

# Boisjoly & Bulletin

## Quillfeather Chronicle

June '25 ★ Weather forecast: Sunny, then dark, then sunny again, and so on

## The Return of RMS Ballast

The audiobook of *Mystery and Malice aboard RMS Ballast* is finally back in all markets.

Regular readers know that this distinguished journal maintains a strict editorial policy, dating back to the last time it was broken for some specious excuse, mandating that no edition shall be released without at least two newsworthy items. This number probably hasn't got even one, depending on how charitably one defines the word 'newsworthy', but I had promised to update the community when RMS Ballast finally made it onto Audible.

That day has finally come.

I won't repeat the details of the unrehearsed pantomime that resulted in a delay of four months because, mainly, I don't know what they are, and I feel sure that if I did I wouldn't understand them.

**Mutiny and Malice aboard  
RMS Ballast on Audio**



What I do know is that for a glancing slice of those four months the audiobook of RMS Ballast was available on most platforms, and during that time several listeners were kind enough to rate and/or review it. Sadly, those ratings and reviews are now gone, and so if you were among those who left them, I would obviously greatly appreciate it if you were to recreate them, but fully understand if you feel that once is plenty.

## The Passengers and Crew of RMS Ballast

As this is a sort of relaunch of the audiobook of RMS Ballast and as I haven't anything else to offer, below I'm reproducing the crew list as it appeared when it was launched the first time, back in March.

Once again, I'm very sorry for this sea-sick series of storms and squalls, but we've finally docked.

### *Passengers*

**Anty Boisjoly.** Boisjoly is pronounced Beaujolais, like the wine region, and similar to products therefrom he's typically drunk before his time. Anty is a golden-era gad-about, wealthy, idle, optimistic, energetic, fast-living and fun-loving. Anty is Oxford educated and London begotted and besotted.

*This contingency was made necessary by a coolness that had quite suddenly developed between myself and Freddy's father. There was no explanation for it but no mistaking it, either.*

*The last time I saw him — I recall because it was during the investiture of Bishop Wilson when Cores Pommeroy and I wore armour to evensong — he asked me to cease paying my addresses to his daughter. Inscrutable, I call it.*

**Vickers.** Anty's valet and Boisjoly family heirloom, dating back to the earliest parts of the reign of Queen Victoria. The gears, accordingly and occasionally, slip a bit, but that which he recalls from roughly prior to the coronation of King George V is always exhaustive and frequently pertinent.

*The Boisjoly gentlemen have valued the valeting of Vickers for at least three generations and recent archaeological findings have indicated that he's no longer a young man. It's a happy confluence of circumstance, then, that his short-term memory, routine, and tea-making has become a scattering smattering of serendipity at just the generation that appreciates it.*

**Detective-Inspector Ivor Wittersham.** This dedicated DI is some ten to fifteen years older than Anty and raised to his current status from the honest font of working class turf. He's officious and official and efficient, but there's a slight sleight of seditions spite to his character which is often at odds with his firm fidelity to country, duty, and king, in that order.

*Archie Lord H-P, as a rule, neither insists on nor knows the conventions of noble address, but I knew from one giddy tea at Claridge's that the inspector fairly marvels at them, like a small child or fully-grown Boisjoly watching fireworks.*

**Theodora 'Teddy' Quillfeather.** Anty's cousin is a fast-talking, fast-thinking, and faster-acting flapper roughly Anty's age and background — they're both from very wealthy families but in her case she hasn't much money of her own and relies heavily and frequently on a generous allowance. When Teddy gets her own series, starting with Hardy Haul at Hardy Hall, we learn that she has a literature degree from Oxford and went to St Swithins. She's much more proactive than Anty and enjoys planting little fibs that, as the plot develops, grow into harvests of capers and comedy.

*And in that instant, a car horn tootled from shore and a smart red convertible coupé with the top down skidded onto the pier. The electric flapper behind the wheel was a bob-tailed Quillfeather, in her natural habitat, and in the passenger seat was Vickers, gentleman's personal gentleman to the last of the Boisjolys.*

*"What ho, Anty." Teddy stood up in the car. "Look who I found at the station, offering two shillings a dance."*

**Lord Hannibal-Pool.** RMS Ballast belongs to Lord Hannibal-Pool. He's a toff, obviously, and has no notion of what life is like for those who are not toffs. He's not a bad chap, but he has the absence of empathy that comes from privilege. On the other hand, he has little time for the conventions and affectations of nobility — he just likes the perks. He's not normally an anxious man but in this story he has cause to believe that Inspector Wittersham presents a very significant threat to his way of life.

*"But, Archie," I made minor contention, "you are a smuggler."*

*"Yes, all right, Anty, but not on this trip I'm not," nit-picked Archie. "And in any case, a spot of grappa for one's own personal consumption and that of one's closest hundred-odd friends isn't really considered smuggling by any magistrate that I know."*

*"That would doubtless be because you know magistrates, Your Lordship," I pointed out. "Not to mention the Prime Minister."*

**Lady Hannibal-Pool.** Like her husband, she's a toff, although more scatterbrained and detached. Her dual passions are eating and marrying off her daughter, the latter of which

results in a very solicitous attitude towards Anty. She's consistently and perhaps a bit deliberately out of touch with everything that's going on around her.

*Lady Charlotte Hannibal-Pool swept through the door at this point. She's a big, robust, country-bred sampling of the quality set, a famous bon-vivant with standing reservations for lunch at Barribault's and tea at Claridge's – dinner, too, if they're doing carvery.*

**Winnifred Hannibal-Pool.** Lord and Lady Hannibal-Pool's daughter is known to them as Freddy, but to Anty she's 'The Winds of Whinge'. Winnie is a trained and gifted narcissist who carefully weighs all occasions, situations, libations, obligations, and people by how they affect her in the near term.

*"That's just the latest atrocity, Anty." Winnie waved an arc of smoke over the whole affair. "Did you know that Papa refused, simply refused like some sort of military dictator, to give me a new Alfa? He says I can just drive the Invicta for another year. And then Mama said that we're not going to Antibes this season because Lady Hackett still hasn't apologised for trying to hire away Mister Carvell while we were in port last year. So we're going to Nice." Winnie gave a little shudder. "One might just as well be in Blackpool."*

**Dare Flashburn** is an adventurer and his record of romance and swashbuckling adventure is a mounting series of successes which he regards and reports as merely mundane and in line with all expectations.

*"...until quite by chance I was competing in a Chinese Boxing tournament in Shanghai," continued Dare. "An old relic of a merchant marine – chap by the name of Daniel Woolacombe – presented his compliments and asked me for a loan of a hundred yen so that he might take advantage of some decidedly worrying odds on my next bout, which was against an undefeated Nepalese warrior whose name translates roughly to 'generous provider of pain and death' or 'October 12th', depending on how you pronounce your 'ng's."*

**Harry 'Bunny' Babbit.** His background is working class but he's been bumped up by an accident of fate that provided an education during which he fell in with the right crowd, most notably The Honourable Caspian Starbuck with whom, it comes to pass as the story unfolds, he shares a deep friendship. Nevertheless, Bunny is alive to any hint of snobbery about his background and prejudice about his height, and he tends to react without pause and act without cause.

*There's something fundamentally boyish about the chap, from his fair hair and sleek cheeks to his blue blazer and white breeches and black buckle boots. I know him to be roughly my age but it's a strain to resist giving him a tip and advising him against strong drink.*

**Caspian 'Caspar' Starbuck.** The Honourable Caspian Starbuck is heir to the Earldom of Bustleport and Leep. His family have been sailors since the invention of water, but he harbours throughout the majority of the story the deep, deep secret that he suffers from seasickness. The reader and Anty suspect that his peculiar behaviour is simply military reserve or, possibly, guilt, but Anty eventually works out that Caspar is hiding a titanic secret.

*Caspar Starbuck makes everything he wears look like an admiral's uniform. Today it was a simple double-breasted evening suit and black tie, but over his broad beam and beneath his trim tip and docked beard, it gave the illusion of gravitas, as though bearing the weight of embroidered epaulettes and history. The overall effect was completed with one of those stern scowls that Nelson doubtless had on his face in the days leading up to Trafalgar.*

## **Crew**

**Clement 'Minty' Moy** is the furtive first mate, tough and tattooed and taciturn. Do Minty's malapropisms obscure scurrilous scandal? <spoiler>yes</spoiler>

*The scarred assassin appeared again on the gangplank. He was compact in a tightly-wound sort of way, and short and ruddy and raw, like a ham, and he wore a striped sailor's jersey and flare-leg trousers and a knitted red cap. This was, it soon transpired, First Mate Clement 'Minty' Moy and, what with all of the above plus a pronounced Emerald Isle accent, he had evidently sprung whole from the pen of Robert Louis Stevenson.*

*"I ain't never killed no one, Mister Boisjoly." Minty waited for Bunny's departure before making this claim. "Not this trip, leastways."*

*"And who can blame you? You must have a hundred other things to do on board."*

**Captain Slapton** is the salt-seasoned skipper of RMS Ballast, cutting a figure and swath of courage and cunning and the occasional capsizing from the Irish Sea to the furthest reaches of the Scilly archipelago where, just beneath the surface, lies his darkest secret.

*"We can't turn back," added Slapton. "We're into the slipstream, now. We try to leave it before Scilly there's no telling where we'll end up. You get caught in the channel currents, you run very serious risk of finding yourself dashed on the rocks off Gris Nez, or worse — forced to moor overnight in Belgium."*

**The Elder.** Anty and Inspector Wittersham have a brief encounter with an elder fisherman and his apprentices on Saint Mary's of the Scilly Islands. He's an old salt and a pipe smoker and, obviously, a native of Scilly.

*Five of the sailors, it should be noted, were young, red-faced boys, taking pipe-smoking lessons — very much in the Socratic tradition — from their elder, a salt-bleached ancient formed mainly of leather and eyebrow.*

*"There ain't nothing south of Gilstone Rock," sayeth the Elder. "Except Spain."*

