

## "...I BEG TO REPORT..."

### Grey House Lunch - 9th April 1999

This particular **Grey House Lunch** is reported for two special and important reasons. Firstly, it was the last of the lunches given by **Camille Wolff** at 60 Portobello Road - lunches which have by now become something of a by-word in 'Ripper' circles. Over the last four years I have been privileged to be invited to many of these functions and through Cam's generosity have met many people in the world of True Crime, and Ripperology in particular, some of whom have become good and close friends. So it is with great sadness on my part that this era is drawing to a close with Cam's move to Battersea and I shall miss, along with many others, her hospitality and welcoming spirit.

She has on many occasions said that it is not 'Jack the Ripper' that interests her, but the people who the subject has brought together - their personalities, and especially their quirks and idiosyncrasies, being far more interesting to her than the case itself - a subject that she has said she knows little about in any case.

At first glance this may sound strange, as it is she that has been a prime mover in the promotion of JTR in recent years not only editing her own book on the subject but instigating the JTR lunches and gatherings and building up an enviable library of books on the subject (for sale, naturally!). But to see her bright eyes observing the participants at these functions and absorbing their theories, then asking very direct and pointed questions to challenge these ideas, one starts to understand why it is the characteristics of her guests that fascinate her rather than the theses that they may be propounding about the case of the Whitechapel murders.

By the time you read this column Cam will be trading from **47 Kersley Street, Battersea** and we hope that her many friends and True Crime enthusiasts will visit her there where she will be carrying on the Grey House tradition - although this will not be including further luncheon events as far as we know at this present time.

The other reason for this reportage is that this lunch was based around the arrival in London of **Michael Barrett**, due to be interviewed by **Keith Skinner** the following day at **The Cloak and Dagger Club** - this interview, of course, being reported upon by **Adam Wood** in the Proceedings column on page 4.

Before I summarise this extremely intense and instructive meal, I would like to make clear to readers that this precis was written BEFORE **The Cloak and Dagger Club** meeting of 10th April and was written entirely without hindsight, bias or influence from what may have transpired at the meeting itself.

I, myself, was present, on the Friday morning, along with Keith Skinner. **Loretta Lay** and Cam, of course, were the hostesses, and Mike Barrett was there with **Andy Aliffe**, who had sole charge of him for the weekend. Andy quietly warned us not to wind Mike up as any overt challenge might provoke him to call the whole thing off, take himself back to Liverpool and leave the C&D meeting the following evening in flux. **Seth Linder**, a professional writer and journalist, joined us after lunch.

**Jeremy Beadle** had been a visitor to Grey House in the morning and had been introduced to Mike. After some talk Jeremy had gently tried to suggest that there was a syndrome where a confidence trickster began to believe his own web of deceit. Mike, presumably taking this to infer that he was lying, had evidently flared up into aggressive attack mode, and had had to be taken outside by Andy for a cool-off period. Jeremy, in the meantime, had left for other engagements. This was when I arrived, and shortly afterwards, Keith Skinner, also. Mike was soon brought back by Andy and introductions made.

Mike Barrett was not at all what I was expecting, and throughout the afternoon I began to realise that he was an entirely different man to the one I had come to know through the hearsay of many other people.

From the outset Mike made it perfectly clear that he wasn't interested in small talk and he directed conversation directly to the provenance of the Diary, and was quite unshakeable in his adamancy that it was he who had actually composed the text, but **Anne Graham**, his then wife, who had taken the words from the word-processor and written them in her own hand into the ledger. This was the one of several statements that Mike consistently asserted throughout the afternoon.

Some points came out during our conversation that had never been apparent before, such as Mike telling us how he had always believed that **James Maybrick** was, in reality, Jack the Ripper, and had written the Diary to draw attention to this fact. He declared that he had forged to diary for James Maybrick.

Another point was that Mike had discovered the name of an agent (**Doreen Montgomery**) from the Artists and Writers Yearbook and telephoned her to 'sell' her on the Diary of Jack the Ripper. The crucial point being that this was before he had allegedly created the artefact. Doreen took the bait and consequently Mike found that his bluff had been called and he was



Loretta Lay and Camille Wolff

Photo: Paul Daniel



obligated to actually produce the Diary that he had told Doreen already existed or abort the exercise. He told us he then had eleven days before his arranged meeting with Doreen in which to concoct the Diary and that was the time span in which he did so. This was completely new to us at this meeting.

At this point Keith Skinner stopped Mike in mid-flow, made sure all visitors to Grey House were present and asked him to repeat what he had said so that we could all witness these new statements.

Several other things became clear, one being that there was deep resentment in Mike for the break-up of his marriage and the loss of his daughter, who he claimed he had not seen for six years, and I felt that this bitterness clouded and influenced a lot of what he said and wanted others to believe. Mike has now had many years to arrange his 'defence' of having created the journal, and it appeared to me that over those years he must have prepared and learnt a script, held in his mind's eye, that covered all contingencies and contained stock answers to any questions he might be asked. Though when taken out of the chronology, or context, in his mind, he floundered, and bluffed and blustered.

Two people received the bulk of Mike's wrath - Anne Graham and Shirley Harrison. I have met, and got to know and like, both these ladies over the last few years, yet Mike was expecting me to believe *him*, to me a complete stranger, without putting forward any qualifying reasons, that everything they both said was lies. This was another point he adamantly held on to throughout the meeting.

It was also very clear that Mike had always wanted to be considered a 'writer' of worth, and when challenged, produced a two page piece of text which, though I did not read it myself, was said by the others who did, not to be of any quality at all. Cam herself challenged Mike suggesting that if he had composed the Diary, as he professed, he should be able to demonstrate that he was, in fact, a good writer, with the result that Mike told a rather charming fairytale about 'Willie the Whale'. This, I felt, was supposed to appear to be spontaneous, but I wondered how many times he'd related that story to his daughter in her childhood, because it was plainly obvious he was 'remembering' the tale, and it was not a stream-of-consciousness story.

Towards the end of the session, which had lasted nearly five hours, questions of a very focused and intense kind were being asked of Mike, specifically from Loretta, and he was reacting in like manner. This was not pleasing to Andy, whose job it was this weekend as Mike's 'minder', to keep him from this sort of interrogation in case he simply blew his cool, upped and walked away from the whole thing, having been pushed too far. But it was in the nature of things that as the afternoon progressed conversation would become more heated and some very hard, pertinent and awkward questions would need definitive answers.

In the final outcome, Mike hung on and kept himself fairly well restrained, and the whole event ended amicably, but with much anticipation for the actual 'interview' to be held at the City Darts the following evening, when things were likely to be far more heavy and the questions more deeply searching and requiring provable answers.

This seems an appropriate place to relate the complete story of Anne Graham's visit to London on 8th February which was commented on in the last issue's "...I Beg..." column, though not reported in full at the time for obvious reasons. When Anne arrived at my flat on this day, after meeting with her agent to discuss publicity for her new book *The Last Victim*, she looked particularly strained. Settling in with a cup of coffee she explained to me and Keith Skinner, who was also present, that she had had a particularly stressful and upsetting weekend. Evidently an excessively drunk Mike Barrett had arrived outside her house on the Saturday evening shouting and swearing, hurling abuse and threats and banging on her front door. He eventually forced his way in, pushed Anne to the ground, knocking off her glasses in the process. Their daughter Caroline came to give Anne support and received a black eye from Mike. When they had managed to eject him from the house he wandered away, still fuming. In the meantime the police had been called. Extraordinarily, when they arrived, Mike Barrett returned to the house, again hurling abuse, and was then arrested and taken to jail for the night. It was no wonder Anne appeared so tired and stressed.

There is simply no reason to disbelieve Anne's story as this incident of Mike's arrest and night in jail will be entered in police records and be available to anyone with the suitable connections to request the information.

The point of relating this incident will be seen in the questions that Loretta Lay asked Mike Barrett towards the end of the Grey House lunch reported above. She asked him, eye to eye, and I witnessed this conversation myself, "Have you ever physically attacked your wife?" To which Mike vehemently replied in the negative. To the next question, and Loretta added that he had no obligation to answer, "Did you attack your daughter Caroline?" Mike professed outrage at the accusation and categorically denied all knowledge of the incident referred to. He then turned to Keith Skinner and asked "What's this all about - I don't know anything about this".

This is the action of a man who would have us believe that he is non-violent; and the culmination to Mike's interview at the *Cloak and Dagger Club* meeting is 'adequate public endorsement of his aggressive attitude.

We recently received the amusing cartoon featured on the right from Jim Tully who had been sent it by his friend Alan Taylor, an artist living in New Zealand - we thought it worth reprinting here to raise a chuckle or two...

