careful of your distemper this month as you could overstretch yourself and get a good stroking. Prudence over Pride!

VIRGO: The goose will enter your house this month; be brave, say BOO to it. You will be invited to that party, probably on the 13th.

LIBRA: Let yourself go as Leo enters your house. Happiness is a warm bed! Bigger even-handedness, tip the scales in favour of joy.

SCORPIO: That sting in your tail is probably an STD. Don't hold any grudges as Aries' influence sees them melt in your hand.

SAGITTARIUS: Care is your watchword. You will get the point but it will leave you all a-quiver. In love you will get an arrow escape.

CAPRICORN: For all you little people you will receive many cuddles this month as you will be mistaken for household pets. Enjoy.

HUMANLY SPORTS PAGES



From left to right:
(back row, standing) Jim "limpet" Crabb; Lord Linseed; Bob "blowfish" Catchit; Eric "the pole" Tallbuoys; and Max "the whipper" Sennapod.
(middle row, seated) Roger "the cad" Monze; Monty Banke; Ishmael "Moby" Dick; Johnny "the Ghost" Whelkin; J.R.R "sir" Harrington-Smythe; and George "leg-folder" Ottoman.
(In front, lying) Igor "flipper" Czyzyzinski.

The 'aquatics' as they were called for their proud record of never having a home fixture called off despite their pitch being constantly under water.

Here they can be seen just resting after a training session at the local baths.

The talismanic kit-washer, Elsie is just out of shot as she was shyly giving Monze's shirt a good thrashing on the sacred rock. Her surefire method of both drying and stretching the pin-hooped shirts the Aquatics wore at home was legend.

The famous hoops were a sartorial elegance chosen by their manager for mesmerising properties, especially when seen at speed. Many an opponent had fainted clean away after a short foaming at the mouth upon being subjected to Sennapod's speedy wizardry.

Their manager, Fu Manchurian, leans, a shadowy figure in the background, overseeing the team's posture as they practice various folded limb techniques that serve them well in subduing

their opponents. Fu often disappears during training sessions and can be seen by snorkeling reporters to be trawling the turf at one eighth of a fathom below the surface, studying tactics and turning techniques of his players and making sure that when they dive they don't make a splash.

An injury can always be spotted by the floating flat cap on the water's surface.

Their home matches have tide times to inform their fans when to be in the shallow end and when to start swimming with joy as they gurgle their approval of the team's tactical superiority over their all-at-sea victims of a Saturday.

Their star striker is down in front submarining as he does so well to the tune of forty-eight goals at home but has yet to break his duck on dry land.

Their passionate powerhouse and Olympic level swimmer, third from the left sitting, is Ishmael Dick - affectionately known as Moby, whose freestyle has caused many a visiting centre-forward to run aground on his rock-like biceps. His partner in brine was Eric Tallbuoys, whose height often meant he could see a wave coming so his anticipation was second to one (the medium that played for their fiercest rivals, Gleadthorpe Sandmen).

At the other end, Bob Catchit was renowned for his ability to inflate his cheeks just at the right time so as to rise majestically to pluck many a goal-bound effort short of its mark.

One of the reasons this outfit never achieved great things was their appalling away form. They endured a goal drought on dry land that lasted two-and-a-half years; being finally broken by an own-goal scored by Kevin Conrite of St Osricks of Lemmingthorpe. In that season they managed three away goals but conceded a mammoth sixty-two, gathering only one point away from their revered home, Deepfields.

One match in 1906 was seriously threatened when three opponents required treatment for 'the bends' when resurfacing too quickly for the half-time break, but the substitutes swam like fish and almost contributed to a shock defeat for the Aquatics.

11

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

This Month: The Ancestors.

Although long gone, they are always in my thoughts. Well, some of them anyway. Obviously not the nasty ones. The remembrance of those fills me with shame. The good ones though are happy memories. After all, every day we are getting better and better.

KRANK IT DOWN

After their star fades another two or three magnitudes, The Krankies' move into glamour modelling only accelerates their decline.



NEWS BITES

PENSIONS ADVICE:

- 1) Light the blue touch paper and retire, watch your money go up in smoke and 'fill the sky with Standard Equities'.
- 2) Think of a number and watch the little white ball.
- 3) Cross your fingers, close your eyes tight and wish!

From **SABOTEUR WEEKLY**: Find the works and liberally distribute the spanner(s).

AN INTERVIEW WITH JUDAS ISCARIOT

"Hello, Mr Iscariot"

"Just call me J."

"How was it for you?"

"It was hard to let the guy down, he was such a lovely geezer, but, I needed the carpentry work. I loved the guy but he was never there when I needed him, take that time he disappeared without a by your leave for forty days into the wilderness."

"How do you feel about your name being a term of abuse?"

"It's unfair. Besides what I did wasn't betrayal, I was just economical with the faith. I couldn't be held responsible for my actions as I never had free will. God created us all in his image so it was his fault really. Don't think I don't regret it; the guilt nearly killed me."

"Nearly."

"Yes, well I couldn't very well do it myself that would be a sin in the eyes of God. So I was in a bind. A catch-22 I believe it later became coined as."

"What did you do?"

"I went to the surplice store and bought a new wardrobe. Really cut me up it did. Didn't get a good night's sleep for the next ten years."

"So why did you give it up?"

"Got tired of it. I went to a soothsayer and she told me everything would be alright in the future. His name would be honoured, mine be trashed. It was the only logical sacrifice I could make that would smooth things over."

At that Mr. Iscariot got up and left. I resisted his attempt to kiss me; well, I'm still nervous about things like that.

We're Glad They Said That!

Football manager: "The true realism of the supporters is fantastic, it's for me to make them believe..."

Political commentator: (on Saddam Hussein trial) "...if indeed they were crimes..."

Little EDITORIAL "Never mind the quantity feel the wit."

EDITORS HONOURED



Following a relatively slow start when fewer than 400 copies were believed to have been read, the modest publication became a veritable publishing phenomenon!

Within one week of its introduction, those 400 copies had become 40,000. Two weeks later, ten times that number were being distributed and just yesterday, the latest figures to emerge from the capital, San Salvador (the people may be proud, but they have little imagination), showed that an incredible 96% of the citizenry had read the first two issues, or had had them read to them. The other 4% were aware of its existence, but their copies had been removed after being branded subversive.

The incredible success of The Inconsequential in this largely undeveloped country was attributed purely to word of mouth - the massive nation-wide advertising campaign being deemed irrelevant. Demand now far outstrips supply, especially since the recurrence of a niggly printing problem with your joint editor's inkjet.

Now, with almost the entire Salvadoran populace devoted fans of this humble effusion, the Government have made the bold move of bestowing a most singular honour on the two editors - the superimposition of their esteemed images onto a second national flag to be flown atop all Government buildings. Not since the world-wide popularity of David Hasselhoff prompted a similar move in the 1980s has such a decision been taken. In that instance, the ignominy of Baywatch effectively ended Mr Hasselhoff's near legendary status in this little country and the flag idea was shelved. It seems, though, that The Inconsequential is a much stiffer proposition - 160 gsm to be exact - and the El Salvador leaders have been forced by public demand to put the flag into production. A prototype has been manufactured (a sneak preview is shown above) and if this meets with the approval of the special committee set up to oversee the project, full production will begin next month.

A spokesperson for the editors said: "Both gentlemen are extremely proud to be given this honour, but if truth be told, also a little embarrassed. They feel this move is out of proportion to their achievements and both felt that, perhaps, two medium-sized statues in the capital's centre would have been more appropriate."

Letters

Dear Sirs

May I take this opportunity to commend you both for your magnificent Christmas edition. The two pullout sections, I know, will prove to be an indispensable part of my family Christmas. There are four of us, but we only have two place mats.

Yours

Edward Teacher

Ed: We'll consider decorative backgrounds to move into the interior decor market. Thanks

Dear Sirs

I found your article on Statistics [Issue 2] quite illuminat-

ing. In fact 76% of me thought it was extremely good, while only 17% thought it average. 4% of me believed the article to be dull, with 3% don't know.

Yours
Albert Bino

Ed: You're 100% barking!

FIFTH COLUMN Despair Floats

Do you have any talent? Have you the ability to enthrall people with your artistry? Do your articles and short stories inspire or move your readers? Perhaps you're a halfway decent singer or sculptor? If so, then I'm afraid there's very little hope of you gaining the recognition you deserve in our society, especially if you're just starting out and looking for an opening.

The agent's books are closed, the publishers have all been hired and the television schedules are full. Full to the margins with brain-dulling mediocrity, fame-hungry chancers and crass opportunists.

Everywhere you care not to look can be found the bastard offspring of Capitalism and Ignorance. Individuals who, but for television or the law courts, would have stayed in blissful localised obscurity, now infiltrate our lives to an inescapable degree. They proliferate among the glossy pages of countless teen magazines (so called because the average IQ of their readers is greater than 12 but less than 20) feeding on the nourishing adulation of that section of society that idolises superficiality and ridicules genius.

I use the word "inescapable" because I'm willing to venture that no matter which newspaper you read, television channel you watch or radio station you listen to, your life will have been touched, or rather, molested, by the likes of Jade Goody, Jordan and her paramour, Peter, or Paul Danan or Calum Best or Rebecca Loos or that bloke that

won X-Factor a couple of years ago whose name no-one can remember or.....or.....or.....

The list is long and spectacularly unifying and yet the fate of that last-mentioned person illustrates perfectly the transient nature of instant celebrity status. A simple, but apt, rule in nature states that the brighter and more fierce a flame burns, the shorter lived it is. Combine that with a distinct lack of combustible material in the first place and you have a salutary lesson for all wannabees and a pleasing dollop of cosmic justice for the rest of us.

Now, having said all of that, I wouldn't want to give the impression that I'm against talent shows or any other form of showcase that allows people to display their abilities and, hopefully, gives a platform to those with something to share. Some of our greatest singers, comedians, writers, dancers, entertainers of all kinds would never have been brought to our attention if no-one had taken a chance and given them a national stage on which to broadcast their talent. They might have remained on the circuit, schlepping around the clubs and local halls giving renditions of *Nessus Dorma* to twenty crack-hardened schoolchildren in Walsall or reciting their latest blank verse epic to thirty rain-sodden pensioners in Uttoxeter. However, the opportunities for genuine talent to emerge and enrich all our lives are becoming far fewer thanks to the present-day blind fascination with nonentities.

It may be argued that those with any sort of ability, especially when allied to genius, will always rise like the proverbial cream to the top. Indeed, with determination, dedication, perseverance and a little luck this may very well be the case. However, why should a talented individual have to endure years of hardship, struggle and rejection to achieve recognition, when a loud, self-obsessed ignoramus can have it shovelled onto them in heaps merely because they've slept with someone famous, sued someone important or shown their tits to someone with a camera?

It's a sobering thought (and, ironically, one that could drive you to drink in the first place) that the vast majority of under-25s could instantly tell you all about Jade or Jordan and their immediate families, but would stare at you blankly if you mentioned Dickens or Beckett.

More often than not, the cream is overlooked because the focus is on the clots.

So, if there are any directors, producers or editors among our half dozen readers, I urge them to listen to my plea. Let's have fewer "reality" TV shows where Joe and Jane Citizen are plucked from obscurity and given their own shows because they shout and whine incessantly; fewer books from "celebrities" who have probably never so much as written a note to their smack dealer; and more, a great deal more, output from those with something to say and the ability to say it with style, grace, emotion and descriptive brilliance. It can only benefit us all.

SHARKEY - THE GREAT WHITE - Fights loneliness



"Why didn't I warn the others? But how? Wow, I've not forgotten my specie codes already, have I?" Sharkey's warm blood ran lukewarm at the thought: I am entirely alone in this sea with no means of communicating. The shock of alienation caused his fin to tremble. "Where do I belong? I feel such an emptiness; like hunger but it's

not. Now, when I see shoals I feel saddened. I've been to schools, seen the herding instinct and how they snubbed the dolphins out of envy: they were more sophisticated in their groupings. It turns my stomach to think I might endure those mating rituals again. No, I need more; an intimacy of communication that affirms me and a significant other without the ignominy of performance." If he had tear ducts they would be filling now. "I feel adrift in a vast ocean - my goodness I am adrift in a vast ocean: no-one to talk with, laugh with, share the beauty of this world with."

He felt much worse than the time he swallowed an outboard motor and it ran around his system for days. No, this was different. He swam without verve, ate without appetite, even the wondrous coral reefs seemed monochrome. Sharkey couldn't face another mating season of mindless procreation. He eased through the water to a depth hitherto foreign to him. It was quiet, and while affording him thought, only confirmed his loneliness. Yes, he could still find solace in his old groups, but it was no longer enough. Just then a diving bell hovered above him; he looked in and saw a vision.

The Child and the Tree

"Why are you weeping, Oak; you're not a willow?"
"I'm not the tree I used to be. I used to give shade for the likes of you, so you could get respite from the over-zealous noonday sun. Since I've acquired dollar bills as leaves, I'm only shady to myself."
"People are very happy to see you."
"Yes, but only until they've stripped me of the greenbacks; no one lingers anymore. They've never believed in such a phenomenon yet they're happy to take advantage of it."
"But I liked you then, ever since I first waddled up to your beautiful bole."
"And now?"
"Yes, I still want to be here most of all but I don't like those who'll not let you be."
"At least if you believe in me regardless of the money, then at least it is reason to be happy."
"How did you get the money?"
"Someone buried a big chest under my trunk, it infected my roots. If you dig deep just to my left, you might find it."

"I don't want the money, I've no use for it...I wonder..if I dig it up and throw it away?"
Next day the child returned to find the oak as proud and full-leaved as he had been. Luckily the child was spared the terrible scenes of mayhem that saw the oak narrowly saved from the angry lynch-mob that were determined to hang the tree from one of its branches, after their disappointment at finding no money on the tree.
"Hello Oak, you look well."
"Thank you, child, you've given me back my identity and dignity. I'm not lonely now. Just a while ago a family laid a picnic beneath my branches and laughed and played. How can I thank you."
"Just be your grand self and give us shade and oxygen. I must go, I need to go to the bank."
"What!"
"No, silly, the grassy bank; she's disinclined to be, she's a little flat. I want to help her become once more a grassy bank whereupon we can sit and lie in the friendlier morning sun, when it is not so hot..."
"Oh, I see, that's a relief. Off you go. See you again, child, and thank you so much."

A philosophical sneeze

A discarded umbrella trying to fit in with the burgeoning undergrowth. Did its owner finally emerge from its shadow, into the elements , yearning for the immediate touch of the rain?

Poo Corner

The Dark Her and Wow

How, now
I long to tousle the blackness
Run my innermost thoughts
Through the glorious darkness
I can, here nuzzle
The warmth without arousing fear
Immerse myself in the puzzle
Hear her here
Now : How: Wow

A Cameo Appearance

I saw your pin unclasped
Eighteen cheers ago;
I know not why
I now see you in relief
And only the tower is ivory
Yet your magnificent telescope
Finds me still and keeps me
From oblivious etude.

Wear yourself with pride
You rational sin
I have yet your wand marks
Under my skin
And am child-like in glee
To remember the worlds
You showed me
Like a cosmic guide;
Earth you ran through your heart
I cherish as samples
For imagination's sake.

Youthless Exuberance

Glassy-eyed morning sings
Of shattered somnambulists;
Light reflection
Murdered once more
By a bullet honed,
Primed by ignorance.

Helter-skelter revolutions
Without beauty, without rebellion
Mesmerised by cracking repetition;
Glittering worthlessness
Inarticulate
(I think therefore I'm bored)
Bang!
A desperately one-sided dialectic
Split
By the cement of brave membership,

Entertainment for the troops,
A rock for the lichen
The rope that binds
Standing to petrified attention
Coaxed into being them
By glib urban muzik
Talking the talk with forked
Tongues piercing cheeks,
Feeding from the silver
E-spoon of opportunism.
(leaves of sass by I won't take noshitman)
Yet they are midden of the roadgang,
Linked by a steely, knife-
Edged apathy
Too ready to pressgang
Audience participation,
Taking the Queen's chilling
Double-headed coign
Of disadvantage.

A Public Announcement

We Are Sorry To Announce...
The world is not perfect
By approximately ten minutes;
Please listen for further pronouncements.

Yet still a consumptive groan
Rumbles along the empty track.

Meanwhile a sun sets gloriously
Stating its satisfaction at the moon.
We share a hue but not a cry.

We are sorry for any inconvenience
Caused by perfection's delay.

Promenade

Waves race ahead of me like a powerful child
Reaching the sure shore, breaking immediately
Forgetting the magnificence of anticipation

The tide heaves in
Its splendid spume swallowed
Under the weight of residual memory
Like two lovers embracing
With a taste of secrets on their lips

The red flag chatters away
Advising compliance
With altruistic menace
For those who would swim

Those Daft Soap Suds

IN THE HOSPITAL:

"Will she be able to dance, again, doc?"
"No, but as far as I can remember, she never could.
It was said she danced like a whale on a sixpence."
"She's moving her fingers, look, she's trying to
tell me something."
"Get a pen and something to write on. Oh, bugger,
she'll have to use this musical keyboard."
Olive Palm began a painstaking quest to tell Sun-
light something important. Sunlight had put down
the other Emin brother - he'd emerged unscathed
from the crash- to rush to her mother's bedside.
It degenerated into a 'name that dirge' - like a
version of Patch Adams without the humour.
Slowly, very, very slowly, a narrative was pitched
together and it was not until the whole ghastly
medley had been clumped through by the possibly



critically ailing Olive Lamp, that a truth emerged.
A cloud had overcome Sunlight.
"What, so you aren't my mother after all! It can't
be him, he's a bloke. What do you mean, a sex-
change just after I was born. Where is he now?"
Sunlight's despairing confusion oozed like a fest-
ering wound and she welcomed the doc's inter-
vention with a humungous wedge of gauze.

IN THE CHURCH:

Duzzit Cleaner and Glade Bright were getting
hitched for the third time - to each other.
"What are those numbers on the board behind the
vicar, hymn numbers?" Verruca Cream hissed.
"No, they are odds; the vicar's running a book on
how long the marriage'll last."
"Are those numbers in years?"
"Nope. Minutes. In fact, one of them is in feet and
inches."
"Terrible. Put a Monkey on number 75 for me will
ya?"

All throughout the service the vicar and some of the
congregation with annual passes, tittered and sup-
pressed a wave of what would have been raucous
laughter when the vicar came to: "If anyone here has
just cause why this marriage should not take place..."
There was a small queue of folks outside waiting for
their cue.



**A CLOAKROOM
IN THE VITRE-
OUS ENAMEL:**
"It's you. Weren't
we married last
year?"

"Yes, but I left you,
remember?" grunted Avalark Lemon.
"Aw, yeah, you tried to kill me with a hover-mow-
er." Penny Pinefresh cleared her head.
"Yeah, but only cos I luv ya."
"I'm not a lawn that needs cutting down every
week."
"I'm sorry, ave a rose."
"That's OK then, give us a kiss."
They entwine once more and exchange less than
ideas; the seed already sown.
Under another mess of coats and empty crisp pack-
ets, love's poisoned arrow stuck up as it must first
thing in the morning.
"It's you. I thought I told you to shove off."
"You did, only I fawt ye ment yeah."
"Well, I'll say this once more only; listening?"
"You're the wrong fragrance and you make me eyes
water..."
"But I luv ya."
"No you don't, and what's more I don't even like
you."
"Is it me mood swings."
"That is one of the reasons why I loathe you. Your
psychopathic tendencies when you tried to suffocate
me with flowers and chocolates. I've done with that.
I'm shacking up with a Methodist. Much more
stable. NOW SHOVE OFF."
MEANWHILE a new family moved into the Oval.
The WIPES, with a matriarchal Auntie Bacterial.
"Gutterwipes." Said one of the more friendly resi-
dents.
A red outfit with white fur trim was being recovered
from the local canal.

THOSE ETHICS GIRLS

Mavis: Pass over those last few poppy tins would you please, Lil? Let's get them opened and counted.

Gladys: I count five, Mavis!

Mavis: Thank you, Gladys! Just for that, you're banished to the kitchen to make the coffees. Oh, and bring some of Lil's latticed apple pie back with you. Another culinary triumph there, Lil.

Lil: Thanks, Mave, but I can't claim the credit for that one. It was given to me by a friend of mine.

Mavis: Well, pass on my compliments - it's delicious. There you are, Lil, can you count this one?

Lil: Certainly. So, how much do you think you've raised this year?

Mavis: It looks a little more than last year - around £600.00 I'd say.

Lil: Oh dear! You'll need a bit more than that to get those two days in London!

Mavis: Pardon?

Lil: You know. The WI outing this Christmas. It was a joke!

Sheila: Oh, very funny, Lil.

Mavis: It may not sound a lot, but it's for a good cause.

Lil: Well, yes, I suppose so, but what if you're a pacifist? I know there's talk of those morally opposed to war wearing a white poppy, but would you feel comfortable contributing to an organisation directly related to war, albeit one that deals with its aftermath? Or would you see your donation as somehow condoning war - almost saying that it's all right to carry on killing one another because the Fund is here to dish out a few pounds to your relatives if the worst happens?

Mavis: I'm not sure if it is a moral issue. War exists. The Haig Fund is there to help those servicemen and women and their families who are caught up in it.

Sheila: Unfortunately, Mavis, that's not always the case.

Lil: Something wrong, Sheila?

Sheila: Just recalling the lives my mother and grandparents had, that's all.

Mavis: Times have changed, though, Sheila.

Sheila: But the aims of the Haig Fund were the same then as they are now, weren't they?

Mavis: Definitely, but the distribution methods were not as well administered.

Sheila: It couldn't have been that difficult to identify who needed help. The casualties themselves were not that easy to overlook and anyone with an ounce of intelligence could have imagined the impact their loss or disablement would have on their families.

Lil: I take it your grandfather didn't return?

Sheila: Oh, he returned. He was wounded on The Somme in 1916 and sent home to recuperate. He was never fit enough to return, though, and after the war his disability meant he couldn't get a job.

Lil: So how did he look after his family?

Sheila: He couldn't. My grandmother worked as a seamstress and earned enough to get the essentials. My grandfather grew what food he could in the back garden and between them they survived. My point, though, is that when the Haig Fund was set up, my grandparents applied for help, but were turned down time after time. It's funny, but they were never told why. They believed it was because my grandmother was working and the little she was bringing in took them over some threshold for assistance, but I don't know if that's true. I would have thought that to have fought and nearly been killed for your country would've entitled you to something, no matter what. Anyway, because they were never helped, it

coloured their outlook somewhat and they never gave to the poppy appeal.

Mavis: Understandable in the circumstances, but their lack of a donation wasn't a moral issue. Many people do need help and are helped today by the appeal.

Gladys: Coffee's here, ladies.

Sheila: Thanks, Gladys. That's true enough, Mavis, but you'll forgive my scepticism. However, do you want to know the irony of that story? I always give, every year, to the appeal and I do it in honour of my grandfather. Despite the fact that my family never received a penny, the Fund, today, does help where it can and if, in doing so, it helps someone like my grandfather, then it's worth it.

Lil: Mind you, the services today are very different from your grandfather's time. They're all volunteers for a start and seem to join up more for the opportunity to go skiing in Norway or The Rockies than do any fighting! When they are shot at, they immediately claim Post Traumatic Stress and sue the Government for thousands. You'd think they'd be aware of the possibility, especially in today's world, that they're going to be sent to some dodgy places. However, if they're sent off to fight in a war that nobody believes is right, or one that is fought for the wrong reasons, does that make it more or less morally acceptable for your poppy tin donations to be used for their or their families benefit? After all, they don't have a say in where they are sent, but no-one forced them to join the services in the first place.

Gladys: Lil, you don't know what you're talking about!

Mavis: Yes, Lil. It would've been better if you'd kept those thoughts to yourself.

Lil: I'm only voicing what a lot of people think! Besides, why is Gladys getting so upset?

Gladys: I'll tell you, shall I?

Mavis: Just forget it, Gladys. Lil didn't know.

Gladys: I'm okay, Mavis. I want Lil to hear this. My son, Scott, joined the army in 1989 at 18. It's all he ever wanted to do and couldn't wait for the day he could sign up. And yes, you're right. He was looking forward to the social side, to the trips abroad, to the 'perks' if you like. Equally, he was aware that he might be called upon to fight and was ready to do so if it came to that. Though, he could never hurt a fly really. Anyway, 1991 came around and he was sent off to the Gulf, to fight in Kuwait. He never came back. It wasn't a courageous, noble death. He didn't die in battle, saving his colleagues by storming a machine-gun post or something like that. The fighting had finished. He happened to be driving a jeep - going to pick up his sergeant, I think they said - when a dog ran out in front of him. He swerved to avoid it and the jeep ended up on its side in a ditch. Scott died instantly. Naturally, my husband and I were aware of the Haig Fund, but we neither knew nor cared if we were entitled to anything. We didn't want money, just our son back. So you see, Lil, I'm not in a position to answer your question and, frankly, I don't know who would be, but I'm willing to venture that every member of a fallen serviceman or woman's family would return every penny they'd ever had from the Haig Fund if it meant they could have their loved one back.

Lil: I'm so sorry, Glad. I just never knew.

Gladys: Look, Lil, don't worry about it. Just remember, next year and each year after that, when you buy your poppy, don't think you're promoting or perpetuating war, or showing your support for a Government, of any colour, that uses war as a vote catcher, or that you're keeping a board of directors in petrol and lunch money. You're just giving something for those who gave everything. Now, pass me that last tin over. It's time we finished counting.

Due to the sobering and chastening lack of interest in the quiz posers in the Xmas pullout, we will not be giving the answers in this lifetime. In the interests of cost-effectiveness, the