

James Courage's niece Virginia Clegg lives in Christchurch and shared some memories of him with Christchurch City Libraries in October 2008:

I never met Uncle Jim, as we called him. The only member of the family he kept in touch with was his sister Patricia who lived in Surrey. They met from time to time.

My mother talked much of his great his sense of humour. One anecdote springs to mind, when one day his father was up on the downs doing a burn-off as farmers do to rid pasture land of scrub.

“Where's Dad?”

Someone said, “He's up the gully burning.”

“Well you'd better go and put him out then!” Jim quipped.

There was a time when grandmother and the children were living in a house in Holly Road. The children got into mischief and Jim heated a half crown tied with cotton and put it through a knothole in the paling fence. Along came an old man who bent down to pick it up.

As for his fame, I did not grow up thinking of him as anything other than a writer. Then I began to read his books in my teen years. We were proud of him. I was thrilled the year “The Young Have Secrets” was on the English curriculum for School Certificate.

His best book I consider was “A Way of Love” – delicately handled exposé of the homosexual world in which he lived.

He was very shy and hated having his photograph taken. I have a photograph of an archery competition when my mother visited him in his days at Oxford. There she is taking part with her bow drawn in the line-up and there is a yawning space, where Jim stepped out of the picture to avoid capture on celluloid. I have the carriage clock mother won in the competition.

He was blue eyed and fair haired and as photographs show, the ones he did allow, probably for publicity to do with publishing his books, he was not of a robust stature.

He came home to New Zealand only once. During this visit he ‘came out’ telling his mother of his gender preference. And when his father discovered all hell broke loose and he never set foot in this country again – very sad.

He was forever on the psychiatrist's couch. One must remember, that not only was his last book banned, but in all those years living in England, his preference was illegal.

He played the piano beautifully on his grand piano. He corresponded with Charles Brash of the Caxton Press who after James's death published a collection of his short stories “Such Separate Creatures”.

Jim had some close women friends, one of whom was Rosamond Peter of Anama. She features in “Fires in the Distance” as the eldest daughter. This novel was in line to be made into a movie through James Wallace, patron of the arts, who inquired about film rights at one time.

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Jim spent long holidays with his beloved grandmother at Mt Somers which was within riding distance of Anama. He and Rosamond carried on correspondence for many years. It had been my late brother's intention to publish them. Coincidentally, his son married Rosamond's grand daughter.

In 1925 my mother went to stay with Jim in his London flat. She found he had 75 pairs of dirty socks in his chest of drawers. He would simply go out to buy a new pair when they became un-wearable! All these she washed and strung them up to dry in the flat.