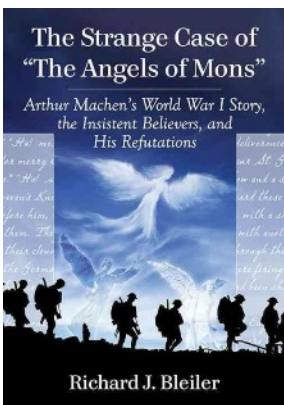


Charles Conway Plumbe



Charles Conway Plumbe (1881-1962)



A poem called *The Angels of Mons* made its first appearance in the magazine *Punch* on 6 October 1915. In his book, *The Strange Case of 'The Angels of Mons'* published 100 years later, Richard Bleiler says the poem "was published anonymously, but *Punch* published its own indexes, and these

reveal that its author was C. Conway Plumbe, but thereafter, the trail becomes faint and confusing. The C. is probably Charles. He contributed verse to *Punch* indicating that he might have been Canadian, but other verse indicates he may have been English. He was

probably the artist of this name whose paintings were displayed at the Royal Academy in 1927, but might he also have been the civil engineer who in 1949 published *Factory Well-Being* and in 1953 the *Factory Health Safety and Welfare Encyclopaedia*? Was this also the person who in 1950 published the philosophical treatise *Release from Time*? It is not inconceivable that a poet painted and earned a living as a civil engineer, but this can be neither proved nor disproved, and these may all be different men having the same name."

Well actually, Richard, it can and has been proved that these were all the works of the same brilliant man. He was Charles Conway Plumbe, the elder son of William Alvey Plumbe and his wife Kate (nee Stidston), whose family had

connections with Totley Rise between 1912 and 1966 (at <http://www.totleyhistorygroup.org.uk/people-of-interest/plumbe-family/>). We mentioned Conway Plumbe only in passing, partly because we were still researching him and partly because he deserves his own special place in the history of our area.

Conway Plumbe was born on 18 April 1881 in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, and named after his maternal grandmother, Catherine Munford Conway (1825-1873). He was educated at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Mansfield and was successful in the University of London Matriculation Examinations in June 1898.

The 1901 Census records that he became an apprentice electrical engineer and was still living with his parents at Linden House, Mansfield. In 1904 Conway graduated from the University of London with an B.Sc. Eng. Honours degree.



Conway Plumbe B.Sc. Eng. graduation photograph, 1904

Conway joined the Civil Service working for the Home Office. We believe his first position as a factory inspector was in Galway, where he was still training with examinations still to take. After qualifying, he was appointed an H.M. Inspector of Factories on 23 July 1908. On 21 October the same year Conway married Lilian Emily Mary Lynham (known as Queenie), in Galway, Ireland.

Queenie had been born at Wood Quay, County Galway on 16 May 1884, the daughter of John Isaac Lynham, an M.D. and Professor of Medicine and his wife Rebecca Margaret (nee Reed). From the 1901 Ireland Census it appears that Queenie was educated at a boarding school in Carrickfergus in Antrim, Northern Ireland.

It is possible that the couple met through their mothers' shared interest in the Women's Temperance movement. On behalf of the English Women's Total Abstinence Society, Kate Plumbe gave an address to the Irish Women's Temperance Union annual conference in Athlone in May 1907 at which both Rebecca Lynham and her daughter were delegates.

The couple made their home in Hendon, Middlesex, and their first child, William John Conway Plumbe (known as John or Jack), was born on 17 March 1910. Soon after, however, the family were to move to Sheffield as the local newspapers report a number of court cases and inquests that Conway attended in his capacity as a factory inspector during the summer of 1912. A daughter, Therle Marguerite Conway Plumbe was born on 3 July 1913 at Airlie, 22 Busheywood Road where the family lived until at least 1923 but they had moved to Barna, 2 Brinkburn Vale Road by 1925.

It was whilst living in Totley Rise that many of Conway's creative works were undertaken. As we have noted already he had verses published anonymously in *Punch*, including *The Sherwood Foresters* which was used in 1917 as the introduction of a bound collection of paintings of Old Mansfield by Albert Sorby Buxton (1867-1932) that was presented to the Duchess of Portland.

In May 1926 Conway Plumbe had a painting called *The Broad West Riding* accepted by the Royal Academy. It was of rolling country near Doncaster in which the huge steel masts of an aerial travelling railway feature in the foreground. Later that year, at the Derby Autumn Exhibition, Conway's painting titled *Sherwood Birklands* was described as a "pleasing landscape of young birches in Sherwood Forest on a day of grey delicate mist"

In May 1927 Conway had two further paintings accepted by the Royal Academy, although in reporting Conway's success the art critic of the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* said that they were not as good as the painting he submitted the previous year. These paintings were called *A West Riding Valley* and *The Coming and the Going*. The *Yorkshire Post* described the latter



"To The Greenwood, Follow Me" [photo taken through glass]

as "ghostly and chilly in effect, perhaps intentionally". *Nature* Magazine described it as "a fine picture of crepuscular rays with layers of cloud... quite a good subject for a meteorological lecture."

The same work also appeared at The Sheffield Society of Arts Exhibition in November 1927 and was described thus: "It is a country scene; a receding flood stream occupies the centre of the canvas; apple-blossom is seen in the foreground; trees with leaves turning brown are at the side; and the sun, apparently setting, is in the background. A charming study but what is Coming and what is Going?" Another of Conway's paintings, *Yorkshire Clay Pit* was described as "a bizarre picture, the colouring being open to criticism from several points of view." The same exhibition had a painting by Queenie Plumbe, described as "undoubtedly one of the most striking on view. It shows a girl standing by a pool in the moonlight. Above her is a planet which is so reflected into the cool water, that the girl appears to be grasping it in her hand."



Landscape painting dated 1934

By the end of 1928 the Plumbe Family had moved home to Sevenoaks in Kent, presumably as a result of an advancement in Conway's career. He had been born a Congregationalist and he became closely associated with the local Congregational Church and with the Fellowship of Youth for whom he contributed talks and even wrote a mock trial called *No Gratuities*, the performance of which was very well received. At one talk to the Fellowship in November 1936 he warned his audience about Communism and Fascism which, he said, had inflamed the youth of Germany and Italy to the point of becoming religions though not as we understood the meaning of the word in Christian Britain. Conway and Queenie also supported the Sevenoaks Arts and Crafts Society, exhibiting their paintings at its annual exhibitions.

They were still living at Windy Ways, Grassy Lane, Sevenoaks by the time of the 1939 National Register when Conway's occupation was described as Deputy Superintending Inspector of Factories. Their daughter Therle was still living with her parents having become a freelance journalist.



Seascape painting by Conway Plumbe

Son John, however, was living in Chellaston, Derbyshire, having followed his father's line of work. Having graduated from Imperial College, London, he became a member of the Institute of Mechanical Engineering on 17 February 1933 and was appointed an H.M. Inspector of Factories on 21 December 1934. John had married Margaret Irene Louise Paine, the youngest daughter of Arthur Edward Paine, a master tailor and his wife Myra (nee Young) at St. Nicholas Parish Church, Sevenoaks, on 23 April 1938 and they had one infant child, Ann. A second daughter, Elizabeth, was born in 1942.

During peace-time, the Factory Department had been under the jurisdiction of the Home Office

but at the start of the war it was brought under the Ministry of Labour and Conway Plumbe was attached to the Central Office of the Ministry. He began a series of lectures around the country on aspects of working conditions in factories. At a talk given to the Industrial Welfare Society's course in Nottingham in May 1942, Conway revealed that since his daughter had become a welfare superintendent at a large Lancashire factory, he had learned far more than he had been able to discover for himself. Conditions had changed enormously since he joined the Factory Department and the aim now, he said, was to get factories not far removed from the home in matters of heating, lighting, ventilation, sanitation and general comfort. Stating that the Factories Acts required a minimum of 400 cubic feet of space per person, he added, amid laughter, that according to their standards the ordinary railway compartment was overcrowded with one person in it. Clearly, Conway had learned a thing or two since his early days as a factory inspector in Yorkshire when he had been criticised on several occasions by magistrates for pursuing cases where there was purely a technical breach of the regulations.



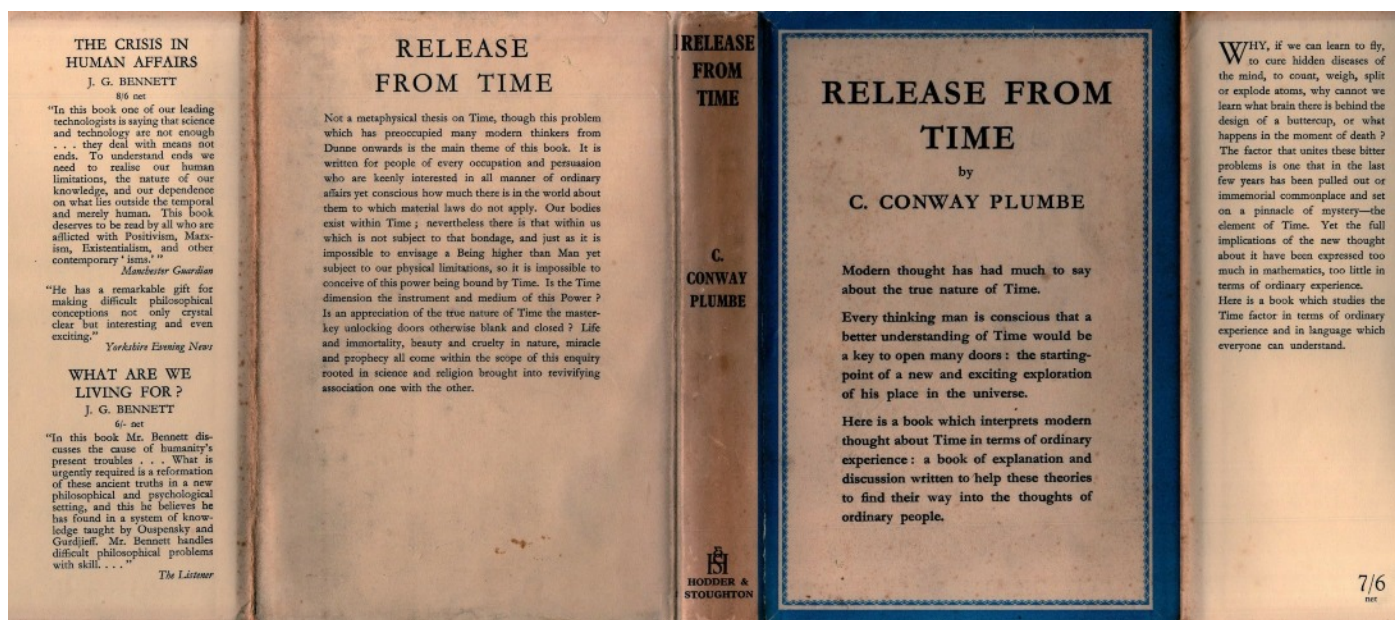
Charles Conway Plumbe

In 1944 Conway Plumbe gave three talks that were broadcast by the BBC Home Service on successive Sunday evenings under the series title of *Our Concern*. Unfortunately the broadcasts are thought to no longer exist but the Radio Times entries do. We believe that the first talk on 27 February, which was called *Your Obedient Servant*, was about the work of H.M. Factory Inspectors. The second talk broadcast on 5 March was called *Out of Shadow* and it dealt with lighting and colour in factories. There was no reason, Conway said, why a factory should be a dull place and intelligent use of colour had been proven to reduce accidents. The third talk was on 12 March and was called *The Machine is the Slave*. In it Conway reminded his audience that too many factories had been built merely to house machines, their owners being forgetful of the fact that humans had to operate those machines.

In January 1946, in one of the last talks he gave before his retirement, Conway Plumbe told an audience in Bristol that factory accidents occurred at the rate of one every one and a half minutes and that out of a total of 280,000 accidents a year, one thousand were fatal. "Only about 15 per cent of these accidents happen at machines," he said. "The remaining 85 per cent happen because someone does any one of a thousand foolish things." It was these "non-machine accidents" that he thought could be significantly reduced. The attitude of many people that "accidents will happen" was a very wrong one and they must endeavour to be more alert and imaginative in accident prevention.

Factory Well-Being was published by Seven Oaks Press Ltd. in 1949. It contained 126 pages, with illustrations, and was sufficiently short and simply written to be read by foremen and shop stewards as well as by factory owners and those who needed to know about the Factories Acts. The book surveys all the influences that go to make the factory a place for human occupation.

Conway had learned that as well as adhering to the requirements of the Factories Acts and their regulations, there were other intangible elements that were very important for the well-being of factory workers. He referred to the "works atmosphere" and believed that sound technical experts - safety officers and medical officers - were more effective when there was also a driving force from the whole community of workers, managers and owners operating through a democratically organised health and safety committee. Democracy in industry he thought was the key to good human relations.



A second book aimed at professionals, *Factory Health, Safety and Welfare Encyclopaedia* was published by The National Trade Press Ltd. in 1953 containing 328 pages. Many of Conway Plumbe's ideas found their way immediately into the publications of the Institute of Personnel Management.

With his place in the annals of workplace health and safety assured, perhaps Conway now felt he could turn his literary skills to other matters closer to his heart. In June 1950 *Release From Time*, a philosophical-spiritual work was published by Hodder & Stoughton. The book was dedicated to Queenie and any royalties were to be divided equally between the London Missionary Society and the Student Christian Movement.

Time was beginning to be studied by mathematicians but Conway's work was intended for the layman and based upon ordinary experiences. He described a universe in which all matter, "natural laws", the three conventional dimensions (length, breadth and height), space and time itself had to have been created by a godlike intelligence. He concluded that the creator must exist outside of time and space and not be bound within them. This creator sees the past, present and future all in one and not as an ongoing sequence of events.

Conway did not try to further justify the existence of the creator but instead he attempted to explain how time-bound events like life, suffering, death, evolution, fate, prayer, miracle and prophecy all fit within this universe. Once the time element is disregarded, the three phases of a man's life (before birth, visible life

on earth and after death) are part of a whole, a life immortal. Memories are carried forward from visible life into spiritual life after death. Eternity becomes a state without time, rather than time moving on forever in chronological progression. Conway considers evil and gives an analogy with disease. Coming so soon after WW2 he uses the example of Nazism which he describes as "the symptom of a communicable soul disease."

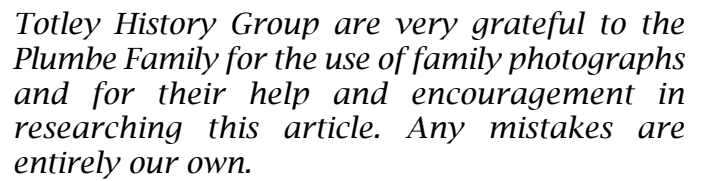
Release From Time appears to have been well received by reviewers, being mentioned in connection with two books by the mathematician and industrialist, John Godolphin Bennett, that had been published a few years earlier. The two men may well have known each other; Bennett was chairman of the British Standards Institute at the time and they shared the same publishers.

Queenie Plumbe died on 8 December 1960, at the age of 76, in Hythe Nursing Home, Kent. The Probate Register shows that she had been living at Crossways, Littlestone-on-Sea beforehand. Charles Conway Plumbe died on 16 April 1962, then aged 80, at the same nursing home. He had previously been living at Fairlight House, 27 Fairlight Road, Hythe.

Therle Plumbe had married George Bernard Hughes at Grappenhall, Cheshire in 1941. Bernard was born in Wolverhampton, Staffordshire on 30 August 1895, the son of Charles Bernard Hughes, a ship's tackle manufacturer and his wife Lydia (nee Shepherd). Bernard had volunteered for active service in World War I, enlisting in Manchester on 18 February 1916. He served with 1st Royal Marine

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