



'IN THE SPOTLIGHT'

Each month we put a different person 'in the spotlight' and pose 12 wide-ranging questions to them. This month, we feature **Max Hunt, Secretary of The Housman Society**.

1. Tell us an interesting fact about yourself that not many people know.

I hate beetroot. It has associations with the dreary salads that used to be part of school dinners in the 1950s. I shall never forget the large bowl of bortsch served up by the wife of a newly appointed headteacher whose first dinner invitation I had accepted in 1974. Politeness and the wish to position myself for my first Head of Department post demanded that I drained the bowl enthusiastically – much to my wife's amusement!

2. What book made most impact on you as a child?

After the Arthur Ransome *Swallows and Amazons* series, which I devoured avidly as an 8-9 year old, probably the most influential was Rosemary Sutcliffe's *Eagle of the Ninth*. It sparked an enthusiasm for historical fiction which led me on through all of her novels and then on to such as Geoffrey Trease.

3. What is your favourite film, and why?

I think it would have to be David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*, partly because of my fascination with the character, partly because of Peter O'Toole's brilliant performance and partly because of the way it brought to a wider audience the history of British duplicity in our treatment of the Arabs during and after the First World War.

4. What are your main hobbies/interests, apart from reading, of course?

In addition to helping run the Housman Society my time is taken up with being Secretary of the Railton Owners Club (I have two of these rare cars from the 1930s), driving and maintaining others in my collection of classic cars (MG, Jaguar, Rover and Mini), and the operation and conservation of the water mill at Shelsley Walsh which I helped restore.

5. What would be the three things you would like to have if you were stranded on a desert island?

Palgrave's Golden Treasury, an endless supply of malt whisky and a wireless with reliable access to BBC Radio Four.

6. What would a look at your bookshelves tell us about you?

That my academic background is in Modern History; that I collect first editions of the novels of Francis Brett Young; and that I have a lifelong interest in vintage and classic motor cars. (I still have *The Driving and Maintenance of Vintage Cars* by Wheatley and Morgan which I chose as a prize on leaving Grammar School in 1964). It would also be evident that I am very untidy!



7. If you could invite any three people, dead or alive, to a dinner party, who would they be, and why?

a) Sir Stirling Moss: to enjoy reminiscence of the glory days of British motor sport in the 1950s. b) Sir Alec Issigonis: to draw on the thinking of, arguably, the most original motor designer and engineer of the twentieth century. c) L.T.C. (Tom) Rolt: to enjoy his remarkable blend of practical enthusiasm for the preservation of canals, heritage railways and vintage cars, with an erudition which shines through his many books.

8. What kind of music do you like, and is there one favourite soundtrack?

I enjoy a wide range of classical and romantic music from the days when, as a sixth former in Birmingham, I used to get to CBSO concerts in cheap seats behind the orchestra. The balance might have been a bit odd but it was fascinating to have the musicians' view of some famous conductors! In addition I still play my 1960s folk music records, particularly the protest songs of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez.

If I had to name one favourite track it would probably be Nimrod from Elgar's Enigma Variations.

9. What are your favourite charities/good causes, and why?

The National Trust whose work protects the areas of countryside which have given me such pleasure over a lifetime.

St. Mungo's because of the shame I feel that in a strong western economy we have an increasing number of desperate people sleeping on the streets.

And locally Shelsley Watermill Society which has given me the satisfaction of helping with the restoration and operation of what is now Worcestershire's only working water-powered corn mill (see www.shelsleywatermill.com).

10. Who is the person who has influenced you most/you most admire?

It would have to be my father, whose family circumstances forced him to leave school at sixteen in 1929 but who, through his wide reading and determination, became an academic force as well as building a successful business. In the 1970s he was joint founder of the Housman Society and also established the Francis Brett Young Society. In "retirement" he was Administrator of the Birmingham and Midland Institute and was awarded an Honorary M.A. by Birmingham University in 1991. I inherited his love of literature and his strong work ethic.

11. What is your connection to Evesham?

As Housman Society Secretary I have collaborated with the Evesham Festival of Words establishing our sponsorship of an annual event within the Festival programme which celebrates the work of Worcestershire's most famous poet. I look forward to next July when Peter Parker, author of *Housman Country*, will give the Housman Lecture (postponed from 2020) on "Bredon and Other Hills".



12. What would you list as your greatest achievement to date?

Leading the educational community of a large metropolitan authority as its Chief Education Officer for nine years before my retirement such that:-

- a). none of the 150 schools chose to "opt out" in spite of central government's constant pushing of Grant Maintained status through the 1990s.
- b). OFSTED inspectors in 2001 judged the Council to be "a good LEA" and its leadership "strong and effective".