

Smallholder Sid



By Richard Barr

Sid Trades Insults

Continuing the adventures of the Harrowing Times drinking trio – Allotment Holder Alice, Farmer Fred and Smallholder Sid.....

They were once again in the snug at the Cowpat and Fly public house. The harvest was in. Allotment Holder Alice had an excellent radish crop and Farmer Fred did not do too badly in the courgette department.

Alice and Fred were still looking deep into each other's eyes but even the enforced intimacy of having a net thrown on top of them by Smallholder Sid (see the last HT) had not advanced their romance beyond dewy eyed gazing.

They were waiting for Smallholder Sid who, as often happens, was late. Alice and Fred believed that one of the reasons for him being late so frequently was so that he did not have to buy the first round of drinks.

The Sid who now came and joined them was not the Sid they normally saw. He was hunched. His eyes were downcast and he was certainly not regaling them with his latest ventures.

He now sat at the table silently fingering an envelope. Eventually Fred took pity on him and bought him a pint of foaming Old Fart. Without changing expression Sid downed it in about thirty seconds. Once the Old Fart had worked its magic Sid at last began to speak.

"I've had a solicitor's letter", he said.

Neither Alice nor Fred were surprised to hear this because they had heard it before. Sid was always getting into little brushes with the law. Normally he was bullish and aggressive, rather like Boris Johnson. One of his war cries was, "I'm going to take this to the highest court in the land". To the best recollection of Alice and Fred he had never actually taken a case to any court let alone the highest one in the land but they held their tongues because it was sometimes easier to listen than to remonstrate with him.

"Go on, tell us what you have been up to", urged Alice

"Well it was like this. My missus Gladys doesn't get on very well with Mabel Beckwith at number 21. Something to do with a flower show years ago. Gladys heard that Mabel had put garage flowers - *not* flowers from her own garden - in her winning display. Gladys thought she had cheated and that she - Gladys - should have won. Well Gladys steers well clear of her but Mabel has recently started bad mouthing her. Calling her a slob and a fatty."

Alice and Fred exchanged looks. They were not very keen on Gladys (though they did feel sorry for her having to put up with Sid when he was not at the Cowpat and Fly), but that was no reason to go round insulting her.

Sid continued, "I tried to speak to Mabel and give her what for, but she just slammed down the telephone, so I sent her a post card saying something like 'I am sick and tired of you insulting my wife. Anyway you've got nothing to be proud of, being a well known swindler and thief'".

"You said that?" erupted Fred and Alice together.

"I did, because people say that she is dishonest and frequently goes shoplifting. I thought she ought to know it is public knowledge. Then I posted it, just to her. I did not tell anyone else what I was doing.

'Now I have had this letter from this rum firm of solicitors saying that I have 

committed deformation of caricature and they want compensation from me. But I didn't think I did anything wrong by writing to her direct".

"Defamation", said Alice.

Sid: "Eh?"

"Defamation, it's defamation of character not deformation of caricature", corrected Alice.

Sid: "whatever – they still want money from me, and she's a crook. And she's fat – much fatter than Alice. She smells too. She's nothing but a poxy doxy if you ask me".

Sid was getting into a right state and had to be calmed by further infusions of Old Fart.

"Now look", said Alice, for once turning her gaze from Fred, "Can you prove that she has ever stolen anything, or that she has er given favours in return for money".

"Well not exactly", mumbled Sid, "but that's what people say".

"And would those people come along to court to give evidence for you?"

"Maybe, more likely not".

"Well", said Alice, who had suddenly become an expert in libel, "you see if you say something publicly like that you have to prove it – and if you can't you run the real risk of losing".

"But I didn't say it publicly. I sent her a postcard".

"Ah," said Alice. "It only has to be published to one other person to be libel. There was a case in 1915 when the court decided that a defamatory post card was likely to be read by the postman, which made it public".

Fred's jaw dropped. "Where did you find all that out Alice?"

"Well I was browsing the internet the other day while you were asleep and came across this old report".

"So you're not just a pretty face then....." he replied in astonishment.

She continued: "My advice to you is to make it up with Mabel, however much it sticks in the craw".

"Yes", said Fred, "Buy her some flowers from the petrol station down your road. Then she can win at the flower show without it costing her a penny".

"Well okay if you think that will do the trick, but if you think I am going to pay her £5 for the other thing you'll have to have another think. Remember – she smells".

And with that they set off for home with Sid looking, if not exactly happy, at least relieved at the advice he had been given. He tore up the letter he had brought with him to the Cowpat and Fly.

It was his reply to Mabel's solicitors. He had not shown it to the others, which was just as well, because the language was so fruity that it almost burst out of the envelope. ♦

Slightly serious legal note.

Surprisingly, a postcard libel featured in the courts a little more recently. Prime Minister Harold Wilson sued the group the Move in 1967 after they had published a promotional postcard showing a nude Harold Wilson, and insinuating that he was having sex with someone other than his wife. He won and in consequence the Move had to pay all their royalties from the sales of [*Flowers in the Rain*](#) to a charity of Wilson's choice.

For more silliness buy a copy of Richard's book *The Savage Poodle* (get it on Amazon or contact Richard on Richard.barr@paston.co.uk for details. Price now £7.99) or listen to him every month or so on the Chrissie Jackson mid-morning show on BBC Radio Norfolk (when he tries to be a little more sensible).