

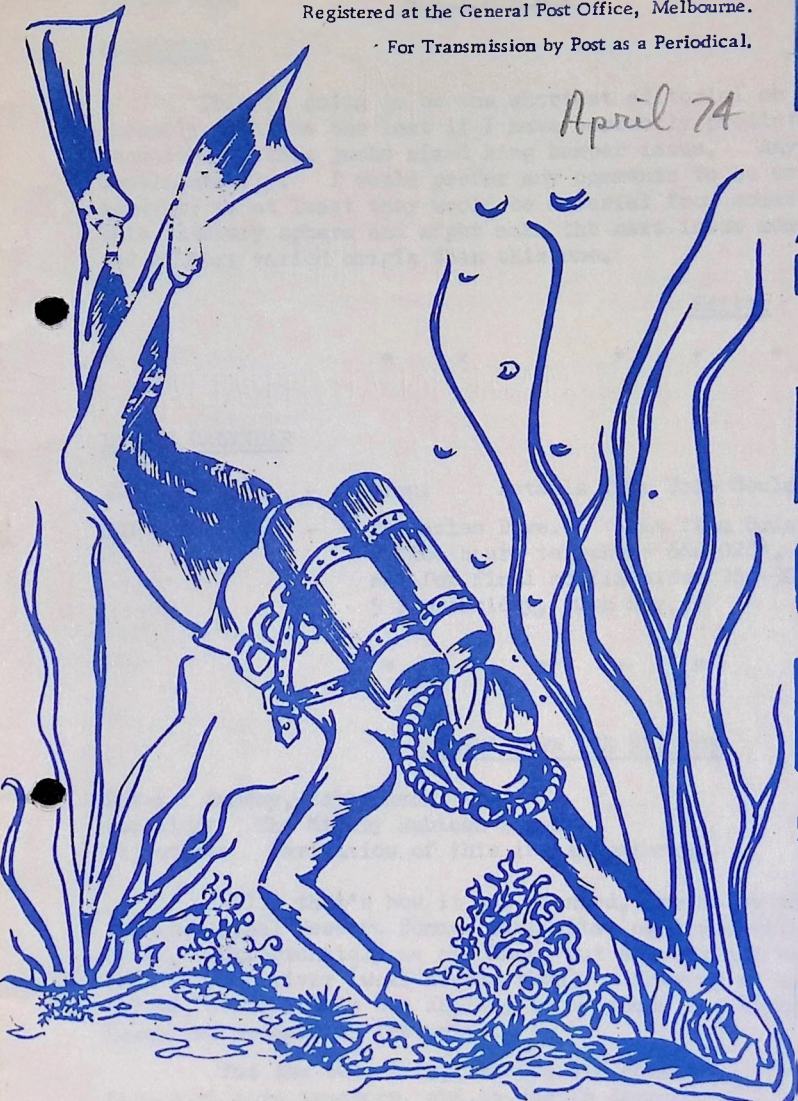
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April 74

FATHOMS



VICTORIAN SUB-AQUA GROUP

EDITORIAL

This is going to be the shortest editorial on record and probably could be the last if I have correctly predicted the reactions to this jumbo sized king bumper issue. Anyway let the complaints fly. I would prefer any comments to be written in, however, as at least they would be material from someone new to this literary sphere and might make the next issue more interesting, and of more varied origin than this one.

Editor

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DIVING CALENDAR

APRIL 25-28th - Eden. Details from John Goulding.
 MAY 12th - Pinnacles Dive. Data from Brian Lynch.
 Office hours telephone 662-0201, Ext. 494,
 and for final confirmation 783-9095 from
 5 p.m. Friday, 10th May.

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ROLLIN' DOWN THE RUBICON

Date: Sunday, 24th March.
 Location: The Mighty Rubicon River
 Objective: Navigation of this inland waterway.

Well, that's how it was planned, and so we all arrived at the Aboriginal Reserve Summer camp-site, equipped with deep water craft. Unfortunately we all knew, but someone had neglected to tell the er' river (well stream then). However we assembled ourselves, confident in our ability to overcome the conditions, and began our assault on the water.

For the tube trip, the vessels come in all shapes and sizes from mini's to tractors, and as Justin demonstrated last year, it is an asset to carry spare tubes (of the amber fluid) merely for medicinal purposes of course. The prize for the most ambitious

amphibian must go yet again to Justin, his must be the only water-bed with a three knot current running through it. But alas like the Titanic, it broke up on its maiden voyage, didn't do the maiden much good either, but more of that later.

This trip had been arranged in conjunction with Bass Strait and Ringwood Underwater Club, and so we had an excellent turnout. This is one of our family trip days, and gives the girls and the children a chance to "enjoy" a wetting with Dad. There were a variety of wet-suited ladies, who I am sure that now having tasted the delights of the comfort of a warm foam rubber surrounding will do it more often.

So to the start, this was a leisurely affair, with Pat and Keith vying for line honours as they shot off, leaving behind the more elderly members of the groups, still on the banks. Johnny began singing 'I'm forever blowing bubbles' as he almost turned the tube over in the beginning, but got under way eventually. The Smiths succumbed early to the cold much to Terry's relief we understand, and those two elegant mermaids, Diane and Annette, sailed gracefully along together. Justin finally launched his boat, using Fosters instead of champagne at the ceremony, and then proceeded to doze off for a while.

Meanwhile down the river the rugged Truscotts were going flat out as usual, with Chris and Craig changing tubes quicker than any mechanic and Bazza and Fritz trying hard to catch them up.

Dave and Pat together with Harvey Allen (Ringwood) constituted the biggest hazard on the river waving flippers, and car tubes all over the place. At one stage, Dave urged Harvey to come over a log waterfall backwards which he did, when he surfaced his first thought was for his "lunch" strapped round his neck, tinnies and children first he spluttered.

Due to the narrowness of the river, much of the scenic surroundings were lost to view and towards the end of the journey a violent thunderstorm finally drove Di and I from the water, although others kept going and going and going. Finally dry and warm we all finished up at the barbecue awaiting the final contestants, Denise finishing behind Justin, both of them having taken to the 'boats' when their ship struck. (There is no truth in the rumour that the Cat was seen diving on the wreck last week. It was left to Harvey to end the show, floating regally down right to the barbecue, he took several curtain calls before staggering wearily from the water. The sun, too, was now

shining and ended for us a good day's "diving" with a difference. Our thanks to the Bureau of Aboriginal Affairs for the use of their facilities, to the weather for being so wet and finally my thanks to Jim Taube for appearing out of nowhere to rescue us, for a couple of minutes. I had thought that like last year we faced a long hike back, but no, thanks to Jim we were whisked off back to civilisation. It was at the barbecue that we said farewell to Ardrie Tol, who has been a consistent diver and camper with us these past few months, and we all wish him well in Tassie.

BRIAN LYNCH

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G O L D F E V E R

Lately the V.S.A.G. have dived some interesting wrecks and I'm certain many members have been looking for some treasure of a sort which may have gone down with the ship. For those really keen on finding treasures from the deep or in this case shallows, possibly the best place is off the Florida coast. The Florida Board of Archives and History estimates that along the State's coastline, there are between 1200 and 2000 shipwrecks. It has precise data on the locations of some 250, many of which contain treasure of real monetary value.

The reason for much of the sunken treasure goes back to the system set up by the Spanish Government more than 400 years ago.

From 1503 to 1790 an agency called the "Casa de La Contratacion" exercised control over trade between Spain and Spanish America. Around 1543, to protect valuable cargoes from pirates and enemy ships, the Casa set up a convoy system which remained into the 18th century.

One homeward bound convoy assembled at Havana - more than ten merchantmen and big-bellied galleons which not only provided protection but also carried royal silver. The ships sailed through the Straits of Florida and rode the gulf stream northwards between Florida and the Bahamas. Two hurricanes were responsible for the shipwrecks which have yielded the greatest treasure yet.

The first overtook the 1715 convoy, destroying 10 of 11 ships. Two foundered at sea, eight broke up on reefs with a loss of more than 1000 men. The second (a 1733 Convoy) was hit by a hurricane on the third day out from Havana. Of 21 vessels, 17 were lost, most of them ending up on the reefs along a 25 mile stretch of the Florida keys.

The first large-scale salvaging of these wrecks was by the Spanish themselves. The 1715 convoy reportedly carried 14 million pesos in silver, gold etc. (about \$13 million). Havana sent a salvage fleet and recovered more than \$4 million of the treasure. In 1964 professional treasure hunters came upon the sand covered wrecks of two ships of the 1715 convoy, one directly offshore from the Spanish salvage camp and the other about 30 miles to the South. The two wreck sites were within 500 feet of shore in 8 to 12 feet of water. As far back as 1920 Spanish coins had been found on the beaches but the rich discoveries were the product of a complex commercial operation using massive pumping-dredging systems capable of clearing eight by ten foot holes through five or six feet of sand in ten minutes.

More than \$66,000 of gold and silver items were recovered, some quite rare, plus artifacts ranging from cannons, cannon balls, sounding leads to pewter plate. And table silver along with the convoy commander's gold whistle on a 2176 link chain. The value recovered over three years came to more than \$3 million (are your appetite's increasing?)/

In 1967 more valuables were brought up from the two wrecks and held in a bank vault for division between salvager and the State of Florida (which gets 25 per cent of every treasure find).

In the Bank vault were four garbage bins loaded with 600 pounds of silver - about 1200 coins. In a box were gold rings, silver bottoms, buckles and sword handles, religious medals, ear rings, a gold tooth pick and 157 gold coins still gleaming after 250 years in the sea. The value of this treasure, around \$800,000 making a total salvaged from the two wrecks around \$4m. Nothing of value of the 1733 convoy has yet been found.

A widespread business taking divers to wreck-sites charging \$50 a day all in, is common and some guides who guarantee visitors that they'll find treasure - for an exorbitant price - salt certain sites with cheap Spanish coins. They even rebuild wrecks hauling an old anchor or timbers to a pretended wreck site. There are even pirates today!

Here is a bit for Bazza. In 1963 a 16 year old skin diver looking for crayfish found three \$20U.S. gold pieces about 400 yards from shore in 12 feet of water. After looking further, fanning sand away, he discovered another 588 gold pieces all minted before 1858 with a face value of \$3866 and a market value in excess of \$50,000. There's hope yet Bazza.

A Florida marine archaeologist determined that \$20,000 in

gold was withdrawn from the South Carolina sub-treasury in 1857 to pay federal troops sent to Florida to engage the Seminole Indians. The gold was carried aboard a schooner in a large leather pouch by an army paymaster off the Indian river inlet, he and the pouch were transferred to a small "wooden" boat which capsized in the outer breakers. The paymaster was rescued (by a fibreglass boat I suppose) but no sign of the gold until a 16 year old uncovered \$50,000, of a market value of perhaps \$175,000.

Could it be that the next V.S.A.G. dive is off the Florida coast?

DAVID MOORE

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"A FEW NOTES FROM THE PAST"

Man might only have been using S.C.U.B.A. for a few years and other forms of compressed air for a hundred or so but there were earlier methods of getting down and doing things. According to a Mr. Edmund Halley of 1720AD "To supply air to this bell when under water, I caused a couple of barrels to be cased with lead, enough to sink empty and each of them to have a bung hole in the bottom to let in the water as the air in them condensed on their descent and to let it out again as they were drawn up from below. To a hole in the uppermost of these barrels I fixed a leathern hose, long enough to fall below the lower bung hole, being kept down by a weight appended, so that the air in the upper part of the barrels could not escape, unless the lower ends of these hose were first lifted up.

The bell was lowered and regularly supplies of these barrels were lowered or dropped to beside the lip of this house. The leathern hose from the barrel was led under the bell and fresh air bled into the chamber to rejuvenate the contents. Before letting in any cool fresh air from the barrels, hot air was let out through a cock at the top of the bell through which it would rush with so much violence.

Thus I found that I could do anything that required to be done under us, having been one of five who have been together at the bottom, in nine to ten fathoms of water for above an hour and a half at a time, without any sort of ill consequence, and I might have tonicued there so long as I pleased, there being no ill consequences that could come upon one in such a situation.

By a glass window, so much light was transmitted that when the sea

was clear, and especially when the sun shone, I could see perfectly well to write or read, much more to fasten or lay hold on anything under us that was to be taken up or in darker weather. If I wished to hold a candle or lantern I could see, even at night, to procure sponges and coral and perhaps pearls if they lie there.

I have also found it not impracticable for a diver to go out of a bell, to a good distance from it, the air being conveyed to him with a continued stream by small flexible pipes; which pipes may serve as a clue to direct him back again when he would return to the bell..."

I have suddenly found a new respect for some of the people of our past. Excusing Mr. Halley for his ignorance of decompression times (and congratulating him on his survival even so), I must also state that he has also proved that there is more than one way of skinning a cat. He didn't have compressed air available and so let the ocean provide it for him and at the same time he pioneered one of the "new" 20th century ideas, i.e. working from a habitat.

It tends to make one wonder what the diving scene would be like if people like that were around today. I guess we're lucky he's not still here, we'd find it hard to keep up with him.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

As a regular reader to your newsletter Fathoms, I have come to know the style of most of your writers. I was under the impression that the V.S.A.G. was one of the largest diving clubs in Victoria, and currently has a membership of 50 plus. With such a large group of followers, how come only a few members ever contribute. Don't they know they get points for submitting articles.

I don't want to point the pen at people but when month after month the effort falls on the same people, it's no wonder that those who write and those who work for the club get a bit fed up.

For all of you who want to voice your opinion at General meetings, when you can only be half heard because of the constant chatter of others, then I say to you; pick up your pens and write to the Editor.

JOHN GOULDING

"HISTORY RE-FOUND"

In 1803, Capt. Matthew Flinders, S.A.'s first explorer was circumnavigating Aust. in H.M.S. Investigator when he was forced to make a hasty decision. On May 21, the Investigator was at anchor off Middle Island in the Bight when a sudden freshening breeze developed, the anchors dragged and Flinders had the cables cut just in time to save the ship. Being a careful navigator, Flinders charted the exact position, hoping to pick up the anchors at some future date. He did not return however, and it was not until 170 years later that anyone else laid eyes on them.

A Mr. Douglas Seton, an information officer at the Adelaide Museum researched the story and over five years managed to narrow the search area to a few hundred metres square of sea-bed.

In January in a private expedition, he and five others set up camp on Middle Island and spent the first week (typically Australian conditions) waiting for the weather to clear up. When they finally started they used a manta board, and after three days one of the group found the first anchor in 15 metres of water. It was the best bower anchor of approximately one ton and was lying in an area of greenish weed and covered with a reddish weed which apparently grows only on solid objects such as iron or rock. The anchor was about four metres long and from the data they already had they calculated that another anchor would lie about nine metres from this large anchor. As they expected, and only a few hours later, they found the kedge-anchor, with a three metre shaft. This also was covered with red weed and was easy to see against the background.

The anchors were lifted in late January and transported to the Western Australian Museum for preservation.

And on the other side of the world.....

The remains of the "Monitor" the world's first "ironclad warship" has just been discovered in about 180 ft. of water about 15 miles off Cape Hatteras on N-E U.S.A. The wreck, which sunk in 1862, is the opposite number of the "Merrimac" another ironclad. These two slugged it out over a days length at point blank range during the Civil War, without hurting each other but proving that the day of the wooden warship was gone. In recent years the U.S. Navy has spent an estimated \$4 million in trying to locate the wreck and now it seems

the amateurs have come our first.

The navy is now trying to recover artifacts from this historic wreck, using two work ships and a submersible.

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DIVING SUPREME

The night was still, the light barely visible. The water had a still musky look. Yet it was strange. As the water gently rose and fell against the walls of its enclosure I knew that alone my task was to go beneath that white bubbling mass and perform a hazardous task. No buddy and with no knowledge of the local hazards, I gingerly bent forward to look down on what might be the last time I would see such a site. Yet the time was running out so I tried to resolve myself to my foregone destiny.

With a striking glance I descended into zero visibility. Face mask non existant, air supply gone, teeth gritted around a sharp metal ring. I pulled and pulled and eventually I did it. I pulled out the bath plug with my teeth.

JOHN GOULDING

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Herb, Arthur and me arrived at Ernie's place just in time for breakfast and a couple of cold beers before setting out for a great day's diving.

The weather was pretty good for Victoria at this time of the year, and I said to Herb as we drove along, "It's too bad the others have missed out again, but they never come along anyhow."

As we got down towards the seaside we could see that it would be pretty good for diving as the swell was not above two metres with about a 19.7 kilometre per hour cross wind. We all piled into Ernie's boat to set off and then nearly fell out laughing as we realized that once again we'd left the drain plugs out. Back to shore and drain out the boat and

pick up Herb's reg which he'd forgotten again. Then finally we were away towards that mecca of Victorian divers, the wreck of the Classic Cat, which had sunk in 14 fathoms off Cape Schank when its captain, one J.F. Goldstein had mistaken the first mate's cigarette for the beacon at Pt. Leo. After a rather slow trip, due to water in the petrol and a bit of cross chop, we arrived over the wreck to find it too rough to anchor. No matter, we said, the current's not running too hard, we'll hang on to the anchor line and pull the boat along with us. Then it was time to hit the water after first checking each other's gear out. We all had at least 1500 in our tanks and as we were only going down 90 ft. so till our air ran out we were pretty right. Then we discovered we'd left our float behind so we bundled our compensators together and stuck the flag in the middle and then all piled out of the boat into reasonably clear water of about 5-7 ft. vis.

It wasn't bad on the way down but Arthur got a bit separated but managed to find us later (after we had got back to the boat) Did we laugh! he'd spent the whole dive looking for us. Anyhow while Arthur was busy being stupid looking for me, Ernie and Herb, we all got stuck into the wreck. To cover as much area as possible, we then all split up. Ernie whipped off towards the sharp end of the boat with his speargun as he had seen something move. (It was only a starfish but he got it. Good shooting Ernie!)

Meanwhile me and Herb got stuck into the portholes with our six foot crowbars. Mine was stuck in a bit of a crevice so I had to take my tank off and hang it on a bit of rusty iron. While I squeezed in under a heap of girders and plate work. Actually we could have had a nasty accident there, as while I was busy exerting myself the tank slipped off and dragged the reg from my mouth. Luckily I was perfect fit and a good diver and managed to swim after it. Herb unfortunately could not leave his porthole to help me because he was running low on air and couldn't leave his porthole, it being almost free at that stage.

You can imagine how sweet that air tasted and boy, was I glad to be still alive, but live and learn, everything turned out O.K., so she's apples mate! Finally I got my breath back and turned round to see how Herb was going, but Herb was gone as he had got his porthole and had gone looking for other goodies. So I had a look at my stem gauge and as I only had 600 left decided to go down the side of the boat and chase a few crays. Gee, it makes them easy to get when you use a spear gun. Got 3 in 10 minutes, all under size, but no matter, if the fisheries chap came long I could always toss

then over the side. Suddenly, out of the gloom Herb appeared, gesturing wildly that he was out of air. Quick as a flash, due to the good training I'd had, I whipped my reg out and gave it to him as we made a fast climb towards the surface. Luckily we were only 10 feet from the top when we ran out of air and it was easy to make it top side. As we lay on the surface gasping and scratching we realized we'd forgotten to hang on to the anchor line of the boat and it was now just barely visible, bobbing in the swell about 400 yds. away. So it was over on our backs, drop the old weight belt and start finning against the current. We weren't doing too bad until Ernie surfaced about 30 yds. to our left yelling "Shark".

Well, you know what we felt like. I told Herb to drop his porthole but he didn't, explaining that he had already risked his life for it once, and it would be sheer waste and stupidity to throw it away now, for nothing. Suddenly a black shape materialized beside us. I got a terrible shock, but Herb came to the rescue and began beating it to death with that big 80 lb. bronze porthole. Suddenly we realized that it wasn't a shark at all, it was Ernie. Did we laugh! Anyway, we managed to get to the boat and lay there for a while having a smoke and also knocking off Arthur's spare cans while we wondered what he was up to anyway.

Finally, this old bloke in a blue and white 20 footer came up beside us and asked us if we were short a diver as he had one gasping on the floor of his boat. We had a quick look and sure enough it was Arthur, seasick again it looked like. After we'd transferred him this bloke in the blue and white boat asked us if we wanted to have a ski so we said yes - the only trouble was he has this foreign bloke with glasses who insisted on skiing too. Anyway after a few more beers and a few wipe outs on the skis, we headed back to port.

THE ABOVE IS A TRUE STORY. ONLY THE FACTS HAVE BEEN CHANGED (but don't be too cynical, sillier things have happened.)

JUSTIN LIDDY
DAVE CARROLL

FLOTSAM and JETSAM

The V.S.A.G. Literary Wizard usually gets his head down and backside up to write this column on the night before deadline. This, of course, is to allow for last minute stop presses to be included. That's O.K. if you happen to document everything that's happened in the last month or have a memory as good as an elephant, but your writer goes through mental agony trying to put the bits and pieces together. So for those of you who read this article you are not the only ones who suffer.

Let us go back to Labor Day Weekend at Port Campbell. We're becoming such regulars down there that a few of the chaps are almost on first name terms with CYRIL - the famous Port Campbell Ranger. We had a jolly good turn up down there once again and the area provided a number of previously unencountered thrills. It also brought out some interesting character traits.

We all know about Cat Carroll's obsession with old junk, why you've just got to look at him. Anyhow between him, Dave Moore, Brian and Bazza they almost stripped clean the old Port Campbell tip in search of a rare bottle, a forgotten pendant, an old piece of china, a lost pair of pants or whatever else looked as if it could be classified X by the National Trust. Centuries of civilization and memories were uprooted and picked over, and then they had the nerve to tell us that their precious trinkets had come from deep inside the captain's cabin on the Loch Ard. I'm telling you they didn't leave a thing. When I went there the next day, all I found was my packet of fags which the Cat had borrowed the previous day.

Well, maybe I'm no tip scavenger but I sure can scale those cliffs. Those of you who made the precipitous climb down Deary's steps on the Sunday with the aid of a rope will know how courageous some of us were to make the descent on the Saturday with only the spirit of unknown excitement to lead us on. I was quite intoxicated by the breathtaking and haunting feeling to be one hundred feet down inside the cliff. Justin in true mountaineering spirit claimed: "I did it because it was there".

Dave Moore did it because it was there. Pat Creffield did it because she didn't want to be there, and Dave Carroll did it because he dropped another of my fags over the edge.

Apart from all these activities there was some time left for diving, and Terry's aqua-bus service came in very handy to ferry divers from the Gorge to the wreck.

Then of course, there was our STRE-K-R who must remain nameless, unless of course we give him a common old name like SMITH - No, not you TERRY. From all reports it was a sneak sleek streak being done in the middle of the night and very quickly at that.

From the depths of Port Campbell we go to the bumpy-bum-bonanza Tube Trip down the Rubicon River. We fielded upwards of 50 riders from the V.S.A.G. Ringwood Underwater Group and Bass Strait Diving Club. Starting point was the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs Camp near Taggerty. The course was littered with obstacles in the form of rocks, not to mention several bone shattering water-swallowing waterfalls. The tandem riders or mixed pairs were definitely at a disadvantage to the more streamlined singles tubes. The site of 15 or 20 cars at the starting line certainly proved that this is a very popular event and one which is sure to be enjoyed each year. Even some non-active members turned up and it was good to get together and have a barby and beer with everyone at the end. What strange impressions people must have of a tube trip. The way many of the tubes had little tin tubes (as in...suck a few tubes) tied to them reminded me of my ballooning days when we would tie sand bags for ballast to the side of the gondola. Ah well I guess sand wouldn't be any good on a tube trip; and it is thirsty work isn't it girls; girls?, girls?. Yes! this year we fielded quite a maiden handicap with Annette, Pat, Diane and Di, Denise and Maree, and if I've forgotten any others its only because I'm not even allowed to look any more these days.

Well, see ya at Easter. I'll be lurking from tent to tent and reporting on all the juicy bits like: who's sleeping with who, or is it whom? How Dave Carroll put on 3 stone in two months on a diet of baked beans and spaghetti. Why Dave Moore wears socks under the shower. Who upset the usher at the open air theatre. So don't miss the next mind-boggling instalment of "My Part in the Downfall of the V.S.A.G."

I. P. DAILY