**METROLAND MEETS OLD ENGLAND**

Leonard and Paula Aspen-Jones

Belong to that very special band

Of middle classes who have homes

In London’s Suburban Metroland.

Harry and Stella Brown are also in this state.

Theirs is a smaller house with no garage,

But he has access through a sly back gate

To green fields and countryside at large.

Leonard is someone in the City;

Harry also, but not so large.

The Northern Line’s where they meet in gritty

Boredom of the tasks they are in charge.

“Let’s go on a driving holiday together”

Leonard has just bought, for himself, a brand-new car.

“Fourth Friday in June, then, let’s hope for some fine weather

Before school hols – Scotland? – I don’t think that’s too far.

The year is nineteen thirty-eight;

The car a Horse-Powered Wolseley of fourteen,

Six cylinders – it’s up to date;

Ripe for rural touring, dressed In Barwick Green.

We’ll take the Great North Road at cruising pace;

Stop at Coaching Houses of Dickensian fame,

Or wander off, if we can find a place

Which has that something special to its name.

Stella does the planning and the looking:

“I’ve found a lovely place, just north of Newark,

Noted for its superb board and cooking,

And nearby river for postprandial walk.”

Stella sets the tone: “We must get a picnic hamper,

Corkscrew, First Aid Box, and Eau de Cologne

If it’s hot, but rugs and waterproofs when it’s damper”

Stella, go to Harrods; yes – set the tone.

For the men – no shorts, plus fours, no open sandals,

No funny hats nor badges in lapel,

but golfing socks ‘neath cotton slacks – avoid new fangles;

Straw hat, stick and blazer; class will always tell.

With the ladies, caution best describes their shot-

Not too girlie, not too flighty, not too posh;

So, out go shorts, slacks, flowing scarves and culottes.

Stick to flowery cotton tops and skirts that you can wash.

Harry does the paper work, he serves in the bank.

Insurance, money, RAC , and maps;

Stamps for postcards, and you’ve him to thank,

Next of kin, just in case, perhaps!

Paula is the nurse; not just cuts and bruises,

From dicky tum to constipation;

She’s prepared to tackle when she chooses-

With mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Fill the tank with top grade Shell

Carefully check the tyres and the oil

Battery, lights – front and back as well,

Spare water for the rad, in case we boil.

*All those little things to do – stop the papers,*

*Stop the milk - hide a key – tell the neighbours.*

**On the dot of ten, then**

Len pips the horn, our party sallies forth.

Stamford, Grantham, Newark, Cromwell, eating up the miles;

Not far, now, this really is The North;

Just after Carlton, a signpost that brings on the smiles.

*The Sutton village, set beside the River Trent.*

Turn right at Mister Morley’s fine garage.

At four fifteen, late afternoon; Leonard is content-

On time, as he off-loads his entourage.

Sited on the left, three furlongs down the High Street,

The Old England is not unpleasing to the eye.

Old it isn’t; twelve years with no attempt at deceit.

Its style seems difficult to express-let’s try.

Brain child, or folly, of *Mein Host* William Pike;

He was, before, a greengrocer by trade.

He wanted more for customers to like -

On running an hotel his hopes were laid.

He started small, his wife could cook -

High standards set of work and cleanliness;

The food was wholesome, by the book;

He’s on the brink of a successful business.

One other skill. He went frequently to auction;

Brown furnishing, brass and copper decoration.

He had an eye for indoor period décor ; spent a fortune –

Crammed them in- without any hesitation.

This way, the structure expanded from inside;

The façade built to house what was within:

Mock Tudor, Macintosh, Nouveau – you decide;

The internal décor drew the custom in.

Teenage apprenticed waiters bring their baggage in.

Two twin bedrooms, but no connecting door;

Private baths, suspended at the mezzanine;

With views across the garden, who could ask for more.

Afternoon tea, al fresco; trays wheeled in are laden;

Smoked salmon, egg with cress and cucumber squares;

Tea infusions, shipped, it seems, from all groves east of Aden

And the cakes…. the answer to a Billy Bunter’s prayers!

Time to rewind. The ladies take a long- perfumed soak,

And then relax beside the much- admired Rose Garden.

The men to walk and talk to village folk,

To find the Parish Church, and chat with a Churchwarden.

Is there a pub, nearby?” asks Harry, but the bells

To Eucharist drown out. “I’ve run out of fags.”

Oblivious to a note in which it clearly tells-

“Today we have the feast day of Saint Mary Mags”

Dinner at seven. The girls change tops, and Stella’s skirt is long.

Harry, open neck pullover, long sleeved, is cool.

But Leonard, a cravat with shirt whose colours clash – all wrong,

Wearing the blazer of a minor Public School

Four courses chosen, wisely, *A La Carte*.

Brown Windsor, soups, Consommé, Prawn Cocktail,

Dover Sole, Salmon and Special Onion Tart,

Roast Beef of Old England: that should not fail.

Pheasant, Chicken Casserole or Ham;

Spotted Dick, Apple Pie with Custard,

Roly Poly served with lots of Jam.

Mousses, Sorbets, Ices, soft or hard.

Leonard shares a Liebfraumilch with his wifie dear,

Stella is content to stick with lemonade.

Harry wants some ale; The Dolphin can supply the beer :

But corkage at the table must be paid.

Cheeses come from far and wide, *they like to say:*

Stilton, Cheshire, Leicester - don’t be silly

To ask for foreign produce; well, O.K.

We do throw in the odd chunk of Caerphilly.

Coffee served in little cups, with Petit Fours.

Meanwhile Harry wants to try a brandy;

One sip and he’s coughing on all fours -

Joins Leonard with his first cigar - that’s handy.

Time for bed, so it would seem;

Can we have our Ovaltine?

Saturday, with no hangover;

All sit down for breakfast at the stroke of eight.

What delights can we discover?

Appetites are whetted when the waiters start to wait.

Porridge from Scotland, kippers from Grimsby,

Coopers Oxford Marmalade, mushrooms from the field;

Fresh fruit from the garden, cream - the local dairy,

Bacon from the piggery; eggs, their free-rangers yield.

With three kinds of bread, still warm, from our bakery.

And does the strong tea pass the wake-up test,

Or do we still say “Camp coffee is the best”?

*And then!*

Sign the book.

Tootle-pip and a fond farewell

“See you later” is what’s said;

Sadly, Leonard’s dad is not so well;

An all-night drive brings him to his bed.

We’ll try next year, unless the lights are red!

24 June 1947. Nine eventful years have passed. Our quartet had a “good war”. Leonard with the Guards in Africa and Italy. Harry joined the RAF and flew at the Battle of Britain. Paula joined the WI and Stella drove a London Transport Bus. The Aspen-Jones’ have a seven-year-old son, Rupert, who is at a Prep School, boarding. Stella Brown is expecting their first son, whom they are going to name George. The car is back on the road and they pay a nostalgic visit to the Old England.

Let’s look at the book they say

Who’s been here while we’ve been far away

Who knows, if someone famous might come here one day

Till then, our genuine respects we pay:

**Len ‘n’ Paula ‘n’ Stella ‘n’ Harry’s son, George to come.**

Sorry, I’ll read that again

**Lennon, Paul, and Starr and Harrison, George, to come.**

***The End***

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*9 July 2023.*