



AUGUST FOLLY (1936)

Hamish Hamilton First Edition

Penny Aldred and Hilary Temple

Angela Thirkell wrote August Folly in 1934 while staying at West Hoathly, near East Grinstead, in East Sussex. In May 1999 the Angela Thirkell Society visited Hook Farm and saw the visitors' book with entries by Angela and Lance, and travelled on the Bluebell Line, a privately-run steam railway operated on what was a public service until the reorganisation and closure of many lines in the 1950s. An account of this appears in the Society's Journal No 19.

CHAPTER I

- 7 Sixty miles west of London: This would place Worsted somewhere near Salisbury, thought to be the inspiration for Barchester, though West Hoathly is in East Sussex, and some forty miles south of London. There is a village called Worstead in Norfolk, which gave its name to the woollen cloth woven there by immigrant Flemish weavers from the Conquest onwards.
 Winter Overcotes: Is it too fanciful to suggest that AT got the idea from this name from the station at Somercotes in Derbyshire, not too far from Totley where she lived in the early days of her marriage to George Thirkell - one of the stations immortalised in Flanders and Swann's "Slow Train", closed down in the 1960s?
 Two lines cross: there is a similar situation at East Grinstead, not far from West Hoathly, where Lance remembered also a grey horse.
- 8 Worsted murders.: Does anyone know of any notorious railway tunnel murders in 1892?
- 9,31 Tokens of metal. This system, designed to prevent accidents on a single-track railway, is still in operation in County Wicklow, Ireland, and no doubt elsewhere.
- 10 Skeynes: One of the stations on what is now the Bluebell Line is Horsted Keynes. A skein is a bundle of wool which has been spun but not yet knitted or woven.
 River Woolram: probably a suitable sheep-related name, though there is a village in Lincolnshire called Woolram Wygate.
 Milk Marketing Board: The MMB was set up in 1933 to control the production and distribution of milk. It was abolished in 1994.
 Mr Tebben: There is much of Professor Mackail in Mr Tebben, though the Tebbens are also thought to be based on Professor and Mrs Esdaile of West Hoathly. Professor Mackail is best known as a Virgil scholar, but he did publish works on the Icelandic sagas. He worked at the Ministry of Education from 1884 – 1919, so it is quite possible that his expertise was in demand for the censor's department.
- 12 small flat tin bath: An illustration by Philip Burne-Jones to *The Young Pretenders* by Edith Henrietta Fowler (1895, Persephone reprint, 2008) shows one of these, which is quite different from a hip bath. See also PT 23.
- 13 Greek plays: Godwin and Charlotte King used to produce Gilbert Murray's translations of Greek plays in a sixteenth-century barn in West Hoathly, performed by visitors and local residents, including Mrs King's household staff. The Anglo-Saxon name Godwin no doubt inspired those of the Bonds – Cedric Weyland, Alured, etc.
- 14 The van will be upon us, before the bridge goes down: From *How Horatius Kept the Bridge*, from the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, by Lord Macaulay.

- 17 Hippolytus: by Euripides, produced in 428 BC.
- 19 Two legs sat on three legs milking four legs: ancient riddle (the three legs being a milking stool).
 Mother Goose: According to one of the many Mother Goose sites online, this riddle is mentioned in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. *Mother Goose, a critical review of her collected works*, by Angela Thirkell, London Mercury, 1932, was reissued by the Angela Thirkell Society in 2003.
 The elder Edda: a collection of Icelandic poems, sometimes called the poetic Edda, and with Snorri Sturluson's younger or prose Edda, an influence on Norse and Teutonic literature. See also 61. and GU47.
 Gunnar: a character in Burnt Njal's saga – favourite story in the Mackail and Thirkell children's nurseries. See also 62.
- 21 Aphrodite: Greek goddess of love (Venus to the Romans)
- 26 Modestine: the obstinate donkey in R L Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey*. See also 97.
- 29 tank engine 17062: AT's son Lance, a schoolboy at the time, was a keen railway enthusiast (see also railway knowledge eg Tony Morland in *The Demon in the House*), so I assume this was a real locomotive. I have traced what I think may be it, photographed on 3 May 1963 in the engine shed at Coalville, Leics, by Richard C Riley, print available from The Transport Treasury.
- 31 exchanging tokens: see 9.

CHAPTER II

- 35 attic, formerly his playroom: but Lamb's Piece had only been built after the children went away to school and Mrs Tebben had earned enough money from her coaching.
- 46 Are you a Blue?: Blues (dark for Oxford, light for Cambridge) are awarded to those who represent their university sports matches.
 Greats: the classics course at Oxford, more properly known as Literae Humaniores. The mid-course examinations are known as Mods (Honour Moderations).
- 49 what von Bastow discovered at Terebinthos: ? (all I can find is that the terebinth or turpentine tree was used by the ancient Greeks in medicine).
- 50 Jessica in the perambulator: therefore she can't be more than five or six at the most, yet by the time of *Private Enterprise*, eleven years later, she is an established West End actress.
- 54 stingo: strong (Yorkshire) beer.
- 55 noble lie: according to Plato, it is necessary for politicians and others to lie to keep society together. Also ESR 113, LAAA, 127, ESR 114, DA 153.

CHAPTER III

- 61 thought the harder, heart the bolder: *The Battle of Maldon*, an Old English (late 10th century) poem ('Hige sceal the heardra, heorte the cenre,/mod sceal the mare, the ure maegen lytlath'). Also p.159.
 Snorri: see 18 above.
 Grasmere to Seascale, Watendlath, Borrowdale, Sty Head Pass: AT and Lance used to spend holidays in the Lake District where Angela was a tireless walker. See also BL 53.
 Burnt Njal: see 18 above. Graham, Colin and Lance used to enjoy the same bedtime story from their mother when they lived at 4 Grace St.
- 65 Oddfellows: A social and friendly society which evolved from the old English craft guilds.
- 75 biggest cinema in South London: probably the Granada, Tooting, built in 1931.
- 79 both their respected heads with sorrow to the grave: "bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave", *Genesis 42.38*). Also LAR 232. "respected heads" also seems like a quotation?
- 81 fair and largely made: This sounds like a quotation – maybe Shakespeare – or a parody of one?
- 82 'Oh, utterly accurst/Be she of women ...': This is Gilbert Murray's translation of the Hippolytus of Euripides. Murray was married to the daughter of George and Rosalind Howard, friends of Burne-Jones.
- 84 boy called Morland: Tony Morland, first appears in *High Rising*. He is a pupil at Southbridge School. Robin is a very similar character, both are evidently based on Lance.
- 91-2 Count of Monte Cristo: novel by Alexandre Dumas, 1844.
- 92 dickey: an exterior seat which opened out from the rear of a car – more or less obsolete by the mid-1930s.

CHAPTER IV

- 97 RLS and all that...Modestine ... pin to prick it: "This plain wand, with an eighth of an inch of pin, was indeed a sceptre when he put it in my hands", Chapter 3 of R L Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* "I have a Goad".
- 100 Buffaloes' Outing: The Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes was formed at least as early as 1822 by stage hands and theatre technicians. It has many similarities to the Masons.

- 102 churchyard ... land fell away ... was terraced: This is a good description of the churchyard at West Hoathly, which has a magnificent view over the Sussex Weald, with a viewpoint, though this may have been created more recently than 1934.
- 105 Miss Pitcher-Jukes, The Octavia Crammer fellowship: Any ideas as to who these are based on?
- 106,123 Charles Ravenshoe, Paul's: see Henry Kingsley's *Ravenshoe*, 1862, where Charles Ravenshoe is an undergraduate at the fictitious St Paul's College, Oxford. See also OBH 351, HR 72, JC 97. H Kingsley references CC 203, DD 147, ESR 239, LAAA 228.
- twelve bumps in Eights Week: The river at Oxford is too narrow for overtaking, so each boat (with a crew of eight) has to try to bump the one in front, the winner moving up day by day to become Head of the River.
- 107 climbed round to the outside of the college: *The Night Climbers of Cambridge*, by the pseudonymous Whipplesnaith, published in 1937, has recently been reissued by Oleander Press under its author's real name, Noel Howard Symington. The book that started it all was *The Roof Climber's Guide to Trinity*, by Geoffrey Winthrop Young, 1899.
- 110 First in Economics: a bit of a mystery here. Women were only admitted as full members of Oxford University and granted degree status in 1920, but on p. 12 we hear that after taking her degree she had done some research, gone on a Norwegian cruise, met and married Mr Tebben, and settled down to coaching and the rearing of a son and daughter. As Richard and Margaret must be round about twenty at the very least, this doesn't add up. Moreover, Economics on its own is still not a degree subject at Oxford. The PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics), or Modern Greats, course was introduced in 1920. However, from the beginning of the 20th century it was possible to take a Diploma in Economics and Political Science (not a degree). Thanks to the Archives Department, University of Oxford.
- 113 Bradford, Greek play at Bradfield: Bradfield College, a public (ie private) school founded in the 1850s in Bradfield, Berkshire, is famous for its Greek theatre where a Greek play is performed every three years. Bradford is an industrial city in Yorkshire.
- 114 the horsemen and the footmen were pouring in amain: *How Horatius Kept the Bridge* again. See 14 above.
- 118 Pindar: Regarded by many as the greatest of the lyric poets of ancient Greece.
- 119, 232 strophe and antistrophe: strophe is the portion of an ode sung by the chorus when turning from east to west, antistrophe the other way.
- 121 Court Theatre, Maeterlinck: plays such as Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* were produced at the Court Theatre in London between 1904 and 1907 by Harley Granville-Barker.
- Celtic Twilight: W B Yeats published a collection of Irish myths and folktales under this name in 1893.
- That woman with one leg who recites so well: Sarah Bernhardt continued to act after having her leg amputated, but she died in 1923, and I don't think she could be described as dwarfish.
- 123 We should take our time from the young men (Ravenshoe's friend Lord Saltire). See 106 above. See also CQ 14, LAAA 270.
- 125 Worship of Dionysus: the worship of Dionysus (Bacchus), god of fertility, wine and growth, involved music, dancing and the drinking of wine, often developing into frenzied orgies.

CHAPTER V

- 136 Orphism: a set of religious beliefs in ancient Greece associated with Orpheus, who descended into Hades and returned.
- Dorothea in *Middlemarch*: the earnest heroine of the novel by George Eliot, married to the elderly scholar Dr Casaubon. See also DA 51, LAAA 144.
- 138 immortal longings: Shakespeare, *Anthony & Cleopatra*, Act V, ii: Cleopatra says 'Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have/Immortal longings in me'. Also MB 148, PBO 9, OBH 85, 157, HRet 36, 79, ESR 10, DA 272, 3SYT 139.
- 142 The Callot or the Schiaparelli: Callot Soeurs, a Paris fashion house noted for their exotic detail, absorbed in 1937 into the House of Calvet, finally closing after WWII. Elsa Schiaparelli, one of the most influential clothing designers of the 20th century, was noted for her surrealist designs of the 1930s.
- 143 like the ass turned lap-dog: fable by Aesop in which the jealous ass tried to behave like the pampered lap-dog and got beaten for the chaos he created.
- 146 W G Grace and Spofforth: famous cricketers of the 19th century – W G Grace English and Spofforth Australian.
- 147 And even the ranks of Tuscany/Could scarce forbear to cheer: at Horatius – Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* again. Also PE 265.
- 152 scrobbling your cook: scrobble is a word probably used by Lance, who would have known John Masfield's *The Midnight Folk* was published in 1927, though *The Box of Delights* was not published until 1935. Some

- readers will remember it on BBC *Children's Hour* in 1943, and later productions in 1948, 1978, and also on TV.
- 154 He was the first that ever burst: we were the first that ever burst/Into that silent sea. Coleridge, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.
- 155 Bolton Abbey in the Olden Time: title of a popular painting. In relusions for JC 12, also DA 268.
- 158-9: Battle of Maldon, see 61 above.
- CHAPTER VI**
- 165 Caligula: particularly unpleasant Roman Emperor.
- 171 It sounds more like Leviticus: Ackcherly it's *Exodus* 20, 17. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's ... ox.
- 174 muzzling oxes that tread corn: Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. *Deuteronomy* 25, 4 Oxes for oxen is unusual. Also NTL 171 and [unmuzzled] 3SYT 69.
- 177 Rushwater Rubicon: The naming of the Rushwater bulls is based on Kipling's Guernsey herd at Batemans, all with names beginning with 'B' – Batemans' Blizzard, Baby, Buttercup, etc.
A story of a cock and a bull: Tobias Smollett, *Tristram Shandy* book 9.
Rape of Europa: mythological tale of Jupiter descending to earth in the form of a bull and carrying Europa off to Crete where she bore him three sons. Also ESR 170
L'appetit vient en mangeant: eating encourages the appetite.
- 179 Intervaluations: though it sounds made-up, this seems to be a genuine term used in economics.
- 180 on with the meal, let joy be unrefined: parody of 'On with the dance, let joy be unconfined', in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Also ESR 190.
a little like Mrs Norris sometimes: in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Mrs Norris is the skinflint aunt of the heroine, Fanny Price, her economies usually entailing expenditure by other people.
walk with kings and not lose that common touch [sic]: AT is deliberately misquoting Kipling's *If*: 'If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue/Or walk with Kings nor lose the common touch', to emphasise the fact that people who talk about Jane or Janeites are common! I feel her disapporval whenever I refer to Angela or AT rather than Mrs Thirkell!
Brooklands: world's first motor-racing circuit, in Surrey. Never recovered from being taken over as an aerodrome in WWII.
The Cities of the Plain: Sodom and Gomorrah, (and three more cities) destroyed by fire and brimstone, *Genesis* 19.
- 185 cuniform (cuneiform): wedge-shaped, like the ancient script of Babylon and Sumeria.
- 188 feed you with apricocks and dewberries: in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* Titania says of Bottom: 'Feed him with apricocks and dewberries, with purple grapes, green figs and mulberries'.
- 189 over the tongs: I can find a couple of references in J M Barrie's novels, *The Little Minister* being one, to marriage, gipsy-fashion, over the tongs.
Special licence: The Archbishop of Canterbury can grant a Special Licence to enable members of the Church of England to be married without waiting for the banns to be read in church, or fulfilling the usual residential qualifications.
- 190 esclandre: an event which gives rise to scandal.
- 192 Oh, arrows of desire: William Blake's poem *Jerusalem*: 'Bring me my bow of burning gold/Bring me my arrows of desire.'
Jaeger underclothes: In 1884 Dr Gustav Jaeger developed so-called 'scientific' theories about hygienic dress and promoted the wearing of pure wool next to the body. Scientific was equated with modern and became associated with 'rational dress reform'. The name Jaeger was sold to an Englishman and the brand survives to this day.
There are distinct echoes of A A Milne's Eeyore in Modestine in this passage.
- CHAPTER VII**
- 195 sluggard's friend: a chafing-dish or hotplate, powered in those days by a spirit lamp.
- 197 Junior Whifflets: This fictitious brand features in Dorothy L Sayers's *Murder Must Advertise*, 1933. In real life, W D & H O Wills produced a small cigar called Wills Whiffs in the 1950s – whether they realised the literary connection I do not know.
- 201 wrapped in a large shepherd's plaid, and looked like a picture of a famous Edinburgh professor: Professor John Stuart Blackie (1809-1895), Professor of Greek at Edinburgh from 1852 to 1882, used to go round wrapped in a shepherd's plaid, wearing a broad-brimmed hat, and carrying a big stick. He lectured at Oxford frequently. In May 1893, he gave his last lecture at Oxford, but afterwards admitted defeat, stating: "It is utterly in vain here to talk reasonably in the matter of Latin or Greek pronunciation: they are case-hardened in ignorance, prejudice and pedantry". He would have been well-known to AT's father.

- 204 till the bull came marching in: not an allusion to *When the Saints*, but to earlier on the page when John says “we’ll be seeing him march in some time this afternoon”.
- 207 the last splinter of ice melted in Helen’s heart: a reference to Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy-tale when Kay had his heart frozen by the Snow Queen and it could only be melted by love. Also LAR 220.
- 213 disported himself like Leviathan: Leviathan, a huge biblical sea-monster, ‘This great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships; there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.’ *Psalms* 104, 25-26.
- 214 took a second ... in the manner of Mr Frank Churchill: from Jane Austen’s *Emma*. Frequently used by AT, see H Ret 229, WDIM 116
- Great Misfortune: Is this something in English history, or just the chief episode in what Susan called the Day of Misfortunes (p.195)
- Stood, uncomfortably bent at a right-angle: it must have been one of those high-built old-fashioned cars where you could stand inside, as you can to this day in a London taxi.
- 216 disciple of Marcus Aurelius: one of the Stoic philosophers, who wrote: ‘We live for an instant, only to be swallowed in “complete forgetfulness and the void of infinite time on this side of us.”’
- 218 Shanks’s mare: [or Shanks’s pony]: to go on foot. Opinion on its derivation is divided between a make of horse-drawn lawn-mower where there was nowhere to sit, and the lower leg-bone or shank.
- 219-221 saving Jessica from the bull: this whole episode is taken from Trollope’s *The Small House at Allington*, where Johnny Eames saves Lord de Guest from a bull and is rewarded by him with a legacy.
- 219 But he felt chilly and grown old: last words of Browning’s poem *Toccata of Galuppi*’s, famous for ‘when the kissing had to stop’. Also PE 176.

CHAPTER VIII

- 227 St Mildred’s = St Hilda’s?
- 228 the unlucky Ivy Punch’s story: Any connection with Rebecca West and the son she had by HG Wells?
- Icelandic procedure in the case of Outlawry: outlawry, or banishment, originated with the Vikings, and many of the best literary and historical accounts come from Iceland.
- 229 spread-eagled: a Viking punishment – having the ribs pried open to expose the still-breathing lungs, as in the case of King Edmund the Martyr (841-869, King of East Anglia).
- 232 strophe and antistrophe: see 119 above.
- Myrmidons: in Homer’s *Iliad*, the soldiers commanded by Achilles.
- 233 Bulls in buckram diminished to one: Falstaff tells a tale of being attacked by men in buckram whose number increases with the telling, when the audience knows that it was simply Prince Hal and Poins (Shakespeare *Henry IV* Part I, act 2, sc. 4: ‘Oh monstrous! Eleven men in buckram grown out of two’.
- Skraeling: the original inhabitants of Greenland at the time of the Vikings’ explorations.
- Kipling’, at which Mr Tebben winced: see Kipling’s *The Finest Story in the World*, an early exercise in sci-fi in which a young bank clerk begins to produce stories about the ancient world, mentioning ‘Skroelings’.
- Mr Tebben evidently did not approve of popularising his area of scholarship. Did Professor Mackail feel the same, perhaps?
- 237 Tristram and Iseult, Lancelot and Guinevere: the legend of the tragic love of Tristram, a knight, and Iseult, wife of King Mark of Cornwall Lancelot and Guinevere: tragic adulterous lovers, predates and probably influenced the Arthurian legend of Sir Lancelot and King Arthur’s wife Guinevere.
- 238 the forbidden degrees: from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, Tables of Kindred and Affinity Wherein Whosoever are Related are Forbidden by the Church of England to Marry Together. The sort of thing Mr Palmer might have been reading on p. 213.
- “Requiem”...rather like Stevenson: R L Stevenson wrote this poem which ends “Home is the sailor, home from sea, and the hunter home from the hill.” It is engraved on his tombstone in Samoa.
- 247 without uncrossing his long legs got up and sat down again: this happens elsewhere in the novels, no doubt modelled on someone AT knew.
- 252 dipping ponds: a feature of many English villages, but we are not sure what they were used for.
- 256 speckled hat: possibly a tweed hat, anyway definitely not the sort of thing one of the gentry would wear.
- Actaeon’s fate: in Greek mythology, Actaeon disturbed Artemis bathing and was turned into a stag, then torn to pieces by his own hounds. See also 287.
- 258 prey to dumb forgetfulness: Gray’s *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. AT also uses its next line more than once: ‘For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey,/this pleasing anxious being e’er resigned,/Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,/Nor cast one longing ling’ring look behind?’ also BL 79.
- Coat-tails flying: as in the song “See me dance the polka.”

259 League of Nations: international organisation founded after WWI with the aim of preventing war ever breaking out again.

CHAPTER IX

266 Theseus's' fillet: a fillet is a band worn around the head and over the hair.

268-9 No mention of Richard and Margaret being required to take a driving test, which became compulsory on 13 March 1935, between the writing of the book and its publication.

271 Blondel: troubadour who discovered where Richard the Lionheart was imprisoned by singing the song they had composed together under the window of numerous castles.

Minotaur: the monster, part man, part bull, encountered and slain by Theseus in the labyrinth at Knossos.

Palmerston: 19th century Prime Minister.

275 the goddess ... sent thunder on his unhappy head: Pallas Athena, no doubt, the warrior goddess who burst from Zeus's forehead, and like him, tended to hurl thunderbolts.

279, 291 sal volatile: ammonium carbonate, crushed and used as smelling salts – though on p. 291 Doris is given it as a drink?

281 mobled in grey veils: from Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, ii – First Player: 'But who, ah woe, had seen the mobled queen –' in other books it is usually Lady Emily Leslie who is mobled in shawls.

283 Aunt Palmer hooshed me out: Eeyore fell into the river when playing Poohsticks and was hooshed to the bank. A A Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*, 1928, set in Ashdown Forest, not far from West Hoathly.

287 chill Artemis: Greek goddess of hunting and of the moon (Diana to the Romans).

291 Ben Hur: presumably in the 1925 silent film starring Ramon Novarro.

294 a plague of both our houses: parody of Mercutio's words in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* Act 3 sc I in which he curses "both your houses", ie Capulets and Montagues, and then expires.

CHAPTER X

299 I'm an old fool, Fred, and there's nothing like that: "there's no fool like an old fool" (proverb).

CHAPTER XI

310 *non più andrai*: "You won't go any more [philandering]" ... Figaro's aria admonishing Cherubino in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.

312 there I lay, till next day: "Till next day, there she lay,/In the Bay of Biscay, O!". 19th century Irish song by Andrew Cherry. A parody of this was apparently very popular at church concerts - in this case it was a bad egg that lay till next day: "And when the dustman came to take the bits away/Egg shells he saw! Egg shells he saw! [ie Excelsior!]. He wrapped it up in his tarpaulin jacket/And thought for his tea it would do./He ate it and early next morning/His widow his club-money drew."

317 an ABC: The railway timetable.

319 ghastlily: The Penguin edition has wrongly corrected this to 'ghastly'.