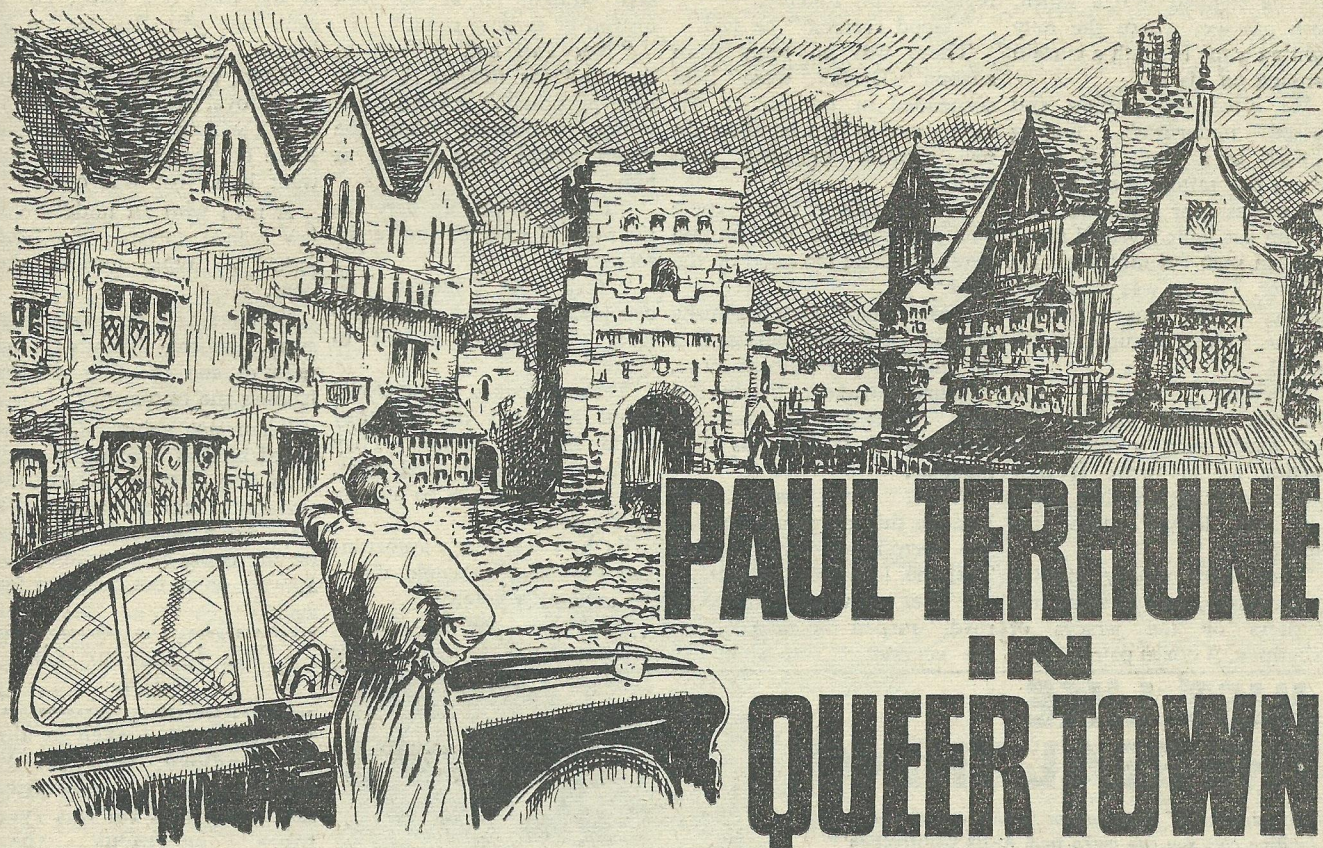


Paul Terhune arrives at a centuries-old town—and soon finds out that strangers are not welcome!



PAUL TERHUNE IN QUEER TOWN

THE mist was so thick that although the sign-post stood out like a tall, white ghost to the left of the fork-roads, Paul Terhune could not read the directions on it.

The road straight ahead was broad and glistened as only wet macadam can glisten. The road to the right was narrow and winding and the surface was none too good. Nine travellers out of ten would have kept to the broad road, but Paul Terhune was tired of driving.

Patches of fog, with ice on the roads, had haunted him ever since he had left London at noon. He had lost his way three times, had skidded twice, and was now lost again, with darkness closing down.

Long before now he had expected to reach a certain old world inn that he knew of in Norfolk, but he was so weary of straining his eyes through mist and drifting snow that he no longer cared if he reached his destination. All he wanted was a roof over his head, a hot meal, and a fire.

He climbed out and moved across to the sign-post, shining a powerful torch on the two outstretched arms.

The air was raw and bitterly cold, but he could smell the salt of the sea, and knew the coast was nearby.

The arm pointing straight ahead indicated: Portmaven, 18m. The other said: Holdenwall, 3m.

"Holdenwall it's going to be," grunted Terhune, with sudden resolution. "I'm blessed

if I'm going to drive another eighteen miles. I seem to know the name of Holdenwall. I believe it's a favourite holiday resort in the season. There's bound to be a hotel there."

He let in the clutch and turned the nose of the car to the right, feeling the difference at once as he ran off the road. He did not know this part of England very well. Now, as he bumped along the dwindling track, he remembered having heard that Holdenwall was one of the few remaining walled towns in the country.

The mist grew thicker as he went along, and it was some minutes later before he discovered he was running along a causeway no more than twenty feet wide.

It was made of solid stone blocks, thickly coated over with mud and sand. By peering cautiously to right and left he saw he was crossing a wide expanse of salt marshes, with water glistening here and there. Terhune dropped to dead-

slow. There appeared to be no wall or fencing to prevent him running over the edge into the mud.

He remembered having glimpsed a large notice-board some way back, and guessed it had warned him against this very thing.

He kept to the middle of the causeway as far as possible. As long as he took it steadily he should not come to harm, though it would be difficult to see what would happen if he encountered another vehicle coming in the opposite direction.

However, he seemed to have the world to himself that night, and not a glimmer of light showed ahead. His own headlights were good ones, and served him well.

Somewhere near at hand he heard the booming of waves, and it occurred to him that this causeway was probably under water at high tide. It was his good luck that he had struck it when the tide was out.

Peering ahead with a definite strain, he finally made out massive walls. Ramparts seemed to loom before him, and he was about to stop and investigate when his headlights picked out a semi-circular gateway ahead. He drove through it at less than eight miles an hour.

It was as well he had done that, for the road bore sharp to the right, and he found himself running over old-fashioned cobble-stones.

"Phew!" he muttered. "I didn't know such a place still existed in England."

The mist still blurred all detail, but the motorist could see that many of the houses and shops on either side had overhanging eaves. The roofs were tiled, and windows leaded.

It was like going back four hundred years.

Here and there a lamp-post gave flickering light from a gas-burner, but no chink of light came from any of the buildings. Shutters were closed and blinds drawn.

"Don't blame 'em!" thought Terhune. "They'll be shutting out the mist. The town must be a bad place for rheumatics in the winter—Hello!"

The road had widened in front of a timbered building outside which hung an old fashioned inn-sign. Terhune sighed with relief, and swung the car in towards the inn.

He turned down his headlights then got out, leaving his bags where they were for the moment. Rather stiffly, for his muscles had become cramped, he climbed the two steps and groped for the door knob.

To his great relief it turned,