

Carl Giles and his adopted town of Ipswich

We welcomed back John Field to our December meeting to speak about the cartoonist Carl Giles and his long connection with Ipswich. Ronald 'Carl' Giles OBE was born in Islington, North London in 1916. He came to Ipswich in 1937 where he was popular with the American G.I. 's for his humorous drawings and his liking of jazz sessions often held at the Tuddenham Fountain. He and his wife Joan lived in Witnesham for over 50 years and his local was the Barley Mow.

Self-taught, he became a newspaper cartoonist for the Daily Express firstly as a war cartoonist in Belgium. One critic wrote 'Giles with his devastating sense of humour was Churchill's secret weapon on the home front'. His humour could be quite sharp, sometimes cruel. In later years friends included Tommy Cooper, Johnny Speight and Eric Sykes.

From 1945-1991 he was a regular Daily Express and Sunday Express cartoonist featuring the fictional Giles family of characters including Mother, Father, the battle-axe Grandma and the children (plus assorted dogs, cats and a parrot). A popular Cartoon Annual was published every Christmas from 1946 onwards. He often produced drawings, free of charge, for local groups and charities and was voted as Britain's favourite cartoonist of the 20th century. His OBE was for services to the cartoon world.

John showed us many examples of cartoons featuring many Ipswich landmarks, characters and events. Recognisable buildings include the Town Hall, Plough, Cricketers, Lord Nelson and Running Buck. He was a regular at the First Floor club and proprietor Ken Bean features in several cartoons. Similarly he drew notable doctors from Ipswich Hospital and local Police Officers (the original cartoons can be seen in the bar at Martlesham Police HQ) For the 1978 FA cup final Ipswich v Arsenal, he depicted Cardinal Wolsey in a blue and white scarf.

Giles is commemorated by a bronze statue of Grandma in Queen Street in Ipswich where she stands looking up at the newspaper office window where he used to work. It was unveiled by close friend actor Warren Mitchell in 1993.

The last years of Giles's life were plagued by failing health including sight loss and the amputation of both legs due to poor circulation in 1990, His wife died on Christmas Day 1994 and he died eight months later aged 78 in 1995. Their graves are located in the churchyard of St. Martin's church in Tuddenham St. Martin, Suffolk.

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