THE FLESHERTON ADVANCE

Published on Collingwood Street, Flesherton, Wednesday of each week. Circulation over 1,000. Price in Canada $2.00 per year, when paid in advance $1.50; in U. S. A. $2.50 per year, when paid in advance $2.00.

F. J. THURSTON, Editor.

Canadian Editors Given Banquet

(By Hugh Templin)

All kinds of honors were paid to the small group of Canadian editors who; travelled to Britain at the invitation of the British Council, but I suppose the greatest honor of them all was the luncheon given us by the British Government. We were the special guests at a dinner at which about half the members of the Cabinet and many other of the greatest in the land were present.

Thirty-two people sat down around the long table in Claridge's Hotel that afternoon of October 1st, 1941. Of the twelve Canadians, two had ranks or titles that sounded impressive when written in full: The Very Rev. Canon Chamberland and the Rt. Rev. Bishop R. J. Renison. The rest of us had none, except the "Esq." placed after each of our names by our polite hosts, so that we wouldn't feel too lonely.

Of the other twenty, there were two Viscounts, one Lord, four Sirs, four Right Honorables, one Air Marshall, one Rear Admiral, one Major-General, one Cardinal, and one Very Rev. Monseigneur.

Now can you imagine that?

You Can't Imagine It

The answer must be, "No." You can't imagine it. And I am afraid I cannot describe it, but I'm going to make an attempt to tell you in my own way. And I'll reassure you by saying at the start that I enjoyed it.

To give you a better description, I should go back to the beginning of the day. That will provide something of the background.

My diary begins to tell of October 1st: "Slept till 1 o'clock and rose weary and worn, though I had been home by 11 the night before.

I had been in London eleven days. They had been strenuous days. There had been a daily program laid out, which usually began about 8.30 in the morning and was apt to continue till long after midnight. It sometimes involved long trips by motor car, sometimes at 90 miles an hour over the broad, straight, new roads that connect the larger cities. There was an exhilaration about the thing that kept me going.

Now, at last, the program was easing off. Instead of seeing interesting places, we were being entertained by various groups, always as "the distinguished visitors who flew the Atlantic to bring us greetings from Canada"—or something of the sort.

On the day before, I had met Winston Chuchill. Anything after that was apt to be something of an anticlimax, or so I supposed. The night before I had eaten away from the Savoy, at a little restaurant, and had come "home" early and had gone to bed, dog-tired.

No Place Like Home

How easily one slips into familiar language. Looking back the thought of calling the Savoy Hotel "home", causes a smile. Home was never like that, and I trust it never will be.

B. K. Sandwell, of Toronto Saturday Night, explained the Savoy to me before I ever saw it. He said it was built out of the profits of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas to provide the height of magnificence in London for visiting potentates and the like.

I believe him. The Savoy Theatre is in the same building. The castle of the Knights of Savoy (or something like that) used to occupy the same site overlooking the Thames. Statues of Gilbert and Sullivan were in the garden between the hotel and the river. Its front faced the Strand, one of the most famous old streets of the world: its back looked out over the gardens and the Embankment to the Thames, certainly one of the most famous rivers in the world. Its private dining rooms were named after characters in the operas. I used to breakfast in the Princess Ida room and when they moved me to The Mikado room for a couple of meals, I felt out of place.

That morning, I awakened late—10 o'clock, the diary says, and turned on the light, for the room was so thoroughly blacked out that the curtains. There wer three push-butt-light as they had kept in the electric light the night before.

It's rather a wonder I could sleep till ten o'clock. Usually my valet was in before that, or the maid would be around to untie the curteins. There were three push-buttons beside my bed, marked "Valet," "Maid" and "Waiter." I seldom used any of them. By touching the bottom one I might have had breakfast in bed, but I never did. That seemed a waste of time. I preferred to get up and go down to the dining room where I could see interesting people.

But the valet used to come around in spite of me. I never let him dress me, but he used to shine my sho every day, hang up my suits for me, lay out the ones he thought I would be wearing, and occasionally consult me about something. But I never got used to having him around.

On the first day, though, he gave me one of my best laughs.

I was standing in the bathroom in my pyjamas and silk dressing gown, preparing to shave myself. Perhaps even that was a faux pas: I suppose the gentlemen in such suites should not shave themselves—but Canadians are a self-reliant race, so I was there, in front of the huge blue Royal Doulton wash basin, with my shaving kit scattered around its circumference.

The valet knocked and entered. What he was ready to do for me have not the slightest idea, for I gave him no encouragement. But he was agreeable and friendly.

"Oh, sir," he remarked at last, "I see you have this famous bawthroom!"

My curiosity was aroused. Had it been the scene of a murder or something. But apparently not.

"You would see how this 'otel was damaged by the bomb, sir?" he continued.

Yes, I had seen. The back of the building, including the wall of the famous restaurant, had apparently been removed almost in one piece. At least, there had been a long gash down its face, now repaired. And in the front, just outside the window, workmen were repairing other scars.

The valet stood beside the bathtub and indicated that it was the damage ouside the window to which he referred. I mention the tub because it was the most striking feature of the room. It was huge and deep, set down into the floor, Roman-style. One stepped over a broad edge and down into the big blue tub, also fabricated of Royal Doulton. And on the wall above were two buttons, one marked "Valet" and the other one, "Maid." It used to be a temptation to me every time I took a bath, to lean against them both and see what happened— but I never did.

The valet went on with his story.

"You see, sir, when the blitz was on Lady Soandso had this suite and the night that big bomb went off there she was standing just where you are now, and it blowed her clean into the bloody bawth."

That morning was short. It was too late for breakfast, probably the only one I missed while in London. There was no need to wonder what to wear. No person in London wears fancy clothes to even the most distinguished gatherings any more. I had two suits with me and chose the blue one as looking slightly more formal. Downstairs I met some of the other Canadians, checked up on the program for the rest of the day, and finally took a taxi with Major Christie to Claridge's, the driver taking the now-familiar streets between the Strand and the West End.

Individuals in London, even the most important ones, have given up trying to keep up appearances, but the head waiters and other attendants at these famous London hotels still looked impressive in their tails. The taxi driver let us out at a side door and we walked down a hall to a lobby. There an attendant looked impressed when we asked the way to the Government luncheon and he directed us down a broad ante-room. At the far end another man in uniform asked the name. He handed me a folder with my name written on the rfont, "Hugh Templin Esq.," and another attendant inside the door announced me, and I shook hands with the Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, an old friend by this time.

The room was large and decorated light grey, with big French windows. In the centre of the room, but filling only a part of it, was the long table. At each place was a card with the Government coat-of-arms on it in red.

There was no need to go looking at all the place cards. In the centre of the folder which had been handed to me at the door, there was a plan of the table and the seating arrangement. Opposite my name was a small red hand. I sat on the right of the Right Hon. Sir Malcolm Robertson of the British Council, our host while in England (though not the host of this banquet). On the other side was Col. Sir Eric Crankshaw, though just what position he held in the Army I never did discover. Beyond him was Major D. C. Unwin Simson, who is on the staff of the Canadian High Commissioner in London. Beyond Sir Malcolm sat Grattan O'Leary of Ottawa, then the Rt. Hon. A. V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, and Viscount Bennett, one-time Prime Minister of Canada, now more happy, perhaps, in the House of Lords at London.

I would need a copy of the British "Who's Who" to tell you something about all who were at the table that day, but I have no doubt that the names of all of them would be found in that volume. And scattered here and there, as far as possible in every second seat, were twelve Canadian editors, not one of whom ever found himself in such distinguished company before.

My allotted space has been used up for this week. Next week, I'll tell you more about these men and what they did and said.

Well, the ragweed is in bloom and your sneeze is as good as ours.

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Sunday, September 27, 1942

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