

Cambridge Evening News, 28 June 1985

Picturing the life of cartoonist Moden's family help to fill in gaps...

HARRY Moden, Cambridge cartoonist of the 1900s was featured in an article in the "News" last week. Although he produced about 100 cartoon postcards of Edwardian Cambridge, little was known about him.

But this week, one of his surviving two nieces who live in Cambridge filled in some of the gaps.

Mrs Doris Marshall [*Doris Irene Marshall née Crouch (1906–2006), daughter of Clara Louise Crouch née Peacock, who was Harry's half-sister by their mother*] of Langdale Close, now 78, remembers her uncle Harry as a tall, slim, very kind gentleman.

At the time she was living with her widowed mother and eight brothers and sisters in Ainsworth Close [Street]. Uncle Harry often visited them bringing with him small gifts, produce from his garden and sometimes clothing, which his only daughter had outgrown.

He lived in a house called Monhill Point in Milton Road. His wife died of cancer when quite young and his daughter, too has been dead many years.

She says Harry Moden's father was Henry Moden who kept a pub in Market Hill, Cambridge, near where the Eastern Electricity showroom now stands. She thinks it was called the Foun[t]ain [The Wheatsheaf].

[*Illustration*] AN ELECTRIC SHOCK. A recent suggestion to electrify the horse-drawn Trams of Cambridge. Reprinted from the "Cambridge Chronicle". How Moden saw the electrification of Cambridge trams.

Memories

Mrs Marshall has memories of sitting in the pub looking out through the window over the market place with her grandad and Uncle Harry.

A Cambridge postcard collector has turned up a postcard of Moden's with a city publisher's name on it. The only publisher's name so far known on his cards is that of an Oxford man.

Her card—"Tariff Reform Crushed"—has an undivided back. This style of card went out of favour in 1903 so must be one of his earliest cards. It was published by J. H. Priest of Bridge Street, Cambridge.

Two of his silhouette cartoons, "Love is Blind" and "My Cousin Sir" have turned up in half-tone in a larger size, and another reader has provided several drawings so far unlisted.

The[re] are two political drawings of funeral parties, one “Alas, Liberal Hopes” and “Alas[,] Conservative Hopes,” and untitled Illustration of a line of glam-looking people approaching a bishop in a church, and another cartoon lampooning bishops “Ecclesiastical Commissioners, Landlords and Owners.” This is signed unusually Mod.

Moden also produced a drawing of a cat, but this may have been for private use only.

Cambridge Weekly News, 16 October 1986

The Illustrators

CONTINUING the series of articles about people who have depicted Cambridgeshire life at various periods, illustrated from examples of their work held in the Cambridge Collection. Today: Harry Moden.

by Mike Petty

The Jekyll and Hyde life of Harry

HARRY MODEN lived a double life. By day he was a quiet office worker who became buyer and stores manager for the Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company.

By night he was a shrewd observer of the Cambridge scene who translated his observations into cartoon drawings that he issued as postcards and sold to the “Cambridge Chronicle” newspaper.

Along with his contemporary Frank Keene he provided a wry commentary on local issues between 1903 and 1914 when his health began to fail and on doctor’s orders, he cut back on his cartooning—though he brought his pen out again to record the celebration of peace in 1918. He died aged 79 in 1960.

Premium

Many of his drawings were produced at his home in Humberstone Road where as a young man he viewed with especial interest the activities of undergraduates.

[*Illustration*] The Unexpected Return

Thus the New Arrival with cap and gown meets the motherly woman who is to be his college “Bedder,” who will make his bed, clean his room and—for a small charge—do his washing. The “Gyp,” his gentleman’s gentleman could be sure to furnish the necessities of life—at a small premium—and advise on the best shops (for a small commission).

And should the undergraduate return unexpectedly to find them both supping from his very best sherry—well that was part of his Cambridge education.

[*Illustration*] Harry Moden's trade card

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HARRY MODEN—CAMBRIDGE CARTOONIST

Mike Petty

Harry Allen Moden lived a double life. By day he was a quiet office worker but by night he was a shrewd observer of the Cambridge scene who translated his observations into cartoons some of which were published in the Cambridge Chronicle newspaper and others he issued as postcards.

Moden was born in June 1881 at the *Wheatsheaf* public house in St Andrew's Street, Cambridge, which was kept by his father, Harry Moden, a brewer. The pub closed in 1883 but the family soon moved to another of the same name, on Market Hill.

Harry attended St Luke's school, off Victoria Road, until 1895. He then worked for a firm of estate agents before moving to the Saxon Portland Cement Company in Mill Road. He left that company in 1907 and went as buyer and stores manager for the Cambridge [Scientific] Instrument Company where he stayed till he retired, early, in 1936 to devote himself to his two great interests of gardening and fishing. He died, aged 79, on 20 January 1960.

But it was in the period 1903 to 1914 that Harry Moden achieved lasting fame. With no formal art training he spent all his spare time sketching humorous incidents in undergraduate and town life, having them published as postcards which he sold to local stationers and adapting some designs in an attempt to obtain sales in the other place, Oxford. In his home town he reflected on the political fortunes during the 1910 election, of the demise of the horse-drawn trams and the proposals for their electrification.

On Monday, and Wednesdays too, if there was a change in programme, he attended the New Theatre in St Andrew's Street and made silhouette sketches of the casts of each production. This was in the heyday of the great musical comedies. These sketches sold at 2/- each to local shops. He also designed menu cards, programme covers for town and University amateur dramatic societies, drawings for the *Cambridge Chronicle* and advertisements for local firms. He seemed to have planned to produce a series of advertisements for national products such as Sunlight Soap and Beecham's Pills.

Of these the best known depict undergraduate life in a number of 'Varsity sketches' including May Week celebrations, bonfire night excesses, rag riots and the general drinking to excess which—if he can be believed—constituted University life before the Great War.

[*Illustration*] "THE FRESHER REVIVED." Varsity Sketches No 7. From the Cambridgeshire Collection

There is also some record of the tribulations of student life—the proctors and bull-dogs who seemed dedicated to denying a chap the fullest enjoyment of a Cambridge education, and of course his bedder—that motherly woman who would make his bed, clean his room and, for a small charge, do his washing. Then there was the Gyp, his gentleman's gentleman who could be sure to furnish the necessities of life—at a small premium—and advise on the best shops (for a small commission). And should the undergraduate return unexpectedly to find them both sipping from his very best sherry—well that was part of his Cambridge education.

The long hours Moden spent at his drawing board at the end of a day's work affected his health, and in 1914 his doctor advised him to take more outdoor exercise. He at once left Humberstone Road, where he had gone to live after his marriage in 1908, and went to live in a house he had built in Milton Road. From that time on he did no more drawings, with the exception of a postcard published at the time of the Armistice celebrations in 1918, and a menu card designed for the annual dinner of the Cambridge & District Angling Club in 1939. Nor did he ever speak of his work. Contemporaries who worked with him at the Scientific Instrument Company never associated the Harry Moden they knew with the black and white cartoons which were so popular in Cambridge.

[*Illustration: Harry Moden's trade card.*] From the Cambridgeshire Collection

In 1996 his surviving relation passed to the Cambridgeshire Collection, in the Central Library at Lion Yard, Cambridge, the family's collection of postcards, sketches and original artwork from this most prolific artist, giving the opportunity for a fuller appreciation of his talent.

Now all that is needed is a similar find of material relating to his contemporary, Frank Keane, who also sketched and published postcards but about whom even less is currently on file. Perhaps some of you can assist.

[*Illustration*] "RAGTIME IN CAMBRIDGE." From the Cambridgeshire Collection

May 1997

Mike Petty was for many years Librarian of the Cambridgeshire Collection at the County Library. He now writes and lectures on local history. In 1997 the University conferred on him the rare distinction of an honorary MA. He is a member of the Society.