A Victorian Institution in the Twentieth Century

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A Brave New Century

It wasn’t All Change in 1900 for *Punch* magazine, but steady-as-she-goes. For one, the editorial staff, writers and cartoonists were all Victorians: Editor Francis Burnand had contributed since 1863, Linley Sambourne since 1867, and its greatest asset Sir John Tenniel who would retire a year later, drew his first *Punch* illustration in 1850. A few of them continued into the mid-twentieth century: Lewis Baumer, George Stampa, Leonard Raven-Hill and Bernard Partridge worked into the 30s, 40s and 50s while a new generation of writers and artists such as PG Wodehouse, AP Herbert, EV Lucas, George Morrow and EH Shepard began their long associations with the magazine at the start of the century.

The weekly issues from 1900 saw a wide range of content and cartoon styles that celebrated the new century and exported English-British culture with cartoons such as ‘Responsibilities of Empire’ while guest authors including Arthur Conan Doyle and Somerset Maugham contributed one-off stories to Mr Punch’s Extra Pages. But as change and progress at home and abroad were pushed through by powerful undercurrents of organised labour, voting equality and rising nationalist independence, *Punch* was firmly anchored in its own Victorian imperial glory. That year the *Punch* offices moved, from 85 Fleet Street a few hundred yards to 10 Bouverie Street, where their printer-owners Bradbury and Agnew had already published (as Bradbury and Evans) The Daily News, Thackeray and Dickens.

Through the Cartoonist’s Looking Glass

Look very closely at the New Year cartoon for 1902 by Linley Sambourne and you will notice a muse holding a mirror with symbols reflected back-to-front and upside-down. A closer inspection reveals the letters of the word “TRUTH”. Through satire and illustration *Punch* never really alters underlying truths, however grotesquely disproportioned its drawings, comical its characters or slanted its Conservative/Liberal/patriarchal/Imperial/English/male bias. Rather, it reflects them back with a mirror of humour, intelligently blending wit, opinion and observation into popular artistic expressions of the highest order. Because a truth remains somewhere in the message, like comedy, the whole thing works. Collectively the magazine described a culture and period of time from within, and in so doing became the definition of Englishness: its worldview, sensibilities, politics, fashions, hobbies and humour. *Punch* regularly surprised the reader by what characters in cartoons would say or do, whether through familiar recognition or anachronistic shock. More impressive is their clothing and accessories; living rooms and gardens, carriages and streets, shops and art galleries are all drawn in authentic contemporary detail. For the 1970s television series Upstairs Downstairs the producers used George du Maurier’s cartoons to help create their sets, while many of the ‘one-liners’ heard in Downton Abbey sound typical of the jokes which appeared in thousands of *Punch* social cartoons.

But the nature of ‘detail’ changed: from du Maurier’s fascinating Society cartoons of the 1860s-1890s rendering every crease and crumple of a lady’s dress (including theatrical instruction in the caption), to Phil
May’s simplified Art Nouveau lines of street life in the early twentieth century, to Fougasse’s distanced view of crowds as detailed squiggles, to the fine-art illustrative colour detail of Frank Reynolds and Leslie Illingworth; the graphic style starting from Linley Sambourne and running through to Norman Thelwell, Mike Williams and Quentin Blake, to the gradually changing facial expressions in HM Bateman’s panel cartoons; Pont’s backgrounds and genteel familiarity, Rowland Emett’s surreal fantasies, Michael ffolkes’ delicate, comical rococo line, Ronald Searle and Ralph Steadman’s sharp scrawls, David Myers’ childlike simplicity and Andre Francois’ cartoons where readers deciphered the joke by making connections within the details. These were all masters of their art.

In ‘cartoon reality’ people go about their daily business conversing with neighbours, going to the office, boating, buying houses, holidaying, driving, playing tennis or parlour games, dining, entertaining and tripping over metaphorical objects, concepts or speech. In this way they distil the dreams and harsh truths of ‘our reality’. We also see the imagined but likely, private conversations of politicians and royalty in their offices and chambers. For example, cartoonist Bernard Partridge places you directly inside the room where PM Stanley Baldwin addresses Edward VIII over the abdication crisis in ‘The Choice’ (16 December 1936: 687). It is this privileged fly-on-the-wall history that Punch invites us into that is most exciting. Another cartoon parodying the Concert of Europe shows the major powers waiting for dance partners; France’s Marianne chooses John Bull after being let down by Mussolini in a 1923 cartoon called The Old Partner. And the real-life ‘Ping-Pong Diplomacy’ of 1971 between the USA and China was borrowed from a Punch cartoon of the same name from 1901.

**Punch as Social Commentary**

It is often said that cartoons in Punch are great social commentary; while many are snapshots of times that describe the way people lived and thought, one often overlooks the writing. For example, greater analysis can be found in Bernard Hollowood’s serious articles on the state of the international, political and economic landscape of the Cold War in the 50s, Elspeth Huxley on how immigration was changing society in the early 60s and society’s responsibility to immigrants; in the 70s William Hardcastle focussed on Britain’s crisis of identity, William Davis on strikes and a New Europe, Francis Williams on the media. And reading Joan Bakewell you can gather what it was like for a woman living in a changing society: the sexual freedoms and expression in the 60s hadn’t translated to equality in the 70s where sexism and misogyny still reigned. As a whole, Punch is a barometer for measuring Britain’s status in the world, measuring class struggle, measuring sexual and racial equality; measuring its own medium against the media. The magazine absorbed, magnified, parodied and re-imagined reality in its own parallel universe threaded with home truths that were particularly English. This interplay of the arts, science, politics, fashion, technology and class in the form of a cartoon, poem, comment or story makes for a fun, engaging experience.

As a study of social character, Pont’s cartoon series ‘The British Character’ is the most celebrated but thousands more by numerous other cartoonists
appeared weekly. One example shows a man crashing through the ceiling, his legs dangling above a married couple nonchalantly reading a newspaper and knitting: “Don’t speak dear” the woman tells her husband, “It’s that horrid Mr Oozley from the flat above who was so rude to me” (Sherwood, 1933). Another by Bateman ‘The Man who Paid off his Overdraft’ (26 May 1930: Summer Number) shows a man happily striding out of a bank manager’s office as a row of cashiers cheer him on. This contrasts with Tenniel’s political cartoon 50 years earlier of The Lady of Threadneedle Street bailing out the banks - represented as naughty boys, heads bowed in shame. Corporate and institutional capitalism of the previous century had given rise to personal capitalism in the 30s just as the European nations were beginning to settle their own Great War debts.

In 1951 the Festival of Britain renewed the legacy of the Great Exhibition of 1851 and *Punch* had its own Festival of *Punch*. In this special edition sub-titled ‘The New Elizabethan Age’ the modest yet proud, quirky yet sure-footed English are examined through cartoons and humorous articles. Kenneth Bird, whose nom-de-plume “Fougasse” was famous for his wartime ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’ posters resurrected his own type of Mass Observation, ‘The Changing Face of Britain’ from WW2: a series of spot-the-difference cartoons showing London crowd behaviour before and after war.

But it wasn’t a one-way dialogue. Starting in 1958 *Punch* started a weekly Toby Competition setting readers challenges: to write a fictional review on a well-known artwork, or a poem in the style of Homer; the top prize being a cartoon original. In 1965 *Punch* published reader letters for the first time and held a cartoon competition for children (a teenage cartoonist, Ken Pyne, was discovered) and in 1969 started the long- running Caption Competition, really a cartoon ‘remix’ by readers. Winners received cash prizes of five pounds, later rising to ten pounds. These important features of the magazine made *Punch* a companion at home, or a home from home for Colonials abroad: a small A4-ish sized corner of England in a remote outpost of Empire. For every magazine of *Punch* sold, nine other people would have held a copy as it was passed around, re- posted or left on coffee tables to enjoy. In a circulation of around 125,000 in 1973 this equated to more than one million readers.

**Defending Civilisation and Empire**

*Punch* is a record of massive cultural change in Britain during a century and a half. It also charts the continuity and struggle of British identity, or more accurately, Englishness as produced for and consumed by the middle classes at home and abroad in the imperial/colonial Empire.

Optimism and civilisation were the order of the day: a dialogue called “The Coming Century” in 1898 may have described a dystopia of a women-only parliament but in presenting a fantastical prophesy it attempted to reinforce the established order. Real change however was already afoot. The British government set up the Fawcett Commission in 1901, an all-woman body led by moderate Suffragist leader Millicent Fawcett to investigate concentration camps during The Boer War.
Britain’s victory in South Africa caused widespread international criticism and approached the high watermark of an Empire globally managed with the use of telegraphy and steam ships. The great threat to Britain in the nineteenth century, which had been France and Russia, became in the twentieth a new imperial, naval Germany. *Punch*’s finest hour was to be in the looming Great War, re-asserting English and wider British-imperial patriotism while pulling together its reader/subjects into duty for ‘king and country’ during social unrest (Suffragettes) and nationalist independence movements (Ireland). It did by using alternating tones of humour, wisdom or outrage. Maintaining the British Empire, defending both civilisation and its own state required vast human and political resources, not least in morale; and the cartoons portrayed, reinforced and convinced accordingly.

Politicians, naturally, were fair game. Gladstone, Disraeli and Lloyd George were praised and pilloried, but respected in equal measure. Members of Parliament, Prime Ministers and Totalitarian leaders all went through the mill of satire, from Asquith to Eden, Atlee to Wilson, Macmillan to Thatcher, Louis Napoleon, Tsar Nicholas I, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Stalin and Hitler. The young Churchill grew up reading *Punch* while seeing his father Randolph mercilessly ridiculed in its pages, and learnt about history and the world through its full page political cartoons. These often depicted Britannia, the British Lion, John Bull, the German Eagle, Russian Bear, French Poodle or Cockerel, Indian Tiger or Afghan Cat. Early on, *Punch*’s staunch anti-Irish/Nationalist/Catholic stance depicted Irish Monkeys, Frankenstein and sub-human Fenians.

A recurring Imperialist tone of saving various peoples (and by extension, taking control) such as the Irish damsel Eire from a separatist dragon, Africans in the Congo from the snake-like Belgian rubber coils, or Indians from famine, all echoed Britain’s burden of responsibility to tame nature and civilise the world. America was ‘Little Jonathan’, a rowdy upstart that a paternal John Bull had trouble guiding. By the time the Great War ended, that relationship had turned upside down along with the old orders of Europe, the British Empire, class, gender and culture itself. The once successful pattern of Britannia or the British Lion meting out vengeance on rebel Sepoys in India or arguing the moral case against Belgium in Africa was over.

**The Consumer Age**

As the sun began setting on Empire, the shoots of a ‘brighter’ London and the Bright Young Things appeared in the 1920s, the term ignited by reports of scientific discoveries such as Einstein’s Relativity theory in 1919 and the requirement for a new way of looking at the world and living in it. Readers were consumers: gadgets, inventions and popular science fed this need for a new society that was at once broken and breaking away from the devastation of WWI [26 August 1914: 185].

The age of the consumer coincided with the Golden Ages of illustration, mass journalism, advertising, radio and cinema, and *Punch* through its anti-hero Mr Punch.
rode these horses simultaneously like a circus entertainer. Frequently cartoons dared to go even further than what was possible in an age of optimism and discovery. One could hardly imagine a plasma TV with two-way communication in the 1870s but *Punch* ‘made it real’ in one of George du Maurier’s visionary cartoons, ‘the Telephonoscope’ (1 January 1879: Almanack). Another by Charles Harrison in 1901 shows a flying policeman stopping speeding cars in the sky. As soon as a new invention appeared, *Punch* re-invented it with its attendant quirks. This was the cutting edge of *Punch*’s Brave New World: humans combining with technology and creating confusion.

Mass travel, motoring and cheap flights in a new Jet Age from the 1950s onwards enhanced a global economy, and more cartoons on regional dialects or cultural differences, holidays, corporate settings and immigration appear in the 60s re-evaluating Britain’s status within Europe and the World. The Come to Europe and Come to Britain cartoons of 1960 developed into questions of England’s North-South divide (30 April 1969: 639), and Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, recession, unemployment, de-valuation, strikes and neo-fascism by 1970 are counterpointed by anti-British immigration cartoons from an Australian perspective. A spine-chilling 1977 front cover cartoon by Jensen ‘If We Had A Fascist Britain’ highlights how far the country had gone, could go and in so doing, how it had to retreat. By being extreme or surreal, cartoons infuse important issues with humour and like the best comedy, question and re-balance a country’s morals. This was *Punch*’s strength: it showed you the abyss in advance and was an early warning alert, a satnav for the cultural psyche. On many occasions the Big Cut [1] political cartoon was a cautionary tale of what could happen: EH Shepard’s ‘The Awful Warning’ (14 August 1935: 183), still pertinent in today’s international affairs, was superbly cynical in its anti-appeasement stance when British and European opinion at the time was largely pro-appeasement. In other cartoons we see Neville Chamberlain building a sandcastle as Mussolini splashes with him in the rising tide; or as a hesitant firefighter as buildings burn, a foretaste of the Blitz and WW2.

**The “New Woman”**

*Punch* in the twentieth century was at the forefront of describing and re-imagining a new world of exciting discoveries, scientific breakthroughs, New Art and New Politics and shows how these layers enhance or challenge the normal man or woman on the street. When a new form of self-defence called Jujitsu becomes popularised in Western media, we see it applied to politics with ‘The Suffragette that knew Jiu-jitsu. The Arrest’ (6 July 1910: 9) one woman, sleeves rolled up, and police casualties impaled on the railings. When a new dance called the Tango arrives we see ‘The Spread of Tango’ (26 November 1913: 458) a policeman arrested a Suffragette using his latest dance move.

The “New Woman” was constantly evolving and pushing the limits of what was permissible in dress, vocation and behaviour. Fashions changed with the practicalities of physical movement in leisure and employment such as cycling, dancing, ice-skating or factory work. If mid-nineteenth century daring would be to visit the criminal courts un-chaperoned with a male friend or cycling in the fin-de-siècle, then in the first half of the twentieth
The New Woman was reinvented every decade, from Actress in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, Munitions Worker in WW1, the Flapper/Bright Young Thing in the 20s, Aviator and Businesswoman in the 30s, Land Girl and WAAF transport pilots in the 40s, the New Look Mary Poppins type in the 50s; liberated and objectified Sex object in the 60s, Feminist in the 70s; social climber, powerdresser, politician and Prime Minister in the 80s. The expedient gender equality for women in WW1 and WW2 which included work at operations desks as Bletchley code breakers, or important roles in Make Do and Mend, and Dig for Victory developed further in the post-war austerity period with rising aspiration, travel, mass consumerism, Rock & Roll, the Pill and Feminism. The Battle of Britain was replaced with the ‘Battle of the Sexes’ and the cartoons in Punch, mostly drawn by men, show assertive women demanding chivalry or equality in ironic settings; secretaries, doll-like, sat forcibly on the boss’ lap; nightclub hostesses, cleaners or long suffering wives. But women hadn’t just demanded equality and empowerment, they started controlling the levers of power and in 1919 Nancy Astor became the first woman MP. ‘The Penitent’ (10 December 1919: 491) fast-forwards to 1967 and future Punch editor William Davis wrote a congratulatory open letter to Minister for Transport Barbara Castle in the series ‘Letters to Our Masters’. A few years later he invited her to be Punch editor for one issue, replacing the editorial staff with women and sub-titling it Judy.

The cartoons drawn by women over the years - Anne Harriet Fish, Antonia Yeoman, Sheila Dunn, Sally Artz, Riana Duncan, Merrily Harpur - show assertive female characters concerned with fashion and social one-upmanship, cynical and sharp witted, at times ruthless to inadequate men, at others the pretentious housewife or ambitious mother. In this sense not much had changed since Society cartoonist George du Maurier’s day, except that women were now making the jokes. Sexism and chauvinism, however, hadn’t changed; female suffrage and greater control of women’s lives (choosing whether or not to have sex/babies/careers) in an increasingly sexualised culture only increased these tensions, and the cartoons reflected this. The corporate world was still male dominated. Punch’s largely male middle-class readers would have simply acknowledged cartoons confirming a misogynistic status quo rather than being made to ask questions or prompting social change. Gone was the out-dated moral guidance of Mr Punch regularly popping-up to tell off strikers and socialists, or venting off about Suffragette vandalism, although Punch did bring balance with cartoons such as ‘The Dignity of the Franchise’ (10 May 1905: 327). By the 1960s Mr Punch’s job was redundant: the cartoon preaching more to the dyed-in-the-wool type than to the New Man. The joke cartoon, social cut, political full page (called the Big or Large Cut) and later the front
cover took over in revealing the surreal and the cynical. Just as these cartoons dealt with racial issues in the 60s and 70s with ‘token blacks’ now it was the irony of ‘token women’ in corporate boardrooms or exclusively male committees on female equality. Later however, the dynamics of this Battle of the Sexes was superbly translated with savage irony by William Haefeli, one of a handful of great American cartoonists working for Punch, in what could be described as his New Man and New Woman cartoons of the 80s and 90s.

Although largely male-oriented in content and readership, Punch did attract women readers with its “For Women” section, written by women (though edited by novelist Peter Dickinson), and was later renamed “Judy”. The poets and writers Margaret Drabble, Joan Bakewell, Angela Milne, EM Delafield, Mary Dunn, Elspeth Huxley and Joyce Grenfell wrote regularly for the magazine; and Virginia Graham’s poems are wonderfully evocative of the struggles that Londoners endured during WW2. Great women cartoonists included Georgina Bowers in the nineteenth and Fish, Anton, Merrily Harpur, Sally Artz and Riana Duncan in the twentieth century. In 1972 with MP Barbara Castle guest-editing the magazine, an all-female editorial staff included Joan Bakewell, Molly Parkin and Irma Kurtz.

**Conclusion**

In the end, Punch remains the chronicle of English culture from its minutest foibles to its grandest achievements. In terms of years served, three cartoonists: John Tenniel, Bernard Partridge and David Langdon span 142 years from 1850-1992, overlapping and working for more than 50 years each to continue the line from the Victorian Age to the Modern Era. Just as the East India Company boldly forged its own destiny and that of the British Empire in the nineteenth century, Punch had done so in the media, achieving world coverage. But just as the East India Company had been absorbed by the Empire, Punch belonged to a certain greatness, to a period of time, to history. It was no longer an institution, but a monument. Like Father Time, Mr Punch could never be wrong: he was merely an observer; an actor on the finest stage reciting lines that we the public, through the satirists, had given him.

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**APPENDIX A: NOTABLE CONTRIBUTORS**

Punch didn’t just have its finger on the pulse of English culture, it was the pulse. Its cartoonists illustrated for the top authors, adverts and information posters. Its writers were respected authors and librettists, playwrights and poets, journalists and critics witnessing first-hand the politics, arts and social developments recorded in ‘Sketches of Parliament’, ‘At the Play’ and the many ‘social cut’ cartoons.

A handful were knighted: John Tenniel, Francis Burnand, Bernard Partridge and AP Herbert; Owen Seaman’s 1914 knighthood was upgraded to a Baronetcy upon retiring as Punch editor. William Haselden was offered a knighthood, and long standing contributors PG Wodehouse and John Betjeman given the honour late in life.
Punch contributors came from a range of backgrounds:

- University dons (Owen Seaman)
- MPs (AP Herbert, Christopher Hollis, Clement Freud, Giles Brandreth, Roy Hattersley)
- A publisher (EV Lucas, chairman of Methuen)
- An architect (Acanthus designed Gatwick Airport’s Beehive lounge)
- Jazz musicians (Trog, Humph, Benny Green, Miles Kington, George Melly)
- Actors (Bernard Partridge, Joyce Grenfell)
- Artists (Jack Butler Yeats)
- An inventor (Rowland Emett)
- Sportsmen (RC Lehmann, Bernard Hollowood)
- Engineers (Fougasse, Sambourne)
- Novelists (George du Maurier: Trilby; Anthony Powell: Dance to the Music of Time; Patrick Ryan: How I Won The War; Ernest Bramah: Kai Lung; Keith Waterhouse: Billy Liar; Alan Hackney: Private’s Progress; Margaret Drabble, Elspeth Huxley, Peter Dickinson, C.S. Lewis)
- Poets (John Betjeman, Virginia Graham)
- Military intelligence (AA Milne, Malcolm Muggeridge)
- War Propaganda Bureau (Thomas Derrick was its Art Editor)
- Broadcasters (Michael Parkinson, Frank Muir, Joan Bakewell, Ann Leslie)

Several served in either of the World Wars including in WW2 Ronald Searle, David Langdon, Alfred Bestall (WW1 and WW2), and Basil Boothroyd.

The cartoonists Partridge, Illingworth, Fougasse and Langdon all produced public information posters for government ministries, the most celebrated of which were the Careless Talk Costs Lives campaign for the Ministry of Information by Fougasse in 1940.

Various high profile regulars and guest writers, historians and thinkers crop up such as:

- John Steinbeck
- Graham Greene
- JB Priestley
- Margaret Drabble
- Alan Bullock
- David Frost
- Clive James
- Michael Parkinson
- Frank Muir
- Harry Secombe

“Fougasse”, Kenneth Bird’s nom-de-plume (French for an unreliable WW1 landmine), was a product of the frontline: his first contribution sent into Punch was from a war hospital bed in 1916 where he was critically injured. Fougasse was awarded a CBE in 1946 in recognition of this contribution.

The series of articles ‘Our Man in America’ in the 1950s was written by the iconic P.G. Wodehouse who had been a regular contributor to Punch from 1902-1914. In the 1970s the staff tried to get his signature on the Punch Table but couldn’t overcome the problem of him being in America.
Jan Struther (whose *Punch* work was noticed by *The Times* and went on to write Mrs Miniver) wrote several stories and poems illustrated by Anne Harriet Fish and EH Shepard.

*Punch* theatre critic Eric Keown’s short story ‘Sir Tristram Goes West’ was turned into the successful Hollywood film ‘The Ghost Goes West’ (1936) starring Robert Donat.

John Bingham (John le Carré’s inspiration for spymaster George Smiley) wrote poetry and prose on occasion: his “Telephone Conversation, 1943” of a supposed cross-wired eavesdropped exchange is a revelation. Readers at the time would not have known his day-job was an MI5 intelligence officer.

**APPENDIX B: FAMOUS SERIES IN PUNCH**

‘The Fancy Portraits’ series in the 1870s of Victorian celebrities, politicians, authors, do-gooders, innovators and icons re-emerged in the twentieth century with ‘Punch Personalities’ and ‘Heroes of Our Time’. In one portrait Arthur Conan Doyle is dramatically chained by an evil Sherlock Holmes in Bernard Partridge’s excellent full page cartoon.

In the 1950s *Punch* made brilliant use of Ronald Searle’s talents to produce double-page colour posters of Princess Margaret, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, Bertrand Russell and Sir Malcolm Sergeant among others, while William Hewison added ‘Sporting Heroes’ and ‘Artist’s Corner’. His ‘As They Might Have Been’ re-cast celebrities such as Graham Greene, Richard Dimbleby and Joe Orton in different occupations.

Later the ‘portrait’ became an illustrated interview in ‘Passing Through’. The actors Roger Moore, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Telly Savalas and many legends from film, music and the arts were interviewed by David Taylor and sketched by the inimitable Ffolkes. Michael Parkinson, Melvyn Bragg, Clement Freud, Humphrey Lyttelton and Harry Secombe were regular contributors and occasional pieces appear by Michael Palin, Terry Jones and John Cleese, Joanna Lumley and even Paul McCartney.

**APPENDIX C: FAMOUS COMIC CREATIONS**

Some great comic characters were created in the twentieth century, just as the Grossmith’s ‘Diary of a Nobody’ had with Charles Pooter in the 1880s or the Mr Briggs series of cartoons by Leech in the 1840s–60s, and all first appeared in *Punch* before being published in book form.

In 1924 Winnie the Pooh (then called Teddy Bear) in the ‘When We Were Very Young’ series of illustrated poems, was a creative merger of two masters: journalist AA Milne and cartoonist EH Shepard. However, Pooh first appeared in *Punch* as Edward Bear with the prototype drawing by Alfred Bestall, not Shepard.

Geoffrey Willans’ ‘Nigel Molesworth’ first appeared in 1939, HF Ellis’ ‘The Diary of AJ Wentworth’ (1938) and ‘Max the hamster’ by Giovannetti (1952).
Another hugely successful series was ex-barrister AP Herbert’s ‘Misleading Cases’ (1924) which parodied the absurdities of British law using hypothetical cases. These were collected in book form and made into a BBC series in the 1960s.

During WW2 and the immediate post-war era Mary Dunn’s ‘Lady Addle’s Domestic Front’ and ‘The Memoirs of Mipsie’ series were also hugely popular.

In the 1970s and 80s it was Alan Coren’s ‘Correspondences of Idi Amin’ (turning him into a first-person fan-fiction comedy character), Miles Kington’s ‘Let’s Parlez Francais’, Merrily Harpur’s ‘The Nightmares of Dream Topping’ and Michael Bywater’s incendiary ‘Bargepole’ column.

NOTES

[1] This is also referred to as the Big Cut by a number of scholars and academics.