

WORD FROM THE CLOISTERS

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The Red obscurantist

ONE HUNDRED years ago, “the men of 1924” – the 20 ministers in Britain’s first Labour government – received their seals of office from King George V. The King asked John Wheatley, the Clydeside socialist who was about to become the minister for health, why he was a revolutionary. Wheatley told him something of his early years. “If I had to live in conditions like that,” the King said, “I would be a revolutionary myself.”

Wheatley’s parents and their eight children had emigrated to Lanarkshire from Bunmahon, Co. Waterford when he was seven. They lived in a single-room miner’s cottage without drainage or indoor plumbing. When he was 12, he followed his father into the mines. After 12 years working down the pit, he got employment on a newspaper. In 1906, he founded the Catholic Socialist Society. Eventually, he set up a successful publishing business, specialising in religious calendars and socialist pamphlets, becoming a comparatively wealthy man.

In 1922, Wheatley was elected to Parliament. He manoeuvred a complex housing act through a sceptical Commons. Within 10 years, more than half a million council



homes had been built in the UK. It was the short-lived minority government’s only significant legislative achievement.

In May 1924, Wheatley was lobbied by H.G. Wells and Dora Russell to allow health clinics and doctors to give advice on birth control. To Wells’ disgust, the “obscurantist Roman Catholic” minister prevaricated. As Wheatley’s suits grew sharper and his girth wider, his politics drifted further to the left of the Labour Party. Beatrice Webb teased him with the suggestion he would make a very good Vatican ambassador to the new Bolshevik government. He died in 1930. Among the mourners was

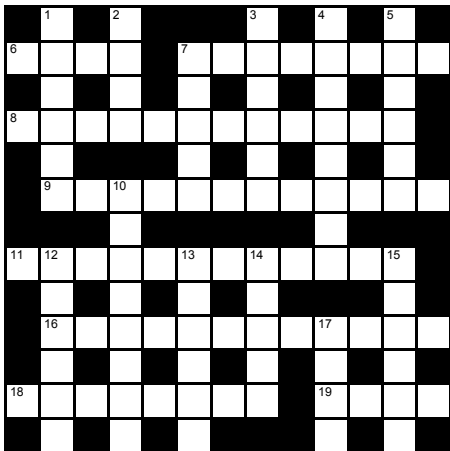
Neville Chamberlain, his most determined opponent in the housing bill debates of 1924.

FR RICHARD FINN wound up our four-part Winter School webinar series on forgiveness on Wednesday. Last week another Dominican, Toby Lees, assistant priest at the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary and St Dominic’s in Haverstock Hill, London, spoke with refreshing honesty of his own wrestling with forgiveness and reconciliation. But it was his mention of a stint working at the Hard Rock Cafe at the posh end of Piccadilly that had several members of his audience perking up. Who hasn’t moaned about the half-an-hour wait for a table to eat a cheeseburger and to have their picture taken with Eric Clapton’s guitar or one of Madonna’s bustiers?

Fr Toby’s mother, Delia, started there as a waitress two weeks after it opened in 1971 – three years before the first McDonald’s arrived in London – and was still working part-time on its fiftieth anniversary. “I never waited the tables,” Fr Toby told us, “although I did do a stint selling T-shirts and as a young kid would come in with my Mum and fold copious quantities of napkins. I owe my existence to the Hard Rock Cafe as my Mum met my Dad when she served him while he was over on a trip from Australia ... the most expensive meal of his life!”

PUZZLES

PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 889 Alanus



Across

- 6 Knighted Baroque court painter at the cathedral with apprentice (4)
- 7 Thus around fifty on river whose language is of southern Europe (8)
- 8 Limits confused senior holding disciplinarian manner (12)
- 9 Short toff with heroin in windows indicate comic Ancient Greek playwright (12)
- 11 Consequence concerning orchestra section (12)
- 16 Toying with the Poe assortment for quality cameraman seeks (12)

- 18 Shorten a French one held by Catholic in gallery (8)
- 19 Cure Achilles’ problem we hear (4)

Down

- 1 See 7 Down
- 2 In Guernsey other island (4)
- 3 Portable PC circuit apex (6)
- 4 Dominican in hired transport following firm to volcano (8)
- 5 Soft paper for the first edition (6)
- 7 & 1 Down: Constantine’s mother nominally played host to exiled Napoleon (5,6)

- 10 Roughly on cue with bid but stuck in arctic weather (8)
- 12 Politician in Ireland for the Holy Roman one (6)
- 13 Relating to voices and Beethoven symphony (6)
- 14 Give utterance we hear to Liverpool suburb with airport (5)
- 15 Bread with the short centre for prophet mediator who admonished King David (6)
- 17 Repeat sound of ignored lover of Narcissus (4)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 3 February, The Tablet, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0GY. Email: thetablet@thetablet.co.uk, with Crossword in the subject field. Please include your full name, telephone number and email address, and a mailing address. Three books – on the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Anglicanism – from OUP’s Very Short Introduction series will go to the sender of the first correct entry drawn at random.

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SUDOKU | Hard

			5	8				
7			8	3				
3	1							
			8		6		4	
			5		1		7	9
				4				2
8	4		7					3
		5		9		4		6
		3	9					

Each 3x3 box, each row and each column must contain all the numbers 1 to 9.

Solution to the 13 January puzzle

5	8	3	9	6	7	1	2	4
2	4	9	8	1	3	5	6	7
6	1	7	5	2	4	9	8	3
1	3	5	7	4	6	2	9	8
9	7	4	2	8	1	6	3	5
8	6	2	3	9	5	7	4	1
3	5	8	6	7	9	4	1	2
7	9	1	4	3	2	8	5	6
4	2	6	1	5	8	3	7	9

Solution to the 13 January crossword No. 886

- Across: 1 Thanes; 5 Leave; 8 Crate; 9 Rocking; 10 Opts; 11 Laughing; 13 Gnome; 14 Stock; 19 Clueless; 21 Oral; 23 Auction; 24 Booze; 25 Sprig; 26 Widens.
 Down: 2 Harten; 3 Noel; 4 Syrian; 5 Lychgate; 6 Alibi; 7 Engage; 8 Coot; 12 Implying; 15 Cartoon; 16 Oceans; 17 Use now; 18 Blue; 20 Ulcer; 22 Ibid.