



## The Mystery of "Paul Feakes"



For those OEs of a certain vintage you'll probably remember that short stories used to be common features in both daily and evening newspapers. Between the 1930s-80 one of London's best known evening newspapers was the Evening News (gone since 1980 - it was the sister paper of the Daily Mail) - in those days it regularly featured short stories. Around 400 of these stories were written by a writer called Paul Feakes, he was very popular and well known. However, Feakes was a pseudo-name, and until his death his real identity was never uncovered... In the 90s a book compiling the best of his stories was published, but it still didn't give away his real name.... The only clue was that it was edited by two women with the last name "Payne". Researchers guessed that they might have been his daughters.

In various literary circles, for years, there has been a debate over who Feakes really was? Very recently, I have been contacted by two researchers who reckoned he may have been an OE.... The only facts that they knew for definite was that he was born in 1898, his father was a policeman, and he went to school just before WW1 - and that he *might* have been called Payne.

Amazingly, I found a Payne in our database born in 1898 and who attended the school 1910-1914 and his father was a police constable! So the Archive helped solve a rather strange literary mystery - William George Payne was Paul Feakes. We even cross referenced his air-force records/dates and that they matched.

The researchers were very excited by this find. We may never know why he kept his identity a secret for so many years? But it might have been because he was a high-ranking merchant banker who wrote short stories in his spare time (hundreds and hundreds of them.) Or it might have been a class thing - a merchant banker writing pulp stories for the working class man on the street, perhaps, wasn't so common!

These are some comments the researcher Morgan Wallace has to say about the mysterious OE:

Paul Feakes (1898- ) The son of a policeman, Feakes was formally educated at Emanuel School in Wandsworth before serving in the Royal Navy during World War I. Although Feakes had a long career in foreign banking, he was a freelance writer from the early 1920s. He lived with his wife and two daughters (one a pianist, the other a journalist) in Southgate, London. Feakes contributed a total of 397 stories to the *Evening News* between 1941 and 1979, making him the author who had more stories published in the newspaper than any other. Although he arrived on

the scene a few years after many of his contemporaries, by the summer of 1942 he had established himself as an *Evening News* regular. However, it should be noted here that in the 1960s the editors of the *Evening News* repeatedly asserted that Feakes had been writing for the paper since 1923. Oddly, the first short story I located under the Feakes by-line appeared in 1941. It is almost certain that the name Paul Feakes was a pseudonym, and one can only surmise that the writer wrote for the paper under another name in earlier years. Whether or not his early work for the newspaper was in the form of articles or stories is open to conjecture. One thing we do know is that Feakes composed many of his stories on the train commuting to and from work in the city, and continued to contribute to the *Evening News* after his retirement in the early 1960s. Feakes' stories appeared in other periodicals such as *John Creasey's Mystery Magazine* ("The Masterpiece," November 1962, and six others in the mid 1960s), *Tit-Bits*, *Weekend*, *The Star*, *The Passing Show*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Lady* and *Stand*. A number of his stories were broadcast on the BBC radio show *Morning Story*. A book collection of his short stories, the aptly titled *But Mostly Laughter* (edited by his two daughters), was published posthumously in 1990. And here we have a clue as to his real name. His daughters signed their introduction to the book as I. and S. Payne. It would seem, therefore, that his surname was almost certainly Payne. But the mystery continues as to what his full real name was and under what by-line his pre-1941 contributions to the *Evening News* appeared. All that aside, it is clear that although he remained relatively unknown in the literary world outside of his work for the *Evening News*, Feakes was a talented writer whose short stories would have been read by tens of thousands of London commuters. Feakes' stories exhibit a briskly competent prose style. Humour plays an important part in his work, with a good deal of his *Evening News* output featuring a selection of series characters. These included the con artist Talking Tommy and the suburban couple Althea and Cecil, whose comic adventures proved popular with readers. His witty and humorous stories were ideal for the *Evening News* short story format, and it's not surprising that his work appeared as frequently as it did for so many years. It should be obvious from the above that I am fascinated by this writer, so if any relatives or friends of the late Paul Feakes read this, then please do get in touch!