

As our Whimsy took us – musings of the setters

We are pleased with the outcome of this ATH. In contrast to our last ATH in Grantchester, our intention this time was for a high proportion of the teams to locate the treasure. Given that, it was very difficult to prevent the experienced and/or fortunate teams from finding it quickly. We also sought a fairly unambiguous treasure site, so that journeys to the wilds of Essex would not go unrewarded for long.

Following our thematic release on Thursday 17th, and the more than usually helpful poster, we suspected the treasure might be found on the first weekend. That 4 teams should visit the site on the Sunday was a slight surprise. Still less did we envisage that apparently 3 of these should reach the tree but be unable to put their hands on the box. First, second and fourth to the box rang the emergency number. 2nd and 4th were unsuccessful and reported (erroneously) that 3rd had also failed to find it. 1st reported that a dog-walker had shown mild interest in his activities round the tree. Could the treasure have been tampered with? We dared not risk it, and so we paid a return visit to the site on the Monday, having procured and produced respectively a replacement box and contents. Needless to say, the box was there all along, stowed neatly where we'd left it. But ticket 2 was missing. We published in the ATH-notes a report that the box was where it should be and a thematic hint that the treasure was concealed above ground and let events unfold.

Meanwhile, we were following online the progress of a few teams who had permitted us to eavesdrop on their progress in newsgroups or Wikis. We would like to reiterate our thanks to all who did this, in particular to Sociometry, TwelevePack, Treble Bobs All Round, and the David Kee team. It rendered the entire process much more entertaining and relaxing, and we recommend this to future setters. However, it is important to adhere strictly to a rule to contribute absolutely nothing to the groups whatever the temptation. One must also remember that one is seeing only a fraction of the competitors – other teams may well be finding individual puzzles easier or harder.

We tried (but probably failed) to stick fairly closely to the codes used in the Wimsey novels, with therefore limited sophistication. Of course present day computers can solve playfair ciphers and the like by brute force. Amusingly, the David Kee team found an alternative and almost plausible key string for the Wimsey Crest, namely “OF HE CAMBRIDG(E) L”.

Virtual Finds

People worked on the ATH round the clock in at least 4 continents. We received two strong entries from the USA-based teams Twelevepack and Yarboroughs. We accepted “virtual find” claims from these teams and from Mick Rogers, but such claims must receive lower credit than those who were able to hack through the snow and mud, especially since not all who reached the site found the box. We decided not to rank the virtual finds. We received another correct claim for a virtual find from someone who declined to send an entry.

The international dimension had other consequences. One team posted on the Web for the benefit of its far-flung teammates video-clips of their finding the treasure and various landmarks. These could be found by a suitable keyword search, but they were quickly removed at our request once we identified the source.

Things we got wrong

Not too many, thankfully. We forgot to remove the digital time-stamps from the pictures we took along the route. Very modest hacking revealed that many of the pictures were taken a few minutes apart, and hence were very likely to be on the treasure trail. As one team put it “A pity they didn't leave the GPS option switched on.” And it turned out that the green bench was easy to identify online – we had considered obscuring the police station sign in the background, but unwisely decided against. As a result it was too easy to identify Witham as the location just from photos, so at least one team found the treasure without having followed one of our intended routes through the hunt.

We included a reference to a “Catholic church” in the directions, thinking that it would deflect solvers who guessed the general location, because there is no such church identifiable on the map – it’s now a private residence. One team admitted to having been put off by it, but others found it helpful because there is in fact a current Catholic church quite near, and there is no such church in some other possible guesses. We would have done better to omit the “Catholic”.

Online portions of the hunt pose their own security problems. We deliberately chose file-names which were not particularly obscure and even occasionally helpful, encrypting everything we wanted concealed. However, we didn’t bargain with the Logica site suggesting corrections to spelling mistakes. One team discovered the red-herring pages by accidentally typing into their browser the url “...r2.htm” instead of “...p2.htm” and was asked whether they meant “rh.htm” or “p2.htm”. Future setters beware!

The page encryption proved sufficiently secure, surviving a few fairly serious attempts to crack it. However, the hashed version of the “unreliability” password was found by some online. While we didn’t predict this, we were not too concerned, as we wanted this password guessable, so as to avoid a bottleneck at the Library entrance – we were aware anyway that it would yield to dictionary search. One team managed to crack the encryption of the final page of the ‘library trail’ by force, but decided it would be dishonourable to claim a prize for doing so, so only told us when they submitted their entry.

The PDF text had a few trivial misprints which we corrected. One crossword clue was slightly flawed, and we inverted East and West in one of the red herring clues.

Our grasp of Italian turned out to be poorer than we realised: we should have checked with a genuine Italian speaker.

Things you got wrong

There were only a few points which no-one got. On the Library page for *the Article in Question*, “the **font** of all wisdom” was an inadequate pointer to the SuperFrench font. And no-one realised that the (b)-questions in the red herring pages were red herrings from the Wimsey stories, deliberately set up by the villain. Perhaps there wasn’t time to read the books in detail. No-one identified that the peal shown on the left-hand side of the quiz was the “Short Touch of Kent Treble-Bob Major” exactly as described at the start of *The Nine Tailors*, although many teams worked out it was a variation on the usual KTBM. The “documents in the case” from the release notes was also missed by all, but overall you did us proud. A number of you were suspicious about the omission of the murderer’s name in the Library page for *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, but we were just trying not to spoil the story.

Things you said that amused us

There were many of these, of which here is a selection. See also the Hunting Tales section on the web-site. The dog-days of marking were brightened by:

From Team Norway

“Dig up one thing,” thought Wimsey, “and you have to dig up another!”

From several sources: **R**awlinson and **H**ubbard – clearly a Red Herring

From the Famous Five: The correction is attributed to "Rawlinson, Hubbard and Mortimer". This appears to be a hint to Kent Treble Bob (Major): **Kent** Rawlinson is Curator at Hampton Court Palace, The Hubbard **Treble** Ensemble is a group of singers and Bob **Mortimer** is a comedian.

From Peter DG Smith: We accidentally found a similar page saying A Happy New Year. Perhaps this was due to replace the previous page after Christmas if the treasure had not been found.

Ticket 9 collected from Witham at 10:01 01/01/10.

From PathFinders, Treble Bobs All Round and Amanda Hartwell:

The knots picture gives instructions to tie a herring knot (*PathFinders and Treble Bobs All Round*) or a bell-ringer's knot (*Amanda Hartwell*). Alas, we thought of neither.

From PsychoLogicals:

In Canto XXIV, the passages we found

no. 87 starts **H**ere, cenchres...

no. 132 starts **A**nd blushed...

So 87, 132, 87, 132, 87, 132 reads HA, HA, HA – another cheeky red herring.

From Sociometry and also Space Invaders: 87,132 is the number of Kbytes in the audio version of “Whose Body?”

(*From a website we were permitted to follow:*) The SOHO telescope sun pictures are taken through a **H**elium filter and a **H**ydrogen **A**lpha filter, so the message under St Anne's church clearly reads

HA HA HA (red herring) HE HE HE (fish in a box) HA HA HA HA (red herring) HE HE HE.

We are impressed by the number of anagrams you found of **losouteprepnitedracih /hic ardet in perpetuo sol**.

Famous Five: **Lord Peter's Utopia Niche**

Slow Learners: **United Trip Poor Chelsea**

Friends of Dorothy Society: **Treasure in chipped tool**

Sociometry: **Upon the red police station** "although getting this did involve cheating and mistyping some of the letters." Alternatively **Also the upper direction**

To which we add: **Latin prose ciphered out** and award ourselves a bonus mark.

TwelevePack suggested slightly unconvincingly that if you omit the final ‘h’, **LO SOUTE PREPNITE DRACI** is Slovak for “Lo, competitor, switch dragons!” and as such is another dragon reference.

From Treble Bobs All Round: That forward thinking Florentine poet Dante Alighieri cunningly arranged Italian words carefully such that an astute translator could bury the name of Witham in an English translation of Lo Inferno's Canto XXIV, not once but twice. The Supreme Poet clearly foresaw that that the main use of renaissance poetry seven hundred years on would be as trivia background for corporate treasure hunts. Bizarrely, DLS, who lived in Witham, completely missed this literary open goal. Fortunately for us Treasure Hunters, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was on the ball, and delivered with his 1867 translation.

A Remark on Collaboration

This ATH was much more a collaborative effort than our previous attempts. This enabled us to create a larger and we hope more enjoyable hunt than any one of us could have managed alone. On the other hand, each of us had different ideas about the design of the hunt, and there were times when slow and painful compromises had to be made. We recommend collaboration, but warn that it's not easy.

Marking

All four of the setters took part in the marking. We were not always in agreement as to what should or should not earn credit. On the one hand, team A deserves recognition if it notices something team B does not, but on the other hand it'd be pretty galling to be marked down for not explicitly mentioning that scarlet, blushing and cherry herrings were red or something else really obvious. One of us wanted to give credit for anything thematic, while another favoured crediting only the big issues. One of us favoured the use of fractional marks, but we decided against that. Should the online notes also act as a source of points? Yes says one. No says another. Let's just get on with it and finish the marking says a third. The attached marksheet is a compromise – you may occasionally disagree with our decisions, but we've tried hard to be fair. You can probably find a weighting which would lift your placing.

We marked the Library, Herring pages and Main hunt separately, and weighted the totals equally. The scores of anyone who failed to gain entry to the library, or declined to bother with what “was obviously a giant red-herring”, suffered as a result. You should also be aware that as is traditional (but not always appropriate) the marks awarded for any clue decrease linearly with the number of people to solve it. This has a distorting effect on the marks distribution in that the bottom few scores are disproportionately low. The maximum score per question in the Library and Herring sections is determined by how many teams reached the start page of each.

There will doubtless be a few errors in the marksheet. You may feel you have been awarded a zero for something you put in your entry. We will listen to complaints, and may even alter the marks for posterity. But it would require a fairly major slip-up on our part for us to alter the prize list.

Prizes

First to the treasure was Team Norway, on the first Sunday morning, a few hours ahead of the pursuing pack. The best overall solution by a clear margin was from Peter DG Smith and his team. First to reach the end of the Library Trail were Q4T Logicals.

There are prizes, which will be in the form of retail vouchers, for the first three to the treasure, for the three highest-scoring solutions, and for the first and only two to reach the end of the Library Trail.

A discretionary Setters' Prize goes to Sociometry, who reached the treasure tree one hour after Team Norway, but somehow failed to find the box.

The first-time entrants this year were all without a Logica captain, so no prize is awarded.

We'll soon announce a time and venue for the traditional post-quiz celebration, at which the prizes will be awarded and the winners get the honour of buying drinks for all. Or for us, at least.