THE JUKEBOX

Or

A Liverpool Childhood

By Stephen Cooper

Introduction: before memory

I have just attained the age of 64, which THE BEATLES famously equated with old age. I had often thought of writing something about my childhood; but the spur to action was *My Father's Fortune* by Michael Frayn. As the title suggests, that book was really about the author's father but it is also a wonderful re-creation of the 1940s and '50s. Although I am younger than Frayn, his recollections brought back my own childhood so vividly that I was able to recall many things I thought I had forgotten forever; but in my case the 'trigger' has also been popular music.

One reason for this is that 'pop' was undergoing some kind of revolution when I was growing up, but there was also another factor at work. I had a brother, four years older than I; and until I was around 16 and he around 20, we shared a rather small bedroom and bunk-beds: he slept in the lower bunk, and I in the top. He had a radio. From a very early age, 'we' used to listen to the *Goon Show* and *Hancock's Half Hour* on BBC and then to Radio Luxembourg, long into the night. (This was before Radio Caroline took to the waves). Records became imprinted on my mind, when it was very impressionable, and probably had as much influence as more formal learning, though we both developed an appetite for that too. I can recall very well the obligatory mid-Atlantic whine of the disc jockeys and the monotonous pleading of Horace Batchelor, who used to plead with us half-hourly, or so it seemed, to write to him in KEYNSHAM, for details of his infallible system for winning the Pools. By the way, that's K-E-Y-N-S-H-A-M., though - if you ever heard him - you are unlikely to have forgotten that.

Memory begins in 1953 and the Coronation, when I was five; but I have some photographs which were my mother's and which I acquired in 1997 when she died. Many of these show me and my elder brother and younger sister prior to 1953. Several of them were taken on Ainsdale beach, between Formby and Southport, on the Lancashire coast. Looking at them now, they remind me of something my mother said to me thirty years later, when she was a widow, and I had small children of my own. She said that I should 'wallow in it'; and I did.

Fast forward to an occasion in 2005, when I was cycling with friends in the French Alps. We were following 'the tyre tracks of the champions' by cycling over some of the great *cols* of the *Tour de France* – the *Madeleine*, the *Colombière*, the *Galibier* and *Alpe d'Huez* – in a week. The night before climbing the *Madeleine,* we stayed the night in a Vichy-type spa, where the hotel had been used for some dark purpose DURING THE WAR and was still used by the infirm for thermal cures, At dinner, we had our own table but sat opposite some patients, or inmates, I am not sure

which. There was an old crone of indeterminate age sitting there with her helper. She was immobile and did not speak, except to address us when we left:

Profitez-en, mes enfants, profitez-en ! she said.
A reasonable translation might be 'Wallow in it!'

There is a photo of my mother with my brother, aged three. He is got up in his Sunday best, hair combed, looking at the camera in a quizzical myopic way, she clearly on fire with motherhood; and there is a photograph of my father and my brother, taken the following year 1948 (when I was 5 months old and probably in a pram somewhere). There are equivalent shots of me and my sister, but nothing like those photos with Ashley; and no Baptismal Card or Cradle Roll Certificate survives for either me or my sister. Does this have any deep psychological significance, related to the special quality of the first-born child? I don't think so, though we have to remember that she had a miscarriage some time before my brother was born and must have been relieved to see him enter the world. No, I have to conclude with the historians that 'the absence of evidence is not evidence.' There may be several reasons why there were no later certificates, or why no such certificates survive. The centripetal force of Protestant Christianity may have had something to do with it, or not.

Then there are three photographs of Lisleholme Close, in West Derby, Liverpool where we lived between 1949 and 1964. That's my brother in control of the tricyle and that's me, as passenger. The first house on the right in the centre of the picture is Mrs Lee's, a Catholic household. (You may think it strange that I mention this, because we got on well with them; but the significance will appear lafer). Note the prevalence of a certain kind of lattice-work fence, in the right foreground. The house on the immediate right, according to my brother belonged to a family called Stone, whose daughter Joan used to babysit on occasion. The other semi-detached house in their case belonged to the Heitmanns - the father evidently having been a former German prisoner of war. One is inclined to say that he got lucky, but then my brother also informs me that their son Kenny got scalded with molten lead.

Note also, with regard to the riders, that they are both clearly myopic, but neither is wearing spectacles; and look how basic everything is – clothes, pavements, tricycle manufacture. This must be about 1952.

And my sister is driving, or rather sitting in, another mode of transport, common amongst the infantile population of the United Kingdom sixty years ago. The car is clearly here to stay, though Jeremy Clarkson is as yet, thank God, not even a twinkling in his prospective father's eye. By the way, the smallest person in all these early photos went on to become a Professor of Physics at Oxford, as well as passing her driving test at the first attempt – more than I ever achieved, in either field of endeavour.

The pebble dashing on the front of number 1, Lisleholme Close is very obvious, as is the grid on the right – grids being a constant source of fascination and of our play. Less obvious is the shed at the back of the house, to my sister's extreme left. Entry into said shed by my father produced a panic amongst the civilian population equalled only by the arrival of the Mongol Horde in Krakow in the thirteenth century.

Our parents' wedding, August 1939

My mother with my brother, 1947

My father with my brother, 1948
Outside 3 Hillingdon Road, Liverpool
(Nana's house)

Mum and Dad and three kids, on a beach, circa 1952

Mum, with the three of us, again about 1952

Dad & co, where?

My brother and me, at the entrance to Lisleholme Close

Car ownership was becoming very widespread in the 1950s

The Coronation, 1953

The Coopers and Francis Lee outside no 1, Lisleholme Close, June 2 1953

Chapter 1

1953 *She Wore Red Feathers*

There is a photograph of me at Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation Day festivities, June 1953, when I was 5 ½. You can see how far American influence has saturated British culture. I'm wearing a cowboy outfit. I can remember my cowboy hat (with its toggle), my black leather jacket and cuffs, and of course the highly-prized Colt six-gun; and the special trousers – bearing in mind that I would otherwise have been wearing shorts, probably Khaki at that time of the year. The celebrations were held on 'the Hockey Field' at the end of Lisleholme Road, by special arrangement. Normally THE HOCKEY was out of bounds, though we were not easily deterred from trespassing, certainly not by the signs which misleadingly threatened prosecution.

Why this fondness for Western dress, at a fête organised to celebrate the coming to the throne of Our Gracious Queen? I can only surmise that the craze for 'Westerns' was then at its height; and certainly the plight of the 'native American' was a matter of indifference. In those days 'the only good Injun was a dead one' (and the same was held to be true, by many kindly English people, of the Germans). The slaughter of the savage 'Red Indians' by the brave pioneers or the noble cowboys was routinely and regularly shown on film, on both sides of the Atlantic, though in real life they would presumably have been busy herding cows or eating baked beans around a camp fire. 'Western' were the staple diet of British children, at the cinema and on television. The Wild West also featured large in comics and books and in our play. What better way to celebrate a British state occasion than by turning up as cowboys and Indians, toting lethal hardware? Fortunately, the guns were fakes and we had no ammunition.

There is a girl behind my right shoulder; but I have no idea who she is. I think her gun is smaller, and I could probably shoot her dead if I wanted to (despite the lack of ammunition); but look at that skirt with the fringe. Is that a 'hooly-hooly skirt'? I would have said it was but, according to *Wikipedia* again, the hooly-hooly skirt is merely a short skirt, with no necessary connection to the Wild West.

Coronation Day fell on June 2nd. Many people can remember clustering around a television in a neighbour's house to watch it, because so few families possessed a 'set'; and I know that everyone in THE CLOSE came round to our house. We had a 9-inch set, black and white of course; and I can dimly remember my mother making tea for those who came. It seemed like hundreds; but there were

only a dozen or so houses in The Close and not everyone can have attended. My brother thinks 20 people must have been crammed into our small 'through' lounge (there was no separate dining room, though there was a small 'morning room', where we had breakfast).

Were we celebrating the Coronation, not the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ. That may seem obvious to you; but not to me at the time. I went to an Anglican primary school and we used to celebrate Church festivals. I started school in January 1953, on my birthday. In that year Ascension Day fell on May 14th. It was part of the Apostle's Creed that HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN; but ascending a throne is a much more concrete thing, and the throne was closer to home than Heaven, though still a long way from Liverpool. If there was any ascending to be done, why not celebrate the fact that HER MAJESTY HAD ASCENDED HER GRACIOUS THRONE?

Pop music

The song went STRAIGHT TO THE TOP OF THE HIT PARADE:

She Wears Red Feathers and a hooly-hooly skirt,
She Wears Red Feathers and a hooly-hooly skirt…

It was sung by an American, as they nearly all were. I now understand that the girl in the song had nothing to do with the Wild West, despite the feathers. She came from Indonesia; but since the Wild West was the most interesting part of the world, and since I never knew more than the first two lines, the man sang to me of a lonely squaw, out in the wilderness in her tepee, pining for me. One day I might join her. She clearly had attractions, since the singer sang his song in a quite demented fashion, as they all did.

It was one of those songs which went round and round in the head until it was driven out by another one. It still does from time to time, as if the brain were some kind of jukebox, where the records are selected by someone else, for the sole purpose of annoying me; but, unfortunately, the brain has a larger selection. *Wikipedia* informs me that the artist who recorded *'Red Feathers'* was Guy Mitchell, and he went on to record '*Singing the Blues'* in 1956, but the jukebox in my head still prefers the version of that one made by Tommy Steele, and so invariably drops the second 'g' in 'Singing'.

Songs lasted longer than the Coronation, which was over in a day, though we all retained our mugs and plates; and 1953 was also the year of Lita Roza's *How much is that doggie in the window*? I liked that one, because it was funny and I could remember more of the words (the dog had a 'waggly' tail, for example). I didn't like Frankie Lane's '*I Believe*', or David Whitfield's '*Answer Me*', because they were ballads, and boring. As I understood it, they were concerned with LOVE or

LER...ER...ER...V (as my father contemptuously pronounced it). All the singers and grownups seemed obsessed with this idea or emotion. Maybe it was of interest to the new 'teenagers' too; but it was of absolutely no interest to me and I couldn't understand why practically all the songs went on and on about it.

Mrs Jeffs, who lived in THE ROAD and was the mother of a boy whom I later become friends with, liked David Whitfield and then Frank Ifield. She thought they were ABSOLUTELY MARVELLOUS. I can just about see why she thought that now (Mr Jeffs was a nice man but I doubt if he ever had sex appeal, any more than any of our fathers); but the appeal of singers like this was lost on me. It was not as if they had ever ASCENDED THE THRONE, let alone INTO HEAVEN (or was it UNTO Heaven?)

The World

1953 was the year when DNA was discovered by Watson and Crick; when Winston Churchill (still Prime Minister!) won the Nobel Prize for literature; when Sir Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay GOT TO THE TOP OF MOUNT EVEREST; when Uncle Joe Stalin died; when the Korean War came to an end; when Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed as spies in America; and when the first *Playboy* magazine was published. These things were talked about in my house, except for *Playboy* – that would never have been thought fit for discussion – but they were of no importance to me. I was vaguely aware that British was best; that the British Empire still ruled most of the world, though it was gradually being downgraded into the Commonwealth; and that the Conservatives were the same as 'the Tories', and that my Dad didn't think much of them, nor (much more unusually) of Winston Churchill, their leader.

There had been rationing of food, both during the War and after; and sweet rationing did not end until 1953. I just about remember the coupons which were used to enable the family to claim its rations. I have no idea how this worked. Did you get more sweets, the more children you had; and was there an active black market amongst kids? I bet there was. Even so, it was reported that, on the day sweet rationing ended, children all over the country emptied their piggy-banks and headed straight for the corner shops, which rapidly ran out of toffee apples, nougat and liquorice.

Although Dad had no interest in football – I can't remember his saying that he had ever played it, even as a child – he was keen that our country should remain what it had always been - the best in the world at everything; and the defeat of the English football team by the Hungarians in 1953, - by a margin of 6-3! – came as a considerable shock, even in our house.

Home

It was a three bedroom semi-detached house, with a coal fire in the living room, and electric fires in all other rooms. There was a 'one-bar' (electric) fire in the bedroom which my brother and I shared. On Friday nights, my sister and I would take a bath together. We devoted no time to the study of anatomical differences, because we were familiar with those, but mostly because we had to concentrate very hard on the ordeal which followed the bathing on winter nights. This involved draping ourselves in a towel big enough for two, and rushing from the bathroom, across the Arctic landing, and getting as close to the one-bar electric fire as safety allowed, so that the towel formed a kind of tent against the icy blasts.

THE COAL BUNKER was in the back garden; but we must have converted to gas quite early on, because we soon made the bunker into a den. It was a very small back garden, but there was also room for a shed, and a swing. (Note that the shed was also an air-raid shelter, which tells you something, because it was built after the war, I think). That left little room for plants; but there was a large privet hedge, dividing us from the next door house, with a gap in the middle where I planted a tree, found as a sapling on Benky's field. By the time we moved in 1964 this had grown into a sturdy adult sycamore. I am surprised now by my parents' indulgence. That tree must have undermined the foundations of half the houses in THE CLOSE.

THE PHONE was a big ugly black thing, kept in the hall so as to interfere with family life as little as possible, and forbidding. The phone number was STO (Stoneycroft) 8846. I didn't acquire any familiarity with the use of the telephone until about 1970, when I started work.

We were by no means poor. Although my mother did not 'go out to work' she had a cleaner who came in once a week. Her name was Mrs Glover. She used to lay the fire (when we had coal) and clean the fireplace. Doubtless she did other things as well, but it was the whitened cracks between the tiles in the fireplace that I used to admire.

The gas was 'coal gas'. It was only in the mid-1960s that the British found and exploit the 'natural gas' under the North Sea. This was thought at the time to be something of a minor miracle. Harold Wilson, who out-talked the Tories with speeches of 'the white heat of the technological revolution', also looked forward to the day when he would become President of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC, founded in 1960). It never happened.

Unlike some, I never worried about the danger caused by laying gas pipes under every house; but I was concerned that the floors might give way under our weight. My Uncle was in the building trade and he once told a story of how someone crashed through from the loft into the bedroom below. (Much later he said that so many load-bearing walls had been removed from the row of terraced houses where he lived, that the entire street was likely to collapse like a pack of card, if someone lent against the end wall). There came a time when my brother spent much time upstairs, studying. I feared he would surprise us one day by landing on the dining table, book still in hand.

My parents were Protestant rather than Catholic; but I think I would classify them as 'Puritan' rather than 'Anglican', 'Presbyterian', 'Methodist' or 'Congregationalist'. They liked things 'plain', like the Amish. Things that were 'fancy', liked stained glass and images, let alone candles and incense, were not quite right, not for any clear doctrinal reason but as a matter of taste. This fitted with the fact that they seldom drank alcohol; and my father did not go frequent pubs, and they disapproved of gambling (and therefore racing) and disliked football (which was quite a thing to dislike in Liverpool). In religious terms, they distinguished between HIGH CHURCH and LOW CHURCH, and the higher it got, the less they liked it.

As Bertrand Russell pointed out in '*Why I am Not A Christian'*, we tend to believe in the religion which is instilled into us when we are young; and for many years I adopted my parents' strangely undenominational Protestantism. I disliked the Anglican Church in West Derby Village, St Mary's, because we had to kneel when we prayed, and because it had stained glass and because Anglicans practised confirmation, which held unknown terrors for me, like having to learn the dreaded Catechism.

But there other reasons to be sceptical. For one, I could not reconcile the exploration of space, with rockets and dogs (and then men) with my childish idea of Heaven, as a physical space up in the wide blue yonder. When my mother explained that Heaven was 'like a seed' – tiny, yet infinite – I think I lost the plot altogether, though I remained reluctant to admit it, even to myself, for fear of Hell. I also remember thinking that there was something wrong with a religion which taught that all men were sinners, and which required us to constantly seek forgiveness for our sins, when I couldn't think of any I had committed. Also, if Mum and Dad were to be believed, we were all <u>good</u> people in our family, whatever one might think of other people in the neighbourhood. So why should we be classed as sinners by the Church?

So, we were backsliders from an early age, so far as the Church was concerned – indeed in our case, so far as one of a number of churches were concerned. I think this is because our parents' Christianity, in so far as it existed at all, was sufficiently Protestant as to be quite anti-clerical, like Methodism without the lay reader, or Presbyterianism without the Elders. In fact, if the Truth be told, without the 'churchgoing'; but we had the misfortune to lived at a time when elements of the old Church discipline still survived, even amongst the Nonconformists . (Remember this was the 'New Elizabethan Age' and during the first such Age it had been a legal requirement to attend the Anglican Church on a Sunday). So, there was a black Deaconess who used to call at the house - black of garment, not of skin, that is, with a somewhat military hat. She arrived unannounced, by bicycle; but we kids had usually spotted her anyway; but I am ashamed to say that we were so far unwilling to stand up for our Faith (or rather the lack of it) that we used to hide, while Mum and Dad assuaged her righteous wrath,

doubtless offering feeble excuses and false promises. Until one day Dad told the Vicar outright that he found he had no need of Religion (or so he claimed later).

'Well', said the Vicar, 'then you are a lucky man.' I think he had failed to detect the note of irony in the Vicar's voice.

I found the subterfuge highly embarrassing; but it was better than going to Church.

Mum

I have never known anyone be rude about their mother, except John Osborne, who appears to have been a good writer, but a poor sort of human being. Most of us non-*litterati* are prepared to concede that, whatever her failings, your Mum is your Mum, when all is said and done: the person who carried you around for 9 months before anyone so much as clapped an eye on you, and put your needs first thereafter, 'no charge'.

We were lucky. Nobody died. Our parents stayed together, indeed appeared to be very happy. Neither of them ever had a major illness, nor was my father ever unemployed, and we all three passed the 11 plus, went on to grammar school and University. We are also beneficiaries of the Welfare State, which meant free medical and dental treatment, free school milk, cod-liver oil and orange juice. We all had measles and mumps and chickenpox; but nobody died of diphtheria or scarlet fever; and we all had vaccinations and inoculations against polio and TB. Our parents joined the property owning democracy (as Ian Macleod called it) as early as 1949. The economic boom of the 1950s meant increased prosperity without inflation. My parents began to enjoy things they never had before – more expensive holidays (though none abroad until 1964); the occasional drink of sherry, Cinzano Bianco, wine or whisky, though always at home.

Having said that, we resented their going out. My sister and I did not like being delivered over to the tender mercies of baby sitters, in any shape or form. We accused our parents of 'gallivanting' whenever they tried to leave the house. Why would they want to go and enjoy themselves without us?

My mother was born on 5 November 1915. When we were kids her birthday was celebrated by the immolation of the awful Catholic traitor, Guy Fawkes. When I got to Oxford, I learned (from the Master of Balliol) that the boys who attended St Peter's School in York did not celebrate Guy Fawkes Day, because Guy Fawkes was an old boy of his school; but this seemed a very strange attitude, even after I had taken A levels. As a child of 5 I would have called it treason, if anyone had declined to celebrate the event; and indeed the skies burned just as bright on Bonfire Night over the Catholic households in Lisleholme Close as they did over no 1.

My mother left school at 14. She met Dad when she was 19, at a dance. According to their marriage certificate they were married at St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, on the corner of Lance Lane, Woolton Road, Wavertree in Liverpool South, on 19 August 1939. WAR BROKE OUT on 1 September – hence they might say 'WE GOT MARRIED AND THE WAR BROKE OUT and laugh, mysteriously. It was a long time before I realised that marriage is a voluntary act rather a fact of life. Like the medieval lawyers or Aristophanes, I assumed that husband and wife were one person and always had been.

The certificate recorded that he was 24 and she was 23. He was described as 'Pharmacist MPS'. That meant Member of the Pharmaceutical Society, which Mum said counted as a degree, though he had not 'gone to University.' No one in the family ever had, until my brother went in 1962. No occupation was shown for Mum. 'Spinster' was clearly enough. His father: 'Arthur Cooper deceased, Post Office official'. Her father: J.W.Hugill, motor driver-mechanic.

When I went through these records after she died, I found, next to the marriage certificate, a Baptismal Card for my brother, 'Marcus Ashley Cooper 9 July 1944 – Urmston Congregational Church'. Also a 'Cradle Roll Certificate' for him dated 25 April 1944, issued by Urmston Congregational Sunday School, with the words 'for such is the Kingdom of Heaven'. They must have been very quick off the mark those Congregationalists, since that was his date of birth. The Cradle Roll certificate shows silhouettes, of boys and girls playing with a sheep, birds in the sky, and other children gathering flowers' – evidently the Congregationalist idea of the infantile Paradise, which associated Heaven with an idealised countryside. Not your everyday scene in Manchester, which is better known for its rain than its sheep. (They lived in Manchester DURING THE WAR).

It's the little things that you remember. Bonfire Night, with black treacle toffee and smoke so thick it stuck to the insides of your nostrils; sparklers (all my sister was allowed at one stage); Silver Fountains; Golden Rain; Catherine Wheels; and bangers for the older children; waiting for Dad to come home so that we could really give full vent to our innate incendiarism. (Man's work that. 'Light the blue touch paper and retire', but above all, you had to light the blue touch paper).

Yet there was always a certain degree of middle-class restraint. The following day's papers would contain the gory detail of what had been happening in the working-class districts. Boys maimed themselves by throwing bangers, or rather by not throwing them in time. Houses were set on fire. Girls' nightdresses which went up like Roman Candles. Mad dogs roamed the streets, stealing babies from prams. Well, perhaps not the last of these. I may be confusing the *Liverpool Echo* with Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*.

'Mum taught us right from wrong'. I suppose that is true; but, to say that they had attended so many churches in their time, they never attempted to drum the religion into us. We were taught a Humanist sort of creed by default – 'do no wrong' and 'do as you would be done by' were the whole of the law, and we were never made to believe that the Commandments concerning observation of the

Sabbath, or the worship of God were of equal importance to those which commanded you not to kill or steal. Just as well that we took what Mum said more seriously than the Ten Commandments. I was never sure what 'coveting' was, nor 'bearing false witness', let alone adultery; and I certainly knew nothing of 'fornication'. Years later, when I was at University and explained to Dad that indulgence in fornication was my best friend's principal pastime, indeed goal in life, he was not amused. He said he disapproved, because 'someone always gets hurt.'

Mum believed that you went through life and, all of a sudden, you met 'The One', and married him. That was it. No ifs, no buts, no uncertainties. You were destined to meet that person, you would know it when it happened, and once you had met 'The One' you had to marry so that you could have children. No-one could be happy without them, because then you wouldn't have a family, would you? Oh and by the way, if you met someone and fell in love, and then split up – as she knew happened sometimes – that just showed that he or she could not have been 'The One.'

In middle age, I used to think that this way of looking was simplistic, bordering on the naive. That nothing was predestined, life was just a chapter of accidents, and with regard to marriage, there was probably an infinite (or at any rate a large) number of possibilities for happiness, though life is short and you only get a comparatively few opportunities to see who's right. Now that I am older, I doubt the wisdom of changing things that appear to work pretty well and see the force of Burke's argument that society is a partnership the present and the past and with future generations. And perhaps the philosophy of 'The One' is not such a bad one after all, for producing a happy life (or one that feels happy, which is all that matters).

It is difficult for a child to imagine a time when your mother was your father's girlfriend and you your father's motives were not simply, or straightforwardly, to get married and produce <u>you</u>; but you get a glimpse now and again of the young people they once were. My mother had red hair and some called her 'carrots' or 'Carrie'. She was even 'Auntie Carrie to her friend Lil's boys. She had learned the piano as a teenager and we always had a piano in our house. After my father died she once told me that there had been a time, after she met Dad but before they married, when she played for him and a group of friends. After some time, Dad got a bit fed up with this, because she had no time for him and they were supposed to be enjoying themselves *together*.

'Hey, everybody, my girlfriend's spending too much time playing, give her a break'.

Or at least, that is what she said that he said. I wonder if he didn't express his frustration a bit more earthily. 'Too much time tickling the ivories' springs to mind.

School

We would all three have gone to a different primary school, if my parents had not moved from Manchester to Liverpool at the wrong time of the year, in 1949. As it was my mother had a humiliating encounter with the authorities at Blackmoor Park Junior School, which was the nearest school to Lisleholme, where she was most unaccountably rejected. Turned away. Rebuffed. Branded as a rank newcomer and an ignoramus of the rules, who had applied too late; but, on the other hand, she returned in triumph when she took Ashley to W.D.C. OF E. – West Derby Church of England School, where she was welcomed with open arms, and he as the prodigal son, into the fold.

'W.D.C. OF E.' was an Anglican school, attached to St Mary's Parish Church in THE VILLAGE, which was still a village, with a VILLAGE HALL, a medieval courthouse, stocks, a few houses appropriate for estate workers and a fine set of gates which led down through a park to Croxteth Hall, which belonged to Lord Sefton. This was all private land, but we were taken on country walks for 'nature study', down through the gates and into THE PARK, where we could pick wild flowers. The more daring boys would take the opportunity to steal marble chippings from the churchyard, for use in hopscotch. Some of them were remarkably good at it, and the teachers never seemed to notice that the marble was stolen. It undoubtedly made the best kind of stone for sliding across a playground surface.

Mum rapidly became convinced that her rejection by Blackmoor Park was a kind of miracle, since we all three thrived at W.D.C. OF E.. She even experienced a kind of *Schadenfreude* at Blackmoor Park's foolish error. Fancy turning away her eldest child! Did they not realise that in doing that they had deprived themselves, not just of one bright child, but of the three cleverest children in the world? On the other hand, Herbert ('Herbie') Simpson, headmaster of W.D.C. OF E. was instantly recognised as one of the wisest and most perspicacious teachers in the land.

When I visited the school 2 or 3 years ago (say around 2008), I found that there was a Herbert Simpson Memorial Hall, and more remarkably that Mrs Simpson, his widow, was still living close by; but I have to say that I remember the man with mixed emotions. He was something of a Tartar, albeit a kindly and well-intentioned one. He used to smack kids round the head with gusto, for very little reason, and this included his own son David, who was a rogue, but not - I would have thought - a vicious one. On second thoughts, I take that back. Perhaps Herbie knew better. Once, when I had a sunburnt neck, he jumped on it and did his best to wring it, causing me pain I can still remember. So he deserved all the slapping he got from his merciless father, the bastard.

But it must have been difficult for David Simpson all the same, because his father was determined to show that he had no favourites, and used to demonstrate this by cruel and unusual punishment on his first born. He slapped his only son around the head very often, and vehemently. A perverse kind of reverse

discrimination. On occasion, Herbie displayed such relish at the prospect of slapping David that he licked his hand before administering the *coup de grâce*. Perhaps this is why David wore his shorts trousers long, though this has since become fashionable.

Other teachers used a cane to keep the older children in order; and there was also a large leather strap, reserved for the younger children. Once, and once only, I 'got' THE STRAP, I think from Miss Wood, or Miss Roberts, for talking in class. (I think it for talking to my best friend, Michael Jackson, of whom more anon).

I hope this narrative does not give the wrong impression of W.D.C.OF E. There was a lot of excellent instruction which went on there, along with the corporal punishment. Miss Close, Mrs Coward, Miss Roberts, Miss Wood, Mr Balderson and Mr Kewin – disciplinarians all, but good teachers who provided us with solid grounding in the 'three Rs' but also in elementary science, history (even pre-history) and geography. We all three passed the 11 plus or in my case (because my birthday was in January) the 10 plus – the passport to the grammar school.

We started in 'the Infants' and went on to 'the Juniors', spending about three years in each part of the school, though I must have missed the last year in the latter. I started learning fast from the start. Nature study: in the first year of the Infants, we boys had an outside toilet, with urinal as well as stalls. When I say 'urinal' I mean that there was a wall which you pissed against, and a foul-smelling gutter running along the bottom of it. It was there that I discovered the meaning of Original Sin.

It was not considered manly to just piss against the wall horizontally. You had to aim as high as you could up the wall. One day, when I was actively engaged in this activity, Miss Roberts walked in and caught us at it. We were all told off, including me. So – contrary to what my mother had led me to believe - nobody was perfect, and there were sinners even in the Cooper family.

It was also at this time that I observed another natural phenomenon. Not all the boy's dicks were the same. Some were like mine, with floppy skin around the end, until you peeled it back; but in the case of one boy, there was nothing to peel. I thought this meant that all boys were born like him or me – Neanderthals or Homo Sapiens, so to speak. Later on I learned that he was Jewish. So Jews were born with different dicks? I was never been told that this was so, not by the great David Attenborough or even by Armand and Michaela Denis, although they had admittedly mostly confined themselves to animals, amongst whom circumcision is, I believe, unknown.

When I passed into 'the Juniors' there was an incident when a boy was suspected of stealing coins from the pockets of coats left in the cloakroom. It was well-known that my father was a pharmacist, and he was asked to supply a substance which Herbie spread on some decoy coins, distributed at random in sundry mac pockets in the cloakroom. When the thief had done his work, his hands turned a peculiar colour, leading to his arrest and condign punishment. I don't think I ever told anyone else of my family's part in the detective work; but I did feel that I had now redeemed myself in the eyes of authority for the heinous crime of vertical

pissing. I hope the boy wasn't birched, as he clearly had not yet attained the age of criminal responsibility.

Mr Balderson (who was suitably bald) had escaped from a Nazi POW camp. It was said that he was one of those who had escaped from *Stalag Luft III* DURING THE WAR, using a wooden vaulting horse. There was a wooden vaulting horse at W.D.C. OF E., which was sometimes lifted out into the playground; and I was somewhat unclear as to how he could have used that to escape from a concentration camp. Did he vault over the wire? I became even more confused when we were told at the grammar school about the wooden horse used by Odysseus to bring about the fall of Troy.

Sadly, having consulted *Wikipedia*, I now think it was all a myth. Three men did escape from *Stalag Luft III* by tunnelling under the ground, disguising their activities by placing the vaulting horse over the entrance to the tunnel; but it seems unlikely that Mr Balderson was one of these. It seems much more likely that he obtained his reputation as an escapee as a result of some infantile fiction, arising from the showing viewing of the film *The Wooden Horse*, which came out in 1950. (There was a whole series of British POW 'escapist' films made in the 1950s, perhaps to compensate returning soldiers for their rather poor record against the Germans on the real battlefields of Western Europe in 1940).

Herbie Simpson was something of a polymath. I don't think he WENT TO UNIVERSITY but he had somehow acquired a BSc, as he was fond of telling us. And he was a radio ham, and liked to tell us about that too. He would say at morning assembly:

'Last night, children, I was talking to man in Tokyo (or America, or some other far-flung place).

This was impressive; but I must say that any respect I had for Radio Hams did not survive my hearing Tony Hancock's *The Radio Ham*, first broadcast as part of the last series of *Hancock's Half Hour* in 1961. (Message received from man in Tokyo: *it is a raining-not in Tokyo*.)

Morning assembly usually included a repetition of stories about the three things closest to Herbie's heart (apart from battering his first born): his love of our old hymn books; the Bible; and the Opportunity Class. So, first a lecture on how our school was the best there was because our hymn books were the most tattered. This showed we used them more than other schools. Therefore we were more Christian.

Second, 'I am going to ask you all a question, and you must shout out the answer'. Right, ready? 'What's the best book in the world?'

Answer, roared by the assembled masses, trained to respond in North Korean style:

'The Bible, Sir'.

'That's right!'

I think it was being required to parrot things like this at school or in Church that helped turn me off the Church and Christianity altogether. That, and the constant requirement to worship and adore Somebody or Something that I wasn't sure existed. Even if He did exist, why were required to 'adore him', and do so repeatedly? Why all this need for adoration? Why couldn't an Omniscient and Omnipotent being be satisfied with what He had done, and what he knew he was capable of?

Third, the Opportunity Class.

'We have a wonderful institution in our school, children. It's called the Opportunity Class. Every boy and girl here has a second chance. They are sent there to give them an opportunity to catch up. It's not for the 'thickoes' and any boy or girl caught using that word will be punished, severely. Do you understand me?'

Assembled masses roar: 'yes, sir!'

'What's it called?'

'The Opportunity Class, sir!'

Assembled masses file out into playground or lessons, whispering quietly;

'So it's for the thickoes, like we thought'. (That's probably what the thickoes thought too).

Children from W.D.C. OF E. sometimes went on holiday to the summer camp at Colomendy in North Wales, but we never went. I think my parents thought it was for the poor, or those who for other reasons couldn't afford a summer holiday of their own, or for parents who had an only child in need of others to play with. Looking back I think we deprived ourselves of the chance to visit a rather beautiful place, with friends rather than family; but then I think our whole family was anti-social to some degree. Dad, for example, discouraged us from joining either the cubs or the Boy Scouts on the grounds that these were 'paramilitary organisations', not a view which was widely shared in the 1950s, I would have thought. Nor did he wholly approve of the Youth Hostels Association. He thought this was a pale imitation of the original German *Jugendherbergen* and tainted by the association with the Hitler Youth (or *Jug-End*).

We spent our Summer Holidays in a boarding house in Barmouth. My brother remembers that it rained every day. I remember the view from our

bedroom: a solid wall of grey Welsh slate, about two feet from the window pane, relieved only by a few streaks of lichen.

Chapter 2

1954 *Oh Mein Papa*

Pop music

Last night the child who turns on the jukebox selected 'Oh Mein, Papa' by Eddie Calvert, THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN TRUMPET.

Why is this? He might just as well have chosen *Secret Love* by Doris Day or *I See the Moon* (by The Stargazers) or Frank Sinatra's *Three Coins in a Fountain*; but no, it had to be Eddie Calvert. Perhaps this was because there was a vogue in the mid-1950s for trumpet players. The trumpet is also associated in my mind with Kenny Ball, Acker Bilk and Herp Alpert and HIS TIJUANA BRASS, though I never liked any of them. (The Jukebox does however hold a copy of Kenny Ball's *Midnight in Moscow* (1961), which had a certain following since it was a good tune and the Soviet Union was still a complete enigma as far as most people in the West were concerned. Anything which suggested that it was an enormous concentration camp run by geriatric maniacs bent on blowing up the planet with their vast store of nuclear weapons was welcome).

But to return to Eddie Calvert and his Papa, the first lines of the song are

Oh, my pa-pa, to me he was so won…der…ful,
Oh, my pa-pa, to me he was so good!

Now the child in charge of the jukebox is playing various tricks on me here, because those are indeed the words; but they are sung by a woman, whereas Eddie Calvert was a (male) trumpet player. Also, these words are in English – the girl laments her Papa, whereas the title of Calvert's recording was 'Oh *Mein* Papa' – in German. So what is going on here? Why do I remember that version, when my father detested all things German? For that matter, why was my middle name Manfred?

Perhaps the answer to the question about Eddie Calvert, is that my father disliked all manner of things, often for multiple reasons. Thus he may well have said that he COULDN'T STAND OH MEIN PAPA on the basis that it was German, but also on the basis that Eddie Calvert was one of those artists who STANK. (Though this is unlikely, because he was after all a trained musician. It was generally people who pretended to sing, when they had not been trained to do so, or purported to play instruments which they could not in fact play who prompted the cry of 'HE [or more rarely, SHE] STINKS'.) The only female singer I can ever remember my father positively approving of was, most improbably, Lulu,

whose first hit 'Shout' was not seen on TV until 1963. This is very odd, since in my father's eyes, popular music as a whole had by then taken a distinct turn for the worse, in the direction of tuneless noise and rank vulgarity; but I think he must have taken an untypical fancy to Lulu's raw enthusiasm.

The World

Though I did not know this until very recently (when I read Tony Judt's *Postwar*) it was in 1954 that the Western European Union (WEU) was formed. This was not the same thing at all as the 'Common Market' or European Union: it was a military and defensive Union, formed as a result of the Cold War. It was this Union which led to West Germany, as it then was, joining N.A.T.O. as a sovereign state. The Warsaw Pact, which included East Germany, was formed soon afterwards.

The agreements reached in 1954 meant GERMAN RE-ARMAMENT, and it is this phrase which comes back to me, after more than half a century. We take it for granted now that Germany is one country; that she is democratic as well as a world-leader economically; and has no aggressive intent; indeed, is reluctant to commit troops internationally. Not so in the 1950s, when there was a very real fear of German 'revanchism' both in the Soviet Union, which had suffered so badly DURING THE WAR and in Britain. My father, who had lost his father in the First World War and endured almost six years of war in his early manhood, was firmly against GERMAN RE-ARMAMENT. Why should we help these people rise like a Phoenix from their richly-deserved ashes, to become a military threat once again, when they had shown, not once but twice!, in the previous 50 years, that they simply could not be trusted?

Likewise, he could not understand quite why 'we' had fallen out with the Soviet Union in the first place, since the disagreement merely appeared to be over nothing more than the best way to organise society? I don't think the horrors of Stalinism, the Ukrainian Famine, the Great Terror and the Gulag were really ever mentioned. They did not really become widely known until the works of Robert Conquest and Alexander Solzenitshyn were published, and not everyone was familiar with them. There was of course the small matter of the Hungarian Revolt of 1956 and the Soviet tanks sent in to crush it; but not everyone in the West thought that this provided a reason for ceasing to mistrust the Germans.

It did not help that the 1954 World Cup was won by West Germany, when England, the inventors of football and the best team in the world, had never won it, especially when by general agreement the Hungarian team - which the West Germans beat in the final - was the more talented. The Germans had triumphed again through their heartless Teutonic efficiency, as they had in 1870, 1940 and so nearly in 1914 and 1918!

Yet, sometime in the late 1950s, Kenny Meadows, a boy who lived in Lisleholme Close and must have been in his late teens at the time, WENT TO MUNICH and brought back stories that it was a far better place than Liverpool! The

streets were clean, the trams and buses ran on time, everybody worked hard and was more prosperous. How could this be? Surely, England (by which we understood Britain or the United Kingdom) was still the best country in the world, and still one of the most powerful? Hadn't we beaten them in both World Wars? Didn't our soldiers still occupy West Germany, and clog up the airwaves with their strange requests for *Forces Favourites* from the B.F.P.O.?

It was in 1954 that the First Atomic Submarine was launched; that a report was published saying cigarettes caused cancer; that Roger Bannister broke the Four-Minute Mile at Oxford; that segregation in schools was ruled illegal by the US Supreme Court; and that Britain sponsored an expedition to search for the Abominable Snowman. It was the Snowman who interested me. There had been reports of expeditions which had found hairs in remote parts of the Himalayas, which supposedly belonged to the 'Yeti' – a creature, perhaps human, perhaps ape, perhaps half of each. The quest for the 'Abominable Snowman' was as popular as the search for the Loch Ness Monster, with the added attraction that it involved a far-away and more exotic place, and his existence was even more difficult to disprove. There might after all be scientific basis for the myth; and in any event the Snowman made for a better game, since he was easier to imitate than a prehistoric reptile (or maybe IT was an amphibian).

My mother was very pleased when Jaroslav Drobny won the men's singles title at Wimbledon. The competition in those days was an amateur one, and MORE FUN than a gladiatorial contest between professional. It had more connection with the game played by the masses; and there were more 'giant-killers', of whom Drobny was one. My Mum's interest in him also stemmed front the fact that she had played tennis with Dad when they were younger. Yet I never saw either of them pick up a racket but there were some old rackets in the house: this was all part of the life once lived BEFORE YOU WERE BORN.

Drobny, said my Mum, was like Rosewall, his opponent. HE WAS A GOOD PLAYER, AS WELL AS A NICE MAN. They were both good 'sports'. How did she know, and what was her standard of comparison? Whatever they were, they were good enough for me; and so we thrilled to Drobny's victory over Rosewall in the final. (Drobny was a Czech who eventually became a British citizen and, in my Mum's eyes, he also had the inestimable advantage in of being a left-hander, like me).

Although the connection between smoking and lung cancer had already been made by the scientists, it took a long time for the message to percolate through to the masses, in view of the active hostility of the tobacco companies; and it had little discernible effect on the behaviour of my father (despite his scientific turn of mind). He and Uncle Harry both enjoyed a smoke, particularly together. In my eyes Harry was the more heroic smoker, because he could puff smoke-rings into the air, which seemed a manly thing to do, especially when the feat was performed with a cigar at Christmas time.

My father once explained why they enjoyed smoking so much. It was again concerned with what happened BEFORE YOU WERE BORN and, in this case, also DURING THE WAR. Tobacco had been rationed then along with everything else; and there was also a shortage of good (that is, American) tobacco – though I can't imagine what the substitute was. So when the War ended and good Virginia tobacco became available once more, it came with great nostalgic pleasure as well as a harbinger for the return of the good times.

We had a family doctor, Irish, Jim Murray, who used to visit us at home (he knew my father well). On entering the house he would offer my father a cigarette, and if my father showed the slightest reluctance, Jim would encourage him by saying 'it's good for you, Mark, it helps you relax'. The other thing about Doctor Murray was that he was from the Republic (which we called 'Southern Ireland'). My Dad said he had once told him that, as a child he (Jim) had been taught to spit on the British flag – something which made me very wary of Irish Republicans. It also suggested that the education system in the Irish Republic must have been different from the one we knew. All that Catholicism, and all that officially inspired spitting, must have made for a very strange curriculum.

Christmas was a great time for smoking, and for vice in general. This was when we boys were encouraged to smoke our first cigarettes and drink our first glasses of sherry. And a time when it was extremely useful that your Dad smoked: because then you did not have to think very long about Christmas presents. *Balkan Sobranie*, *Benson and Hedges*, a cigarette lighter and fuel or an ash tray were all very acceptable.

As late as 1964 and 1966, I would return from trips to France armed with *Gauloises Disque Bleu* or, worse-still, *Gitanes*, foul-smelling rough things made of French tobacco rather than Virginia, and this was considered to be an exotic prize, well worth the smoking, as if sometimes you had to suffer for the cause. Yet, by this time, we were already being shown anti-smoking films at school, where the pathologist would pick lugubriously over a piece of black lung tissue, extracted from the dead body of some hapless victim of smoking. It really was disgusting; and my father in particular knew full well that smoking was a major cause of bronchitis and other diseases, apart from its connection with lung cancer. Why else did Uncle Bill find it virtually impossible to breathe, or even swallow when he got a bad cold, in the winter or when exposed to the elements on his motorbike and sidecar? (THE BROUGH, as my mother called it).

My brother and I took up smoking in a minor way in the early and mid-1960s and for a time as an undergraduate my brother even smoked a pipe. I tried it once and was immediately turned green, and never returned to pipes, despite Harold Wilson's advocacy for them as Prime Minister; but I did smoke cigarettes, on and off, as a young man, partly to keep other's company, partly because it improved one's image, and mainly because I learned to enjoy the taste, especially with alcohol. There has been a sea-change of course. A generation later, my daughters would have regarded such behaviour as semi-criminal, and our parents' behaviour in

encouraging it as criminal negligence; but it was all accepted at the time; and the number of boys who smoked at school, albeit only in the toilets or bikesheds, was very large. It was regarded as a rite of passage and a sign of maturity.

Home

If I look at a Google Map now, I see that the house we lived in is still there, as is the surrounding network of streets which we knew as THE CLOSE (Lisleholme Close), THE ROAD (Lisleholme Road), THE CRESCENT (Lisleholme Crescent) and THE LANE or 'Daisie Lane' (Deysbrook Lane). The whole area is not more than 50 yards square; but it was only in THE CLOSE that you were safe – and even then, the further you got from the front door of no 1, the less secure it became. This was not because there was any danger of riots or sectarian violence, let alone of guerrilla warfare. The people who lived around us were, so far as I was and am aware, much the same as us. It was simply that the world revolved around my Mum and Dad, my elder brother and my younger sister; and even close friends were not of the same tribe. And there were people, even amongst those who lived in THE CLOSE, about whom I had my doubts.

For example Mrs Lee, who lived opposite, was a CATHOLIC, as were Mr and Mrs Tipping, from Preston, who lived at no 3. As I realised much later, my father was a 'freethinker' (not many owned up to being atheists in the 1950s) while my mother basically was content to believe what my father believed ('whatever *you* want, dear'); but we were brought up on that strange combination of Protestant religions, which involved an Anglican primary school on weekdays but services on Sundays at St Stephen's (which was either Presbyterian or Congregationalist); and whatever belief that was supposed to produce, it certainly was not Catholicism. Catholicism, in certain parts of Liverpool, and at least in my mother's mind, had a mysterious and sinister quality. As my sister and I walked to school past the local Catholic Church in Town Row, we almost held our breath. What might they do to you in there, if they dragged you in to that dark nave? What unspeakable tortures might be inflicted in the vestry? It was not long before we were taught about Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh. (Monty Python's sketch about 'The Spanish Inquisition' was not based on nothing. It was only at Oxford, much later, that I learned that there was any alternative to the Protestant version of Elizabethan English history).

Mrs Lee was, I am sure, the kindest of women, very kind to my mother when she was ill; and probably a true Christian, if I can be the judge of that. She was as poor as a Church mouse – which is rather appropriate in her case as she was what is called 'a devout Catholic' (funny how devout Protestants are not usually referred to as such); but, when she performed some service or other for my mother, and my mother offered to pay, she would take no money for it. She said she couldn't possibly do that, because it was 'a gesture'. I wonder now if this had some religious

signficance which was lost on me at the time – an act of contrition, like Lord Marchmain, in the closing chapter of *Brideshead Revisited*? In later years, I became very interested in Catholicism and its doctrines – for example, the much misunderstood doctrine of the Immaculate Conception – but I am sure I would not have wanted to practise it myself. It never seemed to me that Mrs Lee was a very happy woman; but then I suppose 'the pursuit of happiness' is not what it's about. As I understand it, Catholics have always believed that 'Life is a vale of tears' - and you better get used to it.

Mrs Lee's hall was dark. So was the Church round the corner where she WENT TO MASS and which my sister and I were so wary of; and there was even, if I remember correctly, stained glass in her front door. Stained glass, such as was not to be found at St Stephen's; and such as the Puritans, fierce ancestors of our mild Congregationalists, would rather have smashed than adored. What unspeakable tortures (or more likely brainwashing, of the type the Red Chinese employed in Korea) must Mrs Lee have inflicted on her son Francis, to persuade him to remain a Catholic; and induce him to undertake that embarrassing Children's Crusade against pornography, when he was in his teens?

As for Mrs Tipping, who was also Catholic, it was difficult to know what to make of her: she and Tom spoke with such strange Prestonian accents that it was all we could do to understand their everyday conversation; but I was told by my mother that she had a Bible that was different from our own. So, whereas Mrs Lee was probably a secret agent of the Spanish Inquisition, Mrs Tipping was more like a witch, pronouncing incantations over her pseudo-Bible.

There was an old woman who lived in the close called Mrs Adams, who used wear a kind of flowery smock. One hot summer day she said she really envied me, because I was walking about in shorts and sandals, with no 'top'. When she said that, I asked her why she didn't take her top off too, if she felt hot; and I told my mother what I had said.

There was Mr Thompson, who was a bachelor and lived alone, and was therefore clearly a strange man, since normal people were married and had children. There were the Joneses, who owned a pig farm somewhere, collected table scraps for 'pig-swill' but whose pigs were periodically slaughtered on account of the swine-flu, without apparently making any difference to their standard of living. What did they do with the pig-swill, when there were no pigs left to feed? Could it be that they ate it themselves?

Then there was Mr and Mrs Andrews, and their children, an apparently normal family, who lived next door to Mr Thompson, so that Mrs Andrews could report to my mother on his habits. They were reasonably normal; but their children were difficult to play with. David had contracted TB meningitis when he was young and had 'never been quite right' since then, while Barbara had a habit of mispronouncing her words. My sister and I used to think it was funny that she said 'less' instead of 'yes'. I daresay they probably thought we were odd too, the difference being that I could not tell you what our oddities were seen to be. I

suppose that's the trouble with inhabiting your own body and nobody else's; but there was something odd about David Andrews in my view. His hobby was bobbin work. Nothing wrong with that, I suppose; but he was a bit too fond of telling you so. My sister and I formed the view that he spent more time in THE CLOSE, waiting to catch your eye, so that he could tell you that he was going inside - TO DO HIS BOBBIN WORK – than he actually spent producing knitted wool with his bobbin.

Mr and Mrs Fazakerley lived next door, in what must have been no 2 (since the numbers in Lisleholme Close went 1,2, 3 like proper numbers; and not 1,3,5 as they did, unaccountably, in the Road and the Crescent and many insalubrious places. The Fazakerleys, though close neighbours, were not like us. They had no children; and they had a strange name. Fazakerley was a district of Liverpool, and it was not West Derby. Were they foreign?

Mr Fazakerley was, for all I know, a perfectly inoffensive man, though he had a beard and red hair; but my sister and I called him 'the Wild Man of Borneo'. At some stage he went to work abroad for a period of some months or even years, I think in Borneo, where two parts of that huge Island were still under British rule, and where there were reputed to be head-hunters still, apparently leaving Mrs Fazakerley to fend for herself, all alone in the wilds of Lisleholme Close, with no children to comfort her. The original Wild Man must have become news for some reason in 1953 (or perhaps it was 1954). Or rather the Wild *Men*, who had been a pair of exceptionally strong dwarf brothers from Connecticut, who performed with P. T. Barnum and his freak show exhibitions in the late nineteenth century; but it is pointless to try to make sense of the wild speculations which my sister and I indulged in. Perhaps there was some connection, though, between the Wild Man of Borneo and the Abominable Snowman?

There was a great emphasis on learning. A set of Encyclopaedias had been bought, large red volumes with strange names, indicating the subject matter – LON-PAP, PAR_SOP etc; and there were other single volumes containing KNOWLEDGE. – *The World of the Children* for example. One contained cross sections of the human body and the human mind showing what went on in each department of the brain (it largely seemed to proceed on the somewhat outdated theory that each bit of the brain had little men inside it, pulling levers, or riding bicycles attached to dynamos, or simply having clever ideas). Another picture showed the terrors the human mind was prey to when we are asleep. This was a terrifying image – with ghosts and ghoulies creeping around the house below, as you slept upstairs. Not the kind of thing calculated to give a child a good night's sleep.

I am not sure if the two things were connected but there was a period when my sister did not sleep well. She had uncomfortable dreams and used to complain about 'her thoughts' – the things that kept her awake at night. My mother would sometimes agree to sit in her room, patting her head until she went to sleep. On other occasions she would creep in and share my mother's bed, relegating my father to the cold of the small bedroom. I expect she still spends many sleepless nights thinking guiltily about this.

In 1954 my sister appeared as a Red Indian squaw in a musical staged by Miss Francis, the dancing teacher at West Derby Village Hall. There is a photograph of her in full fig. Later on her enthusiasm for dancing waned, as did her membership of the Brownies. She was probably more interested in her school work. I liked to tease her and I took up the cry that had been 'drummed out' of both organisations, which I thought a huge joke. My brother remembers going to see the show where she appeared as the Red Indian. There was a number with a chorus line

Buckets and spades, happy holidays.

Dad

I don't quite know how to put this; but, although I loved my father, I think I was a bit afraid of him. He was a more distant figure than my mother (if only because he worked such long hours; and he could get cross, which my mother never did. I think this is wholly unjustifiable but I can only think that I had some kind of very mild Oedipus complex. Some inkling that the relationship between the two of them was more complex than mine with her. And it made me uneasy.

My father was a self-made man. He had been born in 1915 and his father had been killed when he was three, in 1918. I found out much later, in fact in the 1980s that this had been during the German Spring Offensives of that year; and that my grandfather had been a private soldier in the British Army, who had only been in Flanders for two weeks, when he was BLOWN TO BITS. The consequence was that my father was brought up his grieving mother, and his two elder sisters. It is my guess that it was being the only 'man' in the house determined his character. He grew into a relatively small adult (5 feet 7 inches) but one who was determined to show that he was as good as the next man, and better than most. He was independent, self-reliant but very sure that he was right. I love him dearly, but I was not so completely certain of his affection, as I was of my mother's, until the incident involving the Blackjack wrapper in 1958.

He was highly intelligent, but struggled to get an education, and he left school at around 16, once he had obtained his School Certificate (what we came to know as 'O' level). Then somehow he managed to get an apprenticeship to a pharmacist, and by dint of hard work, he qualified and became a pharmacist. That was the closest he came to GETTING A DEGREE, which was then the privilege of the very few.

My father was very knowledgeable, about many things. He knew his thirteen-times table; he knew Spanish and could sing *La Cucaracha* and dance the *paso doble* (a solo version if you preferred); he knew some Latin or 'dog Latin' as he called it. He was very good at crosswords and puzzles involving numbers; and of course he knew the contents of the *Pharmacopeia*. He read *The Guardian* (or rather *The Manchester Guardian*) as well as *The Liverpool Echo*. He had learned to play the violin,

though I never saw him with one in hand; and his general knowledge was very wide; but he did have narrow views about some things and he was often convinced that he knew better than other people, about a suspiciously wide range of things. He had a habit of denigrating anyone who had reached the top, with the exception of Nobel Prize Winners in the hard sciences, or members of his own family.

Most people in the world, even those who were apparently at the top of their professions, and great successes, were in my father's eyes BLOODY FOOLS. If they were in the entertainment industry, but had not been trained to sing or tread the boards, they also STANK. A person who was obviously intelligent, but did not employ his talents in the furtherance of Medicine or Science, which included all lawyers and politicians, might be summarily condemned with the phrase HE LOVES HIMSELF. (Frankie Vaughan was immediately condemned for this crime, common as it was among entertainers. His trade mark high-kick was a clear sign of his guilt).

The extreme example of this attitude was my father's opinion of Winston Churchill. In 1954, Churchill was Prime Minister once more, having been PM between 1940 and 1945; and again from 1951-55. In the eyes of the world, and of most other British people I have ever met, Churchill was 'the greatest living Englishman'; but my Dad invariably referred to him as 'THAT BLOODY FOOL CHURCHILL.' Now I am not sure that this was ever explained to me; but it was probably because of the impetuousness he had shown at certain moments in his long career, for example, the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915 (coincidentally, the year of my father's birth). No credit was given for those great speeches, rallying the British people when they had their backs to the wall in 1940. In my father's version of history, events had moved swiftly on to the glorious day in 1945, when my mother and father voted for the first time in their lives and helped to bring about the Labour landslide, which sent 'Winnie' packing. My father said that everyone was agreed then, that WE WERE NOT GOING BACK to the Bad Old Days, when Churchill and his kind had laid down the law to the rest of us

My father disliked the SPIVS of the 1940s and the TEDDY-BOYS of the 1950s. If THE SHOP he owned was burgled – which it frequently was - he would rail against the villainy of those responsible; and embark upon a lecture concerning the theories of Cesare Lombroso, an Italian criminologist. Lombroso believed that criminality was inherited, and that someone 'born criminal' could be identified by physical defects, or in my Dad's version by looking at his face. According to my Dad, it was obvious that Lombroso was right: you only had to look at some of the types who came into the shop. He, Dad, could spot the criminals right away. Well, who knows, perhaps Lombroso was right; but he had died in 1909; and I doubt there were many criminologists in 1954 who still subscribed to these views.

Then there was the question of capital punishment. All through the 1950s, the Labour MP Sydney Silverman was campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty; but my father, who as far as I know voted Labour all his life, at least in general elections, opposed this fiercely, at least in our living room. The deterrent effect of capital punishment was open to debate but my father was clear that what

Dad wanted was RETRIBUTION – a word that he almost spat out –or at least he said he did.

Capital punishment was not in fact abolished until 1965, but soon after that, my father informed us that it should be reintroduced; and that, if no-one else was prepared to do so, he was prepared to act as hangman. He was a kind and gentle man; and it was not remotely possible that 'The Government' would find itself in need of his services: so the declaration was greeted with some disbelief; but there was no doubt about his stern views on penal policy. In his view, there should be fixed sentences for petty theft: 'for the first offence, chop off a finger; for the second offence, two fingers; for the third offence, immediate execution'. This was a very extreme, as well as early, version of 'three strikes and you're out'. I am not sure that even the Islamic Sharia is so Draconian.

As for politics, you may by now have concluded that my father was some kind of Communist agent; but in fact he never belonged, even to the Labour party; nor was he a Socialist (in the 1950s 'Labour' and 'Socialist' were used interchangeably). He once explained to me that the only Party he had joined, or perhaps felt tempted to join was the Common Wealth DURING THE WAR. This had been a movement rather than a conventional political party - an alliance of left wing groups formed in 1942. It appealed 'to the egalitarian sentiments of the English populace'. One of its proposals was that all incomes should be subjected to an upper limit. Not very practical I would have thought, but the world was a simpler place in the 1940s.

Christmas was, as I have said, a time for giving presents designed to increase the profits of the tobacco companies; but there was also another regular accompaniment to the festivities, and that was the Giles Annual, which contained the cartoons drawn by [Carl] Giles during the previous year in *The Daily Express* and *The Sunday Express*. This was strange in a way, because Dad never took either of these 'Tory' newspapers, which he regarded as 'rags'; but the annual cartoon book was regarded as a treat. I doubt if I understood most of the jokes, but the drawings were fun nonetheless. Giles was a very skilful draftsman and the characters of the various members of the typical family portrayed there came across very strongly; and there were a lot of minor jokes in the detail of the drawing.

Two themes came up regularly. Granma sometimes wore a gas mask. I thought that was funny in itself; but it was actually very typical of the times, in that it encapsulated (1) the fear of renewed war, after two World Wars within a generation; and (2) the fact that if war broke out, there would be a danger of a gas attack. One cartoon showed Granma in a gas mask alongside some kind of warning about Formosa. Where was Formosa? I had no idea. It was the old Portuguese name for what is now Taiwan, and in the early 1950s, when the 'Red' Chinese took over mainland China, the Nationalists under Chang Kai Shek escaped to Taiwan, and the small coastal islands of Quemoy and Matsu. The Reds bombarded the islands, while the US Navy patrolled the straits. Granma portrayed the fear that

there might be a general conflagration. I just thought the idea of an old woman wearing a gas mask was funny.

The other thing that troubled Granma, in several of the annuals, was the spy scandal involving Burgess and Maclean. I didn't know who they were either; but they were also clearly a huge joke. In fact, it was no laughing matter. They had been recruited at Cambridge in the 1930s and had penetrated the higher echelons of the British civil service. They defected together, to the Soviet Union, in 1951. This led to speculation, which periodically became intense and died away again but lasted all through the 1950s, as to whether there might be a 'third man', a third spy lurking within the 'Establishment' somewhere. The speculation also owed more than a little to the film *The Third Man*, a 1949 British *film noir* starring Joseph Cotten, Orson Welles, and Trevor Howard, though ostensibly that had little or nothing to do with Britain. The aftermath was the unmasking of *The Third Man*, in 1963. He was Kim Philby, who had penetrated British Intelligence while also being a full colonel in the KGB.

The sound track used in the film *The Third Man* featured a zither. There was a very attractive woman who used to play the zither on TV in the mid 1950s. This was Shirley Abicair, an Australian who hosted *Children's Hour*, with help from her Aboriginal puppet friends, Tea Cup and Clothespeg. In the process she became a 'star', as well as an unofficial ambassador and promoter of Australia – and almost as famous as Rolf Harris.

MacDonald Hobley

Sylvia Peters

Shirley Abicair

Cy Grant

Richard Greene as Robin Hood

Clint Walker as 'Cheyenne' Bodie

Conrad Phillips as William Tell, and son (with crew-cut)

The villainous Landberger Gessler (and friend)

Paul Anka

Perry Como, about to fall asleep

Bill Haley and the Comets, 'rocking'

Lonnie Donegan, 'the King of Skiffle'

Chapter 3

1955 – *Rock Around the Clock*

Pop Music

The Jukebox is capable of playing a good number of records from 1955, notwithstanding that many of the 'artistes' in vogue were thought to STINK. For example, Dickie Valentine (*The Finger Of Suspicion*); Rosemary Clooney (*Hey, mambo, mambo Italiano*); Alma Cogan (*Softly, Softly*); but then came Bill Haley (and his Comets) with *Rock Around the Clock*, and this changed everything.

It is difficult now, looking at photographs of Bill Haley to understand why. He looks so 'square', compared with those who followed in the tail of the comet; but *Rock Around the Clock* was the first record to sell a million copies in Britain and Bill Haley the first American 'rocker' to tour here. At the time it seemed that he was on the radio all the time, and that young people and especially teenagers were doing that dance – the rock and roll - everywhere. To my parents it was revolutionary, in that the dance, and the style of dress that went with it, seemed to mark a complete break with what went before. I can see now that rock and roll was still a form of dance, where the couples made physical contact, and there was a recognised pattern to the movement in time with the music. By the time I started dancing with a girl ten years later, the idea of *holding* the girl, except for a slow smooch, was already very old fashioned, having largely been superseded by free expression or 'gyrating', as one friend from Winchester was to call it. But Rock and Roll in 1955, while still a recognisable form of dance, was still an act of rebellion, recognised as such immediately by older people. It thrived on disapproval.

Bill Haley followed up *Rock Around the Clock* with *See you later Alligator (In a while, crocodile*), which appealed to a nine-year old, because it was funny as well as (presumably) romantic for teenagers; but in general, records appealed to me if they were catchy. The lyric didn't matter too much, since it had no connection with sex or romance in my mind, both alien concepts, of interest to grownups and now teenagers. (For instance I liked *Chain-gang* I liked because it wasn't ostensibly about love and romance at all, but about some aspects of the penal system in the Southern United States. 'Sad', I know)

.

My father had a simple view of foreign affairs. Anyone who deliberately shot and killed British soldiers, was A MURDERER, whether they were IRA, EOKA, MAU-MAU, STERN GANG or Malayan Communists. That was all you needed to know about it.

During the 1950s Archbishop Makarios was a popular figure among Greek Cypriots, a leading advocate for Ενοσις (Union with Greece), and suspected by the British of being in league with the terrorist organisation known as EOKA, which was led by General George Grivas. In October 1955, the British governor opened talks on the island's future; but these broke down early in 1956. Makarios was intercepted by the Special Branch whilst attempting to board a flight at Nicosia airport and exiled to the Seychelles. He eventually became President of an independent Cyprus, but whenever he came on TV my father would shout 'MURDERER' because EOKA had undoubtedly murdered British soldiers, on duty in Cyprus,

JOMO KENYATTA was ANOTHER MURDERER. The Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya in the 1950s was extremely violent, as was its successfully suppression. Again the British colonial authorities suspected that Kenyatta was behind it, or at least involved in it. It involved a Kikuyu-dominated anti-colonial group called *Mau Mau*, but there was also Kikuyu who were anti-Mau Mau. Kenyatta was arrested in October 1952 and indicted with five others on the charge of being a member. In April 1953 the court sentenced him to seven years imprisonment with hard labour, and indefinite restriction thereafter. He remained in prison until 1959. The state of emergency was lifted in 1960 and Kenyatta became PM of independent Kenya in 1963 and, the following year, President.

In Palestine, there were many atrocities committed by the Jews as they fought to establish the state of Israel in the late 1940s. Among these was the hanging of three British sergeants and the bombing of the King David Hotel in 1946. My father remembered these with great bitterness too. At the time there were several Jewish terrorist groups, the best known being the IRGUN, of which Menachen Megin was the leader. He was therefore another MURDERER. Begin became Prime Minister of Israel between 1977 and 1983 and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1978.

The tide of history clearly was not flowing Dad's way; but I have to say that he took it all cheerfully enough and confined his protests to bawling MURDERER at the telly. Nothing could be so bad after all, as long as my brother and I did not have to fight in any more European wars; but, in recent years begun to think he was right about THE MURDERERS. You can spend half a lifetime studying other people's nationalisms, and trying to understand the causes of the conflict; but at the end of the day the line has to be drawn between those who are prepared to kill (rather than just die) for a faith and those who aren't willing to put another person's life before an idea; and it remains very difficult for me to sympathise with another person's nationalism, however loud the protests in favour of it.

1955 was the year when the Warsaw Pact was signed; but it was also the year when James Dean died in a car crash and when British Gran Prix was won by Stirling Moss at Aintree on 16 July; and I think I must have seen this. At least, I certainly went to a car-race of some kind at Aintree around about that time, with my father and Uncle Harry. If it was indeed the 1955 British *Grand Prix*, then it should have been a memorable occasion, because that was the year when Moss beat Juan Fangio, the greatest driver of his age. Fangio was more of demonic force than Argentinian. Inconceivable that he should beat good old Stirling on home territory, whatever the odds.

In fact I can only remember one thing about the British Gran Prix of 1955 and this was a humiliation. We had never been to a Gran Prix before; and we were totally unfamiliar with the procedures – where to enter the stadium, where to find the seats, what to look for, how to behave. It had rained heavily. We found some seats, liberally supplied by the weather with puddles where you needed to put your bum. My father devised a way of sweeping the water away and making them reasonably sittable-on. But, not long after we had taken out seats, we were moved on by some men who had booked them; and demanded their rights. My Uncle tried to pass off our arse-trespass by joking that 'at least we had kept the seats dry'; but the true owners did not seem to respond well. There was a hint of menace in the air; and I think he thought that they thought that he was TRYING TO BE FUNNY. On Merseyside it was acceptable, even expected, that you should *be* funny, to some degree but TRYING TO BE FUNNY was an unpardonable sin, in fact was tantamount to issuing an invitation to fight. The incident passed off without violence but, for me, the humiliation was total.

My grandmother, Nana, strongly disapproved of motor-racing. Her Puritanism was deeper, narrower, wider, even than my father's and I suppose that for someone born around 1886. Motor-racing must have seemed a complete waste of money, and a completely pointless activity, as well as extremely dangerous. In the 1950s she was probably right about the danger: there were multiple smashups and pileups, with frequent deaths amongst the drivers, and even the spectators, since cars often crashed through the barriers, or came cartwheeling over them, cutting large swathes through the innocent crowds, virtually every time a race was run. In Nana's view, the sport should be banned, for the sake of everyone's health and safety (which would have been a remarkably early example of the Nanny state in action).

My Nana's wish to prohibit motor-racing was one of the few things my father disagreed with her about. Indeed got quite cross about. It really did show how out of touch with the modern world she was. My father liked motor-sport, indeed he thought that it was at the forefront of modern science and technology. It was only by trying out new models, materials, designs and machinery, in extreme conditions, that one could hope to improve the car, which was such an important part of the modern world and of British industry. Experiment was the fundamental tool of modern science, which had replaced religion as the thing which modern men should

believe in. By her attitude to motor racing, Nana showed that she was LIVING IN THE PAST. My father, who admired Stirling Moss (and other British drivers) thought that death was a necessary part of the experiment, and a price worth paying for PROGRESS. In this I suppose he was a bit like Joseph Stalin. The people at Ibrox had died in vain, since watching football was pointless; but the people who died at motor-races were had sacrificed their lives in a noble cause.

Home

Mum had never wanted to GO BACK TO WORK; and my father would have considered it as a kind of insult if it had been suggested that she should – because it would have cast doubt on his ability to support his family. So, instead, she was 'a housewife'. Even the term sounds quaint now; but she took pride in it. Even so, she seemed to feel the need to justify this existence by claiming that cookery was scientific; and that she was some kind of a chemist, who made the compounds (our dinners) by mixing the elements (or ingredients).

Since she was at home most of the time, she had friends round on a regular basis. There seemed to have an endless round of friends in the house for coffee or tea, though there were probably only three – Aunt Pip, Aunt Lil and Mrs Lee. These she would regale with her endless and much repeated stories, sometimes without pausing for breath. They were designed, deliberately or otherwise, to reduce anyone with a brain, or even half one, to a state of bored stupefaction, and my mother to near-exhaustion. I never met anyone who was so impolite as to interrupt her, or object that they had heard any of it before; and, when I became aware of the awful reality, I was not cruel enough to point any of this out. In any case, it would have been too late. She took all arguments personally and serious difference of view was likely to give rise to mortal offence.

Sometimes, when listening to a grownup conversation, one might get a childish view of what it was all about. For example, I remember my mother discussing a television programme with her friends, over a cup of tea. Somebody (a woman) had done something which was highly disapproved of; and my mother said that what this woman had done was 'suggestive'. The word was spat out, during the consumption of a digestive biscuit, so maybe 'suggestive' and 'digestive' were similar, or connected in some way? At any rate, I took note that suggestive behaviour was something that a lady should never, under any circumstances, engage in. After a time, I realised that it was all about breasts. When photographs of Brigitte Bardot and Sophia Loren started to impinge on my consciousness it was always in the context of their breasts, so I think 'suggestive' meant 'inappropriate use of a woman's breasts in order to enslave the male'. Closely linked in the lexicon was the word 'cleavage', which implied a world where breasts were (a) large; (b) exposed, or more likely semi-exposed, or at least prominently displayed; and (c) clearly divided. You can see why I passed the 10 plus.

My mother did not have much of a sense of humour but my father did. He used to do funny walks and tell jokes – the same ones, often. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to call them funny stories – like the one about the carpenter and the wooden stool, or the can of beans that was not for eating but for selling, or the tailor who advised his customer to stand in a certain way to disguise the poor cut of his suit. They were accompanied by an act or a dance and delighted us all. Childish minds are easily amused by a fond and much loved Dad.

Bill Heslop was a friend of my father's although I think originally he was simply the boyfriend and then husband of my mother's friend Lil. They had gone to dances together, and Lil may have been there in 1934 when my mother and father met at that dance in Liverpool. So they were Uncle Bill and Aunt Lil and their two sons were 'cousins' Donald and Keith. They lived in Aigburth which was at the end of the 61 Bus route, after Old Swan and The Holt School and Childwall Fiveways – in fact quite a lot further on, down near Otterspool. I was never sure you could see otters there, or ever had been able to, but it was an outing by bus or by car, with a large though windy place to play in, down by the Mersey.

But I never really liked Keith and my brother had little in common with Donald. Though they were not so different in age, they were certainly different in outlook. Keith was once of those boys who seemed to grow up much more quickly than I did, and started becoming interested in pop music, and model railways and then bicycles and then motorbikes, long before I did; and I was reluctant to adopt him as a role model, preferring a quiet afternoon with a book to GOING OUT. I remember that the time came when my father had to defend me, against the charge, levelled by Uncle Bill that I 'did not GO OUT much'. I was very pleased that at that time, he did so rather cleverly by saying that although I did not go out much, when I went I went. I think this must refer to a period when I was going cycling into Wales regularly on a Sunday and doing 60 or 70 or even 100 miles on a bike in a day; and hence cannot have related to any time before about 1961 or 62; but the story shows that (a) you had to have some kind of answer to the charge of 'being a stay-at-home', even as a very young child. A reply which said 'yes, he's a stay-at-home, but nice with it' would have been regarded as some mitigation, but not as a defence.

Bill was a severe sort of father – perhaps he had more to be severe about – and in our eyes a true curmudgeon. We used to complain about it. But Dad said he liked him, because he was funny. Wales. Sunday. Some kind of outing. Woman objects because it's the Sabbath. Allegedly Bill completely outsmarts woman with his devastating repartee:

'Madam I am a Jew, I celebrated my Sabbath yesterday.'

Of course he wasn't, and he hadn't; but it was some kind of minor victory over the Welsh obscurantists who were trying to spoil our fun.

As I may have said Mum and Dad didn't into pubs, if they could avoid it. I think my father's attitude here was framed by (1) early contact with the Temperance

Movement in Liverpool in the 1930s (I bet that isn't very influential now); (2) the character of many of the pubs in Liverpool ('spit and sawdust' muich in evidence, I guess, especially around Great Homer Street).

I never heard my parents swear, when we were children. The Ten Commandments (given much additional publicity by the appearance of the eponymous film, starring Charlton Heston and Yul Brynner in 1956) included the requirement that 'thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain'; and at home even the word 'damn' was off limits; but yet my father's friends included some notable swearers.

I once heard Larry Hadden, the optician, complain to my father that when he had taken his car into the garage for repair the bloody mechanics (or perhaps it was bloody monkeys) had had put their shitty hands all over it. This seemed a bit strong; but we liked Larry Hadden. We were all shortsighted and had to go to see Larry very often. I was shortsighted from a very early age (and had an astigmatism). I did not get a pair of spectacles until I was 9 or 10; but I wanted to wear 'glasses' much earlier, because everyone did in our family (well, not Mum, but the rest) and sometimes I used to stare at the lightbulb, thinking this would speed up the myopia. Nobody ever said the word 'fuck' at W.D.C. OF E. although some did talk about shagging. I didn't know what that was, but I thought it was different from fucking. When I realised later that some people used the word 'fuck' rather than, or even in addition to 'shag' I asked my mother about it. She said fuck was a very bad word, that I must never repeat (she could not bring herself to use it, and used if necessary to spell it rather than pronounce it); but anyway it had to do with putting something into a person's bottom, which was very bad indeed. Consequently I spent several years in a state of considerable confusion, because the word was used increasingly often by those around me, but I still thought fucking was different from shagging, except when used as a swear word, when there was clearly little difference.[1]

It was John Kent who explained that they were the same thing, at the grammar school. He was quite surprised that I thought they were different; but quite understanding about my ignorance – and prepared to concede that he might be wrong. There could be a difference, it was just that he was unaware that there was any. I was still unsure what any of this was about, and there were other words which I was even less sure about, because you could hardly ask your parents, once you had realised the nature of the territory you had unwittingly trespassed on.

Cunts! Now, that was a really bad word, though it was in common use at the grammar school as a term of abuse. A 'cunt' was a really vicious and mean type of boy, of whom there were plenty at THE HOLT, despite the process of selection represented by the 11 plus. It was years before I associated that word with the female anatomy, and when I did, I was puzzled by its continued existence as a term of abuse amongst boys.

[1] Since writing this I have been reliably informed that in India 'shagging' means wanking (masturbating).

Foreign travel

Once you got out of THE CLOSE, you were really on your own, and you might well get into trouble. You might be found guilty of TRESPASSING; and, as everyone knew TRESPASSERS WOULD BE PROSECUTED: the dire warnings were everywhere. What would happen to you if you were caught in the act? I can only picture it in terms of those early Victorian spring-guns. An offender would probably lose a leg; but, worse than that was would precede the loss of the limb: the sickening snap of metal on flesh; the tearing of muscle from bone; the disgusting marrowbone jelly; and the life of penury and ignominy, as a cripple, which would inevitably follow. Even worse things might happen to you if you wandered too far DOWN THE LANE. Even if you didn't get as far as Cantril Farm, there began the VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH – and the world of the COUNCIL HOUSE, where the rough kids lived, with their ragged clothes and runny noses. They would duff you up as soon as look at you, just for being a bit 'posher' than they were. One of Gerry Marsden's first songs assured Liverpudlians that:

'People on every corner
They seem to smile and say
We don't know what your name is, boy
We'll never turn you away.'

Well, true. They didn't turn you away, because that would involve letting you go. They preferred to shout abuse, chase you and gave you a kicking, if you were daft enough to wait around for it.

Yet, we did sally forth. To THE HOCKEY. To the R.U.F.C. To NO-MAN'S LAND and onwards To BENKY'S. THE HOCKEY was the nearest. It was a hockey pitch, sometimes played upon for the designated purpose, but sometimes put to more interesting use. Next to it ran THE DITCH, which was some kind of drainage dyke. There was quite a large gang led by a boy of about my brother's age. On one occasion this boy, I think his name was Graham Balfour, dressed in an old German helmet and appointed himself *Obergruppenführer*. As such, he ordered a part of boys to dam the ditch, at the junction of No-man's land, the Hockey and the RUFC. This we proceeded to do with Teutonic efficiency, so that there was no ditch left at all on one side of the dam, and a considerable body of water on the other. It was a long summer evening, so that unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your point of view, there was enough time for the Police and other authorities to be contacted, to put a stop to the mayhem. The importance of the ditch to the local network of drains and dykes was then revealed to an unsuspecting world. So far as I know, we had all scarpered by the time the full extent of the interference was discovered; and I don't think that GB's crime was ever discovered. Which was just as well, since his father

was a Sergeant in the C.I.D. My brother informs me, however, that G drank himself to the death by the age of 40. Always a wild one, that Graham.

On one occasion when I (Simple Simon) was making my brave way alone through No-man's land to Benky's, I was accosted by an older girl who was sitting in some kind of den, which she had furnished with some scraps of fabric in the bushes. She invited me inside to 'taste her ware'. I of course declined and went on my innocent way. She was probably about 12 and probably came from DOWN THE LANE.

If you managed to get to Benky's in one piece, without being ordered to commit some petty crime (or even a major one), and still in possession of your virginity – then a quite different scene awaited you. I never knew where the name came from; but I suppose it was a Liverpudlian abbreviation of a former owner's surname. At any rate, between the years 1953 and 1965 it was a bit of waste ground, surrounded by high trees, and a natural playground, with sandstone outcrops and craters and scrub, surrounded by housing. Not entirely safe, because you could meet kids from quite different areas there, but on the whole they were not of the roughest kind.

I went there once with a new bike, thinking to perform some kind of stunt by flying over the rim of a crater. It is just as well that I chose not to pursue the family love of Science, because this was where my ignorance of elementary physics became manifest. Specifically, I had no concept of how fast you would have to travel to make the leap from one side of the crater to the other; and nor did I understand that the bikes in those days were different from the cars, in that they had no springs. So, when I launched her off the edge, she just descended into the depth of the crater, landing with considerable impact, and depositing me on my head. There was more damage to pride than injury to body; but the bike took a pounding which was hard to explain to a fond parent and a critical sibling.

We often used to drive out to Delamere Forest in Cheshire, for a picnic; but the favourite destination at a weekend was Ainsdale Beach. Sitting in the back of the car playing with my sister, I took very little notice of routes or times; but I remember the names of one place we passed through – Ince Blundell. The journey home usually involved at least one humiliating stop so that my sister could relieve herself into a potty, held by my mother or father between two doors on one side of the car, so as to disguise the activity as far as possible.

Ainsdale beach was a vast expanse of sand, dunes and shallow water, reaching out into the deep Sea. The sun always shone there and we regularly got sunburnt, something which I never own up to when I got to skin-cancer clinics almost 60 years later. There is a contradiction here. The fact that sunburn was such a regular feature of our summers suggests that the British were never truly used to having hot summers. Yet it was certainly true that by the 1960s we regarded the 1950sn as a sun-drenched decade. Summers were never the same again, something which my mother blamed on the bomb though my father would have wanted

evidence for a statement like that. There was no talk of global warming then, only a worry about whether we were ruining the planet with plutonium.

We usually went with my Uncle Harry and Aunty Pip, and our cousin Geraldine who was more like a sister than a cousin; and they were all great fun because they seemed so much younger than Mum and Dad, though there was only eight years difference between the sisters; but sometimes we went with the Heslops, who were not so much fun, largely because Uncle Bill had smelly feet, which he liked to display and because he used to complain, loudly and often about the fact that, in our play, we kicked up the sand and he said that it got into the sandwiches. Some people are never satisfied.

Keith Heslop and I once went skulking in the dunes, tracking down lovers, to see what they were doing. I think Keith copied his father in this, for Bill displayed a fascination for the contents of other men's swimming trunks. In those days the average woollen bathing costume did not have much tensile strength; which meant that it was all right for keeping you warm (well up to a point since the Irish Sea differs from the Mediterranenan); but it also clearly displayed the size of a man's cock and balls. Bill would amuse himself by sitting on a woollen blanket behind a windbreak, singing a popular song from 1944: 'H'I've got a luverly bunch of coconuts' . This amused my father (and mother) greatly.

School

Why do I think of Roy Nevison, who was in my class at W.D.C.OF E., as 'the bad boy'? Because he was, and he knew it. He wasn't just badly behaved, he knew that it was his mission in life to be bad (and if you look at him on the school photograph he clearly has the classic physiognomy of the Lombrosian criminal. And once when I asked him *why* he was bad, he just laughed. He certainly didn't try to deny it. He was quite friendly to me though, for some reason.

I knew where he lived. It was down an alley, some little way from Harold's barber's shop. I went into that alley once, carrying a basket of fruit from the Harvest Festival service at school, for some old folk who lived in the terraced houses there. The old man assumed that, when I knocked on his door, I was playing a trick on him and his wife; and he came out with a roar, waving a stick in the air. I fled, probably dropping the fruit in the process; and this changed my attitude towards philanthropic activities for some years thereafter.

The Vicar of West Derby Parish Church was a Rector – something grand, and indeed he later became a canon. With hindsight it seems like a bit of *Barchester Towers* transported into the middle of the 20th century. The church was big. It was God's house. You better not misbehave in there, because God saw everything, and in his own house he could see right inside your head. We crept around the place like Nuns, though there were no Nuns in the Church of England, were there? That was a Catholic thing.

I can remember walking to school with my sister, who was two years younger. Did my mother really a seven year old to walk a distance of about half a mile to school with a five year old, unaccompanied? Yes, she did. In my mind, that was what used to happen, four times a day for a period of about five years; I suppose it shows that the walk was not considered to be through hostile territory, for that part of West Derby was considered to be 'nice' and it was certainly not hostile territory, as you soon encountered if you went down Deysbrook Lane. I calculate that, since we overlapped at school between 1955 and 1958, that is three years, we must have done that walk at least 2,400 times. (There and back twice a day, five days a week, say 40 weeks a year. We always went home for lunch, which we called 'dinner' and the meals we ate were always the same, according to the day of the week; but it was good food, liberally washed down with quantities of HP sauce (*Cette sauce de haute qualité, est un mélange délicieux de...*). On these journeys my sister and I forged a strong bond,which I think is with us still.

We recited the names of the houses we passed on the way, though I can only remember one now, which was 'Alvanley'. I think 'Alvanley' was towards the end of the walk, near THE VILLAGE HALL. So that meant to get there, we had already entered Lisleholme Road, Deysbrook Lane, rounded the semicircle of Town Row, with its sweetshop, walked for miles along Town Row (though for some unaccountable reasons this became Leyfield Road in the other direction) crossed the roaring thoroughfare of Melwood Drive, where it mysteriously became Barnfield Drive, forged on along the other leg of Town Row and were approaching THE VILLAGE itself, when we saw the gate with 'Alvanley' on it. 'Alvanley' suggested to me a verdant pasture, a safe heaven, an earthly paradise in an urban landscape, and an arriving – although when we did it in the other direction, it was a departure. And then, turning right by the old stocks, we entered Meadow Lane and there on the left was THE SCHOOL, and the safe harbour of the playground.

We also had a game for each day of the week. One day it was 'run a lampost, walk a lampost' – there were many lampposts along the way and the game is fairly self-explanatory. Another day (Wednesdays?) it was was market day; and I was the farmer, taking a pig to market. My sister was the pig, in fact she was a Yorkshire pig. (I suppose Yorkshire was thought to be a more rural kind of county). She did a good imitation of a pig, puckering up her lips to form a snout. I don't think she was insulted by the role. We didn't make up these games for anyone else's benefit, and therefore she was not a pig in anyone's eyes, nor was I seen to think that she was. She was a good Yorkshire pig, and we were both pleased to be taking her to the market. I don't think either of us thought ahead to what her fate would have been if she had arrived. We never invented an abattoir game.

There were Catholic schools as well as Catholic churches all around, as if the Spaniards had landed after all, and managed to conquer some parts of the population, but not others. And we used to see the Catholic children walking to school as we did. There must have been a certain amount of name calling because one day, I had a fight with a Catholic boy, when somehow the mutual hostility in the

air descended on our persons, rather than on anyone else's. It is the only fight I can ever remember having, all my life, except for the ritualistic sparring with my brother. And it was not pleasant. I don't remember that either of us could be said to have 'won'. I don't think my part in it was very honourable, either in terms of its being brought about or in the execution. I think I could have walked away from it, as could he. We traded a few ineffectual blows, and then I went on my way, smarting a bit. My sister had gone on ahead, and I found her sitting on the pavement near Melwood Drive, in tears. I picked her up and kissed her and we walked the rest of the way together, forgetting to say the names of the houses.

I had a friend when I was at W.D.C. OF E., Michael Jackson – not *the* Michael Jackson of course, and he later changed his name to Michael J Jackson to avoid that confusion – for he became an actor. I met him on the first day at W.D.C. of E, when he and I were both in the playground and his mother thought I looked like a nice child and asked if I would hold his hand, as he was looking even more lost than me. I apparently did so successfully.

Michael lived DOWN THE LANE, but in a nice house. In my mind I seemed to go down there every Saturday afternoon to play. There was a tribe of Jacksons living down there, all next to one another, and one of the adults ran a pig farm, so no doubt there were periodic massacres of swine fever ridden animals, as with the Jones/Adams family. Michael and I used to play at the back of his house. Sometimes we would dare each other to walk around the edge of a large stone vat, filled with pig shit. Had one of us fallen in, he would doubtless have drowned in the stuff. On other occasions, we used to make cigarettes out of brown paper and used tea leaves, in the disused chicken coops, amongst the chicken shit, not far from the pig shit. On another occasion, we had a spitting contest in the front room of his house, but were interrupted by Mrs Jackson, who came in from the back room and objected. She had previously thought I was a nice little boy, and the incident was somewhat embarrassing.

It was never the same again after I passed the 10 plus. I remember Michael asking if we would still be friends after I went, and of course I said we would be; but going to The Holt was a rite of passage; and we rapidly acquired other friends. He followed me the next year to The Holt, but he was then in 1B and I was in 2A. That's a big divide.

I can only remember walking to school with Michael on one or two occasions - perhaps he normally cut through Crown Road and walked there a different way, though I am not sure there was a way through there in those days. Anyway, it was while I was walking to school with him one day, just the two of us – where was my sister? – that I first discussed what grown-up men and women did to each other when they were alone and had the chance. Michael and I had each acquired a highly inaccurate idea about this from somewhere or other; but it was he who first used the words. What they did, he said, was 'intersexual intercourse'. That was the scientific term for what we had learned was a brief and vigorous act, involving some kind of clinging and penetration. So this was what lay behind all that frothy and soppy stuff

in the popsongs about love and marriage! Though we could hardly believe that our own mothers and fathers would ever have stooped so low.

We spent our Summer holidays in a caravan at Heysham, on the same site where Great Unlce Tom and Great Aunt Elsie (my mother's mother's younger sister) lived. Tom worked in the mills. They had no children, which was a puzzle to me. If you were married, you had children, didn't you. Wasn't that what it was all about? Uncle Tom's yellow and crooked teeth were a sight to behold. Great Aunt Elsie was only 11 years older than Mum (and I think she wore one of those floral housecoats which Nana wore). The small age gap puzzled me. I think there is some kind of hidden phenomenon here - an absence of any sophisticated notion or method of family planning. If Great Aunt Elsie was only 11 years older than Mum, doesn't that say something about family planning before the First World War – or rather about the absence of it?

Chapter 4

1956 *Why do fools fall in love?*

Popular Culture

The Jukebox can play almost the whole of this one -

Oh wah, Oh wah, Oh wah, Oh wah, Oh wah, Oh wah,
Why do fools fall in love?
Why do birds sing so gay?
And lovers await the break of day
Why do they fall in love?

Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, in case you are wondering. So that's six 'Oh Wahs', not five or seven, and its 'Oh Wah', not 'Do-Wah', as I had falsely remembered. I could equally well play snatches of Tennessee Ernie Ford's *Sixteen Tons*; Dean Martin's *Memories Are Made of This*; or Doris Day's *Whatever Will Be, Will Be (Que Sera, Sera)*. The last of these is a particularly persistent worm.

The radio was not the only source of music in the house. There was also the television, although viewing hours were very restricted, and my bedtime arrived very early in the evening. Cy Grant, who was probably the first black person any of us had ever seen (other than fleetingly) used to appear on the BBC's daily news show, *Tonight*, to sing the news in calypso. (To my surprise I now find that the words were written by Bernard Levin, who went on to be a regular feature of *That Was The Week That Was*, the first 'satirical' show on TV in the early '60s)

MacDonald Hobley and Sylvia Peters became as well known as Giles's Auntie Vera. They were 'continuity announcers' – a breed which has died out now. Hobley used to wear a dinner jacket and bow tie, Peters an evening gown and pearls; but they (and Peter Haigh) all seemed to embody a revival of the wartime bull-dog spirit. Their upper lips did not move, and they all spoke with impeccable 'BBC accents'; but nobody, even in Liverpool, felt that this was strange or represented any kind of 'discrimination'. This was the BBC, after all. Things should be done properly.

Then came ITV. The Television Act of 1954 introduced commercial television for the first time, but in a different form the one it took in America, where it was thought by the British Establishment to be irredeemably cheap and 'vulgar'. From the start it was decreed that in the UK, commercials must be clearly

distinguishable from programmes; and this has remained the rule. In our house we 'got' ITV fairly soon after it was introduced, though not immediately. I think there was a feeling that it was a bit of a foreign interloper, and my father continued to believe that ADVERTISING IS THE CURSE OF MODERN SOCIETY – which sat alongside his refusal to take free offers, or collect coupons or green stamps (THAT IS HOW THEY GET YOU). Having thought when I was young that these were silly prejudices, I can now see what he meant; but my sister and I used to rather enjoy 'the adverts'; and the jingles which accompanied them were (and are) just as playable on my mental Jukebox as those in the Hit Parade:

You'll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent.
(Remember folks, *Pepsodent* (toothpaste) had a new miracle ingredient - 'I.M.P.')

Bom, Bom, Bom, Bom, Esso Blue!

The second of these jingles is paradoxical, because it shows that one's liking for an advert, at least as a child, had little or nothing to do with the commercial success which it achieved. Whereas we knew what *Pepsodent* was (while lacking the purchasing power or legal capacity to buy any), *Esso Blue* was a substance whose very nature was unknown to us. It was in fact a type of paraffin; but we didn't use paraffin in our house, at least not in any substantial or regular quantity.

Notwithstanding the paternal contempt for advertising, my sister and I watched ITV avidly, just as we watched BBC. There was an early type of game-show, pioneered on Radio Luxembourg and 'hosted' on ITV by Michael Miles or Hughie Green. The former hosted *Take Your Pick*, while the latter hosted *Double Your Money* and *Opportunity Knocks*. The problem with watching these shows when Dad was around was that they were doubly infuriating for him because (1) they epitomised the decay of British society associated with gambling and (2) the hosts STANK. In addition Dad thought Michael Miles's grasp of grammar left something to be desired, because he was constantly shouting YOU'VE GOT THE WHOLE THREE RIGHT!

But my father didn't mind Westerns. His favourite film was *Shane* (Paramount Pictures, 1953), starring Alan Ladd. You could watch a Western without fear of being interrupted by the cry of HE STINKS. A favourite of ours was *Cheyenne*, starring Clint Walker as 'Cheyenne Bodie'. This man was impressively built. He stood 6 feet, 6 inches tall, and had a 48-inch chest and a 32-inch waist. His strength was displayed in good causes every week. He was good looking and he became a great hero to young English boys and girls alike, even when engaged in the routine mayhem of shooting 'baddies' first and asking questions later. Even Mum liked them, though she told me later that she wasn't really interested: she had always watched them to please my father. WHATEVER YOU WANT, DEAR.

Rolf Harris was the only entertainer to work on both BBC and ITV, performing on BBC with his own creation, 'Willoughby', a specially made board on which he drew Willoughby. The character would then come to life and talk to Harris as he drew cartoons of Willoughby's adventures. Sounds silly, even for children, but Rolf Harris was a very talented artist, and has proved a lasting success with the British public. (At the time of writing, he is still alive)

We all used to enjoy THE INTERLUDE. Programming was not as slick as it has since become; and there were often gaps between scheduled programmes, to keep us all amused. I suppose it shows the power of repetition; but these Interludes were great favourites with adults and children alike, though they were entirely mundane and largely silent: *The Potter's Wheel, The Spinning Wheel, The White Kitten, Angel Fish, Horses Ploughing a Field*, and of course the more exciting *London to Brighton in 4 Minutes*.

At the cinema, not everything was made in Hollywood, since British films were undergoing one of their periodic revivals. *Private's Progress* was made by the Boulting Brothers. The action took place during the Second World War (as it often did); and followed the adventures of Stanley Windrush (Ian Carmichael), a conscript into the British Army who gets involved in some elaborate fraud. Most of his comrades are malingerers. He joins a secret operation known only as 'Hatrack'. This was one of series of successful satirical comedies made by the Boultings – *I'm All Right Jack* (1959) being another.

As for football, I was interested in the more important matches, like the Cup Final, especially if a local team was playing; and in 1956, Manchester City beat Birmingham 3-1. The man of the match was Bert Trautmann, the Man. City goalkeeper, who had been a German paratrooper (on the Russian front!) and then a POW in England before settling here after the War. (The club's decision to sign him provoked intense controversy at the time). With 17 minutes of the match remaining Trautmann suffered a serious injury after diving at the feet of Birmingham City's Peter Murphy. Despite this, he continued to play and made several important saves, to preserve his team's 3–1 lead. His head was noticeably at an angle as he collected his winner's medal; and three days later it was revealed that he had sustained a broken neck. When last heard of (2011) Trautmann was still alive.

The World

On April 18, 1956, Nikita Khrushchev arrived in the UK for a goodwill visit aboard the cruiser '*Ordzhenikidze*', which docked at Portsmouth. The same day, Commander Crabb, a navy diver and said to be the inspiration for James Bond, checked into a hotel in Portsmouth, checked out again and was never seen again. This led to an international incident, since the Russians accused us of spying on the

ship and on the other hand there was speculation in the British Press that the Soviets had captured Crabb and taken him to the Soviet Union. In June 1957, a body in a frogman's suit was found floating in the sea. The head and both hands were missing.

Elvis Presley shocked the world by wiggling his hips on the Ed Sullivan Show. Sounds tame enough now, but my mother would have called his antics 'suggestive'. Grace Kelly – an American film star - married Prince Rainier of Monaco, to the delight of women everywhere (I think the men were more phlegmatic, when it came to weddings); and Khrushchev denounced the excesses of Comrade Stalin in a 'secret speech', made to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Word of this got out and, as a result, there was an uprising in Hungary later that year which was brutally put down by Soviet troops. Large numbers of Hungarians fled to the West and many prominent members of the British Communist Party resigned, including Christopher Hill, the future master of Balliol. It was the end of a dream for many Socialists. At the time, the West was unable or unwilling to respond in any way to the crushing of the Hungarian revolution (or counter-revolution, as those who remained in the Communist Party called it) because of the distraction of the Suez Crisis.

I remember the panic over the supply of petrol. Because the Suez Canal was closed (Nasser having ordered the sinking of ships in it, so as to block it when the British expeditionary force landed) the Government announced petrol rationing and the public started panic buying. Many cars ran out of petrol. There was much talk of illegal siphoning – I assume it was not so common then to have a lock on the petrol cap. This interested me and I remember asking my father how it was done. He either showed me or explained it so graphically that I think, if pushed, I could still nick petrol if I had a key to the lock, or could pick it.

I think many British people, including my Dad, felt let down by the Americans over Suez. They had been our friends in two World Wars (though always late to arrive), and they had undoubtedly won the Second War – whereas their part in the first was peripheral. At the same time they had always made it clear that they didn't want the British Empire to survive the Second World War – at least not by much – and Suez was proof that they could not always be relied on to help us any more.

Dad

There was no garden to speak of at Lisleholme Close. True, there were areas designated as front and back garden; but (since we had no garage) part of the so-called front garden was devoted to a hard-standing for the car, which my father built for himself with concrete 'flags'. That left very little room for anything else, though there were perhaps a few plants, and there was certainly a low privet hedge between our land and the front pavement. At the back, there was a shed, a coal bunker, a

swing and a large tall privet hedge guarding the territory of the Empire from the land of barbarians, so again there was very little room for gardening of the traditional British suburban variety. I think most of 'the lawn' was reduced to bare earth by our constant journeyings and play, especially when the swing was put to vigorous use. You cannot jump onto grass several dozen times a day without this having a deleterious effect. It was only when I was 16n that we moved to a bigger house and that Dad became interested in gardening, both for itself and as a way of relaxing.

There was no much relaxing that I can recall at Lisleholme Close. Had he lived in Russia, Dad must surely have been recognised as a Hero of the Soviet Union, in the same league as Alexey Stakhanov, who had won that status for his incredibly productive coalmining. He (Dad) must have started work at the age of 15 or 16 when he left school, and worked all his life, until he died at the age of 60. He worked 6 days a week, including Saturdays, usually 9 am to 7pm, and sometimes for a few hours on a Sunday, if there was a rota. It was only in later life that he started to take Wednesday afternoons off. He also did much paperwork in the evenings. He took 2 weeks holiday in the summer and 1 week at Easter, but these short holidays were taken later in life and not invariably. I can remember a time when the rest of the family had a holiday but he continued to work. He had no hobbies.

I think all this this was influential – we were all three Stakhanovites as schoolchildren and students, assuming as we did that, if you were at school or University, you were there to work. I had few hobbies other than reading – no trainspotting – no 'cubs or Scouts'– no airfix models – though I did have friends and a model railway later. At the same time, I have tried all my life, not to work as hard as Dad.

There was a lot of pharmaceutical and medical lore in our house. You did not use too much soap when washing your face and neck, because that would give you boils, or acne. THE BODY DOES NOT STORE VITAMIN C so what you need, when you get a cold is a MASSIVE DOSE OF VITAMIN C. The best medicine for a cough is COOPER'S PHOLCODEINE. T.C.P. [Tom Cat's Pee] is a universal panacea: my father knew a man who washed his hair in it. You should not wear your hair too long, because it harboured lice and germs.

This last became a topic for debate some years later when the Beatles started a trend for wearing your hair as long as the collar. This might be all right for the middle classes (though it was still disapproved of); but for working people it was definitely not advisable, because if worn that way in shops, or trades which involved contact with other people, it was a source of disease. If worn by workers in factories, it could even lead to terrible accidents. Dad knew of a woman who had been scalped when the hair got caught in machinery; and Cheyenne Bodie was not around to rescue her.

Later in life, my father was particularly scornful of modern theories of child rearing. When some latter day psychiatrist announced the results of some big research project which showed that children benefited from being given parental

love, he remarked that 'they' had just discovered that THE THING TO DO WITH BABIES IS TO CUDDLE THEM. On the other hand, when we were small, he once told Mum that, if he had his way, all babies would be issued with small Winston Churchill-style boiler suits, so that, after feeding them, you could simply hose them down. This was years before the *Babygro* had been thought of.

My father's interest in medicine may have begun at a very early date. I inherited (and have passed onto my own daughter) a copy of *The Doctor at home and Nurses Guide-Book*, which belonged to his father, Arthur Cooper. This was given to Arthur by J R Stringer, President of Cheetham Hill Congregational Church, Manchester on April 17th 1910. It was a 'first class' prize. My grandfather was born in 1886, so the prize was awarded when he was 24. What sort of prize would he be winning at that date? Clearly it has something to do with religion; and the date coincides with the year after he was married.

I think if my father had had the chance of going to University he could well have been a doctor; but the idea of it impossible in the 1930s for a boy who had no father and whose mother presumably lived off a modest state pension, as a war-widow (though there may have been a Post Office pension as well). Pharmacy was an ideal occupation for my father, though, because it was scientific, and I think he liked to feel that he was on the side of progress and part of the National Health Service, whilst also taking satisfaction in 'PARTING THE GREAT GENERAL PUBLIC FROM ITS MONEY', by selling cosmetics, shaving foam and contraceptives.

When he said that he liked parting the public from its money, it set a thought going in my mind, which I know that my sister shared. I was unclear as to how exactly this 'parting' was done; but I knew that it involved taking cash over the counter. 'Stand and deliver' was a phrase that was much used in our games – it was common parlance, for example, between the highwayman and his victim in the stagecoach (I'M A HIGHWAYMAN, STAND AND DELIVER! YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE!), or between the child highwayman and his child victim in the bathroom (GET OFF THE TOILET, I'M A HIGHWAYMAN!). So what if our father was some kind of robber, instead of being a Chemist, or perhaps he contrived to combine the two occupations? - though the one of course was more secret than the other.

So was Dad really a bank-robber, as my sister and I sometimes used to wonder? I have examined his accounts for year ended 5 April 1957 when he was at 259 Great Homer Street Liverpool (prepared by E. W. Holland of Lord Street); and these show a Post Office Salary of £1,231/19s/4d; and the net profit from the pharmacy of £1,093/2s/11d. Salary to wife £234; car expenses on a Vauxhall and a Rover of £96/4s/5d. No hidden riches here then. The sort of sum which (incredibly from the viewpoint we have now) kept us all in comfort without resorting to crime, let alone serious crime.

Except that, when he died, I had a curious conversation with his accountant, in Castle Street. The accountant had the task of writing up 'the books' to the date of death. I gave him the death certificate and the grant of probate and the other papers

relating to THE SHOP and asked if there was anything further that he wanted to know. He said there was just one problem. I should tell him how much of the income to declare. I was puzzled. Surely, the income declared was the income one had received, which should be plain from the materials I had handed over. No, he said, my Dad had always given him the books, receipts and invoices etc, but he had also specified how much income should be declared. The two things were not necessarily the same. Surely I realised this?

My father was a kind of barefoot doctor as well as chemist – he gave advice as well as delivering medicines according to the doctor's prescription (a 'dispensing chemist'). Once or twice did I get a taste of the quiet satisfaction he actually derived from his profession. He told me how he was responsible for checking the prescriptions – sometimes the doctor prescribed an incorrect dosage by mistake, and it was the pharmacist's job to spot the error. He told me of the informal medical advice he gave across the counter. Sometimes he would 'go the extra mile' by taking a canister of oxygen round to somebody's house instead of waiting for it to be delivered in the ordinary way. And when he died unexpectedly, we did get a letter or two of appreciation from customers – not the kind of thing one would expect if it was always and on every occasion a purely commercial transaction. There was one from somebody saying they were shocked when they heard that 'dear, kind Mr Cooper' had passed away; and many of the local people being Catholic, we were informed that prayers would be said for him at the local RC Church. I think my father, who as I have said was really some kind of Cromwellian Puritan, but was also a man of science, would have been amused by that.

He must have sold contraceptives, all the time, and probably every day, despite his Puritanism and the prevalence of Catholicism in the area surrounding the shop. (In the 1950s, contraceptives were outlawed in Catholic countries like Ireland and Spain). I never saw them on sale, or being sold; but they were there all right.

Some years later, when I was in the shop, supposedly helping out, I was hugely embarrassed when someone came in to buy some. The youngest assistant Joyce, who was probably no more than 20 but savvy, had clearly been asked for something over the counter which was probably *Durex*. She came into the back of the shop, with a wry smile on her face, asking for the whereabouts of something. My father told her. She looked at me with the cruel look of the cat which has caught the mouse out in the open and asked my father:

DOES HE KNOW? (intonation is same as 'Does he take sugar?)

OF COURSE HE KNOWS

said my father, instinctively sticking up for me, despite the fact that the facts of life had never been, and never were, discussed at home. So what was it that I knew?

Well, not very much as I can recall. Yes, there was sex, but its connection with *Durex*, let alone *Tampax*, was not just woolly it was non-existent.

My parents both had complete sets of false teeth; and I know that my mother had them before she was 42 (see conversation with Mrs Binns below). This now seems like a historical curiosity. My current dentist, regards me, at the age of 64, as a kind of living fossil, with a mouth containing specimens of all the kinds of filling employed by the NHS between 1948 and 2008, but clearly in the 1930s, EXTRACTION was the name of the game (whereas in the world of popular song MULTIPLICATION WAS THE NAME OF THE GAME in the 1950s). At the time, it seemed entirely normal to me that my parents should have dentures. My mother was indeed proud of the fact that she had had the courage to HAVE ALL HER TEETH OUT at the same time; and the practice was so common that I got to thinking that people ought to have all their teeth out as soon as possible, to avoid the dental martyrdom which they would otherwise inevitably have to suffer for the rest of their lives. This would have worked for many people, though not of course for Tom Colton (see below).

There was a long list of people and thing who or which STANK – Tommy Trinder, Cheerful Charlie Chester, Max Bygraves, Tories, spivs – smut – modern art. My Dad approved of Nikita Krushchev's attitude to 'Modern Art': the Soviet leader, when visiting an exhibition of it in Moscow, was honest enough to call it 'dog muck'. He was offended by the artist's unwillingness to be inspired by loyalty to regime, and to paint in the approved Socialist Realist manner. I don't suggest my father's disapproval was based on any similar ideological objection. I think it was just that he had a low opinion of people who either had no talent or couldn't be bothered to demonstrate it.

My father liked people who were masters of their craft, from the anonymous medieval masons who had crafted the gargoyles on our great Cathedrals and Abbeys, to Grinling Gibbons and Leonardo da Vinci. For the same reason he did like some comedians, for example Jimmy James and his various 'stooges'; Hilda Baker ('she knows, you know') and Morecambe and Wise, whose humour was 'clean'. On the other hand, comedians who indulged in 'smut', like Max Miller (the so-called Cheeky Chappy) were strongly disapproved of. I think they were guilty of bringing up the dreaded subject of sex, indeed of making light of it and bringing it into the home. So, if one such should come onto the television, he was likely to be switched off, or have the volume turned down on him, to protect both the children and public decency. (You can imagine the nuclear explosion which was triggered in our house when the critic Kenneth Tynan first used the word 'fuck' on television, in 1965).

There was another philosophical reason for my father's inveterate dislike of smut. At the time of the trial (for obscenity) of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, my father told me that he thought that the mind was like a clean sheet of paper. Once it had received an impression of any kind, it was impossible to eradicate it totally, no matter how hard you tried. So, if you saw something, the

image entered your mind and, if it was something obscene or smutty, that created an indelible blot. At the time I was puzzled by this idea, though also concerned about it, because although I never read '*Lady C*', I had heard innumerable jokes about such matters at school. Some boys at the grammar school excelled in the telling of them, if little else; and I was afraid that if Dad was right, then my mind must already have become a stinking sewer, which would never be free of pollution.

It was a regular thing in the 1950s for footage of the Nazi concentration camps in Germany to be shown on TV. Pictures of the liberation of Belsen by the British Army in 1945 were frequently shown. Once seen, the bodies of the dead being bulldozed into pits and the walking skeletons of those who were still alive, were images which were difficult to forget; but, as soon as these scenes appeared on the TV screen, Dad would leap up and switch off, or else unfold a newspaper and hang it over the screen, remarking that we children should not be exposed to the horror of it. This went on for some years, before I saw the full horrors.

There was also of course advertising, THE CURSE OF MODERN SOCIETY. Lawyers were also held in contempt, since they (apparently) thought they were better than doctors, while in Dad's view medicine was an infinitely more noble profession than law. Horseracing was evil, because it was impossible to separate it from betting, and betting was obviously a breeding ground for crime. In those days, off-course bookmaking was illegal; yet there were apparently large numbers of people in Liverpool who made their money as 'bookie's' runners'. This offended every Puritanical instinct in my father's body. The bookies-runner was the lowest of the low, a PARASITE as well as a criminal.

I must have been the only boy on Merseyside (with the exception I suppose of my brother) who was brought up to believe that you should not attend football matches, because it was dangerous. People had been killed, in large numbers, attending football matches. There were too many people present for it to be safe. When a wall of people started to move, it was like water, nothing could stop it, and you were likely to get killed in the crush. As evidence of this, Dad used to cite the Ibrox disaster of 1902. During a championship game between Scotland and England, the back of a newly-built stand at Ibrox in Glasgow had collapsed, due to heavy rainfall the previous night. Hundreds of supporters had fallen up to 40 feet to the ground below. 25 people died and 517 were injured. Though it had happened 13 years before he was born, this was taken as a terrible warning to anyone with the slightest interest in what we now refer to as 'the beautiful game'.

The list of things Dad liked may be shorter but it should be said that he was a practical man who enjoyed decorating and cleaning the car (he didn't use carwashes – in fact I don't remember there being any in the UK in the 1950s). He loved cars in general – especially Fords and Rovers. He also liked visiting stately homes, gardens and old churches, and gargoyles. IF YOU WANT TO LEARN THE HISTORY OF THIS COUNTRY YOU HAVE TO GO INTO THE PUBS AND THE CHURCHES! (But he didn't go into pubs!)

My Mum did not 'go out to work.' She had given up her job during the War, as women did when they had their first child. There was a system in force then of 'directed labour'. On one occasion, there had to be a tribunal to decide where she should work – Inland Revenue (where she had worked before as a clerk) or some other place. My Mum was very proud of this: two employers fighting over her!

There is a photograph of my Dad outside the front door of his shop at 259 Great Homer Street. Look at those turn-ups on the trousers! Look too at the look on his face. This is pride at becoming a self-employed Pharmacist (and sub-postmaster) at the age of 40. I think Dad borrowed money from Auntie Anne (his unmarried sister), secured on our house by way of second mortgage, to buy the first shop. He remained self-employed for the next 20 years, until his early death from a heart-attack. Self-employment was something he never regretted – ONCE YOU HAVE WORKED FOR YOURSELF, YOU WILL NEVER WANT TO WORK FOR ANYONE ELSE; but I can't say that I ever thought that. It seems to me that if you are self-employed, you never quite know when to call it a day. And neither did he.

We used to help him out at THE SHOP, in various ways. Sometimes it would involve counting scripts – prescriptions – and dividing them into piles, according to GP. Sytner had the biggest pile. This involved recognising the doctor's signature, which was usually illegible; but Dad knew them all. Sometimes it would involve going into the shop, to pour medicines from one bottle to another (and usually getting a lot on the floor); at other times we would be asked to take something UP to the many rooms above. My sister remembers these rooms, in particular the top (second or perhaps even third) floor where there was a model of a girl (a Virgin Mary) that the Catholics must have adored at one time, and she was scared of that. She also remembers that when she went up there there were crates on the first floor labelled 'Lion Gate, Bombay'. She also remembers that there was a large tin of Zubes cough sweets on the window ledge of the landing on the way up to the 1st floor, which Dad never put it away.

Zubes are good for your tubes

There was an old library upstairs too - a Catholic one too. I still have one or two books which were kept there ('Craftsmen through the Ages'). All this Catholicism reminds me that my sister was once 'ducked' at the swimming baths by some Catholic girls who asked where she went to school. The reason for the involuntary immersion was that she replied 'Holly Lodge' which they misheard as 'Orange Lodge.'

But in addition we boys were sometimes asked to go down into THE CELLAR. There were in fact several, and descending the steps was a truly terrifying experience. This was an old building, it was dark, the cellars were damp, the ceilings were low, the wallpaper was coming off and the plasterwork flaking. There were several interconnecting rooms with partition walls behind which anything might lurk. When you were used to a diet of horror comics and old Sherlock

Holmes films, starring 'The Hoxton Creeper' and 'Little Tonga', you constantly expected some awful creature to jump out at you out of the dark. Being asked to descend into the gloom, to fetch a medicine bottle, was like being asked to lower yourself into a snake-infested pit; but I never refused.

Dad did all the adding up for the business, including the Post Office side, manually. I don't think there were any pocket calculators in the early days, let alone computers. His arithmetic was very good (he had been taught the 13 times table, and not just the twelve, as we were); but it must have been very laborious 'balancing the books' in those days.

Tom Colton was Dad's first employer one he returned to Liverpool from Manchester. He was a kindly and generous man. He once gave us two pairs of boxing gloves for Xmas, as a result of which my brother used to batter me mercilessly, though I was a willing party. *Volenti non fit inuria*, as we used to say in the law. Tom was also remarkable for having had three sets of teeth, rather than the normal two.

School

There was a teacher at W.D.C.OF E. called Kewin – whom we called 'Kewie'. Kewie had the remarkable habit of cleaning his ears out – while teaching – with a pair of scissors; but I remember him more for the occasion when he humiliated me by asking me to sing out loud in front of the class. He knew I couldn't sing and had seen me miming. I still think about this sometimes, at night. Not long after this, a boy threw a ball in the playground, and it went straight through a window, landing on Kewie's head. When he taught the afternoon class, he had blood oozing from his ear and a somewhat ineffective bandage. I can't remember if the perpetrator of this act of criminal damage and grievous bodily harm was ever apprehended, let alone punished, by Herbie or the criminal justice system. (It wasn't me, honest).

I think I must have got into my stride at school by this date. My school report from W.D.C. of E. for Class P1, Summer Term shows that I came top of the class, scoring 98 ½ for English and 71/75 for Arithmetic. I also came top in the Christmas term. I never had any difficulty with reading and writing, though I found Arithmetic more difficult, especially 'Mental Arithmetic'. But I couldn't quite understand why I did so much better than most others at school, from the start and all the way through – particularly my friends Michael Jackson and Allan Dickson, who came from similar homes, and were not very different from me. I wonder if the reason was that it *mattered* more in our house. There was certainly always a premium placed on academic success, though no pressure.

We had our two week holiday in Lytham St Anne's for the first time. We went there in preference to Blackpool, because it was more genteel. Indeed I don't remember ever going to Blackpool at all, which is remarkable considering the fact that they built a motorway there, which goes nowhere else. I remember there was a

windmill on the front at Lytham; and a green space of some kind outside the boarding house, with trees and bushes. This was the kind of rural interruption into urban space that I was familiar with, and a lot less easy to get lost in than the real countryside,. Also you didn't need to go 'walking' in it; and my parents were never really walkers, apart from one trip they had made to the Lake District 'BEFORE YOU WERE BORN.' I had a bow and arrows and on this occasion used it to play Robin Hood and his merry men there – in preference to Red Indians. Fortunately, there was another boy there, also on holiday and I made friends with him. But I don't think he was one of the Merry Men. I think we were both Robin.

Dad took the view that General Franco was a Fascist dictator. He said that when he had been a young man, there were people who had volunteered to fight the Fascists – he would have been 19 when the Spanish Civil War broke out. Others had taken a vow never to go to Spain while Franco lived and ruled. We never went abroad as a family and so 'the Spanish question' was never an issue. I don't think Dad had ever taken a formal vow not to go there, any more than he had thought seriously of going there to fight there, but he thought you ought to think seriously about going on holiday there, despite the millions of British holidaymakers who had been there by the time Franco died in 1975.

Some of Dad's Catholic customers clearly took a different view. Aggie was once heard to remark GOD BLESS GENERAL FRANCO, which my Dad thought was a terrible thing to say.

.

My sister in a 'Western' musical – on THE FLAGS

THE COAL BUNKER at 1 Lisleholme Close: my sister and cousin Geraldine, presumably playing 'house'

Sand-dunes at Ainsdale – my sister with Hula-Hoop

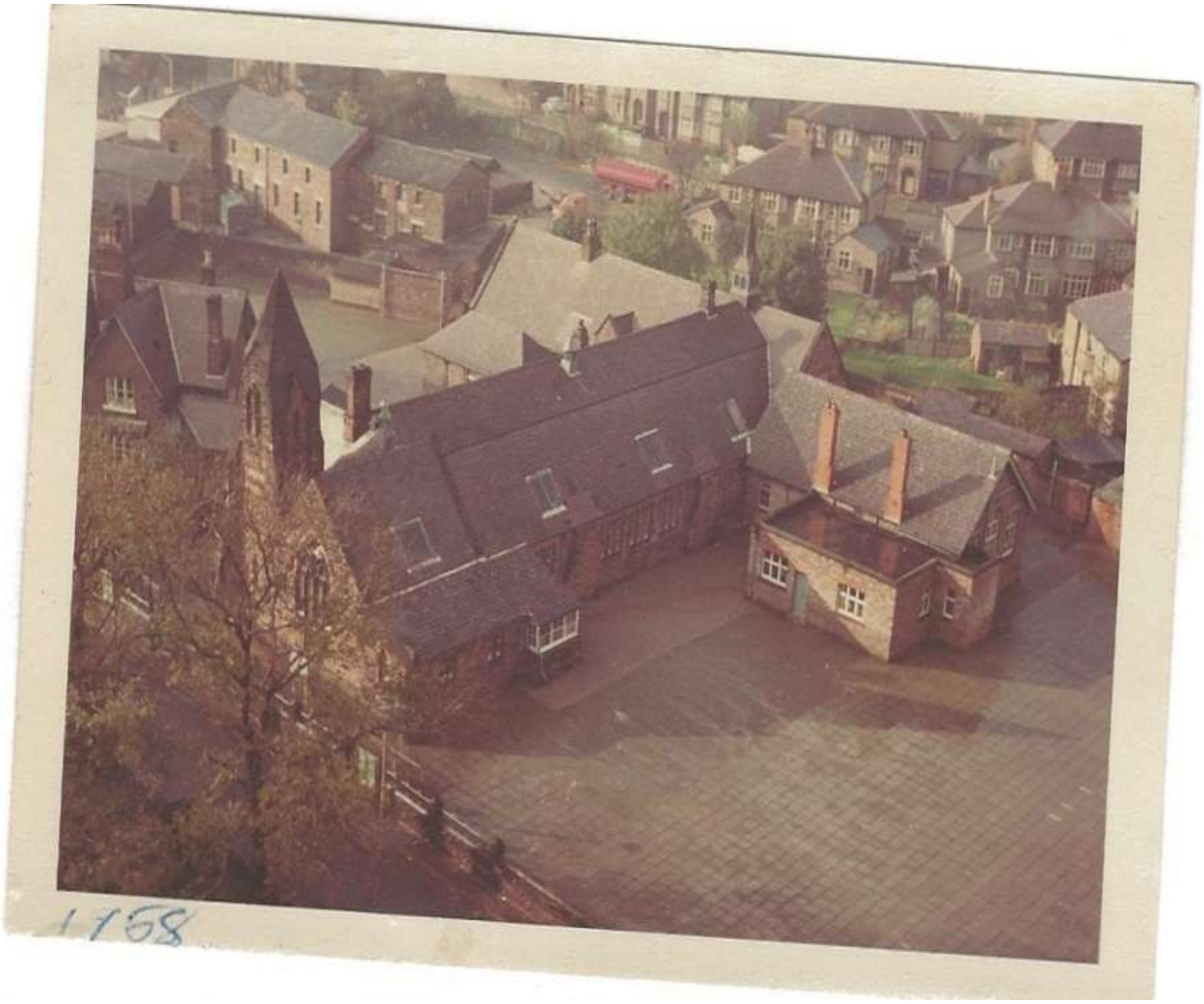
Ainsdale Beach, yours truly in centre

My parents – cuddling! - on Ainsdale beach

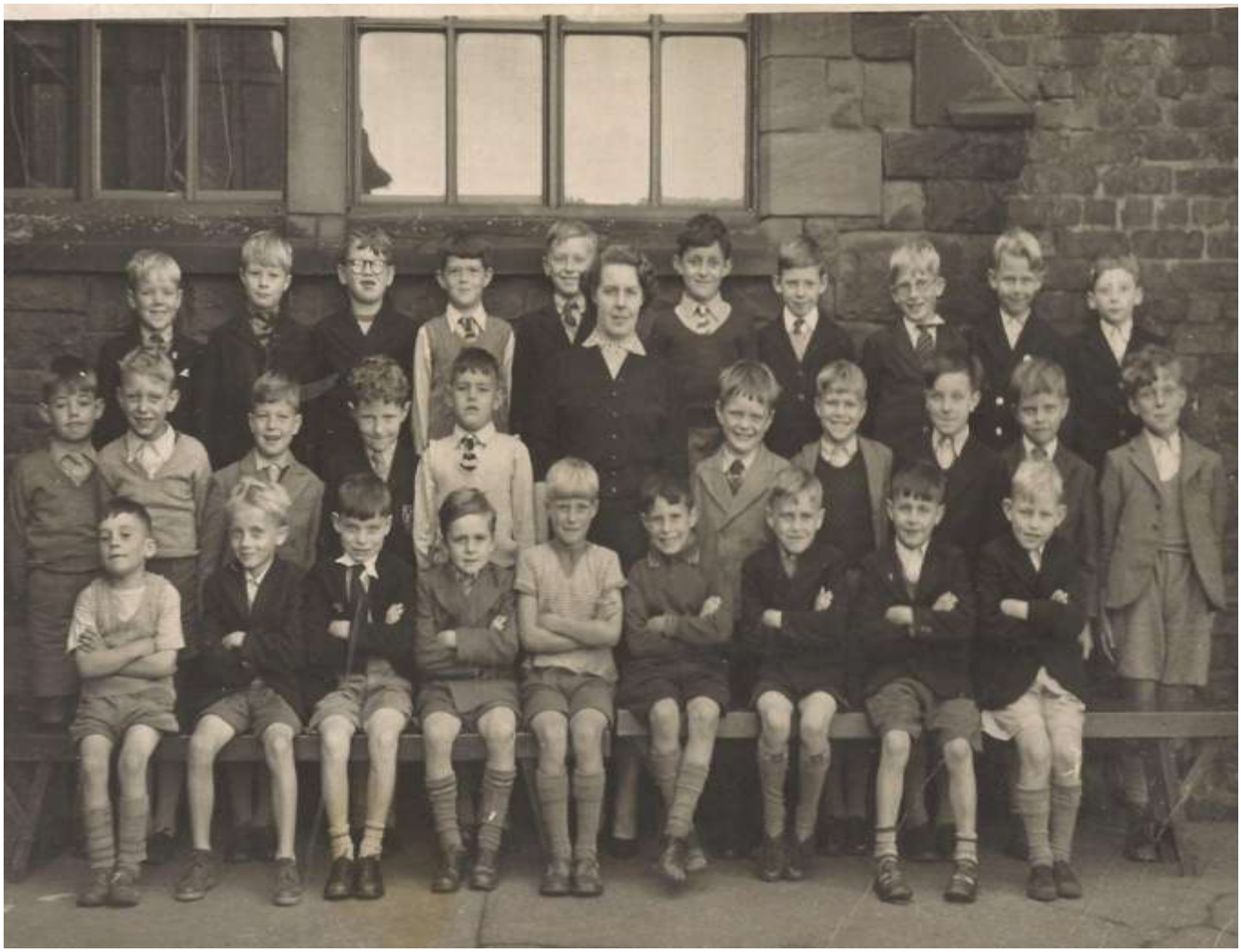
This is me, wearing those bloody awful swimming trunks: I can still feel the wet sand in the crevices. I liked those puddles of seawater. Sometimes the temperature rose above freeing.

Photo taken by my brother: brown bear, Chester Zoo, with turds

Dad, opening his first shop at 259, Great Homer Street



'W.D.C. of E', showing the old Bell Tower (still there, 2008) and the playgrounds



The boys in my class

Top row includes: me (4th from left); my friend Duncan Woods; Eddie Handley; Richard Fairley

Middle row includes from the left: my friend Allan Dickson; David Nutt; my friend Michael Jackson (4th from left); David Simpson (headmaster's son); Miss Wood; Peter Duke (3rd from right)

Bottom row includes from the left: Allan Braithwaite; Paul Mason; Roy Nevison (third from left); Robert Kelsey; Maxwell Brennan.

Chapter 5

1957 *Oh, please, stay by me, Diana*

Pop Music

Paul Anka reached the top of the UK charts in August 1957 with *Diana*, despite the inane repetition of its humiliating final plea:

I'm so young and you're so old
This, my darling, I've been told
I don't care just what they say
'Cause forever I will pray
You and I will be as free
As the birds up in the trees
Oh, please stay by me, Diana

Oh, please stay by me, Diana
Oh, please, Diana
Oh, please, Diana
Oh, please, Diana

Why was the man so desperate for her to stay? It didn't seem manly to me; but 1957 was also the year of Frankie Vaughan's *Garden of Eden* (with its suggestions of pre-lapsarian nudity; Tab Hunter's *Young Love*; Buddy Holly's *That'll be the Day*, Harry Belafonte's *Mary's Boy Child*; and Elvis Presley's *All Shook Up*. The wretched songs, still with me now, were constantly played on *Six five special*; *Oh Boy!*; *Juke box jury* and *Top of the Pops*.

Unfortunately it doesn't stop there, because this was also the year when 'skiffle' made it big. Skiffle was, in principle, the kind of music you could play yourself, since the basic instruments could be made at home, from old-fashioned washboards, bits of string and cardboard boxes. Of course it was a good idea if you had someone who could sing; but 'Lonnie' Donegan proved that it was enough to be able to whine, provided you did so in a mid-Atlantic accent, about humiliations suffered by the British Army in Lousiana in the early nineteenth century.[2] Anthony

[2] For example, 'We fired our guns, and the British kept a comin'; but there weren't as many as there was a while ago-ooo…. We fired our guns, and they began a runnin', all down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico-ooo.'

James Donegan (1931 – 2002) became known as the 'King of Skiffle' and had over 20 hits, including *Cumberland Gap, Gamblin' Man, Puttin' On the Style and My Old Man's a Dustman*; but skiffle had the distinct disadvantage in my eyes that it was adopted enthusiastically by our so-called cousins, Donald and Keith Heslop – the ones who called my mother 'Auntie Carrie'. Donald was slightly older than my brother and Keith was slightly older than me. Their parents had been lifelong friends of our parents, and unfortunately remained so after marriage and children.

The World

The Soviet Union launched the first *Sputnik*, or unmanned satellite. This was a relatively small object but the launching of it made a big impression at the time, because it showed that the USSR had not just caught up with the Americans in some areas of technology, but had apparently surpassed it, in particular in the development of powerful rockets; and this had profound consequences in terms of defence spending and strategy, throughout the West. If the 'the Russians' or 'the Soviets' (the terms were used interchangeably) could do that, they could presumably drop an atom bomb on New York if they wanted to. It was the alleged 'missile gap' (which never existed) which helped President Kennedy win the presidential elections of 1960.

For several years the Russians also seemed to be in the lead in space exploration. After *Sputnik*, which was unmanned, they launched a dog called *Laika* into orbit. My friend Woody thought it was monstrous that the Russians should use an animal for this purpose. He was a lifelong cat-lover and a precocious advocate of anti-vivisectionism. (I didn't know what vivisection was but he described it to me with glee, and said it was going on everywhere, and all around us).

Albert Camus won the Nobel Prize for literature. We studied him later for 'A' level. Depressing stuff that Existentialism; but popular at the time. My father set me straight about it though, long before that sketch on Monty Python. He said it was a 'dead' philosophy, which might make you think, but didn't provide any comfort or cheer. I think he had hit on the truth of it, so far as philosophy was concerned, two centuries after Dr Johnson: 'I have tried in my time, Sir, to be a philosopher, but somehow cheerfulness always kept breaking through.' This is a 'very English conclusion' however. (In *The Memory Chalet*, Tont Judt describes an encounter with a French Maoist in 1970. The Maoist suggested that they burn down the Faculty Library in Paris, so as to 'start over'. Judt thought they ought to wait awhile, in case they had a change of heart in the meantime, and thereby avoid unfortunate consequences. The Maoist condemned this as 'a very English conclusion.')

Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal* was released. I have never seen it all, but years later the History master at The Holt, Charles Lowe, known as *Ecce* (because his initials were E.C.Lowe and *Ecce*! means Lo! in Latin) said the film was the most accurate visual representation of what the Middle Ages must have looked like that he knew.

Harold Macmillan, later 1st Earl of Stockton, (1894-1986) was Conservative Prime Minister between 1957 and 1963. We were led to believe, by my father, that this man, and his predecessors Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden were fools, as were all the members of the various Conservative governments between 1951 and 1964. I think my father, having been an adherent of the Common Wealth Party had certainly voted Labour in 1945 and did so consistently thereafter, at least at the National level, though I do not think he was ever a member of the party. (He would not have been prepared to give up his precious evenings at home for such a cause). By 1964, being above all a moderniser, he certainly subscribed to the view that the years of Conservative government in the '50s and early '60s were wasted years –'thirteen years of misrule'.

The slogan incorporated the idea, which I remember George Brown putting on television, that if you had a State where the main institutions, like the Welfare State and the Nationalised Industries had been created by one party, the Labour Party, you might as well have the Labour Party running them. I now see that this is a pretty thin argument, as well as being a recipe for a one party state; but at the time it was a way of appealing I suppose to the innate conservatism of the British people – 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'. A curious sort of stand to take against the Conservatives.

George Brown had the old-fashioned and for some, endearing habit of addressing people as 'Brother'. He was very popular for his pugnacious style; and he stood up to the Jeremy Paxman of the day – Robin Day – when interviewed on television. On one famous occasion, he called him 'Brother Day' while Day replied by calling him 'Brother Brown'; but he drank too much, and this became widely known. He lost the contest for leadership of the party to Harold Wilson in 1963, when Hugh Gaitskell died. Gaitskell had *gravitas*, but Wilson was known as a wizard at economics, as well as at public speaking, and had a certain modernising style. My father liked him. He had all the authority of being a very clever man who had been an Oxford don and had risen to high office on merit only, whereas his opponents - Macmillan and Alec Douglas Home - were aristocrats. There was a whiff of the French Revolution in the air at the time of the general election of 1964; and my father gave the impression sometimes that he would rather like to be on the barricades, though I could hardly see my mother joining him.

In our house there was another more immediate reason for hating the Conservatives, which was that the Government included Enoch Powell, Minister of Health between 1960 and 1963. If you consult *Wikipedia* you will see that during that time he was famous, indeed notorious, for resisting the claim that the Government was responsible for the Thalidomide disaster ('No one can sue the Government!')

and for starting to think about running down the old fashioned system of mental hospitals ('Care in the Community'); but the reason for his unpopularity in our house was quite different. We despised him because he wanted to change the system for remunerating Pharmacists, evidently to the detriment of Pharmacists in general, and our Dad in particular.

'We hate Enoch Powell, we hate Enoch Powell'

My brother would set up the chant. I don't think he was being ironic, although this is possible, since he was much more mature than I and savvy enough to realise that my father's views about Enoch were somewhat partial.

We were also taught to hate Boots the Chemists. As an independent Pharmacist, my father was in competition with *Boots a*nd Timothy Whites (a separate chain of pharmacies, which was however taken over by Boots in 1968). We were all taught to hate and despite these conglomerates.

My sister and I also made fun of Macmillan because he was old and had a moustache. The second count in the indictment needed no proof - it was obvious. The first was made out when Macmillan met President Kennedy was elected in 1960 and the two world leaders stood alongside one another. It looked as if Macmillan was Kennedy's grandfather. So we held Macmillan in contempt too. We called him THE WALRUS and my sister did an imitation which included the line 'I am a Walrus waffling on…' I now feel that we did Macmillan a great disservice. Having seen the play *Never So Good* (Howard Brenton, 2008, National Theatre) I think there was a lot more to be said, and that he was a brave and idealistic man doing his best in difficult circumstances, whose term in office came to a somewhat ignominious end, through no fault of his own.

We were taught that England (by which we meant Great Britain) was the greatest country, the only country that had consistently played an honourable and unselfish role in world affairs, for centuries. The Americans were clearly more powerful now and they were a force for good, but they had been very late in coming into both world wars. Those Titanic struggles were essentially struggles by England against Germany, where the issue had been quite simple: freedom against tyranny. My father's father had been killed during the First (which had been triggered for the British by the German invasion of neutral Belgium). My parents had to spend the whole of their early married life under the threat of invasion of Britain itself. Everything else was judged in this light. For example, my father was unwilling to be too critical of Stalin, when it seems perfectly obvious now that he was as big a mass murderer than Hitler (and probably a good deal worse) because it was the Red Army which had destroyed the *Wehrmacht* between 1941 and 1945. Likewise, he could never be too critical of the Americans because they had made D Day possible in 1944, and defeated the Japanese.

What I later came to know as the 'Whig interpretation of History' went unchallenged. England had developed peacefully, and without revolution, from an

absolute monarchy into a parliamentary democracy, a model for the world. The Empire had transformed itself seamlessly into the Commonwealth. The white countries had obtained self-government dominion status first, followed by the brown countries and the same process was now taking place in the black. It was all done by agreement and without bloodshed. The occasional rebellions, like Mau Mau in Kenya had to be put down, but these were only occasional interruptions in the benevolent process. The newly independent countries in Africa would become friendly democracies on the Westminster model. All would be well. Britain's retreat from Empire would not be accompanied by the horrors experienced by the hapless French.

The image was tarnished by what happened in Ghana, formerly Gold Coast, which was given independence in 1957. Within a year or two, we were seeing news programmes about Ghana which showed that Nkrumah, the new leader, was effectively a dictator. He eventually made himself president for life, and set up a one party state; but what I remember is seeing film of the new Young Pioneer Movement, drilling on a parade ground, in a fashion which eerily reminiscent of the cohorts marshalled by Mussolini and then Hitler, only 25 years before. There were shots of young people, the same age as me, marching up and down in uniform and shouting and singing

Nkrumah do no wrong!
Nkrumah never die!

So maybe the world did not always work according to the British plan. Maybe multi-party parliamentary democracy was not suited to every country. Maybe not every African politician was a village Hampden, respectful of authority and due process. Maybe politics was about power rather than principled and friendly debate within recognised limits, between equals who each wanted much the same thing but disagreed about the means for obtaining it.

I had no very clear ideas about homosexuality in 1957. I assumed that if you were a boy you fell in love with a girl, got married and had children of your own and vice versa. That was the norm; but in 1957, the Wolfendon Report on homosexuality was published. I can remember a lot of talk about this report; but I never knew what it proposed. I know now that homosexual activity was illegal, even between consenting adults in private; and that the Report was about whether the law should be changed; but the first time I became aware of public debate on the subject was much later, when Field Marshal Montgomery (the hero of El Alamein) spoke in the House of Lords to oppose a liberal measure. He said that if the measure were enacted, all the 'buggery clubs' in London would become legal. I was shocked and puzzled. A lord had said the word 'buggery' out loud; but the puzzle was what the point was, of belonging to a buggery club. I could understand being 'blown to buggery'; but as a recreational activity it seemed to leave a lot to be desired.

Years later, after my mother was widowed, she would discuss things she would never have talked about with me while my father was still alive. Once she said that she had asked Dad what it was that homosexual men DID to each other, because she simply didn't see how it worked, from a physical point of view. (The use of the verb 'did' suggested that she was unaware that there was any emotional or spiritual side to such relationships, and I am not sure she would ever have thought to ask about lesbians). Dad replied
'I don't know and I certainly don't want to talk about it'.

That was the limit of the discussion and presumably always had been, so you can see why the Wolfendon Report made little impact in our house.

There was a very great emphasis on Science (meaning hard Science, like Chemistry, Biology, Physics and Maths). My father was interested in all things scientific and mechanical. Science meant progress, and the way out of a past which was stuffy, old fashioned and inefficient. He had the highest regard for surgeons, who put their scientific knowledge to good use. He thought that lawyers and Classicists were essentially wasting their time on unimportant things. He was delighted when my brother became interested in Chemistry and then read it at University. Likewise, when my sister took the academic road with Physics. I read History and became a lawyer. My father was very proud of us all; but history and law were at first regarded as an eccentric choice, certainly by the Science masters at the grammar school. I have to admit that my choice was partly teenage rebellion.

1957 was the International Geophysical Year (IGY). This marked a thaw in the Cold War, since scientific exchanges took place between East and West (though not with Communist China). The U.S. and the Soviet Union launched artificial satellites. Other significant achievements included the discovery of the Van Allen radiation belts and of mid-ocean submarine ridges, the harbinger of plate tectonics.

An expedition led by the unfortunately-named Vivian Fuchs (1908 – 1999) started the first overland crossing of Antarctica, using *Sno-Cat* tractors to cross the continent in 100 days. Fuchs started at the Weddell Sea, crossed the South Pole and ended his journey at the Ross Sea. He established the thickness of the ice at the Pole, and the existence of a land mass beneath the ice. He was knighted by the Queen. It was a pity about his name, though it has to be said that it was always pronounced 'Fooks' on the BBC; but BBC English was not the same as that spoken in Liverpool; and just how were you supposed to pronounce the name of the *Fuchsia* plant?

Home

MUM was about 5 feet tall, perhaps 5 feet 1, Dad was 5 feet 7ins. She had auburn hair, which she dyed to keep it that way, though, after she went into a home and

stopped dying it, it turned out that it was really brown now (but not grey). He had brown hair all his life, with only touches of grey, even on the day he died.

My mother was not widely read. She read magazines – *Woman* and *Woman's Own* which she swapped each weekend for *Woman's Realm* and *John Bull*, which Aunt Pip, her younger sister, brought round every Saturday. She did not read many books. When she did read it was historical novels by Georgette Heyer and Jean Plaidy. She did not read *The Guardian* or *The Sunday Times*, though they were always in the house. Dad read widely, was interested in current affairs, science, philosophy, most things really. There was clearly an educational difference between them, but they seldom quarrelled and when they did, it usually turned into an argument about Dad's health. (He died of a heart attack and had had an earlier 'warning').

DON'T GET EXCITED! Mum would exclaim.

I'M NOT GETTING EXCITED, YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S GETTING EXCITED.

And so it would proceed to ever greater levels of mutual excitement, the point which had originally started the debate getting entirely lost in the process; but I don't recall that any of this seriously interrupted the general harmony. Looking back on it, after over 40 years of marriage myself, I think they were entirely devoted to one another. Which reminds me that they never celebrated their Ruby Wedding, though they thought were going to.

After TV arrived Mum saw no reason to read newspapers: she could watch the News. Likewise, what was the point in going to the cinema when you could watch films on TV? (For that matter was the point in cooking things for yourself when you could buy 'convenience foods'?) The national addiction to TV which pundits worried about, from the mid-1950s, was in my experience something which sapped her intellect rather than the younger generation's. Though certainly not my father's. He was quite capable of working on his books or reading something else, while my mother sat (or slept) through long hours of mundane and boring rubbish. (It would never have occurred to him to go into another room, or go out, or seek the company of friends).

I took piano lessons, from Mrs Binns, who lived round the corner in Mayfield Close, off Leyfield Road. (There a girl who lived there called Maureen McManus; and her father was SENT TO JAIL, for EMBEZZLEMENT). Mayfield Close is five minutes' walk away from home, but a walk that is full of danger. You have to remember to go right out our close, left up the Lane, left again past the public house, and then left again.

In accordance with the prevailing educational theories, Mrs Binns was a bit of a Tartar. She used to rap you over the knuckles with a ruler if you got your practice pieces wrong; and she was a very strict marker. No 'excellents' with her, at least not in my case. It was always G good, VG very good, VVG 'very very good' and even VVVG. The only system of marking which was as weird as this was the one which

was used for marking the preliminary examinations at Oxford in Michaelmas Term 1966 i.e. what most people would call Autumn term namely – in descending order of merit

Bene – good
Satis – has done enough
Vix satis – has just about done enough

If it was any less good than that, you didn't get a mark at all.

But to return to Mrs Binns, after the initial flush of enthusiasm, I didn't do my homework/practice, and she could tell that I didn't. There were very few VVVGs any more. I eventually gave up, pleading increased homework at school, to disguise from my ever loving mother that my enthusiasm was waning. But not before the humiliation of '*we are Siamese if you please*' (and *we are Siamese if you don't please*). By which I meant that I was asked to choose a piece to study; and instead of choosing something form a proper *repertoire* I chose a popular song from the film *The Lady is a Tramp*. Mrs Binns clearly did not approve; but asked me to obtain the music and then start to sight read and play. I started to play the treble only, rather than the music as a whole, having totally misunderstood the complexity of the piece. This was rapidly pointed out, and the music, and my musical career, consigned to the dustbin of history.

Before parting with Mrs Binns I forgot to tell you how I know that that this was 1957. I tell her my mother has a birthday and she is 42 today. She says I must have this wrong and my mother is only 21. I don't understand this at all. I *know* she is 42, and all her teeth are false; but Mrs Binns, who must be older than my mother, since she has a grown up son (Norman), is quite certain she is only 21. I mustn't say that my mother is 42. I didn't understand what this was all about for several years aftewards.

I gave up piano lessons, and haven't played the piano since. Not that I am altogether ignorant of music. I still have the 53rd edition of Roland's *Pianoforte Tutor* (price 3 shillings). It begins with a 'Left Hand Exercise' and a 'Right Hand Exercise' and even has something for 'Both Hands'. My childish writing sprawls across the page, filling in the notes, Treble and Bass. The first tunes are *Progress*, *Earnestness*, and *Increasing Pleasure*. Later on we get *Speedwell* and *The British Grenadiers*. I am not sure I ever got to the Major Scales at the end of the book. I did play *Sur La Glace À Sweet Briar*. I also have the *Daily Express Community Song Book*, which must have been given to Mum by Nana, since it was published in 1926. Nana's name and address is written in pencil on the first page: 'Mrs Thomas, 143, Albert Edward Road, Kensington, Liverpool'; but there is a mystery here. Why did Nana (or the person who gave her the book?) use her maiden name, eight years after her husband Arthur Cooper had been 'blown to bits' on the Western Front? (Perhaps Mrs Thomas was Nana's mother – in fact that seems more likely, but I don't known when

she died). And, in any event, what were the words written below, which now largely appear only as a series of dashes?

I- ---- ---- ------ ------
-- ---- --- --- ---- ---
---- -- ---e.

The first song in the book is The Agincourt Song (which does date from the time of the great battle in 1415). There are several which date from the First World War, including the extraordinary *Après la guerre fini*:

Après la guerre fini
We'll go home to Blighty
English soldier parti
Soldat anglais parti
Won't we be sorry to leave chère Germaine,
Mamselle français beacoup picanniny,
Napoo, bully beef, comme souvenir, madame, your soup's no bonne

For my birthday, Dad took Michael Jackson and I to see *Moby Dick* at the *Gaumont* in Tuebrook, a district of Liverpool about 2 miles from where we lived. This was an adaptation of Herman Melville's novel of the same name. It was directed by John Huston and starred Gregory Peck as Captain Ahab and Orson Welles as Father Mapple, but it's Captain Ahab whom I remember. I now learn that the film was rated a PG (Parental Guidance) by the British Board of Film Classification but rated a 15 by the Film Censor's Office. Michael and I were only 9 years old; but anyway we thought it was a 'smashing' film. It was all so strange and exciting and dreadful and there was a super ending, when Moby Dick smashes up the ship, and Ahab becomes enmeshed by the ropes attached to the harpoons sticking out of the side of the whale, and disappears beneath the Ocean wave as Moby dives for the depths.

Years later I incorporated the name 'Ahab' into a game I invented for my own children when we were on holiday. This worked very well on any beach which had waves of any size; and consisted of the leader (Dad aka Captain Ahab) spotting the advent of the next *Tsunami*. The idea for the *Tsunami* came from the film *Krakatoa, East of Java* (1969) which has a monster wave which destroys the island; but any wave more than about 3 feet high would do. So, Ahab repeatedly invites his followers to jump the next Tsunami. (That may not sound like much of a game to you now, but try it out next time you have a four year old child to amuse. On second thoughts, don't. I don't think you could play that game now, after seeing what the real Tsunamis did to Phuket Island in 2004 and Japan in 2011).

We went to Chester Zoo several times. This was before Political Correctness towards animals, and before Safari Parks, but even so we liked Chester Zoo because

they did give the big cats and the bears an acceptable amount of space to live in. The pride of lions had a bit of woodland, rather than a cage to live in. Similar luxurious treatment was afforded to the caravan of camels; the sloth of bears; the zeal of zebras; and the herd of elephants; but my brother's favourite animal (and mine) was the vulture. I am sure there was a certain perversity in this choice; but, having discussed the matter again with him recently, he claims he really did like the vultures, despite their baldness, odious appearance and unsavoury taste for carrion, characteristics which were all too obvious at the zoo, and multiplied since there was a whole committee of them in Chester.

My brother had announced that he was going to take up photography. A camera – probably a 'Box Brownie' was acquired for him. He took a photograph of a Brown Bear sitting for the camera. I do not say that he got it to pose for him, because as you can see, it's a long way off, sitting in one of those large enclosures Chester was famous for; but it was a good black and white photograph, well composed, I think though doubtless it could have been improved by the use of a telephoto lens. Nevertheless, it remained the only photo in his brand new album. I asked him recently why he gave up photography and he said it was because on close inspection the items deposited in the enclosure, around the bear, turned out to be turds. But it was just as well that his interest in photography was brief, because the only other person we knew, who took up photography as a hobby, was Cousin Nicholas, and anything he touched was bound to turn out badly. Also, photography was to become confused in my mind with pornography, thanks to the large sales of *Amateur Photographer* and *Health and Efficiency*, which were frequently on display in local newsagents and, if memory serves, at HAROLD THE BARBER'S. I didn't know what pornography was, but it was not good.

Harold was a likeable chap who cut boys' hair very cheaply and efficiently, if somewhat inelegantly, indeed in rough and ready fashion. You often had to wait in line for several other boys to be done first; but there were magazines to read and mysterious adult conversations to interpret, and much talk about football. Harold was an EVERTONIAN, one of the sort who could take no pleasure in Liverpool FC's inexorable rise to the top. His shop was in one of the rows of terraced houses between Town Row and Eaton Road. Possibly Bonsall Road, possibly Rosthwaite Road. Google Maps are very good, but the way to Harold's and back was determined by a child's own method of route finding – and at the child's own pace - and it is difficult now to find this on a satellite-based map. Incidentally, the Google Map shows 'J W Searle and Sons' there, near Town Row, not far from where I turned into the finishing straight for Harold's. That name Searle rings a bell. Was he a builder or an undertaker, or a baker? It may come back to me.

School

Word got about the Coopers always came top of the form; and it became something which was rather expected of us; but in my case it was certainly not always so. My friend Duncan was a clever lad and he used to beat me sometimes; and then there was Pamela Forshaw – a girl! – who lived in The Croft – nearer to West Derby village than us, and had a fringe. She beat me once. Having said that I was always near the top; and used to wonder why. I never had any sense that I was more intelligent than others since I only did moderately well in IQ tests compared to my brother and sister. I always thought that the secret of my success, if there was any, was being in small pond and having a good memory. That, and the Puritan work ethic.

Pamela Forshaw held no attractions for me, even at the age of 10, when girls were getting 'prettier'. Irene Devereux was thin and had plaits but was more attractive. And then there was Susan Kershaw, who used to bring Herbie Simpson his cups of tea during Assembly, and was paid extravagant compliments by him – 'Oh, Sue!'. What was going on there, I wonder; but nobody thought it odd at the time, nor do I suppose it was.

There were two local girls who used to pursue me – Fiona Nicholson and Elaine Colepitts. Why they did so is beyond me, and certainly was then. I had no interest whatsoever in returning their affections; but they would follow me home, singing (yes, singing)

All of my love, all of my kissing
You don't know what you've been a missing,
Oh boy…

'Oh Boy!' was a number recorded by Buddy Holly and the Crickets, then known as *The Chirping Crickets*. Though the music was excellent – in the Buddy Holly version, rather than the Fiona Nicholson version – the problem the girls had was that I was not only pre-pubescent, I didn't even know the meaning of pubescence. Moreover, not only did I find them both physically unattractive, I found Elaine Colepitts positively repugnant, because she suffered from asthma, carried an inhaler, and was prone to attacks. This puts me in a very bad light now, and I regret it – especially since I was diagnosed with late onset asthma some years ago; but I wasn't about to pretend to love somebody back when I didn't actually like the thought of kissing her at all. Besides, she came from the wrong side of the tracks, in that she lived DOWN THE LANE. (Fiona on the other hand lived in Lisleholme Road, not far from Jeffsie).

Kissing, of course was what it was all about. Pairing up of a sort had begun, and it involved kissing. But, when you think about it, it was a bit of a strange strategy those two girls pursued – hunting in pairs, I mean. What was a boy supposed to do, if the strategy worked and wolf pack managed to corner you – kiss

them both? And if so, did you do that serially, or both together somehow? (I have never figured this one out. 'Three in a bed' may be to some people's taste, but I have never been introduced to the practicalities). Anyway, I found the whole idea pretty disgusting and insanitary (not being the son of a pharmacist for nothing, I had a healthy dread of germs).

Yet, it was not so long after this, that I noticed a person who closely resembled Fiona Nicholson, but was strangely transmogrified, walking in Lisleholme Road. This person was stunningly beautiful, with hair, breasts, figure, skirt and legs, and all at the age of fourteen. How I wished then that I had been able to respond to her old calling song in some way, or that she would, at least once, repeat it; but by then of course, it was too late. She had become a woman and I had become a twerp.

I did not dislike girls as such. I was always close to my sister. I wanted to hold her when she was a baby and got a name in the family for insisting on this, by shouting out 'Teedy' (my name for myself) followed by the plea (or imperative) 'hold'. This was repeated several times in *staccato*:

'Teedy hold'
'Teedy hold'
'Teedy hold'
'Tee-ole', 'Tee-ole', 'Tee-ole'.

My sister and I played games all the time at home; and watched a lot of 'rubbish' on the television, together, very happily: *Robin Hood*, with Richard Greene; *Ivanhoe* with a very young Roger Moore; *William Tell*, played by Conrad Phillips, opposite the fat but entertaining *Landberger* Gessler, played by Willoughby Goddard. We knew all the theme tunes by heart, or at least my sister did. Other heroes were *The Lone Ranger* (and of course his sidekick Tonto, the Red Indian).

My school report for W.D.C. OF E. shows that at Midsummer 1957 shows that I came top with a score of 293 out of 300; and that at Christmas I was second, with 94/100 for English; 10 out of 10 for history; and arithmetic 94/100. Total 208/220 – 'very good result, due to hard enthusiastic work all term'. The second place would have been a disappointment to me. I was probably beaten by my friend Duncan, who could speak French, when it was a language totally unknown to me. At least he said he could. His mastery of French was displayed when he went about the playground asking *Parlez-vous Français?* and encountering blank looks on all sides. Also, if he had a party he would put *Répondez s'il vous plaît* on the invitation.

I clearly had a taste for English and I did say, quite early on, that I wanted to be a writer; and that was when we learned about William Caxton at school. Or perhaps we were each taught something about the profession we had expressed an interest in, though I am not sure what, in that case, they would have taught Fiona Nicholson. I still have some stories I wrote as a child, the earliest being *The Children's Friends*, which is written in my mother's handwriting. There is also a story

which was typed, by me I think – *Mr McTavish's Ambition* – about a Scottish farmer who wins the Grand National on an old nag - and quite a few about two friends, CHARLES AND JERRY, which were written in a sub-Billy Bunter *genre* and smack very much of public school and football, though I never went to the one and was useless at the other. Bunter had been created in the 1890s and was still very popular in the 1950s, probably because there was a TV series, starring Gerald Campion. My sister and I produced a FRIDAY MAGAZINE 1ST EDITION 24 MAY 1957 PRICE 6D, which ran for 25 issues or so. It was full of stories, illustrations and adverts, some of them for my father's patented medicines such as COOPER'S PHOLCODEINE, - guaranteed to cure all coughs.

We spent our Summer hols in Lytham St Anne's, for the second year running, in the same boarding-house as before; but I didn't meet up with any of the outlaws from Sherwood Forest this time.

Chapter 6

1958 *Magic Moments*

Popular Culture

1958 was the year of Jerry Lee Lewis's *Great Balls of Fire* and Elvis Presley's *Jailhouse Rock*; but also of the somewhat less exciting Everly Brothers's's *All I have to do is dream* and Connie Francis's's's *Who's Sorry Now*?. Also of the completely wet *Story of My Life* (by Michael Holliday, another of Mrs Jeffs's favourites) and the awful *Magic Moments* (by Perry Como – the man who not only sent you to sleep but actually seemed to go to sleep himself, as he sang); and there was no escape from skiffle either, though it was tainted for me by Cousin Keith's addiction to it. Many of the skiffle numbers that year were sun by the egregious Lonnie Donegan, sung in that strangled mid-Atlantic accent of his, which was so popular at the time - *Lonesome Traveller; Tom Dooley; Rock My Soul;* and *The Grand Coulee Dam.* Why we were expected to get worked up about a Dam in America, I never knew. It might have been a fitting subject for a PhD thesis on economics ('Some Measures Taken by the Roosevelt Administration to Relieve the Worst Effects of the Depression'?)

In the West End the musical *My Fair Lady* opened, with Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews and Stanley Holloway. The show was to run for five and one-half years and the songs became very well known – a regular feature of the Jukebox, unfortunately:

All I want is a room somewhere….
Oh wouldn't it be loverly

I'm getting married in the morning
Ding-dong the bells are gonna chi..i..i..me…

We would no more have attended a live performance, than go to a strip-show in Timbuctoo.

On television, Lloyd Bridges (father of Jeff and Beau) played an ex-Navy frogman Mike Nelson, in *Sea Hunt*. This became a firm favourite for me, because Bridges made extensive use of the aqua-lung and I was becoming interested in the idea of becoming a 'frogman'. I was learning to learn to swim (and became a good swimmer, with a particular fondness for swimming underwater). I imbibed very unrealistic ideas about what it would be like to swim in British waters, as a result of watching that programme. Bridges was always dove (not dived) into clear

blue water (before the term became associated with politics); and the visibility he enjoyed in each episode was spectacular. The water must also have been relatively warm, since he often wore nothing other than his trunks and his acqualung and face mask. Watching *Sea-Hunt* was a totally inadequate preparation for diving in the English Channel or the North Sea.

The World

Elvis Presley joined the army; Boris Pasternak refused the Nobel Prize; Mao Tse Tung launched the "Great Leap Forward' in China; Alfred Hitchcock released Vertigo; and the French replaced their Old Franc with the New Franc (NF). I went to France with the school around 1962, and again for more extended periods on my own in 1964 and 1966: everybody still reckoned in Old Francs which I thought at the time was a sign of backwardness; but it was inconceivable that we in England would ever replace our pounds, shillings and pence with decimal coinage.

John XXIII (the little fat one) was elected Pope. I don't remember his predecessor, Pius XII – the one who later became branded as a collaborator with Fascism and anti-Semitism. I don't think anti- anti-Semitism was the force in 1950s that it later became; but John XXIII seemed to be something new, rather like President Kennedy two years later. At least, his election seemed to mean something new and wonderful to the Catholics on Merseyside. He was jolly and fat, like Falstaff. He did his bit for world peace by meeting Nikita Krushchev. From a Protestant point of view, he seemed to have the right attitude to the Catholic Church, which was that the whole institution was full of superstitious nonsense and needed shaking up. He allowed the Mass to be celebrated in English, which was obviously a good Protestant thing to do, though it was 400 years late. I wouldn't have imagined that his aim in life was actually to preserve the Church for future generations. Why would anyone with half a brain want to do that? (Pope John died in 1963 and was beatified in 2000 by John Paul II).

The Munich air disaster occurred on 6 February 1958, when the Manchester United football team, nicknamed the 'Busby Babes' was almost totally wiped out in a plane crash. Professional football being a matter of indifference in our house, this would not have made much impact of itself; but among the dead was Duncan Edwards, who was worshipped as a god by Woody. Unlike me he was also a skilled footballer himself. He explained to me how great was Manchester's loss, and the country's.

It was around this time that I suffered a personal humiliation when I played left back in a W.D.C.OF E. side which was comprehensively thrashed by Roscoe, in a field of shame near West Derby Village. I think the score was 10-0 and I am sure that I was personally responsible for many of those goals being let in. In short, they knew how to play and we didn't. I displayed to the whole world (and unfortunately

my Dad, who was standing on the sideline) how clueless I was. No natural ability and we were never taught. It must have been bad enough to watch for the few spectators but imagine what it was like to play that day. I had never wanted to play and never pretended that I had any ability; but the school was so small there was no option. Roscoe was a much bigger school, with several sides, all made up of great hulking morons who could find their way round a swotty left back as easily as your Mum could butter toast. They knew what to do and they relished doing it. There was one lad their who positively played with me, except for one time when I fould him, thereby conceding the penalty.

We had a 9 inch TV set, then a 14 then a 21 inch. All of these needed to 'warm up'. IT'S WARMING UP. And all of them broke down regularly. When we complained, Mum would say YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR YOUR FATHER. Often the problem was 'interference', requiring 'adjustment of the set'. Sometimes this took the form of a grey rain, obscuring all vision and sound. At other times a mysterious horizontal black line would appear and 'fiddle' down it, or up it, at unpredictable speeds. We kids would set up a chant of ITS FIDDLING! But WE HAD TO WAIT FOR OUR FATHER, like primitive Christians huddled round an altar. Sometimes the set righted itself, and sometimes, Dad FIXED IT, with a smash of his mighty fist on the top of the telly. The problem was though that he didn't come home until after 7 o clock at night.

It was around about 1958 that we first heard about the Beatniks. Jack Kerouac had already written about 'the Beat Generation' – of 'hipsters' roaming America, 'bumming' and 'hitchhiking' and of people who were 'beat' - 'down and out but full of intense conviction'; but maybe what was new in 1958 was the Russification of the term. In our house the influence of Beatniks went no further than the wearing of dufflecoats. This had originated in the Royal Navy, but Field Marshal Montgomery was also a famous wearer of the coat. Large stocks of post-war military surplus coats became available at reasonable prices in the 1950s, which clearly helped. Dufflecoats gave people an 'image' though. They came to be seen as a type of uniform, worn by supporters of Left-wing causes. They practically ruined Michael Foot (Leader of the Labour Party 1980-83), thirty years later, when he turned up on Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph, wearing one.

Home

Mum and Dad had sayings which became imprinted in our memory. Some of these were concerned with mundane things, like the whereabouts of lost things (IT'S IN A BOTTLE ON THE ROOF). Others were concerned with Mum's periodic but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to learn how to drive a car, Dad being the instructor. She had particular difficulty in knowing which gear to select. He would say it was

eash LISTEN TO THE ENGINE, IT TALKS TO YOU. The problem being that it clearly didn't speak the same language to Mum, as it did to him.

Dad would say that most people led LIVES OF QUIET DESPERATION - this one is actually a quotation from Thoreau, the American writer and philosopher (1817-1862). At other times he told me that the answer (to the question of what to do with one's life) was TO GRIT YOUR TEETH AND SAY 'I WILL SURVIVE'. Without giving much away about my Mum, to whom he was unswervingly devoted, he more than once told me to beware of getting into arguments with women.

DON'T TRY TO ARGUE WITH A WOMAN. THEY ALWAYS TAKE IT PERSONALLY

And then there was the mild reprimand, if I ever expressed anything other than complete contentment with life

ALL YOUR MOTHER CARES ABOUT IS YOUR HAPPINESS.'

The truth of the last saying was brought home to me when I developed haemorrhoids, which is fairly unusual in a child. They were not painful, but they could be rather uncomfortable and there was one that was the size of a small pea, so it was decided to operate. The haemorrhoids were popularly called 'piles' and my brother thought it was very funny to exclaim TEDDY'S MADE HIS PILE. Which I didn't fully understand, because making a pile related to the making of money, which meant very little to me. 'Teddy' by the way was my brother's name for me (When The Beatles sang 'her name was McGill and she called herself Lil, but everyone knew her as Nancy' it came as no mystery to me, especially since I had an Uncle Michael whose real name was Harold).

Anyway, when I went into Alder Hey Hospital to have the piles stripped out and my anus serviced, it was the first time I had ever been away from home; and I have to tell you that it was one of the worst times in my life. I had to have several enemas before the operation; and that wasn't pleasant. The hospital food was not what I was used to. The nurses were, shall we say, 'brusque' though not unkind; and we were woken very early in the morning, every morning; and visiting hours were few and regimented.

The operation was a success, but I woke up with a plastic or rubber 'drain' of some kind stuffed up my bum; and this was painful. I can't remember how long it was before I was allowed home, but my memory tells me it was about a week. The worst thing was that I was miserable in myself, and when my parents visited, I told them so. That made my mother cry, though my father took comfort in talking to the boy in the next bed, who was in a far worse condition. It was when my mother cried that I think I realised the truth of what my father had told me: you actually care more about your children than you care about yourself, and you would do anything to relieve them of pain.

Towards the end of my time at primary school, I had a friend who decided it would be fun to roll up the discarded wrapping of a sweet (I think it was a blackjack, but it could have been an orange 'fruitie') and pop it into one of my ears, from which it could not be extracted by human hand or finger alone. I came home from school, carrying my satchel in my hand, and the invisible blackjack paper in the depths of my ear. I didn't want to own up to what had happened, so I sat on the stairs with a pair of scissors, sticking them into my ear and trying to spear the rolled up sweetpaper lurking within. The activity was bound to arouse suspicion and I was soon discovered there by my mother, who got the story out of me. Dad was summoned home by telephone and took me back to Alder Hey Hospital, where they extracted the wad of paper in a trice with tweezers.

The worst part was in the car on the way home, having to explain to my father why I hadn't immediately told them what the matter was and asked for help. I was unable to explain my diffidence. My father concluded, not incorrectly, that I must have been afraid to do so. I still remember his words:

WE ARE ON YOUR SIDE, YOU KNOW, OLD SON

(He sometimes call me 'Old Son', though at other times it was 'Sam' and at others 'Swedenborg'; but don't ask me about the last of these); but what a sweet mystery of life at least revealed to me! Obviously, clearly, of course, it was true. He loved me; she loved me; they both loved me. I had always known it but now at last the depth of it, the truth of it, was revealed. They loved you even when you were a bloody fool and did stupid things. I didn't need to be told again. But the incident did not have a happy ending for the friend who had inserted the blackjack paper into my ear. He was forever relegated to the outer darkness, though it was only a practical joke.

He remained my friend. How could my parents know what delights we two shared. We had been cycling, down beyond the gates of Croxteth Park and out into the wild countryside. We had got lost somewhere, and found our way home again. My friend could piss or fart at will, and he had proceeded to do both in the lanes, pissing into the large country flowers by the wayside and farting along the tarmac roads, all along the lonely lanes towards Ormskirk. You don't give up friends like that for a piece of blackjack paper thrown in jest.

Dad was a practical man, but Uncle Harry was a skilled joiner. He rescued an old gramophone from a fire and made it as good as new, finishing it with formica - one of the newly-invented miracles that were a hallmark of the 1950s. He re-built the bathroom at the top of the steep stairs in the house at 96 Briardale Road, which had been his parents in law. (I believe my Aunt must have lived in that house all her life). And he floored the loft at our house, so that I could put my model railway up there, and later study for O levels in relative peace.

My sister had a hula hoop. (These were first manufactured in 1957, but became a world-wide 'fad' the following year. 25,000,000 were sold in less than four

months, and in two years sales reached more than 100 million units). There is a photo of her on a beach, probably Ainsdale to judge by the size of the dunes. She was very good at it and could 'keep it up' for several minutes at a time. She must have been eight at the time. I couldn't do it to save my life, at least not for more than two or three turns, and even then it only worked if you gave it a good push at the start, and relied on centrifugal force.

Hawaii and 'the hula' were at the centre of public attention, though it was not until 1959 that the Hawaian Islands became a state of the Union. As you would expect, Elvis's song was clearly based on the hoola skirt rather than the hoola hoop:

Rock-a-hula baby, Rock-a-hula baby,
Rock-a-hula baby, Rock Rock Rock-a-hula baby,
[perhaps that's one to many 'Rocks' in there, but what the hell]
The way she moves her hips to her fingertips
I feel I'm heaven bound
And when she starts to sway, I've gotta say
She really moves the grass around

This must also be round about the time that my sister collected cards from the 'Trex club', a marketing ploy used by J. Bibby and Sons Ltd of Liverpool to increase the sale of their pastry-based products. Mum must have done a lot of baking in those days and this had the advantage that we had a never ending supply of fattening foods and that you got those cards, which you could collect in a book. There was more than one series: one was entitled *How, what and why?* (and contained the answer to such mysteries as *How can flies walk on the ceiling*; *Why can cats see in the dark*; *How do fish breathe*; and best of all *Why are black men black* (you should note that the colouring does not develop fully until 'negro' babies are some weeks old).

My memory is that it was my sister who collected these cards; but on examination of my archive I find that I had Trex club membership too – my number was 170083. It all sounds a bit like the Communist Party; but the aims of the organisation were more modest. They seem to have been about the accumulation of pure knowledge and therefore self-improvement. I could tell you a thing or two now about: *Mrs Surinam toad (she has 100 babies on her back); plants that eat insects; plants that can go for a walk;* as well as about natural wonders such as *The Yosemite Falls; The Petrified Forest; and The Dead Sea*. The Trex cards were typical of a world where children watched HANS AND LOTTE HASS; GEORGE CANSDALE; JACQUES COUSTEAU. It wasn't all DAVID ATTENBOROUGH, though he had already made his appearance, knee-deep in bat guano.

We decided to have a holiday in London. It was after the nation's capital and we had never seen it. Nor do I think had Mum and Dad. We drove there. There were no motorways – not even the M1, so we drove via STONEY STRATFORD, where I remember that the soup tasted of spoon. We stayed in a boarding house (of course) in the SEVEN SISTERS ROAD, near Finsbury Park; and we saw the sights.

Tower Bridge opened up for us. The husband of the landlady said he had lived in London all his life, and he had never seen that happen himself. We had tea in Lyons' Corner Houses, served by BLACK WAITRESSES. It was a strange and wondrous place, not at all like Liverpool.

The fact that we drove there may indicate that it was much cheaper for a family of five to travel by road than by train; but I think it also says something about my father's love of the motor car. He was the first person in his family to own one; and car ownership in the early 1950s at any rate was still a mark of distinction. My father said later (and he died in 1976) that in those early days there was still a 'code' observed by motorists, as if they were all in the same club (which of course some of them were, in the form of the A.A or the R.A.C.); but it was much more than that. According to my father, the early motorists treated each other with respect, even chivalry – they were the KNIGHTS OF THE ROAD. They greeted each other with a wave or a salute, as they swept along the highways and byways of Britain. They gave way to each other, when they didn't strictly need to. They stopped to helped each other if someone got into distress. If this chivalric code existed, it was I think largely confined to men. Driving was still an overwhelmingly male activity; and, 'women drivers' were somewhat suspect, and certainly something to be pointed out and remarked upon.

There were even driving heroes – starting with Stirling Moss of course; but also Paddy Hopkirk. That's a name I haven't really heard since my childhood; but he always seemed to be on my father's lips because he was a rally driver (winning the Monte Carlo Rally in 1964). My father had no ambitions to become a racing driver but he did think that it was not beyond him to participate in local rallies; and, on a few sobering occasions, he attempted to display his superior ability behind the wheel. He knew he was getting older when he finally admitted that he was never going to win the Monte Carlo Rally. I don't think any of us children had the same enthusiasm for cars. I think that we took it for granted that you would pass the driving test at 17 and acquire a car not long afterwards. We took cars for granted, like the Welfare State, prosperity and peace. They were for getting from A to B (a remark that would have been regarded as heretical in the household of our youth).

A distinctive feature of Merseyside was the Mersey Tunnel. It is indicative of the different attitude to motoring which prevailed then that there was said to be a TUNNEL 100 CLUB, whose qualification for membership was that you had driven your car through THE TUNNEL at 100 miles per hour or more. This sounds so insane now that you would think the story apocryphal; but you have to remember that there was much less traffic on the road and a different attitude to road safety. There was no speed limit at all on some roads, even on the first motorways. There was no legislation regarding seatbelts; and no 'breathalyser'. So maybe the Tunnel 100 club was a reality. Certainly my father did not speak of it in horrified tones, as you would now. I think he was actually a bit jealous.

For all the offers my father made to give me a lecture about the INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE, I was very unclear as to how the driver made the car 'go'.

I knew about the brake, because that was a bit like the ones on a bicycle; but engines and gears were a mystery. I think I assumed that it was powered by the willpower of the driver. You sat in the seat and mentally instructed the car to move, forwards or backwards, and released the brake once there was enough mental energy to overcome the inertia.

We went to many places at weekends as a family. Carr Mill Dam, where my brother and I went fishing and on one very smelly occasion actually caught a very small perch. The Trough of Bowland – grand sweeping fells and mountains; Chester Zoo and river; Delamere Forest. We sometimes crossed the Mersey at Widnes, using the old 'Transporter': there was no bridge then, and (improbably) you put your car on a platform, which was winched across the river on chains. Rivington Pike, near Bolton – seemed like a long trip though it can't have been more than 30 miles. This place was a great adventure. It was a series of follies and gardens, built and laid out for Lord Leverhulme in the 1920s on a hillside. By the 1950s it had 'fallen into extreme decay.' For boys, it made for an exciting day out. I can remember exploring there, and coming across mysterious ruins in the undergrowth, the remains of waterfalls, lanterns, tea houses and overgrown Chinese and Japanese gardens

We were not sure why our parents had to have friends, but they did and when we went to see the ones in Yorkshire we had to cross THE YORKSHIRE MOORS. You would have thought it was Siberia judging by the extent of the wild countryside compared to that found in Liverpool, and my parents' attitude to the expedition. Woe betide you, if you broke down there; and cars did break down in those days, quite often. The purpose of the visit was to see Hilda and Albert Whitaker in Bradford – whom our parents had met while on holiday somewhere. Albert wore a special boot on one leg, because he had been injured during the D Day landings. The Whitakers had strange accents and Hilda used to talk about her 'burroo' – meaning a bureau in the living room. Once, for no apparent reason she shouted out PURRIRITHEBURROO! (meaning 'put it in the bureau.'). Albert made very little of his wartime experiences. He said he had scarcely got off the landing craft or boat before he was injured; and that he had been robbed by other British troops when embarking this side of the Channel (because he was 'a Yorkie'). He took it all in good humour.

The countryside was alien territory. I don't think we ever went for a walk, for all Dad's fondness of maps. My parents didn't possess boots, let alone waterproof clothing or equipment. When they went driving they donned their Sunday best. Because of my brother's stories about them, I half expected, when we drove through a village, to see a 'village idiot'. There was one in every village, apparently, half-witted products of agricultural backwardness, and easily recognisable by us sophisticated urban types. They were locked away most of the time, and brought out for the delectation of the tourist. A sort of *League of Gentlemen*/Royston Vasey concept (while less macabre), half a century before its time, possibly derived from *The Goon Show*.

School

At some date in 1958 I had an IQ test. I think they have become a lot more sophisticated since then, but in those days, you were given a single score; and I think mine was around 125. That is high; but, as I remember it, brother's at the same age was 150 and my sister's was even higher. There are those who have taken a dim view of IQ testing, in the years since; but I always thought it was fair enough. I knew very well that I was not as intelligent as my brother or my sister; and I put this down to the fact that they were each more like my father, whereas I was more like my mother. In later years, I came to believe that this was pretty much the same as saying that I only had half a brain; but I always thought that, if I worked hard enough, I could make up for this.

In midsummer 1958, I was placed 3rd in Class P3 – English 99/100 1st; arithmetic 93/100 4th; 192/200. Who beat me? - Woody – Pamela Forshaw?(!) I am only third! What will my parents say? But the scores were good enough for me to be entered for the 11 plus when I was 10. I was very pleased at the time, to be thought special, and my parents were very proud. When we were coming up to the exam, I remember there was another one that you could take then in Liverpool. This was 'the Margaret Bryce'. Kids took that if they wanted to go to the Liverpool Institute, which was therefore (presumably) considered the best school; but I didn't take that exam. I was lacking in self-confidence perhaps. I was good at straightforward 'subjects' like English and arithmetic, things we were taught, because I was hardworking and had a good memory; but I didn't think I was especially intelligent or well-read, and I was very poor at 'general knowledge'. I certainly had no deep interest at that age, in current affairs. Yet one of the exam questions the previous year for the Margaret Bryce had been about a headline in the newspapers

IKE SLAMS MR K – explain.

Who was Ike? Who was Mr K? I would have had no idea at all where to start; and would not have thought the answer was of any interest, since it wasn't something we were taught at school.

W.D.C. OF E. was a mixed school; and we had birthday parties which were attended by boys and girls, something which was noticeable by its absence for several years when we moved on to the secondary school; but, even when there was the possibility of mixed parties they didn't really happen. You made friends with other boys, not girls.

I remember two parties in particular. The first was Eddie Handley's birthday party at his house near W.D.C. of E.. Eddie had an elder brother. We played a game where we took it in turns to gouge out the brothers eyes, with our fingers, while

blindfolded. It came as quite a surprise, and disappointment to discover that what we had gouged out was not Eddie Handley's brother's eye, but an orange. The other party was my own, at our house, when I sat on the back step afterwards, cried and complained it was a ROTTEN PARTY. I blame Peter Duke for this. He wanted to be the centre of attention rather than me; and he achieved this by standing on our dining room table and dancing provocatively, something I am sure he would never have done in his own house, or without imbibing large quantities of cake and fizzy pop.

One of the last things I remember at W.D.C. OF E. was listening to Miss Roberts reading *Wind on the Moon* to us aloud. This was a prize-winning children's fantasy novel written by Eric Linklater and first published in 1944. I recall nothing of the plot or the characters. I just remember sitting in class, listening to the sound of the teacher's voice and being carried away by the art of the writer – particularly the device of alternating chapters between the action taking place in different places and involving different characters.

When I was preparing to go up to the grammar school my brother (I am sure with the best of intentions) explained how difficult this was going to be. You may have been 'clever' at primary school – he said - but 'you ain't seen nothing yet'. There were certain boys in the sixth form – he then being in the fourth – who had built a computer out of jam jars. It was powered by water. This was a remarkable claim indeed since the only general purpose computers in use in 1959 were in NASA or the headquarters of multi-national companies. In addition, I should know that on my first day, I would be 'scragged' – all new boys had to undergo that ritual; and I would be on my own when it happened – anything else would be less than manly.

Going to the grammar school at the age of 10 meant parting from my friends at W.D.C. OF E. This was particularly painful in the case of Michael Jackson, who was not just a friend from school but someone I saw nearly every Saturday and who came with me on birthday treats. I remember that I still wanted very much to go The Holt a year early; but he took it quite badly. He asked if we would still be friends when I went there. Of course I said yes, but at that age, it was a rite of passage and things cooled between us. I soon palled up with the other boys from Blackmoor Park who started at The Holt at the same time as me and who got the same bus.

That summer we went to North Wales for our two-week family holiday. This represented something of a departure for me. We had been to Barmouth and Rhyll when I was too young to remember; but more recently we had been to Silverdale and Lytham St Anne's on the Lancashire Coast. Wales seemed remote and exotic by comparison; and the accommodation was more luxurious – a flat compared to a caravan. We were still 'self-catering' – Mum seemed quite happy to do the cooking and the housework although she was on holiday, though trips were made to the fish and chip shop; and this time my Uncle and Aunt and cousin Geraldine came with us, which made it more jolly and gave it a sense that we were really going to enjoy

this one. We went down in two cars, a big one for the Coopers and a smaller one for the Coops. It seemed like a great adventure.

I have fond memories of the beach at Colwyn Bay. The beach was made of sand; and you could swim in the sea a few yards off it. These might seem like unremarkable qualities; but you have to remember that you couldn't swim in the sea off Ainsdale beach unless you were prepared to walk about a mile out into the water, and somehow negotiate a large hidden trench which lay about a quarter of a mile out; and that the beach at Silverdale was made of grass. In addition, I think I had just about learned to swim by now, and the Welsh sea and sun seemed warmer and hotter than I had experienced before. So a trip to Colwyn Bay was a bit like a trip to Florida, with the advantage that the locals also spoke a foreign language. My uncle bought a box of matches and the words on the back were in Welsh!

Tut tut paed a bod or was it tyr tyr paed a bod

I have never learned what that means.

Old Colwyn was, however, a bit of a snobby area, with some residents not approving of properties being let out to (Liverpudlian) 'trippers. This was confirmed some busybody complained that Dad and Uncle Harry had parked their cars on the road overnight without using parking lights. A local 'Constabwyl' then served them both with a summons and they had to attend at the local police station to produce their documents. My brother went with them, since he was by now 14, but I stayed at home.

Now the local police station was also the home of this particular bobby, who was rather young, plump, and sweaty. He was somewhat apologetic about the whole business - he said he wouldn't himself have complained but 'the locals insisted on it'. There was no malice on either side - Dad and Harry just wanted to sort out the paperwork, pay whatever fine was demanded, promise to leave parking lights on for the rest of the holiday and get back to their holidays; but, as the bobby was transcribing bits of paper, Harry noticed that there was a playpen abutting the little room that was used as an office. He noticed something about it and went closer for an inspection. Then he muttered:

OFFICER YOU HAVE WOODWORM IN YOUR PLAYPEN

Officer (clearly deeply upset, and seeming to regard woodworm as akin to the Black Death):

'Ooh no, that's terrible, what can I do?'

Harry: 'If it's still infected, you can paint it to get rid of the worm'.

(There followed some exchange about how to watch out for fresh sawdust to see if the worm was still active).

Officer: 'Is the whole house infected then?'

Harry provided his opinion which involved a short discussion as to how long said officer had owned the playpen, but suggesting no great cause for worry.

Officer: 'Will the baby be affected?'

The full weight of Dad's knowledge of pharmacy and of Harry's knowledge of joinery was then brought to bear on the problem. They both expressed the view that it was unlikely the baby would suffer any adverse long term consequences as a result of the exposure to woodworm; but they did give a warning that the man should not put the baby back in the pen immediately after painting it. So, then the three Liverpudlians exited the premises, to a chorus of polite thankyous from the Welsh, but without being granted any remission of said parking penalties.

Subsequently the saying OFFICER YOU HAVE WOODWORM IN YOUR PLAYPEN achieved a prominent place in the family lexicon, where it remained for the next several years.

[To be continued]