POETRY and the GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT 1965-2000 NOTES and MEMORIES of IVOR C TREBY

[Assembly of this material begun 3.30 am Sunday 28th. November 2010, after attending a CHE reunion meeting at the Friends Meeting House in Euston Road at 2.00pm on Saturday 27th. November, and hearing Eric Presland speak of his plans for a book on Gay History]

A Preliminary Draft

While I have many and varied rich memories of early days, like all of us long in years, experiences and places have become lost, confused and faded with the passage of time. In particular, any exact chronological context would have been irretrievable but for the fortunate fact that I have kept a more or less detailed record of my writing activities. Accessing this material has not only enabled me to reconstruct in large measure times past and events almost forgotten, but has brought back to mind other shared details of our common gay history.

1968 *Nov 20* We who burn *We who burn close concealed internal tapers..... Who keep still shrouded secrets pent in cages.....* My first significant poem directly on a gay theme, later performed at many gay venues, published several times, and eventually set to music by Fabian Watkinson (*Night Songs*) in 1980.

1969 The Verse Cycle A WIDE SHORE *v Our queer condition wars with resolution.....* written for a boy from Preston then 23 years old and 13 years my junior, whom I met one morning in late June in a Twickenham Cottage near the river. There was also a very active after-dark cottage on the Richmond / Kew towpath, of which I remember him telling me that it often became so crowded that there was "a strong smell of foreskin" even before one went inside.

1976 *Oct 13* Head of a Young Roman *The Roman youth / Whose cold white cheek I kissed.....* A piece resulting from a visit to the museum of classic sculpture in Copenhagen, grieving after the death of my father. Still one of my favourite gay poems, and used in many readings, this was to be widely published here and abroad in later years (notably by **Brilliance Books**).

1978 *Jun 30* The first public reading by Gay Authors Workshop, GAW, (for "The Company of Nine") in the Bloomsbury Tavern, New Oxford Street included We who Burn.

Jul 06,8 GAW were at the Oval House for Gay Pride Week for two readings; I performed a new free verse poem specially written for these occasions, The Pink Triangle. It was certainly a worthy, strongly polemic piece *We are of noble stock/ We should be proud.....* but otherwise of little artistic merit. I keep promising myself that, one day, I will deconstruct and re-write it; otherwise it is best forgotten. However I did also premiere Head of a Young Roman.

Autumn **The Gay Journal #1** (which never got beyond two issues), a venture by Roger Baker and Ian David Baker, published We who burn for the first time. Other contributors included Ray Gosling, Elsa Beckett, Peter Robins and Laurence Collinson.

Nov 23 GAW read for the Gay Care programme in St. Leonard's Church, Streatham. A special piece written for this, which seemed appropriate for the venue, Foreign Station (based on Luke 7 i-x) *That night he'd sent to the village.... They knew a young doctor.....* This was later published in the Australian gay paper **The Sydney Star** in August 1980, but not in England until 2006 (**BLANCHE'S LAST FLING**).

1979 *Feb 25* A GAW entertainment for the Gay Times Festival held at the Oval House included Mr. W.S. at the disco (originally The boy at the disco) *Dance, delicate shadow, substance of dream.....* This piece (a Shakespearean sonnet) was written way back in July 1973, and is a memory of the gay discos held in the upper room of The Hanover Arms, Kennington; it was written for a particular boy I fancied there. Somewhere I have fragments of another poem about this

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1979 *Feb 25* weekly disco, organised by South London GLF, which I immensely enjoyed. I remember they had a primitive light show projected by a lamp behind a rotating paper display of sun and planets, simple but dramatic. This group really knew how to enjoy themselves. I remember on another occasion going to some meeting at the Conway Hall in Red Lion Square, where they produced a humungously enormous wobbly red jelly to enliven the tea and biscuits which would be the normal fare of the more staid "minutes and motions" gay groups.

Mar 11 A GAW reading at the Oval House included the first public performance of Small Ad., *Biker, tattooed, hunky, wears Muir cap..... looking for tall hung active guy.....* This was a wry (and probably, in retrospect, rather unkind) look at the ever vital Personal Columns in **Gay News**. The piece was to become very popular at subsequent readings. Two of my friends (known to their intimates as the Baroness and the Princess) were involved in regular "stuffing" sessions at Greyhound Road, where Gay News was dispatched in inevitable plain brown wrappers to its more apprehensive customers.

May 03 Another GAW reading joint-organised with Kathryn Bell at Gay's the Word bookshop at 66 Marchmont Street.

May 21 A GAW reading for East London CHE, and the first airing of The youth in the park *A trick will come by soon / Not every face fits.....*

Jun 26 A GAW recital ***Litbits*** for Gay Pride Week at the ICA, The Mall SW1, together with Maureen Duffy, Peter Burton and Michael Harth.

1980 *May 01* An "entertainment" set up with Ron Dawson for GAW at Gay's the Word. This included for the first time my 'rent' Bar Hustler *he wears his prick like a pistol, aimed at the eye.....*

Jun 19 With another staff member (a guitarist) I put on at lunch-time in Paddington Technical College (as was— it is now 'the University of Westminster') a two-hander ***A Pea-Green Boat***. This event was open to both staff and students and included two of my overt gay pieces, in one of which, Fulfilment, *The man-child they conceived / grew tall, wise and different / found in his turn his mate, his beloved.*

Sep 16 A GAW reading for the MaryPad CHE Group in a private house off Westbourne Terrace.

Nov 06 A GAW recital ***Two by Three*** in Gay's the Word bookshop

1981 *Jan 31* I recorded a tape, ***We Who Burn,*** containing nine of the pieces intended for my first, largely but not exclusively, gay collection **WARM BODIES**. This latter was ultimately (and perforce) self-published in 1988.

May 05 A second home recording, ***Test Tape A***

Jun 04 Again with the guitarist, a second lunch-time event ***Slices of Quince*** at Paddington; this time the programme included a block of three pieces from A WIDE SHORE

Jun 22 In Gay Pride Week there was another reading at the Oval House, a two-hander organised with Peter Robins, as a promotion for **Gay Mens Press** (this concern later cravenly disguised itself as GMP). However I was able to showcase a substantial group of some eighteen poems. Later that summer Peter Robins took a GAW group to Durham for a reading in which I was unable to participate, although some pieces were kindly performed on my behalf by Nolan Walsh.

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1982 *May 01* A third recording ***Test Tape B.***

May 16 A fourth home recording, of my ***Twelve poems on Gay Themes***.

May 17 And a fifth (and final), ***Miz' Pretty and Miss Wilmington.***

June 26 Peter Robins also introduced me to the composer Robin Bone, and I gladly participated, in Gay Pride Week, in a **Dorian Opera** benefit held in the ULU Music Room, Malet Street. The event included the first performance of my LINES IN A UNICORN BOX, Robin's setting of a group of seven gay pieces. Robin and Peter were collaborating around this time on a gay chamber opera. (A gay friend who came to hear this recital inadvertently emerged from the lift on a floor reserved for the lesbians and was received with very little solidarity; I gathered he felt privileged to have escaped with his testicles still intact.) Through Robin I met the gifted young gay poet Adam Johnson, who tragically died of AIDS before achieving his potential. I was very fond of another equally stoic young poet, Pat O'Brien of the **Oscars** group who befell a similar fate. The Oscars were a gay / lesbian collective working out of the Fallen Angel in Islington; other friends published by **The Oscars Press** included Elsa Beckett and Kathryn Bell (of GAW and much else besides), Andy Archibald— and Ziggy Marsh, who affected a stunning pink triangle hair style, and was the irrepressible director of the **How Absurd! Theatre Company**). However, the undoubted leading light and facilitator of the Oscars was Peter Daniels, who triumphantly and deservedly carried off the prestigious Arvon Poetry Prize in 2009.

Dec 13 I read again at a second Dorian Opera benefit, this time at the London Musicians' Collective at 42 Gloucester Avenue NW1; my contribution included the two gay sauna pieces *bathhouse trick* and *4424 Melrose.*

1983 *Jan 15* A third fund-raiser for Dorian Opera at the London Musicians' Collective.

Sep 15 ***September in the Pink*** was a new two-hander with Peter Robins held at 8.00pm in Gay's the Word bookshop. One of the poems I read was Seven years gone, written in 1976 and set in The Champion, Notting Hill. This famous gay pub, alas, like the Boltons in Earls Court and the even more famous Coleherne in Old Brompton Road, is gay no more. Every so often an innocent leatherman with chains and helmet (but no Harley to match) still turns up outside its chichi successor (next door to an establishment once delightfully described by Peter Robins as "the arsehole of Earls Court"), and looks about him with a wild aspect of marooned despair. Long gone too is the deliciously louche basement after-hours club, the Catacombs, around the corner in Finborough Road.

1984 **Brilliance Books** (of Clerkenwell Green) published my set of ten poetry postcards. **Brilliance** was the brain-child of the splendidly monikered Tenebris Lux (a sweet guy who sported a veritable pinnaful of ear-rings but disappointingly later surrendered to practicality and became Tenebris Light). His partner Roy Trevelion took care of the design side of these very elegant publications, definitely more stylish than the (dare I say) down-market productions of **GMP** (and later, **Third House**). At that time they lived not far from Marchmont Street together with a statue of Anubis (and my borrowed copy of Rider Haggard's *Cleopatra* which it took me some considerable effort and determination to recover). Roy amused me one day

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1984 when he confided that he was currently working on an outside job for a book to be called *Will my baby be normal?* I grieved when their brave and admirable epicurean venture (they published a cookbook after all) inevitably folded.

Jun 28 *The **Defend GTW Campaign.*** GAW mounted a reading in support of this campaign in the Gay's the Word (GTW) bookshop itself. This was the first time I read easy and free in public: *but when i spied his nautical yard / how long and hot, how curved and hard / it was.....*

1985 *Jun 07* ***Gay Words by Gay Men,*** a reading at the London Lesbian & Gay Centre, Cowcross Street EC1. At last we had a base and a home, right in the heart of London too. But such a prize was to be ours for barely ten years; squabbling, mismanagement and the eventual demise of the GLC ensured the loss of the commodious and prime-site building. It is only remotely likely such a chance will ever arise again. At some time this year **GMP** produced their Gay anthology **Not Love alone**, which included my leatherman piece Image of violence

1986 *Jul 05* The ***Performing Oscars*** invited me to join their reading on "Pride Saturday" in Kennington Park. This must have been a Peter Daniels venture.

Apr 13 ***Performing* Oscars** evening in the bar area at The Fallen Angel, with Andy Archibald playing guitar.

Sep 22 My first solo reading was for West London CHE in the upper bar of The Chepstow Arms, Notting Hill, a programme to be repeated for the Croydon Area Gay Society in St. John's Church Hall Upper Norwood in December.

1987 *Jan 22* ***Gay Poetry or Gay Poets?*** A second appearance at the ICA at 12 Carlton Terrace, with Edward Lucie Smith, who read some marvellous poems. This recital was recorded, and is in the ICA Sound Archive.

Jan 28 A solo reading and talk, by invitation of the Gay Writers Group at Morley College.

1988 *Oct 21* The International ***Satisfiction*** gay / lesbian festival held at de Doelen in Rotterdam.

1989 *Nov 16* ***An Evening of Gay Verse,*** indeed a prestigious event, arranged by Martin Humphries at The Poetry Society, 21 Earls Court Square. Marc Almond was billed as the "star" attraction, but ill-manneredly could not be bothered to turn up. The event was recorded, so my Ten alternative uses for an off-duty penis are recorded for posterity *9 a novel soft toy for your pussy— one quick flash intrigues and perplexes / WARNING: you'll need iodine handy, and lightning reflexes.....* This was the second time I had read at Earls Court Square. On a previous occasion an elderly distaff kindly told me that my work reminded her of Swinburne. I wait in some alarm for that terminal stage when I develop an Algernonian fixation on babies and other lisping infants. Meanwhile the Poetry Society has long since moved elsewhere.

1990 *Jun 18* Home recording of ***Foreign Parts***

1991 *Nov 15* Paul Beasley ran ***Apples and Snakes,*** a group of performance poets based at the Covent Garden Community Centre, 46 Earlham Street WC2. Peter Daniels, acting as MC for an evening of gay poetry in association with **The Oscars Press,** yet again very kindly invited me to appear as a guest. There was also an agreeable £40 fee, a rarity indeed in the world of the makar.

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