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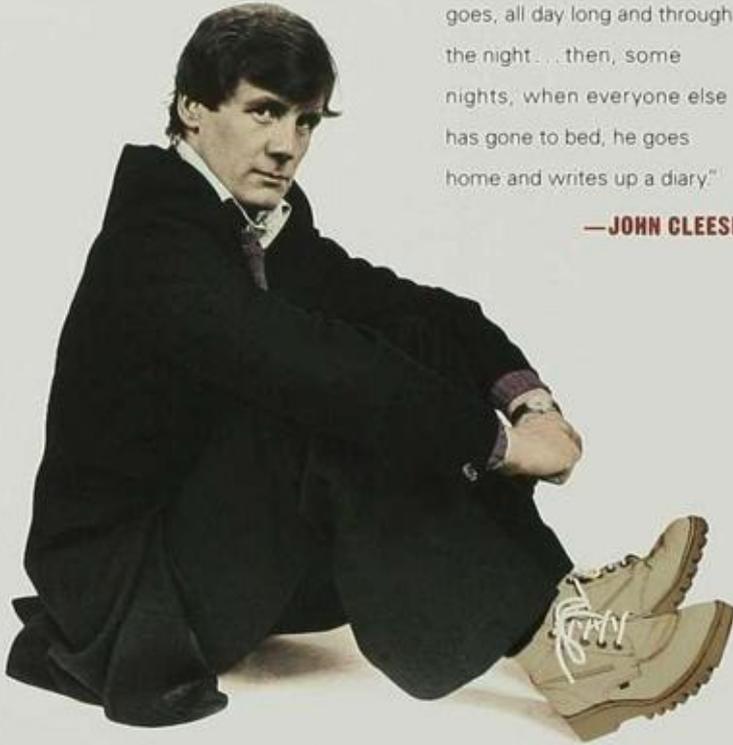
— JOHN CLEESE

# **MICHAEL PALIN** **DIARIES 1969-1979**

*The Python Years*

"Michael Palin is not just one of Britain's foremost comedy character actors, he also talks a lot. Yap, yap, yap he goes, all day long and through the night ... then, some nights, when everyone else has gone to bed, he goes home and writes up a diary."

—JOHN CLEESE



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The Python Years

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**THE PYTHON YEARS**

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**ALSO BY MICHAEL PALIN**

*Himalaya*

*Sahara*

*Michael Paliris Hemingway Adventure*

*Full Circle*

*Hemingway's Chair*

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**DIARIES 1969–1979**  
**THE PYTHON YEARS**

**MICHAEL PALIN**



Thomas Dunne Books  
St. Martin's Press  
New York

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*For my mother and father*

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2 John Ferro Sims

3 Drew Mara

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# Who's Who in the Diaries 1969–1979

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*Certain names recur at various points during the diaries. Here is a rough list of those who make regular appearances.*

## FAMILY

**Edward (Ted) Palin** born July 1900

**Mary Palin** (née Ovey) born January 1904

Retired from Sheffield to Reydon, near Southwold, Suffolk in December 1966 *Children:*

**Angela** born 1934, died 1987

**Michael** born 1943

Angela married Veryan Herbert in 1958 *Children:*

**Jeremy**, born 1960

**Camilla**, born 1962

**Marcus**, born 1963

Michael married Helen Gibbins, born 1942, on April 16, 1966 *Children:*

**Thomas (Tom)**, born 1968

**William**, born 1970

**Rachel**, born 1975

## *Helens family:*

Father, **Dearman Gibbins**, died 1963

Mother, **Anne Gibbins**, born 1913

Elder sister, **Mary**, born 1940. Married **Edward Burd** in 1964.

Daughter, **Catherine**.

Younger sister, **Cathy**, born 1945

## FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

**The Stuart-Harris family.** Lived next door to the Palins in Sheffield. Father, Charles, was a doctor and became Professor of Medicine at Sheffield University. Mother, Marjorie. Graham, the eldest son, married to Margot, and MP's oldest friend. Daughter Susan is a psychologist and young son, Robin, also a doctor. Married to Barbara, a New Zealander.

**Robert Hewison.** Contemporary of MP at Brasenose College Oxford, 1962–5. Fellow cabaret performer and writer. Author of a series of books on modern cultural history, expert on John Ruskin.

**Terry Jones.** Met MP at Oxford in 1963. First performed together in the Oxford Revue, Edinburgh Festival 1964. Wrote together for television on *The Frost Report*, 1966. Married Alison Telfer, 1966. Children: Sally and Bill.

**John Cleese**, married to Connie Booth. Separated in mid-1970s.

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**Eric Idle**, married to Lyn Ashley. Separated in mid-1970s.

**Terry Gilliam**, married to Python make-up supremo Maggie Weston.

**Graham Chapman**, lived with David Sherlock, later adopted John Tomiczek.

**Ian and Anthea Davidson**. Met MP at Oxford. Encouraged him to perform in revue and gave him early work at the BBC. A writer and director and occasional Python performer.

**Ranji and Rolf Veling**. Ranji is a friend from Helen Palin's teaching days. She is Sri Lankan, he Dutch.

**Simon and Phillida Albury**. Simon met MP after Oxford in 1965. Television journalist, producer and gospel music fan.

**Graeme Garden**. Contemporary of Eric Idle at Cambridge. Writer-performer who worked with MP on *Twice a Fortnight* (1967) and *Broaden Your Mind* (1968). First wife Liz and daughter Sally were frequent visitors.

**Bill Oddie**. Cambridge contemporary of Eric's. Lived nearby. Also worked with MP on *Twice a Fortnight*. Regular source of football tickets.

**Tim Brooke-Taylor**. Friend and provider of work for MP on *Broaden Your Mind*.

#### PYTHON'S EXTENDED FAMILY

**Ian MacNaughton**. Director of TV series and first film *And Now for Something Completely Different*.

**Eke Ott**. Became the second Mrs MacNaughton.

**André Jacquemin**. Recording engineer with whom MP went into business as Redwood Studios. Besides being official Python sound genius, André, with partner Dave Howman, wrote and recorded songs for Python and *Ripping Yarns*.

**Michael Henshaw**. MP's first accountant, from 1966 to 1974.

**Anne Henshaw**. Michael's wife, who took over Python affairs as de facto manager in 1974.

**Barry Took**. Marty Feldman's co-writer and the man who helped push Python to the BBC.

**Carol Cleveland**. Started as glamour girl casting but her talent for well-played, well-timed comedy made her Python's favourite real woman. She appeared in the films and stage shows as well as the TV series.

**Neil Innes**. Musician. First worked with MP, TJ and Eric I. on *Do Not Adjust Your Seats*. Indispensable to the Python stage shows. Neil also appeared in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and *Monty Python's Life of Brian* as well as helping Idle create the Rutles.

**Hazel Pethig**. Costume designer from episode one of the Monty Python TV series through

*Monty Python and the Meaning of Life*, thirteen years later.

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**Julian Doyle.** Editor, cameraman, who could turn his hand to any part of the film-making process. Indispensable part of both Python and Gilliam films.

**Geoffrey Strachan.** Hugely supportive editor at Methuen who encouraged Python to go into print. Also published the *Ripping Yarn* books.

**Tony Stratton-Smith.** What Geoffrey Strachan was to Python books, Tony Stratton-Smith was to Python records. Endlessly encouraging founder/proprietor of Charisma Records, who enthusiastically indulged most of Python's whims and even named a racehorse of his 'Monty Python'.

**Jill Foster.** MP and TJ's agent at Fraser & Dunlop.

**John Gledhill.** Agent at the Roger Hancock office who looked after Python affairs until 1974.

**Mark Forstater.** Producer of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

**John Goldstone.** Producer of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and *Monty Python's Life of Brian*.

#### AT THE BBC

**John Howard Davies.** Child actor who played Oliver Twist at the age of nine, director of three earliest episodes of *Monty Python*, then Head of Comedy during the later *Ripping Yarns*.

**James (Jimmy) Gilbert.** Producer/director of *The Frost Report* - MP and TJ's first TV writing break. Head of Comedy in the latter days of Python, then Head of Light Entertainment Department at the time of *Ripping Yarns*.

**Duncan Wood.** Head of Comedy during first three Python series.

**Bill Cotton Jnr.** Head of Light Entertainment.

**Terry Hughes.** Director of the hugely popular Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett series. Producer/director of first three *Ripping Yarns*, until elevated to Head of Variety.

**Jim Franklin.** Special effects expert on *The Frost Report* who took over the production and direction of the next four *Ripping Yarns* after Terry Hughes was promoted.

**Alan J.W. Bell.** Produced and directed last two *Ripping Yarns* - 'Golden Gordon' and 'Whinfrey's Last Case'.

**Mark Shivas and Richard Broke.** Drama producers who backed TJ and MP and encouraged them to write *Secrets* (1973).

#### IN AMERICA

**Nancy Lewis.** Publicist for Buddah Records who almost single-handedly fought to get Python accepted in America, and became their US manager.

**Ina Lee Meibach.** Lawyer in New York who organised Python's battle against ABC TV in 1975.

**Al Levinson.** Writer, teacher and dramaturg for American Public Theatre who became MP's good friend and regular correspondent in the late 1970s. Lived in New York and Sag Harbour, with his wife Eve.

**Lome Michaels.** Producer of *Saturday Night Live*.

# Acknowledgements

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I must thank my editor Ion Trewin for reducing mountains to molehills, and Michael Dover Weidenfeld & Nicolson for his unfailing encouragement. Steve Abbott, my agent, has been a model of sympathy and naked commercial brutality and my wife and family, lured on by curiosity perhaps, have been trusting, realistic and supportive.

The Monty Python team fills these pages and reading through the material made me realise how intricately our lives intertwined. Our differences are not glossed over here but neither is the very close bond of friendship that links, or in Graham Chapman's case, linked us all together. Last, but certainly not least, I owe enormous thanks to Kath Du Prez who typed up over a million words and not only lived to tell the tale, but more than anyone, convinced me that this might be a tale worth telling.

MP



*As Ethelred the Unready, Complete and Utter History of Britain, 1969. 'Well you won't be doing any more of those', John predicted, accurately as it turned out.*

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# Introduction

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I HAVE KEPT A DIARY, more or less continuously, since April 1969. I was twenty-five years old then, married for three years and with a six-month-old son. I had been writing comedy with Terry Jones since leaving university in 1965 and, in addition to contributing material to *The Frost Report*, *Marcello*, *Feldman*, *The Two Ronnies* and anyone else who'd take us, we had written and performed two series *Do Not Adjust Your Set* (with Eric Idle, David Jason and Denise Coffey) and six episodes of *The Complete and Utter History of Britain*. After the last one went out in early 1969, John Cleese rang me. 'Well, you won't be doing any more of those,' he predicted, accurately as it turned out, 'so what don't we think of something new.'

So it was that, quite coincidentally, Monty Python came into my life, only a month or so after the diary.

This was far from my first stab at keeping a regular account of how I spent my time. At the age of eleven I resolved to record each day of the year, and kept it up until the 18th of July. The style was staccato, and looking back now, quite surreal.

## *Letts Schoolboy's Diary, January, 1955*

Tuesday, 18th. Big blow-up in prayers. Had easy prep. Listened to Goon Show. Got sore hand.

Monday 24th. Had fight with (form) VR. Got hit on nose. Did two sets of prep. Jolly hard! Cabbage for lunch. Watched TV.

At regular intervals I tried to resume the habit, but as I grew older keeping a diary seemed an irksome duty, like writing to one's parents, and anyway, there was far too much going on in my teens and early twenties to have either the time or the inclination to write it all down. Yet there remained a nagging feeling that it was a small failure to let life go by without in some way documenting it. This feeling persisted as I grew older. All I lacked was the will-power.

Then, one night, after a meal at the house with my wife Helen and Terry Gilliam, who happened to have dropped by, I found I'd run out of cigarettes (at the time I had a twenty-a-day habit). I looked for a half-crown piece for the slot machine up the road, but could find nothing. I rifled through drawers, flung open cupboards and slid my hand down the back of sofas with increasing desperation.

'You're an addict,' warned Terry.

I smiled wanly. 'I'm not an addict, I would quite like one last cigarette before bed, that's all.'

'Look at you,' Terry persisted, as I began rummaging in ever more unlikely sources, in the laundry basket and amongst the marmalade, 'you need your fix!'

'Look,' I hissed, tipping up the shoe-cleaning box and forensically scrutinising the contents, 'I don't have to have a cigarette. I never have to have a cigarette, it's just a small pleasure, all right?'

'Not if you can't sleep without one.'

The only way to face down these taunts was to deny myself the single thing I wanted most, a nice firm pull on a freshly-lit, deliriously soothing, pungently bracing tube of tightly packed tobacco, coaxed from a brand-new packet of Piccadilly Tipped. And that's where the will-power came in. For the first time in many years I went to bed without a cigarette.

Not only did I survive without the second most satisfying smoke of the day, next morning I survived without the first most satisfying smoke of the day and I never bought a packet of cigarettes again.

So cocky was I that I looked around for other giants to wrestle. As it happened I had, for the first time in years, some free time on my hands. My writing partner Terry Jones was away and I had arranged to travel to Switzerland for a few days with Helen and the baby. Why not have another crack at the diary? It would keep my newly liberated fingers occupied and writing about my post-nicotine lifestyle could only strengthen my resolve to keep it that way. I bought a Ryman's reporter's notepad, smoothed down the front page, wrote the day's date across the top and underlined it. And I've been doing the same thing most mornings of my life for the past thirty-seven years.

There are times when I've resented the whole process, when I've felt lumpen, dull and inarticulate when detail has slipped away and the whole exercise has seemed completely pointless. But the longer I've kept the diary the more inconceivable it has been to abandon it. It's become an effective and tenacious parasite, mutating over the years into something as germane to my life as an arm or a leg.

The motivation for keeping the diaries remains the same as it always was, to keep a record of how to fill the days. Nothing more complicated than that. Though this inevitably involves emotional reactions, I've never treated the diary as a confessional. Once I've noted the day's events, usually the next morning, there's little time left for soul-searching.

The perfect, well-crafted, impeccably balanced entry persistently eludes me. Prejudices bob to the surface, anger crackles, judgements fall over each other, huffing and puffing. Opinions and interpretations are impulsive, inconsistent and frequently contradictory. But I'm not sure if that matters. After all that's where a daily diary differs from autobiography or memoir. It is an antidote to hindsight.



*'A nice firm pull on a freshly lit,  
deliriously soothing, pungently  
bracing tube of tightly packed  
tobacco, coaxed from a brand-new*

It seals the present moment and preserves it from the tidying process of context, perspective, analysis and balance. It becomes history, but quite unselfconsciously. What proves to be important over a long period is not always what a diarist will identify at the time. For the historians' sake I should probably have noted every detail of the birth of Monty Python, but it seemed far more important to me to record the emergence of my new family than the faltering steps of a comedy series that would probably last no more than two years. And that, I feel, is as it should be. Legends are not created by diaries, though they can be destroyed by them.

This selection is culled from thirty-eight hand-written secretarial notebooks amounting to some five times the volume of material reproduced here. The early entries sit a little awkwardly as I search for my voice and a style that relies on more than lists of events. My reward for perseverance, often in the face of tempting discouragement, is to see the diary bed itself in and slowly begin to tell a story, with regular characters, a narrative, and a sense of continuity.

In the course of these diaries I grow up, my family grows up and Monty Python grows up. It was a great time to be alive.

MICHAEL PALIN

*London, January 2006*

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Michael Palin is not just one of Britain's foremost comedy character actors, whose inventive genius and astonishing versatility were vividly demonstrated in his widely acclaimed *Ripping Yarns* series; he also talks a lot. Yap, yap, yap, he goes, all day long *and* through the night, twenty-three or twenty-four hours a day, the ground littered with the hind legs of donkeys, till you believe it is not possible, simply not possible for him to go on any longer, but he *does*. He must be the worst man in the world to take part in a commando raid. You might as well take a large radiogram with the volume turned up. On and on, hour after hour, tiring the sun with talking and sending him down the sky, Michael chats, quips, fantasises, reminisces, commiserates, encourages, plans, discusses and elaborates. Then, some night when everyone else has gone to bed, he goes home and *writes up a diary*.

JOHN CLEESE

*Publicity biography for Life of Brian*, 1979

*Though the first entry of all was April 17th 1969, I've opened the diary on the first day of Pythons filming. All the entries were written at my house in Oak Village, north London, except where otherwise noted.*

## *Tuesday, July 8th*

Today Bunn Wackett Buzzard Stubble and Boot<sup>1</sup> came into being, with about five minutes of film shot around Ham House. It was exhilarating to wake up to the first day's filming of a new show, especially as the sun was streaming down the village and, despite it being only 7.00, I decided to travel to the BBC on the bus and tube. Sure enough, the clouds came up as I put my foot outside the door, and this April-like weather pattern of showers and sunshine was repeated during the day. We arrived at Ham House about 9.30.

It is a Jacobean house, of pleasing proportions, very restrained, but in a more homely and welcoming way than a classical building. A line of Greco/Roman busts in oval niches along the line of walls leading up to the house give you something to remember it by. We were filming Queen Victoria's slapstick film with Gladstone, and the beautifully kept lawn and flower beds at the back of the house provided just the right kind of formality to play off against.

In the afternoon the changes in light from sudden brightness to dullness caused us to slow down a little, but by 6.00 we had quite a chunk of 'Queen Victoria and Her Gardener' and 'Bicycle Repairman' done, and it had been a very good and encouraging first day's shooting.

## *Wednesday, July 9th*

Arrived at TV Centre by 10.00, and was driven in a BBC car, together with John [Cleese], Graham [Chapman] and Terry [Jones], out beyond Windsor and Eton to a tiny church at Boveney. Dressed to the hilt as a young Scottish nobleman of the Walter Scott era, I was able to cash a cheque at a bank on the Uxbridge Road, without the cashier batting an eyelid.

## *Thursday, July 10th, Bournemouth*

Up at 7.15; Graham C called for me in a mini-cab; we got to Waterloo in plenty of time to catch the 8.30 to Bournemouth. We had breakfast on the train. At Bournemouth we were met by a mini-van and driven to the Durley Dean Hotel, where we were to stay that night. I don't think words can fully convey the depression that swept over me as I entered the Durley Dean. From outside it was bad enough – a five storey red-brick block of indeterminate date, but I should guess 1920s – it looked completely ordinary, if anything institutional. Inside there was firstly a dimness, secondly a pervading smell of gravy and thirdly a total lack of any colour – in the carpets, the lino in the passages, the paintwork in the rooms – everywhere the management had opted for the colour most like stale vomit

One saw a few guests, mostly elderly, about half of them crippled, wandering about, as if looking for someone to tell them what to do. What with the grey weather, the lack of much to do (it was mainly Terry's 'Changing on the Beach' film) and the gradual realisation that all Bournemouth was as drab and colourless as the Durley Dean, I felt very low all morning.

After lunch we filmed on, collecting crowds of people watching Terry take his trousers down. Graham and I, finishing early, went back to the Durley Dean. The depression I had felt in the morning was lifted slightly by the sun shining into my room, and plenty of hot water for my bath. After that Graham and I drank at the hotel bar until the rest of the unit returned. I made the mistake of telling the barman that Graham was a doctor, and soon he was telling Graham about his insomnia and his sweating and his bad feet.

John C arrived from London and, together with Graham, a lady designer, a lady extra, a focus puller and one or two others, we sampled the nightlife of Bournemouth. We ended up in the Highcliffe Hotel night-club where, for 7/6 each we enjoyed 45 minutes sitting in dimness with a drink, whilst the bar had their break. When they arrived back (three middle-aged men, looking like failed Sam Costa,<sup>1</sup> who played 'Fly Me to the Moon' in quite a forgettable way), Graham asked them to play 'Happy Birthday' for John Cleese (it wasn't his birthday at all). But the amplification was so bad that we couldn't hear the announcement and the point of the joke was lost.

## *Friday, July 11th, Bournemouth*

Drive over to Shell Bay, beyond Poole, along a flag-lined route – the Queen is visiting Poole today.

In the afternoon filmed some very bizarre pieces, including the death of Genghis Khan, and two men carrying a donkey past a Butlins redcoat, who later gets hit on the head with a raw chicken by a man from the previous sketch, who borrowed the chicken from a man in a suit of armour. All this was filmed in the 80° sunshine, with a small crowd of holidaymakers watching.

We finished at tea-time and were driven to take our leave of Durley Dean and catch the 5.56 train back to London. On account of an unofficial signalmen's strike, the train took two and a half hours to get to London and left Bournemouth half an hour late. But John, Graham, Terry and myself took the First Class compartment and talked about Shows 4 and 5 and decided that we really had an excellent week filming. Ian Mac<sup>1</sup> is marvellous – the best director to work for and, with a fellow Scottish cameraman, Jimmy Balfour, he really gets on with it.

Back in London 9.00 – taxi from Waterloo, end of one of the great days.

## *Wednesday, July 16th*

Filming today in Barnes. The weather continues to be excellent – if anything a little too hot – 80° all day.

After lunch we watched Apollo 11 blastoff, on its trip to the moon.

Ended up the afternoon prancing about in mouse-skins for a documentary about people who like to dress up as mice. That really made the sweat pour down the chest.

*To the many life-changing experiences around this time – fatherhood, quitting smoking, keeping a diary – must be added the alarming discovery that teeth I'd always thought of as glowingly healthy were found to be precariously attached to considerably less healthy gums – a legacy of poor care and too many sweeties in my misspent youth. Treatment involved a series of surgical procedures in which*

~~the gum was opened, cleaned up and stitched together again. These were undertaken by Mr Rob Powell, a robust Australian periodontist who once likened it to working on his rockery at home.~~

## *Saturday, July 19th*

Up early to go to Mr Powell for the fourth and last of my dental operations. I was at his surgery by 9.10. He hadn't arrived, but the nurse sat me down and gave me her *Daily Telegraph* to read. He arrived about ten minutes later, cheerfully announcing that he'd had a late night and a lot of drink, however he said his hand was steady. It needed to be, for this was the most difficult of all the operations. One tooth was obviously more badly infected than he had expected. I even had to go in to the next-door surgery during the operation so that he could use the extra-high-speed drill there. He also took out one of the roots of the tooth, and also a nerve, which gave quite a lot of pain. Mr Powell kept apologising, but I felt at least that I was getting my money's worth. I was finally patched up by 10.10 and drove off to the TV Centre to have a look at the week's rushes.

After the rushes, made the final organisational decisions about the Great Picnic, which Gilliam had suggested a couple of days ago and which was now becoming reality. Helen, Thomas<sup>1</sup> and myself, Graham and David,<sup>2</sup> John and Connie, Terry G and his girlfriend and Alison and Terry J set out in our various cars for Henley – loaded with food and wine. It was a very cloudy day, but warm, and along the motorway a patch of sun made us seem less foolish. We drove out to Remenham church, which I had chosen from pot-luck as being a convenient place for an idyllic riverside picnic. Everything could at this moment have gone hopelessly wrong – the sky was glowering, it was 2.30 and everyone was getting hungry – but Remenham proved to be just the right kind of place – through a gate and we were walking along a flat bank of pastureland with the Thames flowing beside us. We picnicked opposite Temple Island – ham off the bone, pate, salad, several kinds of cheeses, cherries, apples and strawberries, beer sausage, smoked pork, red and white wine and coffee – it was a wonderful spread. Thomas scavenged amongst the food, and was to be seen eating vast chunks of French bread on an off for about an hour. Everyone, Gilliam especially, became infected by picnic madness and there was a hopping relay race and a lot of fighting. The generous doses of wine numbed any possible after-effects of my gingivectomy.

Thomas stood without holding on today.

## *Monday, July 21st*

At 3.00 this morning I woke Helen, and we both watched as the first live television pictures from the moon showed us a rather indistinct piece of ladder, then a large boot, and finally, at 3.56, Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the lunar surface. He said the ground beneath his feet (almost wrote 'the earth beneath his feet') was composed mainly of dust – for a moment one felt he was in danger of falling into a kind of quicksand – but soon he was reassuringly prancing about and telling us that the one-sixth gravity conditions were less hazardous than in simulation.

The extraordinary thing about the evening was that, until 3.56 a.m. when Armstrong clambered out of the spaceship and activated the keyhole camera, we had seen no space pictures at all, and yet ITN had somehow contrived to fill ten hours with a programme devoted to the landing.

To bed at 5.00, with the image in my mind of men in spacesuits doing kangaroo hops and long loping walks on the moon, in front of a strange spidery object, just like the images in my mind after reading Dan Dare in the old *Eagle* comics – only this time it's true. A lot of science fiction is sudden

## *Thursday, July 24th*

Met with Ian and the two Terrys at the BBC. We listened to some possible title music – finally selected Sousa’s march ‘The Liberty Bell’ from a Grenadier Guards LP. There’s something about brass band music that appeals to me very strongly. Probably it’s all to do with my subliminal desire to march along whistling national songs. It’s very difficult to associate brass band music with any class of people. Most enthusiasts perhaps come from north of the Trent working class, but then of course it has high patrician status and support from its part in ceremonial. So in the end it is a brass band march which we’ve chosen – because it creates such immediate atmosphere and rapport, without it being calculated or satirical or ‘fashionable’.

An hour is spent from 5.30—6.30 watching colour pictures of Apollo 11’s return to earth. Again how old-fashioned a) the landing (they landed upside down), b) the scrubbing of the spacecraft and the space-suits, in case they are carrying deadly lunar germs, c) the whole business of helicopter rescue appears. One is almost conscious of the laughter and amazement of viewers in thirty years’ time, as they watch film of the first men on the moon returning home.

## *Friday, August 1st*

The days seem to merge one into another without particular distinction. It’s tending to feel like that with the writing at the moment. We have four shows completed, but apart from the two weeks filming in July, there has been no feeling yet of concerted effort on behalf of the show (now, incidentally, renamed *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*). Partly because John and Graham have fingers in a lot of other pies – especially their film, *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer*.<sup>1</sup> However, it seems that the next two weeks will be much harder work. At least, there is some kind of urgency. August 30th is our first recording date and we have another week’s filming starting on the 18th. Time is getting shorter. But at least it’s nothing like the hectic pace which we were starting on this time last year with the first *Frost on Sundays*. Accordingly, I’ve had much more time at home and, as I write this, I’m in the sitting room with Helen sewing and Thomas being fascinated by the sewing machine.

Terry took Helen and myself and Quick and Ken, Philip John, Gerald<sup>2</sup> and a girl from Germany whom Terry and Al had met on holiday in Crete, to the Hiroko Japanese restaurant in Wigmore Street.

Before entering our room we had to remove our shoes. Here Ken and myself made what I expected to be the first of many faux pas. After taking our shoes off, we noticed some oriental style slippers nearby and presumed that we ought to put these on in true Japanese style. Grumbling that they were a bit too small, we eventually selected two pairs and were tottering to our room when one of the Japanese ‘attendants’ – it wouldn’t be quite right to call them ‘waitresses’ – stopped us excitedly and told us to take off the shoes. Then we realised the awful truth – that they belonged to people already eating there.

## *Sunday, August 3rd*

John C rang up in the morning to ask if I felt like working in the afternoon, so I ended up at Knightsbridge about 3.00. It’s funny, but when one has written in partnership almost exclusively for the last three years, as Terry and I have done, and I suppose John and Graham as well, it requires quite

an adjustment to write with somebody different. Terry and I know each other's way of working so well now – ~~exactly what each one does best, what each one thinks, what makes each of us laugh~~ – that when I sat down to write with John there was a moment's awkwardness, slight embarrassment, but it soon loosened up as we embarked on a saga about Hitler (Hiker), Von Ribbentrop (Ron Vibbentrop) and Himmler (Bimmler) being found in a seaside guest house. We do tend to laugh at the same things and working with John is not difficult – but there are still differences in our respective ways of thinking, not about comedy necessarily, which mean perhaps that the interchange of ideas was a little more cautious than it is with Terry. However, by the time I left, at 7.15, we had almost four minutes' worth of sketch written.

## *Tuesday, August 5th*

Another workday at Eric's.<sup>1</sup> A good morning, but then a rather winey lunch at Pontevecchio on Brompton Road. That is the trouble with working at John or Eric's – both are surrounded by a very good selection of restaurants, temptingly easy to go to, especially after a good morning's work, but debilitating and expensive.

## *Wednesday, August 6th*

A thought struck me as I saw a man in an open-necked shirt walking up Oak Village – and that was that, for at least twelve successive years, the first half of August has meant Palin family holidays either at Sheringham in Norfolk or, later, at Southwold.

I have some wonderful memories of those holidays. Of sitting in the lee of the hill above Sheringham where the golf course was and watching the steam train pulling away towards Weybourne. Of enormous games of tennis on the beach with the Sanders family, of plastic macs and wet days (the latter do seem to be predominant), of sitting excitedly in the back of the Austin 10 (which we inherited when Granny Ovey<sup>2</sup> died in 1951) and the yearly thrill of seeing a pebble-house, and of seeing the sea for the first time.

Now August 6th has no special significance, it's another working day – but it's a token of the enormous difference between my life and that of my father or most people in the country. I have no fixed timetable. I may go away any time of the year, for any length of time, at little more than two weeks' notice. This degree of unpredictability is beyond the sphere of most people – it is an awful thought how regular people's lives contrive to be.

On this August 6th 1969 I am at home. Terry and I are determined to make this a really productive day, to make up for the semi-productive, rather frustrating Monday and Tuesday. We work on till 8.00, finishing our big 'Them' saga. An 85% success day. Very satisfying – and we really worked well together.

## *Thursday, August 7th*

Drove down to Camberwell Grove (where Terry was living) at lunchtime. Lunched with Terry and D Quick, who has a week's break from filming *Christ Recrucified* for BBC2. In the afternoon we worked rather slowly – lots of diversions, e.g. Terry's telescope, which he has bought for his father's birthday, a film which Terry bought that morning, and finally a walk. It seems at last, after almost a year of waiting, that Terry and Alison may have got the house they made an offer for in Grove Park.

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