

Walter Bass

1916 - 1927

(From Rosabeam)

THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

It was a hot summer's afternoon. The opened windows in the old fourth form classroom invited the welcome breeze which blew across the deserted playground. Cleric held the attention of his class in his inimitable way with a lesson in literature and English pronunciation. As was his wont, he expounded on the derivation of common place names and English words and then their etymological journey through history from their Latin or Greek origin, collecting French or Teutonic interpose, eventually to anglicise for a place in our mother tongue, albeit with a pot-pouri of different County dialects (which could confuse the enemy!) With a smile he would say is it Neether or Nyther? Ask a Suffolk farmer and he would declare that "It be Naythure". Cleric's lessons were riveting. It must have been the case because I never dozed.

During this lesson on this summer afternoon we could hear a loaded lorry panting round the steep part of the drive by Gossips' Corner. When the lorry reached the road between the playground and the school building it suddenly stopped. The pensive look by our mentor was shortly followed by the head and shoulders of the lorry driver through the open window. He looked at Cleric with askance. He wanted to know where to deliver his load. Cleric then replied with a friendly and smooth Cockney accent, "It's orl right, yer facing the right way, mate. Go straight on and go rund the corner and yer'l find someone to show yer where to dump it." "Ta, mate." said the lorry driver as he returned to his lorry. We were surprised that Cleric had used that infra-dig word "mate", but there it was, a one-off-the-cuff demonstration of communication.

In 1926 I was one of the lucky choristers to go to the Guildhall to sing at the Annual Dinner. The Prince of Wales was presiding and there was a £26,000 Appeal. The Staff accompanying us were introduced individually. Cleric looked very elegant in evening dress, white tie and tails. "Yes, your Royal Highness" was followed with the same ease of conversation, but tempered with an educated voice, but with the same relaxed manner in which he addressed the lorry driver. He probably thought, "What's in a name - at heart we are all mates".

Cleric was fascinated by speech as a means of communication for the world wide human race through an infinity languages - even Reedham slang. Somewhere within the *Rosabeam* archives (about 1940) there is recorded a jotting which Cleric made of a playground conversation he overheard from his office. It was in pure Reedham slang. It shows that he knew all the words of that time such as: dype, clack, round of grub, gizzy, dozzie, Mondays, Wednesdays, Sundays, Gonk, Clembo, Buzzer, Mum Phlaps, Tishy Bray, etc.