

An excerpt from The Tormented Prince

Mark Holloway arrived on my doorstep unannounced and unexpected one day in August, 1994. It seemed as if he had fallen from the sky. Actually he had called from a telephone booth at Vancouver airport. His voice from the other end was hesitant and sounded more disembodied than is usual for one that is spoken by an unseen stranger.

“Doctor Beevor-Potts?” he queried.

“No,” I answered, “This is his son-in-law.”

Then an operator intervened and the line went dead. I put the phone down, a bit mystified. A few minutes later Mark called again and this time, sounding more confident, introduced himself. He had just arrived on a flight from London and he had come to visit my father-in-law – to talk to him about Paul Potts whose biography he intended to write. My role as an intermediary in this was the result of my father-in-law’s finesse. Mark had corresponded with him, requesting information about Paul, who had passed away four years earlier and who had been Dr. Beevor-Potts’ first cousin. The good doctor did not want to be bothered and had deflected Mark, without my knowledge, onto me. He obviously never dreamed that Mark would, out of the blue, show up.

I wonder whether it would have even been in Mark’s wildest dreams. He was not impulsive and he had outgrown long journeys. But one day he took the train from Salisbury to London and then flew 5000 miles to Vancouver where he

ended up in the phone booth at the airport. I gave him directions and a few hours later he was in Victoria. That evening I picked him up and brought him to our home in Mill Bay for supper.

Another excerpt from The Tormented Prince

He may well have been labeled *Baby Armstrong* at the orphanage, at least for the initial stage of his residence there. That was the surname of the man who brought him and who claimed to be his father. Undoubtedly his basic needs were attended to. He was fed and clothed and he slept in a secure bed. But he would not have received much nurturing, particularly emotionally; not often being held nor smiled at, nor played with by an adult.

When Graham and May Holloway adopted him, he was malnourished and he had rickets. He had been at the orphanage for the first 18 months of his life. They named him Mark Graham Holloway. This was in 1919.

In addition to being sickly, Mark was naturally sensitive and shy. He grew to become a personable, if somewhat reserved, man – perhaps more so than was common for middle-class Englishmen of that era.

Mark's smile was a veil. It presented him to the world and it signified his relationship with others in a likeable and acceptable manner. Paul Willetts' impression of Mark, described in the obituary in the *Independent*, neatly encapsulates the way others perceived him:

“Unlike so many of the other writers drawn to the much-mythologised pub and club scene that flourished in Soho between the 1930s and 1950s, Mark Holloway was no abrasive hell raiser. He was, instead, blessed with mild-mannered, self-effacing charm and gentle humour, which left an abiding impression.”

The man behind the veil was not dramatically different. As with all men he had his share of contradictions and secrets. What was different was his attention to this. Well before his adolescence, Mark had begun to nurture his *secret self* which abided throughout his 87 years in an inner life of introspection; a process by which he attempted to understand why he behaved in certain ways. This included questioning his values – particularly his pacifism which prompted him to reject military service during World War II. He was sometimes judgmental, other times accepting. This introspection, an unremitting self-analysis, was an essential part of his life-long quest for identity. It runs as a connecting thread through all of Mark's writing about himself, the vast majority of which was never meant to be read until after his death. Mark, who aspired to be a writer, wrote over half a million words about his life which were, with the occasional exception, kept unrevealed such that even Vicky, his wife for 52 years, was surprised, if not shocked, at their discovery after his death.