



A Personal View

Graham Greene was born in Berkhamsted (Hertfordshire, England, UK) on 2nd October 1904. He died in Vevey (Switzerland) on 3rd April 1991.

Greene's father, Charles Greene, was second master and housemaster at Berkhamsted School (founded in 1541), where Graham was born. Subsequently Charles was the Headmaster during Greene's own schooldays. Later Greene wrote about the "green baize door", which was like a frontier between his father's civilized life and the barbarous world of boys. The ensuing conflicts of loyalty and betrayal imprinted themselves indelibly upon Greene's memory and imagination, and formed the mind of the writer.

During a career which began in 1925 and lasted until his death Greene became one of the most prolific and successful English authors of the twentieth century. He wrote twenty-five novels. Many of the early texts were thrillers or "entertainments", such as *Brighton Rock* (1938). In his mature period he published three more major Catholic novels, *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) and *The End of the Affair* (1951). He also wrote political novels such as *The Quiet American* (1955), and espionage novels such as *Our Man in Havana* (1958). *A Sort of Life* (1971) is an autobiography, and he also wrote short stories, plays, screenplays, travel books, theatre and film reviews, biography and essays. In addition, he engaged in extensive correspondence.

Twenty-five of his stories have been turned into films, including the classic thriller and "film noir" *The Third Man*. Other very successful films of Greene's stories include *Brighton Rock* (UK, 1947), *The Fallen Idol* (UK, 1948) and *The Honorary Consul* (USA, 1983). Two novels have been twice filmed: *The End of the Affair* (UK, 1955 and 1999) and *The Quiet American* (USA, 1958 and UK, 2002). Greene himself is credited as the screenplay writer for perhaps the most successful films, namely *Brighton Rock*, *The Fallen Idol*, and *The Third Man*. He also wrote the screenplay for *Our Man in Havana* (UK, 1959).

An accountant by profession, the late Ken Sherwood (1935-2009) was prominent in civic matters in Berkhamsted. Inspired by Greene's immense literary accomplishments and aware of his importance to the town's heritage, he had the original thought to establish a Graham Greene Birthplace Trust. He set matters in motion by arranging to meet David Pearce in 1995. Sherwood recognised that, as an erstwhile Head of English at Berkhamsted School, Pearce was intimately familiar with Greene's famous old school.

Sherwood and Pearce realised that they would benefit from the knowledge of Roger Watkins, a lecturer, who for many years had been a frequent supporter of the Cheltenham Literature Festival (Gloucestershire, UK) and the Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts (Hay-on-Wye, Herefordshire, UK). This triumvirate epitomised vision, drive and energy, and they immediately recognised the importance of involving Greene's family.

From its inception the Trust has enjoyed the active support of its Patrons, all of whom are close relations of Greene. They were Caroline Bourget (Greene's daughter), Louise Dennys, Nicholas

Dennys and Amanda Saunders (children of Greene's younger sister, Elisabeth). After the death of her mother, Lucy Saunders succeeded Amanda (1945-2007), as Patron. Otherwise, the Patrons have remained unchanged.

At a public meeting on 2nd October 1997, which was the ninety-third anniversary of the writer's birth, the Trust was launched.

Pearce was the first chairman, and Sherwood the first secretary and treasurer. Other original trustees were Roger Watkins (the first festival director), Giles Clark, who is the current chairman, Jeff Edwards, Lindy Foster and a lawyer, Michael Webster, who helped Sherwood with the legal establishment of the Trust.

The charitable aim of the Trust remains to promote the appreciation and study of the works of Graham Greene. It was further agreed at the launch that its future business should include "an annual lecture, conference or festival, including films and plays on or near the 2nd October [of] each year".

So, at first Watkins was asked to arrange the annual lecture. However, as a film buff, he sensed the potential of the films. So he suggested a weekend of lectures and films. His later idea was to stage a four-day festival, so that the event was long enough to encourage visitors to travel from overseas. Sherwood and Pearce urged him to try this idea in October 1998, and the Graham Greene Festival was born.

The difficulties facing the pioneers were considerable, as volunteers had to perform every task for the first time, and the living was hand-to-mouth. The brunt of the work was borne by relatively few people, performing chores as practical as sawing wood to make notice boards (which filled garages for most of the year), as technical as rigging sound systems, and as routine as licking stamps and envelopes.

Sherwood promoted the Friends of the Trust, as he scoured lists of Old Boys of Berkhamsted School, *Who's Who*, telephone directories, universities and schools. Pearce was active in seeking out venues, such as the Town Hall, the Civic Centre, Berkhamsted School and the King's Arms. By telephone and letter-writing, like the others, Watkins devoted himself to making contacts, while he also devised the first programmes.

Though films proved to be a great attraction, in 1998 there was no cinema in Berkhamsted, and so the Festival had to move to one venue out of town and out of the county to another. Naturally, when Berkhamsted's beautiful "art deco" Rex Cinema reopened in 2004, the Festival director eagerly courted its owner.

While there was always tacit approval from the town, it was clear that support for the venture was not unanimous, nor unequivocal. Some expressed views to the effect that Greene would have disapproved, though others believed that he would never have minded an opportunity to enjoy friendship. Although there was considerable cultural approval, some specialists in Greene were sceptical. Happily, nothing succeeds like success, and support was gradually forthcoming. After the white-knuckle ride of the early years the Festival now enjoys widespread acceptance as a significant event in Berkhamsted's cultural and social calendar, and has earned the tag "International".

Roger Watkins established the format of a four-day Festival with talks, films, dramatised readings, socials, exhibitions, a book stall and sales of memorabilia. He served as Festival Director for three years, and he was succeeded in turn by David Pearce, Mike Hill (a historian and teacher from Yorkshire) and the present director (an English teacher at Oakham School, Rutland, UK). Each has

built upon the template which Watkins had established. The Trustees never presented an incoming director with a “job description”, but instead bestowed the privilege of complete autonomy. Very importantly, each director has successfully attracted distinguished speakers from all over the world.

The first directors were able to recruit eminent speakers who had known Greene personally, such as Sir John Mortimer and Greene’s confessor Fr. Leopoldo Durán, or speakers who had worked with him, such as Roy Boulting (producer of *Brighton Rock*) and Guy Hamilton (assistant director of *The Third Man*). As time passes, sadly such people are harder to find in this world, but still many celebrities (such as Lord Roy Hattersley, Clement Freud and Chris Mullin MP) have been pleased to talk about matters related to Greene. In 2009 the BBC former war correspondent’s Kate Adie OBE will follow this tradition, as the cricketer and psychoanalyst Mike Brearley OBE will do in 2010.

In recent years the Festival has worked to develop stronger ties with schools and universities, to publish a collection of essays, to provide creative writing workshops for adults and for local school boys and girls, to offer awards in new creative writing competitions, to widen the range of films, to play music, to arrange after-dinner speeches, and to build fresh audiences and contacts through internet sites such as Facebook and the Director’s Blog.

The Festival has benefitted greatly from the loyal support of various highly respected academics, including Prof. Cedric Watts (University of Sussex, UK) and Prof. Neil Sinyard (University of Hull, UK). Dr. Brigitte Timmermann has also been a particularly enthusiastic supporter of the Festival: she has given two full lectures, mounted an exhibition, led guided tours in Vienna, and published *The Third Man’s Vienna* (Shippen Rock, 2005), and she will speak on Anton Karas at the forthcoming Festival.

In addition to the Festival, The Trust has five other main activities: the Newsletter, the Awards, the Library, Publications and the Archive.

The Newsletter, always edited by Yan Christensen, is aptly titled *A Sort of Newsletter* to echo Greene’s autobiography. It is published on a quarterly basis, and is sent to all Friends of the Trust. It has an informative, friendly style, and includes an eclectic mixture of festival and book reviews, news, anecdotes, quizzes, letters, promotions, obituaries and other material.

The Trust offers Awards between £250 or more each year to those who intend to pursue some scheme of travel or research which, in the opinion of the Awards’ Panel, will further an understanding or awareness of Greene or which would have appealed to him, had he been alive. The Awards are intended primarily to encourage young people.

In Berkhamsted School there is a substantial Library (collated by Sherwood) by or about Greene. In his former capacity as the school Librarian, Pearce received from Greene signed copies of his books published by Bodley Head. There are also some of Greene’s early novels, including *Babbling April* (1925), which the writer tried to suppress. The books are available for loan to Friends of the Trust. Rachel Guy is the current Librarian.

The Trust publishes occasional papers given at the annual Festival, videos of most Festivals, and some DVDs. Hazel Ward looks after the Publications, of which a current list is available on the website.

The Trust has a growing Archive of Graham Greene memorabilia, newspaper cuttings, Festival programmes and so on, and it is held by the Dacorum Heritage Trust at the Museum Store in Berkhamsted.

The Trust is most grateful to the Anglo-Austrian Society for its generous sponsorship of Cornelia Mayer's performances at the Festival in October 2009, and to Peter Gieler (general secretary of the Society) for his tireless work in support of the project.

Dermot Gilvary
Director
Graham Greene International Festival

<http://grahamgreenefestival.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.grahamgreenefestival.org/>

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