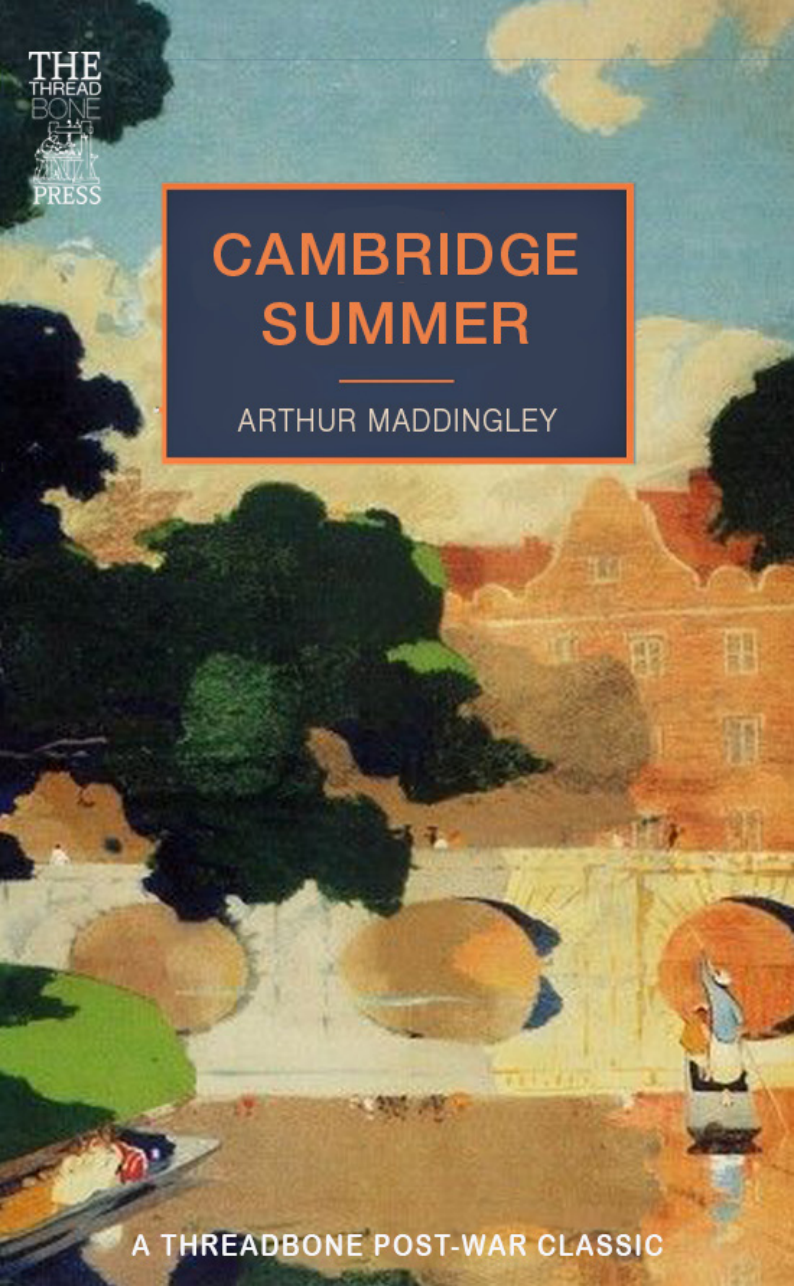




THE
THREAD
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PRESS

CAMBRIDGE SUMMER

ARTHUR MADDINGLEY



A THREADBONE POST-WAR CLASSIC

About the Author:

Arthur Maddingley is the *nom de plume* of Cambridge academic Eric Histon. A distinguished culinary bio-ethicist he was a pupil of Cambridge luminary Dr Kenwood Chefe, though his later career was eclipsed by that of rising star Professor Brian Thrupiece. Maddingley published several works of fiction. *Cambridge Summer* was his best known. It was described by author Henrietta Regatta-Priestly as “*a perfect portrait of a now lost world: both a childhood idyll and a deeply provocative work of almost Freudian insight*”.

Threadbone Post War Classics is a series of reprints designed to bring before the public novels of note which, having never made it into the canon, have disappeared from view. The series is curated by Mrs Amanda J Threadbone.

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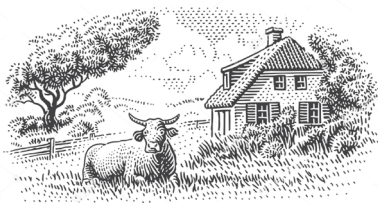
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Cambridge Summer

Arthur Maddingley



INTRODUCTION

It gives me enormous pleasure to introduce to an ignorant public this fine novel from 1947 from the pen of one of our greatest and most underrated novelists. Arthur Maddingley [or Eric Histon as he was known to the scientific world] was a man of great learning and singular insight. An early culinary bio-ethicist, he might have been better known than he was in his chosen sphere were it not for the stellar career of his younger contemporary Professor Brian Thrupiece. He was not alone in finding himself in the shade of an unquestionably greater genius. Whilst some, thus situated, turn to destructive paths, Arthur found both solace and reward in writing novels - works often based on his own childhood experience and drawing upon the rich background of a University city and its environs in the immediate post-War period.

Who, having encountered them, will ever forget the feckless Becky Dalrymple, the artful Peg Tillerton or the endearing Bob Snosbeg? None of these characters will you find in *Cambridge Summer*, a novel which grounds itself instead in the deeper - and sometimes darker - terrain of adult deceit and childhood memory.

It is good to be reminded of what a fine craftsman Arthur was. Prepare to be delighted, surprised and perhaps disturbed.

CHAPTER 1

*Departure - A journey - Observations of my fellow passengers-
Exaltation upon the contemplation of arrival.*

Little did I know, as I waved tearfully towards my mother as she stood motionless on Platform 15 of Alton St Pancras's St Pancras Station, that the pullman express which even now was bearing me toward London and thence to my Aunt's house in Cambridge, would change my life forever.

With dawning apprehension, I clutched at the small reinforced cardboard suitcase which my mother had packed with painstaking care over the previous few days. In it was everything a young boy would need for an extended summer visit - white vests and navy-blue knickers (both of my siblings were girls), a knitted tie, a bright chequered scarf and nearly new dancing pumps - "*a complete survival kit*" my mother had said; or "*Knife, fork and cork*" as my "Uncle Harold had inexplicably preferred to describe it. I felt a knot of anxiety in my stomach and glanced

cautiously at my fellow passengers - a kindly old man busily completing the complex ritual of cleaning his pipe before clamping its well-worn stem between browning teeth in a rictus grin; a younger woman who, having examined her face minutely, returned her compact mirror to her capacious handbag, seemingly satisfied that all was in order, and a rustic soul of uncertain age who clutched to his person a medium-sized ferret-cage in which a lively animal still struggled to settle.

The steady rhythms of the locomotive as it sped through the increasingly unfamiliar landscape encouraged an uncharacteristic introspection; each of us drawn deeply into the world of our own thoughts and imaginations.

The decision to send me to Aunt Iphigenia's home for the summer had surely been a hasty one. It had followed, it now seemed to me, quite soon after the telephone call which father had taken in his study but three days before. He had seemed thoughtful when he returned to the sitting room, though no more so than my mother on whose beautiful yet no longer youthful features anxiety was etched like an ancient lithograph. Despite my tender years, I had heard many a party guest complementing my father on his wife's good looks, fine figure and sociable nature, though naturally - since she was, as far as I

knew, my mother - such comments had made little impact on my nine year old mind. I thought of her simply as mother - the woman who had given me succour as a child, had occasionally joined nanny, my sisters and me for afternoon tea and who even now seemed to me the epitome of steadfast, upright, middle class, Church-going, middle-England Toryism. She kept, I knew, a photograph of Winston Churchill in her purse and was obviously the kind of woman of whom both husband and son would be equally proud. Of equitable disposition, sweet temperament and unquestionably fine judgement she was rarely given to spontaneous acts. And yet my departure from home had resulted from a sudden and recent impulse. What I wondered might have prompted so capricious an act and were there events in train of far greater moment than I could yet fully comprehend?

Such thoughts were temporarily banished as the train slowed in preparation for a stop to take on water for its onward journey. I glanced at the older gentleman who, having loosed the top button of his heavy overcoat, now revealed himself to be a man of the cloth - his telltale fraying dog collar sticking to his dampened throat in the overheated and decidedly airless carriage. Proper reserve had prevented any of my fellow passengers from suggesting that the carriage window might be opened and it would have

been absurdly presumptuous of me to do so. In this and other respects my mother had instilled in me a fierce and demanding self-discipline. I was either to be seen and not heard or, when father was at home, to aspire towards that perfect state of inaudible invisibility. Instead we sweltered, each pretending in their different ways that the discomfort was unnoticeable to them.

“*Do you mind if I smoke?*”, asked the younger woman, extracting a cigarette from a silver case, inserting it into an elegant holder and placing it between carmine lips before lighting it in single deft balletic movement. Whether it was this strangely charged action or her self-evidently well-filled blouse, I could not say, but I was suddenly reminded of mother and my spirits, which had been uplifted by the prospect of the arrival of the tea trolley, sank once more. “*Not at all madam*”, offered the clergyman from behind the thick and somewhat acrid cloud of smoke emanating from his now well-lit pipe. Clergymen I had once been told do not leer. I had suggested to my mother that they might after Sunday School some years ago when I caught the Reverend Dicken lingering overlong at the sight of the seams on Mrs Hayborne’s stockings. Yet I was quite sure something very like a leer had appeared on the face of the overheated vicar as he confirmed his assent.

As though in some strangely choreographed scene, it was now the turn of the rustic gentleman to take to the stage. Spreading his legs a little wider and plunging his hand into his rough-knit trousers, he produced and then unfolded an ancient napkin to reveal a generous slice of well-matured cheese. Then, the other occupants of the carriage having declined - politely and with little difficulty - his invitation to share it, he proceeded to thread the cheese through the grating of the cage to the evident delight of the ferret, the strong scent of which competed with that of the over-ripe comestible it now commenced to nibble with ferocious intent. Never was I more grateful for the heady reek of Old Shag.

Desultory conversation followed - words of as little consequence to me as the featureless fields through which we travelled - as the train and the curious little world it contained cranked into gear, gained speed and once again headed for the city.

My Aunt Iphigenia - whom I had met only once at my christening and hence knew hardly at all - lived, I had been told, on the outskirts of the great university city of Cambridge. She had been married to a fellow of Alma Mater College and so naturally had no children or social life of her own. Her husband, a man of intellect, too learned to bear easily the disfiguring appetites of

ordinary men - had died some years previously in an unexplained laboratory accident. He had been engaged on important research in collaboration with a distinguished Professor though on precisely what he had been experimenting at the time of his demise was as unknown to me as was the theological disposition of the London-bound clergyman whose elasticated sock suspenders now assaulted my eye and captured my horrified and unwilling attention in equal measure. Of course I had seen my mother's rather more generous and alluring suspenders many times as she dressed in preparation for some social event or other and I hoped, of course, to see my aunt's in due course; but the idea that a man - and, worse, a man of the cloth - would wear smaller versions around his ankles seemed to me both astonishing and vainglorious. It was a mark no doubt of my naivety and, had I the prescience to realise it, a measure of how far my sensibilities would be stretched in the coming weeks and months.

Lest I mislead in what follows, honesty compels me to say that I was regarded by those of my contemporaries who regarded me at all as an odd sort of fish. At school I was studious, well-mannered and ever eager to please; qualities not calculated to make me a popular companion to the rougher boys whose status was confirmed either by sporting achievement or a willingness to incur

the wrath of the authorities through acts of petty insubordination. My teacher Miss Frimp in whose eyes I could do little wrong, protected me from all unpleasantness by inventing small tasks which I could undertake during breaks and at the end of school. I was forever grateful to her for her solicitous concern witnessed in countless acts of gentle kindness. Once I recall, after some slight or minor *contretemps* had quite discomposed me, she had placed her delicate hands around my face, wiped away an errant tear and had kissed me gently on the forehead - an act as innocent as it was, to me, confounding. Only after she had left the room had I admitted to myself an alien and quite unexpected stirring, questioned its febrile effect and registered for later contemplation the powerful emotion occasioned by her strange yet welcome *tendresse*. Even now, long after adulthood has laid its palsied hand upon my developing mind, I cannot help but remember Miss Frimp, her heady perfume and the motes of chalk dust hanging in the dusty schoolroom air, whenever I lie with a woman or hear “*An apple for the teacher*” borne on the popular stations of the wireless waves.

By now we were approaching London and my thoughts turned, naturally, to the efforts I would have to make if I was to effect a successful transfer to the Cambridge train. I had in my pocket three shillings. Enough I had been assured to pay both

for a cab from Paddington to King's Cross and for porters at both stations to assist me - provided, of course, that I obeyed my father's solemn advice not to squander more than a shilling at any of the station buffets. My Aunt, I was assured, would be waiting for me once I disembarked at Cambridge, recognisable by her stout umbrella, trilby hat and absurdly bowed legs. From thence it would be but a short ride to her home which lay close to the grounds of the University Farm on the outskirts of the city.

I pictured it now - an idyllic and probably somewhat ramshackle affair complete with many rooms (several locked I hoped), winding corridors, mysterious closets and a secret garden. Just the sort of place in which a solitary but imaginative nine-year-old could find adventure. My Aunt would, of course, be unfailingly kind and would employ a cook whose only pleasure in life was to fashion splendid teas for hungry young boys. And there would be a handyman too; a cheerful chap well-skilled in the art of fashioning boats and cars and aeroplanes from boxes and spare timber, ever ready to make real what had existed hitherto only in my childish imagination. The summer would be as endless as the open sky, the sun as constant as my mother's love.

Cocooned in such thoughts and as carefree as I had ever felt - even my misgivings over the suddenness of my departure temporarily put aside - I prepared to bid farewell to my fellow travellers and clutched eagerly at the handle of my suitcase ready to hoist it from my lap as soon as the locomotive halted. Over the public address I heard a disembodied voice: “*The train now arriving at Platform 6 is the 8.15 from Alton St Pancras*”. Surely all adventures began this way. I was in a world where everything was possible and nothing could go wrong.

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'Cocooned in such thoughts and as carefree as I had ever felt ... I prepared to bid farewell to my fellow travellers and clutched eagerly at the handle of my suitcase ready to hoist it from my lap... I was in a world where everything was possible and nothing could go wrong.'

Cambridge in the idyllic days of 1947. A long hot summer, a child freed from the confines of a Dorset upbringing, a boy ready to explore the countryside and his own free spirit. Looking for answers to questions he did not himself know how to formulate, only chance encounters and the singular intervention of a mysterious stranger can bring to a close a summer of discovery and betrayal.

This evocative and sensitive portrayal of a world now lost is a classic of the golden age of post-war fiction

ARTHUR MADDINGLEY (1918-1966) was a Cambridge-born author of more than three works. He lived and worked in the city and was, under his real name (Eric Histon), a Culinary Bio-ethical scientist of no little distinction.

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