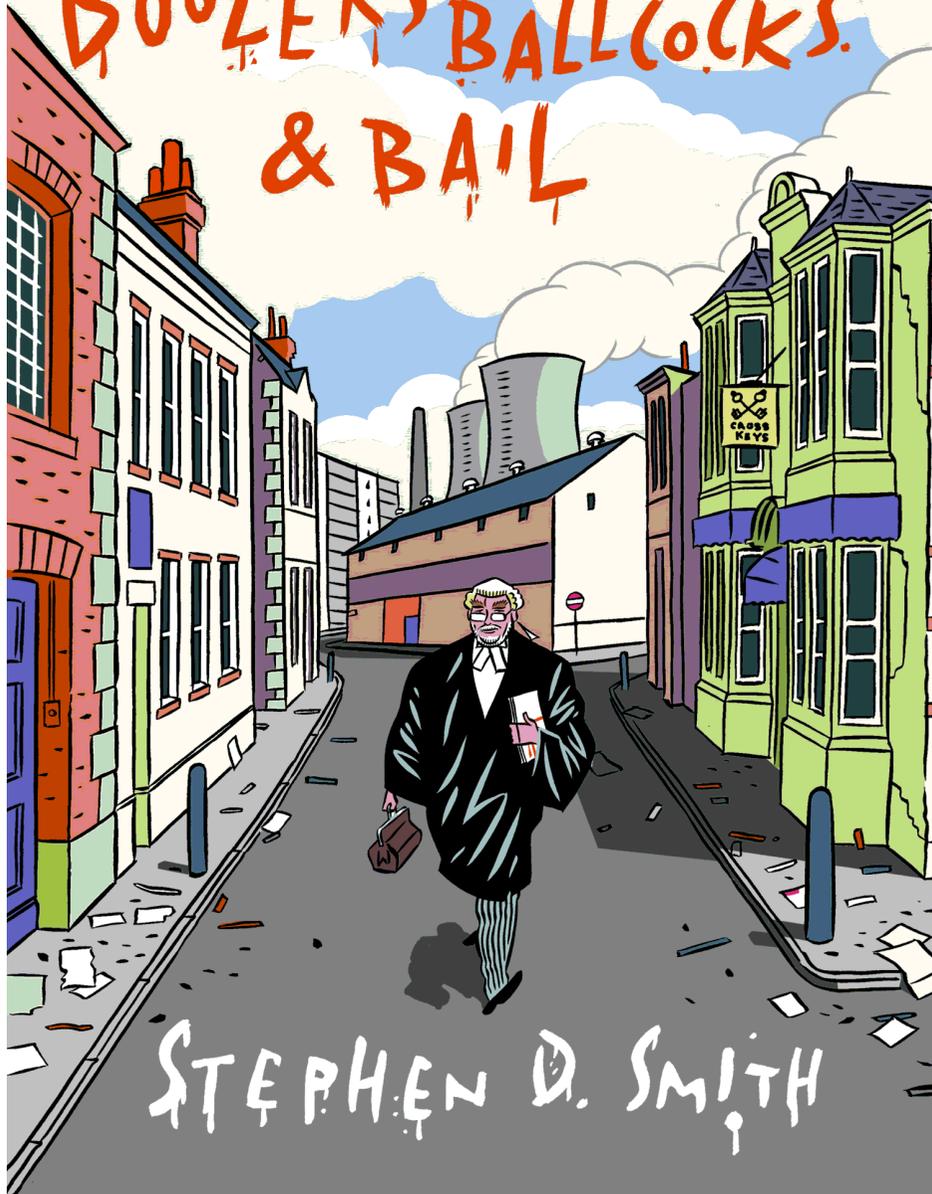


'Guaranteed to lift your spirits and make you  
laugh out loud' **Gervase Phinn**

# BOOZERS & BALLCOCKS & BAIL



# CONTENTS

Foreword	ix
Preface	xi
Acknowledgements	xii
Chapter 1 Albert and a Load of Ballcocks	1
Chapter 2 The Day the Banker Came to Call	9
Chapter 3 Bodger Goes for Bust and Then Tragedy Comes to Call	18
Chapter 4 Corgi 1 – Yobs 0	30
Chapter 5 Irish Jokes, Sick Notes and Medicals	39
Chapter 6 An OAP Gets Ripped Off, So They Try to Take his Home	44
Chapter 7 Albert Strikes Again	51
Chapter 8 I Dress Up and the OAP Gets His Own Back	63
Chapter 9 I Find the Lake District and Spider Finds Drugs	73
Chapter 10 Am I Heading the Right Way for the Psychiatric Hospital?	84

Chapter 11	I Miss the Christmas Party Because Jimmy Shot his Wife	90
Chapter 12	Money Isn't Everything – Is It?	99
Chapter 13	Cigar, Anyone?	109
Chapter 14	Who Wants a Will Anyway, and the Return of Sam	119
Chapter 15	I Find a Cherokee Indian in Belfast	127
Chapter 16	Chimp Chaos and Mrs Mott's Kids	140
Chapter 17	She May Be Ugly, But Jane Can't Half Feight	155
Chapter 18	Jane's Trial and the Case of the False Leg	169
Chapter 19	As Far as I'm Concerned I'm the Earl of Scarborough	177
Chapter 20	Goodbye Moorgate Street, Hello Vicarage Lane	189

# ONE

## ALBERT AND A LOAD OF BALLCOCKS

The day we opened Wilford Smith, my first client was Jack Heptonstall, a likeable rogue with a weakness for other people's property. He had never committed a house burglary or robbed an old person – as he put it, he avoided 'Joe Public' – but scrapyards and commercial properties were fair game for him. Jack also had a flair for driving whilst disqualified, and in all the years he'd been a driver, I don't think he was ever insured. He had nine children, and when I once asked him why so many, he told me that he'd never owned a television. All his children had inherited the huge grin that dominated his face – along with his faults. There are certain clients you can't help liking, and Jack and his family were among them.

Jack, who had come to ask me to represent him in the Rotherham Magistrates' Court the following day, had brought along his youngest son, about seven years old. Albert was a spotty little urchin with an appealing, almost angelic, face that belied his nature, as I found out when he picked up a bottle of ink from my desk and spilt it all over my papers. Jack clouted him about the ear, called him a 'twat', and told him to be quiet. Within seconds the lad was checking to see if my plastic telephone would split if propelled with great force against the desk. Another clout ensued, whereupon the little boy shouted, 'Gi' ower!

'Oh, it can speak,' I thought, as he began to pick his nose.

Throughout the visit, he stared at me with an unreadable

## BOOZERS, BALLCOCKS & BAIL

smile. Jack's cup of tea arrived together with a glass of pop for the boy; Albert managed to knock over the tea, which crept along my file under the legal aid application I'd just filled in and into my top left-hand drawer, but significantly didn't waste a drop of pop. The boy was a disaster area. How I kept my temper I don't know, but I was placated to some extent by the continual clouts from his father.

As our meeting was about to finish, I was aghast to see the brat standing on a chair, trying to capture the koi carp in our fish tank. 'Put the bugger back, you little bastard!' shouted his father with annoyance clouting him again.

'Yes, put the bugger back, you little bastard,' I echoed, with even greater annoyance.

'Gi' ower,' said the boy. 'Gi' ower, will tha? That's child abuse!' Jack clouted him again, twice. 'No, *that's* child abuse,' he said.

I got up, took the fish's castle from him and put it back in the tank, at which point one of the fish bit me. My immediate reaction was to pull my arm out of the way, splashing the front of my immaculately ironed white shirt with water and streaks of green algae, which burrowed into the cotton. In a mere forty minutes, one small boy had almost destroyed my brand new office and image.

'Anyway, we'll get off now,' said Jack. 'Come on, son, say good-bye to Steve.'

'Tarra Steve,' said the boy, offering his hand. I shook it, and came into contact with something extremely sticky. The boy had donated me his used chewing gum.

He laughed, then turned to follow his father, who was blissfully unaware of what the little shit had done. 'Well, Albert,' I thought, 'I'll certainly remember you.'

I had worked in the law since 1965, coming to Rotherham in 1971. At night school I qualified as a Fellow of the Institute of Legal Executives, which I used as a springboard to qualify as a solicitor

of the Supreme Court in 1979, and became an assistant solicitor with a local firm. Two years later, I achieved my ambition of opening my own practice.

I joined forces with my friend and colleague Steven Wilford, who would deal with conveyancing, probate and non-contentious matters, and look after the money, while I dealt with the contentious court proceedings. We'd started work at the same firm and got on well, so kept in touch after I left. In 1973 my then employers were looking for someone about my age who worked in land law and conveyancing; I suggested Wilf, and was delighted when they took him on. He's a remarkable character, a gifted lawyer and excellent office manager, who also likes a drink (as do I and most of our friends!) We were a good match, I the extrovert and Wilford the stable one, and despite all the problems and doubts, the scheme was as exciting as anything I had ever been involved in.

By early January 1981 we had acquired the building; we rented the ground floor to a small print shop, and the upper floors were to be shared between Wilford Smith and Co., Solicitors of Rotherham, South Yorkshire, and our friend Michael Jarvis, an accountant, who needed a room because of overcrowding in his own offices. (I met Michael in 1971, when he was working on the books of my then employers, and we hit it off immediately. A ginger-haired, chubby man with an athletic frame – he even played table-tennis for his county – he's easy-going and well and truly 'one of the boys'; the nicest compliment I can pay him is that I've never heard anybody say a bad word about him. He's also an extremely able accountant, who never lets his socialising skills get in the way of his profession!) We would be the town's tenth firm of solicitors, and were due to open in May with a staff of one. The premises were dilapidated, with holes in the roof and a recalcitrant ballcock in the loo that liked to shoot out of the cistern and hit you on the side of the head while simultaneously showering you with water. But it would be our own!

## BOOZERS, BALLCOCKS & BAIL

On my next free evening I took my family to see the premises, probably more of a thrill for me than for them. While my mother, wife and daughter explored, my father set about mending the ballcock. After much effort and some swearing, he sat back on the toilet seat flushed (sorry!) with success. ‘Shouldn’t be a problem now, son,’ he said, pulling the chain to demonstrate. The ballcock promptly hit him on the back of the head as water shot out of the bowl, soaking the seat of his pants. I rocked with laughter, and after a few seconds he joined in. He laughed so much that he began to cough, sweat running down his temples as he held his sides in an attempt to relieve himself of a stitch. For the rest of the evening, as we cleared up and discussed decor, I could hear him chuckling in the background, reliving the incident.

During the following weeks the whole family joined in: my wife Jennifer, father, mother, and six-year-old daughter Rebecca – who once accidentally kicked over a bucket of emulsion, causing my father even greater hilarity when Wilford slipped in it and gave his Levis a magnificent cream patch around his bottom. Their efforts were such that our two rooms were quickly cleaned and beautifully decorated. We got hold of some second-hand furniture from a dealer in Sheffield, and bought two brand-new desks, one for reception (the larger room, where Anne, our one member of staff, would answer the phone, attend to visitors and do her typing), and one for the office Wilford and I would share. Looking back, I suppose it was a bit of a hovel, but to us it was a dream come true.

About a week before we were due to open our brass plate arrived, bearing the names of the firm and the two partners, and I rushed to my parents’ house to show it to my father, who was delighted. The following day, my mate Graham Broom, joiner-cum-builder-cum-entrepreneur, affectionately nicknamed Bodger for his skills, came to fix it outside our office door. Having done so, he asked me to come out and check it. He had mounted it upside

down, and I pretended I hadn't noticed. We had a good laugh, he made the necessary adjustment, and the job was done. It looked immaculate.

I later picked up Jennifer and Rebecca and my parents, and drove the whole family to Rotherham to show them the nameplate. This was one of the most moving moments of my life. My father had always been in awe of the legal profession – the only time he ever went to see a solicitor he wore his best suit, smelling of mothballs – so the fact that his son had achieved his own office gave him immense pleasure. As he looked at my name on the brass plate he wiped away a tear, and to conceal his emotion, brought out a camera to record it. (I later found out he'd forgotten to put a film in it, so all the effort was for nothing).

A day or two later Jarvis moved in his VAT department, consisting of his friend Oscar, a genius at VAT who unfortunately suffered from dreadful flatulence, becoming quite famous in local circles for his ability to break wind almost on demand. He was also extremely keen on draught Guinness, which I am convinced aggravated his problem. He had a room of his own and a share of the toilet, which was at the top of the stairs.

Oscar was the most consistent person I knew in everything he did, not least his ablutions. He had his breakfast and a cigarette at the same time, bought the same paper from the same news-vendor and walked the same route to the same office, each and every day. The downside to this rigid regime was his dreadful problems each morning, not later than 9.45 am, when he took his first major visit to the lavatory. He always took the *Racing News* with him: a keen horse-racing enthusiast, Oscar liked to consider the day's form whilst he sat doing his duty. The area had to be avoided like the plague, and was.

In the last few days before we opened we were busy with the final arrangements. We had to register with the Law Society and legal aid board, as well as informing the local building societies

## BOOZERS, BALLCOCKS & BAIL

and banks of our move, in the hope they might give us some work. Although both of us had been in Rotherham for about ten years and had built up some business relationships, and indeed a clientele on the litigation side, we now had to start bringing in business for Wilford Smith and Co.

As we got nearer the day, all the financial details were put into place. I'd borrowed £2,500 from my parents, and Wilford the same from his mother. Some of it had gone to buy office equipment, and on deposits for the two cars we'd bought. The rest was in the bank as a buffer against wages and day-to-day expenses. We were indeed working on a shoestring.

The grand opening was 13 May 1981, and in the days leading up to it we received a great deal of help from our friends in the business community. Wilford had taken a couple of weeks' holiday, but I was still working out my notice, though most lunchtimes were spent at the new office. One such lunchtime I went to deliver some stationery, and found that Oscar was paying his second visit of the day to the loo. We were aware that he was in there, because the toilet adjoined our office and the walls were thin.

As we finished our business, Oscar finished his. I could have sworn that I heard him cursing, but thought nothing of it. We were leaving our room as he too emerged, rubbing the side of his head.

'Good afternoon, Oscar, any winners today?'

'Oh hello, lads, not today,' he said distractedly, and disappeared into his office.

'Did you see the lump on the side of his head?' Wilford asked.

'Why don't we get a plumber in?' I asked earnestly, and we both burst out laughing. The ballcock had struck again.

I left my old job on Friday 8 May, after ten happy years with the firm, to become a self-employed solicitor in Rotherham. Over the weekend, I rang all my friends with the new number.

When the big day came, with no files, an empty diary, but a lot

of hope, I set off for work bright and early, calling at a local shop for milk – we had agreed that the first week would be my turn for the collection rota. (This was just one example of the decisions self-employed business partners have to make.) On my way I met one of the local prosecutors, Philip Chadwick, walking towards the court. Seeing the bottles in each hand, and knowing that I had left my old job, he shouted to me, ‘That’s a good idea until you get established, a little milk round.’ I laughed. Nothing was going to upset or offend me that day.

At the office, someone had stuck a balloon to our front door, bearing the words ‘Happy Birthday Margaret’. I couldn’t believe Sean Page had been up so early that morning! (Our friend the Honourable Sean Page, insurance broker and all-round good egg, is one of those characters who can brighten any dull occasion with his wit – or more accurately, lunacy.)

I opened up and went in, and soon Wilford appeared, carrying two bottles of Newcastle Brown Ale. I presumed they would be part of our lunch, but I was wrong: they were part of *his* lunch. Anne appeared a few minutes later, carrying a bottle of champagne. ‘What a lovely gesture,’ I said, only to be told that it was to be *her* lunch! We weren’t having that, and opened the bottle there and then.

At 9.00 am the phone started to ring, with calls from well-wishers. We even had some post: one letter confirming that we had been entered onto the legal aid panel, the rest greetings cards. Page’s bore the legend ‘A happy Easter to all of you’.

By 10.00 am the fuss had died down, and all the post been opened. Wilford and I sat across the desk from each other and suddenly faced the realisation that we had nothing to do. Wilford Smith was open for business, but had no business.

‘I know!’ said Wilford. ‘Pass me the screwdriver. There’s one job I can do; that damn ballcock.’

But before he could set about it, the phone rang again. It was a

## **BOOZERS, BALLCOCKS & BAIL**

local estate agent, asking if we were interested in dealing with a house transaction for one of his clients. This was Wilford's department, and he enthusiastically took down the details of our very first job.

'I can see them right now if you want, I'm free at the moment,' he said, and within half an hour our first clients came through the door. I suppose we overdid it, for they not only got an interview with Wilford, but an interview with me and our secretary, plus copious amounts of coffee from a donated percolator that burnt your fingers every time you used it. They went away happily carrying our business cards, a list of our services, our emergency number and a potted history of the firm and its partners. Their transaction was completed in record time, and to our delight, only a few days later they brought in a relative who was also buying a house.

We spent the rest of the morning showing friends round the premises, then at lunchtime went to the Cross Keys and advertised ourselves to all and sundry for an hour and a quarter. By 2.15 pm we were back in the office, and found Jack Heptonstall waiting to see me. Wilford Smith and Co. was up and running.

## TWO

# THE DAY THE BANKER CAME TO CALL

We did extremely well in our first month. We were lucky; all sorts of work arrived from unexpected quarters, and our friends in the business community put a considerable amount our way.

One Monday morning Wilford arrived, very excited because the manager of the local branch of the Halifax Building Society, one of the largest in Rotherham, wanted to call to see how we were getting on. Jack Bower was a very important person, in a position to provide mortgages and put a lot of conveyancing work our way – and even more importantly, at the stroke of a pen he could alter the course of our overdraft! Wilford had met him often, and enjoyed an excellent rapport with him.

Wilf arranged the appointment for noon the following Friday, having confirmed that I would be there too, as I had a very light court that day. We agreed that the office should be in pristine condition, and decided to buy a new coffee-maker and half a dozen china cups and saucers – Oscar had tipped Shergar to win the Derby, and we'd had a successful flutter. Anne was sent out to make the purchases while Wilford managed the office, answered the phone, made the tea and tackled the ballcock, which had broken again.

We had three days to prepare for the visit, but nature was against us. As the weather became very warm, the flutterings in the roof increased with the pigeon population, and we were also plagued by a small yellow beetle-like creature that was everywhere

## **BOOZERS, BALLCOCKS & BAIL**

– in drawers, and on the ceilings, floors and desks. In the uncarpeted areas, they crunched underfoot. The problem was so marked that even Oscar commented on it.

On Wednesday afternoon, Wilford was interviewing a client whose chair was placed directly under the ceiling light when he noticed that the wire from the ceiling to the bulb appeared to be moving. Putting on his glasses, he saw a family of beetles marching down the wire to the lowest point of the bulb whence, lemming-like, they leapt to the floor.

Unfortunately, directly between the light and the floor was Mr Granville Entwhistle, discussing the purchase of his council house.

Wilford watched in agony as the first of the family landed on Granville's shoulder. Others followed; Granville was soon covered in beetles, and Wilford began to feel hot under the collar, in a quandary over what to do. Should he say, 'Please move, Mr Entwhistle, you're infested with beetles from our roof,' or usher him out and hope he'd think he'd acquired his infestation elsewhere? As a man of honour with every care for his clients, he decided to usher him out. He breathed a huge sigh of relief as, watching from the window, Wilford saw Granville disappear, scratching his head and neck frantically.

On Thursday Rentokil came to call, and identified the insects as golden spider beetles, which fed on the waste matter of pigeons. The pigeons' home in the rafters had also been their cemetery, where the infestation had started. We watched in silence as plastic sack after sack was taken away. I still shudder to think of it. The entire roof and floor were sprayed with a golden-spider-beetle deterrent, and we vowed to get the roof repaired before the pigeons returned.

On Friday, we busily prepared for Mr Bower's visit. If he were sufficiently impressed, he would see to it that we were given what was known as 'Solicitor free work', so his visit was very important.

A few seconds before noon, Jack walked into reception, his timing immaculate as always. We welcomed him enthusiastically, poured him a cup of his favourite Darjeeling tea in a brand new bone-china cup, and ushered him into our office. Given that he had a staff of over eighty and offices with all mod cons, he must have wondered what he'd got himself into when he saw our little enterprise. However, he seemed genuinely pleased for us, and was clearly impressed with our attempt to give it a go.

The interview lasted about twenty minutes, and ended with his promise of support for the future. He had no fears about the quality of our work, because Wilford was a brilliant conveyancer and Jack knew it. As we chatted at the top of the stairs, Oscar appeared for his midday visit. 'Excuse me,' he said; Jack moved out of the way, and the toilet door opened. I looked at Wilford.

It wouldn't do to go into graphic details, but suffice it to say that Oscar was on form, and the acoustics added to the agony of the moment. 'It's the VAT inspector,' I told Jack, for want of a better explanation.

'He's got a real problem, that chap,' said Jack as we walked downstairs. We both nodded in agreement.

The following Wednesday morning I set off for the office in pouring rain, the almost black sky illuminated by streaks of lightning. By the time I'd got from the house to the car, my coat was saturated. I had my briefcase and files for the morning, together with my football kit – which should have included two boots, but I realised I'd only brought one. I cursed, rushed back to the house, and found the boot in the passageway. Back in the car, having been soaked again, I found that I had only one football sock. I decided to borrow one from Lidster rather than get soaked again, and drove off.

My interest in football began at school, and continued in adulthood. Wednesday evenings were taken up with matches on

## BOOZERS, BALLCOCKS & BAIL

the all-weather pitch at the Herringthorpe Leisure Centre in Rotherham. It was a 6.00 pm kick-off, and our team included some very good footballers. They weren't all lawyers, because we had to bring in outsiders to bolster the numbers, and one of them, a lad called David Lidster was not only our captain and a very good player, but also the main supplier of kit when I'd forgotten mine.

It was an eventful day, because my best client Jack Heptonstall was before the court that morning to be sentenced for theft of lead and driving whilst disqualified. I parked the car and ran to the office, getting drenched for a third time in the process. I'd just started to go through my letters when I felt water dripping onto my head from the area of the light bulb above me. I rushed to turn off the lights so I wouldn't be electrocuted, and went up to investigate the attic: water was dripping into two areas. We used all the buckets and pans we had, one of them perched rather precariously on my desk.

When Wilford came in, soaking wet and cursing the weather, he saw me peering into the bucket to check the contents. 'You must have had a good night,' he announced.

'It's for a leak, you chuff,' I said irritably.

'Why don't you leak in the toilet like everybody else?' he said. I granted him a smile and he sat down opposite me, gazing at the water dripping from the ceiling. He had been sitting only a matter of seconds before he realised that his chair was also saturated. 'Bloody marvellous. Look at this,' he said, pointing to the wet patch round his backside.

'Must have been a good night last night, then,' I said.

'Oh bugger off,' said Wilford. 'What are we going to do about this?' As I had four cases that morning and had to be at court early, we agreed to get Bodger Broom in to see if he could effect some speedy repairs.

After we'd been through the post, Wilf set about trying to persuade Bodger to get out of bed and answer the phone. He let the

phone ring and ring and ring.

‘Who the bloody hell is that?’ I heard Bodger shout.

Wilf couldn’t resist shouting ‘Wrong number,’ and putting the phone down. I then rang Bodger, pretending to be the registrar at the local crematorium.

‘Who’s booked me in then?’ he said furiously. ‘I tell thee, I’m not dead!’ he shouted, sounding like a man about to die from a stroke. I put the phone down and Wilford then rang him again. By this time, Broomy must have been frothing at the mouth, he was so angry.

He asked Wilford if we’d been messing about, but Wilford denied all knowledge of the other calls, and told him about our roof problem. Broomy said he’d call at lunchtime and bring his hammer. The hammer was probably for Wilford, but as I wouldn’t be in I didn’t really care.

I set off for court and got soaked again. In the little WRVS tearoom was a rather wet and lonely Jack, and for the first time the wide grin was missing. I ordered two teas, and he handed me a pink charge sheet. I read it and realised that Jack had been driving while disqualified again.

‘Oh, Jack,’ I said in disbelief. ‘How on earth could you get another charge while you’re on bail? You know what this means.’

Jack shrugged, and nodded acceptance of the fate that was to befall him.

‘What were you doing?’ I asked him.

‘About ninety-five miles an hour,’ he said, attempting to revitalise the grin. ‘I’d only gone to the chip shop when PC Cawley clocked me.’

PC Cawley had clocked him many times before, and on each occasion Jack had been charged with an offence. ‘He must’ve seen me go into the chip shop and the cheating bastard hid, watched me

## BOOZERS, BALLCOCKS & BAIL

get into the car, and then pulled me up at the bottom of our road. What a snide git he is.'

I found it difficult to sympathise with Jack, as the policeman was only doing his job and Jack had been warned not to do anything illegal while on bail. I was also distraught, because imprisonment was the likely sentence, so all the good work we had done in preparing his case was lost. How could the court sympathise with somebody who had gone out and committed the same crime yet again?

'I'm sorry I've let thee down,' Jack said.

'You haven't, Jack,' I replied. 'It's just that I don't want you to be sent to prison.'

'Don't worry, Steve,' he said. 'Tha'll do tha' best, and if I have to go to prison, well, I reckon I'll get my old job back in the bakery. But I'm a bit worried about Madge and the kids.'

Jack was an absolute delight to act for, because he was realistic, undemanding and, above all, in a funny kind of way a gentleman – a quality sadly lacking in some of the people appearing before court today. I'm afraid the old saying 'Honour amongst thieves' no longer exists, if indeed it ever did.

I was thinking about this when the emphysemic usher called us in. I was glad to get out of the tea-room, which was like the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, with its smell of cigarette smoke and unwashed bodies.

In Court One, I found the Chairman of the Bench was Mr Norcliffe, a very experienced magistrate who wasn't given to sympathy when he believed a defendant had been mocking the system. It was the worst Bench I could have got for Jack's case. In the courts you're always dealing with different personalities, and any one Bench may take a different view of a case from another. Mr Norcliffe had always been courteous to me, but he wasn't afraid to send people down, and consequently was no favourite of defence advocates. I was cursing my luck when Jack was called into court.

‘What is your full name?’ asked Mr Cook, the Clerk to the Justices.

‘Jack Heptonstall, sir,’ said Jack, in the most respectful tone he could muster.

‘And your address and date of birth?’ added Mr Cook.

Jack answered, using the word ‘sir’ at regular intervals. I looked at him and thought how smart he looked, in his dark blue suit, green shirt, red tie and pink pocket handkerchief. I had asked him to attend court dressed up, which in Yorkshire means wearing your best clothes. Jack was dressed up all right, but what as? The tie was so bright you needed dark glasses. It had an anchor on it, and being an old Navy man, Mr Norcliffe asked me which naval squadron it represented.

I said I wasn’t sure, though I knew Jack had never been in the Navy. But Mr Norcliffe looked at his colleagues with a reassuring nod, confiding to them, ‘Yes, Navy man.’

As Mr Cook started to put the charges, Norcliffe’s eyebrows shot up his forehead and he glared piercingly at Jack. I looked at Jack to see if I could work out the object of concentration, and realised that his fly was undone.

Mr Norcliffe stopped the proceedings and had a *sotto voce* conversation with his clerk, who beckoned me over and whispered the problem in my ear. Jack remained blissfully unaware of anything untoward as I asked the court’s leave to take further instructions from my client, then leaned across and whispered in his ear, ‘Your flies are undone.’

Of course I *would* get Jack’s deaf ear, and he asked me to repeat it. I then stood to conceal him from the Bench while he rectified the situation, only to have an embarrassed Jack report that the zip had broken. I suggested he take his jacket off and hold it in a suitable position in front of him. He didn’t seem to favour the idea, but I insisted, and the general aura of the court seemed to force Jack to my will. But when he did so, I saw with horror that he had

## BOOZERS, BALLCOCKS & BAIL

only one sleeve on his shirt. He looked at me, shrugged, and said, 'It got tore, tha knows, dog pulled it off t'line.... When I pulled it, dog pulled back, and t'sleeve came off. It's a big dog, tha knows, strong jaws, it's a bad bastard really.'

The court clerk had had enough, and asked if we could get on with it. He read out the charges, and Jack pleaded guilty. I then found that he was serving a year's suspended sentence he'd forgotten to tell me about. That was the kiss of death as far as Mr Norcliffe was concerned, and Jack got two months' imprisonment, which was a fairly good result taking everything into account.

As they took Jack down the steel staircase to the cells, he winked at me and gave me a thumbs-up: when I saw him afterwards, he thanked me for my efforts and said he'd expected six months. We worked out his release date, which would only be some four to six weeks away, and he said he would look me up on his release and buy me a pint.

'So long as you don't bring Albert,' I said. 'Neither I nor my fish have recovered from his last visit.'

Jack laughed, the huge grin reappearing on his face, and as I left he was talking the warder into making him a cup of tea. Walking back up the staircase, I remembered the tie.

'Jack, there's something I forgot to ask. Let me have a look at your tie.'

He approached me, and I recognised a golden anchor. On closer scrutiny I saw three words printed around it: 'Captain Bird's Eye.'

'Where did you get it, Jack?' I asked.

'Tesco, he replied proudly. 'Twenty-eight vouchers. Aw reet, i'nt it?'

My last case that day concerned a gipsy who was up for stealing electricity. Henry Fordham lived in a caravan pulled by a Transit van. He had been spotted down a dark lane by a police patrol, who

were intrigued to see this caravan amongst a row of street lights which weren't working. The caravan itself was incredibly well lit, and a stereo was working full blast in it. They parked a short distance away and looked inside. Henry was sitting in front of a portable sun-tanning machine, in a yoga position, and his three children were busy playing Space Invaders.

It was clearly impossible to fuel those contraptions with a twelve-volt car battery, and when the police got round to the other side of the caravan they saw a cable reaching from beneath it to the street light. Henry had worked out how to use the street lighting system to power just about every working part of his caravan.

Henry's statement said it was the first time he had ever tried it (although the police's alternative explanation would certainly account for various areas of Sheffield regularly losing their street lights over a lengthy period). The magistrates adjourned for probation reports to be prepared, as they have to if they decide a case is too serious for a fine or conditional discharge, and are looking at a custody or community service sentence. Henry was released on bail, and neither I nor the court has seen him since. The last I heard, Nottingham was having difficulty with its street lights...

I returned to the office with mixed feelings about my day in court, and Anne told me that a lady called Madge was waiting to see me, with a boy who was trying to electrocute the fish in our tank. Madge was Jack's wife, who had been unable to find out which prison he had been sent to and wondered if I could help.

While I phoned the Allocation Centre, Albert watched me with his disconcerting grin. I avoided mentioning Jack's name so as not to upset him: I just said 'Hull' to Madge, and left it at that. But as they left, Albert turned to me and said, 'Hull Prison, eh? Piece of cake. Tarra for now, Steve.'

I shook my head. 'What is he going to be like?' I thought, and set about my dictation.