

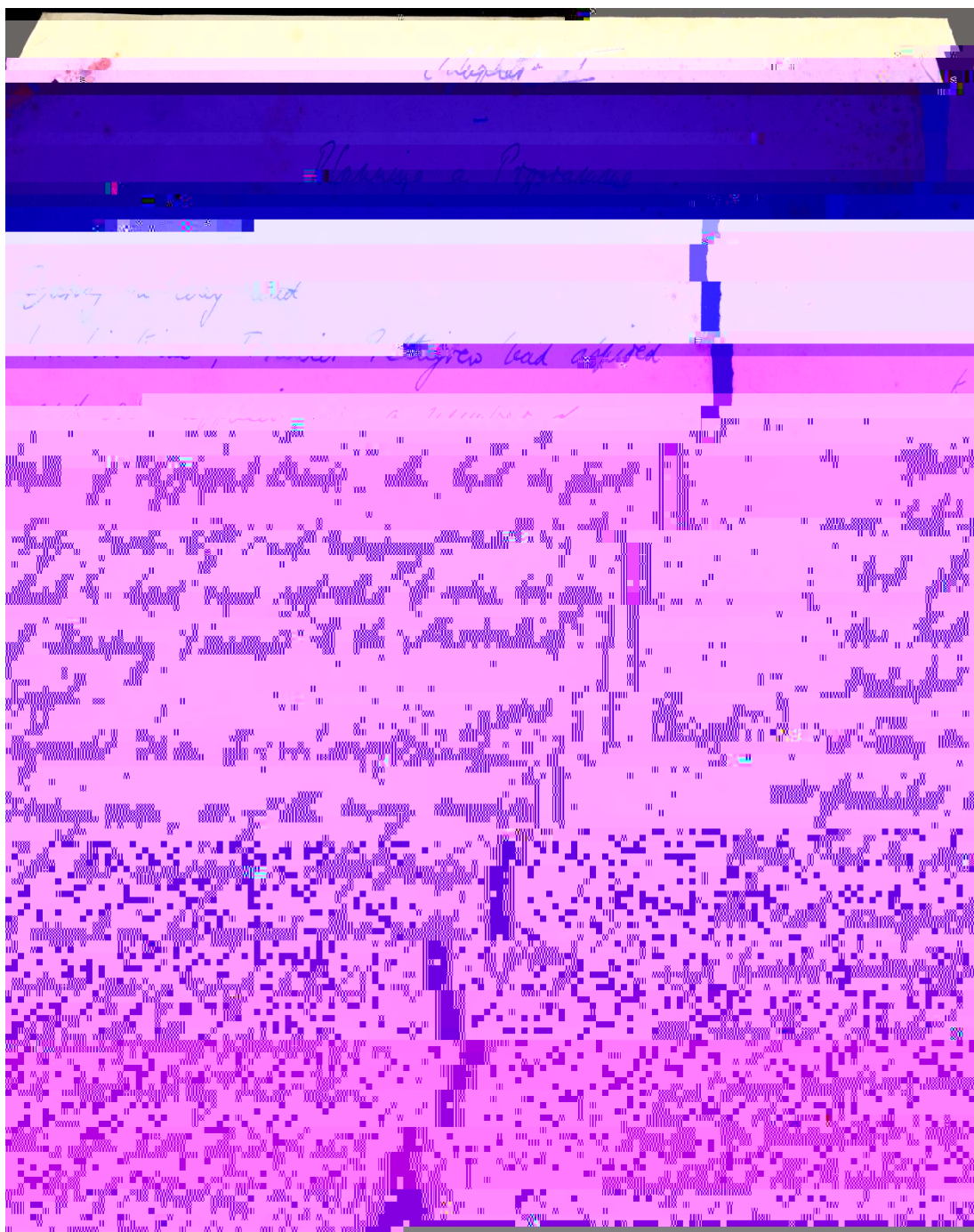
What might be the significance of a missing clarinettist?

As a 16-year-old pupil at Rugby School in 1917, Alfred Alexander Gordon Clark (1900–1958), a soon-to-be history undergraduate at New College, had been rehearsing to perform at Rugby's annual instrumental competition as the clarinettist in a trio for clarinet, cello, and piano. The piece to be performed was No. 1 (Allegro giusto) of _____ (_____), op. 53, by the German composer Alexis Hollaender (1840–1924), who died 100 years ago in Berlin. Gordon Clark's school magazine, _____, records the scene for us:

Mr. Henry Ley, organist of Christ Church, Oxford, was good enough to hear the final competitions. The four Houses left in it were the Town, Wilson's, G. F. Bradby's, and Kittermaster's. Of these Wilson's were handicapped by the unexpected absence of Gordon-Clark, who was suddenly summoned home.¹

The sense of mystery is palpable. Whatever could have necessitated such a dramatic turn of events? It could almost be the stuff of fiction—possibly even a narrative to one day influence the writing of a crime novel that centres on the circumstances behind an absent clarinettist?

Today, Gordon Clark is better known as the murder mystery writer—one of the luminaries of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction—who went by the penname 'Cyril Hare'. A year after Hare's untimely death at the age of 57, an essay he wrote was published, 'The Classic Form', in which he holds forth expertly on the craft of



New College Library, Oxford, MS 381, f. 1r— the first leaf of Hare's manuscript of *Clarendon*. This and following images © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

of 3 March 1918 with a clarinet solo, the Minuet from Charles Harford Lloyd's

Clarendon. Again, he is the all-important opening performer for another Rugby concert of 14 July 1918, when he gives a 'sympathetic rendering' of No. 1 (Andante espressivo) from Richard H. Walthew's Second Set of *Clarendon* for clarinet and piano.⁴ And the first leaf of our newly acquired manuscript shows how the woman in charge of the orchestra's administration in the novel was originally conceived to be a 'Mrs. D ench'— but Hare has amended that to 'Basset', as her name indeed appears in the published novel.⁵ Why Basset? Well, the two

⁴ As recorded in Rugby School's *Clarendon*, 622 (2 April 1918), 66; 627 (20 July 1918), 127.

⁵ New College Library, Oxford, MS 381, f. 1r.

most famous pieces by Mozart showcasing the clarinet— among the two most well-known pieces in the whole clarinet repertoire— are Mozart's Clarinet Quintet (K. 581) and his Clarinet Concerto in A (K. 622). Both were written for Mozart's friend, the Austrian clarinet virtuoso Anton Stadler (1753–1812), and specifically for the (deeper register) *bass* clarinet, the instrument Stadler pioneered, and with which he is so closely associated. All those various musical associations relating to the clarinet and to Mozart might

Detection Club for your Initiation as a member' on 29 January 1947, and then a subsequent letter from her of 7 January 1947, also about the dinner. Finally, there is a typed letter of 18 June 1948, also on Detection Club stationery, this time signed by E. R. Punshon (1872–1956), the crime novelist known for his Bobby Owen mysteries. It follows up with Hare on payment for a guest dinner, and is of particular local interest insofar as it references New College alumnus writer from the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, Milward Kennedy (1894–1968).

grandfather, father, uncle, and elder brother, all of whom held the position of high sheriff and deputy lieutenant of Surrey. The third of five children, home for G ordon Clark ('Taffy') as a boy was the large and graceful Mickleham Hall, and he was educated at a boys' prep school in Rottingdean, St Aubyn's School. In September 1913, he entered Rugby School into what is now known as Cotton House, leaving the school in Easter 1919, after having won reading prizes in 1914 and 1915, an English poem prize and the Kings Medal (for history) in 1918, and lastly the Bowen Modern History Prize in 1919. From Rugby, Hare went up to New College in 1919, graduating with a first in modern history three years later. Thereafter he was called to the bar at the Inner Temple in 1924, and an eminent career in law followed, as well as a wartime spell working as a civil servant in the Ministry of Economic Warfare and then as a legal assistant in the office of the director of public prosecutions. His penname, under which he wrote both novels and short stories, derived from his home in Battersea, Cyril Mansions, and Hare Court, his barristers' chambers. His earliest publications were sketches for _____, and he would also write short stories for the _____. He drew upon his excellent legal knowledge throughout his career as a crime writer, and his first published detective novel, _____, appeared in 1937. Eight more murder mystery novels followed, his last being—the sadly aptly titled—
(American edition:

