

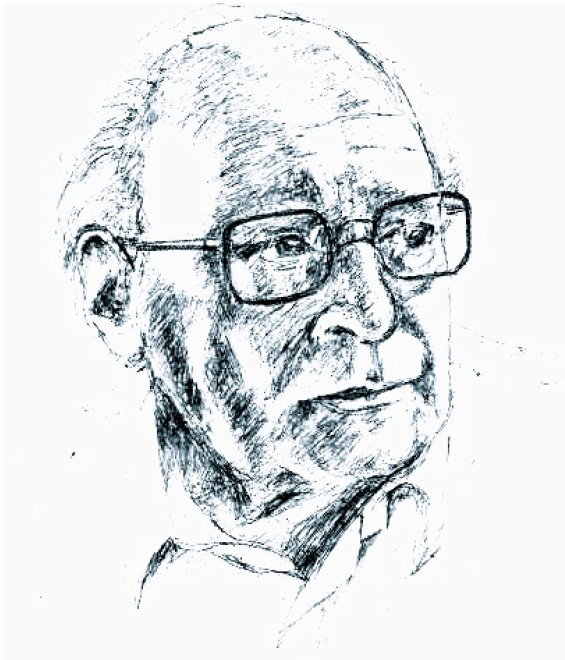


ERIC C WILLIAMS (1909-2010)

Eric, a writer who lived his later years in Horsham, was heavily involved in the post-war renaissance of British Sci-Fi. He was also a loved and most admired member of Horsham Writers Circle. Help yourself to this free booklet which tells something of his life and provides a glimpse of the wit and wisdom to be found in his writing.



Eric C. Williams



There are few privileges in life that come close to being allowed to create the biography of Eric.

I first met Eric in the Horsham Writer's Circle sometime in the early 1990's (he was old then!) and I took a liking to him straight away. There have been very few people in my life that I have taken to so readily. There was never any pomp or falseness about him; he was a true gent and a great wit.

We moved away from Horsham in 1999 where I was born for a stint in Manchester (a painful 9 years). As soon as we had a chance to return home we did and I immediately got back to the Writer's Circle where a familiar smiling face was there to welcome me. Eric was still Eric, just the same as he ever had been. Which was great relief as he was perfect just the way he was. I always think of him with fondness as he was such a kindly soul as you will soon see as you read through this autobiography.

In the last few months of his life I got to spend some time working with Eric to get his books onto the internet via Lulu.com, a task that he took to with surprising vigour. We managed to get two novels done, '**A Time For Mercy**' first published in 1979 and a new title called '**Raggit**', and we were close to completing a third, 'Strike'. Eric really got himself into this work and even managed to sell some copies to the Writer's Circle. I once asked him about writing his autobiography to which he replied, "I scribbled a few things, some old tat." I loved to sit and chat about nothing and everything with him until he apologised for taking up my time, something that I made sure I had plenty of.

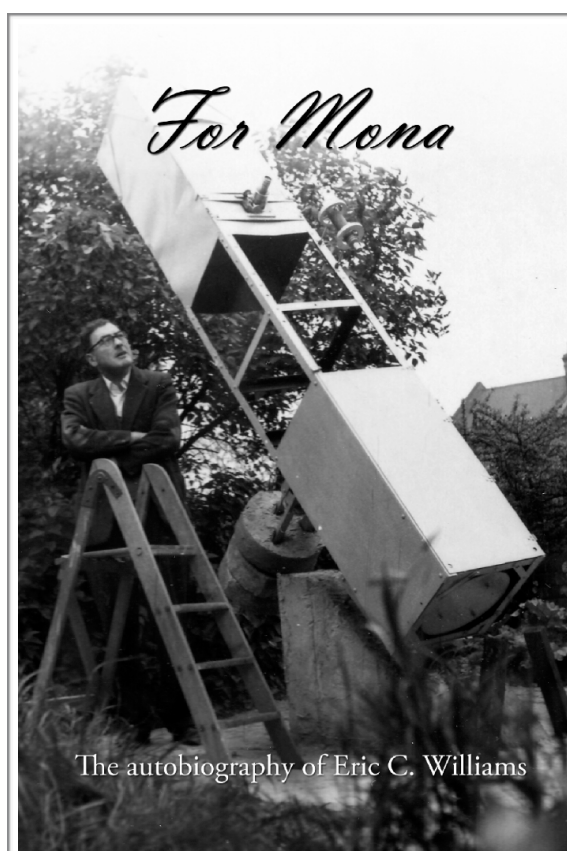
Sadly Eric became ill only days after my last visit. He was taken into hospital where he died on January 21st 2010 at the age of 91. He will be greatly missed by us all but in these pages the life of Eric C. Williams lives on. These may be his memoirs but they contain the very essence of a man that I came to love like my own father.

Mathew Bridle

Eric wrote ten novels between 1968 and 1981, all of which are now out of print. *Time for Mercy* was self-published on lulu.com together with his autobiography *For Mona*, both of which are still available. *Raggit* never made it out to full release.

Here's an excerpt from *For Mona*.

How difficult it is to write an autobiography! Can I truly say I felt joy and pride on finishing that first exploration? It is a guess: the sort of convention an author adopts to round off his story. Some glimmer of that walk does remain: the fear that all children get when they are lost. Everything seemed large and strange; the few passersby seemed strange. The roads which rise on the swell of the hills at the base of Honor Oak were empty then of cars; any noise was human noise. What are they like now? Possibly still quiet, but without doubt, lined with parked cars. One thing will be missing from Dunstan's Road, I feel sure: Mrs. Bennett's sweet shop, half way up on the right. The converted room of a small terraced house, its front garden had been concreted over years before I came on the scene. The shop window was the unaltered, column-supported, bay window of the old house. Sash windows, horizontally divided the three sections of the bay, and the only things missing to restore the windows to their former use were curtains. A cat usually lay amongst the litter of sweet jars, liquorice root and Spanish beans. Mrs. Bennett herself, old and bent, stood in her front parlour behind the counter constructed down the middle of the room, and she dealt firmly and justly with small boys. On her counter, in the open space between two stacks of sweet bottles, there was something like a home-made roulette wheel with a pivoted arrow, which, for a farthing, a boy could flick into motion, and, were he lucky, make it stop on, say, two giant bullseyes or a creamy toffee bar, or even a second free try - but equally he might not. It was a desperate gamble for any boy whose pocket money for the week might be a penny, and fortunes were squandered trying to acquire the touch to get a fortune of gobstoppers for a farthing. The shop was always dark in the daytime, and, these recollections, trying always to be truthful,





do not permit me to describe what it was like at night since I was not allowed out in the dark. But probably it was lit, as was the whole district, by gaslight, a yellow, faintly hissing, illumination which projected dark shadows behind all objects and left the board to sit on, and another as a back rest, and I climbed into this terribly complicated affair, and chose the wrong place for my legs and finished up facing rearwards towards the rest of the class. They stared with

enormous interest. I was lifted out, placed the right way round, and the rest of the morning has vanished from my memory. Perhaps I fainted for the rest of the day.

Another memory of infant school days: a hard winter and my brother, Roy, carrying me home from school on his back across the snow covered triangular green because my feet were too painful with chilblains for me to walk. He was four years older than I, and that walk must have been equivalent to the labours of Hercules for him. It is a strange thing that although there is no doubt at all that the event occurred, I only remember it as seen by a third party, that is, as one boy bent double carrying another on his back across the green. I suffered with awful chilblains up to my twentieth year when I joined the army, and then, despite several winters of life in the open, and frozen feet, I did not suffer the final torture. I put this down to continual activity and to a minimum of warmth. The cure has lasted since those days, and I can only recommend to sufferers that they should join the army if all science fails.

As you can see, Eric was as honest as he could be. He thought little of writing skills though he was indeed a very talented yarn spinner. Here's a sample from *Time for Mercy*

One wall of the cellar exploded outwards, hurling bricks and earth over the rest of the walls and floor arid piling the steps from above with debris. The dust cleared a little and a faint light shone from the hole of the explosion. There

came a metallic click followed by a shaft of brighter light cutting through the dust haze. A man crawled from the hole and stood up. He shone a hand lamp around, then concentrated the beam on the steps and began kicking bricks away so that he could ascend. He was dressed in a white, close-fitting garment, and had on his face a peculiar pair of spectacles whose lens carried an illuminated hand and the rims graduated divisions. His face was dark and flawless; his lips were broad and set in a relaxed smile despite his exertions. He reached the top of the steps, tested the door, found it bolted on the other side, and casually gave the wood a sharp blow. The door flew back. With a slightly wider smile of thankfulness he stepped in to the fresh air of the hallway, set his lamp on the floor, then made for the stairs rising at the far end. He glanced keenly into the two rooms he passed, but despite their interest, did not allow his mission to be deflected. He took time, running yet hurry. On the large were three doors. In a man with his arms apart in frozen right hand held a The running man

stopped.

"Quick," he
He saw instantly that
answer, and he
the palsied man.

On the bed
fully clothed body of



be deflected. He took
time, running yet
hurry. On the large
were three doors. In
a man with his arms
apart in frozen
right hand held a
The running man

said "Where is she?"
he would get no
pushed brusquely past

amidst blood was the
Amelia Fernhurst.

The Time Traveller felt for her pulse, and then let the lax wrist drop. From his breast pocket he extracted a minute ampule and expertly injected it into the corpse's arm.

"Give me a hand with her, Fernhurst," he ordered. "Pull yourself together. Put that knife down and get hold of the feet."

The murderer had turned and was staring wildly at the intruder. "Who... ?" he mouthed.

"Explanations later: action now," said the Time Traveller. "Put down that knife. Do something constructive for once in your life."

As if hypnotised, Malcolm Fernhurst laid the knife on the bedside cabinet and grasped his wife's ankles as ordered. His body began to shake and his jaw vibrated as if he was chilled. "How did you know... ? How?" he managed to say as they lurched from the bedroom with the body.

"Never mind," said the Time Traveller. "Pay attention to what you are doing. There'll be plenty of time for talk afterwards. Hurry!"

Sobbing now with reaction and confusion Fernhurst followed the Time Traveller down the stairs, along the hall, and down the cellar stairs.

"Give her to me now," said the Time Traveller.

"You go upstairs and wait. Go now!" He stood holding the woman's body drooped across his arms, watching the stumbling figure out of sight. Carefully, then, he pushed the body into the hole from which he had himself emerged barely five minutes before, and eased her in until he was able to push her smoothly into the



metal cylinder at the end of the hole. He leaned within and manipulated various switches, then withdrew from the hole and reached back to close the lid on the end of the cylinder. Quickly he dropped to the earth- and brick-covered floor and covered his ears. Almost immediately there was the sharp crack of an implosion. Dust flew up. The door banged shut at the top of the steps. The Time Traveller rose and looked into the hole.

"Right," he murmured. "Now for *Mister Fernhurst*." He took off his spectacles and slid them into a breast pocket.

In the hallway Malcolm Fernhurst had found a seat and was sitting bowed down staring at his red right hand. He had done the deed on which his mind had dwelt so long, and then, in the instant, at the moment of greatest confusion, events had gone skidding off into dream fantasy. He had planned to put his wife's body into the boot of his car and to drive off to a grave he had dug in an overgrown dell five miles away. But who was this figure who had known Amelia was dead and had a grave already prepared for her in the cellar? Had he, Malcolm, gone mad? Was there really somebody down there in the cellar dressed in white like a ghost holding his wife effortlessly across his arms preparing to thrust her into the earth! His over-excited brain darted from this macabre absurdity back to the moment of murder and he closed his eyes convulsively as he saw again the momentary terror on his

wife's face as he lunged towards her. But it had to be done. She had nearly destroyed his personality with her everlasting superiority, her loving kindness, her prudery, her incomprehensible poetry, her imperturbability that deflected all his rages and insults. She had nearly broken him, but now, by God! he had dented her imperturbability and shown her that concrete action was more powerful in the end than all the high-faluting mystic philosophies she constantly murmured at him.

His thoughts went skittering back to the early days of their marriage: it had not always been like that. She had been compliant, admired him, been passionate with him, backed him up. That's how a marriage should be: a wife should confirm the superiority of her husband. But then had come a change. He did not know what had brought it about, but after about five years of marriage she began to express contrary opinions, even opinions critical of him, her love-making became abstracted, she ceased to

chatter and became enigmatic, she took up yoga and contemplation. And at last she began writing her mystical poetry—even got it published. He was excluded from her life. She built herself a world in which he was not needed, and no matter how much he threatened



her, and ridiculed her, and raved at her, she showed more and more plainly how much she despised him. Well, no one despises Malcolm Fernhurst indefinitely! After five years of matrimonial hell, during which time his wife became a sort of guru to a circle of weirdies who came and went in the house and nearly as good as told him to stay out while their confounded poetry reading sessions were in progress, after five years of this he began to plan her death. It took a long time to decide which way to do it, but eventually he decided that the most direct way was the least likely to be thwarted by complications. Complications! Who the devil was the outlandish figure who had come running up the stairs because he, Malcolm Fernhurst, was killing Amelia Fernhurst? How had this man found out? How had he known beforehand when the murder would be done? Malcolm Fernhurst, himself, had not known the moment had come until fifteen minutes beforehand. How had he got into the house? There had been a bang Fernhurst recollected it now just as he had crept into the bedroom: it had woken the sleeping Amelia. She had turned her head lazily towards him. Her eyes had intensified into curiosity, and then as he showed her the knife, they had widened into terror. And then... Fernhurst tore his thoughts

away from 'then'. He stood and weaved down the hall towards the cellar door. There was an explosion from below which confused him momentarily, and then he ran to the splintered door of the cellar as the white-clad man emerged smiling faintly.

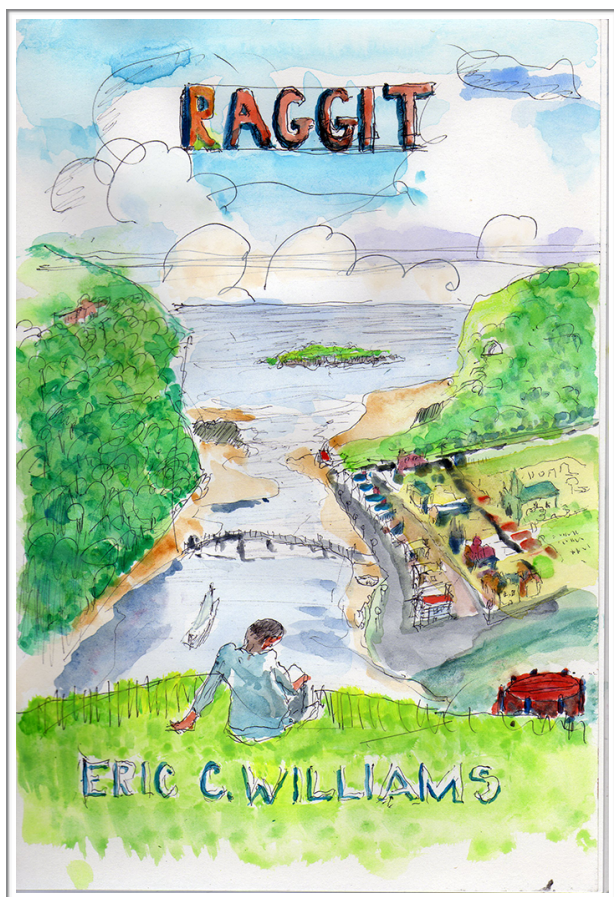
"She has gone," he said.

Simple story telling was what Eric did best, the subject could anything. In the later years Eric wrote a broader selection of ideas, one of which was 'Raggit' a story of a revolution in Dorset.

CHAPTER 7

I spread the news of Sir Kerry's heart attack to as many of the action committee as I could locate, then I went home for a rest. No sooner had I closed the front door than the telephone rang. It was Betty Peach.

Cover design by Eric C. Williams.



"Can I come down and talk, Mr. Crutch?"

This was not the usual Betty Peach who might be expected to inject an insinuation that the meeting was for other than talk.

"Certainly," I said. "What's it about?"

"Tell you in ten minutes."

"Oh, OK. I'll leave the door open."

I put the kettle on, took off my shoes, and waited.

She arrived on a bicycle from which she alighted with grace and athleticism while still in motion. I was, I must confess, not resting as I planned, but

watching from an upstairs window. I put on my slippers and went down to greet her, She brightened up the house considerably.

"Hallo, Percy," she rushed.

"Thanks for seeing me. You don't mind me calling you Percy, do you?"

"Of course not. Come into the best room. What's all this about? Is it your father?"

"No. Not that." She sat facing me. "Mother has dismissed Mary for immoral behaviour. Just after you left."

"Good Lord!" I said. "What does she mean 'immoral behaviour?' I knew, of course.

Betty looked confused but it turned out she was trying to suppress a guilty giggle. "She thinks Dad had been meeting Mary in the observatory for a bit of cuddle."

"Good Lord!" I said again.

Betty sobered and dismissed the comic aspects of the situation with a brisk: "It was you, wasn't it? Nothing wrong in that." Her face took on youthful seriousness. "Mary has got to get out by this evening and she hasn't got anywhere to go. What can I tell her to do? I left her crying in her room, poor thing! She hasn't got any money."

I knew the obvious answer was unacceptable. "Bring her here. I'll put her up."

Betty Peach, the Modern Miss, was shocked. "Oh no, Mr. Crutch. she couldn't come here: what would people say!" She actually blushed.

"Yes. Well. All right; hold on. I've got an idea. Wait a minute; I want to ring somebody." I levered myself out of the deep armchair and went to the telephone in my work room. I put a call through to John Gilcher in the Mad Cow Inn.

"Hallo John. It's Percy." We exchanged health news, then I explained the circumstance of my call. "Mary and I have become friends, and I'd like to help her. Is there any chance you could use her, waiting at table, or chambermaid, or cook, whatever? She's a good, sensible girl; nice looking girl, too."

"What sort of age is she?" asked Gilcher carefully.

"Twenty-six" I answered at once.

"Oh, so you know her that much!" he speculated. "Bit young for you, Percy, isn't she?" He laughed to show that he fully approved and was only kidding. "I have to think what my dear wife would think of me introducing a beautiful Irish blond into the ménage. Seriously, Percy, I've only got one guest at the moment, and Prune does all the chambermaid work for him, and the kids are too old to need a nursemaid. Why don't you ask Fenton whether he could put her up at the mill?"

"Fenton!" I growled. "That old goat!"

"He's got plenty of spare rooms in that place."

"No," I said emphatically. After a moment of thought I went on. "Say you put her up for the time being? I'll pay. Give me a bit of time to work something out."

"Will she accept your help?"

"If she can type I'll get her to type my latest bit of tripe. Pay her the going rate. If she can't...I'll think of something." He made a noise that seemed to imply scepticism.

"Marry the girl: cheapest in the long run."

I blew a small raspberry. "She's a Roman Catholic; I'm atheist. N'ere the twain shall mate. Right. Pay attention. Her name is McNoon, Mary McNoon. Give her your best attention, John; she's far from home and upset."

"Right you are. I'll look out for her."

I went back to Betty Peach who was reading one of my novels from the bookcase. I grimaced and gently took the book from her. "That's not suitable for a young girl like you. Naughty rubbish."

"I like rubbish," she protested, then poured, "especially naughty rubbish."

"Run along home. Tell Mary I'll come up to the Grange gates in a taxi to collect her in about an hour.- There's a room at the Mad Cow for her. I'll take her there." I looked at her kindly. "Thank you for letting me know, Betty."

She looked at me knowingly. "She's a lucky girl. You're quite handsome, you know, now that I've put your head straight."

"Run along," I said. "No time to lose."

For Mona and ***Time For Mercy*** are both available on www.lulu.com in both Ebook and paperback.

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