

# LAST KNOWN MOMENTS OF

# M.P. WHO VANISHED

ONE warm September evening a man ordered a drink at a hotel in London's Strand and began chatting with some army officers standing at the bar.

He was well dressed, spoke with intelligence and style, and gave the impression he was a figure of some importance.

After a few minutes idle conversation he downed his drink, paid for it, walked out of the lobby — and sparked off a mystery that has baffled Scotland Yard for over sixty years.

For when Victor Grayson, MP, one of the most famous figures in British politics, slipped out of that hotel in September 1920, he vanished.

## Swept to power

He disappeared, it seemed, off the face of the earth — leaving friends, relatives and police, baffled.

Grayson's rise to fame had been meteoric.

Born in 1882 in the heart of Liverpool's slums, he grew up amidst the squalor of Victorian city life, and vowed he'd do all he could to change conditions.

He won a scholarship to a local high school, then went on to Cambridge.

There he entered political life and eventually became a Labour Party candidate for Colne Valley.

He swept to power in the former Liberal seat in 1907, and from that moment became one of the most prominent members of London society.

He fascinated with his rapier-like wit in the drawing rooms, or in the House of Commons, and swayed the hearts of thousands with his oratory on the Liverpool docks.

As an opponent, political or social, he was feared.

This was the magnetic, larger-than-life personality who walked out of a hotel and disappeared.

Detectives sifted through the details of his life to find the answer to the mystery.

He'd married in 1912 the actress Ruth Nightingale, daughter of a banker.

Although he was happy with her, and the marriage seemed to form a base for his feverish career, he had a nervous breakdown in 1914.

## Rang hollow

This was largely a combination of money troubles and the pressures he subjected himself to.

At this stage began what was to become a heavy dependence on drink.

But all those who knew him claim that he never took drink out of depression or desperation.

He used alcohol always as a stimulant to keep him going, and only once, some years later, did he show any public signs of its effect — collapsing briefly while speaking at a political rally.

A drink problem would not be enough to defeat

## MYSTERY UNSOLVED?

Intriguing series casts light on baffling human situations that have defied explanation

Instead of going to a meeting in Hull he took a train to London. Was that the first move in a carefully-laid plan to disappear — or was he overtaken by some totally different misadventure?

such an aggressive personality and make him want to disappear.

But the flamboyance and colour which had been his trademark and his passport to success had begun to ring hollow.

Also, his wife had died in childbirth.

## At rally

In September 1920 he told his mother he was going to a meeting in Hull.

Instead he took a train to London.

He went into a hotel, booked a room and had a drink. The group of army officers at the bar enjoyed their few moments conversation with such a likeable and interesting man.

He gave the barman a pound for one drink, waived the change — then vanished.

A former political colleague provided the first sighting after that.

In 1924, four years after his disappearance, he claimed he saw Grayson skulking among crowds at a political rally in Maidstone, Kent.

The mystery man chatted with a group of young people then disappeared.

When the colleague asked them what he'd said to them they quoted, "I used to churn out this rubbish once, you know."

Police inquiries in



Victor Grayson.

He had meteoric rise to fame.



Maidstone revealed nothing. Coincidentally a medium in the same town claimed, soon after, that she'd been in touch with Grayson.

But no more was heard for eight years.

Meanwhile, in 1929, Grayson's mother died.

She swore she'd heard nothing from him, and half believed he was dead.

She died saying she thought he'd suffered some form of amnesia.

Suddenly in 1932 the case burst into life again when an old friend who'd known Grayson since he was at Cambridge said he'd seen him from the top of a bus in Charing Cross Road.

## In train

"I was so convinced it was him, I ran down the stairs and off the moving bus, but by that time he'd disappeared in the crowd," he said.

In 1939 another good friend claimed to have seen Grayson.

Sidney Campion was Chief Public Relations Officer of the Post Office.

His route to work was along the District line underground.

He was sitting in a train one morning when a man and a woman got on at Sloane Square and sat opposite him.

"I immediately thought 'that's Victor Grayson,' and decided to listen to their conversation," he said.

"He looked about sixty, and she seemed to be about 40; several times she called him Vic."

"Then as the train stopped at Westminster the man pointed to the platform sign with his umbrella and said 'Here's the old firm,' and they both laughed.

"She said: 'We must look in some time, Vic.'"

## Kept vow

Campion was worried about challenging the man in case he'd made a mistake — and if it was his old friend he was rather embarrassed about approaching him with a strange woman hanging on his arm.

And Grayson, if it was him, didn't seem to recognise Campion.

Campion got off the train and reported to Scotland Yard — but the chance had been missed.

Other rumours speculated that Grayson had died in Australia.

On a visit to New Zealand and Australia, a Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Fuel and Power was told by an Australian Cabinet Minister that Grayson was buried in a remote grave in Western Australia.

And in New Zealand, a senior member of the Auckland Labour Party confirmed the story — but there was no time to investigate it and now the rumour remains unsubstantiated, with no one

remembering where the grave was supposed to be.

In 1952 Grayson's sister came over from Canada, where she'd emigrated to soon after his disappearance, to keep a vow she'd made to try to trace him.

## Gave up

She told Scotland Yard detectives that he'd warned her never to get worried if he went underground for a while, and that it would be because of money troubles.

But after searching through the missing person's file and talking to everyone who knew him or had sighted him, she gave up, having made no further progress.

Since then other reports and sightings placed Grayson all over Europe, notably in Nice and the South of Spain, but they all came to nothing.

It's almost certain Grayson is now dead.

And it may be the world will never know the reason for his baffling disappearance, and the secrets of his last years.

## NEXT WEEK

Her exploits brought honour and fame. And her tragic end gave rise to startling rumours.

## NEAT TRICK BUT ...

TWO men planned to steal a car and sell it abroad.

They took a new car out for a test drive from a Stirling garage, had the keys copied and returned the car.

Then they stole number plates from a wrecked car of the same make.

## Flew home

The next day they broke into the garage, fitted the car up with the false number plates, and set off for Malta.

But the plan came unstuck when Customs officials in Malta asked them for a driving licence. When neither could produce one, the car was impounded.

The men flew home. And shortly afterwards police investigating the theft arrested them.

They admitted the theft in court, and were recently ordered to do 200 hours community service each.

# HOLIDAYMAKER BECAME STAR OF THE SHOW

TENERIFE won't forget housewife Pam Clegg in a hurry. She took the place by storm during a package holiday and soon was the toast of her hotel — as a singing star.

When Pam (30) and husband Stephen flew to the island for a two-week winter break in the sun they found their hotel had nightly entertainment in the form of a guitarist and organist.

Pam, who a few years ago sang as a semi-professional with a group, approached them the day after she arrived, and asked to sing.

"Stephen and I had listened to them play the first night we stayed at the hotel, and they were very good," said Pam, of Tonaclyffe Road, Rochdale.

"I asked them the next afternoon if they'd go through a couple of songs with me, and we got on well, but I was surprised when they asked me to take part in a talent contest they were organising.

"That night, I was suddenly invited up on stage with them, although the contest wasn't to take place for another few days."

## Won contest

Pam sang a couple of songs and the audience, 400 Germans, French, Swedes and Britons, applauded loudly.

She went down so well, she was asked to sing again the next night, and the next.

Then came the talent contest.

Pam won, and that night the audience demanded so many encores she almost lost her voice.

"The whole thing was unbelievable," she said. "I

thoroughly enjoyed myself, and the audience was marvellous.

"I'd been a bit nervous about singing in public with musicians I didn't really know, but they were so professional I needn't have worried."

## Top-class suite

Then, a week after Pam had begun giving her nightly performances, the hotel's manager offered to give her and Stephen a top-class suite at no extra charge.

Pam and Stephen, a technical engineer, moved from a double room to a vast apartment, complete with living-room, bedroom, two bathrooms and two balconies overlooking the sea.

"We'd never seen such luxury," said Pam. "There was everything we could have wished for, and it was all free."

"When we left, the entertainments manager said we'd be welcome back any time, and I could appear in cabaret."

"My friends could hardly believe I'd spent every night of my holiday on stage singing!"

"Stephen and I haven't decided if we'll go back there next year."



"Cash this and take it out of my husband's half of our account!"

**LAUGH LINES**

● Maid — "There's a delivery boy at the door with a parcel marked C.O.D."

● Mistress — "Tell him to take it back. I ordered haddock." — W.T., Cleethorpes.