

# O. P. Q. PHILANDER SMIFF.

By Tony Woolrich

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## AGLEN DOWTY TIME LINE

Born Bridgwater	Age	1846
Entered Wesley's college, Taunton.	10	About 1856
Had severe skating accident.	19	About 1865
Publishes verses in the local newspaper.	19	From 1865
Verses published in <i>Fun</i> and other comic periodicals.	19	From 1865
Joined the Civil Service. Paymaster-General's office	21	1867 aged 21
Published the Smiff sketches and books in <i>The London Figaro</i> .	24	From 1870
About this time he was a member of the Whitefriars Club, a dining club for working journalists around Fleet Street		
Not in Census, so may be abroad		1871
With Frank Plummer, wrote the libretto of a burlesque <i>Nightingale's wooing</i> , performed at the Philharmonic Theatre, Islington	25	Easter 1871
Beeton's <i>Idylls</i> Series published.	26-30	1872-1876
Stopped serious writing. Afterwards contributed to various Christmas Annuals through the 1880s and 1890s	33	End 1870s
Lived at 8 Phillimore Terrace, Kensington, London, England	35	1881
His play <i>After Dark</i> performed	37	1882
Married Alice Reeves.	39	1884
Lived at 40 Bedford Street Covent Garden, London	41	1887
Census says he is a civil servant, Paymaster General's office. Lived at Yattendon Lodge, Brighton Road, Horley, Surrey, England	45	1891
Began writing again	47	1893
Not in Census, so may be abroad	55	1901
Died and buried at Horley His probate says he lived at Hatchgate, Horley. Surrey	60	1906

Bridgwater-born Artemas Aglen Dowty, (1847-1906) was from 1867 a Civil Servant in the Paymaster General's Office, and was also a prolific contributor, initially with the pen name O.P.Q Philander Smiff, to Victorian comic and political satirical magazines, and also Christmas annuals. These were written for adults, not children, and there was a great deal of very pointed parody.

Some of his contributions to periodicals were signed with his names reversed — Aglen A. Dowty. Indeed, he stopped the name Smiff in his later writing, and reverted to his proper name, especially for the numerous humorous essays and short pieces he wrote later in his life.

### ABOUT THE NAME PHILANDER SMIFF.

It is clearly a doggerel version of the name Philander Smith. A Google search discloses Philander Smith, (November 23, 1809 – February 24, 1882) who was an American real estate agent and philanthropist, who lived in Oak Park, a village in Cook County, Illinois, United States, adjacent to Chicago. Philander Smith University

is his namesake. (Wikipedia) It is highly improbable that Dowty and Smith ever met, but Dowty might have seen the name in a newspaper article, and plagiarised it for his *nom de plume*.

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Photo by F. Blanchard, Regent Street, W.  
O. P. Q. PHILANDER SMIFF.

Dowty, as *The Sketch* showed him in 1893



Smiff as *The London Figaro* drew him

His father, Flixton Golding Dowty (1812-1875), printer and bookseller, is buried in the Quaker burial ground, in Bridgwater, and sister, Mary Aglen Dowty Peace (1843-1917) at Wembdon Road Cemetery, Bridgwater.

He was educated at Wesley's College, Taunton, (now Queen's College). His family were Methodists: his father and uncles were educated at Kingswood School, Bristol.

Dowty married Alice Reeves in 1888, and they had a adopted daughter, Elizabeth Olga. (1891-1973), She married his nephew, Major Aglen H. Peace. on 12 June 1915. She secondly married Hubert Organ.

Dowty died on 18 July 1906, and was buried in St Bartholomew's churchyard, Horley, Ryegate, Surrey. He left £5000. One of his executors was Aglen H. Peace. He left the army as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Service Corps, and was later Secretary of the Bridgwater Club in King Square, Bridgwater. He died in 1957.

Dowty suffered a severe accident as a schoolboy whilst ice-skating, which caused him to abandon any idea of entering university. Whilst convalescing he submitted verses to the local newspaper, and also sent them to Mr. Tom Hood, (1835-1874) who was then the editor of *Fun*, and who commented favourably on them. On recovery he successfully passed the Civil Service examination in 1867 and moved to London, to join the Paymaster General's Office, where he ended as a First Class Clerk. His success was noted in several provincial newspapers, since places were scarce. In his spare time he wrote comic verse and essays.

Soon after arriving in London he joined the Whitefriars club, for working journalists, undoubtedly as a result of his link with his *Fun* editor, Tom Hood, ( 1835-1874) one of the club's founders.

*Tom Hood had an influence among the younger writers and artists of his day that*

cannot be over-rated. He was the most unselfish and least jealous of men. He loved to get his friends about him to talk shop, and to encourage one another in their various callings. Every Friday night of his life, though not particularly blest with this world's riches, he gave a cheery Bohemian supper-party, to which the best fellows in the world were invited. Who that was privileged to attend them can have forgotten Tom Hood's "Friday nights" in South Street, Brompton, where after a pipe and music, conversation, and poetry readings, we sat down to a homely meal of cold joint and roast potatoes, and discussed all the wonderful things that we youngsters intended to do in the future." — Clement Scott, *Thirty Years at the Play*, The Railway and General Automatic Library, 1891, pp. 20–21.

Some Sources noted that a few years after beginning as an author, he stopped for a while, but *London Figaro* in 1893 noted that he had begun again.

The Civil Service at this time was the location of other well-known authors:

THE DRAMA OF TO - DAY by Clement Scott, Vol 2, p 65-66, 1899, noted

*Her Majesty's Service has from time to time given many hostages to literary fortune. Henry Reeve and Sir Arthur Helps, at the Privy Council; W. R. Greg, at the Stationery Office; Sir Henry Taylor, the author of "Philip von Artevelde," at the Colonial Office; Tom Taylor, at the Local Government Board; Anthony Trollope, Edmund Yates, Frank Scudamore, Buxton Forman, and A. B. Walkley, at the Post Office; Austin Dobson and Cosmo Monkhouse, at the Board of Trade; Sir John Milton, Sir Spencer Walpole, Sir Norman Lockyer, Adam Gielgud, Frank Marzials and Arthur A'Beckett, at the War Office; Ernest Bendall and Aglen Dowty ("O. P. Q. Philander Smiff"), at the Paymaster- General's Office; Frank Marshall and Clement Shorter, at the Inland Revenue; J. C. Parkinson at the Audit Office, are but a few of the names that will be claimed in the after years by literature, fiction, poetry, and criticism.*

The *Pall Mall Gazette* noted in August 1901 that the writers listed above had, in fact, all left the Civil Service.

A contributor to *Notes and Queries* after his death claimed he was sacked from the Civil Service due to his inattention to his work. A later contributor said he resigned. This needs investigation.

His work as a Civil Servant is obscure, indeed, a number of the modern authorities consulted describe him as "An obscure Civil Servant". No personal papers have been traced, alas.

With John Plummer he wrote in 1871 the burlesque *Nightingale's wooing*, performed at the Philharmonic Theatre, Islington, Their *nommes de theatre* were Frank Arlon and Arthur Rushton. Plummer was an assistant editor of *Figaro*

He wrote a play *After Darkness, Dawn*, which was performed at Toole's Theatre on May 27, 1882

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

No formal bibliography of Dowty's books has been so far traced, (if he ever wrote any under his own name,) but the Smiff titles can be found by online research, and even here the details can be sketchy. His later pieces, and published in periodicals, such a the short stories, are signed Aglen A Dowty.

### The Smiff books

*Smiff's Figaro annual*, 1878

*Reminiscences of a Rascal and Coster Ballads*, 1876.

*Comic History of England* 1876. 7 ed ed 1879

*Comic History of France : with Sketches in Chalks, London., 1888,*  
*Zummerzeth rhymes. Poems by Jan ( O. P. Q. Philander Smiff, i.e., A. A. Dowty ) and*  
*Tommy Nutty. Enlarged. 2nd edit. 1884*  
*Connubial Bliss, Date?*  
*Smiff's London Guide, Date?*  
*Smiff's Natural History, Date?*

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