

**CAMBRIDGE
NIGHT CLIMBING
HISTORY**

by
Richard Williams

author of the 3rd Edition (1960) of
The Night-Climber's Guide to Trinity

Cambridge night climbing history

A talk given by Richard Williams to the Cambridge Society of Victoria at the Kelvin Club, Melbourne, on Wed 21 Oct 2009

Part I, Introduction

Welcome everybody to my talk, which will give a brief summary of the history of night climbing in Cambridge, with particular reference to Trinity, which is where most of it happened.

Night climbing usually comes to the public eye when some strange object is left on the top of a roof or a spire for the world to see.

By far the most popular piece of roof-top litter would have been the chamber-pot, which was rather coyly described in the old guides to night climbing as a "domestic utensil". Other examples of roof-top litter have been a Belisha beacon, a wheel-barrow, a shop dummy, a policeman's helmet, and a bucket and mop. A very good one was the bowler hat on the head of a statue. Somebody once replaced the sceptre in the hand of the Great Gate statue of Henry VIII by a chair-leg. My favourite story in this context is about the two umbrellas that were mounted on the pinnacles of the Trinity Chapel. This was in 1932. The Master knew a crack rifleman, so he summoned him to shoot the umbrellas down. The marksman promptly obliged, but during the night, the missing umbrellas were replaced by a pair of Union Jacks. The Master summoned the crack shot once again, but this time he refused. "Sir", he said, "I couldn't possibly fire at our national flag!"

Of course, there have been many occasions where people have used the buildings to make political statements, for example (regrettably) a swastika in 1936, and various banners, such as "Save Ethiopia" or "Ban the Bomb", often strung between the pinnacles of King's Chapel.

Sometimes, the roof-top litter is on the grand scale, such as a light four boat. The prize for the most ambitious piece of roof-top litter must go to the group of engineers in 1958 who somehow managed to leave an Austin 7 on the roof of the Senate House.

But I hasten to explain that the people I climbed with were not publicity seekers. On the contrary, we climbed surreptitiously, taking great care to avoid detection and media attention, and we never left roof-top litter behind. These nocturnal activities were strictly forbidden by the college authorities, and therefore we operated like a secret society, the brotherhood of the night. Our only rewards were the sheer enjoyment of climbing the roofs and spires, spiced by the extra thrill of unlawful adventure, and the happy companionship of our fellow conspirators.

I have been asked whether women ever climbed the roofs. In those days, Cambridge wasn't co-ed, and the women were cloistered in their all-female colleges. I don't think it ever occurred to most women of the 1950s to venture out on the roofs. I seem to remember that a female undergraduate named Jo Scarr went out with us once or twice, but I don't know of any others.

The pioneer of night climbing in Cambridge was Geoffrey Winthrop Young, who published the 1st edition of the Trinity Guide in 1900. Subsequent climbers followed literally in his footsteps. The 2nd edition was published in 1930, and I had the honour of writing the 3rd edition in 1960.

I have brought with me copies of all three editions of the Trinity Guide, plus a copy of the Guide to St John's, plus a copy of a book called "Night Climbers of Cambridge", first published in 1937 under the pseudonym of "Whipplesnaith". I shall pass these books round at the end of my talk, together with some other night climbing memorabilia.

I should explain that following Geoffrey Winthrop Young's example, all guides have been published anonymously. The secrecy was essential, because of the prohibition of night climbing. But with the passage of time, the need for anonymity has slowly evaporated, and I shall mention many names in this talk, because I want to give full credit to the pioneers.

I should also explain that again following the practice of the First Guide, all the guides have appropriate quotations sprinkled throughout the text. For example, on the cover of my book, I used the same quotation as the Second Guide, a beautiful biblical verse from Joshua :

*And it came to pass, about the time of the shutting of the gate,
when it was dark, that the men went out;
whither the men went, I wot not.*

To complete my introduction, I'd like to quote some words by Whipplesnaith. He said :

And while mountaineers are counted by the tens of thousands, roof-climbers could scarcely be mustered by the dozen. Like characters from Buchan crossing a Scottish moor on a stormy night, they are silent and solitary, mysterious and unknown except to their own circle, preferring to live their own epics to reading those of others.

Part II, History

The 18th century

Night climbing has probably been going on in Cambridge for centuries. The First Guide said that it was "of enormous antiquity, possessing extensive history and a literature which includes the greatest prose and verse writers of all ages".

But the earliest record that I know of came to me from Lord Adrian, the very distinguished former Master at Trinity, who was kind enough to send me a hand-written note of thanks after my book came out. He said that he suspected there were some routes in the 18th century, and the evidence is that various initials and dates have been scratched on the top pane of the big staircase window at the back of the Lodge.

The 19th century

Some time later, in 1806, Lord Byron is reputed to have made the first ascent of the Fountain in Great Court. It is a difficult climb. The attribution may well be apocryphal, but it fits the dates when Byron was a Trinity undergraduate (1805-07).

I know of no other climbing exploits in Trinity over the next 80 years, so I now want to take you forward to the time of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, 1887, her 50th wedding anniversary. The British Empire was at its height, and although many lived in Dickensian poverty, the rich Englishmen had incredible wealth.

At the close of the 19th century, without the slightest premonition of the disasters that lay ahead, they enjoyed an extremely privileged life-style. This was the era when mountain climbing in the Swiss Alps first became popular. These Englishmen would set out in their tweed jackets and knickerbockers and they would climb the mountains with no equipment other than their walking-sticks. Publishers began to print mountaineering guides to the Swiss Alps for the benefit of this new wave of tourism. The tourists included a young man named Geoffrey Winthrop Young.

The decade from 1900 to 1909

With his friends, Geoffrey Winthrop Young began climbing the roofs of Trinity at night, during term time, to give themselves practice for the Alps during their vacations. As I said earlier, he published the first edition of the Roof Climber's Guide to Trinity in 1900.

Young was born in 1876, the second son of Sir George Young, who was also a mountaineer. He was educated at Marlborough and Trinity (1897-1900). He was a poet, a mountaineer and an educator.

Regarding poetry, Young twice won the Chancellor's Medal for English Verse, and published three books of poetry, plus a book of collected verses.

Regarding mountaineering, he was certainly one of the leading climbers of his generation, and some say he was the greatest English Alpine climber of all time. He has an impressive record of first ascents and difficult ascents in Wales and in the Alps, where his regular climbing partner was George Mallory who perished on Everest in 1924 with Andrew Irvine. That may have been the first ascent of Everest; we will never know.

Regarding education, Young was a master at Eton from 1900 to 1905, then a schools inspector until 1913. From 1932 to 1941, he was a Reader in comparative education at London University. But he is probably best remembered in this context because of his friendship with Kurt Hahn. Their co-operation inspired the foundation of Gordonstoun, the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme, and the Outward Bound movement.

Young was a pacifist. He enlisted in the Friends' Ambulance Unit in 1914. He served in Belgium, France and Italy and was decorated for bravery several times. He lost a leg in 1917 but that didn't prevent him from resuming his climbing career after the war, and he succeeded in climbing several

alpine peaks on a metal leg (Monte Rosa, the Matterhorn and the Wellenkuppe) in 1927 and 1928. He was obviously a most remarkable man.

I have a letter from him which he dictated to his wife Eleanor, dated 1958. In this letter, he says that the original Guide was a May Week joke, a parody of the style of the Swiss mountaineering guides, and intended only to amuse. He died soon afterwards, at the age of 82.

In 1905, a booklet entitled "Wall and Roof-Climbing" was published in Eton. I was surprised to learn that Young was the author, because he was a master at Eton at the time. I haven't seen it, but I must assume that it was a literary and scholarly work, rather than a guide to the Eton roofs. Otherwise, it would have been as though one of the game-keepers had written a guide to poaching !

The decade from 1910 to 1919

The decade from 1910 to 1919 was overshadowed by the horrors of the First World War. The only knowledge that I have of night climbing activity in Cambridge during these years is gleaned from the lead slab on the roof behind King Edward's Tower in Great Court, where a certain "G.F.D. Trin Choir, 1910-1914" has immortalised himself with a pen-knife. The slab has become known among the climbing fraternity as the Chorister's Table.

The decade from 1920 to 1929

In 1921, the Roof-Climber's Guide to St John's was published, with acknowledgments to the first Trinity Guide, under the pseudonym "A Climber". The First Guide has revealed who the authors were. He said "The St John's Roof Guide was produced in imitation of the first edition, by a post-war group consisting largely of Johnsian Blues. Hartley (thrice stroke of the VIII), Oliver Grag (who'd been under me in Italy), Darlington (another doctor), etc. They invited me to attend a solemn meet and showed me the climbs and told me they'd copied the Trinity Guide's style as close as might be." No further editions of the Guide to St John's have ever been published.

In 1922, an article appeared in the journal of the Oxford and Cambridge Mountaineering Club about night climbing at Oxford. This is the only reference to night climbing at Oxford that I have ever seen. It is very strange that it has never taken off at "the other place".

Night climbing in Cambridge was very active in the 1920s, both at St John's and at Trinity. Some of the climbers at this time were Bobby Chew, Bunny Fuchs, John Hurst, Jack Longland, Peter Scott, G L Trevelyan, Laurence Wager, R C Wakefield, Gino Watkins, C T Wedgwood and E G Wright. . Most of them went to Trinity. They were all really amazing men, as I am sure you will agree when I tell you something about each one in turn.

Bobby Chew became headmaster at Gordonstoun. One of his pupils was Prince Charles.

Bunny Fuchs became Sir Vivian Fuchs, the polar explorer.

John Hurst wrote the second Trinity Guide. He was one of the sons of Sir Cecil Hurst, a legal adviser to the Foreign Office. John Hurst later consummated his obvious zeal for higher things by becoming ordained as an Anglican priest. He was the Rector of the West Meon parish in rural

Hampshire for over 50 years until his death in 2003. During those years, he wrote a second guide-book, this time to Corhampton Church, Hampshire.

Jack Longland, later Sir John Longland, was an educator (he was an English lecturer at Durham University), a mountain climber (he was a hero of the 1933 Everest expedition) and a broadcaster (he was the chairman of the BBC programme "My Word" from 1957 to 1977).

Peter Scott, later Sir Peter Scott, was the son of the famous explorer Sir Robert Scott of the Antarctic. He went on to become very well-known in his own right as a famous naturalist, and also as a painter, Olympic yachtsman, gunboat commander, and television personality. He illustrated the Second Trinity Guide.

G L Trevelyan, later Sir George Trevelyan the fourth baronet, taught at Gordonstoun and became a spiritual leader of the New Age movement. He was a nephew of G M Trevelyan the renowned historian, Master of Trinity 1940-51. G M Trevelyan was a great friend of Geoffrey Winthrop Young. In 1898, when they were both 22, the two young men founded the famous Trevelyan Man Hunt, held annually in the Lake District. When he went up to Trinity, G L Trevelyan became the Master of the Man Hunt, and held that position for 42 years.

Laurence Wager became an Arctic explorer, like Fuchs. He was also a member of the 1933 Everest expedition, with Longland.

Gino Watkins became an inspirational mountaineer, and like Fuchs and Wager, an Arctic explorer. But I'm very sad to have to tell you that he died at the age of 25. He drowned in Greenland when hunting seals in a kayak. So many triumphs in his young life, and then the ultimate tragedy.

Let me now return to night climbing. Scott's autobiography says that the first recorded roof-top circuit of Trinity's Great Court was made in November 1927, by Scott with Longland, Wager and Watkins. However, the second edition of the Trinity Guide contains an erratum which says that the Great Gate was first conquered in 1905, not in 1927. This makes me believe that the first roof-top circuit of Great Court was probably made in 1905. Also, my own records say that the successful team in 1927 was Scott, Longland and Trevelyan, rather than Scott, Longland, Wager and Watkins..

My records also show that

> In March 1928, Longland, Scott, Wager and Wakefield made the first ascent of Castor Corner from the Hole

> In February 1929, Hurst and Wright made the first circuit of the Wren Library

> In May 1929, Wedgwood and Wright made the first ascent of the Gateway Column

This was indeed the Golden Age of night climbing in Cambridge. The Cambridge Review in April and May 1924 had 5 consecutive articles by "Messrs Robinson and Jones" on "Alpine Sports in Cambridge". The same author under the pseudonym "Nocturne" wrote an article entitled "A Novel Climb in Cambridge" about the first ascent of the St John's Chapel Tower, published in the Rucksack Club Journal in 1926.

The decade from 1930 to 1939

Then in 1930, the second edition of the Roof Climber's Guide to Trinity was published. The author was John Hurst, and the illustrator was Peter Scott. I have already mentioned them both.

My records show that

> In May 1930, the first ascent of Oriel Corner was made by M S Gordon and John Hurst

> In 1931, the first ascent of 1834 Corner was made by G A Millikan

I now turn to the year 1937. This was marked by the publication of the book that I have already mentioned, called "The Night Climbers of Cambridge". It soon became the night-climbers' bible. It was written under the pseudonym "Whipplesnaith" by a very interesting man named Noel Symington. His father owned the well-established firm "Symington's Soups" of Market Harborough, in Leicestershire.

In 1937, Symington had recently graduated from King's. He decided to publish his book, but he wanted to include a number of flash-light photographs, so he recruited Nares Craig, Alec Crichton and Wilfred Noyce (all Trinity men), and O'Hara Murray (Pembroke). They were climbing colleagues.

Nares Craig is the man standing on top of the St John's "Wedding Cake" in the frontispiece of Symington's book. He was rusticated together with O'Hara Murray for trying to hoist an unflattering effigy of George VI up to the top of King's Chapel. This was in May 1937, when the coronation was imminent. Craig was a communist, and this was his way of "mocking the whole pantomime of royalty".

Wilfred Noyce was a member of the successful 1953 Everest expedition, led by Sir Edmund Hillary.

Symington suffered severe rope-burns to his hands one night during an over-hasty descent from King's College Chapel, and his left hand never fully recovered. He died in 1970 at the age of 56.

I have a letter from Symington, dated October 1958, when he was a farmer living in Market Harborough. He said "You may have heard my name once or twice recently, on the Midlands television, in connection with banned Fascist meetings. I am trying to form a Fascist party, but for the moment it is very uphill work."

The decade from 1940 to 1949

In 1941, inspired by the Whipplesnaith book, a couple of Winchester schoolboys wrote "The Night Climbers of Winchester". This was a hand-covered notebook, containing descriptions and photographs. The authors were Peter Sankey and Freeman Dyson. The photographer was George Hervey (Coll 1937-42), and a climbing colleague was Brown (Coll 1935-41).

Sadly, Peter Sankey died at Arnhem in 1944, but Freeman Dyson went on to become one of the 20th century's pre-eminent theoretical physicists.

Dyson read mathematics at Trinity in 1941-43, then joined RAF Bomber Command where he worked in operational research at the Command HQ, which was hidden in a forest near High Wycombe. He returned to Trinity in 1946 as a Junior Fellow. Then in 1947, he went to Cornell University as a Fellow and studied QED (quantum electrodynamics). His colleagues were Bethe, Feynman and Schwinger, who were all legendary pioneers in this field. He was appointed Professor of Physics at Cornell in 1951, but left in 1953 for a position at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ, where he has been ever since. He is renowned for his work in quantum field theory, solid-state physics and nuclear engineering.

Sankey and Dyson both went up to Cambridge together, the former to Magdalen, the latter to Trinity. They went night climbing together several times in 1941 and did some of the climbs described in Whipplesnaith's book, including the Gateway Column climb at the Wren Library, the New Tower at St John's, the Senate House and a few others.

I have a recent email from Dyson in which he says "So far as I know, nobody else except Sankey and me were night-climbing while I was up at Cambridge. At that time, in the middle of the war, there were few students, and the life of the university was at a low ebb. Of course, we had a big advantage because the town was blacked out and nobody on the ground could see us."

The decade from 1950 to 1959

In 1955, I went up to Trinity. It was very natural for me to get involved with the Cambridge roof climbing fraternity, because I had been climbing roofs throughout my school years.

In fact, my roof-climbing career first started in 1943, when I was only 8 years old. I was playing soccer one summer evening, with my brother John and some friends. We were in the playground of the local primary school. Unfortunately, I accidentally kicked the ball on to the school roof. That was a disaster, because it was the only ball we had. So I decided to retrieve it.

The school porch had a strong old Victorian drain-pipe running up to the roof, and of course the Victorians built everything to last for centuries. It wasn't hard to climb up the drain-pipe, and then there was a tricky bit where I had to reach out to get over the cornice, but I managed that successfully, and I was rewarded by a sight which was never to be forgotten. A real treasure trove, a bonanza, a cornucopia of balls, just lying there in the gutters and on the roof of the porch, waiting to be found !

I quickly discovered that most of them were unusable, they had rotted, but I must have found 20 balls in good condition, including the one that I had just kicked up there. I wriggled along the roof, retrieving balls and throwing them down to my jubilant friends below.

So that's how it all started !

I soon met some kindred spirits at Trinity, and during my three years there, I went night climbing on many occasions. Sometimes alone, but usually with friends. We never used ropes or any other climbing equipment. That was regarded as namby-pamby. We followed the routes developed by the pioneers and we developed many new routes of our own. We did the roof-top circuits of all the

courts, and we usually had a few beers together afterwards. It was all great fun and often very exciting, and we thoroughly enjoyed it.

Here are some of the highlights :

- > In March 1958, the first ascent of Castor Corner from the ground, by Julian Williams of St Catherines, and myself.
- > Also in March 1958, the first ascent of the Devil's Tower from the ground, again by Julian Williams and myself.
- > In May 1958, the first ascent of the Great Hall from the ground, by J L Robinson, R M Sandford, and myself.
- > Also in May 1958, the first ascent of the Angel's Tower, by Brian Young and myself.
- > In November 1959, I did the first circuit of Angel Court. This was a new set of buildings. In the note that I received from Lord Adrian, he said he was delighted to see that Angel Court was already in my guide-book.

Let me interpose a little anecdote at this point. There is a corner of Great Court which is known to the climbing fraternity as "Sandy's Drop", and I am going to tell you how it acquired its name.

On a memorable Bump Supper night, a man named Sandy Robinson had been celebrating excessively, following the success of his boat in the Lent races. He was staggering home late at night in Great Court with one of his friends, when he heard noises on the roof. He looked up and saw four of us on the parapet next to the Chapel.

"I'm going to join you !" he cried. And suiting action to the words, he immediately started climbing up a drain-pipe. But disaster struck. He was only half-way up when he shouted despairingly "I'm not going to make it !" And then I think he just let go. The stillness was broken by a loud crash as he fell to the ground in the shrubbery. We were all horrified.

A light went on in a first-floor room, a window opened, and a head emerged wearing a red and white night-cap. It was one of the dons.

"What was that noise ?" he asked.

The friend below was very quick-witted. "That was only Robinson falling out of bed, sir" came the reply.

"But it sounded like a very heavy fall !" said the don.

"Yes sir, that's because Robinson is a very heavy sleeper, sir !" said the quick-witted friend below.

"Oh, I see" replied the don, apparently quite satisfied with this explanation. The head wearing the night-cap withdrew, the window closed, the light went out, and stillness returned to the night.

The decade from 1960 to 1969

Let me now resume the historical narrative.

In my final year, which was 1958, we often discussed the fact that the first edition of the Trinity Guide had been published in 1900, and the second edition in 1930, so it seemed appropriate that we should maintain the 30-year cycle, and bring out the third edition in 1960. I was elected to be the author, and I managed to complete the manuscript in early 1960.

I had a girl-friend at the time named Angela Machale and she was a very talented artist, so I got her to do all the illustrations, except for the cover illustration which was drawn by another talented artist, Timothy Birdsall, one of my Cambridge friends, who sadly died a few years ago.

I found a publisher in Cambridge, and the book came out on schedule in 1960.

Because of Whipplesnaith's book, everybody used the term "Night Climber" rather than "Roof Climber". The first two editions had been called the "The Roof Climber's Guide to Trinity" but we all regarded that as old-fashioned, so my book came out as "The Night Climber's Guide to Trinity, 3rd edition, 1960".

A few months later, in 1961, I was at a party in London and I met someone who was up at Cambridge at about the same time as me. I was introduced to him by a man named Keith Evans, who was my best friend at Cambridge.

Keith read Law at Cambridge and became a very successful barrister, so you won't be surprised to hear that his style was rather flamboyant.

"Richard's claim to fame is that he wrote the Night Climber's Guide to Trinity", Keith announced loudly in his best court-room voice.

"Oh really, that's most interesting, I have a copy myself" came the reply.

"But is it a SIGNED copy ?" asked Keith, dramatically. He could have been delivering the key question in his cross-examination. Everybody within earshot had turned round to listen.

"No, I'm afraid it isn't, I bought it over the counter in a book-shop !" said my new friend.

"Don't apologise," said Keith, very theatrically, "you should be congratulated ! You are very fortunate ! You have got one of the RARE ones !"

The years from 1970 to 1999

We now move forward to 1970. This was the year of publication of another book on night climbing in Cambridge, written under the pseudonym of Hederatus, which is Latin for "adorned with ivy". His book was called "Cambridge Night Climbing". Unfortunately, I have no further information

about this book. Then in 1977, a book by F A Reeve was published, entitled "Varsity Rags and Hoaxes". This contained a short section on night climbing.

Apart from these two references, I know very little about Cambridge night climbing during the latter part of the 20th century. We had emigrated from the UK to Australia in 1968, so I was out of touch. But my impression is that night climbing was at a low ebb throughout this period. The college authorities became antagonistic towards night climbing, penalties became severe, obstacles and barriers were installed on the college buildings to thwart potential climbing. I made enquiries at Trinity to see if anybody was going to maintain the 30-year cycle by bringing out a fourth edition of the Trinity Guide in 1990, but drew a blank. Nobody knew any night climbers.

Of course, it is quite possible that in fact there was climbing activity of which I am unaware. Heroic but unrecorded deeds of climbing valour may have been achieved. If so, I offer my apologies to these unknown heroes for having excluded them from my talk !

The decade from 2000 to 2009

Now another fast forward, this time to 2007. I visited Trinity on a trip to the UK, with my wife Jan, who is here today by my side.

We were walking round the old college and came to the Wren Library. I decided to demonstrate to Jan how we used to get up to the roof of the library from the ground. I started to show her the chimneying technique for getting up between the pillar and the wall.

This greatly alarmed a couple of Trinity security men who came hurrying over to find out what I was doing. When I explained that I used to be a night climber, their faces lit up. "You are just the man we need !" they said. "Have you got a minute to come to the Great Hall with us ? There is something we would like to show you !"

Well of course we went with them to the Great Hall, and they showed us the problem that they thought I could fix. High up, sitting on one of the roof-beams that crossed the vast ceiling of the hall, they pointed out a little yellow plastic duck ! They wanted me to get it down ! I politely declined !

I am now almost at the end of my historical review, and I come to the present, 2009. This will give quite a dramatic climax to my talk.

A couple of weeks ago, our Hon. Sec., Jerry Platt, announced on the society's web site that I was going to be talking today on the subject of night climbing in Cambridge. Shortly afterwards, I received an email from a very excited publisher in Cambridge, Jon Gifford, of Oleander Press. Apparently he had been trying to find me for years, and had finally succeeded when his regular internet search for references to Cambridge night climbing located Jerry's announcement.

Jon explained to me that in recent years, the night climbers of Cambridge have become cult heroes. This is because of the huge growth of interest in extreme sports -- the BASE jumpers, the builderers, the traceurs, the free climbers, the free runners. Jon said that most climbers are amazed that there were guys climbing roofs over 70 years ago, with no ropes, and often no shoes!

Jon gave me references to recent articles about Cambridge night climbing, not just from England but from all over the world, both in the major newspapers and also in the specialist climbing magazines, particularly from Holland and Germany.

All the old books had been out of print since the 1950s. Mine was the last. Jon reprinted Whipplesnaith's book 20 months ago and has already sold 5,000 copies in hard-back. He has been able to contact the families of the First and Second Trinity Guides and the St John's Guide, and they have all given him permission to reprint them. He was just so delighted to make contact with me, and to get my permission to republish my book.

So it is all quite amazing. It never occurred to me that one day I might become a Cult Hero. That gives me some compensation for feelings of inadequacy that my only claim to fame was to have written the third Trinity guide. I never succeeded in emulating the intellectual feats of some of my illustrious predecessors at Trinity. I never won a Nobel prize ! But I can't complain. Becoming a Cult Hero is really quite a nice thing to have happened to me !

Part III, Conclusion

In conclusion, I should inform you all that I don't do very much roof climbing these days. At the age of 75, the only roof climbing that I still do is when I remove the leaves from the gutters of my garage !

I have mentioned that I found a number of good quotations for my book, to add to those used by the First and Second Guides. One of them in particular was highly appropriate. It was from a poem called "The Ladder of St Augustine", by Henry Longfellow, the American poet.

Well, the rhythm or metre happens to fit a tune which became the party anthem of the British Labour party, the Red Flag. So we used Longfellow's words to the tune of the Red Flag, followed by a second verse of our own, and that became the Night Climbers' Anthem.

Would you like me to sing it for you ? OK, it goes something like this :

*The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they while their companions slept
Were toiling upwards through the night.*

*"Excelsior" shall be our cry,
We'll never stop, we'll never tire,
Until at last we see on high
A chamber-pot on every spire !*

Many thanks to you all for your attendance today.

Epilogue

Shortly after my talk, I received the following letter, dated 22 Oct 2009, from the President of the Cambridge Society of Australia (Victoria) :

Dear Richard

It is not often that one has the honour to address a Cult Figure, but I am seizing this opportunity in thanking you formally on behalf of the Society for providing us with such great entertainment at Wednesday's luncheon.

The size of the turnout for the luncheon and your expose on the Night Climbers speaks for itself; we were lured by the prospect of gleaning hidden insights into this clandestine activity. We were not disappointed: how else would we be able to examine the different routes to the roof of the Wren Library; how else would we have come to know of the plastic duck nested high in the rafters of Trinity Great Hall; how else would we hear first hand of the thrills of those nocturnal expeditions to impossible places; and above all, how else would we have heard a magnificent rendering of the Night Climber's Anthem ?

Those of us present to enjoy your talk would all have been taken back to earlier times in life when we defied the Rules and enjoyed evading the Authorities in seeking out the hidden pleasures of life - thank you so much for the insights, reminiscences and the sheer fun of your address.

Yours very sincerely,

Peter Adams (President)