

## Inklings Forever

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# The Joys of Collecting

Ed Brown

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# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume III**

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Second  
FRANCES WHITE COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

Taylor University 2001

Upland, Indiana

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## **The Joys of Book-Collecting**

Edwin W. Brown

## The Joys of Book-Collecting

Edwin W. Brown

I've been asked to speak not about Lewis himself, but about the pleasures derived from collecting his works, as well as those of these other authors. Before getting into the subject, however, I feel compelled to preface it with a warning from the Surgeon General that book-collecting can be hazardous to your health—and that it's caused by a virus for which there is no known cure.

I will always remember a lecture by Michael Green, one of England's great evangelical clergy and himself a writer of some note, in which he said about C. S. Lewis, "God took that mighty intellect and directed it to His own purpose."

And what a purpose that has been! It would be impossible, I suppose to document the number of persons whose eternal destiny is directly the result of reading *Mere Christianity*, for example—to say nothing of the myriad more of us whose faith has been developed and strengthened through the writings of Lewis and these other great authors. Given the enormous influence of those writings, I was led to assemble everything I could get my hands on over the past twenty years of original copies of books, letters, manuscripts, or whatever, in the hope that the collection would someday be in a place where it would introduce others to these authors.

Having seen the role that Taylor University played in the life of our daughter, my wife and I could think of no better place for the collection—and we are deeply grateful to those who made it possible.

I'm often asked what prompted me to begin collecting the works of C. S. Lewis. It was, in fact, the direct result of an interest in something that was, until a certain fateful day in Oxford, totally unrelated to books. That something was the English pub.

I was first acquainted with that remarkable institution, the English pub, during a guided tour of London on my first visit to England some thirty-five years ago. Of all the charming bits of architecture and interior décor I first saw in that country, none caught my fancy quite as much as that of the pubs, with their dark wood, shining brassware, and often stained glass windows.

The English pub—which is short for public house—is unlike anything we know in this country. It's more of a local social club for families—including the children, especially in the villages, where the only other gathering place might be the church—and most churches in England, at least in the recent past, have not been known much as gathering places, except on Sunday and for funerals.

Not all English pubs are as attractive as I've described, and there are many in which you wouldn't want to set foot. But the choice ones are many, and not only are they physically attractive, but in recent years many have become the best place to get a good meal at a reasonable price. Although I've enjoyed many fine meals in English homes, most English restaurants don't get rave notices in the guide books—and you may have heard what someone

once irreverently said in defining one of the differences between Heaven and Hell.

In Heaven, this heartless jokester said, the policemen are English, the administrators are German, and the cooks are Italian. In Hell, on the other hand, the Germans are the policemen, the Italians are the administrators, and the English are the cooks.

Lest I be accused of vilifying English cuisine, I hasten to add that I delight in the "full English breakfast" served in the bed-and-breakfast establishments in which we stay in that delightful country. And if you're wondering what this has to do with the subject I'm supposed to be addressing, that's just one of the joys of book collecting! On the other hand, I have to ask myself why the "full English breakfast" of eggs, bacon, sausage, fried toast, and baked beans is so heavily promoted to American tourists when my English friends tell me that they indulge only rarely in such dietary abandon. One jaundiced observer, who claims that the English are not particularly fond of Americans, has suggested that the "full English breakfast" is a plot to kill us off.

But getting back to pubs: So enamored was I of pub décor that I began collecting bits and pieces of pubs during my early travels in England—pump handles, advertising mirrors, brass fittings, pewter mugs, etc.—which eventually resulted in a replica of an English pub as our basement rec room.

I should perhaps add that I didn't collect these items in the way that some folks collect hotel towels—although I must confess to pocketing those absorbent cardboard advertising mats that they put under beverage glasses whenever I was in a pub. I

now have what may be the world's greatest collection of beer mats—and would welcome any suggestions for what one does with such.

In those days one could find these old pub items in junk shops. It seems that the breweries, which own most of the pubs, chose to modernize many of the non-historic pubs soon after the war, and the old bits and pieces ended up in second-hand shops throughout England. Today, it's a different story, however. Much of that bric-a-brac was brought back by the pub owners when they realized that modernization was a mistake, and the rest of it seems to have gone all over the world into the clones of English pubs that one can now find in virtually every major city in the world—from Milwaukee to Moscow.

When we moved into our present home some twenty-five years ago, I completed my basement pub—and was then faced with the problem of what to call it. Most intriguing about English pubs is their names and the pictures on their signs—"The Bear and Ragged Staff," "The Duke of Wellington," "The Lamb and Flag," for example. Many of these are taken from English literature and mythology.

On my next trip to England, which was my first visit to Oxford, I found my pub. Until that point in time, I knew virtually nothing about C. S. Lewis except for the relatively few books of his that I had read—and thoroughly enjoyed. And then I wandered into "The Eagle and Child" in Oxford, where the first thing that caught my eye was a wooden plaque on the wall, which read: *C. S. Lewis, his brother W. H. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and other friends met every Tuesday morning between the years 1939 and 1962 in this their favorite pub. These men, popularly*

*known as "The Inklings," met here to drink beer and to discuss, among other things, the books they were writing.*

The name of the pub is taken from mythology, and the sign depicts a great eagle carrying the infant Ganymede on its back—hence the name by which it is more commonly known in Oxford: The Bird and the Baby.

I informed the landlord (as the owner or manager of a pub is called) of my interest in C. S. Lewis and the other Inklings, and that I would like to get a color photo of his sign to grace my basement pub. He then suggested that I would be more pleased with the sign that had been on the pub in Lewis's day, which the brewery had replaced some years ago with a newer and less attractive sign, in his opinion. That sign, he said, had been given to Father Walter Hooper, secretary to Lewis shortly before his death.

I then tracked down Father Hooper, an American and an Anglican priest, who had lived in Oxford since Lewis's death. Those of you familiar with Lewis's writings will have seen his name as editor of the many Lewis books published since Lewis's death in 1963. I took a colored photo of the pub sign, then displayed in Hooper's apartment, gave it to a shop in London, which specialized in reproducing old pub signs, and now had a proper English pub in my basement.

Then the thought occurred to me: "Visitors may ask how I chose that name for it, so perhaps I should have a little shelf of Lewis' books on display." Most of his titles were available only in paperback, however, and since such a display might seem a bit tacky, I thought it might be nice to go for his first editions in hard covers.

Little did I realize the implications of that decision!

Soon thereafter, Pat and I were to join some friends in London for a trip to the Middle East. Having never been to Ireland, we decided to stop in Dublin en route. I had little hope of finding Lewis first editions there, however, assuming that those Catholics had never heard of him. To my question, "Might you have any first editions of C. S. Lewis?" the answer received in the first three shops I entered was the same: "Sorry, but he's so popular that they go out as fast as we get them in!"

On our last day in Dublin, while Pat was on a shopping tour, I decided to take an early train to Belfast to see what was going on in that troubled city. Soon tiring of having to go through body checks at almost every turn, I sought out the only antiquarian bookshop listed in the yellow pages that was located a short taxi ride from the center. Unfortunately, I found only a pile of rubble at the address given for the shop. It had been blown up by IRA terrorists only two days earlier in an effort to destroy a police station next door. However, I was directed to the home of the owner, Jack Gamble, about a mile up the road, who received me warmly.

He told me how they had kidnapped him from his home while holding his family hostage, and forced him to open his shop so that they could plant the bomb – which also destroyed some 50,000 volumes of old books. He did, however, have a number of Lewis first editions among the stock in his home, and thus began my collection.

It was also there that I learned about Lewis's love for the writings of George MacDonald. One of the first editions was Lewis's anthology of George MacDonald,

and my new friend presented it to me as a gift, with the comment: "If you're going to collect Lewis, you'll surely want to collect MacDonald." Having never heard of George MacDonald before, I could only mumble, "Why, yes, I certainly shall."

Looking for first editions is much like Jesus' parable of the pearl merchant who finally found the finest pearl of all and sold everything he had to obtain it. In my wife's real estate circles, they like to say that the three most important factors determining the value of a house are location, location, and location. With first editions those three most important factors are condition, condition, and condition.

The most important factor, however, is the condition of the dust jacket—the decorative paper cover that publishers put on books, not to protect them from dust, however, but to help sell them. Much more fragile than the book, the dust jacket is easily damaged and often discarded by the original owner. The relative rarity of dust jackets thus makes them more valuable than the books themselves. A nice first English edition of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* without a dust jacket could cost as much as \$500 these days. In a very good dust jacket, the price might be \$3000.

The difference between the first edition of a book and the next printing of the same book is like night and day. A classic example is *The Screwtape Letters*, published in 1942 at the height of World War II, when the rationing of paper in England severely limited the amount a publisher could get at any one time. The first printing of the first edition was early in February—and sold out so quickly that the book was reprinted twice more that month, and eight times by the end of the year. A fine copy in a dust jacket, stating "First printed in 1942"

could bring as much as \$1000. The next printing, although done only a week or two later, can be had for as little as \$25.

With only a few expectations, all of Lewis's books were also printed in the United States—and most American first editions are harder to find than English first editions. Nonetheless, because collectors prefer those printed in the author's own country, American firsts cost far less than English firsts. There is, however, one notable exception.

The first Lewis book to be published in this country was his second book, *Dymer*, also a narrative poem and also published under the pseudonym of Clive Hamilton. Given the fact that he was an unknown author, and that it was a book of poetry, it sold poorly in England and, presumably, even more poorly in America.

I found my first copy of the American first edition of *Dymer* about twenty years ago. A few years later I saw another copy, in very poor condition, in another shop in Washington, D.C. I never saw another copy for sale until two years ago, when one turned up in the catalog of an English dealer, from whom I bought it.

As you can see, it's a bit shabby—and as you probably can't see, the binding is mostly paper on heavy cardboard, with only a strip of cloth around the spine. Having continually upgraded the Lewis collection over the years, I had dust jackets on all but three volumes. One was his first books, no copies of which, to my knowledge, have been available in a dust jacket for the past twenty years. Another was his fourth book, my copy of which was that of his publisher and probably never had a dust jacket, having been taken directly off the press and reviewed for typographical errors. The third

was my first American *Dymer*.

I finally began to catalog the collection about two years ago, carefully describing every aspect of each book. Having never seen a first American edition of *Dymer* in a dust jacket, I had concluded that, being bound in paper rather than cloth, it was probably not issued in a dust jacket.

To confirm that conclusion, I checked with the two libraries I knew to have a copy of the book, the Wade Center at Wheaton College and the Lilly Rare Book Library at Indiana University. Neither had a dust jacket. I therefore concluded my description of the book with the authoritative statement: "This book is presumed not to have been issued in a dust jacket."

Scarcely two weeks later, I received a phone call from a collector friend in North Carolina: "Guess what, Ed! I just found a copy of *Dymer* in a dust jacket." And indeed he had, in the shop of a local dealer who obviously had no idea of the author's identity and sold it to my friend for \$65. So much for my diligent research!

Some weeks after that, he called me again to tell me that, as much as he would like to keep the book, he felt that it belonged in my collection. Needless to say, this caught my attention. Moreover, rather than selling it to me, he would be pleased to trade it for surplus first editions of mine (of which I had many as the result of upgrading the collection over the years) which he needed for his collection. We discussed its possible real value, and given its obvious rarity, we agreed that it could be worth as much as \$4000—which is what I gave him in trade! You will understand, I'm sure, if those having keys to the collection over there in the library may be reluctant to let anyone handle that particular volume.

Even greater than the pleasure of finding a fine first edition, however, is the serendipity of finding an additional and unexpected treasure therein—and it's all the more exciting when it's not recognized until sometime later. My first such experience occurred while on a sabbatical in England twelve years ago, when I at last came across a copy of Lewis's first book, *Spirits in Bondage*, which I had been seeking for many years. It was, however, a flawed copy—the owner had defaced the title page by writing in ink, in an almost illegible hand, not only his name but his address as well. I silently denounced his thoughtfulness, but paid what was then a horrendous price for the book, hoping I might someday find an unmarred copy.

Later that summer, while reading a book of letters from Lewis to his boyhood friend Arthur Greeves in Belfast, I came across a reference to Lewis's uncle in Scotland, who had moved there from Northern Ireland in the 1880s to go into business. A footnote by the editor noted that the uncle's name was Richard Lewis, and that his home was at West Dene in Helensburgh. Suddenly a light flickered in my brain, and I grabbed *Spirits in Bondage* from the bookshelf. Now that crude inscription stood out like a shooting star—it was the copy Lewis had given to his uncle.

More recently, I was again reading some of the letters to Arthur Greeves in which Lewis thanks him for sending a number of George MacDonald books that Arthur had finished reading. In a letter dated December 24, 1930, he tells Arthur that only the day before he had picked up a copy of MacDonald's novel, *Alec Forbes*, in three volumes, from a second-hand dealer in Oxford for four shillings and sixpence. Again I dashed to my bookshelves. I had that title, in three volumes, and had been

told that it came from Lewis's own library—but how to prove it? There on the flyleaf was the price penciled by the dealer sixty years ago and never erased—four shillings and sixpence.

An important aspect of any collection is manuscript material of the author—anything in his own handwriting, but especially the so-called “fair copy” of a handwritten manuscript submitted for publication—in other words, the final draft. Although Lewis wrote some forty books and published many essays, lectures, poems, and similar material, relatively few of his manuscripts exist. The reason is very simple—when he received a manuscript back from the publisher after a book was printed, he saw no reason to waste all that good paper that was written on one side only, so he would tear the sheets in two and use the back of the torn sheet for “scratch paper”.

It was my good fortune to be able to obtain the two Lewis manuscripts in this collection—one a well-known but unpublished work that he shared with his closest friend, Owen Barfield, and the other an unknown manuscript of a short story which had been sent to some publisher, was not published, and was not returned to him. It turned up fifty years later among some miscellaneous papers acquired by an obscure dealer in London, who sold it to another dealer, from whom my primary dealer bought it and offered it to me. Needless to say, the price escalated rapidly as it moved from one dealer to another!

Only two years ago, however, another interesting piece of manuscript material turned up—the result of two of Lewis's idiosyncrasies. It's only the bottom half of one sheet of the manuscript of his book, *Christian Behavior*, but it's very special, as you will be able to see during the next hour

in the display available to anyone wishing to see the entire collection in the Faculty lounge of the university library.

The first of those two idiosyncrasies is the one I've already mentioned—tearing manuscript sheets in half and writing on the back sides. The second is his habit of retrieving such pieces of paper from the waste basket when the back side was filled with notes no longer required. He would then fold the piece of paper into a “stick,” light the end with a match, and then use it to reach into the gas heater in his study to light it. This fragment of manuscript has been thus used, as evidenced by its many folds and being charred along its left edge.

What is very special about this particular fragment, aside from the fact that no other such burned fragments are known to exist, is the nature of the penciled notes on the other side. They are, in fact, what is probably the first draft of the notes for his next book, *Beyond Personality*.

This book was the third of a series of talks, which Lewis gave on BBC radio during the war—which were later combined and added to in one of his best-known books, *Mere Christianity*. In the first page of *Beyond Personality*, he writes: *In a way I quite understand why some people are put off by Theology. I remember once when I'd been giving a talk to the R.A.F. [the Royal Air Force], an old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, "I've no use for all that stuff. But, mind you, I'm a religious man too. I know there's a God. I've felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's why I don't believe all your little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who's met the real thing they all seem petty and pedantic and unreal."*

In the next two paragraphs, he com-



compares Theology to a map: Doctrines aren't God; they're only a kind of map. But that map's based on the experiences of hundreds of people who were in touch with God.

In the penciled notes on this fragment, he identifies this officer as *Wing Commander Snooks* and notes that he was *quite right in thinking his experience more "real". But only a map, based on innumerable real experiences and necessary for sailing* (for getting where one wants to go).

The dealer from whom I bought this fragment told me that it had been for many years in the possession of a distant relative of the dealer. This relative had at one time been a part-time maid for the Lewis brothers, and had retrieved it from a wastebasket as a souvenir. The dealer had no idea of the significance of the penciled notes on the back—nor did I until I returned from England at that time and began studying them more carefully. Even then they meant nothing to me—I hadn't the foggiest idea who Wing Commander Snooks might be—until I started reading *Christian Behavior* again to find the location of the text on the manuscript fragment. And there it was—right on the first page—described only as an old, hard-bitten R.A.F. officer who didn't think much of theology, having known God from personal experience. Now that's serendipity of the highest order—acquiring something that's obviously a treasure, only to find later that hidden within it is an even greater treasure.

When it first became known that I might be selling my collection, friends asked if I could really bear to part with something to which I had devoted so much time and effort over the past 20 years or so. I really didn't think it would be difficult for it could be far greater benefit to others at a place like Taylor University than in my

basement—although I must admit that the highlight of the year for me was when David Neuhouser brought a group of students to my home each year to see the collection and let me ramble on for an hour or so about it.

Perhaps I can best describe the thrill I'm experiencing in seeing this collection housed at Taylor as the ultimate serendipity. It's great to be here today, thank you all for coming and making it a great day, and may God richly bless this great institution.