

WORD FROM THE CLOISTERS

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Denis the menace

AFTER HIS ELECTION as Labour MP for Rotherham in 1994, Denis MacShane decided, “probably somewhat pompously” he confesses, that he owed it to future historians to note down as much as possible of what he observed around him.

It seems everyone else in politics was doing the same. But *Labour Takes Power: The Denis MacShane Diaries 1997-2001* (Biteback, £25) has a likeable thread of gossip, self-deprecation and cheerful self-justification that makes it worth reading.

One entry records him introducing his brother, a surgeon, and his uncle, a doctor, to John Hume in the Strangers’ Bar in the Commons. Hume and fellow Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney had both attended the same school, St Columb’s College in Derry. MacShane had forgotten that a brother of his Donegal grandmother, Mgr Joseph O’Doherty, had been the president of the college between 1939 and 1943.

MacShane went to St Benedict’s School, Ealing, west London, where Chris Patten was head boy. “I was far too noisy and naughty for such promotion,” admits MacShane. His next volume of diaries will cover his time as Tony



Blair’s Minister for Europe. “I’ll be recounting my battle to defeat the pagans at the FCO who wanted to merge the British Embassy to the Holy See with the Embassy to Italy.”

ON SATURDAYS, John Tracy liked to sit on the steps of Barclays Bank on London’s Clapham High Street with his beloved dog Diamond. He was on duty. While he was sipping beer from a can, he was also watching what was going on. He would be counselling this one, telling that one where they could get a free meal, looking out for where he needed to step in and sort things out before

a “situation” developed. “John seemed to know everyone in Clapham, the dog walkers, the restaurant owners, the police, the elderly, the beggars,” the writer Kristina Cooper tells us.

John was always short of money because of his drinking. “But the more I got to know him, the more I realised what a decent man he was,” Cooper says.

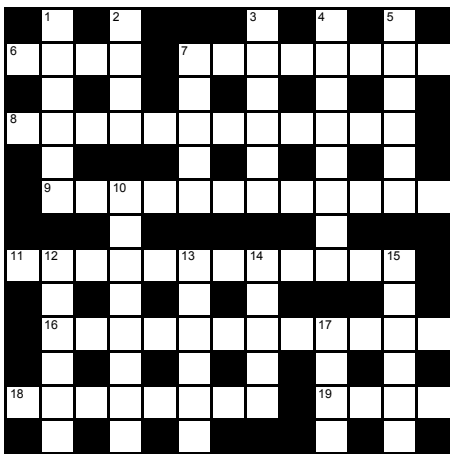
When Cooper learned that Sally, a woman who used to beg outside St Mary’s Catholic Church, had terminal cancer and wanted to make her peace with God, she arranged for her to have her confession heard. She discovered that John had accompanied her several times to hospital. Sally liked to gamble, and when she was lucky, she would ask John to look after her winnings as he was the only person she trusted.

John had had two children back in Scotland when he was little more than a teenager. His daughter had got in touch to tell him he was now a grandfather. He booked a bus ticket to Scotland to visit them. A few days later he went to bed early with a stomach pain. His flatmate found him dead in his bed the following morning. He wasn’t yet 50.

“I had probably walked past John hundreds of times without noticing him,” Cooper says. “We so often fail to see people, to realise what they are doing below the radar.”

PUZZLES

PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 887 Alanus



Across

- 6 French first person led hundred for biblical king (4)
- 7 Fresh harm poet engendered by figure of speech (8)
- 8 Orange drink to offset cares with a legendary Roman ruler (6,6)
- 9 Not bad upright position meeting societal approval (4,8)
- 11 Canonised agent mixed my tonic for anti-bacterial treatment (12)
- 16 Virgin goes over to German city revealing “White Christmas” songwriter (6,6)

- 18 Collapsed and tore up in attempt to predict future (8)
- 19 Innuendo half-appreciated in Gulf capital (4)

Down

- 1 Come to life with backhander for clavichord vibrato (6)
- 2 Type of film showing volcano (4)
- 3 Holy man and a traitor inside layers (6)
- 4 Great story about turf I delivered in instalments (8)
- 5 Irish name of boy from Andorra neighbourhood (6)

- 7 Tablets’ presenter with direction in grass (5)
- 10 Summary finished with an opinion (8)
- 12 Journey to do back stand for shot (6)
- 13 Old coin for leather worker (6)
- 14 Fictional queen with the Spanish girl’s name (5)
- 15 Sounds of rejection and sounds of horses! (6)
- 17 Sound journey to whereabouts of Quarr Abbey (4)

Please send your answers to: Crossword Competition 20 January 2024, 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 Augustine, Christianity and Thomas Aquinas – 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

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

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

Solution to the 23 December 2023 puzzle

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

The names of the winner and runners-up for the Prize Acrostic, 23/30 December 2023, will be published next week in the 27 January issue, together with the solution. Our apologies for the delay.