QUARTERLY RIDDLE ROUNDUP

JIM PUDER
Saratoga, California

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 a 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—or 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 corse
    Of god-like Hector, feeling no remorse.
    From such heart-renting woes I being date,
    And owe my birth to his untimely fate.
    In gallies 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,  
Yet often lie beneath their servants' feet.  
To shield my body from the inclement air;  
In rural cottages I oft appear,  
In red, or blue, or in a coat of white,  
To guard from thieves, the Farmer's Christmas  
I'm wrapt so close, I seldom see the light.  
beer;  
When Lords and Dukes appear in rooms of state.  
But vain, ah vain! my utmost efforts are,  
I'm placed above them, be they e'er so great:  
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,  
At night I attend her, and meet no surprize,  
To sorrow and sleep I am nearly ally'd;  
But fly in the morn when she opens her eyes.  
From mirth ever absent, from folly am free,  
To some lovely bower perhaps I repair,  
A sworn foe to scandal—with envy agree;  
Or mount without murmur, and dwell in the air;  
From a termagent woman am banish'd all day,  
And St.ephon's [?] fond hopes, or his fears I remove,  
Nor with her one hour permitted to stay;  
As the language of hate, or the language of love.

IV. Enigma, by JOSEPHUS SCRIBLERUS

When mortals make a sad lament,  
With gaping mouths they list'ning stand,  
And all around bring discontent,  
Responsive to my high command.  
I, swiftly with a magic charm,  
The gay, the giddy, and the vain,  
A host of horrors can disarm—  
Delighted, join my pleasing train;  
To vexed minds afford relief,  
Nor sober widom doth refuse  
And smooth the troubled face of grief.  
To follow me, whom ev'ry Muse  
I've too, the soft persuasive art  
Acknowledges to be divine,  
To steal into a maiden's heart;  
And hand-maid unto all the Nine.  
And, adding fuel to love's fire,  
I've pass'd the gloomy realms below,  
Can melt the soul with warm desire.  
Made Pluto weep at mortal woe,  
I'm fond of pomp and pageantry,  
Ixion cease to turn his wheel,  
Of dance and youthful jollity;  
And ev'ry torture to be still;  
Am with the hero in his car,  
But, yet, my birth I draw from Heav'n,  
And give fresh courage for the war;  
From whence my wond'rous pow'r is giv'n;  
To charm the planets in their spheres,  
Tumultuous crowds, wher'e I call,  
And bid them roll unnumber'd years.  
Silence each rude contentious brawl.

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

When Kneller with peculiar grace  
And matchless charms harmonious join,  
Immortaliz'd a lady's face,  'Tis nature favors my design.  
His eyes no doubt her beauties caught,  But, ladies, hear my wretched case,  And overlook'd each trivial fault;  I know you'll pity my disgrace;  Nor ever imitated me,  I've been your servant wretched case,  A Painter of sincerity.  And shall while youth and beauty last,  When in my service I engage,  You as a lover have address'd me,  To justify the wrecks of age,  Rever'd, rewarded and caress'd me:  I flatter none; and when I trace  And shall a daring race divide  The passions in the varying face:  A friendship, wit and beauty ty'd?  Hate's sullen gloom, or love's soft sigh,  Shall folly, leagu'd with impudence,  The whispering wish, the speaking eye,  Usurp the place of solid sense,  The look of rapture, or despair,  Where studied converse, garb and features  Or mirth, or frolic revel there;  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 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.