

MARRIOTT EDGAR



George Marriott Edgar is little known now because the style in which his words usually came to the public no longer carries popularity. But in his day one could find people freely reciting his words not only in performances but in pubs and at home. They were a kind of community singing and made people laugh. Perhaps they didn't know they were his, because the public reciter was the well-known actor Stanley Holloway (1890-1982).

Edgar's background was itself interesting. His was a Lancashire family forming a theatre troupe, and he was born in Kirkcudbright in 1880. His parents Jennifer and Richard had married in 1875, but neither was aware that Richard had already fathered an illegitimate child by an actress. This boy turned out to be Edgar Wallace (1875-1932), the celebrated author, and it was a long time before the connection became known: in fact the Kirkcudbright Edgar remained ignorant of it until he met the more famous author in Hollywood not long before Wallace's death there. Edgar used the name Wallace for the lion (of *Albert and the Lion*) but this appears to be coincidence.

Like the scions to so many music hall families Edgar took to the stage, and only began to come to notice in the long running *The Co-Optimists* in London in 1921-22. It was there that he met Stanley Holloway, who had already started his series of monologues. From 1930 Edgar supplied the words and their piano accompaniment. He also worked as a film scriptwriter, usually on comedies, including *Oh Mr Porter!* and *The ghost train*.

The Holloway/Edgar monologues famously included *Albert and the Lion* and *The Battle of Hastings* among many others. Edgar wrote sixteen monologues for Holloway. The total list, including the sixteen, is:

Albert 'Arold and others

The Lion and Albert: Runcorn Ferry (Tuppence per person per trip)

Three ha'pence a foot

The Battle of Hastings (see below)

Marksmen Sam

Albert and the 'eadsman

The return of Albert (Albert comes back)

Goalkeeper Joe

Gunner Joe

The Jubilee Sov'rin

The Magna Charter

Little Aggie

Albert and Balbus and Samuel Small

The 'ole in the Ark

Sam's racehorse

George and the dragon

The recumbent posture

The Channel swimmer

Asparagus

Upwards

Joe Ramsbottom

Burghers of Calais

Balbus (The Great Wall of China)

Jonah and the grampus

Normans and Saxons and such

Canute the Great 1017-1035

William Rufus 1087-1100

Queen Matilda 1100-1135

The Fair Rosamond 1154-1189

Richard Cœur-de-Lion 1189-1199

Henry the Seventh 1485-1509

As a scriptwriter for Gainsborough Pictures between 1936 and 1944 Edgar wrote the following, all comedies except *The ghost train*:

Windbag the sailor (1936)
Oh, Mr Porter! (1937)
Good morning, boys (1937)
Said O'Reilly to McNab (1937)
Convict 99 (1938)
Alf's button afloat (1938)
Old Bones of the river (1938)
Ask a policeman (1939)
The frozen limits (1939)
Charley's (big-hearted) aunt (1940)

Band waggon (1940)
Where's that fire? (1940)
The ghost train (1941)
Gasbags (1941)
I thank you (1941)
Back-room boy (1942)
King Arthur was a gentleman (1942)
Miss London Ltd. (1943)
Bees in paradise (1944)

Edgar married Mildred William in 1904, and their son Hindle became an actor. Edgar died at his house (Broom, North Trade Road, Battle) on 14 May 1951 – at least that is what his probate record states. Other records state 5 May. Mildred died there on 20 April 1961. Hindle died locally in 1984.

It is inevitable that an account of writers of the Battle area should end with the text of Edgar's *The battle of Hastings*:

I'll tell of the Battle of Hastings,
As happened in days long gone by,
When Duke William became King of England,
And 'Arold got shot in the eye.

It were this way - one day in October
The Duke, who were always a toff
Having no battles on at the moment,
Had given his lads a day off.

They'd all taken boats to go fishing,
When some chap in t' Conqueror's ear
Said 'Let's go and put breeze up the Saxons;'
Said Bill - 'By gum, that's an idea.'

Then turning around to his soldiers,
He lifted his big Norman voice,
Shouting - 'Hands up who's coming to England.'
That was swank 'cos they hadn't no choice.

They started away about tea-time -
The sea was so calm and so still,
And at quarter to ten the next morning
They arrived at a place called Bexhill.

King 'Arold came up as they landed -
His face full of venom and 'ate -
He said 'If you've come for Regatta
You've got here just six weeks too late.'

At this William rose, cool but 'aughty,
And said 'Give us none of your cheek;
You'd best have your throne re-upholstered,
I'll be wanting to use it next week.'

When 'Arold heard this 'ere defiance,
With rage he turned purple and blue,
And shouted some rude words in Saxon,
To which William answered - 'And you.'

'Twere a beautiful day for a battle;
The Normans set off with a will,
And when both sides was duly assembled,
They tossed for the top of the hill.

King 'Arold he won the advantage,
On the hill-top he took up his stand,
With his knaves and his cads all around him,
On his 'orse with his 'awk in his 'and.

The Normans had nowt in their favour,
Their chance of a victory seemed small,
For the slope of the field were against them,
And the wind in their faces an' all.

The kick-off were sharp at two-thirty,
And soon as the whistle had went
Both sides started banging each other
'Til the swineherds could hear them in Kent.

The Saxons had best line of forwards,
Well armed both with buckler and sword -
But the Normans had best combination,
And when half-time came neither had scored.

So the Duke called his cohorts together
And said - 'Let's pretend that we're beat,
Once we get Saxons down on the level
We'll cut off their means of retreat.'

So they ran - and the Saxons ran after,
Just exactly as William had planned,
Leaving 'Arold alone on the hill-top
On his 'orse with his 'awk in his 'and.

When the Conqueror saw what had happened,
A bow and an arrow he drew;
He went right up to 'Arold and shot him.
He were off-side, but what could they do?

The Normans turned round in a fury,
And gave back both parry and thrust,
Till the fight were all over bar shouting,
And you couldn't see Saxons for dust.

And after the battle were over
They found 'Arold so stately and grand,
Sitting there with an eye-full of arrow
On his 'orse with his 'awk in his 'and.

George Kiloh
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Sources

List from Wikipedia, edited

P G Wodehouse (ed Sophie Ratcliffe): *A life in letters* (Random House 2013)

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