

Death Duty

An Inspector Mowgley Mystery

George East

A La Puce Publication
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Death Duty

Published by La Puce Publications

website: www.george-east.net

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ISBN 978-1-908747-05-1

Typesetting and design by Nigel Rice

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e-pub version ISBN 978-1-908747-03-7

mobi-kindle version ISBN 978-1-908747-04-4

About the Author

While trying out a number of life options, George East scraped a living as a private detective, film and TV extra, club bouncer and DJ, demolition worker, brewer's drayman, magazine editor, pickled onion manufacturer, snooker club owner, publican, failed rock god, TV and radio presenter, PR and marketing supremo, seamstress and the world's first and probably only professional bed tester. He gained his knowledge of police procedure and attitudes as a result of a number of arrests for violent behaviour in his extreme youth. In the 1980s, he gained an understanding and liking of plain-clothes policemen while running an inner-city pub which acted as a local (and once as a murder room) for a whole station's-worth of C.I.D. officers. This is the first Inspector Mowgley Mystery in what his publishers trust will be a series almost as long as the list of the author's past endeavours to turn a mainly honest crust.

It's 1999 and the world is on the brink of a new millennium. Detective Inspector Jack Mowgley is on the brink of enforced early retirement. Or worse. Attitudes are changing, and senior officers think people like Mowgley have no part to play in the Modern Police Force. For sure, Jack Mowgley is caught in a time warp with regard to policing policies and procedures, and PC he most definitely ain't. Divorced and dispossessed of his home, we find Mowgley sleeping on a redundant lightship in a scrapyard near the ferryport which is his patch. A colleague arrives to inform her boss about a dramatic event in mid-Channel, and Mowgley applies his own very distinct form of policing to solve an increasingly perplexing case...

The Players

main characters in order of appearance

Detective Inspector Jack Mowgley:

Officer notionally in charge of the city's intercontinental ferryport.

Detective Sergeant Catherine 'Melons' McCarthy:

Mowgley's colleague, conscience, confidante and drinking companion.

George The Dog: A dog.

Detective Sergeant Dickie Quayle:

Able but generally unloved member of Team Mowgley.

Margaret Birchall: The Overboard.

Yvonne McLaughlin: Witness to the overboard incident.

Two-Shits: Ferryport pub landlord.

Mundy The Younger:

Most junior member of Mowgley's team, and son of Mowgley's boss.

Linda Russell: Sister of Margaret Birchall.

Robert Birchall:

City solicitor and husband to Margaret Birchall.

Chief Superintendent Sidney 'Gloria' Mundy:

Mowgley's boss.

Detective Inspector Cyril 'Cyrano' Byng:

Bag-carrier to Chief Superintendent Mundy.

Capitaine Guy Varennes:

French police officer, friend and admirer of Mowgley and his attitude to police procedures.

Dodger Long: Scrapyard owner and Mowgley's landlord.

Eddie Barnes: Influential and dodgy City Councillor.

Offender Profile

Name:	John ('Jack') Mowgley
Rank:	Detective Inspector (just)
D.O.B.:	31.1. 50
Height:	5ft 11 inches
Weight:	16–17 stones (depending)
Body shape:	Lumpy
Distinguishing features:	'ACAB' tattooed on fingers of left hand. Scar on right temple. Frequently broken nose. Right earlobe mislaid
Eyes:	Yes
Teeth:	Mostly
Hair:	Dark, copious and untended
Facial type:	Lived-in (as if by squatters)
Favourite haunt:	Proper pubs
Favourite activity:	Drinking in proper pubs
Favourite drink:	Any cheap lager
Favourite smoke:	Any duty-free rolling tobacco
Favourite food:	Indian/fry-ups

Favourite film star: Paul Newman in *Hombre*

Favourite film: See above

Favourite film theme: 'The Trap'

Favourite music: Country & Western

Favourite song: 'Ring of Fire'

Favourite singer: Johnny Cash

Heroes: Father & mother, Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, Dennis Skinner MP, Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali.

Politics: Left, Right and Centre (depending)

Ideal woman: Modest, demure, caring and companionable, with really big tits

Fact:

A team of police officers with Special Branch connections is based at each UK intercontinental ferryport. Their brief is to investigate all criminal matters taking place within the port and detain British and foreign nationals who have committed crimes and are passing through their patch.

Fiction:

Although based in part on real people, places and events, the characters and events and places featuring in this story are all works of complete fiction.

Dedication:

Thanks are due to the local C.I.D.'s finest during the 80s and 90s, especially Dougie, Floodie, Hoppy, Nick-Nick, Bingabong, Ace, Jock and most of all Big John M for all the inside info. And, of course, the fun we had during all those memorable (or not) drinking sessions.

Talking in tongues

Portsmouth is a treasure trove for anyone wanting to sample a whole range of dialects, slang and other alternative uses and abuses of the Queen's English. We Pomponians talk so funny for a number of reasons. To start with, the city has been a premier Naval port for many centuries and the Royal Navy has a language of its own. Also, generations of naval ratings arriving in Portsmouth from all parts of the British Isles have left their regional linguistic mark. Then there is the picaresque linkage with London, and Portsmouth has long been a popular stop-off point for travelling folk. All these elements have combined to create an often impenetrable argot (even to some locals) which blends rhyming slang, Romany, naval patois and all manner of regional dialects.

I have steered clear of giving full rein to my extensive repertoire of traditional Pompey street-talk in this book, but have included the odd word or expression which might give someone not of my area and upbringing a problem of interpretation. To that end I have included a brief glossary of some of the more esoteric examples of Portsmouth *lingua franca* at the end of the book.

One

The ship circled in the grey waters of the English Channel for almost three hours. The captain, crew and amateur sailors amongst the passengers knew it to be a pointless exercise, but propriety and standing orders required that the search be seen to be thorough and prolonged.

The car ferry had steamed on at fifteen knots for more than ten minutes before the alarm was raised. Even had the searchers been looking in the right place, it would have been near-impossible to spot a small white face amongst the rolling, spume-topped waves. Besides, as captain, crew and sailors amongst the passengers knew, survival time in the English Channel in mid-winter is mercifully short.

It would, they also knew but did not care to say, have been more than a small miracle to have found the woman and taken her alive from the cold, dark sea.

Two

When Melons arrived, Mowgley lay dreaming.

He dreamed often, or thought he did.

Mostly, his dreams seemed to be disjunctive fragments of events and places and people he knew. Taken together they made no sense and nearly always turned out badly. A bit like his waking life, really.

Invariably, the pace and progress of the events and characters streaming through his dreams were completely beyond his control. But now and then, he would know he was dreaming, and if he tried hard enough he could influence the outcome. He could make things happen and get what he wanted and ensure a happy ending. That was certainly not like his waking life.

His head was starting to hurt, so he gave up the struggle, yawned, opened an eye and looked blearily up at his visitor.

“Bugger me,” she said, “what a state.”

Knowing not whether she referred to him, his surroundings or both, he grunted neutrally and wondered yet again why he did not fancy her. Short hair, long legs, big tits, and not a bad face. Perhaps if she wore her old Plod uniform it would help, but he thought not. As far as he knew, policewomen and nurses didn't wear suspender belts and stockings nowadays. With some high-ranking male officers he knew of in the Modern Force, it was a different matter.

When Sergeant Catherine McCarthy had been wished on him, he had suspected it was a plot by those above who considered he did not grace a modern-thinking, inclusive and socially responsive police force. They thought they knew what he thought about women in general and women in the Force in particular, and probably thought he would react to her arrival in one of two ways. Either get pissed and try to get a leg over, or give her a hard time and an excuse to claim mental or sexual harassment, or both. Either outcome would have given them safe grounds for giving him the elbow.

But neither reaction, to their and his surprise, had happened. From the start and in spite of himself, he had liked her. This was mainly because although she was a woman, rarely used her weapons and wiles except on a job - and then usually only when he persuaded her to use them.

At first, she had been so unlike what he expected of a modern woman officer that he had thought she was a dyke. She did not scream, sulk, pout or whinge when she did not get her own way, even when she had the painters in. Most surprisingly for a woman, she even took the blame when she fucked up. Other points in her favour were that she always bought her round, thought in an almost logical pattern most of the time, and, most surprisingly of all for a woman, had a sense of humour and could laugh at herself. Well, sometimes. Best of all, she didn't compete with or try to control him. Or seemed not to. If she did, she was very good at disguising it.

He scratched his belly, yawned and continued to regard his sergeant. People who thought he didn't like women were wrong.

Once while they were both sober enough to exchange fairly coherent sentences, a wise old Super had said Mowgley was not so much a misogynist as a misanthrope. It wasn't that he didn't like women; he didn't like the human race.

After working out if he should feel offended or flattered, Mowgley had thought the judgement a tad harsh. He quite

liked some members of the human race. The reason he didn't like most women was because of the power they had and how casually they often used it. It scared him in the same way he would be scared of a panther, elephant or poisonous snake. It was not the species he objected to, just the harm they could do to him. Perhaps it was true that, as many of his fellow ex-husbands thought, women were born without a conscience, and had been programmed at the start of it all to help them survive in a world where strength and not guile was all. Things had changed since then, which made them even more dangerous.

Mowgley yawned again, stretched and then took a comforting hold on his tackle as he continued to consider why Melons did not appeal to him sexually. In their early days together he had tried to fantasise about her, but it had never worked. From the beginning, she was almost one of the lads. He had never had a sister, but it must be the same sort of thing. For normal people, anyway. He had read somewhere that the average man thought about sex every ten seconds. But how did the surveyors know? Was there proper scientific research, or did they just ask a few blokes to make a note every time they thought about a bunk-up? The trouble with all these claims was that people believed them if it suited their prejudices. Mind you, he did believe that most women rarely thought about sex, and, whatever they said nowadays, they didn't really enjoy it. Well, none of the women he had done it with had enjoyed it, for sure.

Feeling his head hurt again, Mowgley struggled to an upright position and reached instinctively for his tobacco tin.

He had read somewhere that, if you smoked a cigarette within half an hour of waking up in the morning, you were addicted to nicotine. Fucking brilliant. The team of scientists who came up with that one were probably even now conducting an exhaustive research programme to prove that bears shat in woods.

After saying good morning to his posters of Johnny Cash and Muhammad Ali in his Cassius Clay days, he

looked for his clothes while Melons told him about the overboard.

It was their first for nearly two years, she reminded him, and their first ever woman. It all seemed pretty straightforward, but with it being a French boat there would be the usual complications.

“Technically, it’s all down to the Frogs, but they’re more than happy for us to get involved. From their point of view, it’s only a British woman, and not as if it’s one of theirs.”

“Charming.” Mowgley found his right sock hanging from a broken light socket on the starboard bulkhead, then asked: “What about the Coastguard?”

“They told all ships to stop looking after the standard three hours. No point at that time of night and in those conditions, but they had to go through the motions.” She shivered. “Poor woman, what a way to go.”

Inspector Mowgley grunted assent, sniffed at the sock to test its wearability factor, then went in search of its mate. “Any forecasts on the body?”

“Because of where she was when she jumped, their best bet is three days and anywhere between Shoreham and Brighton.”

“Nice surprise for a metal detectorist or dog walker, then.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

Some comfort came with the information that D.S. Quayle had been on board the French ferry, having a jolly while pretending to be tracking the latest acquisition of an enterprising steal-to-order car ring.

For whatever reason he had been on the crossing, his presence on board was good news as all the paperwork would be down to him.

According to Quayle’s call to the office earlier, someone could go ahead and notify the next of kin as there was no possibility of a mix-up this time.

Mowgley harrumphed at what was obviously a little dig, harking back to when he could find nobody else to break the news to a woman that her husband had died following a

heart attack on a crossing to Bilbao. When he arrived and invited himself into the neat apartment on the seafront, he had been careful not to mention that the heart attack had happened while the man was trying to keep up with the demands of his very personal assistant. The young woman had had to ring a friend on her mobile and ask him to call the ferry company so they could tell the boat to send a couple of husky deckhands to enter the cabin and haul the twenty stone corpse off her. As one of the men had enjoyed telling Mowgley and the rest of the office, it was the leg irons, chains and other restraints which were the real problem for the woman. The keys were in the dead man's trousers, and they were in a pile of clothing by the door.

It was not until after Mowgley had told the alleged widow her husband was dead that he saw a wedding photo of a very slim man on top of the television, checked his facts and discovered he was at the wrong address. From then on, he determined never to go on a similar mission after a pub lunch. As he took lunch in the pub most days, the nause-up at least gave him a good excuse for lumbering someone else with the job.

Returning to the present, Mowgley learned there was a witness to the incident. She would be asked to wait at Cherbourg if Mowgley fancied making the trip to speak to the woman while it was all fresh in her mind.

Knowing it had been at least a month since he had been over for booze and baccy supplies, Melons had checked with Eastleigh and there was a plane available, if not exactly standing by. If he wished, she would come too. He might want someone to talk to the French authorities in French and without upsetting them, and she too was running short of fags. Either way he would need to phone Superintendent Mundy to clear the trip.

Mowgley nodded absent-mindedly, then yipped in triumph as he found his left sock.

Shuffling around on one foot he remembered reading that the standard daily test for President Reagan's physical competence had been his ability to put his socks on whilst

standing up. The article hadn't mentioned any sort of mental test.

Properly clad, he lowered his freshly-socked left foot and felt a warm softness where there should have been cold steel decking. He groaned and asked Melons to fetch a butter knife from the galley. It had been a dirty night, but he must persuade the bloody dog to shit outside rather than inside the cabin whatever the weather.

* * *

Outside, oily water washed over the deck of the World War II German submarine. As it was lashed securely to the redundant lightship that was his current home, Mowgley had recently asked Dodger Long about the vessel's disturbing tendency to settle ever lower in the water after rough weather. His old classmate and now landlord had merely shrugged and pointed out that that was what submarines were designed to do. Mowgley had been unsure if the scrapyard owner had meant that submarines were designed to settle in rough conditions, or generally to submerge in any conditions.

While Melons tempted George The Dog out on to the deck with a Kit-Kat, Inspector Mowgley stood at the rail of his temporary home, sighed heavily and looked at his surroundings.

On the foreshore, a rat was investigating the exhaust of the American-made tank with Argentine army markings and a bent barrel. Beyond the waterside scrapyard, a couple of clearly dispirited figures in white coats were trying to persuade an assortment of tatty-looking dogs to run after a bundle of rags. The greyhound track was obviously gearing up for the evening meeting, and most of the dogs - or at least the ones he regularly backed - would need to start running soon if they were to finish by closing time.

Alongside the port basin, the flyover was choking up nicely with early morning traffic. In the middle distance, the cranes and funnels of the ferryport broke the skyline like

rotten teeth. And it was raining.

Mowgley sighed again. "What's it all about, Melons?"

His sergeant walked to where he stood and handed him the neatly folded wrapper of the Kit-Kat.

"What's all what about?"

Mowgley took the wrapper and tossed it over the rail. They watched as it bobbed across the greasy water before coming to rest alongside the jetty, next to a somehow depressingly large condom.

"Here's me," he said, "a senior, experienced and particularly intelligent police officer, dossing on a dead lightship in the shittiest part of what visiting American sailors so justifiably call Shitty City. As we stand at the dawn of a new Millennium, I'm nearly fifty, with piles like a bunch of grapes, toothache, a bad back, a rapacious ex-wife, an old and incontinent dog, a psychotic boss and as much future as that French letter. I thought I was a pretty good copper, but everyone else seems to think I'm a dinosaur who should be put out to grass. If dinosaurs eat grass."

"I think they did," said Melons, then: "It is better to deserve honours and not have them than to have them and not deserve them."

"Who said that?" he asked testily as his roll-up smoked itself in the offshore breeze.

"I just did."

Mowgley tried to hit the condom with his soggy cigarette end and missed. "Har de har. I mean who said it first?"

"Mark Twain."

"Oh," said Mowgley heavily, "that's all right, then. Funny how it's always the people with lots of money and fame who tell us we don't need them and it's not much fun having them anyway."

Melons tried again. "When it's dark enough, you can see the stars."

Her superior looked up at the grey skies. "Not when it's bloody cloudy you can't. Come on, take me away from all this."

Mowgley shivered as he walked down the gangplank and between tall columns of rusting metal objects to where Melons had left her car alongside a trackless half-track troop carrier. His courtesy car from Dodger was not where he thought he had left it the night before. He made a mental note to check with the scrapyards office and find out if the crusher was working again. He had quite liked the hand-painted Ford Fiesta. At least, he thought as they drove towards the motorway, Eastleigh airport and the Cherbourg peninsula, he could always get another one from the same source, and some of Dodger's motors were so old they were coming into fashion as retro rides. Perhaps if he hung around long enough, the same might become true of him and his ideas of proper and effective police work. Or not.

Three

The day was not on the up.

Mowgley had refused the offer of Melons's company and Anglo-Franco diplomatic services, and sent her to tell the overboard's husband it was highly unlikely he would see his wife again. On reflection, his subordinate had had the better deal. He hated flying, and especially in planes with outside toilets.

At this time of day there was no scheduled flight to Cherbourg, so Melons had fixed him up with a charter company which usually took business people with a death wish to Alderney. It was not that the small Channel island was a dangerous place to be, just that the size of the plane did not inspire confidence that it would complete the journey in a head wind of more than a knot or two. He had honestly thought the company rep was joking when she led the handful of passengers past the relatively huge Channel Islands aircraft to a small delivery van with wings. He had known that she was serious when he and the other five people with a desperate reason to be in the Cotentin peninsula that morning were lined up alongside it. This, she said, was so they could be allocated the correct seats to keep the plane in trim.

Without actually poking anyone with a stick or looking at their teeth, the veteran pilot still gave a passable impression of a horse meat butcher on a buying trip as he selected who

would sit where. Mowgley was left to last, then asked cheerfully to take a central position amidships and try and spread himself around a bit.

He did so, and thought the most disconcerting aspect of the journey was to see the pilot not in a proper, sealed-off cabin of his own, but sitting in the front seat like a coach driver.

At least, Mowgley thought as they bumped down the runway, he hadn't come round to collect the tickets and would hopefully not be serving their in-flight drinks.

* * *

Unsurprisingly, it was raining as the plane touched down at Maupertus airfield, but there were no cows on or near the runway. This was always a bonus.

The drive to Cherbourg ferryport went without major incident. This was not the driver's fault, but because the bucketing old Peugeot encountered only three cars on the journey, and all were travelling in roughly the same direction.

Mowgley patted the cabbie's shoulder as they pulled up at the terminal, and then nodded encouragingly to where a stream of British-registered vehicles was rolling off a P&O boat. There were sure to be some confrontational opportunities there, he pointed out, especially if the driver could get in amongst the first-time caravan-towers. His sarcasm was wasted, as he had constructed the dig in his version of French. His idea of the *lingua franca* could usually be decoded by French friends and contacts who were long used to what he did to their language, but never by strangers. In fact, most French people seemed to take a perverse pleasure in pretending not to understand what he said. In this case and apart from a scowl at the lack of a tip, there was no reaction to his jibe but a bemused grunt and Force Five Gallic shrug. Mowgley often wondered what the French made of the sound of a Briton speaking their tongue and why it seemed so painful to them. Neither could he understand why so many British women went weak at the

knees when hearing the Queen's English mangled by a French singer or actor. He never got that sort of response when he made an effort and spoke to French women in their language.

Shouldering his bag, he set off across the small ocean of car park between where the cab driver had dropped him and the entrance to the terminal building. As he turned his collar up against the wind-driven rain, he considered how much shorter the hike would have been had he given the man a tip with the up-front fare.

As he would have expected, the custom post was deserted. This was due to the weather and the onset of the sacred lunch break, so any mass murderers, drug smugglers, illegal immigrants or other general fugitives from justice would be free to enter France without let or hindrance until after the cheese course.

Approaching the concrete and glass creation, he reflected as usual on how a nation with such a reputation for fashion, style and design could breed such crap architects. Replacing a majestic art-deco building which had welcomed American liners in the heady days when only people with lots of money went on cruises, the new terminal had been unveiled a couple of years ago by the head of the *Chambre de Commerce*. Mowgley suspected that as the sole Briton at the function, he had been invited to attend the ceremony not so much out of professional courtesy, but so his French opposite number could show off his posh new offices and superior facilities.

Although the responsibility for being in charge of all matters concerning illegal activity at the ferryport required Inspector rank and Special Branch accreditation, Mowgley warranted not much more than a boxroom as an office and an open-plan area for his colleagues, housed in a tired old building overlooking the docks. The location for Team Mowgley did have its saving graces, though, and one was being not much more than a stagger from his favourite boozier.

Although three million people passed through his

terminal every year and amongst them would be a large number of undesirable, he also got very little assistance or even acknowledgement from the commercial interests at the port. In effect, he was the sheriff of quite a sizeable and potentially troublesome town, but did not seem to be treated with the sort of respect, recognition or rewards accorded to Wyatt Earp. Even his sobriquet of the King of the Ferries was used more in mockery than acknowledgement of his status.

On the day of the official opening of the Cherbourg terminal and after the usual long lunch and speeches by everyone from the mayor to the chef who would be in charge of the filled baguette counter, the architect had explained how the building had been designed to 'echo its environment and usage'. While mentally agreeing that it was a novel idea to build the terminal in the shape of a boat, Mowgley could not help wondering if the structural requirements of building it in the shape of an upturned boat would prove a suitably reassuring symbol for the ferry passengers who would be passing through it.

A few years on and the concrete exterior was already looking grim. Inside it looked, smelled and felt like every other airport or ferry terminal in the fairly developed world. Perhaps this was because anywhere that people had to use on their way to where they wanted to go and could not wait to get away from could not be expected to have much of an atmosphere. At best, the punters hoped they would be processed through with no major delays, hang-ups or contentions. At worst, the most modern and well-appointed airport or ferry terminal could be an open prison for hours.

Today the ambience was especially depressing. The weather and season did not help, and the sprinkling of Britons waiting for the return trip looked like survivors of Dunkirk rather than patrons of a Bargain Winter Breakaway. At the bar, a collection of British lorry drivers were enjoying trying to upset the French staff, while a solitary booze cruiser was being sick on the juke box.

Mowgley sighed, stepped over a pool of vomit and the

drunk, who had by now slid to the floor. The Ferry King looked up and sighed again as he read the new sign above the main entrance: *Welcome to the Gateway to Europe.*

Yeah, right.

