OBITUARIES

Helen Snow

Adventurous American writer with an exaggerated sense of her importance in the wars and revolutions of China

HELEN SNOW, who has died aged 89, witnessed the Chinese civil war and revolution as a chronicler and energetic participant.

She arrived in Shanghai in 1931, a tall and strikingly attractive 23-year-old, described by the dazzled Edgar Snow (whom she married a year later), as an "Amazon". She was eager to get started straight away on writing the books that would bring her the excitement and literary fame for which she considered herself uniquely qualified.

"I was brought up exactly right," she recalled confidently. "There was nothing wrong with it because it worked. I loved school. I loved every class. I took for granted that I should study; and I was the teacher's pet and the most popular girl in the school. This is a combination that isn't easy to find."

She produced a stream of books on China: some ephemeral, some written to promote a cause, some deliberately literary. Her account of the history of the Chinese Communist Party, written as it unfolded, is still in use in Chinese schools, and her book *Red Dust*, a sequence of biographies of Chinese Communists, remains an important historical source.

Much of her work was overshadowed by that of her more famous husband, a fact that occasionally inflamed her combative character. Her marriage to Snow rested on a professional partnership in which each spurred the other on.

Helen Foster was born on Sept 21 1907, at Cedar, Utah, the daughter of a lawyer. From university, she joined the American Mining Congress, which lobbied for the adoption of the silver standard. She went to China to become private secretary to the American consul in Shanghai.

An air of manifest destiny charged the account of her first meeting with Edgar Snow, which she wrote in *My China Years* (1972). She had compiled a folder of cuttings of his news stories, and met him the day she arrived in Shanghai. "We were in league with the future," she wrote, "and we both knew it — yes, the first day."

They were married the following year. The wedding ceremony took place, at very short notice, at noon, on Christmas Day, in the American

Helen Snow sets off in a litter to support Mao and chronicle China's unfolding history

embassy in Tokyo. She chose Tokyo because it was "nice and clean," compared with Shanghai.

By March 1933, they were living in Peking, in the luxurious way of life of the "foreign set," in a traditional compound with a spacious house, garden and servants, all of which could be afforded on a journalist's income because of a highly favourable exchange rate.

They entertained and socialised (among her friends was the Jesuit palaeontologist-philosopher Teilhard de Chardin, with whom she argued about philosophy), and Helen did her best to improve Snow's scruffy journalistic habits.

They lived in Peking until the Japanese invasion of the city in 1937. As popular discontent with the Japanese regime in China grew, the Snows became increasingly active in supporting the Chinese students who were becoming the leaders of the movement for Chinese independence (culminating years later in the establishment of the People's Republic of China), offering them their house as a safe haven, and helping to produce their publications.

In 1935, when the Japanese-backed government took steps to separate Manchuria from the rest of China, Helen helped to organise street demonstrations in protest. Taking credit for their success, she wrote: "It is a charming irony that [the Japanese Major-General Kenji] Doihara and all his mobilised armies had to retreat when faced with two little anti-Fascist Americans living on $50 a month — but armed with a piece of the truth."

The next year, as Edgar Snow was having the first of his encounters with Mao Tse-tung, Helen too entered the communist stronghold in Yenan, northwest China, filing newspaper stories. The adventures that she and Edgar Snow had were made possible by the extra-territorial legal status that foreigners enjoyed in China in these years.

While helping Edgar Snow transcribe the notes of his Yenan trip, she became intrigued by the life stories of the Chinese communists. This gave her the idea for her best book, *Red Dust* (1952), 24 profiles of people she had interviewed in a physically gruelling five-month period in 1937. Out of a sense of what she called "do-gooder public service," she concentrated in her books, which she wrote in haste, on "just giving out information, not being a writer."

Helen Snow's trip to Yenan followed her husband's, and involved comparable heroics: notably when Helen escaped through the window of the Xi'an guest house where she was under police surveillance to make her way into communist-held territory. The trip gave her material for four books, written from notebooks she wore strapped to her body in a kind of home-made lifebelt.

The Snows were as much the engines of history in China in these years as they were recorders of it. In 1938 the couple joined and led a campaign to develop light industry inside and outside communist-held areas through workers' co-operatives. Their purpose was to sustain the economies of regions where Red military operations were under way.

The "gung-ho" movement, as it came to be known (meaning "working together"), had at its peak in 1940 nearly 2,000 functioning societies and nearly 30,000 members. It was the subject of a book by Helen Snow, *China Builds For Democracy*. She remained active in promoting and raising money for the movement long after her return to the United States.

The Snow marriage did not survive the adventurous China years. By 1942, after both had settled in America, it was all but over. Helen's imperious and frequently disparaging personal style conflicted painfully with Edgar's more relaxed approach to life.

A separation agreement signed in 1945 was followed by four years of acrimonious personal and legal wrangling that ended in a divorce settlement.

In 1963, she brought a legal action against him for back-alimony, attaching Snow's American book royalties. She did not remarry.

Leo Rosten

Jewish humorist who sometimes tired of his lovable creation, Hyman Kaplan

LEO ROSTEN, who has died aged 88, will always be recalled as the creator of Hyman Kaplan, possibly to the exclusion of almost everything else he wrote.

There were times when Rosten almost tired of Kaplan as much as Conan Doyle tired of Holmes. "There are people," he lamented, "who seem to think I'm Hyman Kaplan." But nothing he produced was suffused with the same warmth or humour or had the same appeal.

Leo Calvin Rosten was born at Lodz, Poland, on April 11 1908 and went to America in 1911. He was educated at Chicago University and then at the LSE. His stay in London left him with a life-long affection for England. He liked to entertain at the Savile Club on the frequent occasions he was in London. "Here I inhale the past," he said, "in New York I exhale it."

In 1933 he became a research assistant in the Political Science Department at Chicago, and the next year a Fellow of the Social Science Research Council. But that did not last long and he was soon teaching English to immigrants in night school.

There he came across Kaplan, a small, tireless, indomitable and opinionated character whose limited command of English did not prevent him from airing his views on an unlimited range of subjects, or even correcting his English teachers.

Rosten was a careful observer with a faultless ear and he used his encounter with Kaplan to write a succession of short stories under the name of Leonard Q Ross for the *New Yorker* in 1935. In book form *The Education of Hyman Kaplan* (1937) was an immediate success in America.

It also sold well in Britain, where even Harold Nicolson,

Rosten: a new readership for The Joys of Yiddish

who was not overly fond of Jews, was charmed by it. P G Wodehouse, hailed it as "sheer genius"; Evelyn Waugh said it was worthy of Dickens.

While the book was a tribute both to America and its immigrants, it was not always seen as such by Jewish readers, especially when they no longer spoke in broken English. Some regarded the work as a send-up of their fathers; others denounced Jewish dialect jokes as anti-Semitic. Had the book been written by a non-Jew it might never have been published.

Rosten was unapologetic, but more than 20 years passed before he followed up the book with *The Return of Hyman Kaplan* (1959) which, perhaps inevitably, was less successful. He had a third try in 1976 with *Kaplan O My Kaplan* which, in comparative terms, was a flop. By then Jews were better placed to laugh at themselves, but immigrants were a distant memory and they no longer saw the joke.

By then Rosten had another best-seller to his name in the form of a dictionary, *The Joys of Yiddish* (1968). He illustrated his meanings with a wealth of Jewish jokes, all superbly told. And this time there were no recriminations.

Yiddish, by 1968, had made considerable inroads into American and through it into English. Consequently, the book was of more than Jewish interest and became a standard work of reference; Rosten himself became an exponent of what he called "Yinglish". It was, however, particularly cherished among Jews who had been impatient to discard their past in their anxiety to become American and were now trying to recover it.

Rosten was a distinguished-looking figure, broad shouldered, of medium height, with silvery hair, pouchy eyes and a world-weary expression — and indeed as he grew older he did rather weary of the world. He regarded student unrest as the caprice of a pampered generation and denounced it in a fiercely written polemic, *A Trumpet for Reason* (1971).

He became something of an industry and produced a torrent of newspaper and magazine articles, novels, thrillers and screenplays, but at heart he was always an academic. In 1939 he headed a team of historians and sociologists to produce a history of the motion picture industry, but unfortunately the book was published on Dec 7 1941, the same day as Pearl Harbor. It did not vanish without trace, but did not get the attention it would otherwise have received.

During the war he was deputy director of war information in Washington, and in 1945 he was made a special consultant to the Secretary of State for War and was sent on missions to France, Germany and England.

Later he became a faculty associate at Columbia, taught Political Science at Yale and at the School for Social Research, New York.

He received the Distinguished Almunus Award at Chicago University, and honorary degrees from Rochester University and Hebrew Union College.

In 1975 he was made a Fellow of the LSE.

Leo Rosten married first, in 1935, Priscilla Mead. After her death he married Gertrude Zimmerman. He is survived by his second wife, one son and two daughters.

Lt-Col Philip Edgell

Organiser of mountain supply lines

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL PHILIP EDGELL, who has died aged 90, held probably the largest lieutenant-colonel's command in the Second World War, and was one of the few British officers to be decorated by the Russians.

In December 1942 Edgell was posted to Paiforce (Persia and Iraq) to form 16 Transport Column, RASC, as well as to advise the UK Commercial Transport Department, Teheran. For some time this department had been running non-military supplies to Russia in chartered civilian vehicles with Persian drivers.

With the Germans pressing on to Stalingrad, it was vital to supply the Russians with ammunition, which could not be carried by civilian vehicles. During the next 15 months, 16 columns delivered 300 tons a day of ammunition and military supplies.

It was a 700-mile journey from Khanaqin in Iraq to Tabriz in Persia, which included four mountain passes, two over 7,000 ft. Temperatures varied from 125 F in summer to minus 10 F in winter. One convoy experienced a drop in temperature from 106 F to 19 F in four days on the road.

By March 1944, when supplies were coming in from Archangel, the column was withdrawn. By then it had 80 officers, 4,121 other ranks and 1,400 vehicles. Edgell, who had been appointed OBE in 1943, was then appointed a Member of the Order of the Patriotic War (1st class) by the Praesidium of the USSR.

Philip Mawbey Edgell was born on Nov 26 1906 and educated at Forest Hill School. While working for the Goldsmiths Company in 1925 he joined the Artists Rifles. In 1931 he became advertising manager for Harrods and in 1936 joined C D Notley, the advertising agency.

On the outbreak of war he

Edgell in Persia

applied for an Infantry commission, but as he was then 33 he was transferred to the Royal Army Service Corps. He served in France with the BEF, and was evacuated at Dunkirk.

He was then posted to the Middle East, where he commanded 345 Company, RASC, one of whose first tasks was conveying sick and wounded on the 300 miles from Benghazi to Tobruk. Later the company was besieged for four months in Tobruk, where he was mentioned in despatches.

Edgell was then appointed Deputy Assistant Director of Transport in the Canal area, and organised supplies for the Battle of Alamein. He was again mentioned in despatches.

Then came Paiforce, after which 16 Column moved to Italy and was employed in Taranto, Brindisi and Bari.

After the war he returned to Notley's, becoming its managing director.

Philip Edgell married first, in 1934, Lorna Winch. She and her mother were killed by a German bomb on London in 1940. He married secondly, in 1946, Natalie Broomhead; they had two sons.

Christopher Hohler

Unlikely but brilliant and devoted medievalist whose fierce approach to his students sorted out the sheep from the goats

CHRISTOPHER HOHLER, the medievalist and art historian who has died aged 80, never fulfilled the expectations of those who knew him before the war.

Perhaps this is explained by his refusal to cultivate the kind of success that is measured by appointments or publications, nor did he order his life according to any preconceived plan.

Born on Jan 22 1917, he was educated at Eton and New College, Oxford, where he took a degree in history. He then spent most of the war in military intelligence in the Middle East, and stayed on afterwards to learn Arabic, with a view to joining the Foreign Office — though he had previously tried for the Army, and once remarked that he would have liked to be a bishop.

None of this prepared him for what became his life's work. On his return to England, and one suspects rather to his surprise, he was invited by Anthony Blunt, on the recommendation of Joan Evans and his former tutor at Oxford, T S R Boase, to teach medieval art history at the Courtauld Institute.

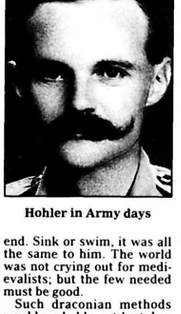
For this his only apparent qualification was an enthusiasm for archaeology, and he is said to have protested that he knew nothing about art. "That is all right," said Boase, "you know everything else. You'll soon pick it up." Hohler stayed at the Courtauld until he retired to Norway in 1980.

Whether he ever did become a proper art historian is a matter of opinion. He wrote no books and few articles. His name is hardly ever to be found in art-historical bibliographies. It is probably more familiar to medieval musicologists than to students of medieval art.

But appearances are deceptive. The places to find Hohler's contributions to art-historical scholarship are in his correspondence and among his students. He was an indefatigable writer of letters, which, if collected, would fill volumes.

Those favoured by his attention were liable to find the experience unnerving. Ignorance of liturgical texts would bring down upon their heads avalanches of erudition, the purpose of which was to destroy what Hohler considered to be simple-minded nonsense. He cared deeply about the Middle Ages, and could not bear to see the reality traduced by modern minds ill equipped to understand them.

This determination to protect the period he loved from the ravages of the incompetent was the hallmark of his teaching. Would-be medievalists at the Courtauld were plunged in at the deep



Hohler in Army days

end. Sink or swim, it was all the same to him. The world was not crying out for medievalists; but the few needed must be good.

Such draconian methods would probably not be tolerated today; but "Ordeal by Hohler" did sort out the sheep from the goats. Some of his students were very good indeed — the late Andrew Martindale and the present directors of the Victoria and Albert and the Courtauld Institute were among them.

Those who survived the treatment could be excused for feeling that they had been initiated into an exclusive club. Hohler was one of the first to see the necessity of treating art history in the same way as any other historical discipline; and though he himself was not very good at providing examples of how this should be done, his nose for bad arguments was unerring.

Hohler could, and perhaps did, live much of his life in the past, thinking its thoughts and knowing by instinct what it was like to be an important medieval person, whether a grand prelate or a knight errant, both of which he could play as if to the manner born.

Impetuous and hot-blooded, gallant and chivalrous, obstinate and honest, pious and humble by turns, he was not a man to feel at ease with — which may explain why he remained on the fringes of the academic establishment.

He was too eccentric, too much a man out of his own time, to have disciples. But his disconcerting ability to see the present from a viewpoint in the past could shake out of any complacent assumption those who thought that ours is the best of all possible worlds. He was a very remarkable man.

He was married first to Jane Lane; they had two sons and two daughters. After their divorce he married Erla Bergendahl; they had two sons and a one daughter.

Clifford Longley

SACRED AND PROFANE

The Internet is clever – but what's it for?

THERE is one trouble with the Internet. It is the answer to a question nobody was asking. Back in the 1970s, not even the wildest visionary was wondering how to use his telephone, at his own expense, to fill his computer screen with an advert for Coca-Cola.

And what is the question to which this is the answer? — "The Church of England is the established (i.e. state) church in England and the mother church of the Anglican Communion. It originated in the councils between Church and State throughout the Middle Ages, culminating in the Act of Supremacy issued by Henry VIII in 1534." Is cyberspace — what they call the Internet world — full of people asking themselves whether the Church of England is or is not the mother church of the Anglican Communion? As to what these mysterious "councils" were, we are not told.

This is how the Church of England's main Internet entry begins on what is called its Home Web Page. Apart from its inelegant pomposity, it is obviously the wrong answer to what the Internet is for, because it presupposes that Web pages are like shop-fronts or the shelves of a magazine rack, where casual passers-by might be tempted to browse.

The Internet, for those who have yet to open *The Daily Telegraph's* weekly *Connected* supplement, is a worldwide lattice of large computers, connected by phone-line, with which smaller desktop computers can also connect by phone.

Its tentacles stretch from the Indian Ocean to the Holy See

Its tentacles stretch to many millions, from Beijing to Auckland, from the Indian Ocean to . . . well, to the Holy See. If this is the pipeline, what does one pour through it? The Vatican is now investing heavily in what *Time* magazine has described as the world's biggest Web site (www.vatican.va), with three large computers (named Raphael, Michael and Gabriel). It is not yet open, but it will offer resources for theological research second to none.

The Vatican already has an edge in this field, because of the renowned location (christusrex.org/www1/sistine) at which the entire decoration of the Sistine Chapel is available, detail by detail, in full colour. At Vatican Radio's site (www.wrn.org/vatican-radio), even the voice of the Pope saying the Rosary can be downloaded.

Whatever else the Internet is for, it is for communication. It should suit very well any organisation with a central leadership and many dispersed members and local groups. Churches and religions, it would seem, are ideal. There are already said to be some 20,000 Web sites worldwide devoted to religion in one form or another. It is apparent, however, that the English view of the Internet is rather tepid. It is still seen as not much more than a toy, of no great interest to grown-ups.

Thousands of local churches all over America put the times of their services and the names of their ministers on the Internet as a matter of routine. In Britain, only a few have followed suit. Thus a company director in East Sussex might be entertaining Polish visitors for the weekend, and can tell his guests that there is a mass in Polish in Brighton every Sunday.

The Internet can do that. But how many people would think of looking? The Arundel and Brighton Catholic diocese is one of the very few to get its Internet act together. Two other creditable church Web sites are the Anglican dioceses of Oxford, and Bath and Wells, where Internet visitors are greeted with a "Message from Jim", the bishop.

But it is patchy and often half-hearted. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Web site does not seem to have been updated since October, and shows only a meagre sample of the many thoughtful speeches Dr Carey has made in the past year. (When Dr Carey visited the Pope last year, the Vatican was putting out papal speeches of welcome on the Internet almost as they were delivered. There is still no mention of the trip, let alone what Dr Carey said in reply, at www.anglican.org.uk/arch/).

There are good spots. The Church of Scotland's Web page (churchnet.org.uk/lifework), is very attractive and does not make the mistake of trying to anticipate too closely what use people will make of it. The *Tablet* (www.thetablet.co.uk) is the leading English religious publication on the Net. The Anglican Consultative Council has a busy site (aco.org/acns) which sometimes gives Church of England news, but the most user-friendly English site is the main Catholic one (www.tasc.ac.uk/cc/).

Where church involvement is successful, this is clearly the work of enthusiastic individuals like the Rev Richard Thomas, responsible for the Oxford site. He is also organising a Web site for the millennium celebrations (200ad.org) and is a founder member of a new European ecumenical body, European Christian Internet Consultation (ECIC), which held its first conference in Germany last November and plans another next summer in England.

It may be a good sign, perhaps, that its main preoccupation is still "What is the Internet for?" It is a brilliant tool . . . but for doing what, exactly?

CHESS

Challenge by China trio

By Malcolm Pein

THE Malaysian millionaire chess enthusiast, Dato Tan, is sponsoring a challenge match between three English Grandmasters and three Chinese GMs currently on a tour of Europe. The match will be at the London College of Traditional Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, Finchley, north London.

The Chinese GMs will be Wang Zili, Ye Jingchuan and Peng Xaomin. The visitors outrate the English trio of Chris Ward, reigning British champion, Neil McDonald, and Keith Arkell.

The match will run from Feb 25 to March 2 under the double round Scheveningen System, where each member of each team plays his opposite numbers twice.

Danny Gormally, of Charlton Chess Club, is on course for his second IM norm after scoring three straight wins at the **Cardiff Masters.** Gormally needs four draws from his remaining games to reach the required 6/9. Luke McShane lost to the Irish international, Colm Daly, and needs a 3/4 finish.

Round 4: Gormally 1-0 Saunders; J Cobb draw S Williams; Ionescu 0-1 McShane; Daly draw Mannion, Siebrecht 1-0 Tozer. **Round 5:** Tozer 0-1 Gormally; Mannion draw Siebrecht; McShane 0-1 Daly; S Williams 1-0 Ionescu; Saunders 0-1 J Cobb.

Scores: Gormally 4/5; J Cobb, Williams 3.5; Daly, Mannion, McShane 3; Siebrecht 2.5; Ionescu, Tozer 1; Saunders 0.5.

Croatian GM Bogdan Lalic emerged as the only player on a perfect score after three rounds of the Deloitte & Touche **Jersey Chess Festival** played at the Hotel de Normande at St Helier.

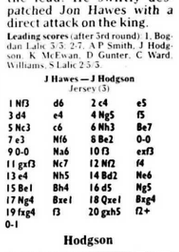
The game of the day was on top board where Lalic deftly avoided English IM Andrew Webster's attempts to complicate with a sacrifice and exchanged pieces to a won endgame. Welsh international Leighton Williams achieved a creditable draw against Chris Ward. Julian Hodgson is half a point off the lead. He swiftly despatched Jon Hawes with a direct attack on the king.

Leading scores (after 3rd round): J. Bogdan Lalic 3.5; 2-7, A.P. Smith, J. Hodgson, K. McEwan, D. Gunter, C. Ward, Williams, S Lalic 2.5; 3.

J Hawes — J Hodgson
Jersey (5)

1 Nf3	d6	2 c4	e5
3 d4	e4	4 Ng5	f5
5 Nc3	c6	6 Nh3	Be7
7 e3	Nf6	8 Be2	0-0
9 0-0	Na6	10 f3	exf3
11 gxf3	Nc7	12 Nf2	f4
13 e4	Nh5	14 Bd2	Ne6
15 Be1	Bh4	16 d5	Ng5
17 Ng4	Bxe1	18 Qxe1	Bxg4
19 fxg4	f3	20 gxh5	f2+
0-1			

Hodgson



Hawes

Final position. 21.Rxf2 Nh3+ wins

B Lalic — A Webster
Jersey (3)

1 e4	g6	2 d4	Bg7
3 Nc3	c6	4 Nf3	d5
5 h3	Nf6	6 e5	Ne4
7 Nxe4	dxe4	8 Ng5	c5
9 e6	f6	10 Nf7	Qxd4
11 Nxh8	Bxe6	12 Nxg6	hxg6
13 Bb5+	Nd7	14 0-0	0-0-0
15 Qe2	Ne5	16 Be3	Qd6
17 Rfd1	Qc7	18 Rxd8+	Kxd8
19 Qd2+	Kc8	20 Bf4	Qb6
21 Rd1	f5	22 a4	a6
23 Bxe5	Bxe5	24 Bd7+	Bxd7
25 Qxd7+	Kb8	26 Qxe7	Bc7
27 b3	c4	28 bxc4	Qc6
29 Qb4	f4	30 c5	f3
31 Re1	fxg2	32 Qxe4	Qxc5
33 Qe8+	Ka7	34 Qe3	Qxa3
35 Kxe3	Kb6	36 Rb1+	Ka5
37 Rxb7	Bd8	38 Kxg2	Kxa4
39 e4	1-0		

"Helen Snow." Daily Telegraph, 21 Feb. 1997, p. 31. The Telegraph Historical Archive, link.gale.com/apps/doc/IO0700703626/TGRH?u=tou&sid=bookmark-TGRH. Accessed 9 July 2024.