

POST
OPINION

Taxes

NOBODY is ever going to like paying income tax but it could be a little less painful if the process was more simple. Much of the resentment now is due to the fact that our income tax system is so complicated that no ordinary taxpayer can be sure that he is being fairly treated.

For that reason the changes proposed in the Government's White Paper are to be welcomed. The new system will allow the taxpayer to see exactly what the rate of tax is without having to calculate in "standard rates" and "investment rates" and difficult fractions like two-ninths.

Perhaps the most welcome proposal is that which would treat investment income as earned income up to a certain level eventually to be decided.

The present differentiation between the two has always been unfair to people with modest incomes. If a man contrives to save a little of his earnings and invests the money against a rainy day he is performing a service not less valuable than the work he did to earn it. His money goes to help industry or the State.

By taxing the payment he gets for that service at a higher rate the impression is given that to save money and use it is a misdemeanour that deserves to be punished by a special fine.

THE Law Society has come down heavily against any suggestion that their rule that prohibits solicitors from offering competitive charges for conveyancing work should be relaxed. They say it would lead to reduced standards of service to the public.

Why should it? If one solicitor is happy to take a smaller profit margin than another there is no reason why the service he gives should not be equally as efficient.

In any event it would be for the Law Society, a disciplinary body, to ensure that the proper standards of service are maintained, whatever the level of charges.

It is generally accepted that competition is a spur to efficiency. It is hard to see why the legal profession should be an exception to the rule.

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SUPERSTAR



HARRIS THE ARTIST is a very interesting phenomenon. It would not be an exaggeration to say that thousands of people who normally wouldn't have paid attention to painting or sketching have suddenly sat up and taken notice — because of his paintings on television.

When he left school Harris became a teacher. By the time he was 21 he was producing dozens of sketches and paintings. And it was as a cartoonist-storyteller that he made his television debut in this country, in 1954.

He had arrived in England two years earlier. When he was 22, he took his life-savings of £207 out of the bank and sailed for Britain. His early work at London's Down Under Club paid for art lessons over here.

Originally, Rolf had gone to a teachers' training college with the intention of becoming a teacher of general subjects. During his training he had taught swimming on a part-time basis and when he had completed the course he was put on the swimming staff for the rest of the summer.

"It meant that I had a different set of children to teach every hour," said Rolf. "But in 1952 before I decided to come to this country I was ill with meningitis. I was in hospital for a month, and it was while I was lying there that I made up my mind to study art and work as an entertainer on the side."

It was at art school that he met Alwen Hughes, his wife. In 1956 he exhibited at the Royal Academy. In view of this it would seem that at one stage of his life Harris had to have a long think about whether he would have to choose between art and show business.

In fact, stories about Harris have said quite clearly that this was a decision he had to make. Had he? Harris thought a long time about this question. Every now and again he returned to it. "No," he said, "when I really think about it I don't think it was ever on the cards that I would have become a full-time artist rather than an entertainer."

"How can I put it? I believe that I can communicate a lot better with people through being an entertainer than an artist. Any entertainer can communicate better with people than an artist, because not many people SEE paintings. Paintings are things that people buy and then lock them up so that only they can see them."

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"And to be a successful, full-time artist now I think that you have to be far more gimmicky and publicity-conscious than anybody in the entertainment world."

"What do you do to succeed? In far too many cases it is a question of throwing a piece of canvas on the floor, slapping paint all over it and then riding a bicycle all over it. Or you can vary it, of course, by having a naked lady roll all over the canvas."

"I really believe that through the stuff I have done on television I have interested a lot of people in art... people who probably didn't think much about it before because they never had the opportunity of seeing an artist at work and seeing a finished product. You know, seeing the job all the way through. My work is not at all gimmicky. It is perfectly straightforward." Harris readily agreed that his quick-fire television paintings needed a lot of rehearsal.

"Yes indeed," he said. "Art is rather messy. And, of course, with colour television it means that it is even more involved. Let me show you where I rehearse." We went to the old coach house at the bottom of his garden. The coach house includes Rolf's room, complete with a piano, a

stone-cutting room and the room where Alwen does her sculpture. He uses huge sheets of Coloramo paper which run back against one of the walls. Sometimes he has to 'rehearse' a painting seven times before he goes into the studio.

A lot of people believe that when he paints on television, Harris uses guide lines. "This is a mistaken idea," he said. "The kind of guide lines I would have to use would have to be faint enough not to be picked up by the camera. And if they were that faint then I wouldn't be able to see them myself."

He reflected: "I think one of the things that makes my painting on television interesting is that in the back of their minds people have the thought that I could make a mess of it — it is a kind of adventure. They are quite right, of course. I could make a mess of it."

He often takes hours over his rehearsals. His "practice" canvases, incidentally, are in considerable demand for charity functions. And that is where they generally go — but before anybody gets any ideas it is well to recall that the Rolf Harris Show isn't running at the moment, and he is not currently doing any.

But inside his house, there is only one of his paintings on the walls. His daughter Bindi, however, has her work displayed all over the place. The Harrises are obviously immensely proud of her ability, particularly in view of the fact that she has real talent. One of her drawings, a nude self-portrait, done when she was three, is framed.

Harris could talk about his daughter's drawings for hours. "Look at this... and this," he enthused, off on a tour of the wall space. "She is remarkable. Her ability to create is incredible... she has a great feeling... a great feeling."

Then he frowned, thought for a moment, and said: "A natural artist... she is a natural artist. Children generally are natural artists, you know. They draw what they see. It is exciting stuff. It is completely individual, completely honest. Then what happens? Off they go to school and have art lessons. All the

The incredible story of Rolf Harris, part 3

It looks so simple when Harris paints on television. But the secret is in the hours of 'rehearsal' in a house at the bottom of his garden

■ Pictures by Nick Rogers and Chris Capstick

BY

LINTON MITCHELL

individuality is lost. They start to copy, to follow each other. They all produce exactly the same thing. And they don't copy the best; they copy the worst."

Evidence of Harris the creative handyman can be found all over the house. "I love to create things," he said. "Everybody should create what they want. It's a tragedy that most people never produce anything but children."

Holidays? "Not in the usual sense," said Harris. "After two days of doing nothing I am bored to tears. Do you know one of the best holidays I ever had? It was when I discovered a potter."

It also led to something more. Harris was on a concert tour of New Zealand at the time. His manager, Phyllis Rounce, was with him and one Sunday she asked if he would like to go with her to a place called Nelson and see some friends who had emigrated to New Zealand 20 years ago.

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"They had a daughter who was a wood sculptor and she was married to be a potter," said Rolf. "He was a chap of 24 and he had a nice business going. I started to 'throw' a couple of pots and, eventually, I decided to make something special. It started out as a very ambitious project but got smaller and smaller until I thought it would make a nice ash tray."

"Then the bottom fell out, and I decided that it really was cut out to be a napkin ring. I got on with this chap like a house on fire. He wanted to buy a larger property on a hillside, because he was getting a bit cramped working in a shed in the back garden. There really was a market for his work."

Harris didn't forget the potter. A month after he left New Zealand he wrote to him offering to go into partnership. And that is what happened. He is still his partner.

Harris doesn't make a lot of pottery himself now, but whenever he visits New Zealand though he

always goes to see his partner and tries his hand at "throwing" some pots before he leaves. His friend "fires" the pots for him and sends the completed work half way round the world to Harris.

Harris was talking about plastic now. "I loathe plastic with a deep-rooted loathing," he said. "Plastic imitations should be banned. Somebody should get all the plastic chess sets and the plastic this and that's and drop a bomb on them."

There is a remarkably handsome, finely-shaped post at the top of the stairs leading to the living room. "That's a nice bit of timber, isn't it?" said Harris. "I found that lying in a ditch in Oxfordshire. I knew it would come in handy one day."

Another piece of timber, which he bought for ten shillings about eight years ago, turned out to be an elaborate-looking table top. Then there is the Tiffany-style lamp made by Harris and his wife from a plate-glass church window which they found lying in the mud in a disused churchyard.

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"Making that was like putting a jig-saw puzzle together," he said. "Eventually, we had to get hold of some more stained glass because we couldn't find a vital piece to fit. By the way, we are making another one — so if you know of any old stained glass windows going..."

A downstairs room contains some pieces of choice timber, including Jarrah, Bloodwood and some from trees of which Harris doesn't know the name. One of the pieces is in the shape of Australia. "I'll find something good for that one," he said, adding: "Look at these shapes. They are fantastic." He pointed to one piece. "I brought that one back from Australia with me. That's 41 years old. I try to bring some timber back with me when I go abroad. The Customs? No, they don't give me any funny looks. They don't really pay any attention to it."

As well as running the house and looking after Bindi, his wife Alwen still finds time to do some sculpture. The garden is decorated with her work. "But I don't do a great deal," she said.

Harris the creative handyman has only one regret. And his wife summed it up for him. "There is so much that we want to do," she said, "and there just isn't the time."

TOMORROW:
Harris the swimmer and father

