

Assorted Tales of the Hunt

(As the marking continues, we have been asked to release some extracts of the travails of the intrepid ATHers...these may be updated in time. Feel free to send us more, or remind us if we've omitted a suitable inclusion from your submission.)

Space Invaders:

It was now late afternoon on Saturday 19th December, and we knew it would take at least three hours to get to Witham, Essex, from the south coast of England, where we live! So early on Sunday morning, we set off, under far-from-ideal conditions, which rapidly deteriorated as we headed North-East. We had to stop every half hour to clear the windscreen of salt, as the washers were continually freezing-up. However, we finally arrived in Witham at mid-day, and were just turning into Blackwater Lane when a strangely familiar group of people were observed walking out of the lane! We soon discovered that the road was impassable, with snow and ice, and nowhere to park, so we reversed up the road, and discovered the ATH Sociometry Team standing there. They had been in Witham for the previous hour and a half, and were being very evasive as to whether or not they had actually found the treasure – hinting that maybe there was additional information needed to find it. Undeterred, we set off through the snow, and quickly confirmed that we were in the right place:

After searching for some time in the large hollow at the base of the first tree, we remembered that in previous years the treasure had been hidden up in the tree, and the instructions this time say “look **IN** the first” (not *under*), and after further careful inspection of the hollow at around eye-level, we finally found what we were looking for – a moment of great excitement! Only to be let down when we found that someone else had beaten us to it, as we were second. We picked up our “Number 2” token, and read the extract from Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto XXIV, then wondered if we had missed something, as we never seemed to have used any of the references to Dante in locating the treasure. So was there a whole separate/parallel hunt which we had missed?

The Famous Five:

Now we had the detailed instructions for finding the treasure, all we needed was to find the starting place. We noticed from examining the image files from the web site that 5 of them had embedded EXIF information showing that they had been taken by the same model of camera (Pentax) on 31 October 2009. The timestamps suggested they might show the treasure route, and the first picture (the “wonky blue bench” on P3) looked like it was in front of a Police Station, so we set out to find pictures of police stations in southern England. Cambridgeshire and Essex were obvious candidates, as Dorothy L Sayers had lived in both counties, and helpfully both constabularies provide pictures of their police stations on their web sites, so it didn’t take long to identify Witham Police station, and therefore Dorothy L Sayers’ house in Newland Street as the starting point.

We already had a 1:25000 map of the area, acquired for the 2003 ATH when the treasure was buried in nearby Ulting, and it looked like we could match the pictures and instructions up with a route from the Police Station, down the old railway track bed to the River Brain, then along the river to its confluence with the Blackwater.

So on Monday 21st we had enough information to find the treasure. However we hadn't anticipated getting so far so quickly, and were not in a position to make the journey to Essex until after Christmas. So it was that on Tuesday 29th, after meeting up the previous night at a hotel near Newbury (!), we battled through the rain to Witham. The instructions were easy to follow and yielded ticket no. 7.

PathFinders:

This was a typically enjoyable and well-constructed Barden hunt. It was about the right level of difficulty: we had hopes of cracking it before Christmas, but it was nearly the New Year before we heard the satisfying thud of trowel on Tupperware. While we can't claim to have spent much time in the library (oh for those innocent internet-free days of the Orwell hunt!) we did at least learn a lot - about Dorothy Sayers, Dante and Bell-ringing - which is always the mark of a good hunt. It's hard to believe that no-one has based a hunt on the Peter Wimsey books before now - they are tailor-made for the ATH (though having boosted Sayers' sales by 1000% we are quite happy to catch up on our other reading; Dave is already back tackling Wolf Hall.) Some other highlights and lowlights of the hunt (you can decide which):

- Getting a first proper sight of the ATH at team-captain Dave Harding's house, and Matt becoming so engrossed that he devoured an entire shepherd's pie (one of Jan's specialities, quite wonderful, and hopefully destined to become an ATH tradition the perfect accompaniment to puzzle solving on a winter's evening) without realising until it was too late. Dave could only look on with amazement, and has put in an order for three next year.
- Converting mesmerising, barely-visible dots from binary to decimal, then looking up the corresponding ASCII letter, for approximately 2 hours on the first snowy evening of the winter.
- Finding out that not only had someone posted the picture of Jan Smith to a forum for identification, but that another poster had then successfully identified her, saving us from what would have been an impossible task. (We had been convinced she was a writer, and that we recognised her, but we were clearly mistaken on both points.)
- Matt starting the decode of the bellringing code in Paddington and finishing it literally as his train was pulling into Totnes station. He did not have the Double Helix Differential Major method to hand on the train funny that so as Dave had predicted the bells ran out at row 88, around Newbury. All attempts to then apply brute force failed, owing to the sheer number of combinations. Fortunately around Taunton the required pattern to continue the method was found, buried in the existing method on page 1 (it is

in the red bell going upwards from around the middle of the grid) allowing the decode to be completed.

- Dave forgetting the tool on the ATH website that would have allowed him to complete the page 8 decode in a quarter of the time
- Matt selecting a hotel for his 'twixtmas' break not on the basis of cost, room, pool, location etc. but because it had the words 'free wireless internet access' in small print at the bottom. He hopes his wife never finds this out, even though it was actually a very nice place. He took the laptop along on the pretext that it was needed to charge the iPod, whereas it was actually used to pinpoint Witham as a starting point and draw up the enclosed map until 1 a.m. Is there an ATHers Anonymous?
- Getting the phone call from Dave the following lunchtime indicating we had got ticket number 8.
- A particularly strong contribution from Phil Stockton this year, perhaps he recognises that the team needs all the help it can get these days! With so many of the team spread out across the country, Dave is considering issuing Blackberries to improve our position next year.
- The long and tedious trip to Witham (so a plea for a nearer site next year!) At least Dave now has his picture with Dorothy.
- Spending ages trying to understand the relevance of 'Uncle Feedle' from Bagpuss and its connection with three blind mice (the number of mice on the mouse organ perhaps?) before finding out, hours from the deadline, that it's actually a rip-off of folk song 'The Tailor and the Mouse'.

The Slow Learners:

Many thanks to the setters for a very enjoyable quiz. We have emerged not only with a much-extended knowledge of the life and works of Dorothy L Sayers, but also now know more than we care to about change ringing. By way of thanks, we would share with you below what looks to be a suitably exciting interest to 'save you from ennui during the dog days' that will follow the heady times of ATH mmix. [URL omitted]

We also noted that many of the squares in the panels contained dots, but were unable to make anything of it, in spite of persistent effort. One member of our group could not believe that somebody would sit there and put in all those dots just to mislead innocent, trusting team members. She tried Morse code but no answer came along the water pipes. She tried to make them play a tune but only the distant hum of traffic broke the silence. She is now considering her options: -- Should she hope that they do not mean anything so no points are lost and she will have to accept that she has been had for a mug OR Should she turn up at the pub and sort out a few of those quiz setters who are badly in need of a good shake up!

The Yarboroughs :

Placet.

Psycho-Logica-L People:

A few weeks ago a hunt began,
A team was created, a nine strong gang.
Like an army assembled and ready to fight,
They awaited their quest, which came at midnight.

The race was on, the whistle was blown,
And to the world of hunters the puzzle was shown.
Printers went crazy, search engines froze,
As battle commenced against friends and foes.

Diagrams, questions, ciphers and quotes,
Pic's ranging from Toucans to wine tasting goats.
Soon those Psycho's peeled back the layers
The whimsical theme was Dorothy L Sayers.

TheLow began ringing the colourful bells,
Its a binary code! He suddenly yells.
The code was broken and soon he wrote
The message of the Welcome Note.

A cipher to solve was displayed on page 8
And Ozzy and friend stepped up to the plate.
A favourite walk by a Catholic Church,
Revealed an area to big to search.

Hydradoc came in a little bit late
Declaring 1957 was a special date
So what was the solve to be found here?
'No solve at all, but I was born in that year'

Fudge arrived with Watson and Crick
And a major link to the Helix pic.
Iso departed from school on a train
And Dorothy's name was mentioned again

Trebor (the one with the pic of an Elf)
Rode the dragon to the library shelf.
Soon it was opened for all to see,
The novels by Sayers and Open Sesame.

Some pictures contained a time and a place
And geograph was searched till they were blue in the face.
Then came a post with a drum roll rhythm.....
The wacky bench was in sunny old Witham!

MacMan read a letter written on green

And as the land turned white he smiled at his screen.
He quickly announced 'There's letters to peal'
And with Rogers help they got a reveal!!

A trail began to be come together,
Witham, a library, a church and a river,
Under the road to the skewiff trees!!!!!!!
This must be the treasure...please, please please!

With the treasure site known but three days to wait,
They hoped and prayed they would not be too late.
Then Iso and TheLow pursued the way
And Christmas came again on Boxing Day.

The Boxing Day hunt was such a pleasure
The Psychos found themselves third to the treasure
With morale high they announced a new quest,
For their submission to be the best.

The timetable had them tied up in knots
Producing more pictures and links to spot
Soon the knotty theme got frayed
It embrangled the places where Dorothy stayed.

The crossword was finished and Dante appeared
A trip to hell was soon to be feared
Some numbers came thrice to take them afar
A clever red herring Ha Ha Ha!

Ho Ho Ho! They thought 'That fits!'
'Oops' wrong translation Macman admits
Then **with a** mind free of confusion,
They came up **with a** more worthy conclusion!!

The Smiths gave them Oxford and asked them to follow
Like Dante they laughed as the bells there rang hollow
The quotes gave them headaches and what they derived
Was to always look on the 'Sunnyside'

Now Sarah's in overdrive as crazy as hell
Locating the pictures that are hidden so well
Tying it up they have only one foe
The link to the berries on the mistletoe.

Then a late xmas greeting and a tap tap tap
had Macman looking for a map map map
The quest was finished and to all good luck
It's a pity though that the library's still shut.

The end is near the puzzles unravelled
and with our submission we hope you are dazzled
The Psychos we are, By Our Whimsy We Stand
And to the Puzzle Setters a very big hand!

The Friends of Dorothy Society:

As I made my way from Wimbledon to Upminster on the District line, I counted the number of stops. 41. Under what circumstances would I voluntarily sit on the District line for 41 stops? Finding the treasure for the first time? Yes, that'd be one of them. In the car from Upminster to Witham, the weather got worse and worse, heaters on full blast just to allow us to see.

Eventually, we made it to Witham. The bench, bell tower and war memorial were easy to find. The footpath sign was not far up the road. But after that, all we had to go on was a photo of another sign, a photo of a set of steps down to the river (the implication of the page 8 cipher text being to follow from church to railway sign to river) and the following words:

"Follow the river downstream under the main road then for another quarter mile to the platform then go upstream until you find two sawn off trees on your left look in the first".

Our map suggested that the main road would be the A12. The footpath was a quagmire. And each section got worse. Abandon hope all ye who enter here, or should I say, lay down all hope, you who go in by me.

One team member was wearing trainers and was struggling. But this team leaves no man behind. (Especially when that man is driving you back to London afterwards.) We found the Blackwater Rail Trail sign, which you had cleverly altered to say ATH. But wait here while I move these thorny branches out of the way, so we can get a better photo of it. Aaaaaaaarrggghh.

The steps down to the river were not far away. The river was swollen and close to bursting its banks. "Follow the river downstream under the main road then for another quarter mile to the platform" Had we jumped in, we'd have been there in seconds. We struggled on by foot.

With the road bridge in sight, our team mate became the victim of a sharp overhanging branch. Got him right in the eye. Partially blinded, and with his ankles deep in the mud, he bravely fought onwards. This was a man close to finding his first ATH box.

After the promised quarter mile, we found the point where the 2 rivers joined. The platform was there. Two anglers eyed us with some suspicion. Men in dashing hats, carrying a pink bucket and spade are uncommon sights round these parts. We kept walking and photographed a different platform. Now heading upstream, it was not long until we spotted the two sawn off trees.

A woman dressed in extreme weather gear walked past with her dog. She stopped to ask us what on earth we were doing. We told her. She said that she'd seen loads of other people doing the same thing a couple of weeks earlier. This was not what we wanted to

hear. Her dog bit me and then took refuge by cowering on the other side of its owner. But this was no time for taking revenge on small dogs. The treasure was just metres away. After 2 previous outings with the bucket and spade had produced no opportunity to dig for any treasure, now was my chance.

The treasure wasn't buried there, of course. The instructions had told us that already. But we don't like to miss a photo opportunity. "Look in the first (tree)". Maybe in there - it's muddy as hell, it's freezing of course. It's the treasure! Just that? That's it!

The number on our ticket, in case the picture is not clear enough, is a 1. Ah no, on closer inspection it is a 16. It's all this rain in my eyes, plus the blood loss from one hand due to aggressive vegetation and on the other due to a territorial canine. Job done. And we made it safely back to team HQ without further incident.

However, on the morning of submission, I was late for my first day on my new project as it turned out my tetanus was out of date, so I had to go and get an injection because of that dog.

[Picture of tetanus booster certificate]

Jeanne and Dave's [*Kee*] site visit to Witham 7th January 2010

"Rather than a failure to collect or share intelligence, this was a failure to connect and understand the intelligence that we already had,"

President Obama 7th January 2010.

It's all so obvious now. We should have found it on December 19th when we had all the information!

So how did the 7th of January 2010 unfold?

In the early hours I decided to review Canto 24, Jeanne had kindly extracted the Longfellow and Sayers versions from the London Library. I started with the Longfellow version. Witham! Witham! it seemed to shout at me – how did I (we) not see this before? (I blame the inferno that is *athfever*, Dante doesn't know the half of it).

So, taking into account that only essential journeys should be attempted in current weather conditions, I decided that a site visit was essential. We could get to Witham from our local station (Acton Central) with just one change and only £10.50 with a Senior Railcard and Freedom Pass. We just made it to the station in time for the 10:23 that was "sorry for any inconvenience caused" but 20 minutes late. When it did arrive it was one of the nice new comfortable modern trains and broke down at the next station. We finally got to Stratford at 11:50 and then things improved. A train came in straight away and a brief change at Chelmsford had us leaving Witham station in fine spirit – things were looking up

We got a cab to where Anthony had suggested the location might be and we were “in the field at 12:59”. In fact it was quite a large field with no sawn off tree stumps. At least we had determined to my satisfaction which way was upstream on the River Witham (not entirely clear from my map extract).

So onto the next most likely location, the River Brain at its junction with the River Witham. Unfortunately this was two miles north and there was a lot of snow. Actually it was great, a footpath by the river and everything snow covered, no one to be seen, and the only wooden railway viaduct left in the UK! It did seem to be very cold though, despite the sun coming out from time to time.

Eventually we arrived at the Brain and some local lads who happily looked at our pictures of signposts and handrails. Regrettably the observation lobes of the combined brains were no better than the eponymous river. Undeterred by the lack of local knowledge, and the fact that we did not seem to be on a public footpath, we headed for the river junction and there was a platform covered in snow. I swept the snow aside, there must be something significant about this 3’ square, 1’ high, platform I thought, but there wasn’t. We headed upstream, two large sawn off tree stumps loomed into view – this had to be it and it was. The box was located, my picture taken and we retrieved ticket 11. There was some disappointment at having been beaten by ten others, but great relief that many people could now get a decent night’s sleep.

We decided to reverse the route instructions and see how we should have approached the site – I really wanted to know about that wretched catholic church (religion has always given me grief, Dawkins was right). Going back up the River Brain, just as we joined the railway we came across the first picture, the handrail. We then walked north along the railway seeing nothing, so I took a short cut back to the road intending to go straight to the railway station and head off to the next big task of the day, dealing with the parental care issues crisis. However, at the road I looked up to where the railway line went under and saw a signpost, the signpost! As we headed south to the library we identified pictures from each page. In fact most of the pictures we have not been able to find were on the route.

If only, if only, I had ignored the complication of the catholic church we would have been here weeks ago. The library reference in the instructions makes it obvious it must be Witham and once at the library and walking up the road all the other pictures fall into place.

I should be sacked, or perhaps I will go down the Obama route (“... the missteps were not the fault of one individual or one agency.”).

"CLOUDS OF GAUDY EVIDENCE"

Prequel to "LORD TONY VIEWS THE TREASURE"
(unpublished)

by DOTTY INCUNABULA

Team Norway:

The weather had not been particularly friendly of late. Parts of Essex had lost their power the previous night and more heavy snow was forecast overnight. Metcheck and xcweather saw a lot of hits that evening from two of the team. There was much debate as to whether the journey should be attempted. On Sunday morning at 7:30, Tim decided that it was worth a try. Just how mad at himself would he have been to find that the treasure was found on the 'bad snow' day if he delayed the trip!

A couple of hours later he arrived at Witham, negotiated the narrow width restriction on the slippery snowy lane, parked up, and located the river. Decision time – should he follow the south bank on the basis that he had to turn 'upstream' [retracing his steps, perhaps] in order to find the trees on his left, or the north bank. The decision was made by two loud dogs belonging to a dog walker on the north bank. Tim is not at all scared by dogs but it was easier for their owner for him to choose the south bank. At the junction with the Blackwater he realised to his horror that the 'platform' was on the other bank. He ran all the way back, across the bridge, and followed the route to the sawn-off trees. By this time he was convinced he would shortly be joined by competing hunters, having wasted at least ten minutes. Incidentally, the weather had turned out sunny with just a few inches of snow and was easily negotiated in walking boots.

The area around the tree was virgin snow. Either there had been a fresh fall or we were first. The treasure wasn't as easy to locate as expected, as upon seeing the tree Tim interpreted 'in the tree' as meaning 'inside the rotten base buried a foot down', whereas it had been very cleverly placed about 4-5 feet up in a rotten area where a large branch had once connected. Discovering ticket number 1 made it all worthwhile, as only one of

our team has ever found a ticket number 1 and that was well over a decade ago. A first for Team Norway, which first competed in ATH 1999.

[Further travel pains:] I joined the M25 heading anticlockwise, only to discover that my windscreen washer wasn't frozen as I thought but simply devoid of fluid. I pulled in at Clacket Lane services. They were out of washer fluid. What! I daren't put plain water in to the reservoir because it was minus 3 outside and would undoubtedly freeze the jets until the ambient temperature rose in a week's time. I continued my journey, occasionally squirting water out the window from a bottle. This was one better than fellow motorists some of whom were stopping and grabbing handfuls of snow to wipe over their windscreens. As I approached the Sevenoaks junction for some unknown reason I stayed in the middle lane rather than using the slip lane to continue around the M25. I was now on the M26. Doh! Never mind, I'll go down the A21 to the A25 and turn round. I did this and exited at the A25 and headed east for a few tens of metres intending to perform a U-turn. 'No U-turns allowed', and cars heading towards me. Never mind, I thought, I'll perform a 'P-turn' using that little side road on the right. The snow disguising the road layout and my reduced visibility hid the fact that this was in fact the slip lane back on to the A21 Sevenoaks bypass and by now beyond the point of no return I sadly had to travel south for a further five miles to the Hildenborough junction in order to turn back again. Result – at least twenty valuable minutes wasted.

No Management Potential:

We thought of phoning the warden at the Nature reserve, but then found out that Stephen's dad lived only about 10 minutes away. He volunteered to try it out. "Just spoke to Mr Lees Snr and they are game. He wants detailed instructions before bed time..." These were duly provided – maps, google earth pictures, detailed instructions. On 30th Dec, he visited the site:

“Report in and the treasure was not found. “

“The sawn off trees are there ok. They are big and the first one he came to has lots of nooks and crannies. He looked in them all, and all inside; nothing. He is not overjoyed because he had a dip in a ditch adjoining the Brain involving a floating gas cylinder that he thought was not floating, which he investigated. His theory is that the uncracked green text gives us clues and the treasure is in the river "its freezing" (he checked and it is!). The river brain comes from Braintree and a Braintree with a sawn off tree is Brain..! “

“I called the emergency ATH line and was told "we have had lots of calls along these lines". She asked me how we got there, so I explained our code cracking journey. She didn't say we were wrong. She said "you have to look harder". I asked, "at the ATH or in the tree?" She said that she couldn't say too much and that we need to take the "end of the green text very literally". I left him looking for something which could be described as "the First", maybe the first platform (there are fishing platforms, about 4 apparently) and then said to give up. “

We retired hurt and disappointed.

However, Stephen is made of stern stuff and decided to *visit his parents!!!!* He got there on New Year's Day and had a bracing stroll along the river.

“It was in the tree. As we walked up to it, I saw it from about 20 yards away; a little plastic tupperware box. My Dad swears blind it wasn't there the other day. He spent about 25 minutes looking in the tree, so not sure what to make of it. “

Treble Bobs All Round:

I printed out the maps, the directions and anything else that we felt may be useful and Parker also promised to be available on Skype (ah modern technology) and set off with the family in the car (after all, what else is there to do on Boxing Day). Everyone got into the spirit of the chase, which even the start of the rain half way there did little to dampen.

We decided to miss out on the first part of the directions (although we took them with us). It was a miserable day and we knew where to start: **BLACKWATER LANE**. We parked in River View and made our way down to the river in the drizzle. The rain and the thaw had contributed to fairly miserable walking conditions. We walked (at a fairly brisk pace due to the excitement and the conditions) went under the A12 and continued along the River Blackwater until we came to the joining of the rivers.

At the back of my mind was always the doubt that surely this was too far away from London for the Treasure to be buried and this was bound to be a wild goose chase. These fears were allayed when we saw the platform at the join or bend of the rivers. Surely we were in the right place?

At a faster pace, we turned upstream and after a few minutes searching for two cut off trees we saw them in the near distance. Impossible to miss...The kids raced off toward the trees in the distance and we eventually caught up – they were under strict instructions not to look for anything until we got there!.

Once we reached the tree it was clear where the Treasure was located – underneath a foot or two of mulch in the rotten out centre. I got down and shovelled away decades of mulch only to find that the Treasure was not there! Surely some catastrophic mistake or heinous tomfoolery by the setters! It took a 12 year old boy to find the Treasure in a cleft within a cleft in the tree.

Fourth! But still joyous. We packed the treasure into its hiding location ensuring it was well hidden, as we had found it, by strategically placed pieces of bark.

On the way back, we passed a young gentleman clad in extremely inappropriate footwear for such a wet and awful day. He stopped at the trees, walked round and then called someone on his phone. He probably got ticket number 5! [He did; see below]

I just need to know who to send the dry-cleaning bills to

Alcoholus Lubricatum:

...having decided this, we thought it sensible to wait for daylight the next day to make a trip.

[photo of Ingrid braving the arctic conditions on 20 December]

Unfortunately we didn't manage to find the treasure that day. We spent quite a lot of time looking inside the base of the tree (it goes down very deep). We also searched the rest of the tree, but thought we must be on the wrong track after unearthing a wasps' nest (which turned out in the end to be a few centimetres from the actual treasure!).

We scratched our heads about where we might have gone wrong, wondering if there was more quiz to solve before we could find the treasure. We wondered if examining the tree again might be what was required, and after the hint released on 22 December it looked pretty likely that we should be looking elsewhere in the tree at above-ground level. "Try down there" was changed to "Maybe in there", and Rawlinson, Hubbard and Mortimer are from *The Undignified Melodrama of the Bone of Contention*, where it is essential to the plot that the body remain above ground and not be buried. A second trip on 26 December proved fruitful. We obtained ticket number 5. Appropriately, our ticket had the 5th tercet from the 24th canto of *Lo Inferno*.

The Q4T Logicals

We had already deciphered the two directions to the Treasure card by the 20th December, both these were solved by Catherwood, but we had no idea of a start location, apart from the mention of Christchurch. So knowing that DLS was born in Christchurch, Oxford and the train journey ended at DLS College, we scanned Google earth for a route. About this time we also worked out the Smiths passage from the bible so we used a start point of the Jericho Tavern in Oxford and Sergio took up the challenge of hunting in Oxford, after we were quite happy with the route we had found on Google earth. But alas one of the five Red Herrings had bitten us.

Whilst solving the six pages of Red Herrings, Catherwood found the last location of Witham on Xmas Day, but we still needed a confirmer. Looking at the picture of the cyan coloured angular bench, which nobody had been able to find on the web, we noticed what looked like a police station in the background. So I Googled all the locations with 'police station' and Bingo, I had found the bench when using Witham with it. This happened on the evening of Xmas day, and unfortunately, we had relations coming over for Boxing Day so couldn't confirm the location till the 27th December. Unfortunately 2 of our team, Peter and Jayadee live in Oz, and another 2 Catherwood and OmegaOrion live across the Pond, so it was down to us Limeys to do the hunting.

27th December

Myself, Mary and Trax our dog, left about lunch time for Witham, which is only about an hour from us. Arriving at Witham using the Sat Nav post code of the police station, we saw the bench for the first time, so decided to look for a place to park. Whilst doing this I noticed the memorial with the relief from page 2. (Excitement increasing), parked the car and went to the memorial to take a video of it. Whilst doing this a little old lady, asked us 'why we were videoing the memorial', and for about a quarter of an hour we discussed

what we were doing, and got some very useful answers. I said to Mary that the trail seems to follow the pictures of the pages in order, so we would probably have to find a tower with a bell in it, with that she said 'What, like that one over there' Bingo again. Now we knew we were in the right location, so to cut a long story short, we followed all the other pictures and text to the river, which was quite a trek (Trax loved it though). Following the green trail everything mentioned just fell into place and before we knew it we were retrieving the box from the first sawn-off tree. Alas 5 teams had got there before us (Card No. 6), but I think Mary was just happy that we would be going home, as she had not brought her trekking boots and her nice leather boots were covered in mud, sorry Mary.

Nick

No Management Potential

My Logica orienteering club-mate and -- it transpires -- veteran Treasure-hunter Pete Huzan sent out the link to this year's ATH to several orienteers, as a bit of fun. I'd never previously seen the ATH but I was immediately intrigued. There was just so much to do! And look at the list of previous treasure locations: Christmas Common, Leith Hill, Coombe Hill and Ashridge Park (all of which I've orienteered on many times), Watlington Hill (childhood kite-flying days out from home in Henley), Beaconsfield and Little Chalfont (days out from previous childhood home in Chalfont St Peter), Steeple Aston (where I ran last year past the llamas / alpacas), Port Meadow (runs from home in Oxford), Grantchester (punting trips from Cambridge) and even Chislehurst (mother-in-law's house).

After a couple of days I'd found lots of Smiths (Smith Square?), located lots of quotations and identified some pictures. I'd also made good progress with the cryptic clues and had realised that they fitted together to form a grid. Snow cancelled the orienteering on 20 December and by that evening I'd built a grid, with highlights on the unclued answers. An invitation to join the No Management Potential team soon followed.

The crossword was soon finished and the DLS / Dante theme was clear. I discovered that the rest of the team had solved the ASCII code, the Playfair motto and the Sayers acrostic journey, and had reached the vestibule to the library. I spent a long time studying the various JavaScript files, including the fearsome md5sha1.js; once I understood what was going on it was time for <http://www.sha1-lookup.com/> and <http://hashcrack.com/index.php> to prove their (un)reliability -- and we were in. To see Uncle Meleager's impluvium pop up, differing from my hard-won grid only in the colour of the highlighting, was an amazing moment.

Things built from there. I probably averaged 10 hours per day on the ATH between Christmas and New Year. Stephen cracked the bell-ringing code on 23 December but we didn't know where to start the walk. However, if ever I got fed up with one part of the puzzle, there was another one to try. The 'downstream... upstream' directions didn't fit Bluntisham, 'crooked green bench sculpture' produced no matching Google image, the

mistletoe numbers didn't extract meaningful text from Lo Inferno and Herhethel led to Playfair contradictions as did numerous variations of 'Christchurch, fourtenth February ninetegen-thirty'. But suddenly, on an OS map of Witham, all the directions fitted. And later that night, text messages from a computerless Pete in Scotland revealed that pencil, paper and Ian Webb had broken the Bluntisham Playfair. You've heard the treasure-hunting tale that followed, along with Mr Lees senior's dip in the icy River Brain.

As we progressed further, my respect for the setter grew and grew. The JavaScript was cunningly crafted to disguise the existence of a 6th alias (for the library challenge), and on my 'spider' diagram of the different puzzles the central 'ATH' grew as many as 15 legs. Some connected up, but some, like the John Arbuthnot / Billy Bunter / St George / Gherkins leg, didn't go anywhere. The PNGs remained uninvestigated and we never did open Ali Baba's cave. Having counted rectangles and constructed the proof that the tiling answer was 132, suddenly (while researching number theory for the sigma and phi functions), I came across the Catalan numbers... and the meaning of the already-identified map fragment became clear. I realised that the 'taut web of clues' really was taut: there was nothing extraneous. (Never did identify that knot diagram though.) And I was learning things: bell-ringing, number theory, misfitting engravings of Georgian 'settlers', endless interesting photos of 'actress Smith', and all those Wren churches. You must have been delighted to find that the best Flickr set of 'Wren Churches' has about 50 images of a couple of dozen churches, but St Pancras is notable by its absence.

We found and enjoyed the red herrings questions. "More like a traditional old-style ATH" said the veterans.

Who was that last Smith?

Patti Smith it clearly wasn't, but Patty Smyth... now there was a possibility. Yes P=16 and Matthew 20:16 is clearly the instructions for selecting ("for many be called, but few chosen") then reading ("so the last shall be first") those red letters from the quotations. I'd decided that they were encoded, and only when writing them backwards in preparation for some Caesar-shifting did I notice that they gave Latin plain-text immediately... aaargh!

The railway timetable and the Mistletoe code produced similar "aaargh" moments (applying the numbers to Ulysses gave much nonsense), outdone only by the DLS chapter numbers, after I'd spent a long long time trying to get the first paragraph or two of text from each chapter and then extracting the Nth word, with N many varieties of 'position of red letter in quote' 'position of red letter in alphabet', etc etc.

I'm looking forward to seeing how the scoring system works in practice. I'm hoping that the obvious spot "mmix = 2009" (or indeed the reference in "the good Lord willing") don't count as 'significant' -- or else in future years the solvers will be solemnly identifying 'ATH' as 'Armchair Treasure Hunt' in their answers. The hashed passwords and answers were excellent confirmation that you were making progress, as was the idea

of the self-checking cryptic crossword, where it's almost impossible to find an alternative wrong answer that fits.

I thoroughly enjoyed this first experience of the ATH and I hope that the next one is as good. Many thanks for your efforts.

Regards
Roger Thetford