

MEETING KELVER HARTLEY

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During the course of my doctoral studies, when I was deeply immersed in the life and works of Oscar Wilde, Grahame Jones had the idea that we should have lunch with Professor Kelper Hartley, an eminent scholar in this field, but a recluse. He knew that it would require considerable premeditation and delicacy of manoeuvre, but that it might just conceivably work.

His plan of campaign was to meet Professor Hartley under the big clock at Sydney's Central Station, which was their usual venue, but to turn up with me unannounced. He was well aware that he was literally his former Professor's only remaining social contact, that his attempts to vary the format of their short and infrequent encounters had never succeeded, let alone repeated invitations to visit UNE, which Grahame would have cherished but knew were entirely out of the question. Hence the cloak-and-dagger routine on this particular occasion.

"The worst the old dog can do is to bolt when he sees you", he whispered to me, as we approached, not without some trepidation, the timid old man, whose neglected appearance belied his immense personal and intellectual wealth. To our great delight, he stayed with us, recounting quietly over lunch how he had taken afternoon tea with André Gide and dinner with Lord Alfred Douglas ("it was like dining with Cleopatra") and answering the many questions I had meticulously prepared but feared would not be answered. Suddenly, Grahame wondered how long Oscar Wilde had lived. "He died at the age of 46" was the immediate response. "Then at least I outlived *him*", Grahame declared triumphantly.

The silence which ensued was our cue to adjourn and sit in the sun for a little while longer before Professor Hartley rose to walk back to his one-room dwelling in Glebe. Meanwhile, I walked with Grahame to the Medical Centre where he was to receive further treatment that afternoon. In less than a year, I was the only survivor of that unforgettable social occasion.

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