

QUARTERLY RIDDLE ROUNDUP

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Each of the last four issues of *Word Ways* has offered one or more articles discussing Eliza Hurst's 1782 *Ladies' Diary* riddle or enigma, and this article continues the fad. Herewith the latest on this topic so far as I am aware of it at press time, plus some items of related interest:

Hurst Enigma News

Ronnie Kon came tantalizingly close, in the August *Word Ways*, to identifying the long-sought intended solution to Eliza Hurst's 1782 *Ladies' Diary* enigma. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately, for it is a poor fit for her riddle), the solution he found—an oven—could not have been Eliza's intended one. Here is why:

As will be recalled, Faith Eckler reported in the May 2011 *Word Ways* that Jeff Grant had discovered that this riddle first appeared, attributed to one Miss Eliza Hurst, in the 1782 edition of the *Ladies' Diary* almanac, where it was the first in a group of riddles entitled "New Enigmas to be answered in next Year's Diary." Jeff found an online copy of this almanac in a book entitled *Collection of English Almanacs for the years 1702–1835* on the Google Books website; it was said to be copyrighted, and consequently only the first two lines of the riddle were permitted to be read. Unfortunately, this book does not contain a copy of the 1783 *Ladies' Diary*, in which the answer to the riddle may presumably be found. However, Google Books indicates that at least one copy of the 1783 almanac does still exist, in the library of Cambridge University.

Subsequently, as was reported in the August *Word Ways*, Ronnie Kon found another online copy of *Collection of English Almanacs for the Years 1702-1835*, this one at the website of the HathiTrust Digital Library. Here, the book is described as being uncopyrighted, and may be perused in its entirety. Even more startlingly, Kon was somehow able to obtain from or through the British Library (although I fail to find any mention of the *Ladies' Diary* in its posted collection lists) a photocopy, reproduced in *Word Ways* in August, of a page from the 1783 *Ladies' Diary* which at first glance seems to bring to a merciful end the saga of the the search for the intended solution to Eliza Hurst's enigma. In a box entitled "Answers to the Enigmas," it shows a list of *twelve* numbered words, No. 1 of which (corresponding to the Hurst enigma's number) is "oven."

This is not, however, be the right grail. As may be seen from the copy of the almanac at the HathiTrust site, there were only *six* enigmas offered in the 1782 almanac—six, not twelve. The most likely explanation for this discrepancy is that the 1783 almanac contains *two* sets of enigma answers, one of twelve for the 1783 enigmas and one of six for the 1782 enigmas, and by mistake the wrong list was photocopied. (Or so one hopes; the alternative possibility, that the 1783 almanac's editor simply forgot to post the 1782 answers, hardly bears contemplation.) The right list, presumably, still awaits recovery elsewhere in the almanac.

So it seems we must wait yet a while longer to learn at last the intended answer to this elusive little enigma. For the nonce, at least, rival theories of what in the world Eliza Hurst may have

been hinting at in her rhymes may still be entertained; for my part, I have previously indicated my belief that the answer to her riddle is probably “a honeybee,” much to the general apathy. We shall see what transpires.

The Pipers of Craven

Regarding the honeybee hypothesis, I have recently come across an interesting fact which may tend to bolster it. When I expounded the bee theory in a February 2011 article, I had no definite explanation for the line in the riddle which runs, “...And in the ev’ning I close with a pipe,” an activity which seems like a bit of a stretch for a bee. Since then, I have learned something that apiarists have apparently long known, namely that both queen and worker bees at certain times emit a variety of loud, distinctive sounds collectively known as “piping.” These sounds, which the bees make by rapidly vibrating their flight muscles, seem to serve both as a form of intrahive communication from queens to workers and as a way to ready the bees’ muscles for flight just prior to swarming events. Whereas worker bees are said to make only one kind of piping sound, queens, depending upon their circumstances, may make either of two very distinct sounds, these being characterized by those who have heard them as “hooting” and—so help me—“quacking.” Anyone wishing to learn more about piping behavior in bees needs only google the phrase “bees piping” to be directed to a number of informative online articles.

Could Eliza Hurst have been familiar with the term “piping” as it pertains to bees? It seems not impossible. The OED’s earliest citation for such usage is from the 1828 edition of the *Craven Glossary*, a lexicon of the north Yorkshire dialect, which defines the term as “the musical signal of bees preparatory to their swarming or casting a second time.” That citation is 46 years younger than Eliza’s enigma, but such an arcane usage of the term “piping” might easily have existed in colloquial regional speech for a long time before coming to the attention of early lexicographers.

Some New Old Enigmas

For anyone who may have an appetite for this kind of riddle, here are the four of the five other enigmas in the 1782 *Ladies’ Diary* set that was headed by Eliza Hurst’s contribution. Their intended answers, obviously, will come to light whenever Eliza’s enigma’s does.

II. Enigma, by MYSTICUS

Ye tuneful nymphs on whom Apollo deigns
To smile propitious and reward your strains,
Descend a while from your exalted state,
And hear attentive what I shall relate.

Where plummy songsters strain their little throats,
And fill th’ air with their harmonious notes,
Where lowing kine and bleating flocks repair
From Phoebus’ ray, to taste the noontide air.
Such blissful scenes my parent long enjoy’d,
No cares e’er troubled and no pleasures cloy’d;
'Till cruel man with rage relentless steel’d,
By blows repeated forc’d him soon to yield.

Proud of the conquest he pursues with ire,
His limbs he tears and burns his head with fire;
He binds his body with a massive chain,
And, unrelenting, drags him o’er the plain.
So stern Achilles triumph’d o’er the corpse
Of god-like Hector, feeling no remorse.
From such heart-renting woes I being date,
And owe my birth to his untimely fate.
In galling bands my infant days are past,
With num’rous brethren, but get free at last;
Forsake my bondage vile, ascend on high,
And fix my residence ’tween earth and sky:

In splendid robes I'm drest in nicest care,
 To shield my body from the inclement air;
 In red, or blue, or in a coat of white,
 I'm wrapt so close, I seldom see the light.
 When Lords and Dukes appear in rooms of state,
 I'm placed above them, be they e'er so great:

Yet often lie beneath their servants' feet.
 In rural cottages I oft appear,
 To guard from thieves, the Farmer's Christmas
 beer;
 But vain, ah vain! my utmost efforts are,
 Thieves will be thieves, in spite of all my care.

III. Enigma, by Mr. WILLIAM PURVER

In the regions of death I am known to abide,
 To sorrow and sleep I am nearly ally'd;
 From mirth ever absent, from folly am free,
 A sworn foe to scandal—with envy agree:
 From a termagant woman am banish'd all day,
 Nor with her one hour permitted to stay;

At night I attend her, and meet no surprize,
 But fly in the morn when she opens her eyes.
 To some lovely bower perhaps I repair,
 Or mount without murmur, and dwell in the air;
 And St.ephon's [?] fond hopes, or his fears I remove,
 As the language of hate, or the language of love.

IV. Enigma, by JOSEPHUS SCRIBLERUS

When mortals make a sad lament,
 And all around bring discontent,
 I, swiftly with a magic charm,
 A host of horrors can disarm—
 To vexed minds afford relief,
 And smooth the troubled face of grief.
 I've too, the soft persuasive art
 To steal into a maiden's heart;
 And, adding fuel to love's fire,
 Can melt the soul with warm desire.
 I'm fond of pomp and pageantry,
 Of dance and youthful jollity;
 Am with the hero in his car,
 And give fresh courage for the war;
 Tumultuous crowds, whene'er I call,
 Silence each rude contentious brawl.

With gaping mouths they list'ning stand,
 Responsive to my high command.
 The gay, the giddy, and the vain,
 Delighted, join my pleasing train;
 Nor sober widom doth refuse
 To follow me, whom ev'ry Muse
 Acknowledges to be divine,
 And hand-maid unto all the Nine.
 I've pass'd the gloomy realms below,
 Made *Pluto* weep at mortal woe,
Ixion cease to turn his wheel,
 And ev'ry torture to be still;
 But, yet, my birth I draw from Heav'n,
 From whence my wond'rous pow'r is giv'n;
 To charm the planets in their spheres,
 And bid them roll unnumber'd years.

[6.] Prize Enigma (of 10 Diaries,) by Mr. WM. PURVER

When Kneller with peculiar grace
 Immortaliz'd a lady's face,
 His eyes no doubt her beauties caught,
 And overlook'd each trivial fault;
 Nor ever imitated me,
 A Painter of sincerity.
 When in my service I engage,
 To justify the wrecks of age,
 I flatter none; and when I trace
 The passions in the varying face:
 Hate's sullen gloom, or love's soft sigh,
 The whisp'ring wish, the speaking eye,
 The look of rapture, or despair,
 Or mirth, or frolic revel there;

And matchless charms harmonious join,
 'Tis nature favors my design.
 But, ladies, hear my wretched case,
 I know you'll pity my disgrace;
 I've been your servant ages past,
 And shall while youth and beauty last,
 You as a lover have address'd me,
 Rever'd, rewarded and caress'd me:
 And shall a daring race divide
 A friendship, wit and beauty ty'd?
 Shall folly, leagu'd with impudence,
 Usurp the place of solid sense,
 Where studied converse, garb and features
 Spoil one of nature's noblest creatures?

You with a smile my presence greet;
From those a grin is all I meet;
Where grace in all its height has been,
Deformity reverse the scene;
Thus Dian's air and Venus' shape
Are oft contrasted by an ape,
And some there are where sense presides,
Where reason rules, and prudence guides,
Who level satires at the fair,
And hate the beau's fantastic air:
But cease to chide, ye grave and wise,
And gaze on Stella's brilliant eyes,
Through all that art and dress supplies,
She will this wondrous truth fulfil,
'That beauty will be beauty still.'

While thus in friendship we combine,
Let malice hiss, and envy pine,
For 'tis the ladies who respect me,
And who but them will e'er protect me.

But truth, ye fair, I needs must tell,
You often love me far too well;
You're beautiful, I can't deceive ye,
And yet so faithless can't believe me;
Should I a thousand times restore,
What I have shown you o'er and o'er.
But in that sad and luckless day,
When passion bears so great a sway,
I fill the mind with dire infections,
Urge vanity, and cast reflections,
Assist the hand in beauty's cause,
To banish health and gain applause.

So when Narcissus vainly spy'd
His image in the floating tide,
And reason in the maze was lost,
And love his anxious bosom crost,
His beauteous form at ev'ry view,
Tho' fair at first, still fairer grew;
Till to himself a slave was made,
And fell a victim to a shade.