

H. E. BATES

By DAVID HOLLOWAY

H. E. BATES, the novelist and short story writer, who has died aged 68, was one of the most popular, successful and accomplished of all modern writers. In his almost 50 years as an author he produced more than one book a year, in addition to essays, plays and occasional poems.

In effect he had three different careers as a writer, but most people will remember his middle period best when under the pseudonym "Flying Officer X" he wrote a series of short stories about the R A F which, when published in a collected edition as "The Greatest People in the World," sold more than three million copies.

Bates had been rejected by the R A F when he first applied and was desperately seeking some sort of war work when David Garnett and the late Hilary St George Saunders invented the perfect job for him. He was commissioned as a flight lieutenant specifically to write short stories about aircrew.

He lived on R A F stations, attended flight briefings, drank in the local pubs. The result was a memorable series, sparsely written and undeniably authentic. In addition his R A F knowledge formed the basis for a moving flying novel, "Fair Stood the Wind for France," which was an immediate best-seller in this country and America.

Late in the war he was also sent to visit R A F stations in India, which were to provide material for his early post-war novels.

Threw up job

Herbert Ernest Bates was born in Northampton where his father was an executive in a boot factory. His family has for generations been bootmakers, his grandfather being one of the last generation who worked in their own houses. He was educated at Kettering Grammar School, and on leaving first tried journalism. He did not enjoy the life and soon found an office job that gave him time to write fiction.

His first published novel, "The Two Sisters," was turned down by nine firms before it was spotted by a great discoverer of talent, Edward Garnett. Almost immediately Bates threw up his job and determined to live by his pen.

As he explained in an article he wrote for *Weekend Telegraph* on the occasion of his 60th birthday, and later wrote about at length in three volumes of autobiography, he existed from hand-to-mouth all the time, but then there were sufficient literary papers, and life, if lived simply, was cheap enough for the professional writer to exist.

He was, in fact, able to educate four children and live in moderate comfort.

It was at this period, the late 1920s and early 1930s that he made his first reputation as the writer of country novels and more particularly short stories. He was the acknowledged master of the pastoral story. The dramatic skill involved in them could be seen when some of them were adapted as television plays recently.

Then came the war and an even greater reputation. As war ended he still continued to write about it. "The Purple Plain" and "The Jacaranda Tree," about the campaigns in Burma, were great successes, but the best of all of his war stories was an intensely moving long short story about a trawler crew, "The Cruise of the Breadwinner."

Love of countryside

In the years that followed the war Bates never quite seemed to find his form except in occasional short stories. Then suddenly his career took a new turn when he invented the Larkin family, a vulgar, immoral, tax-dodging bunch whose lusty adventures won Bates many new admirers. He multiplied the family's adventures after "The Darling Buds of May" in several other novels.

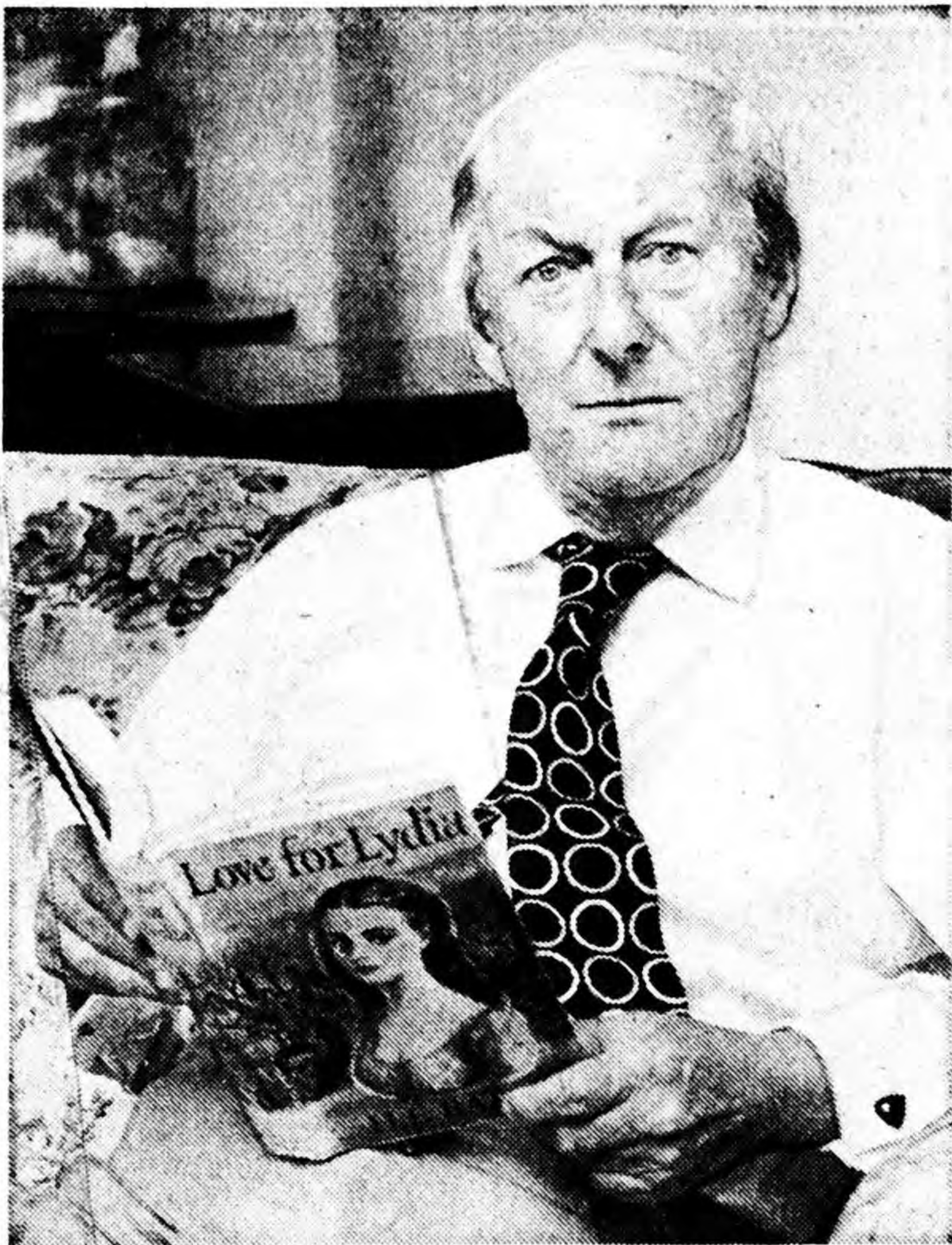
One theme ran through all Bates's work—love of the English countryside. For most of his life he chose to live in Kent, the complete countryman, devoted to village cricket (he presented his village, Little Chart, with a cricket green), a keen gardener (his begonias were famous).

He looked a countryman too, smallish but solid with a ruddy complexion and very bright blue eyes.

His articles in *The Daily Telegraph* drew attention to the crippling tax position of authors in the years following the last war.

In 1931 he married Marjorie Helen Cox, who survives him. They had two sons and two daughters.

Lady (Clarice) Harrison. At Sidcup, Kent. Widow of Sir



H. E. Bates, the best-selling novelist who has died aged 68. In this recent picture he was reading one of his books at his home at Little Chart, Kent.

Mild weather helps winter blooms

By FRED WHITSEY

THE first Westminster flower show of the year offers a rare chance to see the flowers that bloom out of doors in winter in perfect condition, thanks to the mild weather.

2,300gns FOR MODEL OF BARGE

By Our Art Sales Correspondent

A FINE 19th century lacquer model of a treasure barge, 20in long with an elaborate dragon prow, was sold for 2,300 guineas (S. Day) in a sale of Japanese art works at Christie's yesterday.

In the sale, which realised £39,940, Woods Wilson gave 1,900 guineas for a large 19th century lacquer cabinet. A 3½in high lacquer box and cover, by Kokosei, in the form of a seated maiden beating a roll of cloth, went to Spinks for 1,000 guineas.

PRINTS MAKE £25,000 Chinese ceramics

At Sothebys, 19th century and modern prints brought in £25,128. H. Moss paid £1,000 for an example of Chagall's lithograph, "The Harlequin's Game," printed in colours, and another Chagall lithograph "Vase de Fleurs," was acquired by the Redfern Gallery for £950.

A sale of Chinese ceramic and works of art realised £22,084.

Organised by the Royal Horticultural Society, the show is open to the public until 5 p.m. today.

A competition for shrubs that make a winter effect has attracted entries of the whole range. The leading exhibitors with four kinds were yesterday the Bodnant National Trust gardens, showing from North Wales.

Their first prize-winning entries comprised *Rhododendron nobleanum venustum*, with red flowers; the umbrella pine, *Sciadopitys verticillata*, its narrow leaves resembling the ribs; *Acer palmatum Senkaki*, with coral coloured bark; and *Rhododendron sino-grande*, grown for its massive, highly-polished leaves.

Great admiration was lavished yesterday on the pure white form of the familiar *Viburnum fragrans*, which appeared in a second prize-winning set from the Wellcome Foundation, Beckenham, under the correct name of *Viburnum farreri candidissimum*. The scent seemed even richer than the parent plant's.

The yellow form of the wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox luteus*, appears in a first prize-winning entry from the Commissioners of Crown Lands, Windsor. The same exhibitors led with a rhododendron, showing the rosy mauve *dauricum* Midwinter, and with one of the *reticulata* camellias, Shot Silk, from the Savill Garden greenhouse.

Chance to compare

A class for witchhazels in flower provides an opportunity for making comparisons. While Bodnant has scored with *Hamamelis mollis* itself, Nymans one of the Sussex National Trust gardens, has led with "any other," showing a richly coloured seedling from H. japonica. Nymans are also the winners in a class for one plant with a rare winter snowflake, *Leucojum carpathicum*.

In the non-competitive groups, a perpetual flowering wallflower, named Constant Joy, makes its appearance in Mrs Desmond Underwood's group and L. R. Russell has the early Japanese hybrid cherry, *Prunus Okame*, bred in Kent.

Wisley has sent many early plants from the Alpine House there. Thus outdoor cyclamen and miniature irises can be enjoyed in comfort and at close quarters. Ingwersen has brought the first tiny daffodils and slender crocuses.

Ingwersen's smoky blue iris Katharine Hodgkin won a first class certificate. Awards of Merit were conferred on Garrya elliptica James Rolf, with double length catkins, from Windsor; Mahonia napaulensis, from Wakehurst Place; and Clematis cirrhosa balearica, with scented ivory flowers, from G. S. Thomas, Woking.

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liver, as the present Shah recently did, an eminently sensible lecture on the world's fuel resources to the statesmen and industrialists of the "developed" countries?

There was a time when Shahs, like Sultans, were capricious absolute monarchs, wearing silken robes and usually immured in gilded palaces, where they spent their time lying on gilded cushions, eating exotic gilded sweetmeats and reading not technical reports but (at best) trashy French novels.

When they visited European countries like England, as they occasionally did, they bedazzled the masses by their strange manners and unlooked-for behaviour, becoming legendary figures who, to judge from the talk in West Riding bowling clubs, have still not completely faded from the folk-memory.

Such useless, decadent creatures are no loss, says the Voice of Progress and Rationality. Not that it has much good to say of the present Shah either.