

# VISITING TIME AT THE ZOO

Or

*A Liverpool Childhood*

*Part Two*

1959-1965

For my Mum and Dad, but for whom.



The Holt High School for boys, circa 1959



Class of 1958-9

Yours truly, first squirt to the right of the headmaster (A.G.Russell, centre). Also on the right of the Head: Mr Yeo (English and History); 'Spike' Rankin (English); Mr Brown (Biology); 'Ecce' Lowe (History); 'Pisser' Thompson (Geography and Economics); 'Jim' Jones (the gym master); Dai Brew (Biology); Johnny Rhoden (French, Russian). To the left of the Head, 'Herbie' Milne; 'Paddy' Malone; 'Faggsie' Faragher 'Ollie' Hardy; 'Maggie' Evans); 'Dickie' Barton; 'E.R.' Marcastel (French Assistant and French Revolutionary).



A better version of part of the school photo of April 1959, showing my brother (second row down, fifth youth from the left, with specs); and teachers, from left to right Dickie Barton (Chemistry); Maggie Evans (English); Ollie Hardy (Art); 'Faggsy' Faragher (Maths?); Paddy Malone (Maths?); Herbie Milne (Deputy Head)

# Chapter 7

## 1959 Living Doll

### *Pop Music*

'The charts' for 1959 show a wide variety of songs reaching THE TOP OF THE HIT PARADE

Elvis Presley	<i>One Night</i>
Shirley Bassey	<i>As I Love You</i>
The Platters	<i>Smoke Gets in Your Eyes</i>
Russ Conway	<i>Side Saddle</i>
Buddy Holly	<i>It Doesn't Matter Anymore</i>
Russ Conway	<i>Roulette</i>
Bobby Darin	<i>Dream Lover</i>
Cliff Richard and The Drifters (sic)	<i>Living Doll</i>
Craig Douglas	<i>Only Sixteen</i>
Bobby Darin	<i>"Mack the Knife"</i>
Cliff Richard and The Shadows	<i>"Travellin' Light"</i>

Adam Faith	<i>What Do You Want?</i>
Emile Ford and the Checkmates	<i>What Do You Want to Make Those Eyes at Me For?</i>

Though I never played the guitar, never joined a 'group' or even followed one, and was much less addicted to the study of 'the charts' than many of my friends and contemporaries, I remember every one of these records in a passive way and can even hum or sing the first line or two, sometimes more, to myself. Worse, the tunes come into my head unexpectedly, indeed sometimes when I least expect them, at all times of the day and night. I find the whole thing annoying, and an interruption to more serious thought and feeling, but at the same time I have a certain fondness for some of these numbers. The nostalgia takes over my critical faculties; and I am even surprised, though not hurt, that Lonnie Donegan's *Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavour (On the Bedpost Overnight?)* does not appear in the official list.

Perhaps the most insidious tune is 'Living Doll' by Cliff Richard. It has been playing in my head all this afternoon as I was cycling; as it has done from time to time ever since 1959, mundane little worm that it is; but on the other hand, we forget what a phenomenon Cliff, who (as everybody must know) was really called Harry Webb, was, and I suppose still is. He now seems a monument of British culture; but at the time he was proof of how dominant American pop music was. He was originally sold as the British Elvis, with a quiff, swivelling hips, curling lip, snarling lyrics and a feigned heightened sexuality to match. His early hits included "High Class Baby" and "Mean Streak"; but I suppose you could argue that his recording of Lionel Bart's "Living Doll" showed a certain gentle reaction, in that the words are very innocent and sweetly sung. It was on "Living Doll" that Cliff was backed for the first time by a group known as 'the Drifters' which soon had to change its name to 'The Shadows' after legal complications with the US Drifters.

Has he aged well? Ostensibly yes – in fact extremely well; but I cannot help wondering whether there hasn't been some Faustian pact struck, and whether he doesn't keep a horrific portrait of himself in an attic somewhere.

### *The World*

In 1959, Cyprus joined the Commonwealth; North Sea gas was discovered; and (rare sign of international co-operation) a treaty was signed declaring that Antarctica could be used for peaceful purposes only.

We were in the middle of the Cold War. Having taken control of Eastern Europe after the War, 'the Communists' took control of mainland China in 1949. The Communist world was growing, as Communist theory said it would. With the accession of China, it was thought to contain more of the World's landmass and population than the Free World or 'the West'; and it was still growing. It seemed as if it had history on its side, and there were widespread predictions that, one day, it would take over the entire globe. It was not until 1960 that the Chinese quarrelled with the Soviet Union and the Communist or Socialist 'bloc' or camp was divided between the two, with most of the relevant countries siding with the USSR, though – weirdly – Albania decided to remain loyal to China.

In 1959, the Chinese invaded Tibet; and Fidel Castro took power in Cuba, establishing a Communist outpost for the first time in the Western hemisphere. This was undoubtedly a bad thing, because he was some kind of a communist and because he soon started acting in a hostile way towards the Americans, our staunchest friends (putting their failure to back us up during the Suez Crisis to one side). In *Mad* magazine, which was a great favourite at this time, there was a cartoon entitled *Spy v Spy* which featured a good (white) mouse-like creature struggling to defeat an evil (black) creature, and the Cubans were soon identified there as being on the side of the bad guy. It was only when I went up to Oxford in 1966 that I met people who believed that, on the contrary, Castro, and more especially his friend Che Guevara, were the good guys, and indeed 'Che' was some kind of hero, along the lines of Robin Hood.

In the 1950s the Labour Party was regarded as a Socialist Party; but there was a great deal of difference, of course, between the Socialism preached by Michael Foot and that practised by Joseph Stalin. Yet my father, who was the fount of all wisdom on these as well as other matters, would make remarks which made light of the difference. Uncle Jo Stalin had been our ally during the war, and hated Germans much as much Dad did. He could never understand why we and the Americans had fallen out with him. Whereas other people clearly regarded Communism as being as bad as (though seldom worse than) Fascism, Dad said that the difference between us and the Russians was about how society should be organised (and by implication this was not a reason to go to war). The view that the struggle was 'ideological' because the Russians were 'Godless communists' did not appeal to him, since he thought, as we were brought up to believe, that it was Natural Science rather than religion, which held the key to the truth and the future. Besides, in the late 1950s 'the Russians' (as the Soviet Union was often referred to) were going places – they clearly dominated international sport, they were winning the space race; and it was widely reported that they were winning the arms race too. Half the world was already communist; and Krushchev the Soviet leader promised that by 1980 the USSR would overtake the West economically.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the economist J.K.Galbraith preached the doctrine of 'convergence': communism and capitalism

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<sup>1</sup> For the atmosphere of the time see *Red Plenty* by Francis Spufford (Faber & Faber 2011).



were coming to resemble one another in important respects and the remaining differences might one day come to seem unimportant. Dad was an optimist in those days and was in favour of this kind of idea, which suggested that there might not have to be a Third World War in his lifetime. It would have been wildly eccentric, and perhaps as a betrayal of Russian sacrifices during the Second World War, to say that the USSR was from the very beginning an experiment with human nature that was bound to fail, had soon become a monstrous tyranny that was a travesty of the noble ideals of socialism, and was even now a house built on sand that would crash to pieces a little more than 30 years' time. There were plenty of people in 1959 who were saying the first two of these things; but no one who was predicting the third.

### *Home*

The first section of the M1 motorway opened between junction 5 (Watford) and junction 18 (Crick/Rugby) on 2 November 1959 together with the motorway's two spurs, the M10 (from junction 7 to south of St Albans originally connecting to the A1) and the M45 (from junction 17 to the A45 and Coventry). Ernest (Ernie) Marples was the Minister of Transport at the time. Since this was a Conservative Government, my father did not think much of him; and he cannot have been alone because it was no longer after this that a slogan was painted on one of the new bridges over the M1, which we used to look out for years later when driving 'down' to London from the North of England:

#### *MARPLES MUST GO*

Marples had joined the government in 1957 as Postmaster General, and introduced postcodes to the UK, and also brought in the subscriber trunk dialling (STD) telephone system that eliminated the use of telephone operators on national phone calls. On 2 June 1957, he was the first person to operate his namesake ERNIE, the computer which selects winners for the new Premium Bond scheme. He was Minister of Transport between October 1959 and October 1964, but I presume the objection to him, taken by my father and those mysterious motorway protestors, was not to the M1 itself but to some of his other policies. He was responsible for roadside yellow lines, parking meters and seat belts; and appointed Dr Beeching chairman of the British Railways Board (so he may also have been blamed for the widely unpopular Beeching 'cuts' to the railway network).

My brother remembers that Ernie Marples was an MP on [the] Wirral, and so a local man. He also believes that the first stretch of motorway in Britain was not in fact the M1, but the Preston bypass section of the M6. This was a source of some local pride in Lancashire, but was (typically) ignored in favour of publicity for the M1.

1959 also saw the enactment of the Street Offences Act of 1959. Section 1 of this made it a criminal offence for a 'common prostitute' to 'loiter or solicit in a street or public place for the purpose of prostitution.' Before the introduction of the Act, prostitutes packed the streets and alleys of certain areas in the major towns; but, with prostitution driven off the streets, these areas, especially Soho became home to dozens of strip clubs and almost every doorway in Soho had little postcards advertising "Large Chest for Sale" or "French Lessons Given". 'Clip joints' also surfaced in the 1960s, selling coloured water as champagne with the promise of sex to follow. Also in 1960, London's first sex cinema theatre, the Compton Cinema Club (a membership only club to get around the law) opened at 56 Old Compton Street.

Following the Act, a chap called Shaw published a booklet, the Ladies' Directory, of some 28 pages, containing the names and addresses of prostitutes. Shaw admitted that his purpose was to assist prostitutes to ply their trade when as a result of the Street Offences Act, they were no longer able to solicit in the street. The prostitutes paid for the advertisements and the appellant derived a profit from the publication. The appellant pleaded not guilty to an indictment charging him with (1) conspiracy to corrupt public morals; (2) living on the earnings of prostitution contrary to section 30 of the Sexual Offences Act, 1956. The case went on appeal to the House of Lords, where the convictions were upheld; but it sparked a lively controversy as to whether the courts could still 'invent' common law offences, when an activity had not been clearly criminalised by Parliament. This became a subject for undergraduate law students in the 1960s, especially at Oxford where I subsequently met my wife, late in 1966.

We got our information, directly or indirectly, from The Manchester Guardian; but then, one day, the 'Manchester' slipped from this paper's title. "The omission of *Manchester* implies neither a change of policy nor any disrespect to our home," a leading article explained, while admitting that "ours is undeniably an ugly city"; but it still seemed like rank treachery to me. My brother and I had been born in Manchester and still felt a certain loyalty to the place, despite our Liverpoolian upbringing, and the traditional rivalry between the two cities.

In the world of cinema, 1959 was the year of *Some Like It Hot* by Billy Wilder starring Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Marilyn Monroe; *North By Northwest* by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Cary Grant; and *The 400 Blows*, the first of Truffaut's autobiographical *Antoine Doinel* series; but at the time *Carry On Nurse* made more impact with me. Of the regular team, it featured Joan Sims, Kenneth Williams, Kenneth Connor, Charles Hawtrey, Hattie Jacques and Leslie Phillips. This was the top grossing film of the year in the UK and - with an audience of 10.4 million - had the highest cinema viewing of any of the *Carry On* films. We also saw *I'm All Right Jack* a British comedy directed by the Boulting brothers, a sequel to the Boulting's 1956 film *Private's Progress*, and also starring Ian Carmichael, Dennis Price, Richard Attenborough and Terry-Thomas. Peter Sellers played the communist shop steward Fred Kite, and the film was a widely acclaimed satire on British industrial life in the 1950s. The trade unions, workers, and bosses are all seen

to be incompetent or corrupt. It seemed at the least a triumphant vindication of the notion that the British are very good at laughing at themselves in times of adversity, since it did coincide with a period of catastrophic relative decline of British industry, manufacturing and the economy as a whole, particularly in comparison with countries like West Germany which was experiencing its 'Economic Miracle' (*Wirtschaftswunder*) at the time. It was certainly a change from films like *The Dam Busters* (1955) and *Cockleshell Heroes* (also 1955).

We had no record player in our house at that time, so all recorded music was listened to on the radio or TV (since this was before tape-recording became widely available); but at Christmas time, Uncle Harry got an LP to play on the rebuilt gramophone which he had rescued from a bonfire somewhere. This was *Songs for Swinging Sellers* and it was a parody of Frank Sinatra's album *Songs for Swinging Lovers*, My brother and I listened to it at Harry and Pip's house and thought it all hugely funny, although I am sure he must have understood much more of it than I. I particularly remember Sellers performing "Puttin on the Style" (a parody of Skiffle and Lonnie Donegan; but there was also a spoof interview in which a drunken Brendan Behan character, who keeps asking 'Where the Hell am I?' and 'Where's the gents?' calls the fruity English interviewer a 'snotty-nosed spud-faced bastard' and threatens to strangle him with his old-school tie, which had us rolling on the floor. The insult 'spudface', pronounced with an Irish accent became a favourite fraternal insult.

I had no idea who Brendan Behan was; but it turned out that he was a famous playwright who had been convicted of plotting to blow up Liverpool docks in 1940, while a very young member of the IRA. He died of the drink, in 1964, at the age of 41.

### *School*

Having passed the 11 plus when I was in fact 10 (so that my mother always said that I had passed the '10 plus') I started at The Holt High School, which was very definitely a *grammar* school, and proud of it and also (how could I forget?) a single-sex boys' school. I didn't realise it at the time, but those of who passed were in a tiny minority – I think somewhere between 5 and 10%.

The Holt was, I suppose, a typical Grammar School, though not in the first rank. It was not in the same league as Manchester Grammar, or even the Liverpool Institute; but it had all the traditions, including a Latin motto (*Certum Pete Finem* – seek a sure goal), Latin for the brightest boys from the second year, and houses based on the Greece of Mycenae and Pericles: all boys were allocated to Athens, Corinth, Sparta and Troy, each of which had a colour – blue, yellow, green and red. For a year or two, one took the rivalry seriously, for the purposes of games. No-one thought to suggest that, if we had really followed in ancient footsteps, the Athenians,

Corinthians and Spartans would immediately have ganged up and murdered the Trojans. (I was in Troy). However, Greek was not taught, until I persuaded the Latin master Albert Wilson to teach it to me in the Lower Sixth

You would not have known that we were any kind of elite on that first day at school, when we all had to endure the initiation ceremony known as 'scragging'. This consisted in having your face rubbed vigorously with dandelions, of which (of which there must have been several million on THE PLAYING FIELD). I don't remember this being painful, but it was humiliating to be chased around the field, putting up a token resistance before having the war paint put on. It was several years later when I read about the sort of initiation rite practised by the Sioux Indians (and memorably depicted in the film *A Man Called Horse* in 1970) and thanked my lucky stars that some of the older boys at The Holt were not more literate, or interested in the rituals of those we now call Native Americans.

At some point in the 1960s the Labour Party committed itself to abolishing the grammar schools, as bastions of privilege – there was never an equivalent campaign to abolish the public schools – and The Holt was in fact made into a comprehensive, by amalgamation, not long after I left there at the end of 1965. It became the coeducational Holt Comprehensive School, then Childwall Comprehensive School, then Childwall Community School and is now Childwall Sports College. Whether any of these changes were for the better I doubt, but they certainly were profound, and extremely disruptive in the short-term, by all accounts. My parents detested the whole idea of abolishing the grammar schools (and made the dramatic decision not to vote Labour, at least in local elections); but at the time, I was probably in favour, at least in theory, being theoretically in favour of any system which was thought in some way to be 'fairer', and having experienced the unfairness of selection at the age of 11 (or for that matter 10), when a friend of mine Allan Dickson failed to pass the test and seemed in my eyes condemned to a lifetime of ignorance.

Not that there was much sign of academic excellence in Form 1D in 1958-9. Duncan Woods, Paul Green and I were all put into this form, because we had passed the 11 plus a year early; and 1D was quite literally the bottom class, not to say the arse-end of the school. There was normally a three-form entry at The Holt, with boys put into Form 1A, 1B or 1C, according to perceived ability; but in a 'bulge' year, which 1958-9 evidently was, they added a fourth stream, labelled as D. Of course that meant that in our eyes, at any rate, if A meant very bright and B meant bright, C meant not so bright and D meant thick. This way of looking at the matter seemed to be confirmed when one looked at the fact that all four forms had to do French while in the second year the A class started to study Latin as a second language, while the B class studied German, while the C and D boys did not take a second language at all, though otherwise, the curriculum was the same for everyone. This seemed normal at the time but looking back two things strike me as odd, or at least questionable, in the light of subsequent developments in educational theory.

Firstly, they presumably selected boys for the A, B, C and (where appropriate D) streams according to the result in the 11 plus (which had already been used to

determine the type of school you went to), unless there was some consultation with the primary schools; but in either case, they were clearly using past performance to determine future potential in several different ways, and virtually irrevocably.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, overall ability (judged according to ability in Maths, English and an I/Q. test) was clearly thought to be determinative of one's ability to master foreign languages; and clearly German was thought to be more difficult than French, and Latin more difficult than German. Now, you could argue about these propositions, and you could have argued about them at the time; but it was in the nature of the grammar school that they were not only taken as axiomatic, but used to determine the future path taken by around 600 pupils at a time.

All this seemed truly 'academic' at the time because it was decided that Duncan, Paul and I should be put into the D Form, not because we were in any sense failures, but because it had been decided that for the time being, we were too young to face the academic rigours of life in either A, B or C. I thought at the time that this decision was somewhat unjust; but I now think it was truly strange. It was clear from the outset that we were 'A' material, not 'D' and we were able to cope with the year's differential soon enough - we were all three promoted to 1A after the first term - and coped perfectly well thereafter; but the consequence was that life was pretty hellish for that first term at The Holt.

Why so? Because of the fear. There was a gang of sadists operating in 1D, although ostensibly they were little boys dressed in short trousers (incredibly, we wore shorts until the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Form). Their bullying turned into sadism around November and December 1958. The winters always seemed incredibly cold then, before global warming; and we regularly had snow at Christmas; but we had large radiators in every class room; and, there being no adequate thermostats, these became overheated, so that it seemed to us as if they almost reaching boiling point. The sadists realised that they had been provided here, free of charge, with very efficient instruments of torture; and the gang used the radiators in the same way as the Romans had once used the gridiron to martyr St Laurence, or Flashman had once used an open fire at Rugby School. They roasted the weaker and smaller members of the class, either by placing the boy's hand on a radiator, or by sitting him on it. In either case, several members of the gang would apply physical pressure until the hand or the bottom burnt, or until the screams became so loud as to attract attention, or the child managed to wriggle free, as the pain-induced thrashing overcame the force applied.

I may have exaggerated the degree of torture inflicted; but not by much; and there are two things about this procedure which I feel unable to explain, at least adequately. The first is, why I was not tortured in this way. I was relatively small,

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<sup>2</sup> This was not the practice in all grammar schools. My wife attended Doncaster High School for Girls, at more or less the same time as I was at The Holt. Selection there was by means of the 11 plus but the streaming was alphabetical. Likewise, my sister's grammar school (Holly Lodge in West Derby) had streaming but it was according to the surname of the teacher.

being that year younger than most, and certainly vulnerable, in that I had been well brought up, spoke 'nicely', had some manners and didn't believe that might was right, or that football was the most important thing in life. I suppose the answer may have been that I was not worth bothering with, not being a member of a rival gang or faction, or that I simply kept my head down and didn't come to their attention. Possibly some minor acts of cowardice were sufficient to ingratiate me with the bullies. I am ashamed to examine this possibility further.

The second puzzle is why none of this ever came to the attention of the teachers, especially of the Form Master? Here I think the answer is probably a little clearer. Firstly, there was a code of *omerta* (= silence) which operated in that school, similar to the one which operates (as I understand it) in prisons, criminal organisations and the Mafia: you didn't grass on your 'mates', no matter how badly you were treated, and no matter how unworthy your mates might be to claim the name. Secondly, and contrary to the myth, not all the grammar schools were very good, and not all the teachers in the good ones were cast in the same mould as the best of them. I cannot remember now who the Form Master in 1D was, but the fact that I can't remember indicates that he (it was almost certainly a he) may have been faceless and ineffective, in more than one department. Not that I could ever have done that job.

I have my school report for the Autumn term 1959, Form ID.

*Age 10 years 11 months*

*Average age 11 years 10 months*

*4 feet 8  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches, 5 stones and 6 lbs*

*General estimate II plus*

*I in English, French, Biology, Physics, Maths*

*II in History, P.E. and Geography*

*II minus in Woodwork and Drawing*

Not a brilliant performance, but I (and my friend Duncan Woods from the primary school) were promoted at the end of that term into Form 1A and I remained in the A form for the rest of my time at The Holt. This meant a change of friends, apart from Duncan – indeed I had not made any new ones in 1D, apart from a boy called Bradshaw ('Braddy') with whom I used to eat my sandwiches at lunchtime, since I never took school dinners. (Not sure why not).

Being in 1A was a new beginning. The boys were much more to my liking and I soon met a number who are still friends to this day – especially Graham Jeffs, who lived in Lisleholme Road, Chris Beazer, who lived down Deysbrook Lane, and Brian Brown who lived a bit further away but met us at the bus stop to wait for the

61 bus. Our form master, or rather mistress was 'Maggie' Evans, a rather fat spinster whom we addressed – without complaint, or attempt at correction – as 'Sir', because she and 'Fanny' Harkness (mistress to Form 1B) were the only female teachers in the school (the only other female in the building being the School Secretary, who was known, unkindly, as 'T.B.T.', or 'Tennis Ball Tits'. At least she is the only one I can remember, there was probably more than one secretary during my time).

I remember that Maggie, who taught us English, used to read aloud to us from a book called *Men and Gods* (by Rex Warner), which had stories in it based on the Greek myths; and the idea that there were three classes of men – Men, Gods and Heroes, impinged on my mind. Women did not play much of a role in this world; nor in the early essays which we wrote, about the achievements of Thomas Alva Edison and Louis Pasteur. I think we were taught, subconsciously, that they were put in the world to be loyal help-meets and mothers for men, like Penelope for Odysseus/Ulysses – unless of course they were being abducted or abandoned. The Greeks, and for that matter the early Romans, seem to have done a lot of abducting and abandoning.

The older boys were taught Maths by a very old man – no, this one really was (comparatively) old – known as 'Paddy' Malone; but he sometimes took us for a lesson if other teachers were away. It turned out that this chap not only taught my brother but had also taught my father, at The Oulton school in Liverpool, in the late 1920s. When my brother first started at The Holt and came across Paddy, Dad thought it couldn't possibly be the same man, because *he'd be much too old*; and, further pointed out that *Paddy had a bad limp - does this chap limp?* - which he didn't; but it was indeed the same man. Dad met him at a parents' evening soon afterwards and they recognised each other.

Paddy was certainly a 'one-off.' His technique for keeping control was to speak harshly and carry a large blackboard rubber. Sometimes he shouted vulgar abuse ('ugly beast', or 'gammy backhander' if you happened to be left-handed, as I was) and sometimes he launched the blackboard rubber. On one occasion he kicked a lad called Sperry in the face, leaving a large footprint visible on his cheek; but at the same time, he was reckoned to be a very good Maths teacher, and I think we rather enjoyed the comedy of his routines. The kick wasn't hard, by the way.

We were taught music by a very fierce and strange man called Ron Jennings, whose mission (unlike Paddy's) did seem to be terrorise rather than teach. If you made the least mistake in copying something out in your exercise book, the offending page would be ripped out with scorn. Many boys ended the term with scarcely a leaf left in the book. If you offended in class, by misbehaving or creating some kind of smell, the delict would be brought to the attention of the whole class, so that you could be ritually humiliated in some way. There was one boy who suffered from particularly bad body odour. Jennings would stand next to him and roar out the question

*'Which of you boys smells like a lavatory?'*

Or sometimes *'Which boy near here wants to see Mrs Murphy?'*

Jennings had been in the RAF and boasted that he had extraordinarily good eyesight. To prove this, he would spend part of each lesson standing on the other side of the classroom by the window and reading notices which were pinned up next to the door, or on the blackboard. He also played the piano to amuse himself rather than instruct, periodically removing the sandwiches which boys had placed inside it by way of revenge during break. At other times, he would just rant, against the evils of modern society and modern Britain. Some thought he was a Communist, others that he was a Fascist. Either way, his views were certainly extreme. All this meant there was very little time left for teaching; and I cannot remember that my musical education was enhanced at this time.

My brother remembers that, on one occasion, Jennings, in gown, came into the music room where the class was sitting. He took his gown off, looked round – apparently seeing nowhere to hang it up, then went to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk, drew a hook and hung the gown on it. Of course the boys were mystified. Playing along, Jennings started the lesson, then noticing that all attention was on the gown, asked one boy what he was staring at. The reply was along the lines of

*Your gown sir. Is that chalk very thick?*

Someone else asked whether the chalk contained glue. Eventually we were let into the secret. Before the lesson, he had tapped a small black nail into the board, then drawn the hook round it!

There was another very fierce teacher called Yeo, whom my brother again remembers better than I; but there was apparently a human side to him. This was revealed when he started going out with a girl who worked in the same bookshop as Aunt Peg. He also wrote a book about his childhood called – we think - *A place of stones*. My brother thinks he came from Fleetwood, though I doubt that the beach was stony there? In one part of his book, he revealed that, as a youth, he and some others looked up the skirts of a shop girl, who had climbed some steps to a high shelf. It would be surprising if a teacher owned up to this kind of thing today

As for practical skills, we did Art and Woodwork in the first year, and most boys preferred Woodwork, because this was the passport to Metalwork in the second year, when you could learn to use a lathe and make real things that would last – perhaps a sign that manufacturing still played an important part in the British economy in those days. I preferred Art, and was particularly poor at Woodwork, even in the theoretical department, where I failed to see the importance of what kind of wood each tool was made of, but especially at the practical side. I remember one particular humiliation over a trenching exercise. I had dug too deep at one side of one trench so that one 'crenellation', separating two trenches, hung on by a wafer thin piece of wood. When I presented it to the master (Kissack or Burgoyne, I



forget which) I sighed involuntarily. He, spying the defect immediately, flipped the entire crenellation out with a flick of his thumb and bawled:

*It's me that should be sighing, boy, at some of the bits of firewood presented to me.*

I 'dropped' Woodwork as soon as I could, and never took up Metalwork. Not that I was much good at Art, but at least the master was kind and did not go in for public humiliation. Gentle sarcasm was more his style.

Curiously when I took my 25 yards swimming certificate beginners in May 1959, the examiner was CHARNOCK, the belching Biology master. I also have one for 50 yards in June 1959. I think the swimming was done at Picton Road Baths, an old style pool where the changing cubicles surrounded the water on all side, and where the water was comfortably warm, possibly due to the effect upon the temperature of large amounts of infantile urine, mixed with unsafe levels of chlorine.

As I have said, Maggie Evans was Form Mistress of 1A and Fanny Harkness was Mistress of 1B. It was probably deliberate policy, to put two women in charge of the 'tenderest' flowers in the school; but, if so, the framers of the policy were mistaken, in two entirely different respects. Firstly, I don't believe that the boys in 1A and 1B were, on the whole, any more 'tender' than those in 1C and 1D. They were simply better at certain types of exam. Some of the boys in my class were certainly just as vicious as any in the so-called 'lower' forms. Secondly, Fanny Harkness was probably a member of the Communist Party, with orders from Moscow to indoctrinate us in the superiority of the Worker's Paradise that was the USSR.

I grant you that Fanny, a well-spoken English spinster of indeterminate age, and (judging by her appearance) quintessentially conservative, was an unlikely Soviet agent, but she might have well as been, listening to what she told us during Geography lessons. Whereas other geography teachers – like 'Marty' Wilde - concentrated, in the long run-up to 'O' level, on the Amazon Basin, the Congo, the Mississippi, or the Canadian Shield, she spoke about the Soviet Union. She taught us about its enormous natural resources of timber, oil and minerals and its vast size and different time zones; but also its excellent but egalitarian educational system; the vast numbers of its scientists; and its splendid collective farms (*Kolkhoz*).

In Fanny's book the Soviet Union was a wonderful and successful country, to whom the future clearly belonged. It was the 'new civilisation' of Sydney and Beatrice Webb, though she didn't use their term. This was most obviously demonstrated in her treatment of the *Komsomols* – the youth organisations - which were clearly much more than a superior version of the Boy Scouts. In the USSR, all was for the best, apparently, in the best of all possible worlds. The possibility that the Soviet Union was in reality an old-style Empire, or a monstrous tyranny, and that the *Komsomols* were little different from the Hitler Youth, was not even discussed. In mitigation, I suppose it could be said that this was took place before

the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 and the publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in the West (1973); but it was a long time after Arthur Koestler's *Darkness At Noon* (of 1940) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (of 1949) and not long after the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, which led to the virtual demise of the British Communist Party. Many people had already seen the light about the nature of the communist system in the USSR; and the other side of the coin might at least have been mentioned in our lessons.

And all the time, an insidious denigration of the USA, which I would have thought - even in the narrow terms of physical geography - had certain features which were almost totally lacking in the USSR, like sunshine and rivers which flowed in the right direction. There was a prevailing pessimism about America and the West generally, and not just in geography lessons, which seems to have re-emerged now in relation to discussions about China, for which there was and is a distinct lack of evidence. Meanwhile, the USSR has collapsed, while the USA has carried on growing. Its population, around 150 million at the time, is now over 300 million, and it is still in some ways a developing country.

### *Summer holidays*

For the summer holidays we went with Harry and Pip and Cousin Geraldine and stayed in a house in St Florence near Tenby, where we were provided with breakfast and evening meal, but otherwise catered for ourselves. In fact I see from Google Maps it's about 4 miles from Tenby. I can remember little about the house where we stayed, except that I think it belonged to a Mrs Richards; and that on one occasion her cat shat all over a chair in the dining room. This occasioned some embarrassment, since it was not easy to find the appropriate words for pointing this out to her, in a polite way.

The other thing I remember is that the house had a drive, with room to park cars and my brother was learning to drive on private land and was allowed to park the car, notwithstanding that he wasn't sixteen at the time. (He was 15 and 3 months to be exact). I thought this was definitely risky, from several points of view; but I was assured that he was allowed to drive the car on private land, so I refrained from informing the Police, notwithstanding our unfortunate experiences with the law in the previous year at Old Colwyn.

There are two beaches at Tenby but we preferred the North Beach, where there was a rock - Goscar Rock, or at least I did, because there was a diving board on the rock, from which you could jump or dive into the sea. On one occasion I swam right round the rock, disappearing from view at one point. Mum and Dad were watching from the beach and they, understandably, became concerned. I was told later that Dad had threatened to go in - in his underpants - to rescue me, if I didn't re-appear shortly; but fortunately my head bobbed into view the next moment.

When I wasn't swimming, I read a novel called *Blood Brother*, which was extremely bloodthirsty novel, involving some several exquisite tortures inflicted by Red Indians on Mexicans. In one chapter, the Apaches (reputedly amongst the most bloodthirsty of tribes) bound a prisoner's head with wet leather strips and staked him out in the sun, so that his head burst open as the leather dried. In another, they buried another captive in the desert up to his neck, poured honey over his head and left him to be eaten alive by the termites. I think the fascination of the book for an 11 year old lay in its extreme violence, and the absence of sex. Sex was of no interest to me whatsoever at that age.

There was another beach near Tenby, at Manorbier. This has a very fine Norman castle, where I was impressed by a mannequin of Giraldus Cambrensis, last time I went; but in 1959 what I remember is the waves. On a windy day, they crashed down on the beach at Manorbier in tremendous fashion, though the idea of surfing had yet to dawn on anyone outside Hawaii.

We all took the boat to Caldey Island, where there is a Cistercian monastery. They wouldn't let women in, and at first Dad took that as an insult – *if they won't allow my wife to visit, they're not going to see me either!*; but he relented and so the men – Dad, Harry, Ash and me, went round, leaving the womenfolk (Mum, Pip, Mandy and Geraldine) to fend for themselves, on an island which had doubtless been pillaged by Vikings long ago.

The fat monk who showed us around was a jolly cove, very reminiscent of Friar Tuck, but with a very slack leather belt, which he moved up and down his cassock or habit continuously, warming his ample stomach in the process. (I remember thinking that it must have been cold wearing sandals in all weathers, without socks); but I was impressed by their simple way of life – the food was mostly lettuce, it seemed; but then how did the fat monk get so fat? And fancy deliberately choosing to remain unmarried and have no kids to keep you going.

By the time we got back to the landing stage for the return boat trip, the Heavens had opened and we got absolutely soaked. More torrential rain as we waited, and I don't think we had umbrellas, though we may have had macs (Pacamac?) Mandy and I and Geraldine were small enough to shelter under the jetty. Then a further wet trip in the open boat (the boat trip back was much rougher than the outward trip, so we were taking on water from all directions); and a mad dash back over the 4 miles to St Florence by car, picking up some hot fish and chips on the way home.

My brother remembers that the fat monk smelled very sweetly. He had told us that a large part of his diet was fruit and vegetables so this may be why. It apparently led Dad to speculate, in pharmaceutical fashion, as to whether the odour of sanctity was a real, diet-related phenomenon, rather than a figment of the mystical imagination.

My sister remembers that there were other people staying at the house in St Florence at the same time as us; and that Dad used to chat to a Mr Green (who I think was some kind of scientist) in the evenings, when she and I had a practice of

reading *Mad* magazine. Green beans were on the evening menu every night. She also recalls that, after the drenched trip to Caldey island, there was a difference of opinion between the Coops and the Coopers: the Coops wanted to have chips in a greasy café RIGHT AWAY, whereas the Coopers wanted to go back to St Florence and put on dry clothes after which we re-met the Coops in the greasy café for the chips. She also remembers Dad and Mum thinking that I had been too long swimming round Goscar Rock, and Dad declaring that he was 'going in' after me, notwithstanding the lack of a bathing costume. Not that this would have been any use; but it's the kind of thing parents are prepared to do.

We all went to see *Carry on Constable* at a Cinema near Tenby South beach.

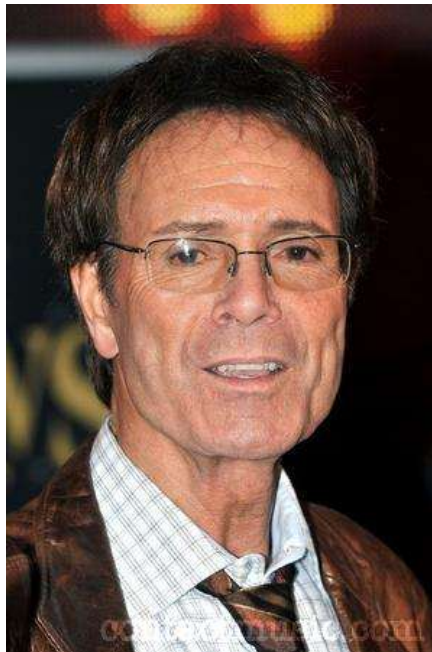


'Fanny' Harkness, avid fan of the *Komsomol*

(the boy at bottom right is Paul Green, who was at WDCE and passed the 10 plus along with Duncan Woods and me)



Cliff Richard circa 1959



And now!



Helen Shapiro



Craig Douglas

## Chapter 8

### 1960 My Old Man's a Dustman

*Pop Music*

*Oh, my old man's a dustman  
He wears a dustman's hat  
He wears 'cor blimey' trousers  
And he lives in a council flat*

Well of course he wasn't and he didn't. My old man was a well-respected Pharmacist – or rather one a 'pharmacist cum sub-postmaster', which was a somewhat rarer phenomenon, but one Dad was proud to be. Moreover, we lived in a (small) three-bedroomed house which my parents owned (albeit on mortgage); and they were undoubtedly of the middle class. However, there was no doubt that it was the working class which had the most popular singers; and it seemed as if there was an inverted snobbery at work here. The working class singers sold the most records, even if (to my father's evident distaste and disgust) they had never been trained to sing in the old-fashioned way and even if they could not play whatever instruments they were told to strut around with. I am thinking here of people like Adam Faith and Tommy Steele (who notoriously came from Bermondsey, and had at one time been a barrow boy).

Here are some of the songs which were popular in 1960:

Michael Holliday	<i>Starry Eyed</i>
Anthony Newley	<i>Why?</i>
Adam Faith	<i>Poor Me</i>
Johnny Preston	<i>Running Bear</i>
Lonnie Donegan	<i>My Old Man's a Dustman</i>
The Everly Brothers	<i>Cathy's Clown</i>
Cliff Richard and The Shadows	<i>Please Don't Tease</i>
The Shadows	<i>Apache</i>



Ricky Valance	<i>Tell Laura I Love Her</i>
Roy Orbison	<i>Only the Lonely (Know How I Feel)</i>
Elvis Presley	<i>It's Now or Never</i>

One which is not in the above list, but which I remember listening to over and over on Radio Luxembourg that year, while lying in the top bunk bed in 'the boys' bedroom', with my brother firmly in charge of the radio set and in the bottom bunk, was Sam Cooke's *Chaingang*, which I thought was fantastic, though it was not until I saw Paul Newman in *Cool Hand Luke*, many years later, that I really understood what a chaingang was:

*Oooh! Aaah! Oooh! Aaah!*

*Oooh! Aaah! Oooh! Aaah!*

*Well, don't you know?*

*That's the sound of the men working on the chain ga-a-ang!*

(You had to be there, to understand how the first two lines were pronounced and sung).

### *The World*

In 1960 the Belgian Congo gained its independence from Belgium, and became Zaire. I was shocked when the new Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba insulted the Belgians at the independence day ceremony, instead of thanking them, as was becoming traditional when Britain granted independence to its former colonies. Not long after this, the province of Katanga tried to break away from the Congo; there was a bloody and protracted civil war, and Patrice Lumumba was not only overthrown but murdered, after being abused on screen (rather as Colonel Gaddafi was on TV recently).

British Somaliland and Nigeria also become independent in 1960; and Archbishop Makarios (who had served time in a British jail) became President of Cyprus. The world news seemed to be dominated by the gradual crumbling of British power and the military and ideological rivalry of the United States and the USSR. The Russian leader Nikita Krushchev lost his temper at a meeting of the United Nations in November: he pounded his desk and shouted interruptions to show his disapproval at the way UN forces had intervened in the recent trouble in the Congo. On that or another occasion around the same time, he banged his shoe on the

desk, when the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was speaking. 'Supermac' as he was beginning to be called in some quarters, gained considerable kudos, at least with the home audience for immediately asking for a translation.

In November 1960, Jack Kennedy was elected President of the USA. He was young, much younger than Macmillan, and he seemed from the start to bring new hope to the world. I was puzzled that my father didn't wholly trust him, because Kennedy's father, Senator Joseph Kennedy had once said that Britain was 'finished', and Dad said that he had 'bought' the presidential election of 1960 for his son.

Nuclear testing was in full swing; and Mum's view was that of course this was ruining the weather. Summers were not what they used to be in her youth, and you couldn't tell her otherwise. It had to be the result of all that radiation being pumped into the sky. At the same time, neither Mum nor Dad ever had any time for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, founded in 1960. The idea of unilateral disarmament, of any kind, was not calculated to appeal to people who had lived through the years of Appeasement and married two weeks before the Second World War broke out in 1939. On the other hand, 1960 saw the abolition of conscription (or 'National Service') in the United Kingdom. I welcomed this because I had a fear that my brother would be whisked away to some foreign war; but he comfortably 'escaped' National Service, since he was not 18 until 1962.

The Olympic Games of 1960 were held in Rome; and were seen as part of the global ideological contest between West and East, especially since the State in the East invested very heavily in the promotion of sport, as evidence of its superiority – to a far greater extent than anyone in the West realised at the time. This was reflected in the final medals table. The USSR topped the table with 43 golds, 29 silver and 31 bronze medals, totalling 103: the USA came a poor second, considering its size and wealth, with 34 golds, 21 silver, and 16 bronze, totalling 71 medals. Surprisingly Italy was in third place; and Germany (still competing as one country) in fourth. Soviet gymnasts won 15 of 16 possible medals in women's gymnastics.

Nevertheless, there were some notable triumphs for the West. Wilma Rudolph a Black American (in those days we called them 'Negroes' and 'Negresses,' without apology) won three gold medals in sprint events on the track. Cassius Clay, later known as Muhammad Ali, won boxing's light-heavyweight gold medal. Australian athlete Herb Elliott won the men's 1500 metres. Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia won the marathon bare-footed to become the first black African Olympic champion. South Africa appeared in the Olympic arena for the last time under its apartheid regime. As for Great Britain, Peter Radford won a bronze medal 100 metres; but this was long before the glorious period of Coe and Ovett: it was a time when British runners, men like 'Puffing' Gordon Pirie and Yorkshireman Derek Ibbotson regularly 'lost' in middle distance races, to men with exotic foreign names, like Emil Zatopek.

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The Government changed the law with regard to betting. Prior to the Betting and Gaming Act of 1960, there were no betting shops and people who wanted to bet on horseracing had (theoretically) to go a racecourse and place a bet there. The practice of employing 'runners' to collect stakes from punters and take them to the bookmakers on the course, was illegal, though it must certainly have been widespread in Liverpool, to judge from the number of times boys at school referred to 'bookie's runners'. I always assumed this was in jest, and that 'bookie's runner' was a kind of insult, like calling someone a 'pimp' (also widespread at the grammar school); but perhaps some of the older boys did get involved in it (running for bookies, I mean, though some of them may also have become pimps after they left school).

The Act of Parliament legalised betting shops. There was a good deal of Puritanism still in Britain in 1960 and the government felt obliged to argue that the legalising of betting shops would take gambling off the streets and bring the profession of bookie's runner to an end. It may have done this; but on the other hand, the national addiction to betting vastly exceeded all predictions. After 1 May 1961 (when the Act came into force) betting shops opened at a rate of 100 a week. After six months there were already 10,000; and around 1,000 casinos were opened in the first five years. Betting became one of the most vibrant and profitable parts of the new British economy. My father thought that the change was a clear sign of moral decay. He shared the view of the old Puritans of Cromwell's time: that all betting and gambling was wrong. The difference was that whereas the seventeenth century Puritan believed that the individual who placed a bet was placing his fate in the hands of the pagan Goddess Dame Fortune, rather than in the hands of God – and gaming was therefore blasphemous – my father simply believed that it was frivolous and almost inevitably led to an increase in debt, marital discord, bankruptcy, ruin and moral turpitude.

Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* was being shown at *The Carlton* cinema in Tuebrook,<sup>3</sup> which I regularly went past on the number 12 bus into town. I did not see the film myself, but other boys did, probably illegally; and said it was the most frightening thing they had ever seen. I am not sure, in fact that I have ever seen it from beginning to end; but the scene where the girl in the shower is murdered with a knife by Norman Bates (played by Anthony Perkins) at The Bates Motel (12 cabins, 12 vacancies, and 12 showers) became legendary. There were however many competitors in the realms of horro. The horror comic was much in vogue; my pals and I used to swop stories from collections of horror stories which were published in paperback; and there were short films on the TV late at night about the bizarre as well as the horrific e.g. *One Step Beyond* and *The Twilight Zone*. From 1961 Alfred Hitchcock presented half hour TV versions of strange stories that he was associated with – *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to my sister and brother, each of whom point out that the name of the cinema was *The Carlton*. I had remembered it as *The Gaumont*.

## *Home*

It was around this time that I acquired a model railway. My first (which was a Christmas present) was a Triang; but then I progressed onto something bigger and better (Hornby?). Around this time, my parents decided to have the loft floored, so as to give me more room. My brother had more or less taken over our bedroom. There was no more room, and so my Uncle Harry, who had been a joiner, bought some planks and used his 'Welshman's screwdriver' (a hammer) to attach them to the rafters with long screws. He did the work mostly on his own; but my father, my brother and I helped a bit. Thereafter, I benefitted from a great deal more privacy; and for a period of about three years until we moved from Lisleholme to Sandfield Park. I could read up there, do my homework; and I also had a place for my model railway. It was my private space, and I had warning of anyone else's imminent approach by virtue of the fact that they had to climb a ladder to get up into the loft, and the ladder squeaked, a lot.

My friend Graham Jeffs used to come round and we would spend our time constructing and de-constructing the track rather than actually running the trains. It is better to travel than to arrive, and the business of making plans, thinking about how to implement them, and then actually building the new layout was somewhat more interesting than watching the trains progress around the still somewhat limited space available in the loft. Graham was a whiz at all this, and seemed to have inherited a knowledge of electricity and its mysteries from his father, who worked at Plessey's. For example, he showed me that if you connected the electric leads to your own tongue, or his, and turned the power on, the tongue would jerk in a very interesting fashion.

The loft was also the scene of other adventures. I started a fire up there one day in the waste paper basket. Fortunately, it never got out of control. And my brother, with his knowledge of chemical reactions, sometimes used the space as a laboratory, producing foul smells and plotting to produce poison gas, to be pumped down through the chimney-breast into the house next door, with the aim of killing 'the Weed', our obnoxious next door neighbour.<sup>4</sup>

Opposite Benky's (Benkie's?) field and on the Lisleholme side of Leyfield Road there was a farmhouse, inhabited by a woman called Mabel, who had a horse and cart and delivered milk. Much of the farmland had been sold as the site for Lisleholme, where we lived, and the milk must have come from elsewhere since there were no cows. Graham Jeffs's house backed onto Mabel's farm; and rats from

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<sup>4</sup> We all three now think we were excessively hard on The Weed. The poor man must have suffered from much private grief. He and his wife had a child which died when it was only a few weeks old. Weed was seen emerging from the house, cradling a tiny coffin and sitting in the funeral car, the coffin on his knee.

the outbuildings were a constant problem for grownups but a delight for Graham, who had a taste for killing things even as a boy, and was seldom squeamish. When the farmhouse itself was demolished, they needed the services of ratcatchers from miles around. More housing was then built on the site, some of it occupied by young men with fancy cars who seemed to be around the house during normal working hours. These were the new breed of players who signed for Liverpool Football Club under the new managership of Bill Shankly (from 1958-9), though the club was only promoted to the First Division in 1962. One of the players who lived round the corner from us was Chris Lawler (Liverpool F.C. 1960-75). This was a badge of pride worn by some of us at the time.

Liverpool in 1960 was 'the city of change and challenge', with a population of some 750,000, which included 50,000 men employed as dockers. It had three football teams, if you included Tranmere Rovers; but, to tell the truth, my knowledge of it was always very limited. I only ever became familiar with a few bits of West Derby (for example, the Village and later Sandfield Park), a few roads on the way from West Derby to Childwall, and a few streets 'in Town'. What knowledge I did have was based on certain well known bus journeys or trips around Liverpool by bicycle. Thus I knew the way to Philip Son & Nephew, the bookseller; to Hattons, the model railway shop; to 'Precision Engineering', which sold models and kits of various kinds, mostly of cars and railway engines, or aeroplanes; and later to Jimmy Soens's cycle shop in Lower Breck Road.

I also knew the way to *The Tatler* and *The News Theatre* in Town, where one could watch films on a Saturday. I remember going into one or the other, some time when I was at The Holt, with a friend. After half an hour, I became aware that on either side of us, there were men with raincoats over their knees; and that the raincoats had gradually started to cover our knees as well. Then, I thought I felt a hand on my knee. The pressure was very slight and the movement was very subtle, but repeated. I suggested to my friend that we should leave, and we did. He said the same thing had been happening to him, from the gent on the other side. We never discussed the matter further; and I never told anyone else; but I think this was probably an example of some kind of mild paedophilia at work, though it was decades before that problem or word was widely discussed or thought to be a widespread problem.

There was also a small cinema in West Derby Village, near *The Rookery*, which was the shop which belonged to the parents of my friend Duncan Woods. Here, there were *matinées* on a Saturday attended by the local youth. This was another 'interesting' experience. There were no adults in attendance, or so few that they were totally unable to exercise any control over the Graham Balfours who led the charge, or rather ran riot. The noise and the catcalling (and worse) was quite amazing to me; but my brother seemed to think it was all good fun, possibly because he knew some of the malefactors. I think I was a bit frightened, of authority and of getting into trouble. On one occasion the noise got so bad that the manager stopped

the show, came out, read the Riot Act and retreated into the gloom, whereupon the din recommenced immediately.

There was a pub in Town called *The Legs of Man*. This is associated in my mind the dreaded 'Isle of Man Boat' from Liverpool to Douglas, which provided passengers with a convenient way of getting to the Isle, provided that you had a taste for adventure and a strong stomach. Having said that, I only went there once myself, many years later (for a wedding) and the passage was calm and trouble free.

I cannot claim to be any sort of seaman, just because I came from Liverpool. In my day, there were still many boys who would say that they wanted to join the Merchant Navy, when asked what career they had in mind; and Alexei Sayle has a wonderful joke about a Liverpoolian who spent 'forty years before the mast on the Valparaiso run'; but I never shared these ambitions.

My father's elder sister, Aunt 'Peg', was regarded as the eccentric of the family. In fact my mother, who had evidently never liked her, thought she was mad. Peg's eccentricity manifested itself, so far as I was concerned, when she took to signing herself *Tante Marguerite* in her letters, and threatened to write a book entitled *Histoire des Familles Cooper et Thomas*. Her madness was demonstrated when she started to study Russian at nightschool, which she did at The Holt, being taught by one of my French teachers, 'Johnny' (or 'Ratty') Rhoden. What might have been seen by others as an admirable thirst for knowledge was portrayed by mother, to her friends, as a sign of insanity, and accepted by them as such. My father's attitude was more kindly. I think he felt sorry for Peg, because her home life was not, perhaps, a happy one. Nevertheless he did think she was a little strange and had little time for her passion for family history.

Peg became intensely interested in this long before others did. Unfortunately, my parents' indifference meant that the version of our family history which came down to me was somewhat confused, especially since her approach to research was erratic. (Her motive included the chance to meet long-lost cousins in person; and I fear that not all of them welcomed her arrival on their doorsteps as warmly as she had hoped).

There was a story that all elder male children in the Cooper family had been called Ashley, like my older brother and my father. This turned out to be totally untrue: there was no-one else in the family of that name. Then, the use of 'Ashley' was supposed to indicate descent from the Ashley Coopers, Earls of Shaftesbury (in particular the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl, who was a philanthropist and factory reformer in the nineteenth century, and before him the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl, who was one of Charles II's Ministers, and later a leading Whig). Well, I researched the family tree once and got back to a John Cooper, my great-great-great grandfather; but he was a haberdasher in Tring in the 1840s. No blue blood there.

There was a suggestion that the descent from the Earls of Shaftesbury might have been 'on the wrong side of the blanket' – a coy phrase much in use before illegitimacy became respectable. Peg's evidence for this scandalous suggestion was that there was a miniature, handed down in the family, which I have in front of me

now. It shows a Victorian gentleman, dressed in somewhat foppish style, with a nose which might be said to be a Cooperish nose, and a lock of hair preserved in the back of the case. This miniature is a nice object – it was valued by Boodle and Dunthorne, of Liverpool, in the 1960s and found to be of the right period; but there is no evidence that it ever belonged to the Shaftesburys. My Aunt Peg said she had visited the home of the Shaftesburys, and they had a wall where a number of miniatures were hanging, and there was one missing; but I am afraid that an air of mystery still surrounds this story. As far as I can see, the ancestral home of the Shaftesburys is St Giles's House, Wimborne in Dorset and this is not generally open to the public, though for all I know, it may have been in the 1960s.

The claims to noble, or at any rate gentle, descent, on the Thomas side of the family were if anything even more extravagant. Peg's mother, my 'Nana', was Margaret Thomas, originally from Knutsford. Her mother – my great-grandmother, Eliza Jane Thomas – was born Eliza Jane Massey. The story was that she used to 'bring home her earnings from working in the fields', to her father Francis Massey 'to help pay for the lawsuit'. I suppose this was in the 1870s or '80s, since Nana was born circa 1886. So what was this lawsuit about?

The Masseys had a considerable history in the County of Cheshire. Our Nana apparently always said that her Masseys came from Dunham Massey, while Cousin Fred said that in Cheshire 'there were as many asses as Masseys;' and Eliza Jane Thomas used to say that 'by rights she should have been able to ride in her own carriage round Knutsford'. In its fully developed form, the myth was that some young Massey squire had fathered a child on a young girl of peasant stock, giving rise to our poverty-stricken (but honest) side of the Massey family; but that Francis Massey knew the truth of the matter and sent Eliza Jane to collect 'hush-money' from the big house (was it Dunham Massey Hall, or Tatton Park?) But that tale is incompatible with the idea, also current, that 'if we had our rights, we would be lords of Dunham Massey/Tatton Park', because illegitimate children had no right to inherit property on an intestacy until very recently. Perhaps I am trying to inject an element of logic here, where it really does not belong.

There remains, however, one piece of intriguing evidence, though it is difficult to say what it is evidence of. During her heroic but unsung researches, conducted during the early 1960s when no-one else was interested, Aunt Peg came into possession of a document; and I find that I have this now too. It is a petition filed by Charles Massey, said to be my great-great-grandfather's uncle, perhaps with the House of Lords; and it asks in the most moving but hopeless terms, for justice to be done, at long last.

The petition is dated at London, 19 December 1816. It claims ownership of some property or other on the basis that it is theirs by right although the Masseys have always paid a rent of £2/5s/- for it. Reference is made to a John Massey, who originally made this claim in 1781, when he put a plate on the pew door at Hollingsgreen(?) Chapel in the township of Brixton in the parish of Warrington. It is said that the Masseys were at some date deprived of their estate by the Tempest

family. Since then the Tempests have paid the Crown the sum in question, but in the name of the Masseys.

The Petition has clearly been drafted by a litigant in person, and does not make much sense; but Charles Massey clearly felt that there had been some skulduggery on the part of the foul Tempests; and there is a tone of outraged innocence which appeals to me, even after 200 years:

*Since your petitioner started a lawsuit against Stephen Tempest, some persons have taken down the monument out of their chapel in Warrington church in order that their family may not be traced and also taken their names out of the Register.*

*So my lords the question that your petitioner humbly prays to put before your lordships is ? have not Government always considered that Masseys was the family that enjoyed the property and my lords does it not ? that Masseys are still the holders of the property... Your petitioner still lives in hope... you will allow your petitioner to be entitled to the premises and the others the unlawful intruders keeping them by tyranny ...*

I have to say that, when presented with the evidence that there might be something in the ancestral claim to the Massey inheritance, my father wisely took the line that the kindly and wise John Jarndyce had taken towards the far more famous lawsuit of Jarndyce v Jarndyce – *Suffer any wrong that can be done you rather than come [to the court of Chancery]*. Litigation was likely to end in bankruptcy, madness and worse. Dickens had had good reasons for writing *Bleak House*; and my father was undoubtedly right; but I retain a certain curiosity to know more.

Aunt Peg's historical researches must have occupied several years; but 1960 is a suitable year to relate them to because that was the year when Gerald Vernon Massey 'the last of the Masseys' (or of those we were concerned with), was killed. He was the son of Frederick and Elsie Massey of 260 Lovely Lane, Warrington; and, according to a family tree prepared by Aunt Peg and sent to me in the late 1970s, Frederick Massey was descended from Sir William Massey of Tatton, who died in 1272; and, more recently, he was a nephew of that Eliza Jane Massey who was my great grandmother.

Gerald was educated at Warrington and attended St Barnabas's school, Bewsey Boys' school and Boteler Grammar School. He went to the University of Nottingham, where he read Physics. He served with the RAF between 1945 and 1948. His squadron leader gave him a reference saying he had 'given the fullest satisfaction' and was 'an extremely intelligent type'. He played an active part in Station affairs, sports, recreation etc. He joined the UK Atomic Energy Authority in 1951 and at first worked at Culceth. He was sent to work in Dounreay in September 1956, and promoted to Senior Experimental Officer. Clearly an 'all-rounder', he remained a mountaineer, astronomer, poet, actor and sportsman. Also he enjoyed public speaking – after he died, his parents gave a plaque to encourage skill and efficiency in the art.



The *Culceth Chronicle* reported that Gerald Vernon Massey 'fell to his death from the slopes of Ben Hope, Sutherland', on 7 February 1960, aged 33. An article was published in the *Pincerna Magazine* of the Boteler School vol. VI no 7 July 1960 which adds that he 'plunged over a precipice while glissading on the slopes of Ben Hope' and that there was a funeral service at Bold Street Methodist Church. A service of remembrance was held in the Congregational Church, Thurso, on 19 February 1960. His parents published a commemorative booklet from which the above information is taken. It also contained several poems by him, including *The Song of the Neutron*. Another, entitled *In Memoriam* and beginning with the line 'Fight, Magyar, fight...' clearly commemorated the Hungarian Uprising of 1956.

Everyone clearly thought that Gerry was a very fine chap, and there was plenty of evidence to confirm this – he was the recipient of the Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society's bronze medal and certificate for rescuing a boy from Sankey Brook in December 1943; but he never married. I quote from the commemorative booklet:

*Mr Massey was interested in drama, cricket, swimming and badminton, and had been on mountain climbing expeditions in Eire, France, Spain and Norway in which latter country he was awarded a badge for climbing the highest mountain there. Galdhøpiggen (2469 metres)...*

*At grammar school he formed a close friendship with Dr Keith Warburton, another Warrington man, who vanished last year (1959) with members of an expedition he was leading in the Himalayas. The two had often climbed together on mountains in North Wales, Scotland and the Lake District. When Dr Warburton married in 1958, Mr Massey was his best man.*

And finally, there is this pathetic sentence:

*He was evidently also interested in family history.*

So it looks as if Charles Massey's Petition of 1816, which I inherited from Aunt Peg, had originally been Gerald's; and that it came to her in 1960, via Gerald's father. The tradition here is that, when Gerald was killed, Fred had no further use for the Petition, or for it, or for a number of other documents which Gerald had collected, and therefore gave the entirety to Peg, remarking that she might as well have the papers because they were 'a lot of old rubbish'.

*School*

My school report for Summer 1960:

*Form II A J. Rhoden form master*

*Height 4 ft 11 ½; Weight 6 st 3lbs*

*1 minus overall*

[1s in all 'academic' subjects]

How strange and modern the new date had seemed in January 1960, when you wrote it at down at the start of each exercise: almost like a piece of science fiction; and at first, you had to make a conscious effort to remember that it was 1960 now, not some date in the 1950s; but after a week or two, you started to write it with confidence; and soon enough 1961 takes over from 1960.

I got my 250 yards swimming certificate in 1960; and it must have been that year that my brother took GCE (General Certificate of Education) 'O' level, winning the Treeby Memorial prize for the best performance. I always felt an obligation to live up to what he had achieved, and was regularly reminded of it by teachers, like 'Dickie' Barton, Ecce Lowe and Albert Wilson. Ashley's performance was no fluke. He was very bright, excelling in all subjects except P.E.; and he had been Junior chess champion of Liverpool, something which I knew I could never emulate. I didn't have either the brain or the killer instinct for chess – or for that matter for Maths.

In the second year, we started Latin, and the Latin master, Albert Wilson, was one of the most intelligent and interesting men I have ever met. There were many stories about him. It was said that, since he could teach anything to anybody, he had been employed during the War in teaching recruits to operate radio sets, something which he knew nothing about but which he mastered in no time. His technique, with Latin, at least to begin with, was to walk around the classroom, talking the language as he went. So, he would say 'ambulo' [I walk] as he walked, then 'sedeo' [I sit] when he sat down. Then he would point to a boy and address him, saying 'sedes' [you are sitting] then, still talking to the same boy, he would point to another boy and say 'sedet' [he is sitting]; and so on. It seemed to work a treat with young and impressionable minds, thirsty for knowledge, which I suppose most of us in 2A were.

We certainly learned all about grammar through the vehicle of Latin. I think we also learned about English grammar in English lessons, but not in the same depth as we learned about it in Latin. Conjugation, declension, ablative absolute, the gerund. Albert took us for Latin pretty much all the way through to 'O' level and I cannot remember that there were many boys who rejected it on the grounds of it being a 'dead' language or 'irrelevant'. He made it come alive, and of course there were many bloodthirsty episodes from Caesar's Gallic Wars, especially about his invasion of Britain, to keep us interested.

Having said that, Albert was a strict disciplinarian, and had perfected a technique for maintaining control, which consisted of instilling a high degree of terror into us all at the outset – for example by shouting at those guilty of minor

misdemeanours 'Have you ever had a thrashing?' Albert must have been a consummate actor, because we truly believed that he was a very fierce, as well as a highly intelligent, man, who would think nothing of sending us to the Headmaster for a 'thrashing' (which we had no doubt would be inflicted), whereas – as I learned in later years – he was actually the most charming of men, and the Headmaster no sadistic torturer either.

I was never threatened with a thrashing; but on one occasion when my homework was not up to standard, and Albert had covered it with red ink, he simply asked me in a severe tone 'Has your brother seen this work?' The disapproval (and the comparison) contained in the remark, and the fear that he might report what had happened to my brother, if I didn't, was enough to ensure a marked and immediate improvement, which I took good care to maintain thereafter.

My brother and I sometimes rode to school on our bikes, though never together I think. I remember being very worried about him, especially one day when we learned that a boy had been killed when he got his wheel stuck in a tramline in the centre of Liverpool. My brother explained that I need not worry, because he did not ride the same kind of bike as the unfortunate deceased must have ridden. That bike must have been a 'racer' with very thin wheels. His bike was a roadster, with comparatively thick wheel and tyres, which could not possibly get stuck in a tramline.

My friends and I were starting to take an interest in things which were to be seen at the bus stop, or from the 61 bus on the way to school. There was a very attractive young woman who walked past, taking her children to the primary school. When we started to notice her – probably not in 1960 but certainly by 1963 – we called her the 'yummy Mummy'. There was a man who walked past on the other side of the road, with his head leaning backwards at an extreme angle. My friend Chris liked to imitate his strange way of walking, but by good fortune his imitation did not come to the man's attention, except on one occasion when we escaped. Coming back from school, where we got on the bus at Childwall Fiveways, there a schoolgirl who wore very short skirts (before it became fashionable), and whom we called 'Chiselly', because (I think) of the shape of her jaw. Her suspenders made a deep impression on us all.

### *Holidays*

We had a couple of holidays at Easter time, staying in a farmhouse in Eaton Bishop, near Hereford. We saw Tintern Abbey, the Hereford World Map – the *Mappa Mundi* - and toured the Wye Valley, including Symonds' Yat.

My parents loved Eaton Bishop because it was so quiet, rural and crime-free, in comparison with Liverpool. The house where we stayed was directly opposite the parish church, which had a grill over the wooden door. My father

noticed this and remarked to our hostess Mrs Powell that it was such a pity that it was necessary to protect the church against thieves and vandals, even in such a peaceful country village; but she explained that the grill was there to protect the door against woodpeckers, not people.

Teddy Boys were already become a problem in Liverpool. My father asked Mrs Powell if they had any in their part of the world and was amused when she replied: 'I think there be one in 'ereford.'

In the summer, we went to Newquay, on the North Coast of Cornwall for our two week holiday. Or rather I think that we stayed in St Columb Minor (not to be confused with St Column Major or St Columb Road), in a house and a village that were a few miles from Newquay. In those days, a trip to Cornwall seemed like a real expedition, in terms of the time it took to get there by car. There were no motorways down to the South-West; but the Exeter bypass was already to be dreaded, and avoided if at all possible, by taking the minor road through Okehampton, I think we allowed about 12 hours for the trip, setting off at a very early hour in the morning, with my brother navigating and my father driving, which left Mum, me and my sister on the back seat, and (in the case of my sister and I) free to tease the unfortunates who happened to be driving behind us with silly faces and private jokes. There were various exotic places to be negotiated along the way – Indian Queens being one, Jamaica Inn another.

The North Coast of Cornwall is rocky and notorious for its wrecks and vast beaches and its Atlantic surf. I regarded Cornwall as infinitely superior to the places we had visited in Wales for years; but I have only hazy memories of this holiday. One incident, however occurred at Bedruthan Steps, a spectacular series of rocks set A little way off from the main cliffs, on the beach, which become inundated with water at a trot to get down to the beach by the steep coastal path, to admire the Steps close-up. This seemed such an obvious thing to do that we either didn't see the warning signs at the top of the cliff, or we decided that they couldn't apply to us. We dashed down the cliff path, which did not seem particularly dangerous to us, and got down to the beach; but nobody followed, at least not very quickly, so we went back up, to find an unusually irate Dad, scolding us for having made the descent without permission, indeed in plain contradiction of the clear written warning that visitors must not use that cliff path at all, since it was highly dangerous. We were chastened; but I don't think that either of us could really figure out what the fuss was all about.

In Affectionate Remembrance  
of our Dear Son



Gerald Vernon Massey

Who met his death whilst climbing  
on Ben Hope, Sutherland, on the  
7th February, 1960, age 33 years.

Dedicated to his memory by his  
Father and Mother

260 LOVELY LANE  
WARRINGTON  
LANCS.

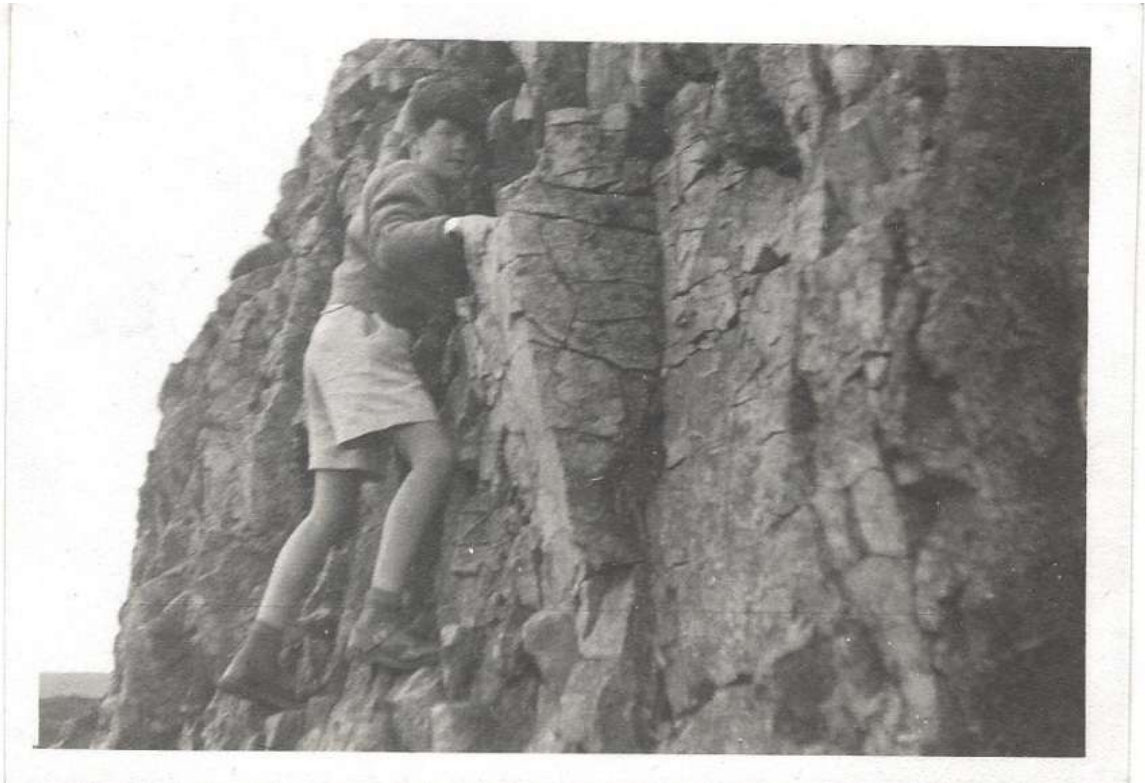
The flower which Gerald Massey was wearing suggests that the photograph was taken at the wedding of his friend, Keith Warburton, in 1958 (see below).



Martin's Croft – the house where we stayed in Eaton Bishop



The Church in Eaton Bishop, which was under attack from woodpeckers



There was a place near Buxton where we went for picnics on a Sunday; and where I could climb some rocks in safety. Nonetheless, this picture is a bit of a cheat, since my feet are probably only around 4 feet off the ground.

# Chapter 9

## 1961 Runaway

*Pop Music*

*As I walk along,  
I wonder,  
I wa wa wa wa wonder.  
What went wrong  
With our love,  
A love that was so strong?*

Del Shannon	<i>Runaway</i>
Johnny Tillotson	<i>Poetry in Motion</i>
Elvis Presley	<i>Are You Lonesome Tonight?</i>
The Everly Brothers	<i>Walk Right Back</i>
Elvis Presley	<i>Wooden Heart</i>
The Temperance Seven	<i>You're Driving Me Crazy</i>
The Marcels	<i>Blue Moon</i>
Elvis Presley	<i>Surrender</i>
Helen Shapiro	<i>You Don't Know</i>
John Leyton	<i>Johnny Remember Me</i>
The Highwaymen	<i>Michael (Row the Boat)</i>
Helen Shapiro	<i>Walkin' Back to Happiness</i>
Elvis Presley	<i>His Latest Flame</i>
Frankie Vaughan	<i>Tower of Strength</i>
Bobby Vee	<i>Take Good Care of My Baby</i>
Danny Williams	<i>Moon River</i>

Four records by Elvis Presley!

In general, lyrics were coy or mysterious; but this was not true of Bobby Darin's *Multiplication*. It was all too obvious what this song was about:



*Multiplication  
That's the name of the game!  
And each generation...  
They play the same.*

### *The World*

Goya's portrait of The Duke of Wellington was acquired for the nation and almost immediately stolen from the National Gallery by a disabled pensioner, as a protest. Following the theft, a government enquiry examined how the burglary had taken place; and this led to widespread improvements to the security of public buildings. The thief was in fact a very ordinary man called Kempton Bunton, who started to send notes, demanding that the sum of £140,000 be paid to charity. He announced 'My sole object in all this was to set up a charity to buy TV licences for old and poor people who seem to be neglected in an affluent society.' (It was eventually revealed that he had served time in prison after repeatedly refusing to pay the TV licence fee).

Over the years a number of notes were received, leading to intense speculation in the Press and various attempts to secure the painting's release; but the missing Goya remained in Bunton's hands until he eventually gave himself up in July 1965. He was then charged on five counts: larceny of the picture and the frame; demanding money from Lord Robbins (chairman of the Trustees of the National Gallery) with menaces; demanding money with menaces from the editor of the *Daily Mirror*; and causing a nuisance to the public. His QC argued that the offence of 'larceny' needed proof of a intent to sell or keep the work, and neither had been proved: Bunton had merely 'borrowed' the painting. However, although he was acquitted on the other four charges, Bunton was convicted of stealing the frame, and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. This led to the inclusion of a specific section in the Theft Act of 1968, making it illegal to 'remove without authority any object displayed or kept for display to the public in a building to which the public have access'. Throughout the period 1961-5, the Goya featured regularly in the Giles cartoon books which we pored over at Christmas time. There was no specific reference to it: the painting was simply drawn in part of the cartoon, perhaps protruding from behind a door in the living room, while Granma, Auntie Vera and the rest went about their business.

The Cold War was hotting up. In April 1961, Cuban exiles, with some backing from the United States, tried unsuccessfully to invade Cuba. This was an ignominious outcome for President Kennedy, who had just launched the Peace Corps. In August 1961 the East German authorities constructed an ugly concrete wall to divide East from West Berlin, because so many people were escaping to the West, despite the fact that they could be shot if caught in the act. As is well known, the Wall remained in place until 1989 and it seemed (to most people in the West) to

be living proof that the East was no sort of Paradise, if the Communists had to try so hard to keep their people from voting, even with their feet.

Sierra Leone, Tanganyika and British Cameroons become independent; South Africa left the Commonwealth. The Russians launched the First Man into Space – Yuri Gagarin, who visited Britain in July, three months after his flight in the spaceship *Vostok*. He landed at Manchester airport and was acclaimed by vast enthusiastic crowds wherever he went. The scale of the welcome caught the authorities by surprise, because the visit had originally been conceived as a trade-union sponsored tour. It seemed as if the Russians were going to take over Space as well as the World! Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had threatened to ‘bury’ us; and it seemed increasingly possible that he had the means to do so. Gagarin’s flight demonstrated that the Russians had more accurate and more powerful rockets than we did. The Russians seemed to get everything right, in terms of space exploration, while the Americans repeatedly made the most disastrous mistakes. The Russians sent up rocket after rocket, always achieving something new, while the Americans had a succession of flops and disasters (only redeeming the position when they put the first man on the Moon in 1969). I remember a Giles cartoon which showed two Russian holidaymakers sunbathing on the Moon, and watching the Earth through binoculars. They catch sight of the latest American rocket, taking off from Cape Canaveral (later renamed Cape Kennedy), describing a short arc across the Caribbean and plunging back down into the sea, and make some caustic remark, as they sink back into their deckchairs.

But my father shrewdly pointed out that America was a free society and the USSR was not. Whereas the Americans gave wide publicity to everything they did – showing most things live on TV, so that you knew about their failures as well as their successes – the Russians only told you what they wanted you to hear. He was proved right, several years after his death, when we learned more about the Soviet record in space, during Gorbachev’s *Glasnost* years, and when the Soviet Union fell apart and the archives were opened in 1991. It turned out that the Russians had had numerous failures themselves in space (including catastrophic loss of life) but they had never told anyone at the time, not even their domestic public.

In London Special Branch officers arrested five people, all of whom were part of the ‘Portland Spy Ring’. One of the five was Gordon Lonsdale. He turned out to be a Russian, with a naval background. He was tried, along with Ethel Gee and the others. Still refusing to reveal his real identity, Lonsdale was sentenced to 25 years in jail in March 1961. He was taken to Winson Green Prison, Birmingham, where he was said to have fraternised with some of the Great Train Robbers. On 22 April 1964 he was exchanged for Greville Wynne, a British businessman apprehended and convicted in Moscow for his contacts with Oleg Penkovsky. As part of the process, the Soviets admitted that Lonsdale was a spy and gave the British his real name, which was Konon Molody.

My father was always in favour of the death penalty. He claimed he would have been prepared to do the job himself, if they ever ran short of hangmen. I can't see that he would have done that; but he was quite vehement on the subject. Among the last executions in Britain was that of James Hanratty (on 4 April 1962 in Bedford Prison). Hanratty was a professional car thief, convicted of the murder of Michael Gregsten at Deadman's Hill on the A6, near the village of Clophill in Bedfordshire, on 23 August 1961. Gregsten's companion Valerie Storie was raped and shot at the same time. She survived but testified at the trial, despite being paralysed by her injuries.

What made Hanratty special was that his guilt was hotly disputed, and over a period of many years. The case for a pardon was pursued by his family as well as by opponents of capital punishment and in particular by Paul Foot (1937-2004), an industrious journalist and controversialist, who wrote a book on the subject entitled *Who Killed Hanratty?* The case was eventually referred back to the Court of Appeal in 2002, which decided (partly on the basis of newly-available DNA evidence) that Hanratty's guilt had been established beyond reasonable doubt. Paul Foot and some other campaigners continued to believe in his innocence and argued that the DNA evidence could have been contaminated.

*Home*

MAD magazine, whose editor was Alfred E. Neuman (motto – *What me, worry?*) was a favourite in our house, at least with my sister and I. My sister was very adept at reciting long passages from it by heart, particularly one about 'the amazing average clod', which was full of unkind remarks about the unintelligent (American) masses. There was also a routine, which delighted my father, about the need to set off on holiday before other people did

*Let's go, let's go, let's go before the crowds go!*

**1961**, according to *Mad Magazine*, was the first reversible date for many centuries: it read the same way if looked at in the mirror, and you could even turn it upside down and it was still 1961. This fascinated the more intelligent boys at The Holt.

D.H.Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (popularly known as 'Lady C') made an impact in our house, just as it did throughout the whole country; but only in an indirect fashion. The full unexpurgated edition of the novel had been published by Penguin Books in Britain in 1960. The publishers were then tried under the new Obscene Publications Act of 1959, which made it possible for publishers to escape conviction if they could show that a work was of literary merit. One of the objections was to the frequent use of the word 'fuck', another to the use of what is still usually referred to 'the C word'. Various academic critics and experts, including E. M.

Forster, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Norman St John-Stevás [d. 2012], were called as witnesses, and the verdict, delivered on 2 November 1960, was 'not guilty'. The prosecution was ridiculed for being out of touch with the changes in society, when the chief prosecutor, Mervyn Griffith-Jones, asked the jury if this was 'the kind of book you would wish your wife or servants to read'. On the back of the acquittal, the Penguin second edition was published in 1961; and from that time on, at least in the eyes of conservatives, the floodgates were open.

There were certainly boys who read it at The Holt; but Dad would not have it in the house. So far as he was concerned, it had always been 'filth' and filth it would remain. He also muttered darkly that D.H.Lawrence 'understood nothing about women' (I have no idea what he meant by that); and he also predicted (correctly) that the day would now come when a so-called artist would urinate or defecate on the floor and call the product 'art'. It struck me as odd that Dad's views on modern art coincided pretty much with those of Nikita Khrushchev. There was a story that Mr K had toured an art gallery in Moscow and denounced the deviations that he found there, from Socialist Realism, as 'dog muck'.

One of Dad's jokes:

*Before becoming President of South Korea, Syngman Rhee was for many years foreign correspondent for Life magazine, dividing his time between their New York and Seoul. One day, he left New York for a routine trip to Seoul, but, when they didn't hear from him for a while, the New York office became concerned and called the Seoul office. The Seoul office confirmed that he had arrived as scheduled but had left almost immediately for North Korea. They quoted him as saying that he was not at liberty to say where he could be reached there; but would be doing a story on how 'the other half' lived, having promised to cable it to Seoul and New York on completion.*

*The New York office was still worried and decided to send a correspondent to try to find him. This man travelled to Seoul, where they had had an update: Syngman Rhee had called in a half hour earlier to say that his story would concern interviews with a taxi driver, a tailor, and a restaurant manager, all in Pyongyang. But he still declined to supply a contact address.*

*So the reporter decided to go to Pyongyang to track him down. At Pyongyang airport he took a taxi into town, and although the taxi driver was not the one interviewed by Rhee, he knew the driver who had been, and he gave the reporter his name. When the reporter talked to the right driver, the latter said that Rhee had planned to interview a tailor in a district known for its many tailors.*

*Again luck was on the correspondent's side: out of 3,518 tailors, he only had to talk to 17 before finding the one who had been interviewed by Rhee: the latter said Rhee had told him that he intended to talk to a restaurant manager located in another suburb of Pyongyang. Acting on a hunch that the suburb would be the last one on the commuter train line, our*

*intrepid correspondent took the train for the northern suburbs and got off at the last stop. He interviewed a restaurant manager there without success, so he returned to Pyongyang Central Station and took a train to the northeast, getting off at the last stop. In this way he worked his way around, taking trains to the east, then southeast, and again luck was with him. He did not have to get half way around the circuit before arriving at the last town on a line running southeast of Pyongyang, where he talked to the manager of one of the town's only two restaurants. The manager confirmed that Syngman Rhee had gone to the other one for his interview.*

*Arriving there, the correspondent talked to the manager, who said that Rhee had just interviewed him and was now in the kitchen talking to the staff. The reporter went into the kitchen, and there was Syngman Rhee, fit and well, and sipping a cup of tea with the staff with his notebook on his knee. The correspondent said,*

*Ah, sweet Mr. Rhee of Life, at last I've found you!*<sup>5</sup>

But what was the 'sweet mystery of life' that the joke turned upon? The phrase was used in a song in a film made in 1935 - *Naughty Marietta*; and again in Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (1974), starring Gene Wilder.

Even at the time of Dad's joke about the President of South Korea, I was intrigued by the meaning of the phrase. 'Sweet mystery of life' has such a ring to it. I had become aware that my parents had a relationship, closely related to parenthood, but not entirely the same. It was, I am sure, a very deep and loving relationship. They had after all been through a lot together – with the war beginning two weeks after they got married. And there must have been years when it seemed possible, even likely, that the country would be invaded and overrun. Dad spoke of their having avoided 'a hundred years of tyranny'.

And then there was the decision to postpone having children until they knew the war was being won; but also the mysterious lost baby of 1943. This was one of those things my mother told me about, much later after Dad died, but even then, I never got the whole of a story, only snatches which I pieced together, probably inaccurately. There had been a quarrel of some kind, during the War, between Mum and Dad and a couple with whom they had been best friends. In some way, this was connected with a miscarriage which Mum had had before my brother was born – the 'lost baby.' And there was the mysterious lawsuit, which may or may not have been connected. The landlord tried to evict them but the case was declared a non-suit, because tenancies were given some kind of legal protection for the duration of hostilities. (All tenancies? In that case, why did the landlord even try?....)

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<sup>5</sup> Note: these events took place before the Korean war of 1950-53; Rhee was president of South Korea between 1948 and 1960

My parents didn't quarrel much; but there were tensions. In later years this seemed to revolve around the questions of blood pressure and the state of Dad's heart.

Mum – *don't get excited, it's not good for you.*

Dad – *I'm not excited. You're the one who's excited. You ought to calm down.*

Mum - *No – I'm only getting excited because you're excited.*

And so on; but the argument never lasted long.

When I was a child, there was a curious 'transporter' which was the only method of crossing the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal between Widnes and Runcorn in Cheshire. You had to drive your car onto the transporter, which was essentially a large platform which then swung across the river on chains suspended from a metal structure above. It had been in place since 1905, and by the 1960s was regarded as a curiosity; but there had long been plans to replace it with a modern bridge. Work on the new bridge began in 1956 and it was opened in 1961, by Princess Alexandra. It seemed enormous, and it was a great adventure to drive across it for the first time. In those days, I used to dream a lot, and on one occasion I dreamed that the new bridge was faced with a terrible catastrophe. (I had probably been reading about the Tay Bridge disaster of 1879, or seen that film of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in the USA, swaying and then collapsing spectacularly into the river below, in 1940). When my mother woke me, to ask if I wanted breakfast, I asked her in a confused way 'How is that going to save the new bridge?' Not that my mother had very clear ideas about the Runcorn bridge herself: when we approached it from the Widnes side for the first time in the car, she thought we were going to have to drive right over the top of the arch, from which the bridge was suspended. (Mechanics was not one of her strengths).

I don't say that this was connected with the unsafe character of the river crossing at Runcorn; but we often went into Wales on a Sunday, rather than Cheshire. It was near enough to be easy to visit, and far enough to make the trip worthwhile; but my father had little time for the idea that the Welsh were in any way oppressed, or deserved some measure of Home Rule, let alone independence. Indeed, I recall quite a lot of anti-Welsh prejudice, though possibly expressed in jest. I think this was born of a dislike of Welsh smugness about their exceptionality: the Welsh insistence that certain counties remain 'dry' on a Sunday; the idea that in the Welsh language the Welsh people had something unique and superior; the Welsh resentment at England's taking 'their' water (Lake Vyrnwy being the main reservoir for Liverpool); and the fact that Huw Wheldon (who presented certain Welsh programmes on TV) was so smug. Dad thought the Welsh ought to be grateful for the money the English brought into their economy. He also suggested that many Welsh people did not really speak Welsh, and only did so when the English were present, so that they could exclude us, and in some cases insult us, to our faces but

also behind our backs. At the time I thought this was a ludicrously paranoid suggestion; but a Welsh-speaking friend of mine informed me quite recently that the suspicion is well founded.

We went to Wales very often, but we never went to other Celtic countries, unless you count Cornwall – so that means we never went to the Isle of Man, Scotland or any part of Ireland. This did not prevent my father from being pretty anti-Irish, too, based (I think) on the fact that Eire had remained neutral during the Second World War; and that we had an Irish G.P., Jim Murray. Not that my father disliked Jim; but Jim had assured him that when he was growing up in De Valera's Free State, they were all 'taught to spit on the British flag'.

We visited my grandmother – my father's mother – on a Wednesday afternoon. She lived at 3 Hillingdon Road, about 3 miles away from where we did. She was a widow, her husband having been killed in the First World War, when my father was only three years old. She lived with my father's younger sister Aunt Anne, who had never married (having been 'jilted' by her fiancé during or shortly after the Second World War). My mother like Aunt Anne, who was kindly and mild, unlike our other paternal Aunt, Peg, whom I have already described. Mum thought that Aunt Anne was 'put upon' – and treated like a little girl by Nana. For example, she was allowed a glass of sherry at Christmas, but if she asked for another, Nana would counsel against it: you couldn't want more, after 'all that wine'. Mum also thought that the wrong sister had got married, because Peg was not in the least maternal, whereas Anne was. I think this was a strange and unjust verdict; but you don't question your parent's ruling on such matters when you are 12 and 13.

Visiting my grandmother, I have to say, was a duty rather than a pleasure. I can't remember having any kind of relationship with her. We were looked at rather than played with or spoken to. The visits consisted of being mildly bored while our parents conversed with Nana, though we perhaps had to reply to a question now and again. Sometimes we were allowed to venture into the garden, but there was nothing much there. The highlight was when we were allowed to see the cobbler who worked in a workshop in Nana's garage. He seemed like a throwback to Dickensian times - a little old man, with a smile on his face and a last in his hand, hammering in the nails which he stored in his mouth. I never knew why he had taken up possession of Nana's garage, which was in an overwhelmingly suburban area. I suppose the rent was very low.

We had few pets. We never had a dog or a cat; and I certainly grew up with a fear of dogs as a result. Even now, I don't trust them and don't know how to handle them. We had a rabbit when we were younger, and more than one tortoise, which seldom survived the winter. We had two budgerigars, both called Mickie. The first we inherited, I think from Mrs Binns the music teacher, or from an acquaintance of hers. The second budgie was new; but soon flew into a door and lost an eye. We also had a number of goldfish. Doesn't exactly sound like a family of animal-lovers, does it?

We used to go places on a Sunday as a family - Delamere Forest; Buxton; the Trough of Bowland; Speke Hall; Little Moreton Hall; Stokesay Castle; Chirk; Cholmondely (pronounced Chumley); Lyme Park; Chatsworth. You will see that there is a good number of ancient monuments and 'stately homes' here. My father was, I think, a highly cultured man, though he never went to University, and he wanted us to share his interest in the English heritage. I think some of this rubbed off on us – I can remember the quality of the wood carving by Grinling Gibbons at Chatsworth and the *trompe l'oeil* violin, hanging in a long gallery there; but I also remember the games and the messing about, which he bore with patience.

*School*

*School report, Summer term 1961*

*FORM III A - J. Rhoden, form master*

*5 ft 2 ¼ ins; 7 st 13 ½ lbs*

*Overall mark I minus*

There was one distinctly lukewarm comment, from the younger of the two gym masters, for P.E.

Always tries hard but is somewhat below standard in his athletics.

This was untrue, mainly because I did not always try very hard, or at all, because I didn't regard P.E. as a proper subject and didn't see why it was compulsory and didn't see why we should be required to try hard. There, I've finally got that off my chest.

I didn't much like 'Chalky' White. It didn't seem right to me that someone who was rather good at games and sports should have the status of a teacher at a grammar school, the purpose of which was to teach proper things like Latin and Chemistry. The idea of *mens sana in corpore sano* may have been part of the public school ethos - and I can see now why it was a good idea - but I believed in meritocracy and I didn't see why the sort of things we did in the gym or on the playing field had any importance. (In addition, my arms were always weak, and I have never been able to do anything that requires great strength in the upper body, like throwing stones, or moving old washing-machines).

However, it has to be said that the word 'meritocracy' would not have meant anything to me in 1961. It had been coined by Michael Young (1915-2002) in his book, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, of 1958 and it was certainly in the air; but that



wouldn't have been the sort of book that I would have read before the sixth form, when 'Current Affairs' became part of the syllabus. However, I was interested to read, when Michael Young died in 2002, that he had originally intended his world-famous book as a satire on what might happen if society placed the gaining of formal educational qualifications over all other considerations. He had in fact argued that this would lead to the permanent rejection of many able working-class men and women, and result in the rise of a new exclusive social class as discriminatory as the older ones. Well, bugger me, and here was me and the rest of the world having lived our lives on the assumption that 'meritocracy' was a good thing, something that governments of all parties should strive to promote, the golden rule from which all departures were corrupt, old-fashioned and objectionable.

The revelation has come as a considerable shock to me. I now take back all those unkind thoughts about Chalky, and all my seething resentment of his scathing criticisms (of my pathetic attempts to jump high or long, throw the javelin and climb a rope). It was all kindly meant after all. Clearly Chalky had been a devotee of Michael Young's advanced sociological ideas. He had been trying all the time to produce young men with a correct understanding of the drawbacks of a purely meritocratic education.

My brother was scarcely athletic, but he did like football. I remember he had a book about Tom Finney, and was a follower of the Spurs, whose captain was Danny Blanchflower, and whom he greatly admired. In 1960-61 Spurs enjoyed unprecedented success, winning both the F.A.Cup and the League in the same year. Having a football team to follow, even if it was neither Liverpool nor Everton, made you part of the human race; but I could never see why I should get involved or be interested.

I think it was around Easter 1961 that we went on a school trip from The Holt to Paris, for a week. There were boys of all ages there, maybe thirty of us in all; but my pals and I were among the youngest. I remember two of the masters who accompanied us – Johnny Rhoden and another French teacher called Groarke. (I can't remember his nickname although he would undoubtedly have had one). Rhoden was a small man, but fierce and fond of rugby. Groarke was a gentle giant, with a mild temperament to match, though he too played rugby. We stayed in a hotel somewhere in Paris, and it seemed to me at the time that we walked everywhere, and were always footsore.

We saw all the sights in the centre of the old City – the Eiffel Tower, the *Arc de Triomphe*, Napoleon's Tomb at *Les Invalides*; Montmartre and the *Sacré Coeur*; and we had a boat trip on the River Seine. We contrived by some means of transport or other to get to Versailles, and go out on the boats on the lakes there. Pete Hayes disgraced himself by swearing at a man on the river bank, in English so foul that the man could not possibly understand – or so Pete thought. It was an unsafe assumption.

We did not do well with the food; but the drink was OK: we had shandies, and citrons presses, instead of Coca-Cola; and the older boys were allowed to smoke

to their heart's content, along with the masters. Rhoden sent me out to buy some *Disque Bleus* for him, which I signally failed to do, because I misheard him, and was afraid to ask him to repeat the order.

Two incidents of a risqué nature – which it seems appropriate to relate since we are talking about 1961, when Paris still retained its nineteenth century reputation for being more 'saucy' than London. First, there was a youth on the trip who had a hole in his heart – such were not uncommon in those days. He was pale and thin, and was always excused games and P.E., but I can't remember the name. Anyway, as we were strolling near one of the bridges over the Seine in Central Paris, late at night, a prostitute approached this boy and tried to drag him off into a dark place near the embankment. At least, this is what seemed to have happened, piecing together the various bits of garbled testimony, which was endlessly repeated during the rest of that week, by boys with imperfect memories, fevered imaginations and every reason to exaggerate the story. The masters did not think any of it was funny, nor I think did the victim (nor would the prostitute have done), but the rest of us did. It was also, for many of us, our first encounter with the phenomenon of prostitution.

Second, something which one of the boys said to another. The background to this remark was that we occupied the rooms in the hotel in threes, and there was usually one double bed and 1 single per room. One of the rooms was occupied by Roy Evans, Pete Hayes and Roger Little. Now these boys seemed much more mature than the ones I knew best, though they were all much the same age; and in particular, they claimed to have a much better of knowledge of matters sexual. My friends and I were still, I would say, fairly innocent, certainly ignorant, about such things; but one day, Pete Hayes says to Rodge Little, in front of everyone

*I'm playing the part of the man tonight, Rodge, you've gotta be the woman.*

What on earth were they getting up to at night? Was it some kind of heterosexual role-play, or homosexual? Of course it may have been neither. It might have been no more than a crude joke, but at whose expense?.

When we got back from Paris, I don't seriously think that my French had improved; but I think I was a little wiser in the ways of the world; or maybe not, but certainly more curious about France and French culture.

### *Summer Holidays*

The family spent the two-week Summer holidays in 1961 and 1962 in a house called Blue Waters, in Porthpean Beach Road, Porthpean, near St Austell, on the South Coast of Cornwall. If Newquay had been an adventure, Blue Waters was a revelation, not least of how 'the other half' (meaning in this case, the wealthy) lived. It was a very large house, with its own garages and grounds. There was one room

that was permanently locked and had the curtains drawn because it was so expensively furnished and decorated, but the cleaner would let visitors in to look for a few minutes under close supervision. There was a big conservatory whose only drawback was an excess of bees and wasps, after the grapes that grew there; and there was a gardener and even a private track which led from the back garden down to Porthpean beach. This was not a private beach, but it might as well have been on certain days and at certain times of the day, even during the Summer months. The house belonged to a consultant gynaecologist, whose name was (I think) Wilson-Clyne. (There was a Douglas G. Wilson-Clyne who was a gynaecologist and the author of a textbook on the subject, whose dates were 1912-1989; and it may well have been he).

The holiday was a rare taste of luxury for adults and children alike. Harry and Pip and Geraldine came with us as usual and it was like a long house party, with games in the large garden and on the beach, and little need for excursions. There was also a library and I spent some part of the holiday reading a History of Scotland which I found there. The gardener's name was Tregidgar, and he was an extremely shy man. We were told that he would do everything necessary in the garden; but we must not attempt to approach him, let alone talk to him because this would cause him intense embarrassment. You can imagine the amusement this caused in us children.

I remember long days on the beach; and swimming and diving off the rocks, to the left of the beach. We sat in deckchairs in the garden, while my sister and cousin abused the people who sat on the top-deck of the buses that went past the garden on Porthpean Road and looked down into the garden, as 'trippers.'

We had little need to go out, but we visited the harbour at Charlestown, more than once. This seemed a 'man's thing' to do, because in those days, this was still a working harbour and Dad, Uncle Harry, my brother and I went down there to watch the men loading the china-clay onto ships there. Uncle Harry told me, many years later, that this was where he and Dad had bought my brother his first pint of beer (though he would certainly have been under age at the time). Charlestown is no longer a working harbour in the old sense. When I went back with my wife, it had become a place where they moored vessels used in the making of costume dramas about the sea. The place seems to be very successful in this way, although whether it brings any employment into the local area, I know not.



Nikita Khrushchev, banging his shoe at the United Nations



President Kennedy and Harold Macmillan, the British P.M.



James Hanratty



Mr Rhee of *Life*, and *Time*



The old transporter between Widnes and Runcorn



The new bridge



Porthpean Beach, near St Austell, Cornwall. 'Blue Waters' was above, and behind the trees.



Charlestown Harbour. Storage bins for china clay on the right?

# Chapter 10

## 1962 I Can't Help Falling in Love With You

*Pop Music*

Acker Bilk	<i>Stranger on the Shore</i>
Cliff Richard	<i>The Young Ones</i>
Chubby Checker	<i>Let's Twist Again</i>
Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen	<i>March of the Siamese Children</i>
The Shadows	<i>Wonderful Land</i>
B. Bumble and the Stingers	<i>Nut Rocker</i>
Elvis Presley	<i>Good Luck Charm</i>
Mike Sarne with Wendy Richard	<i>Come Outside</i>
Joe Brown and the Bruvvers	<i>A Picture Of You</i>
Ray Charles	<i>I Can't Stop Loving You</i>
Frank Ifield	<i>I Remember You</i>
Elvis Presley	<i>She's Not You</i>
The Tornados	<i>Telstar</i>
Frank Ifield	<i>Lovesick Blues</i>
Elvis Presley	<i>Return to Sender</i>
Cliff Richard and The Shadows	<i>Bachelor Boy</i>

Kenny Ball and Acker Bilk both belonged to the ersatz sort of 'Jazzmen' which this country produced at the time; but I never had much time for Jazz', of any sort – 'trad', modern or otherwise. Note the absence, from the charts at this date, of The Beatles, as indeed of 'the Mersey Sound' in general. The British working class pop



heroes still tended to come from the East End of London – for example Joe Brown, and his ‘Bruvvers’. As far as the American artists were concerned, Ray Charles is better remembered, but the phenomenon of the year of the year was ‘Chubby’ Checker, who was no longer chubby because he (allegedly and visibly) lost several stones in weight while ‘twisting’ his way across America. ‘The Twist’ was simple to do, though it required a lot of energy and it was different enough from conventional ‘Rock and Roll’ to acquire a new following, which persists to this day when people of my age have had enough to drink. Elvis was still very ‘big’, as was his pale but still successful imitator, Cliff Richard, whose orientation was already giving rise to much speculation, in view of the title of that record - ‘Bachelor Boy’. There were still plenty of artists in the list whom I have always thought of, from that day to this, as just plain ‘wet’, like Frank Ifield, though he appealed greatly to Graham Jeffs’s mother.

Perhaps the most popular lyric of all around this time was from the TV series *Rawhide*, which starred a young Clint Eastwood and had a very catchy theme tune:

*Rollin’ Rollin’ Rollin’!*

*Keep movin’, movin’, movin’!  
 Though they’re disapprovin’,  
 Keep them doggies movin’, Rawhide!  
 Don’t try to understand ‘em,  
 Just rope and throw and grab ‘em.<sup>6</sup>*

*Move ‘em on, head ‘em up,  
 Head ‘em up, move ‘em out,  
 Move ‘em on, head ‘em out, Rawhide!  
 Set ‘em out, ride ‘em in  
 Ride ‘em in, let ‘em out,  
 Cut ‘em out, ride ‘em in, Rawhide!*

### *The World*

John Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for literature. David Lean’s *Lawrence of Arabia* won all the awards and was a smash hit at the Box Office, making a star of Omar Sharif and Peter O’Toole. Andy Warhol exhibited his Campbell’s Soup Can. The first person was killed trying to Cross the Berlin Wall from East to West. Marilyn Monroe was found dead. Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*; but what I

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<sup>6</sup> My sister begs to differ. She says the authorised version was

Don’t try to understand ‘em,  
 Just rope and throw and bind ‘em....

principally remember about world affairs was the two-week Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, when it seemed as if the world might come to an end.

This was the period when MAD was not simply the title of a magazine: it also stood for 'mutually assured destruction' – the theory that, if there were a Third World War between the USA and the USSR, it would result in each of them blowing the other up with nuclear weapons, and taking the rest us along with them, to Armageddon (if you were Jewish) or 'Buggery' (if you were English). According to the theory, the prospect of this happening was so awful that neither side would actually ever start a war in the first place; but of course the theory could never be tested out, and you could never rule out some cataclysmic mistake, so it wasn't something that made us feel very secure, even if we were. 1962 seems to have been the nearest we got to the great Atomic Buggery in the sky.

On October 14, a United States Air Force (USAF) U-2 aeroplane, on a photo-reconnaissance mission obtained pictures of Soviet missile bases under construction in Cuba. The Americans announced to the World that the Cubans and the Soviets had secretly begun to build bases in Cuba for a number of medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic nuclear missiles (MRBMs and IRBMs), which would give them the ability to strike most of the continental USA. They decided that they could not live with this and determined to get the missiles out of Cuba, 'by any means necessary', to use Malcolm X's phrase. We know now that they considered pre-emptive airstrikes, but settled on a military 'quarantine' of the island instead: they would not permit offensive weapons to be delivered to Cuba and demanded that the Soviets dismantle the bases already under construction or already completed. Again, we now know that the Kennedy administration did not think that the Kremlin would agree; and fully expected a military confrontation. On the Soviet side, Khrushchev wrote to Kennedy that the blockade was illegal and 'an act of aggression propelling humankind into the abyss'.

So it really did seem as if we were 'in for it'; and I remember sitting with my pals on the top of the 61 bus on the way to school, discussing whether the world was going to end. Not that we went in for panic-buying of food, or the construction of bunkers, or last desperate attempts to extract the most out of life while one could – all things which would have been theoretically possible for adults. No, like the Abbe Siéyès during the French Revolution, we simply survived.<sup>7</sup>

It turned out that negotiations had been going on in secret; and the confrontation ended on October 28, when President Kennedy and UN Secretary-General U Thant reached both a public and secret agreement with Khrushchev. Publicly, the Soviets would dismantle their offensive weapons in Cuba and return them to the Soviet Union, in exchange for a public declaration by the US that it would never invade Cuba. Secretly, the US also agreed that it would dismantle all US-built *Thor* and *Jupiter* IRBMs previously deployed in Turkey. An additional

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<sup>7</sup> Asked how he had managed to survive all the violence of the French Revolution, the Abbe Siéyès is said to have replied '*J'ai vécu.*' (Favourite story of history master J.R.D.Jones).

outcome of the negotiations was the creation of the 'hotline' between Moscow and Washington, a direct means of communication which enabled the leaders to talk to each other and hopefully 'defuse' any similar confrontation in future. We all breathed a sigh of relief; and Kennedy's reputation received a considerable boost. The idea got about that, in the poker game of diplomacy, the Russians had 'blinked first'. We didn't know at the time that the Russians saw the result as a considerable humiliation; and it was the Cuban Crisis which led (in part) to Khrushchev's overthrow, and Brezhnev's decision to build a Blue Water Navy.

On 12 September 1962 a British civil servant called Vassall was arrested and charged with espionage. Vassall had worked as a photographer for the RAF during the Second World War. In the 1950s he had been a Naval Attaché at the British embassy in Moscow, where he was lonely. In 1954, he was invited to a party (arranged by the KGB), where he was encouraged to become extremely drunk, and where he was photographed in a compromising position with several men. The KGB then used these photographs to blackmail Vassall into working for them as a spy. Vassall then worked as Private Secretary to a junior Conservative Minister in the Admiralty. He then provided the Soviets with several thousand classified documents, including information on British radar, torpedoes, anti-submarine equipment and hovercraft. In October 1962, Vassall was sentenced to 18 years in jail. (He was released in 1972, having served ten years. He published an autobiography in 1975. In later life he changed his surname to Phillips, and worked quietly for a firm of solicitors in Gray's Inn).

Homosexuality was a complete mystery to me in 1962 (still is in many ways); but I was beginning to learn about feudalism. A 'vassal' was a peasant who occupied a distinctly inferior position in feudal society. So, in my mind, whatever nefarious activities this particular 'Vassall' was getting up to were in some way associated with the obligations owed by a medieval peasant to his lord. Both clearly involved subservience and degradation and both may have involved some kind of 'bondage', as in 'the ties that bind' (I probably read Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* around this time as well). It would be better not to enquire too far into why this man was called Vassall.

Notwithstanding the existential threat, ours seemed a very peaceful and civilised country compared to France, particularly in relation to decolonisation. There was a vicious war going on in Algeria, where the French government was trying to put down a nationalist insurrection led by the FLN. There were hundreds, if not thousands of casualties. The French officially regarded Algeria as an integral part of France. *Algerie Francaise!* was both a slogan and a policy; and General de Gaulle had come to power in 1958 on the backs of the support of the French settlers in Algeria. He soon realised the need to withdraw; but this did not alter the power of the *pieds-noirs*. The French settlers who had been born in Algeria and who, determined to stay there, mounted a guerrilla campaign of their own, both in Algeria and in France, to which large parts of the French military establishment were said to be sympathetic. There were plots to assassinate de Gaulle (on which Frederick

Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* was based). *Algerie Francaise!* was adopted as the war-cry of a new 'White Terror'. Walls in France were painted 'O.A.S.' *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète*. There was almost a civil war there. At this date, we had seen nothing like this in the UK.

Notwithstanding my general disinterest in football, you could not ignore the rise and rise of Liverpool F.C. My uncle supported Everton (always had and always did); but Liverpool trained 'down the lane' – at the ground near Melwood Avenue, very near where Michael Jackson lived. (I read now that the ground was later transformed into a 'top class facility' by Bill Shankly; but the view from Mike's house was of a very ordinary field, on which we often trespassed).

When Bill Shankly signed Ron (a.k.a. 'Rowdy') Yeats<sup>8</sup> in July 1961, he claimed that Liverpool would quickly move back into the First Division, from which it had been relegated in 1953-4; and, within 12 months, he was proved right. With Yeats as captain, Ian St John, Ian Callaghan and Roger Hunt, Liverpool won promotion in the 1961-2 Season. Needless to say this did not impress Everton fans, who came up with the chant:

*Oh we hate Bill Shankly and we hate St John  
But most of all we hate big Ron  
And we'll kill the Coppites one by one  
And throw them in the Ri-ver Mersey!*

*School*

*School Report Summer 1962 Form IVA*

*Form master Mr I Wilde*

*(though inevitably called 'Marty' after the popstar of that name).*

*Average age 15 yrs 4 m*

*My age 14 years 6 m*

*Height 5ft 5 ½ Weight 8 st 3 lbs*

*Overall mark 'straight' I*

*[1s in everything except PE II ['a fair effort']*

*Marty's comment on my 'I' in geography - 'an admirable pupil'*

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<sup>8</sup> Rowdy Yates was also the name of Clint Eastwood's character in *Rawhide*.

You can tell I was getting into my stride with this grammar school stuff – and coming out from under the shadow of my brother. On the other hand, my brother's 'A' level G.C.E results that year were spectacular. In those days they gave percentages rather than A, B and C etc and this meant that the true stars showed. My brother's marks for Maths, Physics and Chemistry were above 80%; and even (in Chemistry) over 90%. He won the Innes O'Hutcheson Prize for the best 'A' level result and was awarded a Scholarship to Liverpool University, to read Chemistry. We were all very proud, but it was even more difficult to compete with him now, except by moving sideways and going in for the Arts subjects.

C.P. Snow (1905 – 1980) had lectured about *The Two Cultures* in 1959, lamenting the gulf between scientists and 'literary intellectuals'; and in those days there was certainly a marked division between 'the Arts' and 'Science'. You were not allowed to mix the two when it came to your choice of A levels and you had to start choosing which side you were on, and what path you were going to pursue, in the 4<sup>th</sup> year, because that was the pre 'O' level year, and you had to choose between 'V Arts' and 'V Science'. The choice came naturally to me. I liked languages and history (though not English literature, especially) and I couldn't see how I was ever going to keep up with my brother in Science.

Harold Wilson's speech about 'the white heat of the technological revolution' was not made until 1963; but the idea was in the air; and certainly the Science masters at school – men like 'Dickie' Barton (who taught us Chemistry with great gusto) thought it distinctly odd that I, who was thought to be 'able', should deliberately choose the Arts. And it was odd too, from the point of view of the numbers. Twice as many boys opted for V Science, and there had to be two forms created for it, at least in my year, whereas there was only one V 'Arts' but two V 'Science' Forms. Dickie berated anyone who was thought to have brains but wanted to read Arts. We few, we unhappy eccentric few, were made to feel that we were letting the country down somehow. He referred to us collectively as 'hairy artists' and asked me directly one day why I didn't want to do science 'like my brother'. I can't remember what I said. I liked Chemistry for example, but never felt that I loved it, in the way that both my father and brother did, or that I had their natural talent.

Was it a good, or a bad, thing, to be at a single sex school? I am not sure. When I was young and an iconoclast, I thought it was bad. Though I make no complaint about the education I received, I did think – say at the age of 18 - that the almost complete segregation of the sexes between the ages of 11 and 18 made it extremely difficult, when you eventually decided that it would be interesting to try to cross the barrier. Girls had become an alien species, and when you did make contact, it felt like visiting time at the Zoo. You didn't know how to communicate with them. The fact that I had a younger sister, whom I always loved dearly, made little difference to this. She might be a girl but she was, after all, my sister and therefore a member of my tribe, rather than another.

It was many years before I understood that there were boys who had the same kind of feelings for other boys, as we were beginning to feel for girls, although there were plenty of jokes about 'queers'. Jokes were a kind of currency (given that none of us had any money, to speak of) and we all used to laugh at every joke of a risqué nature, whether we understood it or not, for fear of being thought stupid or naive – the same reason why you didn't ask too many questions in class. So, although there was 'homophobia', there was mostly just ignorance. As for 'lesbians' or 'hermaphrodites', or for that matter 'nymphomaniacs', one might as well have been talking about the creatures in the Greek myths or the travels of Sir John Mandeville. The words were used in jokes, but there was no reality to the discourse.

There are few dreams that I can recall from that time in my life; but I can remember swimming, before I could swim. I think I had learned to swim when I was at the primary school: we were encouraged to do that; and at that time I used to go to Norris Green Baths, sometimes with my friend Allan Dickson, from W.D.C of E. At the grammar school we played football or rugby during the winter terms, but had a choice in the summer between swimming and cricket, and there was never any contest here for me since cricket was a game which I disliked as much as football. This was partly because it was a team game, and partly because I always found cricket so boring: it seemed to me there was nothing to do at all, for hours at a time, unless you were a good batsman or bowler. Swimming was a different matter: I loved it.

From The Holt, we went to Picton Road Baths, either by bus or on foot. These were much older than Norris Green and had a different layout. It was warmer, the pool was smaller than the large one at Norris Green (where there were three pools), and it had the changing cubicles all around it, rather than at a distance and separated by the showers. So you could change and jump straight into the pool. I look back on Picton with a strange combination of feelings of pleasure, and surprise. The water was warm but also this was where I had my first orgasm, unrecognised as such, but brought on by swimming the breast stroke for a long time. The rhythmic repetition had an effect on me which was unmistakable, but which at the time I did not know how to repeat, without swimming a great deal further.

Picton Road was where we went with the school; but, out of school, my friends and I took to walking to Dovecot Baths on a Saturday morning, which were almost identical to those at Norris Green – three pools: large, diving and 'baby' pool, where the water was incredibly warm. We used to stay at there for what seemed like hours at a time, on any given Saturday morning in the early 1960s. We would meet by the bus-stop, walk along Leyfield Road to 'The Triangle', then along the side of Cardinal Allen (a Roman Catholic boy's grammar school), past the Carmelite monastery next door, through the waste ground and across the dual carriageway to the Baths. There was a lot of larking around as well as swimming, and on one occasion we had an argument with the baths attendant, who was a particularly aggressive young man who used to shout

DON'T STAND THERE, STAND ON THE FUCKING... as he pointed to nowhere in particular.

So we were never sure which particular part of the FUCKING he wished us to avoid and which part of the FUCKING, precisely, we were allowed to stand on. The dispute must have escalated because we were hauled up before the Baths Manager, who resembled Inspector Barlow of *Z Cars*, in appearance and demeanour, but saw it as his job to conciliate. I acted as spokesman, voicing our complaint about the vagueness of the charge, and asserting our good character. I think the Manager was quite clever. He managed to 'let us off' without being seen to let his subordinate *Gruppenfuhrer* down, by blaming the whole thing on THE EBULLIENCE OF YOUTH.<sup>9</sup>

On the way back from the Baths, we would stop for a sherbet dip at a small sweet shop which seemed to have been built on the cinders, next to the waste ground. The sherbet powder, when sucked through a straw made of liquorice, had a particularly powerful effect on lungs already weakened by the inhalation of chlorine gas, but one which we found pleasant. Then home, as Pepys would say, laughing and joking by the monastery, except on one occasion when we were set on by the eponymous 'Muscovites', a gang from the Moscow Road area of the City. There were about a dozen of them, large and small, and of varying ages, hard-looking louts, who got one of us down on the floor and 'put the boot in'. The victim was a boy called Roger Fallon (who seldom came with us, and never came again). He had to have several stitches in his head, the matter was reported to the Police, and the guilty party was, I think, prosecuted; but it made me at any rate more than a little wary about walking around unfamiliar (and even familiar) parts of Liverpool, even in broad daylight.

From time to time nowadays it is suggested that I should join 'Friends Re-Unite' so as to get back in touch with those old boys I knew at The Holt. I have never done so, because the truth is that I have kept in touch with those I truly liked, and there are some of the others I would have run paid good money, or run a mile to avoid even then, except that I had no money and couldn't run a mile. I don't mean the Muscovites, incidentally – none of them were at The Holt; but some of the boys in 1D, and for that matter 4D or V General, were also to be avoided if you.

I don't include all the boys in 1D in that category. Not all of them were vicious. Mostly, they were just not the sort of people you wanted to get close to. There was one chap called Bird – 'Birdie', whose chief characteristic was sourness. At some point or other he encountered Rob Bell, a boy from a similar background, but of a very different nature, who had a way with language and a ready wit. Rob

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<sup>9</sup> The baths at Dovecot Road and Norris Green were pulled down in the 1990s, though they were not so old as smaller pools like Picton Road and Lister Drive. This was apparently because they were too expensive to maintain. They must certainly have been expensive to heat, given the size of the building, and the temperature of the water in the 'baby' pools.

had been studying Birdie for some time, and on one occasion, in front of the whole class (I think this was in Art, where the Forms mingled at one point), he says to him

*'Ey Birdie, you've got a face like sour piss.*

Which was a very accurate description. Incidentally, Bird's sourness was not limited to his physiognomy. His attitude to schoolwork was that it was all right to do well in exams, provided that you didn't 'work' for a good result. This seemed to embody the theory that the exam ought to be a test of innate intelligence, rather than your ability to learn or concentrate, or make an effort; but I am not sure Birdie articulated the thought. He just had an aversion to work. So, when I did spectacularly well in mock or real exams – compared to him - he would say that this didn't prove anything, because I had 'worked'. Which was true, but I never saw anyone who gained anything in life by not working. His seemed a perverse attitude to take in the age of meritocracy; and yet there were many, even at the Grammar school who simply gave up and came away with less than they could have got out of the system.

By the time we got into the fourth year, we were getting quite big and in a position to do some serious bullying of younger boys. Forms IVD and V General were the spiritual home of the school bullies; and there was some serious fighting done too. Fights were a form of mass entertainment, akin to bear-baiting and dogfighting, but they usually broke out spontaneously, over some minor disagreement or point of pride. However, they were also arranged, sometimes, for the wider entertainment. On one occasion, there was one staged behind the shops at Childwall Fiveways, between a younger but athletic boy called Taylor and an older, smaller, but more aggressive one called Patterson.<sup>10</sup> Patterson had announced that he was going to fix Taylor. Sensing that some dirty work was afoot, Taylor insisted on conditions, designed to ensure a fair fight (I am not clear now what these were, or how they could have been enforced). A large part of the school, at least of the relevant age group gathered to watch. Patterson arrived and put down his satchel. Then he took off his belt, as if he was merely stripping for action; but then suddenly he wrapped the belt up in such a way as to make a weapon out of the buckle, and rushed at Taylor, striking him hard on the forehead. Taylor staggered, there was blood everywhere, and then he hurled himself on top of his assailant and started to beat the living daylights out of him.

The fight soon broke up, with no clear 'winner'. Patterson was expelled; and we were all given a severe dressing-down for being passive bystanders at a disgraceful event. The fact that it was off school premises was no excuse, or mitigation – and rightly so. Our behaviour that day is one reason for the title I have given to the second part of this Memoir; and I don't exempt myself from the implied criticism. We all behaved like animals that day.

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<sup>10</sup> A pseudonym.



Taylor, Patterson, and the rest of us involved in this episode were in the A and B forms and felt some degree of responsibility for their actions and towards society; but some of the boys in IVD and V General appeared to have none, and were beyond all discipline. You can see that from the school photos: those who did not even wear the school blazer, which was compulsory, stand out clearly. There was nothing to be done with them and they were a Prefect's worst nightmare. One year, they even staged a minor riot on the school field, on the last day of the Summer term, which would also have been their last day at school. I can remember a horde of them charging around, with a few of them singing *When the Red Revolution Comes*. This is curious, looking back on it. I would not have thought that the average member of V General would have had the least idea what Socialism was about; but *When the Revolution Comes* is actually an authentic Socialist song. Sung to the tune of *Glory Glory Hallelujah*) it goes

*Free beer for all the workers  
Free beer for all the workers  
Free beer for all the workers  
When the red revolution comes*

*We'll turn Buckingham Palace into a public lavatory  
We'll turn Buckingham Palace into a public lavatory  
We'll turn Buckingham Palace into a public lavatory  
When the red revolution comes*

The approximate date is confirmed by some of the other lines

*We'll make Princess Margaret do a striptease in the Strand*

*We'll make Winston Churchill smoke a Woodbine everyday*

*We'll make Hugh Gaitskell sell his shares in ICI*

*We'll make Lady Docker sweep the steps of Transport House*

*We'll make Johnny Gollan eat a dozen British roads*

Hugh Gaitskell was a leader of the British Labour Party, and therefore regarded by Communists as a capitalist lackey or 'running dog', though whether he ever owned shares in ICI I don't know. (He died in 1963). Lady Docker was a notorious socialite (as opposed to Socialist), the wife of a millionaire who was always in the news in the early '60s because of her extravagant spending and way of dressing. John Gollan

was the Secretary of the British Communist Party. I expect 'the British road' was the British road to Socialism, and the presence of these words in the song probably indicate some arcane internal dispute in the C.P.G.B., or else a dispute between it and the C.P.S.U. (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), which most people (even on the Left) were still trying to distance themselves from in 1962, in view of the brutal crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956.

The hardest hardman of all was probably a character called 'Gobbo', who had a big mouth, in more ways than one. I have blown up one of the school photos and you will immediately be able to recognise him, arms folded, leer across his face, ears stuck out to indicate that he was not going to co-operate, even if it involved mere listening. My memory of him is this. In the summer time, those of us who took sandwiches for our lunch ate them on the school field, but in the winter time, we were allowed to shelter in the gallery of the school hall; and this was Gobbo's favourite hunting ground. Like a ravening wolf, he could get in there (contrary to all the rules) and extort sandwiches and other goodies from smaller boys. He didn't need to use force, since his very presence was menacing. So he would simply enquire whether you wanted everything your loving mother had provided for you; and proceeded to Hoover everything up.

Notwithstanding the prize fights and the revolution on the playing-field and the meagre diet of Gobbo leftovers, we did some quite serious stuff academically at that school, especially in the fourth year. Spike Rankin taught us English and we 'did' Shakespeare's *Henry V*; but in addition, I remember writing an essay about something that the critic Empson had written – he who wrote *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and was expelled from Cambridge for having contraceptives in his room. I argued that Empson was wrong to see anything sexual in another poet's description of the blooming of a flower. This, as we would say through the blue cigarette haze which hung in the bikesheds, was 'serious shit'. I really didn't know what I was talking about; but Spike seemed to think it was a good effort.

It was around this time that the elder brother of Doylie Doyle, who was to become a bus conductor after he left school, broke into Dovecot Baths one night and deposited a different kind of shit on the bottom of the pool. Don't ask me why; but we thought this was an amusing act of rebellion. I suppose the Baths Manager would have put it down to the ebullience of youth.

After swimming came cycling. I had always had a bike – a three-wheeler Gresham Flyer when I was very small, and later a Triumph with straight handlebars, which I think I took over from my brother; but around the age of 13 or 14, I was introduced to 'proper' cycling by Graham Jeffs, whose parents had been in a club together before the War (and I daresay afterwards); and I acquired a *Sun Wasp* with drop handlebars – the acid test for whether it was a proper 'racer'. I kept that *Sun Wasp* all the way through until I was at University, when I unwisely sold it or got rid of it, in favour of a more fashionable, but less robust and less reliable, Cinelli.

Between the ages of say 14 and 16, a group of around six of us took up cycling in quite a serious way, though only one (Graham) ever joined a club and raced.

Instead, we basically had our own club, though one without rules, and we went out for day excursions, invariably at a weekend during term time. This period in my life seems now to have been a golden age, which stretched on and on, all through my youth, an endless succession of weekends where Saturday was spent getting ready for the ride (with maybe a practice short ride thrown in) and Sunday was devoted to the ride itself. Yet in fact, we are only talking about a period of three years, which now seems to have flashed by. I suppose we had a lot of shared experiences, at an impressionable age.

There were trips to the East and South of West Derby, to Frodsham (where there was a hill to be climbed at the end) and to Delamere Forest, and to places to the North like Parbold (where there was another hill); but we usually went into North Wales, taking the early Sunday morning ferry across the Mersey and wending our way through Wirral, past Two Mills and through Queensferry, where Wales began. That was where the serious choices had to be made – whether to carry on for Mold, the Rainbow, the Bwlch and Ruthin, where we often stopped in the Winter. Or on, in the Summer to Corwen. Or else to head South for Wrexham and Bangor on Dee (to give it the English name). Or branch out along the coast road for the North Wales resorts – Rhyll etc, Colwyn Bay, Conway, even Llandudno. Or inland, through the mountains to Cilcain and Babel, Halkyn, Buckley or Denbigh. There was an infinite variety of lanes and steep hills and descents and hazards of one kind or another to be negotiated. I remember one of the longest and most challenging days involved going over to Betwys-y-Coed via Ruthin and Corwen and then descending the Clwyd Valley all the way into Conway and then coming home via the coast road. That was well over a 100 miles and a good twelve hour ride; but you could do that in the summer, without taking lights, provided you spent the whole day in the saddle and were not interested in stopping to see the sights. We weren't really interested in the countryside, except as the backdrop to a good ride.

For a year or two, we had an obsession about getting to Anglesey and back in the day, which was a tall order. We never quite made it, but we got to within a few miles of Bangor and the Menai Strait once before turning back, which seemed like some kind of achievement. On another occasion, we had to be rescued by my father because one of us was in minor collision with the wing mirror of a car, came off and buckled a wheel; and although we could mend a puncture, we didn't have spare wheels with us. Dad was very forgiving of youthful misdemeanours and escapades, and prepared to go to any lengths to help us out.

It was not always the same six. Me, Graham Jeffs, Chris Beazer, Brian Brown, Duncan Woods and Ian Evans, but sometimes Colin Frazer and in the early days Roger Fallon (who rode a Falcon) and sometimes 'Mac' and sometimes Willie Moore (who subsequently competed at Olympic Level for Great Britain and sometimes friends of Graham's from Merseyside Wheelers. I have fond memories of Colin Frazer. His father had relocated from Aberdeen Docks to Liverpool in 1960, and Colin joined us in Form IIA, when we were starting Latin. I remember that, because of the superiority of the Scottish educational system at the time, he had already done

a year of Latin, but he was a shy, small boy when he first joined us; and, because I liked him and he was a stranger, I took the trouble to befriend him. He became a regular member of our cycling club, and had a Viking bike. We knew him as 'Fraz' and later as 'Col.' He had red hair and he took to growing this long and even sporting a small red moustache. Other boys objected to this and he was waylaid one day in the Art room. One boy trimmed off some hair, while others held him down and tried to shave off the moustache with a blunt instrument. Colin took great exception to this and seemed to think that the rest of us had let him down, either by failing to inform him of the impending attack or failing to intervene on his behalf while it was taking place. You can understand his point of view.

After a year or two Colin decided that girls were more interesting than bikes. I remember him telling me, somewhat contemptuously that you couldn't stroke a metal tube, which I rather took to heart, though it did not make me change my addiction to cycling. With hindsight, what he said was only half true, though. The point is, surely, that you *can* stroke a metal tube, but it doesn't stroke you back.

He stopped cycling and started smoking, which I saw as a sign of moral decay – more than the fact that he also acquired a girlfriend. He was a talented artist, but didn't work, and got an indifferent set of 'O' levels. I didn't expect him to make anything of his life; but, decades later when I met him again briefly, he said that he had been given an ultimatum by his father and that, on leaving school, he went to college, began to study again and qualified as an architect. This in turn led to his moving back to Scotland, and indeed to Shetland, during the oil boom, when there were plenty of houses to design, but little else to do but drink whisky. He continued to smoke as well, and died a few years ago in his late 50s, having had a shortish life but a merry one. I understand that he married that first girlfriend, Anne, and they had children, but they divorced and she died of cancer, many years ago, in Aberdeen.

We frequented cyclist's cafes, where there were pints of tea and pints of orange juice, to be consumed along with the sandwiches (generally prepared by our mothers); and there was often a Jukebox. There were cafes like this in Two Mills, Queensferry, Ruthin, 'Betsy' (Betwys-y-Coed); and in Runcorn; and it was best to stick to the cyclist's cafes rather than go into other sorts of establishment, where the owner, or other customers, might object to the sound made by your cycling shoes, and start 'trying to be funny' in that inimitable Liverpudlian way. (Although we were often far from the City, its cultural influence was widespread).

I think it was in Runcorn that we discovered the drawback to wearing racing shorts. The reason for wearing them was to look cool; but the recommendation was wear nothing underneath. The thinking being that cycling shorts, of the racing variety, were fitted with a chamois leather inside, so underpants weren't necessary from the point of view of comfort and warmth. The drawback was what happened when you had an erection. If this happened when you weren't wearing underpants, it was pretty obvious, and not obviously pretty to behold. You might have thought this would not be a problem when we spent the whole day in more or less

continuous exertion on the bikes; but you would be wrong about that one. Erections were only too likely to occur when you were in a cafe, sitting around a Jukebox, discussing Jill Browne's tits. She was a nurse on *Emergency! Ward 10* but also appeared on early chat shows in a low cut dress. They ought to warn you about these things, when you buy cycling shorts.

And then there were the youth-hostelling holidays, again in that short window of youth between 1962 and 1965. In those days you had to travel between Youth Hostels by pushbike or on foot: you were not allowed to go by car (at least not in England and Wales). Conditions were Spartan and you had a 'job' or duty to perform each day, usually washing up or cleaning, but sometimes chopping wood or clearing undergrowth; and I recall one occasion when the washing up had to be done in a stream, since there was no running water in the hostel. It was a kind of Hitler Youth Camp, without the German ideology.

My youth hostel card, issued by Merseyside Youth Hostels Ltd, Scotland Road, Liverpool, shows that we first went to Llangollen for a weekend, as a trial run. I remember that visit, because the Warden confiscated our cards for some alleged misdemeanour – we thought it was mere prejudice against 'Scousers' – and I had to be advocate again and plead for us to get them back (which worked). Then we branched further afield to the Lake District; and around the Peak District. Some Youth Hostels had exotic names in those days, and exotic stamps which they put on your card, which provided a nice record, for example *Coppermines house, Coniston*, or *Treyarnon for surfing*. The hostel in Delamere Forest was called *Fox Howl*; but we never got to *Dirtpot* or *Once Brewed* (in Northumberland). I can't remember any quarrels between us, notwithstanding the possibility for tension. Usually between 50 and 100 miles a day. Usually a week in all, though the Cornwall trip was much longer. Graham and I tended to plan the holidays in my house beforehand. He would bring a map and we would plot the distances carefully. Then we would book the hostels in advance, sending postal orders as a means of payment, and stamped-addressed envelopes (s.a.e.s). There were never any administrative hiccups. The Youth Hostels were cheap and efficient, though as I have said, somewhat Spartan: iron bedsteads, very little heating and needless to say, no double glazing. (You had to take your own sheet, though blankets were provided).

### *The Hobbs Murder*

A horrible murder took place in Liverpool, not far from the school. Lesley Hobbs was a schoolgirl, aged 12. She was stabbed, and battered to death with an ash tray, in the lounge of her own house, whilst her mother and father had gone out one Sunday evening and she had been left, apparently babysitting. Over 500 officers were brought in, including policemen from the West Midlands. The police said they had never seen anything like the carnage in the house. There were rumours that she had had a boyfriend and that he had visited her during the course of the evening;

but she seems too young for a boyfriend; and the rumours that the murderer was a boyfriend were never substantiated.

We were all agog while the 'manhunt' was going on. Then it turned out that the murderer was Peter Rix, who attended The Holt. I had known him as 'Rixie' when we were both in Form 1D three years before. He was 15 now. There were rumours that he had known Lesley Hobbs, but also that he had simply been passing the house at the time of the murder. Rix was insane. Though he was held at Walton prison, he was convicted of Manslaughter rather than Murder, presumably on the grounds of diminished responsibility. The psychiatrist who gave evidence at the trial was Dr. Benedict Finkelman, whom I met when my brother married his daughter in 1966 (though I have only just discovered this connection). 'Rixie' was sentenced to be detained 'during Her Majesty's pleasure', so that he probably ended his days in Broadmoor.

I know nothing else about the circumstances of the case. All I can say is that I remember 'Rixie', from that term together in 1D in the Autumn of 1958, as a rather strange character, a loner who didn't mix, or at least, not well.



Norris Green Baths – on a quiet day



*Doppelganger: the Harold Davies Baths at Dovecot (above) was identical to the William Roberts Baths. Both were demolished in the 1990's. (copyright Liverpool City Council)*

Dovecot Baths, on an even quieter day



Rowdy Yates



Ron Yeats





'Gobbo'



Lady Docker (1906-1983)

# Chapter 11

## 1963 Summer Holiday

*Pop Music*

*We're all going on a Summer Holiday....*

*We're going where the sun shines brightly  
we're going where the sea is blue,  
we've all seen it in the movies,  
now let's see if it's true...oo.*

<b>The Beatles</b>	<i>Please Please Me</i>
<b>Cliff Richard and The Shadows</b>	<i>Summer Holiday</i>
<b>Gerry &amp; The Pacemakers</b>	<i>How Do You Do It?</i>
<b>The Beatles</b>	<i>From Me to You</i>
<b>Billy J. Kramer &amp; The Dakotas</b>	<i>Do You Want to Know a Secret</i>
<b>Gerry &amp; The Pacemakers</b>	<i>I Like It</i>
<b>The Searchers</b>	<i>Sweets for My Sweet</i>
<b>Billy J. Kramer &amp; The Dakotas</b>	<i>Bad to Me</i>
<b>The Beatles</b>	<i>She Loves You</i>
<b>Brian Poole and The Tremeloes</b>	<i>Do You Love Me</i>
<b>Gerry &amp; The Pacemakers</b>	<i>You'll Never Walk Alone</i>
<b>The Beatles</b>	<i>She Loves You</i>
<b>The Beatles</b>	<i>I Want to Hold Your Hand</i>

So this was the year of the breakthrough: look at all those records by artists and groups from Liverpool – not just The Beatles, but Gerry & the Pacemakers, The Searchers, Billy J Kramer; and there were of course many others who got into the charts at this time or soon afterwards. You couldn't help but be a little proud, though, in our house, you could not be heard to say that The Beatles had put the city on the map: Dad insisted that other, far greater, men had done that, in the nineteenth century – and these had been fine men, their statues to be seen around St George's Hall, not long-haired louts. Nonetheless, in some social situations – I mean, if you

ever thought you had the courage to 'chat up' a girl – it could conceivably be an advantage to come from Liverpool and at least claim to have some passing knowledge of The Beatles. The trouble was, when we formed our plan to cycle to Cornwall, that the best we could come up with was that the so-called Fifth Beatle had once bought a minor item in the shop belonging to Woody's parents.

Compared to the 'Merseybeat', everything else sounded effete and inferior. Who were these people who bought records by Brian Poole & The Tremeloes, and later by Dave Clarke and his Second Rate Five? On the other hand, 1963 was also the year when Lulu had a hit with 'Shout!' To my profound amazement, even my father liked Lulu! One would have thought that she would 'stink' more than most; but he thought she had something different – talent and abundant energy. She performed vigorously on *Ready Steady Go!*, one of the UK's first rock/pop music TV programmes, broadcast from August 1963 until December 1966, and pre-dating Top of the Pops.

Personally, I liked The Beatles but I never cared for *Please Please Me*, their second big hit after *Love Me Do*. It seemed to me to be too overtly sexual to be listened to with any peace of mind, in the presence of one's parents. The pleasure of sexual experiences of any kind was not a thing to be discussed in public, or in the home. Secondly, we were still in the small house in Lisleholme Close; and Mrs Weed, the neighbour played it over and over and over again, even when Mr Weed was not at home. It must have been a single, so she must have been able to set the record-player so as to re-select it automatically, after the end of each play, or else (more likely) she used to stop very frequently while doing the housework, so as to give herself another fix. I heard that bloody record so many bloody times, it drove me round the bend; and it still does. I run a mile if that ever comes on.

1963 was also the year when the Beach Boys released *Surfin' USA and Surfer Girl*. These were greeted with great enthusiasm in Britain, as was the sport of surfing, though our beaches, outside Cornwall, were largely unsuited to it and the water, even in Cornwall, was too cold – wetsuits at that time being the prerogative of professional divers and TV stars. Nevertheless, it was part of our plan, when we cycled to Cornwall, that we would do some surfing when we got there.

### *The World*

It's a cliché that everyone remembers where they were and what they were doing when the news came through that President Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas, Texas on November 22 1963; but it is certainly true in my case. I was in the loft at 1 Lisleholme Close, doing my homework, when my mother came up the stairs and shouted up the rungs of the loft ladder, to tell me that it had happened. We were all profoundly shocked. It seemed that a light and a hope had gone out.

There was no doubt at the time as to who had fired the shots that killed him: it was Lee Harvey Oswald, who was subsequently killed on TV, in the courthouse, by Jack Ruby (who had terminal cancer, thereby putting the chain of killings to a premature end). But conspiracy theories grew up around the event almost immediately; and, according to Wikipedia, these persist to this day. By the time I got to Oxford (1966-69), there was an American pundit doing the rounds and telling anyone who was prepared to listen that the findings of the Warren Commission, 1963–1964, which concluded that the President was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone and that Jack Ruby acted alone when he killed Oswald, were seriously flawed; and in 1979 the US United States House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded that the assassination did indeed involve a conspiracy. I have never bought this idea myself. It seems to me that if there had been a conspiracy of any kind, in a country as open as the United States, the fact of it would have been conclusively established quite quickly and long ago now, whereas all we have ever had is suspicion and a public preference for conspiracy theory rather than facts. Ockham's razor would also suggest that the simplest explanation is the best.

Back home, Dr Beeching produced a report proposing the closure of 6,000 miles (9,700 km) of the remaining 18,000 miles (29,000 km) of Britain's railway network. The resultant closures, most of which were carried out under the Wilson Labour Government of 1964–1970, became known as 'the Beeching Axe'. The cuts have been mourned by lovers of railways throughout Britain ever since – and there are many of them. Personally, I find the old railway tracks an excellent place to walk and cycle. They seem to have reverted to nature in a most satisfactory way.

The British public's fondness for railways was not the only reason why the Conservative Government had run into trouble. There was a whiff of scandal in the air, a potent mix of espionage and sex, ruthlessly exploited by the new TV programme *That Was The Week That Was*, also known as *TW3*, which was shown late on Saturday nights in 1962 and 1963; and which I was allowed to watch, though it was greeted with a measure of disapproval by my father, usually expressed silently. Devised, produced and directed by Ned Sherrin and presented by David Frost, this poked fun at politicians in a new way. They had usually been treated with deference, even reverence. On *TW3* they were ripped apart. But *TW3* was famous also for a very open attitude towards sex. It was to be on *TW3* in 1965 that the theatre critic Kenneth Tynan first used the word 'fuck' during a TV broadcast. My father's protest on that occasion was not merely silent.

1963 saw the exposure of 'Kim' Philby. Ever since Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean had fled to Moscow in 1951, there had been speculation as to the existence of a 'third man' – a third Russian spy at the heart of the British 'Establishment' (a term first used in 1955, though *The Establishment Club* in Soho was not founded until 1961). In January 1963, 'Kim' Philby, who was a high-ranking member of British Intelligence (and had been awarded the O.B.E.), vanished from Beirut, after failing to meet his wife for a dinner party at the British Embassy. It was revealed that he too had fled to Moscow and had been a full colonel in the Soviet K.G.B. for some years.

Philby was the most successful spy of the 'Cambridge Five', the others being Maclean, Burgess, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross. (Blunt was not exposed until 1979, Cairncross died in 1995 without ever having been publicly exposed).

Then there was the Profumo affair. Profumo was Secretary of State for War in Macmillan's government and was married to a popular and attractive actress Valerie Hobson. In March 1963, he told the House of Commons that there was 'no impropriety whatever' in his relationship with the 'call-girl' Christine Keeler and that he would issue writs for libel and slander if the allegations were repeated outside the House. However, in June, Profumo confessed that he had misled the House and lied in his testimony and he resigned, from the Cabinet, the Privy Council and Parliament. It turned out that he had been introduced to Keeler at a house party thrown by the Astors and had had an affair with her, though she had also been sleeping with a Soviet naval attaché at the time; and this gave rise to the suspicion that he had passed on military secrets to her which could in turn have been passed on to the Russians, via the much discussed mechanism of 'pillow-talk.' The Cold War was at its height and the potential ramifications in terms of national security were serious.

The most famous Judge of the day, Lord Denning, was asked to investigate and he released his report on 25 September 1963, which found that there had been no serious threat to security; but one month later Macmillan resigned as Prime Minister, ostensibly on the grounds of ill health. The public was left feeling that there was more to it than this. In his autobiography *Spycatcher*, Peter Wright relates that he was working at the British counter-intelligence agency MI5 at the time and was assigned to question Keeler. He found Keeler to be poorly educated and not well informed but when the subject of nuclear missiles came up, she used the term 'nuclear payload'. Wright concluded that there had, at the very least, been an attempt by the Soviet attaché to use Keeler to get classified information from Profumo.

My mother thought the whole thing was 'dreadful'. She felt sorry for Valerie Hobson; and she could not imagine why a man like Profumo, with a beautiful wife, would want to resort to a 'common prostitute' like Christine Keeler: it was like exchanging gold for dross. I could not explain to her, then or afterwards, that the average man, when presented with the opportunity, might, now and again, might quite fancy a bit of dross. There is a photograph of Christine Keeler taken in May 1963, where she is sitting naked, with her legs on either side of a chair. You have to admit, if you are a man, that it is sexy; but my Mum would have called it pornography, or more likely, plain 'filth'.

The Earl of Home became Prime Minister. Although the position was governed by 'soft law' in the form of a constitutional convention, rather than by the terms of legislation, he took the view that in the modern world it was impossible to govern the country and command the confidence of Parliament, from the House of Lords, so he renounced his peerage and won a safe seat in the House of Commons as Sir Alec Douglas-Home. Even so he was no match for Harold Wilson, the leader of

the Labour Party, who was very definitely not a 'toff', but had taught P.P.E. at Oxford, while Home admitted that he had to use matchsticks in order to understand Economics. However, considering the depths of unpopularity reached by the Conservative government in 1963 (the end of the so-called '13 years of misrule') he did not do so badly in the General Election of 1964, when Labour only achieved an overall majority of 4.

You could not escape the influence of Roman Catholicism in Liverpool. We had always had Catholic neighbours, and at some point a new Catholic Secondary School – Christ the King – was built next door to The Holt. The new Catholic cathedral in Liverpool was begun in 1962 and consecrated in 1967. So wide publicity was given to things which happened in Rome. In 1963 the old Pope John XXIII died – the jolly fat one – and was succeeded by Paul VI, who was thin and serious. His real name was Giovanni Montini; and it was generally thought that he was more of a conservative than his predecessor; but the Second Vatican Council (also known as Vatican II) which had been called to 'address relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the modern world' continued to sit and eventually made changes which, for the Catholic Church, were radical.

One of the first issues considered by the Council was the revision of the liturgy. The central idea was that there ought to be greater lay participation. Permission was granted to celebrate most of the Mass in vernacular languages. The Church also began to provide versions of the Bible in the mother tongues of the faithful, and both clergy and laity were encouraged to make Bible study a central part of their lives, something which had hitherto been regarded as a feature of Protestantism.

1963 was the year of Fellini's *8 ½* 'one of the most intensely personal statements ever made on celluloid' – but not a film I have ever seen. It was also the year of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. I didn't see that either at the time, though I have seen it since, and it struck me as more nasty than frightening, though the short story it is based on, written by Daphne du Maurier in 1952, is truly gripping. I heard an interview recently with Tippi Hedren, the actress who is attacked by birds in one of the most horrific scenes, and was most surprised to learn that they used real birds in the shooting of that scene. (They had mechanical birds, but they didn't work). I am sure this would not be allowed today. Hedren said that she was so exhausted after the shooting of the scene in question that she had to take a week off work afterwards.

The 'Great Train Robbery' was committed on 8 August at Bridego Railway Bridge, Ledburn near Mentmore in Buckinghamshire. £2.6 million was stolen from a train, when it was held up there. The gang of train robbers consisted of 17 full 'members' who were to receive an equal share. The gang was led by Bruce Reynolds, and assisted by Gordon Goody, Charlie Wilson and Ronald 'Buster' Edwards. Their key electronics expert was Roger Cordrey. The most famous member of the gang was Ronnie Biggs, though he played a minor role.

Most members of the gang were caught the same year, and many - including Biggs – received sentences of 30 years. Biggs escaped, where he acquired new identity papers and underwent plastic surgery. In 1970, he moved to Adelaide, Australia, where he worked as a builder and lived a relatively normal life. He was tipped off and moved to Melbourne, later escaping to Rio de Janeiro. Biggs could not be extradited because there was no reciprocal extradition treaty between Britain and Brazil. He became father to a Brazilian son, which afforded him legal immunity. As a result, he lived openly in Rio for many years, safe from the British authorities. There were plans to kidnap him and return him to justice, but these were abortive. In May 2001, aged 71 and having suffered three strokes, Biggs voluntarily returned to England. Biggs's stated desire was to 'walk into a Margate pub and buy a pint of bitter. After detention a short court hearing he was sent back to prison to serve the remainder of his sentence. On 2 July 2009, he was denied parole by Jack Straw, who considered that he was 'wholly unrepentant.' However, on 6 August 2009, he was granted release from prison on compassionate grounds.

Some sections of the British public seemed to sympathise with Biggs to some degree and even considered that he had been harshly treated. My father (who died in 1976) had no time for Biggs, or for this sympathy, which he thought must emanate from 'the criminal classes'. He felt sorry for the train guard, who had been badly beaten during the robbery, and suffered from headaches for the rest of his life.

The tennis at Wimbledon had been dominated by the Australian Rod Laver ('Rod the Rocket'), who won the men's championship in 1961 and 1962. Some said he could have won it ten years running; but in those days it was an amateur tournament and he 'turned' professional in 1963, leaving the court open for another Australian, Roy Emerson (who had a very peculiar way of serving the ball, as if he was winding himself up for the shot). Except that Emerson was eliminated by a German, Wilhelm Bungert, and the championship was taken by the American Chuck McKinley (1941-1986).

It came as a great surprise that Bungert did so well, in a sport which was dominated by the Americans and Australians; and in my father's case the surprise was mixed with disapproval, since the Germans were a cowardly and untrustworthy lot, and what is more (strangely and ironically) they were racially inferior, and destined to fail when engaged in any kind of combat with better men. Being a German, Bungert might succeed for a while, but he was not capable of 'lasting the course'. This was proved four years later when, having beaten the brave Englishman Roger Taylor in the semi-final, he lost the final itself to the Australian John Newcombe and in straight sets. Dad was very pleased. He knew it was bound to happen. (Emerson, by the way, won at Wimbledon in 1964 and 65, beating Fred Stolle each time).

*School*

*School Report, Summer term 1963 V Arts I*

*15 years 6 months*

*(They had stopped measuring and weighing us, though in the previous term I had been 5 ft 6 3/4in tall and weighed 9 st 5lbs)*

*I note that in the athletic record at the back Chalky White wrote that I had achieved 0/4 athletic standards – I don't remember being that much of a weakling; but he probably wrote it in revenge for my lack of commitment.*

*Under Scripture it says II 'good... he takes an active part in discussion.'*

This last is simply not true. I never willingly took part in any discussion about Scripture. I didn't believe a word of it and, in particular could never understand why the Old Testament could be any sort of guide for us, living in the middle of the twentieth century – or why it should be, since we had had the New Testament for almost 2,000 years; and I studiously avoided any discussion which could possibly lend credence to Christianity. I think this was a common attitude at the time, though this was some 40 years before Richard Dawkins got going.

Academically we were building up to O level – which we sat in the school hall, where they laid out the long lines of desks, as if for an execution. I took 9 subjects (the examining Board being the 'NUJMB', Northern Universities Joint Matriculation Board - Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham, though I would not have thought of Birmingham as being in the North of England):

English Language

English Literature

History Syllabus B

Geography

Art

Latin

French

Mathematics Syllabus B

Chemistry.

The certificate does not say so but I know the papers were marked on a numerical scale, and that I got 6 '1s', 2 '2s' and a '3'. I know one of the '2s' was in Art – which I am sure I attained only because the exam included a paper on Architecture, which you could 'swot' up on – and the '3' was I think in Maths, which was a great disappointment to my brother and probably my father.

There was a joke which circulated at The Holt. I think it was told to me by a lad called Paul Jenkins, who was a Tranmere Rovers Supporter and a spastic (no, he was really). The bare bones of it were



*Have you heard of Al Capone? Yes*  
*Have you heard of Christine Keeler? Yes*  
*Have you heard of John Montini? No*

*So, you know the names of the world's most famous gangster, and the world's most famous whore, but you don't know the name of His Holiness the Pope?*

Not very funny, either then or now; but once again it shows the pervasive influence of Catholicism, since there is only any point to it if you knew who Pope Paul VI was in the first place.

It wasn't all laughs at The Holt, at least not the whole time. There was some very vicious behaviour. I remember there was some kind of game, played with a pack of cards. I can't remember the detail, but I do remember that the winner got to hit the loser over the knuckles with a full deck. If you've never witnessed it, you won't think that this is a very horrific penalty; but it was. If the deck of cards is new, and especially if you hold it at a certain angle, so that you use the corner as the weapon, it is capable of drawing blood; and if you wield the deck with malicious intent, striking at the same raw place repeatedly, the game becomes sadistic (and possibly sado-masochistic); but we played and watched all the same, out of bravado, and were bound by the perverse schoolboys' *omerta*, which dictated that we could not inform, or try to stop it.

We still went swimming, though not as often and we didn't stay in for as long. Round about this time, Graham became friendly with a boy called Ian Evans, who, although the same age as most of us, seemed more experienced in various ways. He combed his hair back in a quiff, he could greater bike control than anyone I have ever seen; and he even had a girlfriend. So, a few times only, we went swimming together, and the girlfriend came too. We swam at Lister Drive Baths, which were similar to Picton Road in layout; and the girlfriend's swimming costume, or rather what filled it, attracted a good deal of covert attention.

### *Summer Holidays*

We were all dedicated followers of cycling fashion, and in particular of a select band of racing cyclists, who participated in the Tour de France, and classics like the Paris-Nice, Paris-Roubaix and the Giro d'Italia. Jacques Anquetil, Raymond Poulidor, Rudy Altig and of course Tommy Simpson the Yorkshireman, were our heroes; and we copied what they did, rode and wore. They, and anyone out on the road who resembled them, were called 'fazzies'. I am not sure of this but I think the origin of this word was probably the French spectators' habit of standing by the side of the

road and shouting encouragement during a bike race. Having witnessed one or two such races, I know that French crowds are very enthusiastic and they will often shout out 'Courage!' or 'Vas-y'. 'Courage!' needs no translation. 'Vas-y!' means, roughly speaking 'Keep Going!'; but when repeated ('Vas-y!' 'Vas-y!' 'Vas-y!') you can see how it might easily become 'Fazzie'.

Because of the hero-worship, our bicycles all had to look a certain way, though some of these features were a trifle impractical. They had drop handlebars (when you very seldom went down on the 'drops') and, if possible, the gears had to be made in Italy by *Campagnolo* (which were very expensive); and the brakes had to be 'centre-pulls' (though side-pulls were probably just as efficient).

These bikes had not changed much mechanically in 20 or 30 years. They had derailleur gears, always 5 or 10, though you could have a third chain-wheel fitted which would give you 15 (unnecessary except on the steepest of hills, and the roughest of roads, in the Lake District). The gear levers were on the down bar, though sometimes mounted at the tip of the handlebars (where they were much less efficient but looked 'flashy'). Likewise, we wore racing shorts and racing tops (though we never raced), and cycling shoes, held onto the pedal with toe-clips and 'rat-traps' (though these could be positively dangerous). Coming back to cycling a dozen or so years later, I can't help noticing the changes to the racing-bike. The frames are often now made, not of steel, but of carbon fibre (incredibly light and durable); gear levers are now integrated with the brake levers, into a universal 'head-set' (much better, especially on hills); the number of gears seems to have increased exponentially (you can have 9 or 10 cogs at the back plus a triple on the front); and your feet are attached even more tightly to the pedals, by means of special shoes and cleats. Those long pumps we used to have been replaced by short little ones, or else by gas cylinders which can inflate an inner-tube in an instant. Mountain-bikes, which did not exist at all in my youth, are something else again: they even have suspension and disc-brakes. Clothing has also changed, almost out all recognition. We now have leg and arm warmers, shorts that have bibs, tights, and helmets, though these are not yet compulsory.

We, or at any rate I, used to crash, regularly, but there was less traffic around so I suspect the casualties were not horrific. On the Cornish trip of 1963, I came off while going down a hill into Clovelly, and had to be taken to a local Cottage hospital for treatment to a bruised hip – I still bear the scar; but the worst of it was that I buckled a rear-wheel, so badly that a new one had to be purchased. I think it cost fifteen shillings, which made a hole in the budget. Whenever I came off, it was always the pride that was most badly hurt; but my mother and father didn't have quite the same attitude.

I suppose the main thing about cycling, though we would never have voiced our appreciation of it, was the *camaraderie*, cemented by common challenges, and a degree of adversity and difficulty. We had been cycling on Sundays for some years, and we had been on several youth-hostel tours; but in 1963, following the O level rite of passage, we decided to cycle to Cornwall and back, partly to see if it could be

done and partly to go surfing when we got there. The destination was therefore, not so much Land's End or the Lizard but Treyarnon, where there was said to be a surfing beach. We had had no instruction – we reckoned to learn how to do it when we got there.

On the way down we stayed at 'Woodlands', Shrewsbury; Malvern Wells; Birdlip; Bath; 'Seven Acres' Holford; Lynbridge, Lynton; Elmscott; Tintagel and then Treyarnon ('for surf-riding'). Then on to 'Riviere house' Phillack; Truro; and then there is a page missing from my Youth Hostel card; but I think we stayed on the way back at Salcombe, Beer and then at Duntisbourne Abbots and then up the Wye Valley and back to a hostel near Shrewsbury called Wilderhope Manor.

We arrived early at the Youth Hostel at Birdlip in Gloucestershire, after climbing the steep hill which led to the door. There was usually a strict policy that you were not allowed in before 4pm, because the hostel was after all, 'the Warden's home'; but on this occasion we were welcomed in by the warden's daughter, who was not much older than us, but very attractive. We were in awe of her, but gratefully accepted the tea. Then she revealed that she was shortly getting married and one of us naively asked whether she would be spending the honeymoon youth hostelling. Given the strict segregation which applied in 1963 in youth hostels, this was not the right question to ask, and I think there was more than one red face by the end of the tea party.

The coast of Devon and Cornwall, when we got there, was a revelation. I had been there before, but a bicycle allows you to appreciate the lie of the land and the natural wonders better than a car; and we were there together, in our youth, with the sun shining, and the diversions of the road, and the great adventures of life still in front of us. It seemed like the promise of Cliff's song was being fulfilled.

There was a wreck off the coast, I think near Elmscott, when we walked along the coastal path near one of the Hostels in Devon. I don't think I have ever seen anything as dramatic, before or since. The ship was sitting there, broken backed, on the rocks below, and you could almost imagine being invited to join the party of wreckers that would be sent out that night from the local villages with orders to retrieve the salvage and murder any hapless survivor found treading up the breach, begging for water.

Next day, we were heading for the hostel at Tintagel, when we came to the North side of an estuary at Bude. There was a long way round this and a short way. The short way involved getting a ferry in a very small boat – it looked no more than a rowing boat and we could not imagine that the man could get six bikes and six youths inside it. But the man had no doubts. We were told to climb in and we stood in the boat, with our bikes perched on the gunwales, all around the little ship, with us clinging on to the bikes for dear life. It was a sunny day, the estuary seemed as wide as the Mersey, but the air was clean and the water was bluer; and we were exhilarated to make a safe landing. It seemed as if we had saved ourselves many miles by putting our lives in peril; but I should imagine it was a trip the boatman made many times a day in the tourist season, though usually with fewer bikes.

There were disappointments, for me at any rate. I never got to go surfing, because of that crash on the hill, descending into Clovelly. The road was banked the wrong way, and one of us was bound to come off, given that we liked to descend at top speed when we had a chance, and that bend comes upon you very suddenly; but it had to be me, and the fall made me feel like a fool, and the least experienced rider, as well as hurting quite a bit at the time. The boys took me to a nearby vicarage, where the Vicar gave us tea and biscuits, and a consolatory tale about an Italian who had recently killed himself in the very same spot. He also helped us out by giving me a lift into the local hospital, while Graham went to fetch a new wheel. We carried on much as normal, but the doctor in the hospital said I shouldn't get seawater in the wound, which is why I refrained from the three days surfing at Treyarnon. This was a bit of a bummer, considering all the hopes we had got up; and I actually think seawater would not have done my any harm. Still, too late now.

The second disappointment was Porthpean beach. We called in there once we had reached Penance and started to head for home; and, having fond memories of it from the family holidays at Blue Waters, and 'talked it up' quite a bit, I took a couple of the lads down there one evening. This proved to be a classic demonstration of the wisdom of that old saying 'never go back!', because on a dull day, when the tide had left a lot of driftwood on the sand, the water was iron grey, the atmosphere was not imbued with the pleasure of staying in luxury at Blue Waters and there was no opportunity to swim anyway, the place seemed distinctly ordinary – as one of my friends unkindly pointed out.

The unkindest cut of all was administered by my best friend of the day, when he unwittingly announced that he had acquired a girlfriend. He and I had grown close, through the swimming and the cycling, and I had no thoughts as yet of mixing with girls; but one evening as we were crossing the road, somewhere in a Cornish village, he almost took my hand, and then apologised and said it was force of (a recently-acquired) habit, and then explained that he had met a girl and was going out with her. He knew that the news would not be wholly welcome.

I think I did feel that it was some kind of petty treason – though there was nothing remotely sexual in our friendship. The previous winter we had a couple of rides in the snow, just the two of us, one around Wirral and one over the Rainbow to Ruthin, which I had greatly enjoyed and I remember thinking that it was unlikely that we would do that again: and we never did, though we remained good friends. Of course, it was always understood that, sooner or later, we would go our separate ways; but his announcement about the girlfriend still took me by surprise. As it happened, Alison was a very nice girl, you couldn't help but like her; and she was also very attractive; but it was clear from that moment that I was always going to be an also-ran, when it came to how he spent his time.

When we got back to Wilderhope Manor, another friend of mine (Allan Dickson) came down there on his own and the two of us then cycled across to Norfolk, where my parents were having a holiday that year with my sister, my cousin, aunt and uncle. (My brother didn't come that year: he stayed at home, as he

was doing a summer placement with I.C.I. at Runcorn). Mum and Dad had taken a house again, as they always did, at Bacton, on the coast, and Allan and I stayed down there for a week and then cycled home to Liverpool. I think I was fitter that Summer than I have ever been in my life, before or since.

We swam in the sea off Norfolk, and went on the beach but I have to say that I don't think Norfolk compares to Cornwall for beach holidays. The beaches are made of stone, not sand; there is little protection from the East wind, and everything is flat and featureless – the countryside, the coast, the sea and the horizon. Cornwall has coves and cliffs, breakers and surf, but also hundreds of secluded spots where you can dive and explore rockpools. There is really no comparison if you are 15 and like the water, and secret places to explore.



President Kennedy reels from the assassin's bullet in Dallas



Jack Ruby shoots Lee Harvey Oswald on TV



Christine Keeler



Russian postage stamp commemorating the spy 'Kim' Philby



Malvern Wells Youth Hostel. Left to right): Graham Jeffs, Brian Brown



Holford Y.H.: Ian Evans; Duncan Woods; Graham Jeffs





Outside a Youth Hostel: 'Woody'; Steve; 'Brownie' in the doorway



The Devon Coast



That Wreck off the coast near Elmscott Y.H.



Tintern Abbey, on the way home: Chris; Graham; the back of Ian Evans's head



The six of us: Cornwall, 1963



Me and the *Sun Wasp*

# Chapter 12

## 1964 Can't Buy Me Love

*Pop*

It was a very good for the year for the Jukebox.

The Dave Clark Five *Glad All Over*  
The Searchers *Needles and Pins*  
Cilla Black *Anyone Who had a Heart*  
Billy J Kramer and the Dakotass *Little Children*  
The Beatles *Can't Buy Me Love*  
The Animals *The House of the Rising Sun*  
Manfred Mann *Do Wah Diddy Diddy*  
The Kinks *You Really Got Me*  
Herman's Hermits *I'm Into Something Good*  
Roy Orbison *Oh Pretty Woman*  
Sandie Shaw *There's Always Something there to remind me*  
The Supremes *Baby Love*  
The Rolling Stones *Little Red Rooster*  
The Beatles *I Feel Fine*

Look again at how many were there from the Beatles, or from Merseyside; but look too at the new stuff coming out of both the UK and the U.S.: the Stones; the Kinks; Roy Orbison; the Supremes; but, for me, none of them compared with The Beatles, and I still think 'I Feel Fine' was one of the best records ever made.

*The World*

The Civil Rights Act was passed in the USA. Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment in South Africa. Jean -Paul Sartre won the Nobel Prize for literature, Martin Luther King the Peace Prize. Northern Rhodesia became Zambia; Nyasaland became Malawi; Malta becomes independent. Harold Wilson became Prime Minister. Brezhnev ousted Khrushchev. Cassius Clay changed his name to

Muhammad Ali and became 'undisputed heavyweight champion of the world' when he knocked out Charles 'Sonny' Liston.

It was Ali's demolition of Liston which attracted most attention at school. Ali was a new type of champion. He was a boxer rather than a slugger. Ali was the new kid on the block (though the phrase had yet to be used in England); and he was loquacious and funny. He liked to dance in the ring, kept his guard low and taunted his opponents. He was the underdog since Liston was heavier, meaner and intimidating, though much older and silent. He had destroyed Floyd Paterson in September 1962 and was a fighter whom many other heavyweights were reluctant to meet in the ring, being an ex-con with ties to organized crime. There was no doubt as to who the bad guy was, at least in the UK. During training, Ali took to driving his entourage in a bus over to the site where Liston and repeatedly called him the 'big, ugly bear'. He also insisted that he would knock out Liston in eight rounds.

When the fight began it became apparent that Liston was out of condition. Right from the first round, the younger man's superior speed was evident. He was on the move all the time, jabbing and delivering flurries of punches. Liston failed to answer the bell for the seventh round and Ali was declared the winner by a technical knockout. At The Holt we regarded Ali as new kind of hero, even though we were all white. (There was only ever one black kid at The Holt – a fellow called Chin, whom the headmaster - Brierley, who had succeeded Russell around this time - once called 'a black fraud'. He was always claiming that people picked on him, despite being a large and intimidating youth, who liked to beat up smaller boys).

The film of the year was Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned To Stop Worrying...and Love the Bomb*, starring Peter Sellers, in which a fanatical general launched an atomic bomb attack on the U.S.S.R. Sellers played the American President, a British captain and the mad inventor of the Bomb.

The 1964 Summer Olympics, officially known as the Games of the XVIII Olympiad, was held in Tokyo – the first time the games had been held in Asia; and the event constituted an international rehabilitation for Japan, after the horrors she had inflicted and the defeat she had suffered in the Second World War. There was a memorable theme tune, played at the beginning and end of every broadcast on the TV. I was chiefly interested in the athletics, especially the mile and the sprints. Bob Hayes of the USA won the 100 metres; Peter Snell of New Zealand won the 1500 metres; Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia won the marathon for second time, though Basil Heatley of Great Britain was in second place.

There was one feature of the final medal table which seems curious now

	<b>Gold</b>	<b>Silver</b>	<b>Bronze</b>	<b>Total</b>
1 <u>United States</u>	36	26	28	90
2 <u>Soviet Union</u>	30	31	35	96
3 <u>Japan</u>	16	5	8	29
4 <u>Germany</u>	10	22	18	50
5 <u>Italy</u>	10	10	7	27
6 <u>Hungary</u>	10	7	5	22
7 <u>Poland</u>	7	6	10	23
8 <u>Australia</u>	6	2	10	18
9 <u>Czechoslovakia</u>	5	6	3	14
10 <u>Great Britain</u>	4	12	2	18

Curiously, considering that the Cold War had been going on for almost 20 years and the Berlin Wall had already been built, the athletes from East and West Germany still competed together, though this was for the last time (prior to the reunification of Germany in 1989-90).

At that time, Japan was also known, to us schoolboys, as the land of 'Harry-Carry', or more properly *Harakiri*, or more properly again *Seppuku*. This was the ritual suicide, performed by the samurai warriors when they felt disgraced, with a very sharp knife. For some reason we thought the idea of disembowelling oneself in public, without the benefit of anaesthetic, was amusing. I seem to remember that there was much talk about it, and speculation as to the pain involved, and as to how you could keep the knife cutting sufficiently to complete the operation, despite the pain, while waiting for the 61 bus.<sup>11</sup>

My sister started going out with her first boyfriend, though she was only 14 at the time. They met at a bus-stop, when he approached her with an imitation firearm, and said 'stick em up.' My mother and father did not wholly approve; but Mum and Dad took the wiser course and decided not to ban the relationship altogether. As for

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<sup>11</sup> In 1970 Yukio Mishima committed *seppuku* in the office of General Mashita. His second in command, Morita, then tried three times to ritually behead Mishima but failed. The latter's head had to be severed by a third man, Koga. Morita then attempted to commit *seppuku* himself, but failed. He in turn was beheaded by Koga.

me, I quite liked the bloke, who was around 17 at the time; but I also felt rather sorry for myself, especially since my best friend had just told me that he had a girlfriend and my brother met his future wife at around the same time.

### *School*

By 1964, the vogue for science and science teaching had become so widespread, and the segregation between 'Science' and 'Arts' in schools and Universities had become so entrenched, that it became a cause of concern to the educationalists. One result of this was that it became compulsory for all of us to take a 'Use of English' Paper at the end of the Lower VI.

Our teacher was a young, idealistic enthusiast called Peter Hilken, who (from his accent) came from the South of England and (from his manner) either from Oxford or Cambridge. I am grateful to him because he introduced us to modern literature. Some of the poetry he liked to read to us was by Ted Hughes, who was just making a name for himself; but it is the novels that I remember. We were set to read *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley); *Lucky Jim* (Kingsley Amis); *Catcher in the Rye* (J.D.Salinger) and *Lord of the Flies* (William Golding); but I enjoyed these four so much that I really started to read novels for myself. They were so different from what I thought novels were like, having previously read little but Dickens and boys' books by the likes of Rider Haggard. This new kind of novel spoke more directly to me at the time, and reading became a pleasure rather than a duty. By the time I left school, I had read dozens of novels, including many by Huxley, Orwell, Golding, Somerset Maugham and A.J.Cronin, and Hemingway, Steinbeck and other American writers; and all for pleasure, rather than because I had been told to read them.

My sister reminds me that it was around this time that I told her that she should start reading more serious books, which she did, abandoning the meretricious delights of *Cherry Ames - student nurse* for Camus, Huxley and Jean-Paul Sartre.

My brother would have thought that it was ironic that the answer to the segregation between Arts and Science was to teach the Scientists English. He would have said that it was equally important to teach the Artists Science; but at any rate, I did well in Use of English. We were regularly asked to write a précis of a newspaper article; and I once wrote one about a piece concerning women and topless swimming costumes (new to the British at the time). I saw that the point of the article was to question whether this was truly a moral question or a practical and biological one, since (it was argued) the long term effect would be to reduce the power that a woman had to arouse a man. I entitled my précis '*Topless - loss of morals or of assets?*'. I felt very pleased with it and Mr Hilken read it out in class; but I realised quite soon afterwards that thousands of other boys (and girls), up and down the country, could have produced something that was equally good or better.

My 'A' level subjects were History Latin and French, but I also persuaded the Latin Master, Albert Wilson, to teach me Ancient Greek to 'O' level GCE standard. I asked him to do this because in Lower VI Arts it was compulsory to take an extra language, and I didn't have much confidence in the German master, whereas I had enormous respect for Albert. I was taught on a one to one basis (since no-one else had my eccentric interest in the Classics); and I enjoyed learning Greek, and I think he enjoyed teaching me. At the end of the year I passed the 'O' level easily. I didn't continue with Greek after that, but I have never regretted learning it. Ancient Greek is not very different from Modern Greek and it came in useful when we had family holidays in Greece, many years later; but the main thing was the experience of Ancient Greek culture and learning, so different from ours and yet so strangely familiar.

My results at the end of the Lower Sixth were very pleasing, considering the battle I had had with some teachers over the decision to do 'Arts' at all: Overall Grade, I: French language 76, French literature 68; European history 75; English history 75, Latin 82; and a Grade 1 in the Greek 'O' level. Hilken commented on 'Use of English' *I confess myself surprised by the quality of his work this term. His competence was always beyond question.*

But there were already indications, amply confirmed when I got to Oxford, that I was not an outstanding pupil, despite these marks and comments, but merely a big fish in a small pond. I began to realise this when Albert Wilson remarked one day, when we were translating some Latin, that I did not have the 'facility' that Alfie May had. Now Alfie May was about four years older than I, who had gone up to Cambridge to read History about the time my brother left school. So we ought to have been operating on about the same level. Yet here was Albert, who was always a friend and advocate, telling me that, although I was good at Latin, I was not as good as Alfie; and since he said that I did not have his 'facility', I took it that what he was really saying was that I would never become as good. This was a hard thing to take on board at the time, though it was a preparation for future disappointments. What can you do, after all, but carry on and do your best?

Albert started to have difficulty in motivating some of the other boys who were doing Latin in the sixth form. They had chosen to do it, but started to question the point. I thought he made the mistake of letting the cat out of the bag one day, when he asked Stu' Carter<sup>12</sup> whether he thought there was any point in studying a dead language; and Stuart said frankly, no. Albert then answered his own question by saying that a knowledge of Latin was one of the keys to understanding Western literature, history and culture, as well as a way of learning other languages; but we could all see that Stu' was not convinced. Once you have lost the will to succeed academically, it is difficult to recover it, and there was no point in lecturing Stu' on the importance of literature, culture and history, when there were girls to be pursued out of school hours.

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<sup>12</sup> A pseudonym.



Stu' was an interesting character all round. He lived not far from me but was not part of my inner circle of friends. He sometimes came cycling with us, but was always apart because of his superior physique. He was prematurely tall and very strong; and had a vicious streak, though he could be friendly to his friends. When we were younger, he had picked on Paul Jenkins<sup>13</sup> (who was a spastic) in a very unpleasant bullying way. On one occasion, he mocked him by sticking a blade of grass between his legs and claiming that this was 'Paul's cock'. On another occasion, he totally destroyed some kind of record-stand which Paul had taken weeks to make in Metalwork, pulling it apart with his hands and stomping on it on the floor. Paul could not possibly respond – he was half Stu's size – and no one else was prepared to stick up for him.

So Paul took out his anger on the only other boy he could bully, who was a much younger, and outstandingly clever, Jewish boy called Bodansky. There weren't many Jews in our school, since they had their own school nearby (King David's), so Paul was free to give full expression to his anti-semitism. This appalling act of revenge only came to an end when it came to the attention of Spike Rankin, who delivered a devastating dressing-down in front of the whole class, pointing out that people of his generation had made considerable sacrifices during the War, when fighting Hitler's intensely anti-semitic regime.

Meanwhile Carter severed his relationship with the groves of *Academe* when he left school. Reportedly, he became a 'roadie' for a pop group and took to drugs, his body shrank and he became a shadow of his former self. He probably came to a bad end; but I doubt that he ever regretted his lack of attention in Latin, or his failure to pursue the opportunity to study history, culture and literature in greater depth. When last seen, he was on the fabled permanent 'high', and it wasn't induced by fine thoughts.

We studied History under E.C.Lowe ('Ecce') and I can see now that although we were relatively well taught, we learned seventeenth century English history from a Left-wing, though not a Marxist, point of view. Ecce started off telling us about the Anabaptists of Munster in the 1530s; and he used Christopher Hill's *Century of Revolution* as a textbook. He praised the Levellers and lent me a book by a Canadian academic called Petegorsky about the Diggers. The message was that there had indeed been a revolution, as opposed to a 'great rebellion' in England between 1640 and 1660, and that it was driven by economic and social developments – something which I think most historians of the period would nowadays reject out of hand, as being plainly inconsistent with the facts.

I was brought up to believe therefore that the Roundheads were clearly the 'good guys', but so were the Levellers, and there was no doubt whose 'side' Ecce would have been on if he had participated in the Putney Debates – just as he was clearly on Tom Paine's 'side' (and not Burke's) when it came to the American and French Revolutions, rather than Burke's. No wonder that, when he advised me to

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<sup>13</sup> A pseudonym.

try for Oxford, he said I should apply to Balliol. The Master of Balliol, elected in 1965, was Christopher Hill, the first Marxist to hold the position.

I don't criticise Ecce too much for this. He gave me a love of history; and he took it all seriously; but I do think that he imparted information in such a way as to disparage a conservative point of view. He taught the Left-wing – or 'progressive' – way of looking at history as if it was the only version. It captured my imagination at the time; but we could at least have been told that there was another way of looking at the story.

When I was in Liverpool town centre one day, I found a book for sale in Philip Son & Nephew and I bought it. This was *Puritanism and Revolution* (published 1958) and it was a collection of essays by Christopher Hill. I was captivated by those essays. They dealt with curious characters and incidents, as well as with grand themes. The arguments seemed irrefutable at the time, because they were based on an unparalleled knowledge of thousands of tracts published between 1640 and 1660, when censorship virtually ceased to exist; but Hill never took the trouble to consider how many people actually read them; and his book seems a period piece now. The idea that there was an English Revolution in the seventeenth century was (for most people) exploded, long ago now, by the work of B. H. G. Wormald, Peter Laslett, J. H. Hexter, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Brunton and Pennington, Conrad Russell and others. Laslett (in *The World We Have Lost*) pointed out that Hill never counted anything, and that the class struggle he wrote about simply didn't exist in seventeenth century England.

For a time, though, it seemed as if Marxism had all the answers. It explained the past, related it to the present and even predicted the future. It made it seem as if there was a purpose to everything – even to the study of History, which most of my friends regarded as a complete waste of time. History was not just 'one damned thing after another'. The study of it was worthwhile and could be put to good use. ; It was only at Oxford that I encountered a teacher – Maurice Keen – who made me see that one's interests could be both broader and deeper, that History was worth studying for its own sake and that it could be about discovering yourself rather than changing the world.

In the end, the attraction and plausibility of Marxism was dealt a lethal blow when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and the state capitalists took over the running of China, thereby proving once and for all that history was not inexorably marching towards the Left. But, though I now look at the world in an entirely different way from the way that I did in the Sixth Form, it has to be said that there are some fascinating stories in *Puritanism and Revolution*. I particularly like *John Mason and the End of the World*, first published in *History Today* in November 1957.

Looking back, there was a huge difference between the way in which History was taught when I was at school and the way it was taught in the 1980s when my daughters were at Old Hall Comprehensive in Rotherham. In my day, it was essentially a matter of absorbing certain facts and narratives, and being able to answer questions about them, or reproduce them in essay form. When my

daughters were taught about King Arthur, or the Norman Conquest, or the History of Medicine or the History of the Wild West, they were taught to compare and contrast the information to be found in different sources, which was not done in my time before the 3<sup>rd</sup> year at University. So, here was my 12 year old daughter pointing out that there was no good evidence that King Harold was ever shot through the eye with an arrow; and asking how you could possibly believe a chronicle source which said that King Arthur had slain 999 men 'with his own hand'.

Now this was all very well. I accept that it might have been a good idea to teach children to be critical, and to understand where we get the history from in the first place; and that the history taught in the 1980s was an excellent preparation for life, and for various careers; but I also think that 'they' threw the baby out with the bathwater. The new method of teaching history left out the history, in favour of 'skills'. It produced a generation of children with admirable skills, but little interest in History, and no real sense of what happened when.<sup>14</sup>

### *Holidays*

During the Easter Holidays, half a dozen of us went youth hostelling, cycling up out of Merseyside and staying at the hostels in Dacre Banks (near Harrogate), York, Bawtry, Matlock Bath and Castleton before returning home. The trip took a week so there was another hostel involved, where we stayed the first night, but I have forgotten both the name and where it was – though it would probably have been somewhere in the Trough of Bowland. York and Castleton are still open, but Matlock Bath, Dacre Banks and Bawtry closed long ago. I think this was probably connected with the fact that they were primitive. When we there, some of them had no running water and you had to wash the dishes in the stream.

The group was differently composed from those which went on our normal Sunday rides. Ian Evans brought two of his friends – I think one was called Dave Rollinson – and there was also 'Willi' Moore (who subsequently won a bronze medal in cycling at the Munich Olympic games of 1972 a Gold medal in Christchurch in the 1974 Commonwealth Games in the team pursuit, and a silver in the individual pursuit). Willi had a physique to remember and an aggressive way of cycling, even in 1964. I remember seeing him stripping off before climbing into the top bunk, at some Youth Hostel or other, and you see his muscles rippling; and there was no way you could stay with him on the hills or in a sprint.

Willi was already in a league of his own when it came to cycling; but he was also, shall we say, a bit more 'daring' than the rest of us in general, as shown by his performance on the roof of York Minster. He climbed onto the central lead area of

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<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the story of the Donner Party was a cracker. This was a group of 87 pioneers who set off for California by waggon train, only to be trapped by snow in the Sierra Nevada. Few of them survived. Cannibalism was rife. Several of them kept journals, describing the horrors in graphic detail. Suitably gory for kids.

the roof, where I am sure visitors were not supposed to go, while the rest of us clung to the edges.

One night when we were out in the wilds of Yorkshire, probably near Dacre Banks, we went out exploring on the bikes and came across a quarry. There was a car there and Willi suggested that we smash it up. He found an iron bar with which to do the necessary damage. He insisted that we each had to bear equal responsibility, so we all took a hand and stove in the windscreen, so that we could sit inside. After the damage was done and before we could all get in the car, a strange-looking man appeared on a moped at the entrance to the quarry and we 'scarpered' back to the Youth Hostel as fast we could go on two wheels, and waited to see what would happen. Nothing did, or has, so far. To the best of my knowledge, information and belief, the car was a wreck before we started. The windows were intact, but I doubt if there was an engine; and it did not look as if it had been parked in the expectation that anyone was coming back for it. However, I cannot be sure, and was certainly not confident then, that it was not a fully-functioning (if old) car, which had been left in the quarry by its owner or owners – perhaps by some lovers engaged in a tryst, deeper in the quarry.

I have, since that time, attended lectures by the Police, in which they stress that we are all potential criminals, so they cannot be expected to hold 'the thin blue line' on their own. I have also read about 'group mentality' and crowd psychology and peer pressure; but it was participating in that act of vandalism in 1964 which was more influential.

For the first time that summer, the family was widely dispersed. My brother was in Heidelberg in West Germany on some kind of a scholarship; my parents went to Italy for the first time. I don't really remember what happened to my sister; but she has reminded me that it was arranged that she stay with friends for a fortnight in Liverpool. (It has previously been arranged for her to go on holiday with our Uncle, Aunt and Cousin but she rebelled against this idea, for reasons not unconnected with her meeting the first boyfriend).

And I went to Normandy, on my own. The reasons for this were probably more deeply psychological than I can now express, but the ostensible motive for going was to improve my French; and I came across an organisation called the Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges, which arranged for me to live in a French home, *en famille*. The family I stayed with was called Dubosq. M and Mme Dubosq were a middle-aged couple, somewhat older than my parents (perhaps 60?) with a married son, who visited from time to time with his wife. I spent six weeks in Normandy - the whole of the Summer holidays, to get the most out of the experience.

I travelled by bus from Liverpool to Southampton and then by ferry to Cherbourg, then by train to Caen, where I was met by Madame Dubosq in her car. She had once taught English; but the rule in her house was that we only spoke French. I was there at the same time as two German boys, Michael and Rainer and an American, John Dove. The house was in the *Rue de l'Arquette* (a corruption of *Rue*

*de la Requête*, as M Dubosq informed me when he found that I was interested in History). It was a substantial detached house, with a large garden which backed onto the canal, and on the other side of which was a large meadow known as *The Prairie*. (Looking at it on Google Maps now, it still seems to be there, but my impression is that it is much reduced in size).

I had never met an American before. John Dove was about the same age as me, from New York and a Republican. His parents must have 'had money' – as my parents would have put it - since he was at private school at Bembridge in the Isle of Wight and he was the owner of the first copy of *Playboy* that I had ever seen, which he kept under his bed. John found that French food, even as prepared carefully by Mme Dubosq, was not to his taste, and he said so in a surprisingly forthright way. In addition to that insult, he refused to drink the mildly alcoholic cider, which was provided with every main meal. He insisted on buying large bottles of *Coca Cola*, which he placed in a prominent position on the dining table. Mme Dubosq pointed out to me, very quickly and idiomatically, that John was *un drôle de garçon*; and also that cider was good for you, but that Coca-Cola was bad, and it would turn John's insides all black in time; but John liked it, and clearly regarded it also a symbol of the American superiority in technology.

Being an American in the mid-1960s, John had a big mouth. He claimed that everything in America was bigger and better, and seemed to assume that everyone would readily agree, since it was pretty obvious. He mocked the British accent of his teachers in the Isle of Wight, whilst recognising that I did not speak exactly like them. He said that Britain was 'just some place' the Americans had 'taken over' at the end of the War, along with the rest; and he even purported to know about girls, though I think he was probably about 15 or 16. He said that, on any given Saturday night back in the States, he and his friends would drive around in cars, pick up girls and 'fool around with them', discarding them at the end of the evening, like used potato crisp packets. This sounded a bit callous to me. He also claimed that he had spied a girl riding a bike outside the house in the *Rue de l'Arquette*, and that she had deliberately ridden by, in such a way as to show him her knickers; but he didn't think he would bother to accept the invitation to the dance, since he was only there for a short time, and his French wasn't up to it. It seemed as if he had a lot more experience of these matters than I, so I could only agree that it was wiser not to get involved.

After a week or two, John claimed that the food served by Madame had given him worms. He took me to one side confidentially and said that he had just 'taken a crap' and seen a maggot in the turd. Fortunately he didn't show me the evidence; but – poor chap - what was he to do? Then, around the same time, Mme Dubosq discovered that copy of *Playboy*. She was not inclined to agree the drawings were to be admired as a form of modern art, to be ranked alongside the work of Andy Warhol and Jackson Pollock; and the two incidents – the poisoning and the pornography - created a major row. Madame decided that John was both ill and insane rather than merely being a badly-behaved *drôle*, and he was sent packing to

the Isle of Wight, if not to New York. I have never seen or heard of him since. He took his copy of *Playboy* with him, by the way.

I adapted to the food quite well, though it was certainly different from what I was used to; but I had developed a habit of having bread and cheese late at night at home; and, one night in Caen, I felt hungry in the small hours. I crept down the stairs into the kitchen and found the bread basket. Of course the bread, being 'French', needed slicing. So I rummaged around in the pale moonlight and found a bread knife, placed the stick of bread firmly on the bread board and sliced off a good chunk, making a neat but deep incision into one of my fingers in the process. I could hardly wake the Dubosqs, in order to ask for medical assistance, since this reveal the crime, so I unwisely elected to wrap the wound very firmly with a handkerchief, go back to bed and suffer in silence, with only a dry crust to chew on for consolation. Fortunately, I did not get tetanus and the wound healed very quickly and well, but I still bear the scar.

I found that the Germans, in particular Michael Hammer, who was my age, were more sympathetic - 'sympa' - than John Dove; but before he went home, we all went to see *La Grande Évasion* (The Great Escape) at the cinema. The film starred Steve McQueen and John and I enjoyed it greatly; but the Germans (Michael and the older boy Rainer) did not. They said this was not because hundreds of German soldiers were killed during the filming of it, but because it was grossly inaccurate. They explained that the film showed the *Gestapo* as the really bad guys who had rounded up the brave escapees, but that in real life the *Gestatspolizei* had been responsible for internal policing, so they would have spent their time hunting down fellow Germans, not foreign prisoners. This led to a discussion of the War in general (long before John Cleese's precautionary message in *Fawlty Towers*). Michael said that there was no question about it - Hitler had been a madman. No-one but a madman could think that Germany, which was a relatively small country, could take over the whole world. The implication, of course, was that the Germans as a whole were 'O.K.'

On my return, I asked my father about this. I had heard him say, whether seriously or not, that 'the only good German is a dead one'; but on this occasion, he gave me a reasonable argument. He said that you could perhaps divide into two: those who had been members of the Nazi party and those who had not been; but you couldn't get away from the fact that many ordinary Germans must have known about the tyranny and gone along with it, even if they had not enjoyed its benefits; and the concentration camps had been built and run on such a scale that the average German people *must* at least have known what was going on. There is now an extensive literature about all this - *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996) and so on - but at any rate that was his view, and he had lived through the War and seen that awful footage of Belsen when the British Army entered the camp, when it happened.

To my mind the Dubosqs had a strange attitude to the War. They used to complain bitterly that Caen had been *quatre-vingt-dix pour cent détruit* in 1944, not by the retreating Germans but by the American bombing. I thought this was a

somewhat ungrateful way of talking about their liberators; but Monsieur Dubosq's attitude to the German Occupation was also a little suspect. He said you had to give some credit to General Pétain and the Vichy government for recognising the reality of the situation, which was that in 1940 France was on its back and could not possibly have resisted further. It was all very well for de Gaulle, sitting comfortably in London, to tell the French to resist; but was the average man, whose first duty was to his family, to do? I think his 'realism' was also tinged with a bit of Fascism, since he was certainly no democrat. He told me that a system which meant that the vote of a great man like Winston Churchill had the same value as that of *un homme de la rue* could not be right.

On the other hand, Madame Dubosq had enormous respect for the British Army. When it had arrived on the *Prairie* in the late Summer of 1944, it had looked after the civilian population very well. There had been a British Major, who came by regularly and asked if everyone was 'all right' and did his best to see that they were supplied with what they needed. This contrasted starkly with the behaviour of one German officer who had called at the house in the *Rue de L'Arquette* one day and demanded that she sew a button on his coat at gunpoint; and with the American bombing.

From time to time, I was homesick; but I kept myself busy, reading some of the texts we had been set for 'A' level and doing a bit of Greek. I read a lot. We were 'doing' Louis XIV and I bought two books in French about episodes which had occurred during his reign - *La Révolte des Camisards* and *Les Grand Jours d'Auvergne*. At that date I had the naïve idea that there was probably only one book on each important episode in history, and it would be possible to cover the ground completely if you started at the beginning of a period and read one book about each episode. I had no idea what I was embarking on here. The truth had been neatly summed up by Isaac Newton 300 years before: *I was like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.*

It was a hot summer and I swam in the canal at the back of the house, opposite the *Prairie* where the British Army had camped twenty years before. I walked – up to the new University (in the heat), or else to the botanical gardens where Madame had told me that there was a tropical lily - the *Victoria Regis*? - which only flowered once a century. Sometimes the Dubosq's son came to visit, and once he took me (and his wife) out to the seaside for a swim in the sea. They seemed very happy together. He used to tease her about *La Petite Église de St Pierre Sur Dives*, which is where they had married and which was associated with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

I hired a bike in Caen, bought a map and drew up a *réseau-routier*, a map showing the routes radiating out from the town. I had six weeks on my hands and covered a lot of ground – often going up to the coast, along by Pegasus Bridge, Lion-Sur-Mer, Luc-Sur-Mer or else inland to Thury-Harcourt or Villers-Bocage, and the lanes in between. One day I got as far as the new bridge at Tancarville – that seems

impossibly far now. The remains or the memory of the D-Day landings were everywhere: tank traps at Arromanches; Pegasus Bridge, where the first paratroopers landed. Sea food - *les fruits de la mer* – was for sale all along the coast - not something I remembered from those blazing Sundays spent on Ainsdale beach. The French were evidently very keen on snails, whether from the forest or the sea. Ouistreham was named after the oyster beds. By the end of the holiday, I had covered many miles, and M. Dubosq asked me what the point of my expeditions was. I said it was *pour remplir quelques brèches dans mon réseau-routier* (fill the breaches in my strategic plan). He laughed and said I spoke like Molière or Racine, but in spoken French it was no longer common to employ the *style noble*, and I would do better to say *pour boucher les trous* (stop up the holes).

I was struck by the visible and sensual nature of Catholic worship in Normandy – not just the images in the Churches and the incense and the kneeling but also the wayside crosses, which I seemed to come across everywhere when I was out on my bike. This was the year my parents first went to Italy; and I remember my mother saying later, after my father had died, that, when he went into a church in Italy, he would light a candle. She said ‘I thought you didn’t believe in all that’; but he replied ‘When in Rome’. Not the reaction of every Englishman who goes to Continental Europe. I remember reading something about a British soldier in France during the First World War. Giving voice to his innate preference for the plainness of English Protestant worship, he said: *What I don't like about this 'ere bloody Europe is all these bloody pictures of Jesus Christ an' 'is relatives behind bloody bits of glawss.*

One day, out cycling, I came across a *Course Landaise*, which was a kind of gentler bullfight, where no harm was done to the cow – they were cows not bulls that they used. Another time, I went on a coach trip to the Mont St Michel, took some photographs, bought a guide book, mooched about; but I have no real memory of it, despite my interest in history. I think that the experiences one remembers the best are the ones that you share with your nearest and dearest.

But I do remember going to see the cyclists from the *Tour de France*, competing in a vélodrome, on the other side of the *Prairie*. Jacques Anquetil and Raymond Poulidor were there, circling the track in front of me! Anquetil (1934 – 1987) had just won the Tour for the fifth time, while Poulidor was the eternal runner up. So Anquetil wore the yellow jersey that night. I went on my own, but the crowd was friendly. I remember a man embracing me and saying that he came from the *Petite Bretagne* and I was from the *Grande Bretagne* so we were brothers. The two French champions each had their supporters, and each was cheered to the rooftops, though Anquetil was from Normandy, Poulidor from some other part of France. The crowd shouted *Pou-pou* as Poulidor went by, and was answered each time by a roar of *Allez, Jacques!* from the other side. The rivalry of Anquetil and Poulidor was legendary. I remember reading that Poulidor's best chance of defeating Anquetil had in fact been in that 1964 Tour, in the climb up the *Puy de Dôme*; but Anquetil had still beaten him. This was explained to me once, by a Frenchman. The answer was that Anquetil was clever, Poulidor was *bête* – stupid.



I was lonely that Summer, but I had the curious idea that somehow, if you waited patiently, you would eventually 'get a girlfriend', without actually going out and looking for one, or bothering to meet people in general. My friends had tried to disabuse me of this notion once or twice, kindly, but I still clung to it. And so I waited all those six weeks (ignoring the girls in the *Rue de l'Arquette* whom John had spotted immediately) - reading, swimming and cycling; but it did strike me, on the train going back to Cherbourg, that I had missed out on something important. There was a couple of young lovers in one of the compartments on the train, and I noticed, as I made my way down the corridor, that they were kissing; but the thing that struck me most was that I heard one of them giving the other a direct order: *Embrasse-moi, chérie!* Perhaps it was even *cheri*. Either way, I felt very English at that moment.

To compensate I ate a whole bunch of grapes on that train, given to me by Mme Dubosq, for the journey; and I ate them very quickly, without chewing. It was an overnight voyage, from Cherbourg to Southampton; and I spent most of that night in the bog, throwing up. In fact, I spent much of it lying on the floor with my legs up the side of the cubicle wall, dozing, when I didn't have my head over the toilet bowl.

When I came back from Caen, we had moved house, from 1 Lisleholme Close to 23 Whinmoor Road. This was still in West Derby, but in a much nicer area, in Sandfield Park; and it was a much bigger house. There had been a feeling that my sister would be reluctant to go there, since she had rejected earlier suggestions about moving house. Apparently, my brother was asked to speak to her about the matter, on the grounds that they were in some ways alike, despite being 20 and 14 and of different sexes. (Was it that they were both thought to be awkward buggers?) In fact, it turns out that she was very ready to move, since she was getting tired of having a girl known only as 'Toots' (who lived near Kewley's shop) cat-call at her at the no 12A bus-stop on the way to school. Clearly they could tell a 'swot' at 100 paces no matter how hard she tried to hide it. She would be on her way to Holly Lodge High School for Girls, when they were on their way to Bankfield Secondary Modern.

No 23 Whinmoor Road was certainly much more spacious than the house at Lisleholme, and had much bigger gardens, front and back, and two loos, though I think Dad kept the outdoor one for himself. (I didn't like going in there. Musty smell, and a fear of spiders under the toilet seat). I think this was when Dad took up gardening, and in particular built a trellis fence of some kind at the back. It was a back garden that was big enough to sit out in, in deckchairs, and surrounded by trees. We each had our own bedroom, because the house had four, though my sister still got the smallest. Mum often used to say, after Dad died, *your father loved that house*, which brought it all back to me with a pang.



Albert Wilson



Alfie May (centre, with glasses)



Ian Evans (left); Willi Moore



Willi Moore standing on top of York Minster



Left to right – Brian Brown; friend of Ian Evans; Willi Moore; another friend of Ian Evans; Graham Jeffs; Ian Evans; Duncan Woods. (Taken by me, Yorkshire, 1964)



The canal next to the prairie, the Dubosq's house, Caen



The Rue de l'Arquette



M and Mme Dubosq

# CONCLUSION

## 1965

My memory tells me that the theatre and film critic Kenneth Tynan first used the word 'fuck' on television on a Saturday night, during an episode of *That Was The Week That Was*; but the record shows that 'TW3' was taken off the air in 1962, and that the great swearing-in took place on 13 November 1965, during a live television debate which was part of a programme known as *BBC-3*. Whichever it was, Tynan (who was also literary manager at the National Theatre) was asked whether he would allow a play to be staged in which sexual intercourse was represented on the stage. He replied: *Well, I think so, certainly. I doubt if there are any rational people to whom the word 'fuck' would be particularly diabolical, revolting or totally forbidden. I think that anything which can be printed or said can also be seen.*

Well, Kenneth Tynan may or may not have been right about that, but he certainly made life difficult for me that night, because the word 'fuck' was completely taboo in our house, and my father was outraged, both on his own behalf and my mother's. Not to the point of registering an official complaint with the BBC, but certainly to the point of getting out of his chair and turned the sound down, which left me sitting there intensely embarrassed, and wondering whether I ought to storm out of the room in mock outrage too. Paul Johnson remarked that Tynan's use of 'that word' was a 'masterpiece of calculated self-publicity'. My Dad would have agreed with that, but would not have put the criticism so politely.

In my last full academic year at The Holt (1964-5), I concentrated on my 'A' level subjects and did no more Greek. Consequently, any idea of trying to read Classics at University was out, and this meant that I had to choose between History, Latin and French as the subjects I would read at University. It never occurred to me that there were other things that you could study like Law, and I had never even heard of 'PPE' or 'PPP', both of which were of course well-known degree courses at Oxford.

For A level we studied English History between 1603 and 1714 (the Stuarts and the Interregnum) and European History between 1648 (the end of the Thirty Years War) and 1870 (the Franco-Prussian War). For A level French we did French language but mostly French literature (*La Peste* by Albert Camus, *Terre des Hommes* by Antoine de St Exupéry, *Eugénie Grandet* by Balzac, and poems by Victor Hugo, Leconte de Lisle and Baudelaire). For A level Latin we studied language (in Bradley's *Arnold*) while in literature we read Book II of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Cicero's *Second Philippic* – or 'Second Oration against Marc Antony'. Ecce Lowe taught us English History, Jardie Jones European. 'Jim' Askill us taught French. Albert Wilson taught us Latin. I knew all the literary works backwards by June 1965 and gained straight 'A' grades in all three plus Grade 1s in 'S' (or Special) Level in History and Latin. I stayed on at school for an extra term between September and Christmas

1965, to sit the separate Oxford Entrance Exams after A level, which was the usual way of doing it then, at least at my school (though it was rare for anyone there to even try for either Oxford or Cambridge). I won all the school prizes that year, and was allowed to carry all 12 books that I was presented with off the stage at the same time, at Speech Day, *pour encourager les autres*, I suppose. At the same time, I participated in a swimming gala and won the last leg of a relay race for the house of Troy. This was the last year when I felt that I was at the top of the tree.

The experience of staying on for a third year in the Sixth Form (or the first term of a third year, as it turned out) was a strange one. All my friends and contemporaries except one (Derek Marsden) had left school and we became close; but I was taught on my own, and had lots of free time. I was also very free (probably too free) to study as I liked. I spent a lot of time reading – novels but also lots of paperbacks on different subjects, in an attempt to educate myself in things other than my chosen subject (Modern History, rather than Ancient). I read Eysenck on Psychology, Margaret Mead on Anthropology, Julian Huxley on Evolution and other popular texts of the day on 'Current Affairs' and took everything I read very seriously. Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders* persuaded me that my Dad was right to say that advertising was the curse of modern society. Daniel Boorstin's *The Image* persuaded me that photography was equally a curse (because it destroyed your ability to appreciate the moment, and 'seize the time': so for some years after this I took no photographs. The result of this is that, while I have photographs of my youth hostelling days, I have virtually no photos of my time in France in the first half of 1966 or my time at Oxford between 1966 and 1969, though these were some of the happiest years of my life, and I would like to have them now. The man who reads a few paperbacks and thinks he knows everything about the subject is indeed a fool.

I liked the novels of Aldous Huxley and I also read his *Doors of Perception* (1954), the idea of which was the 'doors of perception were cleansed' if you took the drug Mescaline. I also read some books about Philosophy and became interested in the idea that it was possible to discover 'the secret of life'. At the same time, I couldn't help regarding philosophy as a whole as a bit of a joke, since (like religion) it always seems to reflect the individual's particular circumstances, and I had pretty much accepted Albert Camus's idea that life is absurd anyway. The feeling was enhanced by a story of my father's, which I think he must have got from Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (1945):

"[The American philosopher] William James describes a man who related that, whenever he was under the influence of laughing gas, he knew the secret of the universe, but when he came to, he had forgotten it. At last, with immense effort, he wrote down the secret before the vision had faded. When completely recovered, he rushed to see what he had written. It was:

*A smell of petroleum prevails throughout".*



I was also very fond of another story, variously ascribed to William James and the American humourist Dorothy Parker:

“Around the turn of the century [i.e. 1900], William James decided to experiment on himself with the effects of opium in order to increase his creativity and powers of insight. In the middle of one drug-induced dream, he suddenly felt a flash of inspiration. Certain that the secret of the universe had suddenly been revealed to him, he managed to write down the content of his inspirational flash before losing consciousness. On awakening, he found to his dismay that what he had written was,

*Hogamous, higamous: Men are polygamous;  
Higamous, hogamous – Women are monogamous.*

There may be some truth in this; but it is hardly the secret of the Universe. It also doesn't correspond with my mother and father's experience, or mine, or my brother's or my sister's, so far.

In my last term at school, I sat the Oxford entrance exams, in the Library at The Holt; and went up to Balliol for the interview, with the Master and the History Fellows (Christopher Hill, Richard Cobb, Maurice Keen and Donald Pennington). I did not acquit myself very well in either, I think – I certainly had no experience of interviews and was tongue-tied –but they offered me a place as a Commoner, to start in the Autumn of 1966.<sup>15</sup> Having got my place, I wanted to leave The Holt and do something else with my life, and the Headmaster reluctantly allowed me to do this (though he really wanted me to stay and 'give something back to the school'). I applied to do Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in Zambia, went for an interview for that in London but was rejected, presumably on account of my immaturity. I also applied to become a teaching assistant in France and, having started work as an assistant nurse in the mental hospital at Rainhill run by my brother's girlfriend's father, was eventually offered a place for six months at a *College d'Enseignement Général* in Monflanquin, Lot-et-Garonne.<sup>16</sup> I left Liverpool for France, and a new life, in February 1966.

I cannot leave this memoir of my early life without paying tribute to the young couple to whom I have dedicated it, and whose photograph appears below. I say 'young' because the picture was taken at my wedding in 1970 but they didn't look much different in 1965, when they would both have been 50, which is quite a bit younger than I am now; but the point is, that they were older and wiser when it mattered.

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<sup>15</sup> After the Michaelmas Term in 1966 I was awarded a minor scholarship known as an Exhibition.

<sup>16</sup> I learned recently that this closed last year (2011), moving to different premises at the foot of the hill.

To sum up, I would say that these twain gave their three children stability; unconditional love and a model of married love to follow; an upbringing and an education that was free of religious clutter and excessive bias; and an example of tolerance and moderation. Many young people tend to the extreme and this is why all faiths (religious or political) like to capture people before they mature; but it would have been hard to grow up as an extremist of any sort with parents like mine. Dad, in particular, was not afraid to give vent to his prejudices, but he (like his wife) was a fundamentally decent, kind and tolerant human being, who could see that there was another point of view and that the other man was entitled to hold it; and he had a deep sympathy with the man in the street, the man who lived a life of 'quiet desperation', but got on with it just the same.

