

Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016

Volume 10 *A Collection of Essays Presented at the Tenth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis & Friends*

Article 61

6-5-2016

Friends at Home: C. S. Lewis's Social Relation at The Kilns

David Beckmann

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Beckmann, David (2016) "Friends at Home: C. S. Lewis's Social Relation at The Kilns," *Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016*: Vol. 10 , Article 61.

Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol10/iss1/61

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis & Friends at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016* by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.

Friends at Home: C. S. Lewis's Social Relations at The Kilns

by David Beckmann

The Revd. David Beckmann is the Moderator of the C. S. Lewis Society of Chattanooga and a former Director of the C. S. Lewis Study Centre at The Kilns. He is an Anglican priest and has held faculty positions at Covenant College and the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga.

It would take a much longer essay to survey all of Lewis's social relations during the 33 years he lived at The Kilns. Instead, this essay considers the World War II evacuees and Lewis's relationship with them. Before I go into detail on the evacuees, however, here is a snapshot of the people living at The Kilns during the time span that the evacuees came and went.

The day after England declared war on Germany, Warnie was called back to the colours and sent to France. He was eventually evacuated with the troops at Dunkirk and continued to serve in England until the middle of August, 1940, at which time he returned to live at The Kilns. He was officially retired with the rank of Major from the regular service, but he was obliged to serve with the Home Guard in Oxford, which meant that, during the summer, he got to navigate his boat, *The Bosphorus*, up and down the rivers looking for downed Germans. Jack and Warnie, of course, had a very close relationship and it continued through these years and beyond.

The house actually belonged to Mrs. Moore, or "Minto" as they called her, whom Lewis treated as his mother. Being born in 1872, she was by the time the war began on 1 Sept. 1939, 67 years old, and in increasingly poor health. She had begun to suffer from ulcerating varicose veins.

Mrs. Moore's daughter, Maureen, also lived there. She had just turned 33 at the start of the war. Almost exactly a year later (27 Aug 1940), she married Leonard Blake, Music Master at Malvern College. So, one year into the war, she left The Kilns. She and Jack were life-long friends.

When the war began, there was a Mrs. Alice Hamilton Moore (no relation to Minto) staying in one of the two bungalows on the property. She was a friend of Mrs. Moore's family in Ireland who was widowed and had hit upon hard times. The Lewis brothers built the

INKLINGS FOREVER X

bungalow on the property for her so she could stay with them. She died early in November of that year.

Fred Paxford was 41 by that time, and served as the faithful gardener of The Kilns, living in a bungalow on the property. Later in the war he was assigned to work in the Morris car factory in Cowley, south of Oxford. That cut into his time to help around the house, but he still had time to drive Jack back and forth from town. Jack and Fred got along very well, and enjoyed sharing jokes with each other.

Vera Henry, Mrs. Moore's goddaughter, was in and out, helping with the cooking a couple of times a week.¹ She does not seem to have gotten along well with other folks in the house. Jack himself apparently had to work hard at being civil with her.²

There were housekeeping maids now and then. When June Flewett, a young evacuee, first arrived, Miss Muriel Morris was present to help with the gardening in Fred's absence.³ Muriel was in ill health and only there for about a year. There was also, for a time, a maid named Margaret. According to Lewis, Mrs. Moore, Muriel and Margaret did not get along well with each other at all.

And then there were the animals. There were always a couple of dogs and cats around the place. There were at least a couple dozen hens. By 1 June, 1943, Lewis wrote to Arthur Greeves that they were keeping rabbits. He amusingly described how, walking past the hutch one Sunday evening, he saw the rabbits all in their box, on their hind legs, all facing the same direction, looking very much like they were in a church pew and holding an evening prayer service.⁴

Enough about the folks living at The Kilns during the war. What about the evacuees? Contrary to popular opinion, the evacuees were not young children like the Pevensie children in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. The children in the Narnia books seemed to be based on the Bastables in the E. Nesbit books.⁵ The evacuees at The Kilns were, in fact, all teenage girls.

Our sources for stories about Jack's time with the girls are primarily four. We find information on the students at The Kilns for the fall of 1939 from his letters, mostly to Warnie and Sister Penelope.

1 C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. 2*. Walter Hooper, ed. 622.

2 Ibid., 366.

3 Ibid., 587.

4 Ibid., 579.

5 14 September 1957 letter to Lucy Matthews: *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol. 2*. Walter Hooper, ed., 882.

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

A letter from Margaret Leyland, one of the second group (winter of 1940) appears in Volume 1 of *The Lamp-Post*, the newsletter of the Southern California C. S. Lewis Society. Patricia Heidelberg, one of the two who were in the third group (fall of 1940), wrote a letter to Clyde Kilby. This letter is published in Stephen Schofield's *In Search of C. S. Lewis*. And then there are the various reminiscences of Lady Freud which appear in Schofield's book, on the web, and which she has shared with me in personal correspondence.

The first of the girls arrived on 2 September, 1939. This was one day after Warnie had been called back to the colours and the day before England officially declared war. Some authors say there were four girls initially, but there were actually three.⁶ By November there were four. This first group included a young girl that Lewis described as being like Rose Macaulay, the author. Lewis thought her the best, and based on a 1940 letter by Lewis, I believe her name was Sheila Morrison.⁷ Sadly, in a couple of weeks, her mother took her away and a young girl, Annamarie, was added to the number.⁸ Annamarie's school said she might be a problem, and it seems as if she were. By around 5 November, she was replaced, and a new one added, so that they had now a group of four, which made a merry show when they marched to church on Sundays in columns of two, with Jack and Maureen bringing up the rear. By the end of the year, all four were gone, so the fall of 1939 was quite busy.

January of 1940 saw three new girls, Margaret, Mary, and Katherine. All three girls were Roman Catholic and were students at The Convent of the Sacred Heart in Hammersmith. Margaret was the

6 E.g., McGrath's *Life*, p. 192: "Within hours of Warnie's departure, The Kilns had four new occupants. . ."

7 In a letter dated 10 September, 1939, Lewis says that the nicest of the three children staying with them was like Rose Macaulay. We learn from a letter dated 18 September that the "nicest" child is taken away. And then, in 1940, Lewis says that they were visited by Sheila Morrison, whom he calls "the nicest of our old lot of evacuees." The nicest child must be Sheila.

8 When the Rose Macaulay-like child was taken away, she was replaced by a sixteen-year-old Jewish girl from Austria. Lewis writes that this girl's school said she might be "difficult" (*Collected Letters*, 18 September, 1939; Vol. II, p. 276). We learn that, as of 5 November, a girl named Annamarie is "being replaced," and, in a letter of 11 November, Lewis forthrightly says that the house was "pleasanter" with her gone (letters of 5 and 11 November; *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 282 & 289). The conclusion seems to be reasonable that the girl who might be trouble was indeed a bit of a problem; and that her name was Annamarie.

oldest at 17 years. They stayed at The Kilns until July.

The third group entered The Kilns in September of 1940. There were only two at that time: Patricia and Marie, nicknamed “Microbe.” Though Lewis tells Sister Penelope a few weeks later that the house is full of delightful children, Patricia, in a letter she wrote years afterward to Clyde Kilby, speaks only of the two of them. Patricia writes to Dr. Kilby, “In all, I look back on those years as two of the happiest of my school life.”⁹ These two years would have been two school years. According to Lady Freud, the girls left after the school term ended in July 1942. While living at The Kilns, they attended school at Our Lady’s Convent in Abingdon, a few miles from the house.¹⁰

In June of 1942, June Flewett (age 14) was interviewed by Mrs. Moore as a possible resident. At the age of 14, when her school class moved back to London, she had to leave Oxford. The plan was for her to return to the Kilns for a little summer holiday the next year, when her final exams were done.

So, in July of 1943, June Flewett arrived at The Kilns. When she saw how much she was needed there to help, she stayed until the end of the war.

There has been some confusion in the secondary literature about Lady Freud’s name. Her name was June Flewett. After she graduated from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, she played a lead in a film at Pinewood Studios, and the Publicity Department claimed that June Flewett was not a suitable name for a rising star, so they changed it to Jill Raymond. After her marriage to Clement Freud, she changed to Jill Freud as her professional name. She became Lady Jill Freud in 1987, when her husband was granted a knighthood.

So, in brief, in the fall of 1939 we have three or four girls at a time with some turnover going on. In 1940, there were two other sets, one of three in the winter and one of two in the fall, the latter staying for two years. After that, it seems there were no more except for June Flewett who was there from July of 1943 until January of 1945.

How did Lewis relate to these girls socially? In his letters, he confesses that he knew little of children, that he seldom talked to them, and just wasn’t much good with them. But once the girls show up, he found them “delightful,” and, though he was terribly busy, he found lots of ways to spend time with them and to help them.

All of these women testify to the loving kindness that Jack showed to them. Both Margaret and Lady Freud speak of how gently Lewis dealt with them when it came to intellectual issues. For example, Margaret said that Lewis never talked down to the girls. Lady Freud agrees and adds that Lewis even built up her confidence in her intellectual ability. He would often help them with their school work. Patricia writes that he coached her in her

9 Stephen Schofield, *In Search of C. S. Lewis*. 54.

10 Personal correspondence with Lady Freud.

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

Latin and helped her learn a little Greek, since she wanted to attend Oxford. While we sometimes read of Lewis treating his tutorial students somewhat harshly at the college, he did no such thing with these evacuees.

Speaking of the college students, Margaret tell us that Lewis would often bring three or four of his male students from Magdalen over to The Kilns on the weekend to play tennis or go swimming in the lake - and the girls were invited to join in as well. Now that's not the kind of picture we probably carry around with us of Lewis and his students, is it?

Indeed, Margaret's letter is one of the most revealing of the accounts that we have, with lots of surprises, which challenge our stereotypes of Lewis. For example, we know that Mrs. Moore ruled the house with a tight and frugal hand. Margaret says that she and the other two girls with her were only allowed a Marie biscuit, an apple, and a glass of milk for supper; hardly sufficient. Their room was upstairs across the hall from Mrs. Moore's room, but it also was just above what we today call Joy's room, which has bay windows with little roofs on them. Lewis would sometimes climb up on top of the bay window and hand the girls food through their own window. He would also often help them sneak out of their room through the window, and climb down off the roof of the bay window, so they could walk around to the kitchen or listen to records in his study. Every once in a while, he would take them to the local pub and buy them fish and chips, which they would eat out of their boxes on the way home, so Mrs. Moore wouldn't know.

Lewis was compassionate and kind to the children, but he also could be a bit mischievous. I'm sure a lot of the fun of this had to do with his opportunity to sneak around and do things without Mrs. Moore knowing about it.

Sometimes Jack would take the kids into town. You know about the famous singing of the chapel choir at the top of Magdalen College tower on May Day. At least once, Lewis got the girls up early in the morning on May Day, and climbed up with them to the top of Magdalen Tower to listen. He also would take Margaret into town with him on occasion, and would introduce her to his friends. It was on one such occasion she met Tolkien.

Jack would also spend time sitting with the girls in the garden at The Kilns or taking them for walks over Shotover hill and tell them stories. Lewis did enjoy being with the girls, but I think we can confidently imagine that he felt it his duty to care for them and

INKLINGS FOREVER X

to improve them. He did think they needed improving. He notes in one of his letters that at times the children would be appealing to Maureen for things to do because they were bored. He speaks of how poorly developed their imaginations were, and so he set out to try to do something about it. He spent time with them, trying to enlarge their world and their imaginations with his stories, told amidst the beauties of the Creation around them.

What does the evacuee experience suggest about Lewis and his relationship with Roman Catholicism? You'll recall that Margaret and her friends were students from a convent. She says that she thinks Lewis was disappointed that they were Roman Catholics. So he made a deal with them. When he would preach in church, if they would come and listen to him, he would return the favour and go to Mass with them. It seems they did this, once or twice.

June Flewett had her own good times at The Kilns, but her time there was a bit different because she became so involved with the struggles of the household, both because help was scarcer by that time, and also because of her desire to help. Warnie's 2 January, 1945, entry in his diary is quite revealing. He writes of her "slaving" from seven in the morning to nine at night and he was amazed at how gracious she could be. Of course, there were things about living at The Kilns that Warnie had particular problems with, and so he was amazed that June could go about such chores as cheerfully and with such Christian grace as she did. He knew it would be very difficult for him to do the same. He speaks of her working from 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M., but in the summertime, when the sun is up by 4:00, she had to start the day earlier. I asked her if she liked taking care of the chickens—since I myself like chickens—and she told me that she enjoyed the hens, but she had to let them out of the hut by a half-hour past sunrise—which in the summer was very early indeed.

Jack and Warnie became very attached to June, and they remained good friends for the rest of Jack's and Warnie's lives. They both record their regret of June's leaving in 1945. In a letter to her mother (4 Jan. 1945), Lewis writes:

Dear Mrs. Flewett,

Oh what a sad waking up this morning when we realized that June was gone!—but I try to comfort myself by realising that there was a correspondingly happy waking in your house and thinking how long you and she had waited for it and how you deserve it. . . . I have never really met anything like her in

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

unselfishness and patience and kindness and shall feel deeply in her debt as long as I live. . . . We are the ghost and ruin of a house. . . . Ichabod, Ichabod! God bless her.¹¹

It is perhaps no surprise that, according to Douglas Gresham, June was the inspiration for the character of Lucy Pevensie.¹²

There would seem to be plenty of evidence to show that, even though the children were officially the charge of Mrs. Moore, Jack's kind and gracious heart lead him to take on the real guardianship of these young ladies who had had to leave their homes and live with strange people. He made them feel welcome. He thoughtfully took the initiative to care for them. He would sacrificially do things with them that a loving father would have done for his own children. And he took these girls under his wing because he was willing to have his character stretched. He could just have easily said, "I'm no good with children" and ignored them. Instead, he was willing to step out, enlarge the sphere of his interest and experience, and do whatever he had to do to see to it that these children knew the love of Christ through him. His caring for and befriending these girls was one of the great moments of Jack's life.

11 Lewis, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 636-637. From the Taylor University Collection.

12 Bond, Paul. "Jill Freud, Inspiration for Lucy in 'Narnia,' Reveals C. S. Lewis Memories." *The Hollywood Reporter*. 8/19/2014 Web 17 June, 2016.

WORKS CITED

- Bond, Paul. "Jill Freud, Inspiration for Lucy in 'Narnia,' Reveals C.S. Lewis Memories." *The Hollywood Reporter*. n.d. Web. 17 June, 2016.
- McGrath, Alister. *C. S. Lewis: A Life*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012. Print.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*. Ed. Walter Hooper. Vols. 2 & 3. New York, NY: Harper San Francisco: 2004. Print.
- Leyland, Margaret M. "Lewis and the Schoolgirls." *The Lamp-Post of The Southern California C. S. Lewis Society* 1.3. (1977): 1. Print.
- Schofield, Stephen, ed. *In Search of C. S. Lewis*. South Pittsburg, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1983. Print.