

BILL CARTER: ROTARY'S MAN OF DESTINY

The 63rd President of R.I. is a modest Britisher who believes passionately in high standards and Rotary's ability to seize on a man's qualities and make them richer.

by Roger Levy

IT WOULD be hard to find an address more redolent of England than "Old Windsor," which is the home of William Clarke Carter, his wife, Olive, and their daughter, Rosalind. By a happy chance, the new world leader of Rotary International lives almost within the shadow of the castle which has given its name to a royal house.

What sort of man is the Rotarian who is President of Rotary International in 1973-74?

He was born on September 23, 1906, in Flixton, a small village in the county of Lancashire, on the banks of the River Mersey. There was nothing ancestral about the place. His parents lived there simply because they were both keen cyclists; the green county of Cheshire was near to hand, and the Cheshire lanes were fine cycling country in those early 20th century days.

His mother and father were perhaps unusual people. But in industrial Britain at the beginning of the century, to be unusual was not necessarily to be untypical. It was an age of idiosyncrasy. Many of the men who, like William Carter's father, worked in steel were determined that if they could not themselves break away from the tentacles of the industrial revolution, at least their children should do so. While the father was working for the famous firm of Armstrong Whitworth by day and teaching at night, the mother operated a little shop, and the family lived above it. The income from the shop kept the household going. The father's earnings were saved and invested—not with a dream, but with a determination that young Willie Carter should have the opportunities that the older generation had missed. (Round the world the new President is known as "Bill"; but first it was "Willie"; then it was "Will," and, he says, only on tense occasions was it "William.")

Bill Carter likes to tell you that Destiny has been at



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Rotary's "First Couple" for the 1973-74 year live in "Old Windsor," Berkshire, on the western fringe of London. Olive, always full of charm and good humor, was a professional singer and Bill was an aspiring young amateur actor when they met in 1939. They have one daughter.

At England's most famous address (opposite page)—No. 10 Downing Street—Bill Carter and R.I. President Carl Miller (1963-64) prepare to visit with British Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home. Bill, who arranged the 1964 meeting, was President of R.I.B.I. at the time.

work throughout his life—that coming events do cast their shadows a long way before them. For instance, his father, when only a young man of 30, was sent by his firm to the U.S.A. He arrived there in 1904 and stayed till 1905. He went to New York and to Pittsburgh, for there are postcards and letters to prove it. But there is no evidence of where he was on Rotary's "birthday" of February 23, 1905. Could it have been Chicago?

During Bill Carter's early months, there were moves for the family, and changes of employment for his



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WAYNE WILSON

Respected in Rotary and his profession of law as an articulate spokesman and a master of the English language, Bill (above) presides over the Council on Legislation at the 1970 Convention of R.I. in Atlanta.

father. But by 1908 they were established in Topley, a north Derbyshire village which was virtually a part of the great steelmaking city of Sheffield. It was here, during the next four years, that Bill's father created and marketed one of the leading high-speed steels of the period. One must know something of the rigid class structure in England's society at the beginning of the 1900s to appreciate the educational journey that lay ahead of the young boy. It was possible, but it was not easy, for this grandson of a foundry shop-foreman and of a decora-

tor-plasterer to travel the road from a north-country village school to one of the 19th-century scholastic foundations which were the preserves, for better or for worse, of the English gentleman. Determination was needed, first from the father, then from the son.

Willie Carter went first to a kindergarten or "dame school"; then to the village school (a state primary school) until he was 9. From age 9 to 11 he went to grammar school in the Derbyshire town of Chesterfield, and then came the startling change: his father lifted him sev-

BILL CARTER *Continued*

Clockwise starting below left: "Willie" Carter at age 3 in 1909; of this photo, Bill says: "We were all Little Lord Fauntlerays in those days." . . . At age 18, Bill was a handsome student at Marlborough College with plans to specialize in law studies. . . . The Carters enjoy a holiday in 1948 with daughter Rosalind at Weymouth, England. . . . Now Rosalind is grown up and a beauty; here the Carters turn out for a friend's London wedding reception in 1971. . . . Wedding day on June 23, 1945, for Bill and Olive at New Delhi. Bill was a major, who helped create the Indian Army Pioneer Corps; World War II had separated him from Olive almost five years.



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eral rungs of the ladder in one jump by moving him to the south of England and a private preparatory school at Seaford on the Sussex coast. It was the last year of World War I; the school was St. Wilfrid's (and Bill Carter is now president of the Old Boys' Association). He was 11; he was lonely; he was miserable. A certain speaking accent was the hallmark of the middle classes, and he was a Northerner exiled in the South. Although he could get most of the words right, he was teased for his broad northern vowels. (One word above all caused him trouble: "none." You won't hear him use it, not if he can help it, even now.)

From St. Wilfrid's his course was irrevocably set. He must go, as all his schoolfellows would go, to one of the great English public schools (these, as any Britisher will tell you, are, above everything, private and expensive). He gained entrance to Marlborough College, lying in a quiet and lovely town in the Wiltshire countryside.

Bill was fairly fluent in French, thanks to a war-refugee from ravaged Belgium who had taught him at Seaford, and because in 1919, the year after the end of hostilities, he had spent a holiday with a French family. But though he wanted to study modern languages more deeply, it was not a major part of the public school curriculum in those days. The emphasis was upon Latin

and Greek, with mathematics and history perhaps a third and had fourth. Young Bill wrote an essay on "the feudal system" based on his experience in France. It attracted a master's attention, brought the boy his first real encouragement, and he chose history as his special field. His mathematics, he says, were no good, perhaps because of his father who was too able with figures to tolerate his son's fumbling approach. His father, indeed, was not a man who found it easy to say "Well done." He had pulled himself up by his bootstraps, with little help and praise from others, and he saw no reason why his son should not do the same.

Bill Carter claims to have been a "slow doer." He never became a school prefect; he never excelled at games; he was never within sight of an honours scholarship. But from Marlborough College he gained the quality which the public schools of Great Britain were, virtually, founded to instill: that of leadership, a philosophy, a confidence, a *savoir faire*, a love of the English language and an ability to use it. This amalgam was to fit Bill to take his place, identifiably in this next year, at the zenith of his career, as a citizen of the world.

For Bill Carter, the call to his vocation as a lawyer came gradually. He tried steel, but the smell of a crucible was hateful to him. He would have liked to do

handcrafted body-work for motor cars, but his father was far-seeing enough to realize that this would surely be a trade without a long future. Bill himself said "no" to medicine; "no" to dentistry; "no" to teaching. So, the young man was articulated to a Chesterfield solicitor. There still remained a sentimental yen towards automobiles. He was passionately interested in cars, and still is. As a young man he plastered the walls of his rooms with pictures cut out of the early motoring magazines. It is also significant that the Foreign Service had attracted him. In recent years, his visits on Rotary's behalf to India, to Egypt, to Israel, to Japan, have served Rotary well and added to his stature; these travels have been, perhaps, another of Destiny's rewards: a dream unexpectedly come true.

He was admitted to the roll of solicitors in 1930; in those days of the Great Depression, he was lucky to get a job at all. Over the next few years he moved from office to office, from place to place, improving his position, increasing his affection for the law. And concurrently, of course, he was leading the life of a young-man-about-town in a great provincial centre (for he had stayed always within reach of Sheffield). Surprisingly, perhaps, for those who think they know him best, he once won a prize for dancing "the Charleston" during a summer holiday in Belgium!

Acting was his hobby, and it gave him the chance to make good use of his fine voice and his passion for the English language. It also gave Destiny another chance. For, in Sheffield, the hub of the city's life was the Hall of the Cutlers' Company. The Company had a beadle; and the beadle, whose name was Turner, had a daughter, whose name was Olive. At the great functions held in the Cutlers' Hall, Olive would, *ex officio*, so to speak, be there—in the company but not of it. Bill Carter did not in the least please his partner during one such evening by pointedly asking who the dark-haired, shy girl might be. But he was told, and for the time being, Destiny left it at that. But not for long.

Olive Turner became a professional singer. Bill Carter was enjoying himself on the amateur stage. In February, 1939, the Croft House Settlement Operatic Society decided to present (and they were the first amateurs to do so) Ivor Novello's operetta *Glamorous Night*. It is no surprise in this fate-ridden story to learn that the Rotary Club of Sheffield had been closely concerned with the support of the Croft House Settlement. Olive Turner had sung with its operatic society some years before, and remembers being told by her producer, "Give the performance of your life; it's Rotary night tonight." (And she remembers, too, a big bouquet afterwards in Rotary's colours of blue and gold.) For *Glamorous Night*, Bill Carter was eventually and reluctantly wheedled into playing the speaking part of the King. And then he discovered that Olive Turner was to be brought in for the chief singing part. Bill was terrified: "Me opposite the great Olive Turner?" he said. "I couldn't do it." But he did it, and he wasn't to know

that the rest of the company were soon betting whether he or the leading male singer would get the girl. Bill got her. "I was his mistress in the play," Olive remarks with a smile, "but he made an honest woman of me in the end."

But before they could become formally engaged World War II had broken out. Bill Carter was called up into the Army with his age group in 1940, and joined the Royal Armoured Corps. In December of that year he had seven days' leave, proposed to Olive, and was accepted. He was already on his way to a commission, and soon found himself posted to the Indian Army. There his administrative skills flowered, and by 1945 he was in New Delhi, India, busy with the creation of the Indian Pioneer Corps—a military force in uniform as distinct from a labour force in mufti.

Then, at last, the wartime regulations were lifted sufficiently to allow Olive Turner to travel to India to marry him. She jumped out of the train at Delhi, miraculously spick-and-span in the heat that only an Indian railway could generate. (There was little air-conditioning then.) Bill was waiting and, she says, "We started talking straight away, and we haven't stopped since." They did stop, though, long enough to get married at the Church of the Redemption, now the Cathedral Church of India, on June 23, 1945. There was a month's honeymoon in Kashmir, and in 1946, with their share of the war over, they were on their way home.

Like so many, Bill Carter returned to England restless; but though he wondered about a change, he remained in his chosen profession. Jobs were scarce, but eventually he found himself working for a London lawyer who needed help from "a back-room boy"—a position he eventually resigned over a professional difference of opinion. His last duty for his employer (and he remembers that he accepted it unwillingly) was to visit George Gibson, a solicitor at Clapham Junction, a business neighbourhood two or three miles from central London. George Gibson asked the young man why he was working for his then employer. Bill Carter explained the situation. "I wish," said George Gibson, "that someone would come and do some 'back-room' work for me." Bill Carter had got himself a new job. In a year he was a partner in the firm; now he is the senior co-partner (with George Gibson's nephew, also a Rotarian).

In 1949, three years after he had joined George H. Gibson and Company (Destiny again), the lawyer member of the Rotary Club of Battersea (which covered the area of Clapham Junction) decided to take Senior Active Membership. He therefore invited the much-respected George Gibson to consider taking over his classification in the Rotary Club. Lawyer Gibson, for personal reasons, felt unable to do so, but he mentioned his able and likeable young partner. . . .

Once a Rotarian, Bill Carter found an engaging custom in the Rotary Club of Battersea. On "New Members' Day" the names of all new Rotarians were put into one hat; the names of the [\[Continued on page 42\]](#)

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Bill Carter: Rotary's Man of Destiny

[Continued from page 19] 42 various offices were put into another; the names and the offices were drawn out of the hats, and matched together. Destiny saw to it, inevitably, that Bill Carter came out as President for the day.

"As soon as we heard him at work," recalls one of the senior members of the Club, "we realized what we had got." Soon after, the Club lost its Vice President owing to a shift of business premises, and decided that it would be wise to have two Vice Presidents: Bill Carter was proposed unhesitatingly and equally unhesitatingly elected as Second Vice President. Thus he found himself President of the Club in Rotary's Jubilee Year of 1955, and with all the other Presidents in the London area he took part in celebrations at the House of Commons and at the Rotary Club of London. There he met the leaders of Rotary in the metropolitan area. Quickly they recognized the quality of this quiet, dignified, well-spoken man. He became a member of the London District's International Service Committee, with the duty of looking after Rotary Foundation Fellows studying in the

London area. In due course he became Governor of the District; Vice President of Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland (R.I.B.I.); President of R.I.B.I.; R.I. Committee member and chairman; Trustee of The Rotary Foundation; Director of Rotary International; First Vice President of Rotary International; chairman of the 1970 Council on Legislation, and finally, President-Elect of Rotary International.

Olive and his daughter Rosalind remember the night when the news of Bill's nomination for the Presidency was telephoned to his Windsor home. They had never seen him so near to tears. But they would have been tears of humility in the knowledge that he was to become one of the long procession of men whose leadership has given so much to Rotary—and who have gained so much from it. For Bill Carter would be the first to admit that Rotary has a strange alchemy that seizes upon a man's qualities and transmutes them into something richer than before. None who have seen him presiding, for instance, over the Council on Legislation, speaking from the Conference or *[Continued on page 46]*

Some Suicides, Theirs and Mine

[Continued from page 39]

jacket, a large, bright-yellow, torpedo-shaped pill, which I had conned from a heavily insomniac American the day I left. I stared at the thing, turning it over and over on my palm, wondering how I'd missed it on the night. It looked lethal. I had survived 45 pills. Would 46 have done it? I flushed the thing down the toilet.

And that was that. Of course, my marriage was finished. We hung on a few months for decency's sake, but neither of us could continue in the shadow of such blackmail. By the time we parted there was nothing left. Inevitably, I went through the expected motions of distress. But in my heart I no longer cared.

The truth is, in some way I had died. The overintensity, the tiresome excess of sensitivity and self-consciousness, of arrogance and idealism, which came in adolescence and stayed on and on beyond their due time, like some visiting bore, had not survived the coma. It was as though I had finally, and sadly late in the day, lost my innocence.

Above all I was disappointed. Somehow, I felt, death had let me down; I had expected more of it. I had looked for something overwhelming, an experience which would clarify all my confusions. But it turned out to be simply a denial of experience.

All I knew of death were the terrifying dreams that came later. Blame it,

perhaps, on my delayed adolescence: adolescents always expect too much; they want solutions to be immediate and neat, instead of gradual and incomplete. Or blame it on the cinema: secretly, I had thought death would be like the last reel of one of those old Hitchcock thrillers. But all I had got was oblivion.

Months later I began to understand that I had had my answer, after all. The despair that had led me to try to kill myself had been pure and unadulterated, like the final, unanswerable despair a child feels, with no before or after. And childishly, I had expected death not merely to end it but also to explain it. Then, when death let me down, I gradually saw that I had been using the wrong language; I had translated the thing into *Americanese*. Too many movies, too many novels, too many trips to the States had switched my understanding into a hopeful, alien tongue. I no longer thought of myself as unhappy; instead, I had "problems." Which is an optimistic way of putting it, since problems imply solutions, whereas unhappiness is merely a condition of life which you must live with, like the weather. Once I had accepted that there weren't ever going to be any answers, even in death, I found to my surprise that I didn't much care whether I was happy or unhappy; "problems" and "the problem of problems" no longer existed. And that in itself is already the beginning of happiness. ●

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Bill Carter: Rotary's Man of Destiny

[Continued from page 42] Convention platform, serving in committees, could doubt that this is a man in whom Rotary could take a proprietorial pride—and a man who takes a grateful and affectionate pride in Rotary.

Apart from that, apart from the "curriculum vitae," what sort of man is this? He is a man of great courtesy. ("It's not just that he lets the other cars pass him," says his daughter. "He raises his hat to them as they go.") He is a patriot—loyal to his country and its industrial hardcore in which he has his roots; proud of its poetry and its prose, and particularly, perhaps, of its Shakespeare. He is sickened by injustice (one of the few things, says his family, which will make him white with fury). He is a man of unassailable integrity; and his urbane exterior, his bowler hat, and his rolled umbrella—so typical to international eyes of the British professional man—conceal a quite powerful personality.

Despite his true modesty, Bill Carter will, under pressure, admit that he has a facility for saying what he believes in such a way that it is accepted. What does he believe? He believes, above all, in standards. He loves to quote from the rules for the conduct of life published in the city of London in the Middle Ages for the direction of the members of the City Guild and Livery Companies (and he is himself a member of one such Company). "Remember that you are a

Christian," states Rule 35, (and for "Christian" read "Rotarian," he suggests), "and neither be ashamed nor afraid to speak and act like one upon all occasions. Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. Neither affecting to be thought a saint nor dreading to be deemed a hypocrite by any man for so doing."

Here is a man who, but for Rotary, might now be looking forward to a leisurely retirement, with the chance to read more, with more time to stand and stare. He has been called by Rotary, and when Bill Carter hears a call he listens carefully; and if he feels it is right and proper so to do, he answers it. He is answering Rotary's call, and his friends (literally in their thousands) are sure that he will answer it superbly well. Beside him will be his wife, Olive—a companion of great humor and charm, fun to be with, and one whom Bill himself described to the Rotarians and ladies at the R.I.B.I. Conference at Bournemouth in 1972 as "an ally of incomparable ability in human relationships."

We in Great Britain and Ireland, who have had the luck to have known him best also know that this good, friendly, and honest person, this very nice man, will in the next year walk among kings and commoners—and Rotarians—in many corners of the world. Bill Carter will serve them to the best of his great ability. It will be a year which will add lustre to his high office and to Rotary. We may not deserve it, but we in his own country will bask a little in the reflected glory. Destiny has done well. ☺

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