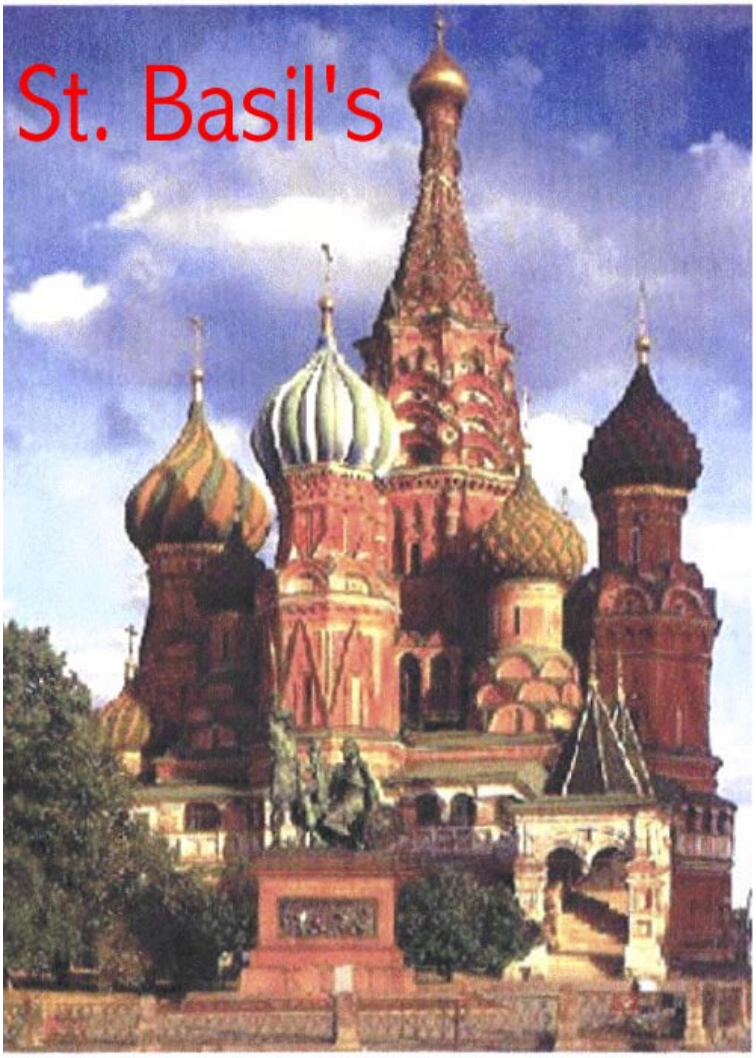

BEFORE I FORGET

MEMORIES OF A LIFETIME

BY DOUGLAS HUNTINGTON

PUBLISHED BY HELMWIND BOOKS.

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FIRST PUBLISHED IN GREAT BRITAIN IN 2000 A.D.

BY HELMWIND BOOKS

BONAVENTURE, HERONSLEA, NEW DOMEWOOD

COPTHORNE WEST SUSSEX RH10 3HE.

SECOND EDITION PUBLISHED IN FRANCE IN 2007 A.D.

27 AVENUE DES ALPES, CENTRAL PARK, CEDEX 264,

06330 ROQUEFORT-LES-PINS, FRANCE.

BEFORE I FORGET

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FOREWORD

This is not intended as an autobiography, but as a commentary as seen through my eyes and experience, of life in the twentieth century. This has spanned nearly three quarters of that century, and has witnessed many amazing happenings and developments. Readers who are contemporaries of mine may shrug their shoulders and say "so what, I have seen it all too!" It is for much later readers that I have written. Just as I have enjoyed and gained benefit from reading about times earlier than my own, so perhaps will they.

Everybody's perspective is different, and the reader may not agree with some of the views and observations that I have offered, especially those about the standard of British business management. These however are not expressed from a particularly political stance. They are from a view of one whose prosperity and job security, like many millions of others, depended upon the skill and commitment of business bosses. This management standard is slowly improving, but there are still thousands of companies, managed in key roles, by those who have inherited their position rather than earned it. Of course many of these are capable people, but the business world is a hard and competitive one and for businesses to survive, lean, committed and industrious men and women are needed.

When I was a youngster the nation celebrated the silver jubilee of King George V with a day's holiday,

and at school we received a commemoration mug emblazoned with his coat of arms, and mention of the Empire to which we belonged. Or was it which we owned?

I remember spending the whole day at a funfair in Carshalton. The rides were unusually cheap and of long duration, probably more to do with the depression than the celebration. When I wasn't riding on the chairplanes, which swung out almost horizontally, I was clambering over a World War 1 cannon which had been stationed there, I suppose now, because they didn't know where else to put it. I clearly recall hoping, on that blissful day, that I would be able to last out until the year 2000. If the jubilee is like this, what will the centenary celebrations be like?

Well, here I am. I have clung on to life without any difficulty; no haemorrhoids, at least not so far; a touch of arthritis here and there, flat feet, but nothing life threatening. On January 1st 2000 I didn't go to a funfair, nor even to the Dome or London Eye. Whereas in 1935 I would have loved to go to London, since about 1980 I

have avoided it like the plague; I can get mugged in Crawley, Croydon or Brighton, for a much shorter journey. That is a pity, because I spent a lot of my working life there, and enjoyed to the full all that it offered – theatres, concerts, museums, art galleries, restaurants, parks, fabulous shops, and soap-box speakers on Tower Hill. All those, I think, are now owned by Mr. Al Fayed.

Except for one event, which has occurred only this year, I would not swap my time for any other. I am sure that the ensuing century will be equally exciting, and I intend to participate in it for as long as possible.

Douglas Huntington, Bonaventure, November 2000

BEFORE I FORGET
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of friends and relatives have helped me with this book of memories; some of them without even knowing it!

My daughter-in-law Bridget, trying to think of ideas to occupy the old man's time, made the suggestion that I should write an autobiography; I wasn't too keen on that because so many autobiographies are self-serving, or self-justifying. However, I have packed so much into my life at a period of time when so much of interest has happened, that I thought it would amuse me to put some of it down on paper. Doing so has indeed entertained me and if any other reader draws pleasure from reading it, that will be an added bonus to my satisfaction.

My eldest brother Gordon not only threw in some suggestions, and gave me continuous encouragement, but he also read the manuscripts of each chapter, and checked for accuracy, so that I can blame any errors which remained unnoticed on him. After all, our mutual headmaster once indicated that Gordon's English was better than wot mine is. A one time school contemporary, Bunny Warren, gave me some helpful reminders. My friend of over thirty years, Geoffrey Bowden, also refreshed my memory, as did also Joan Sherring, now retired but who at one time shared many "Rustyfa" experiences with me, and who lent some relevant photographs. I owe thanks to my son Warwick for his practical help with this book.

Lastly, thanks to the beautiful Pamela, who unbeknown to her, appears in this book, for involuntarily dropping her knickers – in the nicest possible way, of course.

I dedicate this book to the memory
of my darling June

Whom I shall never forget

Bonaventure, November 2000.

BEFORE I FORGET

Memories of a Lifetime
By
Douglas Huntington

Chapter one
1927-1939 Childhood

My earliest childhood memory is shortly after our family had moved from Streatham to Wallington, in 1929, when I was two years old. It was a newly built house in a newly built road – Crichton Avenue – developed by a Mr. Snowden, who lived at No.1. That first recollection must have been fairly soon after we moved because the pavements had not yet been laid. I had a new toy pedal car, presumably a present for Christmas 1929, and it was not possible to drive it on the pavement until that had been properly laid. I also remember, before pavements had been laid, my mother pushing me to the new shopping parade in Wallington in a push-chair; it was a very bumpy ride. Another memory is of her taking me to Streatham to have afternoon tea with a former neighbour Mrs Witcher in Gracedale Road, where I had started life.

Wallington, at that time, was a fast-growing suburb of London, and the country literally started across the road, with green fields stretching as far as the suburban railway line, which ran from Epsom Downs, through Croydon to termini at Victoria or London Bridge. Beyond that there were a few residential roads but then the countryside stretched through Woodmansterne to Banstead to Box Hill, and so on. It wasn't long before Mr Snowden had built houses on the opposite side of Crichton

Avenue, and the sidewalks had been properly paved. Along with neighbouring suburbs, Waddon, Carshalton, Sutton, Cheam and Epsom, Wallington was growing fast, and during the 1930s dignified itself with a borough council (of Beddington and Wallington) and built itself a handsome Town Hall, Public Library, and Civic Centre. Meanwhile a mile or so to the southeast of Crichton Avenue, England's new civil airport was developing, originally referred to as Wallington Aerodrome, it was renamed Croydon Aerodrome in order to put it "on the map". More about the Airport later. Also in the 30s one of the local gentry, Major (later Sir William) Mallinson presented to the borough one of his seats – The Grange along with the grounds surrounding it, named Grange Park, complete with ornamental lakes, which adjoined Beddington Park, the River Wandle wandering through both on its way to join the River Thames. So my memories include the fast growth of these latest additions to London's sprawl into its surrounding countryside.

Nearer to home at Crichton Avenue there was a small parade of shops in Demesne Road, comprising a corner shop selling groceries, owned by Mr Honeyfield, a confectioner and tobacconist, owned by brothers Eric and Richard Cordy, a butcher's shop, a greengrocer and barber's shop, names unrecalled. My father used to spin a yarn to me about an elephant who called at each of these shops, asking for food, and about the unfriendly, even aggressive response which he received from the butcher, compared with the apple, sweet and biscuit he received from the kindly Messrs. Honeyfield, Cordy, and the unnamed greengrocer. The elephant's revenge came next day when he returned with his trunk full of water from the Wandle, and drenched the unkind butcher. This yarn was

told at bedtimes and bathnights and always produced shrieks of laughter. Needless to say that I in turn eventually retailed it to my children, though having to recast the names to local shopkeepers. In addition to the local shops, household needs arrived by other means. No, not mail order, nor via supermarkets, but by delivery to our door. There was the greengrocer who came with vegetables and fruit, using a horse and cart, both horse and cart being rather decrepit. Outside our house there was a lamp-post, and the old horse used to lean against this whilst his master called on the nearby houses. For as long as we lived there the lamp-post had a pronounced tilt. Then there were the baker, milkmen and laundrymen calling regularly. Tinkers came from time to time offering to clean the cutlery, and sharpen knives with, on board their handcart, the Kent Patent Knife Cleaning Machine.

Kent Knife Cleaning Machine

Then there were the special treats; the Walls Ice Cream man pedalling a tricycle and ringing his bell. Water Ice Lollipops, strawberry or lime flavoured were going for a

penny, a wafer covered vanilla brick was tuppence. Now and then the Muffinman would come round, ringing his hand bell like a town crier of earlier times, to proclaim his presence. Like the Tonibell vans of later times these unbudgeted demands on parents' purses must sometimes have been annoying. A regular sight in the roads of Wallington was "Paper Jack". I believe he was a leftover from the frightful World War I, and he lived as a tramp locally. He was totally clad in newspapers down to the calves of his legs. Unshaven, with a long beard, and mostly unwashed except by the rain, he was harmless and genial, kept alive and fed by compassionate housewives. Another familiar sight was a badly shell-shocked man in his forties. Walking about the streets he would let out a shriek every few yards, and look around him to find the source of that noise. Again he was quite harmless, but jolted a lot of nerves, and perhaps stirred feelings of guilt among his luckier citizens.

Familiar sounds everywhere in those days, in addition to the sounds of half a dozen competing church bells and the occasional Muffinman, were the factory hooters, summoning workers to work, or signalling the start and end of lunchbreaks. Not that Wallington was a heavily industrialised district, but we had two chocolate factories, one at Waddon and the other at Beddington, (heavenly smells), and there were numerous factories near the Airport, as well as in Carshalton, Hackbridge and Mitcham. And of course the passing airplanes were quite noisy.

The house at Number 23 seemed perfect to me; it had three bedrooms one of them large enough only to sleep one person, so I shared the back bedroom with my brother Gordon, older by 7 years, and Ken, older by 4

years had the small room. Returning there in my forties I realised how "Jerry-built" those houses had been, looking as they were, quite dilapidated. Still, they withstood the battering from three lusty boys, and survived the bombing in the "Blitz", when they were shaken by near misses, losing windows and ceilings so regularly that we didn't bother to replace them until the bombing slackened in 1943. The back garden was about 105 feet long, and about 15 feet wider than the width of our semi-detached house – just wide enough for those who could afford to aspire to a garage and car. Just long enough to play cricket using a soft ball.

We were well served with parks and recreation areas, with the already mentioned Beddington Park, Grange Park, and a large recreation park, referred to as "The Rec" between us and the Aerodrome. Additionally there was "Queen Elizabeth's Walk" about 200 yards from us. Named after the first Elizabeth, this was a long avenue of trees, of about three quarters of a mile, stretching to Beddington Park.. More interestingly to Gordon, then Ken, and in due time to me, was the disused brickworks at the end of Queen Elizabeth's Walk, with its sand cliffs where the materials had been quarried, with abandoned machinery, and most exciting of all, several long dark tunnels into the sand cliffs, which, had our parents been aware of the dangers of their collapse, would have been designated "no go areas"!

And of course there was Croydon Aerodrome to entertain us; from Wallington it stretched southwards for about a mile towards Purley. From our house the boundary was just over half a mile away, and although some of Foresters Drive on its western side had houses

backing on to it, there was another large recreation park through whose railing fence one could watch the activity. The runway was of grass, and not all that smooth and level for take-off and landing, as I discovered later in the war. It was also rising gently for the take-off into the generally prevailing south-west wind. On the opposite, eastern side from Foresters Drive there was the "Front Office" of the Airport – the Booking Hall, the Arrivals and Departures area, the concrete apron, and of course the Control Tower. On the same side there were various workshops, hangars, and some factories running down Purley Way to Waddon, including some manufacturers of Airplanes and components. In those days security was such that one could walk in and out without interference, though grubby looking unaccompanied schoolboys might be shown the door in due course. The same lack of security applied to the fence at the Stafford Road Waddon end – it was a corrugated iron fence about seven feet in height. On the Foresters Drive side, in the recreation ground, the airport was bounded by a railing fence of about 6 feet in height. Later, during the war, the Hurricane and Spitfire squadrons belonging to No.11 Group were additionally protected by barbed wire.

It was not necessary, though, to go to the Airport perimeter for aerial entertainment. Whether in your garden, in one of the parks, or out shopping, planes were always bumbling about the sky – some on foggy days, groping through the mist searching for the Aerodrome. Their only guiding beacon was a flashing light shone from beside the Control Tower. Flying being a young science with every hazard yet to be learned about and avoided, there were quite frequent crashes, usually within a mile or so of the aerodrome. These of course drew all the

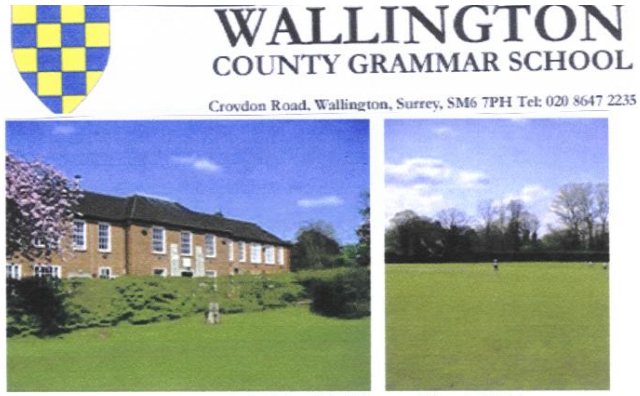
youngsters, and quite a lot of oldsters as well, to the scene of the crash, to ogle at the wreckage.

This was the home of Imperial Airways, after the war to be divided into two and renamed British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), and British European Airways (BEA), all much later being yet again renamed British Airways (BA). Imperial were flying the (then) giant Handley Page Hercules class, and equally prominent was the German airline flying what became known in World War Two as Junkers 52 airliners. These had three engines and were clad in what looked like corrugated iron, but which presumably were aluminium alloy.

In 1938 came the wonderful new monoplane airliner – the Ensign range, but a year later, after the war had begun, these were commandeered for military requirements. But they presaged that the concept of air travel had taken hold, and that we could look forward to many new developments in this mode of travel. In the early thirties their competitors in air travel had been the airships, frequently seen in the sky. The British airship R34 was, in 1934, the first airship to complete a non-stop transatlantic roundtrip flight. But a number of airship disasters put paid to their prospects; the danger of fire to their gas-filled bodies being brought home by the destruction of Germany's Hindenburg by fire. This happened in 1937 in America after its passage across the Atlantic. In the early 1920s Helium had been introduced to replace Hydrogen because it reduced the dangers from fire. The Hindenburg, however had been forced to return to the use of Hydrogen because the Americans had placed an embargo on Helium. I remember seeing the British R101 pass over Crichton Avenue quite low, and a few days later, on a proving flight

to Egypt it struck a hill near Beauvais in northern France, killing 48 of its passengers. The airship had been struggling against engine problems and poor weather conditions. This ended once and for all the prospects of the dirigible airship except, it seems, for screening Test cricket from the air at Lords.

Brother Gordon had entered Wallington County School, the equivalent of today's (or rather yesterday's) Grammar School, at that time a collection of very tatty buildings near Woodcote Road. In 1935, in keeping with the growth and dignity of the borough of Beddington and Wallington a fine new school was built on the Croydon Road, fully equipped with Chemistry Laboratories, a gymnasium, a tuck shop, even a separate room for the prefects.



Main School Building and Sports Fields

So brother Gordon, who matriculated in 1936, only enjoyed these amenities for a year or so, whereas, entering

the school in 1937, I inherited the use of this fine establishment for my years of secondary education. The fee my parents paid for my education was 4 guineas per term. As a pint of best beer then cost 6d (2 ½ pence) and now costs over £2, the 4 guineas per term should be translated as 80 times £4.20, namely £336. My parents had three boys to send to school, and each one cost the equivalent in today's money of over £1000 each year, if you include school uniforms. This was another sacrifice which my parents and thousands of others bore, usually without recognition of that and other sacrifices by their children. I thought always my parents were rich, as every year the family went to the seaside on holiday, usually to Sandown on the Isle of Wight, or to Swanage in Dorset, for two weeks, often for three weeks, when my father went back to work, leaving mother in charge of spoiling us. In fact it was a struggle and only by teaching at evening classes after work three times a week could they afford such luxuries.

On those three evenings my father would arrive home at about 11 p.m., doubtless very tired. Luckier parents than mine could be saved the cost if their children passed a scholarship exam at the entry age of 10 or 11; for them the schooling was free, and I realise now that they enjoyed the pride of gaining entry by their own efforts. I never counted, but I guess that about one third of the 500 pupils at Wallington County School were scholarship boys. To my knowledge there was never any sign of snobbishness, and many of my and my brothers' friends had scholarships.

The only segregation came as a result of their industriousness, in that each year's stream was divided into three separate streams according to their perceived

diligence, and abilities to learn at the speed of that stream. And sure enough, the fastest stream mostly comprised scholarship boys. Later, during the war, when Mitcham County School was bombed to destruction, large numbers of their pupils were parcelled out to neighbouring districts. Wallington accommodated a sizeable number of them. Mitcham had attracted on the whole a less prosperous section of the citizenry, and the boys came from marginally poorer homes than was the case in Wallington – their clothes were shabbier, their accents less "suburbanised." They enriched the school, were on the whole better at sports, and as I have noted, worked harder, and matriculated with higher marks and more honours. It was an excellent school and I am proud to have been a pupil there over a period of six years. There were many contemporaries there who remembered Gordon, and who knew me also, because my brother had often taken me along to watch cricket matches organised by themselves on Saturdays and during school holidays. I was part mascot and probably three parts pest.

Most of the teaching staff also remembered Gordon as he was a very likeable and personable fellow, who could strike up a fellowship or friendship at first meeting. The teachers also were for the most part excellent and very committed. It is a fact that good schools attract the best teachers, and Wallington County School was well endowed with good facilities, had a good academic record, and therefore had above average teachers, led by a very talented Headmaster. My fraternal connection with the school had both advantages and its downside: the prefects' acquaintance with Gordon made life easier from a disciplinary point of view, but on the other hand the teaching staff tended to compare me with my brother's academic prowess. I was

good at French, "but not as good as your brother"; and I remember on one occasion the Headmaster, who took us for English Grammar and Literature, damned me with faint praise by saying " you know Huntington if you tried a bit harder you could be almost as good as your brother Minnie"; that having been Gordon's nickname at school. He also observed of my composition "Huntington you have a tendency to compose overlong and woolly sentences". This was absolutely untrue as always I write short sharp economical brief and uncluttered sentences, as my Mother and Uncle Bert always assured me when I raised the subject, usually after lunch on Sundays, but sometimes on other days as well, that being the best time to air those matters.

With the outbreak of war in September 1939 the character of the school changed drastically; many of the teaching staff went into the fighting forces – usually the best, and certainly the best loved of them, as did large numbers of ex-pupils, including my brother Gordon. Sadly several of the teachers lost their lives, as also did far too many of the fine young men whom I had watched playing cricket only recently. I was too young, by a year or two, to serve in the forces during the war, and I have always, since then, been able to distinguish fairly accurately between those who did so, and those who, like myself, did not. I remembered those fresh-faced contemporaries of my brothers carrying that happy-go-lucky and optimistic air. Those who returned often had a much more cynical air, having been rudely exposed to grim realities at too early an age. I could also usually distinguish between those who had been personally involved in action, and those who had not. The former never would talk about it……...

CHAPTER TWO
1939 - 1945 PIMPLY YOUTH

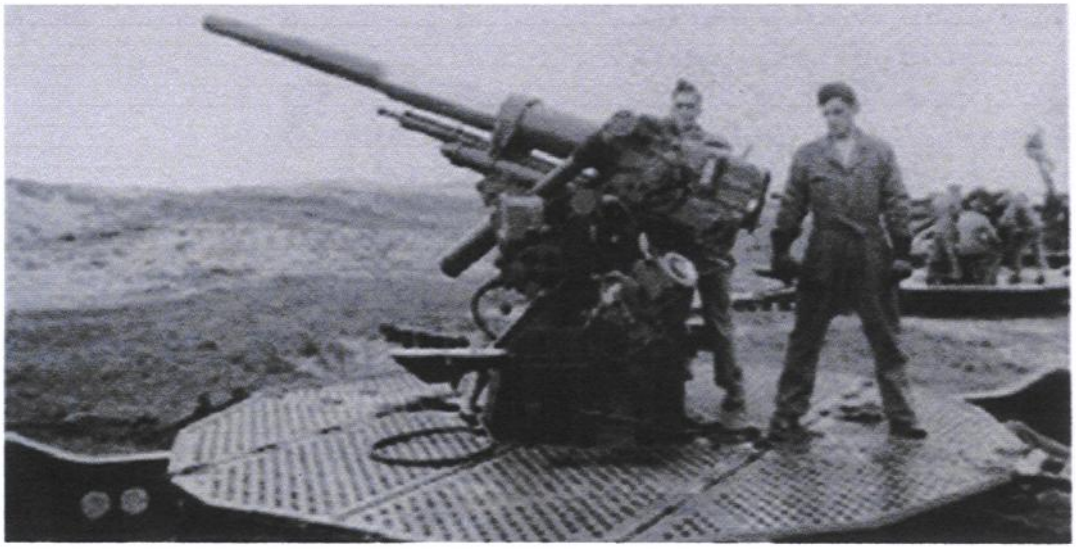
My first recollection of the outbreak of World War Two must be similar to those of virtually every Briton who was alive at the time; that of sitting by the radio with the whole family, at 11 a.m. on Sunday September 3rd 1939. Neville Chamberlain, sounding like a curate announcing to the congregation that somebody had rifled the poor box, explained that we were now in a state of war with Nazi Germany. His voice did not sound to me all that optimistic of its outcome, probably rightly so, as he had a far more extensive knowledge of the states of preparedness of the three countries involved.

Probably, a few minutes after he had finished his speech, somewhere between 30 and 50 million Brits reached for their gas masks, when the Air Raid sirens sounded over the nation, for we had been advised to wear these when the warnings were sounded. My mother was in tears, and my father was very solemn, because they realised that at least two of their sons, then aged 19 and 16 respectively were to be caught up in this war. In fact Gordon, having joined the Territorial Army in 1938, had already been mobilised two days earlier, and reported on September 1st to London Divisional Signals Barracks in Balham.

In fact we had all been witnesses to dress rehearsals for the coming war in addition to the early issue of gas masks. For the preceding two years, when holidaying at Sandown, we had enjoyed the excitement of watching the guns on the cliff forts above the town, practising against

targets towed by naval ships about two miles out to sea. Accuracy was not very impressive, and we sometimes felt that the towing vessels were in mortal danger. This was not all. The firing went on at nights as well. Weighed against the excitement of the young, the anxiety and sleep-loss of our parents was, to them, unwelcome.

Back home, we had a marvellous view from our bedroom window, of scores of Barrage Balloons stretching in the sky northwards to and beyond London. As if that was not enough several batteries of Anti-Aircraft guns were installed nearby. On Mitcham Common heavy 3.7 inch calibre Naval guns were amassed, and nearer in Beddington lighter AA Bofors guns were arrayed. All these began practising firing, and the clatter was exquisitely loud. It really felt as if they were firing from our back garden. It was altogether more exciting than the previous year's spectacles, firstly the Northern Lights, the Aurora Borealis. That had been followed by the burning one evening of the Crystal Palace, perched on a hill at Norwood about four miles away. Those were tough acts to follow, but the Ack-Ack regiment obliged amply.



Above:Typical World War 2 anti-aircraft gun, calibre 3.7 in.

My father, a hard-working Accountant, had in 1935, saved up the money, by giving up cigarettes for a year, to buy a new Murphy mains electric radio. This saved us the task every week of carrying two heavy wet batteries to the local barber's shop, who had the sideline business of recharging them. By 1939 my father had saved up enough, he thought to buy a car. A new Ford 8 could be bought for £100 at that time. Upon the outbreak of war he had to ditch that plan, and divert the funds to building an underground air raid shelter. He commandeered part of the lawn – our cricket pitch – and set to work excavating and building our shelter. So to balance my excitement at all things warlike, my parents failed to realise their ambition to own a car, had the anxiety of having two of their sons in uniform, endured the additional anxiety of food shortages, (I remember my mother bursting into tears when I smashed the family's ration for the week of three eggs), and to come, the anxiety about bombing raids, possibly with poison gas as well as with fire and explosives.

To digress from the war for a moment, England was at a peak of talent in a cricketing sense. Leonard Hutton had beaten Donald Bradman's test batting record of 336, by scoring 364 against Australia. New, promising cricketers had emerged to enable us to win the test series against Australia – Denis Compton, whom I rate the greatest of all batsmen ever, Bill Edrich, another Middlesex cricketer, almost as promising with the bat as Denis, and a handy fast-medium bowler to boot, Hedley Verity, a devastating spin bowler, a guy called Farnes from Essex who could bowl at amazing speeds; and lots of others showing great promise,including our own Ken King, a Wallington County School hopeful, who was bowling for Surrey. How I wish I had kept one set at least of the Players cigarette cards,

portraying the English and Australian teams. Incidentally Denis Compton was also outstanding at soccer, playing for Arsenal. The Edrich family have produced, over the generations, many outstanding cricketers, the last one to reach stardom was John Edrich, who played for Surrey and England. In those days we had to listen to the commentaries on the steam-radio. When England were touring Australia the live commentary was via cable connections under the sea, and the voice of Howard Marshall sounded as if he was 100 fathoms down too.

Sadly though, these cricketers had their professional careers in the game decimated by the exigencies of war, and some indeed lost their lives. During the war scratch one-day games were laid on at Lords, featuring some of the leading cricketers, from England, the West Indies, or Australia, who might be in the UK, and released temporarily for the day. I used to travel from Wallington across London to the Lords ground on every possible occasion, tomato sandwiches in satchel, and pencil in hand to record every ball on the scorecard one could buy for threepence. I am convinced having watched the Compton and Edrich pair in numerous of those matches, that, had they not lost those seven years, they would have become cricketing legends universally, and not just to me.

Denis Compton batting in 1951

The England side that regained the Ashes at The Oval in 1953: Trevor Bailey, Peter May, Tom Graveney, Jim Laker, Tony Lock, Johnny Wardle (12th man), Fred Trueman. (Front row Bill Edrich, Alec Bedser, Len Hutton (captain), Denis Compton, Godfrey Evans.

The early stages of the war, as we have often been reminded, was phoney, which means that few people were being killed or maimed – at least in Britain, France and Germany. The Germans were fed with leaflet raids telling them how stupid they were to follow Hitler and his clique, and we were fed with nonsensical propaganda telling us how successfully our non-action was filling the Germans with fear and dread – always in the same hectoring, sycophantic BBC-announcer voice. When the Germans took to the offensive they walked all over the allies, brought brave France, who had been bled white in World War 1, to her knees and to a quick defeat, and pushed us out of France leaving behind thousands of troops and most of our military equipment. Thanks to the gallantry of the Royal Navy and hundreds of civilian sailors, nearly three hundred thousand British and allied troops were rescued from the French beaches, to fight another day.

It is to the credit of the nation and to the steadfastness of the national leader, Winston Churchill, that few people panicked, and the country stood, alone, to face whatever was to come next. And it was thanks to Nazi Germany's convictions that the war in the west was won despite our obstinate refusal to perceive this fact, that, after failure to convince us by massive bombing attacks on the mainland, they turned their attention eastwards, and attacked Soviet Russia. Mr. Churchill, mirroring the reactive thoughts of millions of his countrymen, must have believed that miraculously his wildest hopes and prayers had been granted, as we and he did a second time, when a few months later, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour brought the U.S.A. into the conflict. Within a short time our lonely and hopeless stand against the fascists had been reinforced by

the entry on our side of the two mightiest countries in the world.

Meanwhile back at the ranch we had taken a pounding during the blitz. For a 13 year old boy it just meant that the excitement was mounting. My experience with the air raid shelter was negative; neighbours capitalising on my father's enterprise and industry in building the shelter, joined us for nights at a time. Not content with that they brought their smelly dog, so that a shelter, able to accommodate four in bed, became a home for six plus stinker. Unwilling to endure that I copped out and retired to my bedroom where I could also enjoy the fireworks. (Probably in truth the smell of the dog was an excuse on my part – possibly I smelled just as bad to him!) Slowly the rest of the family followed suit, and thereafter the shelter was only used on occasions when the intensity of the blitz was at its greatest, and later on for storing chicken-feed.

My parents were very tolerant of my freedom at that time, probably because they were more consumed by anxiety for their other sons, and felt fatalistic about my safety. Whatever the reason they allowed me to wander abroad during raids, with the falling shrapnel from our anti-aircraft shells pinging and clattering on the roofs and roads all around. Soon, anyway, my father enrolled as a stretcher bearer at the local hospital, and we were all in the same boat. In my spare time I became a "voyeur" of bomb damage, visiting the bombsites, collecting bomb fragments, especially of the worst events, which were where Land Mines had exploded. Unlike normal bombs which penetrated the ground before exploding, and leaving a crater, Land Mines, usually dropped by parachute,

exploded on impact with the ground, causing by their blast far more damage over a much wider area.

My parents' tolerance over my unsupervised activities ended abruptly with "The affair of the Anti-Aircraft Shell". I and a friend had discovered the place where the military dumped unexploded German bombs and unexploded British shells. Just to the north of Beddington Park there was a very large Sewerage Farm, serving Mitcham, Sutton, Wallington, and probably also Croydon. I was familiar with the area because I was in the school cross-country running team, and our practice runs took us across the sewerage area, from Waddon to Hackbridge. For that mile we would like to have held our breath, but that wasn't possible! In a remote part of this area we found this dump, and although the bombs were too large and heavy to commandeer, we both took possession of a shell, also pretty heavy. But I managed to fix mine on the carrier of my bicycle and took it home, where I stored it unobtrusively in the back garden; it was the star item in my collection of wartime memorabilia. But not for long. When my mother came across it she went berserk. She did not know that all the bombs and shells in that dump had been rendered harmless before being abandoned. I was ordered to get rid of it that day!!! Fortunately the dustmen were due that day to take away our refuse…….

The area around Croydon, including Wallington was fairly heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe, for not only was Croydon quite heavily industrialised, but the route up the Caterham Valley to Croydon and thence to London was well known to the German civil pilots, who had become Luftwaffe pilots instead of Lufthansa employees. Likewise when Hitler unleashed one of his secret weapons

"which were going to put us out of the war" – the V1, or Doodlebug as it was quickly called, a high proportion of them, launched from the Pas de Calais, came our way. They had a jet engine which had a very distinctive sound, quite unlike the Heinkel's throbbing sound. More distinctive still was the sudden silence when their engine cut out, which meant they were coming down. It paid to keep an eye on the sky because sometimes when the engine stopped they would dive steeply; sometimes they would keel over and dive out of their line of flight; and sometimes they would glide silently on and then abruptly dive to earth.

They were destructive because like the Land Mines, they exploded on impact and the blast swept a wide area . For a sixteen year old they provided a new excitement. That excitement ended when a school friend and his father were killed just 100 yards from where I, seeing it diving sharply, also dived sharply into the shelter. The Doodlebugs didn't end the war.

Hitler's second secret weapon didn't either. But it might have gone some way toward that event had things gone in its favour. This was of course the V2, the rocket developed by Werner von Braun, who after the war went to America to develop rocketry for the US. By the time of its readiness for use the Allies had cleared Northern France and Belgium of Nazis. So it had to be launched from afar – in Holland. This didn't help its accuracy. Nor had the Germans had enough time to make sufficient numbers of the V2; the Allies had rumbled what was afoot, and their bombing raids set the project back severely. All the same, accuracy or no, it was a fearsome thing. The rocket would drop out of the sky with no warning whatsoever, and its very large explosive content would lay a large area flat.

None of the warring governments fully understood that such bombing, in whatever form it took, was unable to cow the victims into submission. However severe the ravage, the British people got on with their lives the next morning, and I am sure that the same applied to the Germans

The exception to that comment must apply to the developments later in the war, when our destructive ability increased dramatically; firstly by the ability to create fire storms, turning whole cities into infernos. The allies applied this to Hamburg and to Dresden; secondly by atomic bombs, which as everybody knows became the fate of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. In retrospect it is hard to imagine that so-called civilised human beings could inflict this on their fellows. That retrospection needs to be tempered with the understanding that whole nations were so filled with contempt for their German and Japanese enemies, that only much later did compassion enter their thoughts. For some, who had suffered or witnessed the enemies' atrocities, compassion never did return.

As was mentioned earlier, changes took place at school, most particularly in regard to the teaching staff. Many teachers of military age had volunteered or had been drafted into the services, and the remainder were struggling to carry on the same high standards. For the first time women teachers were introduced; some were good, and some others either not so good, or were less able to cope with 30 spirited boys. However work carried on until the school was hit by its first bomb. At the time the end of summer holidays was approaching. Damage was widespread, one whole wing being put out of use, and few windows survived. Consequently to the joy of most, the

holidays were extended by about three weeks. Not long after our resumption of school an unexploded bomb, or it might have been a time-bomb set to explode later, buried itself in the central quadrangle round which the school was built. Whilst this was rendered safe and removed we enjoyed a further break.. Later in the war, after I had left school, a third bomb, this time one of a stick of five bombs which had been jetissoned by a bomber, itself about to crash, fell on the luckless school.

The Headmaster, Mr. Walter Hutchins, very wisely made the school routine less demanding by permitting the whole school to spend an afternoon on the playing field to watch a match. This relieved some of the pressure, caused by wartime conditions, on pupils and staff alike, and was very welcome. Although he himself didn't take part in the sports, he gave every support to that part of life, and introduced matches between staff and pupils. This was in addition to the traditional annual Parents' Match. My father, during my brother's time at the school, had been invited to recruit and captain the parents' eleven. He carried his captaincy through my years at the school as well.

He was very good at persuading out-of-condition parents to turn out. If they were out of condition many of their cricket clothes were out of date, and always caused amusement for the boys. Mothers of course did tea duty.

Food rationing was severe, and the nation was urged:

1. To dig for Victory, and
2 Eat more potatoes.

My father obtained an "allotment", a piece of ground of about a quarter of an acre in size, to supplement our vegetable patch at home. It was a derelict piece of land which required digging over very thoroughly before it became arable. Sometimes on Sundays I was a none-too-willing helper in the digging and weeding. Much more to my taste was the rearing and keeping of chickens. In Croydon's Surrey Street market I bought 6 one-day-old chicks for tuppence each. In those days chicks were not "sexed", and we had to hope that we would be rearing 6 egg-laying pullets. My mother entered into the spirit enthusiastically, and somehow we knocked up a coop for them. In the event we reared 6 young cockerels, but nevertheless they promised to become food for our table. We had not taken into account that, by the time they were grown up and ready to be eaten, we would have given them all names, and would have become fond of them!

It was surprising to us how popular we became with our neighbours, especially when we developed our enterprise, bought young hens of the correct gender, and became egg producers with a yield surplus to our own needs, both in egg output, and the maturing to fitness for the table of the unlucky males. We would find parcels of scraps for chicken-feed on our doorstep every day.

Neighbours solved our squeamishness about executing the birds, by their willingness to do the jobs for us.

It became quite an enterprise – I sold a couple of my cockerels to one of the hungry neighbours for 5/- (25 pence), and thought that a good deal considering they had cost me tuppence (eight-tenths of one p). My father built a handsome chicken house by the rarely used air raid shelter (no planning consent required then!). Mother acquired the ability to fertilise eggs (with the help of a cockerel), and to get the broody hens to hatch them, and we were away in big business, selling eggs and table birds to friends and neighbours. At the peak there were about 36 hens in residence, with usually half a dozen eggs waiting to be hatched. We became egg barons! As usual many of them became half pets, and half livestock, especially the "good layers", including one which often laid double-yokers. In fact the wartime rationing continued for several years after the war had ended. I remember the great pleasure in 1953, eight years after VJ day, when butter finally came off the ration, and could be bought freely.

Brother Gordon, who was in the 8th Army in North Africa, was stationed at Tobruk.. That place had already withstood a long siege earlier in the war, holding out for months behind the lines. At that time Britain had been standing alone against Germany and Italy, and most news brought to us was bad news, as the enemy prevailed successfully wherever there was fighting. Therefore Tobruk's holding out was one of the scarce bits of good news which we received. The enemy at Tobruk in those early days was the Italian Army, and whilst they were glad to obtain pickings as allies of Germany, their hearts were not really in the fight. Consequently their attacks were fairly

easily repulsed by the 8th Army. The tide of war had swung back and forth in the Sahara Desert, large advances being made by both sides and then reversed. Precious troops and equipment had to be rushed from Africa to Greece and then Crete to support the Greeks against their German invaders, thus loosening our hold on our gains in North Africa. Then the balance was altered by the injection of German troops under Rommel to stiffen the Italian Army.

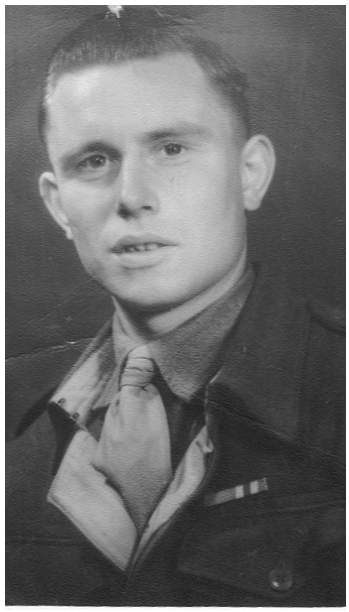
Rommel swiftly reversed the position in North Africa, Tobruk was captured, along with Gordon and a big bag of prisoners. The nation could believe only with difficulty that the bastion of Tobruk fell so easily, and that the British found themselves back in El Alamein – in Egypt. It took a long time, the replacement of several Generals-in Command until Montgomery was chosen, and the massive strengthening of military resources and men, insisted upon by Montgomery, before the enemy was driven out of Libya and Cyrenaica. By that time also the U.S.A. had been drawn into the war, and eventually, the Americans landing in Algeria and Tunisia , and driving east, in concert with the 8th Army's drive westward, the enemy was forced out of Africa completely. We knew that Gordon was in Tobruk as he had given a code to his fiancée, Edna Clark, by which he could pass information.

Initially Gordon was posted as "missing", and we did not know whether he had been killed during Rommel's over-running of Tobruk, or had been taken prisoner. A telegram arrived at 23 Crichton Avenue when my parents were on holiday in Boscombe. A War Office telegram was a document which most people read with apprehension, and I took it upon myself to open it. It announced that Gordon was missing. I telephoned my parents and read the

message out to my father. His voice faltered as he spoke to me, and then he paused to tell my mother the news. They must have dreaded receiving such a message for many months, and they came home quickly. It seemed a long time before the news came that Gordon was a prisoner-of-war to our great relief. Since the day they came home from their holiday I have always marvelled at the calmness, in common with many, many other parents in the same situation, with which my parents bore the news and the uncertain waiting to know at least that Gordon was alive and well. My breaking of our week's ration of eggs might have brought my mother to tears, but in the case of that really serious happening, she kept her tears to herself when alone.

The sequel to this story is that Gordon was imprisoned in a camp in Italy, and that he escaped from his captors. After the Allies had invaded Sicily and southern Italy from North Africa, Fascist Italy bowed out of the war, which had brought them no gains. In due course they revoked their alliance with Germany and instead joined the cause of the Allies. My brother made his way southward, being helped and fed by now friendly Italians, and managed to make his way through the combat lines to safety. He was awarded a mention in dispatches, and has never divulged to me the deeds for which he received this award. I think it may have been help he gave in assisting or leading others out of captivity. The best information I was given was that it had been for waiting twenty minutes in a N.A.A.F.I. queue. (The forces refreshment canteens). Whatever, I always think of it when the Prince of Wales appears on television in a uniform wearing literally rows of medals. He is unlikely to know what a N.A.A.F.I queue is, let alone to have stood in one!

So far this narrative has largely ignored brother Ken, not for lack of love for him. His war was rather less glamorous than Gordon's, for until he enrolled in the Army when 19, he worked firstly for an aircraft company – Rollason, on Croydon aerodrome, which was heavily bombed in 1940 whilst he was there, and later worked for another munitions factory in Waddon. He served in the Royal Army Service Corps, and eventually went to Greece, where he was part of the occupation force. At the time he was there, instead of being liberating heroes, the army had to struggle with and quell the Enosis guerrillas – the Greek Communist faction, who were attempting to take the country into the embrace of the Soviet Bloc.



Brother Ken Huntington in 1946
(1923-2001)

It is hard to imagine the conditions under which many thousands of people lived during and after the bombing. Many families had lost their homes completely, together with all their belongings. Most people living in urban districts countrywide had suffered bomb or fire damage. In this respect I suppose that our home was typical, escaping direct hits by short distances, but losing ceilings and windows so frequently that replacing them in a hurry seemed a waste of time. Our kitchen had a stout wooden

prop in the centre of the room, supporting the ceiling. For some time afterwards, when the prop had finally been removed, we all stepped round the place where it had stood. The kitchen windows were boarded up with stout wooden shutters, as we preferred to use this room instead of the air raid shelter. Most of our ceilings were down, and most of the 'windows' were felt sheets in place of glass for long periods. It made the home rather gloomy, but not its inhabitants. I am sure that the Germans were similarly stoical in enduring things cheerfully, and that the objective of cowing the populace into surrender failed completely on both sides.

D Day, June 6th 1944. This was a day we had all been awaiting impatiently – the beginning of the end for Nazi domination in Western Europe. That week is embedded in my memory for I experienced my first flight, in a Royal Air Force Airspeed Oxford Reconaissance plane. The Polish pilot took me from Croydon to the Solent. There below us lay an enormous fleet of invasion ships lined up at anchor waiting for the order to go. Altogether 7000 ships took part in the invasion. Our plane was buzzed angrily by a flight of fighters and shooed off.

D- Day 1944. Troops storming Sword Beach Normandy.

After D-Day things looked up. Long before that, though, it was plain that the Allies were going to win, even though equally clearly it was going to be a long struggle. The Russians were rolling the enemy back steadily, and it was exciting, each day, to study the battlefront maps on the "eastern front", as the Germans gave ground slowly but steadily. The battlefront maps in the west, on the Italian front were much less exciting – much more static, as the Germans obstinately defended the very defendable terrain, skilfully managed by Fieldmarshal Kesselring. (who was in fact a Luftwaffe General.). It was when the Allies landed in Normandy, and after a few weeks desperate fighting, finally broke out of the beachheads, that faster progress was made in the west. That done, most of France was quickly cleared, and the enemy retired to re-

group in Holland and Luxembourg, and then back to the Rhine. It was good to find that by this time the Nazis were actually defending their own fatherland, rather than somebody else's. On both fronts too, for the Russians were yapping at their heels on the Prussian border too. The Germans were defending a shattered Germany, and devastated towns, having suffered bombing of such an intensity that the bombardments which Britain had withstood seemed moderate. A few years after the war I drove down most of the length of the Rhine from Aachen to Mainz, and cities like Cologne were like heaps of rubble. Later it was possible to pity the German folk, but at the time I am afraid that we said and thought "serves you right". Immediately after the war there seemed to be awfully few Nazis – everybody claimed not to have supported the regime. We recalled those prewar pictures of Hitler's rallies at Nuremburg, packed with thousands of delirious supporters, who dissolved into the night of May 8th 1945.

I spent VE-Day (Victory in Europe) on an American Airbase near Norwich. Earlier in the year several relatives had visited Barkingside in Essex where our cousin Eugene Simonds was visiting whilst on weekend leave. Eugene was a son of Tom Simonds, who like his brother Sam, had migrated when young to America in the late 19th century. Their elder sister, Emma Simonds was a grandmother of mine, having married William Huntington. Eugene was a Major in the 19th Bomb Combat Wing of the 8th U.S. Air Force, and as a Navigator had guided his Wing on several bombing missions into Europe.

My parents and I were especially glad to have the chance of meeting him. In 1940, when a German

invasion seemed certain after the fall of France, Eugene's father, Tom, with typical American kindness, had offered to have me over to live with the family. We went through to the stage of obtaining a visa, but then decided not to take up the kind offer, and instead I was shunted off for a few months to Cumberland. During our reunion with Eugene ("Gene") he kindly invited me for a stay on his airbase. As I had just been selected for aircrew training in the Royal Air Force I accepted his invitation eagerly. The visit took place on May 6th 1945 (The only time I played Hookey from my job). The experience was marvellous. I had meals in the Officers' Mess, a sprog sitting next to the base commander, General Johnson! Ice Cream – a distant memory to the poor British – was available by the bucketful. The American PX store, the equivalent of Gordon's N.A.A.F.I. was stocked with everything we could only dream about at very cheap prices. The Americans certainly looked after their troops, and made sure that they lacked nothing.

Whilst there it transpired that Hitler had heard that yet another Huntington was preparing to scourge the German nation. Germany surrendered, and I spent VE-Day on the madly celebrating American Airbase. I was handed a bottle of Scotch to be getting on with, and through a haze I witnessed a terrific firework show, mainly from Verey Shells fired into the air. Maybe my faculties were at fault but I am sure that, in the course of the celebrations, an American Liberator bomber went up in the flames. I returned home to a London where everybody seemed as jaded as myself after their partying.

It was all an anti-climax for the next few months. To our surprise, despite Winston Churchill's immense

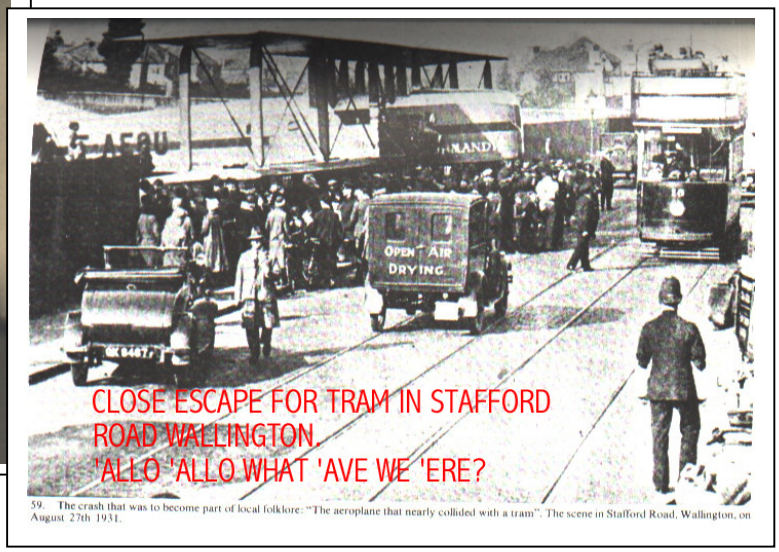
popularity for having led Britain to its victory, the Conservative Government was heavily defeated at the polls by Labour immediately after VE-Day. Alhough having been on the winning side the nation suffered many years of gloomy deprivation for its trouble. Everything remained in short supply; some things even harder to come by. The winter of 1946/7 was the bitterest in most people's memory – and the longest, as it was early April before the ice melted, and warmer winds blew our way. An exhausted Britain was struggling to revert to manufacturing for peacetime needs, but the machinery and plant, like the railways, been worked to death providing wartime needs. How we needed those railways during the war, and how short-sighted we have been to run them down progressively in the intervening years! The same applies to Agriculture. Our farms kept us from starving in the war, and farmers were being begged to cultivate marginal land – to dig for Victory. Now our farmers are actually being paid with subsidies NOT to grow food!

Looking back, because I was so young, I was able to enjoy its excitement, even the bombing – especially the

bombing, whereas the adult population, suffered years of misery and anxiety, if not grief.

GRAF ZEPPELIN AIRSHIP

CROYDON AIRPORT



Chapter Three
1945 – 1957. Manhood

By 1948 most of those who had served during the war had been demobilised. Negotiations for the independence from British rule of the Indian sub-continent had delayed many demobilisations because of the rioting and unrest during the course of these negotiations. Along with thousands of others I was given three embarkation leaves of about ten days each prior to being shipped to India. Some others were given leave prior to being sent to Israel/Palestine for the same reason that the unrest prior to declaration by the Israelis of an Israeli state made the whole region unstable. In the event, having enjoyed those leaves and said farewell to my parents thrice, I returned to R.A.F. station Turnhouse (which later became Edinburgh Airport) to continue a most enjoyable posting there. Instead of becoming a pilot, I was classified as a Pay Accountant I think because my father was an accountant.

I spent a whole summer at Turnhouse, in between those embarkation leaves and look back upon that period with great affection. At Turnhouse one could just see the upper steelwork of the Forth Bridge. (At that time there was only the original railway bridge spanning the Firth of Forth between North and South Queensferry), and one could walk across fields and down lanes to reach it. There was also, not far away, a pretty babbling stream, the river Almond, flowing to Cramond on the outskirts of Edinburgh and into the Forth, which made an attractive morning's hike. From Turnhouse the view to the south stretched to the Pentland Hills, which also skirted Edinburgh on its south side.

The River Almond

Edinburgh itself was and is a beautiful city, albeit grey like the stone from which many of its buildings were made. To the east of the city, and easily reached by bus are Portobello and Musselburgh, the first of interest because it boasted a fine swimming pool, and the second for its famous racecourse.

I found the people of Edinburgh very friendly indeed, and very generous. RAF Turnhouse was full of unwanted ex-aircrew awaiting their turn for demobilisation, but in 1946 the war was only a recent memory. Strolling down the country lanes it was common for passers-by to offer some hospitality. Men at the station received frequent invitations for a picnic day, or to a dance. The weather was also generous, and we enjoyed a warm summer. I went to look at Glasgow but didn't stay long. To southern heathens there was one practice which took some getting used to : it was not possible to buy a drink on the Sabbath. The only relaxation to the rule was for travellers travelling more than 30 miles, or was it 20? Amazingly a lot of people took to the road for a long journey on Sundays! I took the

opportunity to explore as much of the near environs as possible, visiting Berwick on Tweed, Dunfermline, Falkirk and Stirling by bus. Another journey, by rail, I took was down to Cumberland, where I visited my Cumbrian cousins at Langwathby. I received a warm welcome, enjoyed a magnificent English Breakfast, and before leaving reminded myself about the superb pastry-making abilities of my cousin Grace, by eating slices of delicious fruit pies.

That pleasant spell had to end, and in the autumn I was posted to RAF Station Filton, on the outskirts of Bristol. It was a long walk into Bristol, which had been badly bombed several times, and looked very sad. RAF Filton shared the site with Bristol Aircraft Company, which then was engaged in developing a huge new civil airliner, the Bristol Brabazon. The engine test-beds, lots of them, were continuously, night and day, test-running gigantic new engines, which made a frightful clatter. I don't know how the natives put up with it, but it certainly was tiring to have it as a permanent background. Presumably for many it had the consolation of providing them with a job. In the event, several years later, when the development was completed, the project was abandoned, the Brabazon never seeing service. I believe that advances in aircraft technology made it obsolete before it was finished. Another, later, attempt by Bristol Aircraft Company to develop a new civil airplane, the Brittania, was completed, a few manufactured, but again, the aviation world was looking to jet-propelled airliners, and the Brittania was dropped, the few in service going second hand to more marginal plane users.

My posting to Filton was much less agreeable than Edinburgh, lasting from the autumn of 1946 until

the spring of 1947. This spanned the period of the worst winter in memory, and although the winter of 1962/3 was even harsher, and as long lasting, the added harshness of the country's economic condition added to the misery. Heavy snow began to fall in December, and stayed on the ground in the form of compressed ice through to late March. At Filton we seemed to be continually shovelling thick ice off the paths and roads. The two-storey barrack block, which was my home, had an icicle the thickness of a man's trunk down to the ground where pipes had burst. The trains were unheated for shortage of coal, and life was made a misery by the bitter cold. In April at last a mild breeze replaced the bitter north wind, and I can remember, more than fifty years later, the joy of feeling that soft, warm air on my cheeks. Since that winter I have experienced many times over, cold winters, and cold places, such as Russia and Roumania, but then having the proper clothing, and being well fed made endurance a lot easier.

By the summer of 1947 I had learned a few of the devices by which servicemen can make life more agreeable. One of these was the simple device of "wangling" a posting of my choice. My parental home was still in Wallington, and therefore I sought a posting nearer to there, where weekend passes might make a break at home occasionally possible. My posting came to No. 1 Squadron, No. 11 Group, Fighter Command, at Tangmere in Sussex. This was a squadron which had distinguished itself in the Battle of Britain, and during the rest of the war. Tangmere is about three miles east of the city of Chichester, and about three miles north of the seaside resort of Bognor Regis, set in very pleasant countryside.

As Pay Accountant for No.1 Squadron I was promoted to the dizzy rank of Temporary Corporal, my daily rate of pay rising from 6/6d (32 pence) to 8/6d (42 pence) per day. As additionally, "all was found" this represented spending money, and one could live quite well on that income. My exalted rank placed me in charge of a barrack-roomful of airmen and entitled me to a separate small room, where I could even smuggle in and use, a forbidden electric fire. The separate room was quite a benefit enabling me to get a bit of peace if I wanted it; The American Radio Station, (AFN) American Forces Network, broadcasting from Munich, beamed continuous music to the servicemen, and "Midnight in Munich" was an exceptionally popular programme, the volume being turned up to the maximum in the barracks. The trouble was that England then had "Double British Summer Time", which meant that "Midnight" started at 2 a.m. in the morning! Being " in charge" did not involve having a roomful of obedient airmen. As the rate of demobilisation increased, my fellow inhabitants were not amenable to discipline, being "demob happy", and usually it was necessary to be something of a Sergeant Wilson as in "Dad's Army" to keep the peace. The only occasion when I put some airmen on a charge for their very rowdy and aggressive behaviour, I was informed when I went to the Guardroom that they were embarking overseas next morning, "so forget it!"

Being involved in an active fighter squadron, I was always impressed that the engine and aircraft fitters were able to do their work on bitterly cold mornings, when I could barely hold a razor because of the cold. Being a softee I have always had to wait for the sun to get up and the streets to be warmed up before attempting any such manual work.. Being a squadron pay accountant, I found,

was not without its advantages in the social pecking order. I remember a Station Warrant Officer, the equivalent I suppose in the army, of a Regimental Sergeant Major, of fearsome reputation. Somehow, before my arrival, his pay account had gone heavily into deficit. Strictly his pay should have been stopped, or considerably reduced, until the deficit was eliminated. Very deferentially he came to see me, and we amicably agreed on a gentle deduction rate spread over a long period. Thereafter he ceased to be fearsome – at least with me.

As I had hoped, weekend passes became easier to obtain, and usually I managed to hitch-hike a ride to somewhere near Wallington. Motorists were kind to servicemen, and on one occasion, when I had got as far as Arundel with my first lift, the very attractive Duchess of Norfolk, driving alone, stopped, picked me up, and drove me all the way to Sutton – a bus ride from home.

Whilst on leave in Wallington, I bumped into a girl whom I had befriended whilst only 16. During that earlier period, whilst I had been at her parents' house one evening a German Heinkel 111, damaged by Anti-Aircraft fire, had jettisoned a stick of 500 lb bombs whilst passing overhead, and before crashing near Crystal Palace. The second bomb had fallen on my luckless school, but the first had fallen only 100 yards from my girlfriend's house. Her house was moderately damaged – windows shattered, ceilings down, and her house was a mess. Her father was away in the army, in Kent. She and her mother and brother were badly shaken by the nearness of the explosion. It fell to me to play the calm and purposeful hero, to soothe them, and then telephone her father's army unit, to tell him what had

happened, and to enable him to obtain compassionate leave to return home immediately.

By the summer of 1947, the intervening time had been even kinder to her looks, her grace and to her figure, and we resumed our friendship. We had many good times whenever I was home on leave or on pass. By this time she was working clerically at the Bank of England, commuting to town every day. One weekend, having borrowed 10 shillings (50 pence) from my father to help out with the cost, I took this young lady up to the West End, and to the theatre, to see "Bless the Bride", a popular musical. The tickets cost 13/6d each, (67 pence). It was a magnificent show, and afterwards we walked, hand in hand, in the warm evening sunshine through St. James's Park.. Feeling that we ought to round off a perfect day, I took the young lady to the Trocadero Restaurant in Shaftesbury Avenue then one of the most fashionable restaurants in the West End. We had only a modest meal, I remember our main course was a fancy style of omelette, followed by a dessert. The cost though, was anything but modest, and whilst my girl friend excused herself to visit the ladies room, a waiter brought me the bill. It was about £2 -10/- (£2.50 pence) to which a gratuity had to be added. It was more than I had with me – more cash in fact than I owned just then! This was one of the few moments when I wished the floor would open up and I could disappear fast. On my companion's return to the table I had to ask her if she could lend some money to pay the bill.

Young readers of today and tomorrow may not understand the embarrassment I felt, because the other side of female liberation means that ladies can be allowed to pay their share with no embarrassment

whatsoever. In the 1940s men were expected to pick up the tab. The event ruined for me what should have been a perfect day. Up to that point I believe that I was quite high in her esteem, but at that moment the scales dropped from her eyes, and I was quietly dropped from her life.

In retrospect I realised that the event had signified a message that I was not missing anything by being dropped. It also helped to harden me against future embarrassments. Later such possible embarrassing happenings were passed off without my blushing – maybe sometimes another person blushed, but not I. Another gorgeous girlfriend of mine, when on holiday with a party of other friends, appeared outside her hotel room, like a conjurer producing the white rabbit, beautifully done up for dinner. As she did so a pair of lacy french knickers floated to the floor round her ankles. She stepped out of them daintily, and with some aplomb I bent down, picked them up and stuffed them in my pocket. The happening at the "Troc" had been of benefit! It paid off too when another lady companion out walking with me dropped a Tampax on the pavement from her handbag in full view of some passers-by. A quick stoop, scoop, and this was pocketed too, to the grateful relief of the lady. I hadn't been a slip fielder for nothing!

Tangmere R.A.F. Station was very pleasant. I could walk to Bognor, to Chichester, and get home for short weekend breaks and Mother's Sunday Roast dinner frequently. Towards the end of the summer of 1947 the rate of demobilisation quickened up, and my number, 70, which not long ago had seemed an age away, loomed up. In February 1948 it came up and I went all the way to Lancashire to be released and to receive my eight weeks

demob-leave money, and a set of civilian clothes, and I was once again in "civvy street". Service in the Royal Air Force had been quite an interesting time. I had not fulfilled my dream of becoming a Pilot – to achieve that it would have been necessary to sign as a regular, and anyway the R.A.F. had aircrew coming out of its ears. But I had seen quite a lot of Britain at His Majesty's expense, and usefully I had lived among, and mixed, with a wide variety of men, from all classes including several West Indians. This was good as normally one gained knowledge only from the social stratum in which he had been brought up. This experience was valuable later in my life. I found myself at ease with people who earned their living by getting their hands dirty; indeed I got my own hands dirty with them for a period of time. Later on, when I had several hundred people working for me, the empathy I felt enabled me to handle difficult situations, which, had I not gained that experience might well have gone badly. In fact I regard many people who worked "on the shop floor" with affection, admiration, and as good and true friends.

In the summer before my demobilisation – 1947 – I was on leave at home, and took the opportunity of going to Lords in July to watch the annual "local derby" cricket match between Middlesex and Surrey, in which records were created : firstly my cricketing hero, Denis Compton broke the record for the most 100s in first-class cricket in a season, with 18 centuries. That record still stands unbeaten. In the same year both Compton and Bill Edrich set records for reaching 3000 runs in a season; again those have never been beaten, Compton's average for the season being 90.85 runs per innings, and Bill Edrich's being 80.45 – averages approached nowadays only by men of duskier hue from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan, or men from the penal colonies.

Before joining the Royal Air Force I had worked as an actuarial clerk with one of London's leading stockbrokers – Mullens and Company. To progress there it would have been necessary to study and qualify as an Actuary. Most actuaries are just brains on legs, with the ability to solve complicated mathematical problems. Just as there is a difference between operating computers and inventing them, so there is a vast gulf between actuaries and actuarial clerks. So I did not seriously contemplate returning to Mullens. In any case, after the 1945 Socialist landslide, I did not view the Stock Exchange as having any great future. How wrong I was with that!

One of my father's audit clients was George Kent Limited, a largely family owned engineering company manufacturing a wide range of sophisticated measuring equipment, with factories at Luton, Bedfordshire, and at Resolven in South Wales, and with its head office in High Holborn, London. Their Company Secretary was looking for a person to train up with the objective of his succession as Secretary on retirement. I was invited to attend an interview, after which I was also interviewed by the Chairman, Commander Philip Walter Kent, R.N. (Retired). He was a very quiet, gentle-looking man, in appearance quite like the late Wilfred Hyde-White. He had a disconcerting manner, when his questions had been answered, of remaining silent with his eyes fixed on you for a long time. To an interviewee it seemed a very long time! In spite of his gentle appearance somehow it was evident that there was iron in there.

So after three days of my eight-week demobilisation leave I joined "Kents", and worked for the fiery welsh-born Cyril Percy Evans, the Company Secretary. It was a habit in Kents for all to be referred to by their initials, (except for the "Commander") So my boss was CPE, my father was HH, and I became DWH in place of 3039181 Corporal Huntington. I can't say that I enjoyed the work of assistant to the Company Secretary, but there, most clerical jobs are dull., and in truth I always found accounting and administrative work rather boring. But the people I worked with at High Holborn were pleasant, if rather embedded in Victorian and Edwardian outlooks.

I did take advantage of as many of London's numerous amenities as possible. The place was bulging with Theatres and Concert halls, and I saw and listened to most plays, musicals and concerts which were staged from 1948 onwards. I was a regular visitor to the Proms, and enjoyed Handel's Messiah several times. Likewise I spent much time visiting the several museums and art galleries, (then free) my habit being to spend lunchtimes on those pursuits. I also obtained a Reader's Ticket for the British Library, which was useful for reference on several occasions.

To be able to afford all those theatres and concerts I used to sit in the "Gods" to watch the plays and musicals. At lunchtime one could "put down a stool" for 3d (1 and a quarter pence) outside the theatre, return to claim it just before the performance, and when the doors opened, find a seat in the gods, usually for 2/- (10 pence). So the theatre visit cost 2/3d (less than 12 pence). On those days I would take sandwiches from home and spend the half-crown I had allotted for lunch money on the pleasure of enjoying the great and the good performers. For the Proms at Albert Hall, entry in the gods was 2/- (10

pence); there were no seats in the topmost circle, and the listeners literally could promenade round the full circle, and stop, watch and listen wherever they chose. The acoustics in the Albert Hall are magnificent, and are nowhere better than up in the top.

I made full use of the wide range of shops and department stores available in London, subject of course to the depth of my pocket. Next door to my office was the Holborn Library, and being an avid reader of both Fiction and Non-fiction I took full advantage of that, averaging two to three books per week, in addition to the studies to become a Chartered Company Secretary on which I had embarked. In retrospect this seems hard to believe, but I had the commuting time on the railway in which to read. In the beginning the commuting was between Victoria and Wallington, but in September 1948, my parents, Ken and I moved to Luton, as father had been offered and had accepted the post of Chief Accountant of Kents, the job being based at their Luton factory, which employed in all about 3000 people. For me this meant a rail journey, each way, of 30 miles, and about 90 minutes on a good day with the wind behind us – plenty of time to read! The cost of the season ticket for that journey also rose steeply, but Kents managed to organise what was called a Trader's Season ticket. This brought down the cost to a manageable £26 per year. But it was a lot of travelling, including the time to and from the terminus to Holborn, and, at the other end, from Luton Station to home. Before long also I was attending evening classes, which meant that, like my father as a teacher, I as a student was arriving home at 11 p.m.

I am ashamed to recollect that I was so dejected at having to move from Wallington to Luton, 30 miles north of London, and as I have said, necessitating a much longer travel time to and from work. The real disappointment was to move away from friends. At that time I was playing cricket regularly for the Old Walcountians team, and doing better as a bowler than I had ever done when playing for the school first eleven. I was so fed up that I was positively rude and unkind to my father for the career move which had made this move necessary. He treated the family to a dinner in a Luton hotel on the evening after our move, and I was bad sulky company all the evening. Ever since I have sincerely regretted having been so unkind to one of the kindest and most gentle persons in the world.

Before leaving Wallington I must recall another event not without its shame for me. This was my twenty-first birthday on May 10th 1948. To celebrate this my parents had organised a dinner and theatre party for the whole family in the West End. The theatre part of the outing was to see "Annie Get Your Gun", the hit musical gem then being staged in London. On the evening prior to this celebration I and a close friend spent the evening boozing in Croydon. I recall that I drank 21 tots of rum – one for each year of my life. I was lucky that it did not end my life! The last thing I can recall of that evening was standing and listening to a speaker on the steps of the Croydon Town Hall. The next thing I remember was waking up in the Mayday Hospital, being discharged, and then appearing at the Magistrates' Court for being drunk. The magistrate let me off with a caution and £2 costs as it was my 21st birthday. I think he was anxious to get rid of me, because I must have smelt and badly needed a bath.

On reaching home to face a resentful mother I had to go to bed, and was nowhere near feeling able to face a dinner and theatre outing. So the rest of the family went to London and celebrated my twenty-first birthday without me. Since then I have been careful not to drink so much as to risk a repetition of that foolish episode. Sorry, Mother, sorry Dad.

Much to my surprise Luton, I found, was a good place to which to move. Friends were easily made there. It was a town which had a large number of people who had moved from other parts of the country – from Birmingham, Wales, Scotland, and the north-west. This was because several 20th century industries had settled there, creating large-scale employment for people with engineering skills. It was the home of Vauxhall Motors, which alone employed over 12000 people, Commer, then part of the Rootes vehicle group, SKF, the Swedish-owned bearing manufacturer, and of course George Kent Limited. These large companies had in turn attracted numerous manufacturers and suppliers of goods and services which they required. The historically indigenous industries were manufacturers of hats, and although the demand for hats was declining, those manufacturers who remained were quite prosperous. So the neighbours among whom we settled were largely well-off local manufacturers, or executives of those large and prosperous companies. Moreover, whereas Wallington was only 12 miles from London, and looked to London for its culture and entertainment, Luton, being 30 miles away had to provide its own diversions – it looked inward rather than outward. And the folk, for all those reasons were much more sociable than dwellers of suburbia. In suburbia one could travel every day, in the same railway coach, with the same

people, and all of us would bury ourselves behind newspapers and totally ignore each other.

I had just passed my 21st birthday, and there followed, after our arrival in Luton, a series of 21st birthday parties thrown by the comfortably-off parents of the town. I was asked to several of these, being an eligible young man new to the scene and therefore an object of curiosity. So friends were made quickly, and several of us formed a social club, The Ace of Clubs, organising tennis and table tennis matches. I also joined the Luton Rugby Club, which used a ground near my new home. The name Luton Rugby Club sounds quite grand, but to many of its players the quaffing of beer seemed more urgent than playing good rugby. In the end I quit because some players came on to the field at the start of the game semi-drunk.. But in the meantime we played against some fairly tough teams, among which the Metropolitan Police were the roughest and toughest, but also some well-known clubs, including the Wasps and the Saracens.

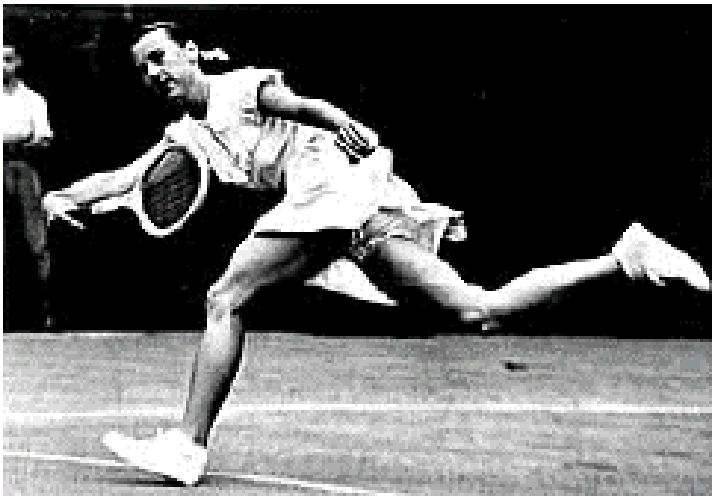
My closest friends at Luton were David, a very likeable, witty person who was studying to become a Civil Engineer, and Pamela, the beautiful daughter of a Hat Manufacturer, who had a job as Personnel Manageress of a London-based Dry Cleaning chain, for which she had a company car, kept in London. Along with several other good friends we commuted each day between Luton and St. Pancras Station in London. It didn't help my plan to study whilst travelling, but we all enjoyed journeying together. David, Pamela and I, with other friends had several holidays together, one I remember, to Jersey, and another to Marazion in Cornwall, for which latter holiday Pamela obtained permission to take the company car.

Wherever we were we played a lot of tennis, saw everything and everywhere we could in the area, enjoyed a stormy passage from Penzance to Scilly, and a placid overnight passage to St Helier, lying on the deck admiring the stars and the moon-silvered ship's wake. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Beautiful as Pamela was no romance arose – both David and I were studying for our careers, and we enjoyed intimate friendship without such ties. That is not to say that we didn't love her, I am sure we did. Had romance developed I am sure that David would have been preferred because he had charisma, and also because his parents had been elevated to "Sir and Lady" as a result of his father's distinguished career as a senior civil servant. Pam's parents would have approved. In the end, several years later, Pamela married a young brewer. She was, of course, the lady of the French knickers!

There were of course many more close friends – Zena Skinner, of BBC fame yesteryear, a forerunner of the now endless string of broadcasters with culinary skills; Nigel, who was the real tennis fanatic, Elizabeth (Wuz), who married Zena's brother Bruce; and John Crarer, the son of a local doctor, who himself became a physician, and who married Doreen Humphries; and Anne Larrson, whose Swedish-born father was a senior engineer at SKF.

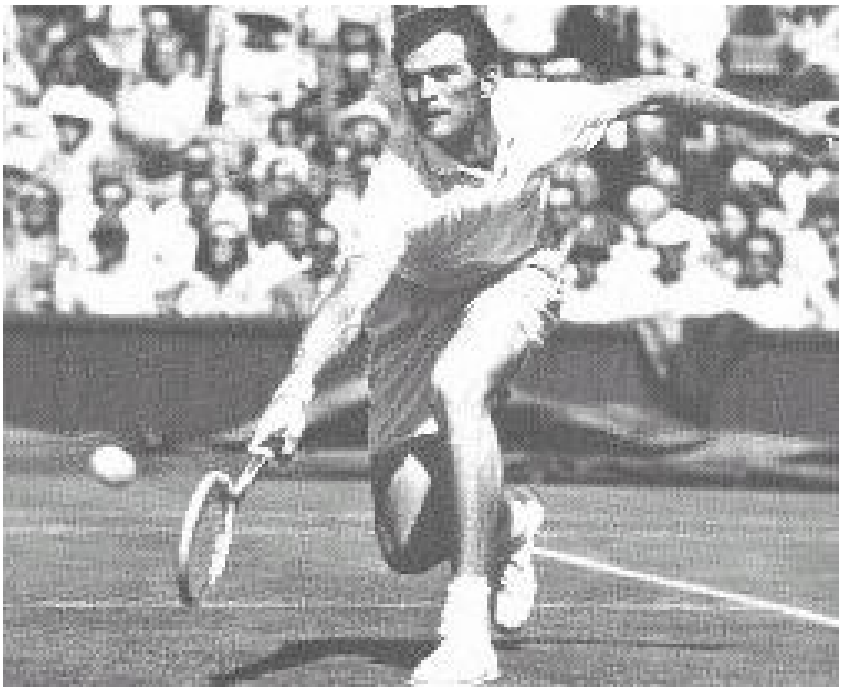
Some of the more enthusiastic of us went to Wimbledon to watch the Championships, and a memorable year was when an ancient but spritely Jean Borotra, then aged 51, played in a match, and jumped the net at the finish like a twenty-year old. He was known as the "Bounding Basque" having been born near Biarritz. He won four Grand Slam Singles titles in the French, Australian and British Championships, failing to win only in the American championships. He also won in five doubles championships. He died in 1994 aged 95.

Jean Borotra, the Bounding Basque



Gorgeous Gussie Moran 1949

That was also the year of "Gorgeous Gussie", who drew crowds, not necessarily of tennis aficionados, but for the frilly panties showing beneath her short dress. Not many years later she would have appeared positively old fashioned, as skirts became shorter and nether garments became more glamorous. Those were good years, and the tennis was quite good too! Being keen on tennis we also patronised a tennis exhibition at nearby Harpenden Tennis Club, entry costing 10/- (50p) where the reigning stars put on a show, including Budge Patty, but not "Gussie", (who was good, but not star quality as a tennis player!
Below: Budge Patty – French Open Champion 1950



Some of us from Luton would also meet, whenever possible for lunch in London. One of our favourite venues was the cafeteria on the top floor of D.H.Evans in Oxford Street. Here for 2/3d (11 ¼ pence) a three- course lunch with coffee was available. It was amazing value even though I had to spend an additional 3d (1 ½ p) on return bus fare. As I had found from Croydon, culture was thriving in Luton, and the local Rep. Company, which included Zena Skinner were active and popular. Luton was also the home of the Luton Girls Choir, which gained national popularity. One of our neighbours was a member of this choir. Such was the community spirit in Luton that if one of your acquaintances was involved in a venture, you proudly supported its efforts, and attended its performances.

It was at Luton that I resumed, briefly, my interest in golf. During the war, after leaving school, I had played golf quite frequently. Not having had the financial resources to pay the green fees, nor to equip myself with the necessary clubs, I used to start play at the 2nd hole and finish at the 17th, those latter not being within sight of the club-house, where a non-paying golfer might be spotted and apprehended. For my first few games I went round the course using just a putter, but progressively I obtained, second-hand a number 5, a driver, a number 8, and disastrously, a number 2 club. For two or three years I played with just these clubs compared with which modern-day beginners, usually have a complete set of clubs, but more often, I do not know why, they have two of everything! Having, many years earlier, when brother Gordon was dabbling with golf, I acted as his golf ball spotter, usually finding more and better balls than he had

lost, I normally finished on the 17th hole with more golf balls than I had set out with.

A keen golfer in the Ace of Clubs, I expect it was John Crarer, (as fanatical over golf as was Nigel Staddon over tennis), proposed a club golf tournament. I entered for it and was drawn to compete with Michael Rudd,- another fanatic. Michael, like many a golfer, spoiled his enjoyment by taking the game far too seriously. Now is the moment to explain that I am a left-handed player, and that many years previously I had disposed of my few left-handed clubs. For this tournament I tried to hire a set of left-handed clubs from the golf pro. But he had none to hire. So I explained to Michael that I would have to take him on using a set of right-handed clubs. He purred his sympathetic understanding, and we set off on the first hole. Miraculously my first shot off the tee went straight and true a long way down the fairway. So shattered was Michael that he played dreadfully and lost the first, second and third holes as a result. They say that gamesmanship is all in the mind, and it certainly was in this case. I would like to report that I won the match, but that would not be true; Michael did win the day, but refused to be persuaded that I was left-handed.

In 1952 I passed my Final Examination for the Chartered Institute of Secretaries.It had taken 5 years of study and attendance at evening classes, initially in North London, and later at the Luton College for Further Education, plus hours of study and revision in my spare time. As with Accountancy I did not find the syllabus very interesting, with the exception of the Law subjects, which I did find absorbing. Having become an Associate of the Chartered Institute, I was appointed Deputy Secretary of George

Kent, which involved quite a decent salary increase. I was also approached by one of the Principals of the Luton College to teach some of the professional subjects during evening classes, and I agreed to devote two evenings per week, which carried quite a good supplement to my income.

My first class, in Commercial Law, contained about twenty students, among them several who had just graduated in Law, and come down from University. My heart sank at this news, believing that they would make rings round me; and they seemed very confident persons too. It was not long before I realised that whatever they had gathered at University, it certainly wasn't much knowledge of the Law! Teaching several subjects in the first year was hard work, because each session had to be planned and mapped out in advance, the preparation for which absorbed much more time than the session for which I was to be paid by the hour. After the first year it became easier though. I remembered from my own school and evening class learning, that it was necessary to try and make the lessons interesting, or better still, exciting and amusing. So I set out to do this. At least my efforts were rewarded by many who thanked me at the end of the terms, and later by quite a good pass rate among my students. I was also approached to take on more teaching work, but I found that the more I agreed to take on the more was offered me, and I had to keep it to a moderate level – after all, I had a full-time career to pursue.

George Kent Limited was quite a large company by the standards of those days, employing over 3000 people. It was a busy company, expanding its activities quite briskly, and above all, trying hard to develop its export

business. Not only was the UK trying to repair the ravages of its industries, but so much plant and equipment throughout Europe and the rest of the world had been worked, if not bombed to death, during the war, and needed replacing and modernising. Kents was in a position to serve that need.

The company was badly undercapitalised to tackle this, being only a generation from having been a family-owned business. So the Secretariat of the company needed to organise a series of share issues in order to remedy this shortage of funds. As the Secretariat comprised only the Company Secretary and myself, a good deal of this work fell to me. The issues were all successful and always oversubscribed, as there were always a lot of funds looking for good investments. Also it was a standard practice for companies to insure themselves against new shares being left unapplied for by having the issue underwritten, a percentage of the proceeds going to the underwriters. In fact a lot of institutions would get in on the act, receiving some of the cream from the issue. For auditors, investigating and reporting on the company to boost the confidence of would-be investors, it was a welcome addition to their traditional, rather dull work of checking annual accounts.

The surprising fact to me, looking back, was how undemanding the City and investors then were in the matter of profitability. Kents, as a typical example, annually turned in profits, in relation to its capitalisation and turnover, which a quarter of a century later, would be treated with the thumbs down, and company bosses would be visited by leading institutional investors, or their brokers. Heads would roll, and share issues would be badly

undersubscribed.. Of course money was cheap in those days, as the Governments pursued the Keynesian policy of low interest rates. Bank rate was 2%, and nobody took account of the inflationary risk of this cheap money.

The fact that investors were so undemanding, induced complacency in British management – company boards being heavily peopled with inheritors rather than with competent people. Of course, after the war, companies took in thousands of fresh young executives. But too often the top places were filled with young inheritors, who had received little or no training, and were steeped in the same determination to bolster, become part of, and retain the same old dynasties of managements. In the case of Kents, two key directorships were given to members of the family returning from the war. Nice enough people, who certainly had won their spurs in battle, but not in earning key jobs in a company wherein over 3000 employees and their families depended on good management for their job security.

Later in my career I came to realise that this was the typical case within British business as a whole. It wasn't until brash and ambitious young dynamos broke into the business world, with their keen eyes perceiving how badly company managements were using the assets entrusted to them, that things began to change. And the necessary changes have still not come about on the scale required to make British business competitive with its fellow Europeans, Americans, and Japanese. Too often those brash young men who broke in and started to apply better management principles, then consolidated their power, and became as bad as the people whom they had usurped. The truth is that we are a generally lazy race of

Anglo-Saxons, round whom the more industrious Scots, Germans, Japanese, and Jews can make rings. And even some of these, once successful, can get infected with the same malaise! A conversation between two brothers, directors of the Group of companies for which I worked, sticks in my memory.
Elder brother : " How do I find my way to the factory?"
Younger brother: " You must know, you always pass it on the way to Goodwood (racecourse)". That said it all!

In 1954 I was approached to take on an assignment outside of the Secretariat, which would be based at Luton. The Sales Director wanted somebody with financial and administrative knowledge working for him. He was in the course of setting up a number of company-owned branches overseas, which would replace the agents working in those countries. He had already taken the first steps in identifying Belgium, Holland and Austria as a beginning for this policy. It sounded quite an interesting prospect. I was quite well qualified for this, as, wishing to learn all I could about Kent's engineering business, I had spent a lot of time in a number of departments at Luton, actually working in them, and "getting my hands dirty." This phase included the Assembly Departments, the Service Departments, and the Cost Accounting Department. So I had a fair grasp of the company's wide range of products, of the relative importance to the company of each, and what was involved in their manufacture.

This assignment meant some travel abroad, initially to Vienna, to Brussels and to The Hague. The Sales Director was authorising quite substantial funds to support the set-ups in those countries, and to my disappointment I found that his policy in requiring performance from these

company outposts was as undemanding as was that of the shareholders' of the company. The people running these outposts – local nationals – were "chums"of the Sales Director, and the reins were so loosely held that in my experience they never felt a tug. The manager in Vienna, was a charming and vivacious person, whose first love was music. He was First Violin in a leading Viennese Amateur orchestra. His wife was also charming, and both of these were characters out of the Habsburg Imperial mould. In fairness this Viennese was quite effective in obtaining substantial orders for the company, particularly from Jugoslavia, where Austria still had some influence. But the prices at which these orders were won often didn't bear inspection, and the cash demands from Austria to fund this sales drive were substantial. I was sent to Vienna to see what could be done further to support this gentleman. In the course of looking at what accounts he kept, I visited a shop which he kept, which was stocked with kitchen hardware – washing machines, refrigerators and the like. I found it impossible to trace where the company's cash injections had been invested, whether in the business of selling Kent products, or of kitchen equipment to the passing Viennese.

My boss at Luton didn't like my report given him on my return. I think he found me uncooperative, and I don't believe other eyes had a chance to read it. Besides the boss was the son of the Chairman, and probably was himself the likely future Chairman. Although I didn't discover any impropriety on the part of the people running the outfits in Belgium and Holland, these were likewise poorly motivated to perform. The unfortunate fact was that the company, was at the top, riddled with jealousies and resentment. I don't think the Chairman was aware of

this. As a result, the warring directors tended to direct their venom at their rivals' underlings, given the chance. I didn't enjoy this, and began to look for a more agreeable environment in which to work..

Chapter Four
1957-1967 Career Moves

In the autumn of 1957 I was invited to attend an interview in the Aldwych, in Holborn, at the offices of Crompton Parkinson Limited. I was interviewed by their Company Secretary. It transpired that the appointment was not for that company. Crompton Parkinson was a member company of a newly formed consortium, comprising several large engineering companies, their combined purpose being to tender for a huge contract to be placed in the USSR. The project was for the design of a vast tyre factory in Dniepropetrovsk in the Ukraine. It included the specifying and supplying of all the necessary plant and equipment, its installation, and the ultimate commissioning of the factory, which was to be designed to manufacture 2 million tyres a year. The constituent companies were each to manufacture that share of the plant in which they had the expertise. The consortium was to employ Dunlop as the engineering consultants, for a fee which was to be a percentage of the value of the total project. Dunlop formed a subsidiary called Dunlop Advisory Services Limited to render that service.

It sounded a very exciting prospect, and the vacancy was as Chief Accountant at the consortium offices located in St. James's Street in the West End. My interviewer was, like myself, a Chartered Secretary, which probably helped in my selection for the job. So in September 1957 I began my new job with the company which had been named Rustyfa (for Russian Tyre Factory). When I arrived there were only three other employees of the company – Harold Spencer,

the Director and General Manager, who had been co-opted from Crompton Parkinson, Phyllis Grigg, a private secretary, and a newly-appointed company buyer.

Harold H. Spencer (he became nicknamed "H Squared") was an electrical engineer from the sales division of Crompton Parkinson. In appearance he looked like the popular image of Colonel Blimp, and had certain similar characteristics. He was a member of the Devonshire Club just next door, and fitted in very well with that Wodehousian scene. He could be charming, but had a very fiery temper, not enduring idiots one jot. Idiots included those with a negative "can't do" temperament. He decided fairly soon that the Buyer was an idiot, so that his days were numbered. He was always kind to me, and it helped not to be intimidated by his temper – a lesson which Phyllis Grigg demonstrated with her 'sang froid' response to it.

My first task was to organise a Dinner Party at the Hyde Park Hotel for the members of the high-powered Russian Trade Delegation. This signalled that the life as a Chief Accountant was likely to be very different from that which I had imagined. The party numbered about 30, and the Russians were led by the very senior Vlas Klentsov. He was a tough gentleman who obviously had "picked" his way carefully through the Russian Party hierarchy, "picking" up a few bruises on the way. The Chairman of our consortium was Dr. John Mackay, the Managing Director of Francis Shaw, the company with the largest share of the equipment orders. He was a very tough Scot, who had picked up his bruises on the Rugby field, having played for Bath, one of the top clubs. It was soon evident that in his sport as a lynch pin in the rugby

forwards, and in his climb to the top in business, he had dished out more bruises than he had received. Physically he was of the Bull Mastiff build, with his bull neck, stocky frame, and jutting chin Here was the company chief that I felt that most companies lacked. He had earned his success by hard work and determination, and proved a good counterpart to the all-powerful Vlas Klentsov.

The Dinner party was a great success; the language barrier was a bit of a problem but was washed away by plenty of vodka, wine and Beluga Caviar. The Russians laugh a lot, and provided they are satisfied that you are laughing with them and not at them, they are jolly company. We had the benefit of Arthur Birse, an ex-banker who spoke five languages fluently, to most people's one. He had spent some years in Russia, and, during the war, had been Winston Churchill's preferred interpreter, on his missions to Soviet Russia. On the occasion of Winston's first sally to Moscow, the interpreter who accompanied his delegation became so immersed in the passion of the exchanges between Stalin and Churchill that he forgot to interpret them. He was quickly sent home by our Prime Minister, and Major Birse was called in. He did his job so faithfully that when he and Joseph Stalin met to relieve themselves in Stalin's private loo, the Soviet leader congratulated Arthur on his fluency. He was a great asset to Rustyfa for several years, and was a good companion on the various delegations to the USSR., when requested to regale us with his numerous reminiscences.

The task of putting together a detailed tender, with machinery specifications, was a big one, and the newly-formed Rustyfa didn't make a very professional job of it. This was to lead to difficulties when our delegation

travelled to Moscow to begin negotiations. The first delegation duly went to Moscow, led by Dr Mackay, and comprising directors from each of the six constituent companies, Hsquared, an executive from Dunlop, Charles Drover, a senior partner in the London firm of solicitors – Coward Chance & Co., and Phyllis Grigg. They were there for about three weeks, staying initially at the National Hotel, overlooking Red Square, most of the time spent on examining and questioning the specifications of the plant recommended by Dunlop, and a lot of time on a matter which would arise and re-arise several times at later discussions. This was the subject of "guarantees".

It was understood that one of the Russians' main aims was to catch up with the latest state of the art in rubber technology. Their knowledge up to then being confined to their existing factory, built in the 1920s – also by a British company. The contract was worth over £15 million, and they wanted to be re-assured that, having spent that vast sum, the factory would produce good tyres on the scale they had specified. This is always a problematic bone of contention, for productivity does not exclusively depend on technology, but also on the quality of management, the skills of the workforce, the quality of materials used, and the standard of maintenance of the plant. Tempers became sometimes frayed in Moscow, as the wilful Mackay battled with Comrade Klentsov, who undoubtedly might have ended up in the Lubianka, or even in Siberia had he signed a bad contract. The worst that could happen to Dr. Mackay might have been exile to Glasgow.

By telephone and by cable, we back at base were bombarded with requests for information, and further quotations which had to be obtained from the

constituents- all urgently required "tomorrow, if not yesterday" The pressure told on the Buyer, and he was reckless enough to say that many of the demands could not be satisfied in the required time. That negative response damned him, and Hsquared showed him the red card and ordered him off the pitch. That left me, the Chief Accountant, in the firing line. It was much, much more exciting than accounting, and I had caught and liked the flavour of being on the sharp end of business at Kents. By temperament I have always been impatient to do whatever needs doing NOW – often resulting in loss of sleep should tomorrow not come quickly enough. So I devoted all my energies to supplying all the help needed by the delegation in Moscow. It didn't need much imagination to realise that, glamorous as it sounded, time wasted in the communist paradise waiting for back-up meant misery for my colleagues, and was costly for us. In addition to serving their requests I managed to add with the messages sent, news not only global, but also of their families, and even some critical sporting news. So I became the "blue-eyed boy" for the delegation – the chap who gets things done.

After a lot of to-ing and fro-ing the contract was awarded to Rustyfa, and I was appointed as Commercial Manager. I was able to hire a Chief Accountant to take my place, and was glad to be shot of what I regarded as dull and sterile work.. The Russians had a permanent Trade Delegation, based in Highgate, within shouting distance of Karl Marx's tomb. It was staffed by English-speaking native Russians, naturally all trusted party members. They lived monk-like in their enclosed world at Highgate, undoubtedly all watching each other carefully, and each one wondering who amongst them was a KGB member. They rarely left the compound singly, always

travelling in twos and threes. One of their senior staff was allocated the task of collaborating with Rustyfa on all matters connected with the contract. He was a Ukrainian, and his name was Daniel Shkrebtienko – a likeable and always courteous man, but necessarily persistent if he didn't achieve what he knew was required.

Much routine work was necessary to start with, placing orders from Rustyfa with the constituent companies, then with other suppliers, not members of the consortium, giving them detailed shipping instructions, delivery dates, documentation, etc. There were also quite a lot of tasks, arising from the most recent technical discussions with the customer, especially concerning the role of Dunlop Advisory Services Limited. It was also necessary to have meetings with Mr. Shkrebtienko to tie up details not covered at the time of the negotiations: to prepare lists of spare parts recommended by the manufacturers, prior to tendering for these separately; and to prepare schedules of British personnel required to supervise installation of the plant , and of its eventual commissioning. Additionally it was necessary to negotiate with Export Credits Guarantee Department, (ECGD), the Board of Trade body responsible for assessing the credit risk, and for a premium, to insure us against failure by the customer. It has to be noted here that the Soviets, as they had always been reputed to be, were completely trustworthy about payment – that is, as long as the suppliers adhered to their obligations under the contract terms.

Naturally enough the company attracted a lot of publicity, as the value of £15 million at that time exceeded that of any previous contract with the USSR. Later Dr. Mackay deservedly was awarded a C.B.E. for his

contribution to the nation's export efforts, of which this contract was only a part. One has to compare this moderate gesture with the knighthoods and higher honours awarded to others, for instance, Henry Cooper for flooring but not beating Mohammed Ali, (a.k.a. Cassius Clay). Let alone Jeffrey Archer!!

It was necessary to recruit more staff than just our initial skeletal staffing. The matter of shipping arrangements and documentation alone required clerical assistants, and the typing capacity to cope with huge volumes of equipment to despatch. We also needed the capability to co-ordinate work with the consultants. Progressing deliveries by the member companies and sub-contractors soon became a pressing need, especially as it became evident that lots of them, in fact, most of them were going to fall badly behind in their promised deliveries.

Another task that had to addressed was the question of safety equipment. There were for instance numerous huge electrical motors, and large arrays of Switchgear to drive the plant, and the suppliers of those naturally recommended standards of safety add-ons which would be insisted on by UK factory and Health & Safety inspectors. The Russians, with their Slavic suspicious natures, probably believed that we were trying to gild the lily, and refused to agree the purchase of much of this safety equipment. When our engineers pointed out that workers could easily kill themselves if they ignored or overlooked safe practices, the Russian reply was to the effect that if workers were stupid enough to do this they deserved to die. Life was cheap in the USSR. In the event they did mostly follow our recommendations, and possibly they were testing the outside of the envelope by that initial stance.

Another strange tendency found in their buying policy, and one we found to be common to most Eastern European purchasing agencies, was their demand to know the net weight of each piece of equipment for which we had tendered. This puzzled us for some time, until we reflected that, having no other way to judge the value of the items, not having "commercialised" expertise, they used weight as a crude, very crude, benchmark. A five ton slab of steel should, in their view, bear some relationship in terms of cost to a Tiger Tank of the same weight.

As the execution of our contract proceeded, the Russians from Highgate became more pressing. Quite reasonably so, bearing in mind that, in payment and other respects, they complied punctiliously with their contractual obligations. So we found the late deliveries very embarrassing. The suppliers did too, because the Russians began to impose the penalty clause on which they insisted during negotiations. This caused much consternation among the suppliers, their managements being largely of the quality I have described in an earlier chapter. It just was not cricket!! Fortunately we were able to challenge and obtain mitigation of much of the penalties charged. This was by pointing out that technical and other information required from the customer, had arrived late, which delayed our manufacturing programme. Both the customer and Rustyfa needed the goodwill of each other, and I believe that this factor dictated a moderate policy on the part of the Russians.

I think that, encouraged by the success of Rustyfa and one or two others, the Board of Trade promoted a Trade Fair in Moscow, to be staged in 1961. Knowing of

the industrial expansion plans of the USSR and of their fellow eastern European Socialist Republics, we felt it obligatory to participate on a fairly grand scale. The Fair was to be held in Sokolniki Park in Moscow, and as Commercial Manager I had the responsibility of co-ordinating our plans, and of managing the Rustyfa exhibition. Planning the exhibition stand was not easy. Firstly we had to determine shares of the total exhibition space on the stand, which was large – over 6000 square feet in area. Then how best to depict the total sum of the individual members' exhibits? This was decided by making a large model plan of the Dniepropetrovsk factory then in course of construction, locating that on the stand as the centrepiece, and surrounded by the individual machines, which were not models but real equipment. It took a lot of meetings, and co-ordination with the stand contractors, who would eventually be responsible for shipping the exhibits, their care whilst the stand was being constructed in situ, and their installation on the stand.

About ten days before the exhibition was to be opened I went out to Moscow to make sure that things were proceeding to plan. Being in that place as part of a delegation is one thing, for you have others with whom to laugh over the numerous frustrations which were endemic to communist countries. Being alone was another matter, with nobody with whom to share experiences. Things we take for granted when visiting any western country just could not be relied upon in Moscow. Just to get hotel accommodation could be a nightmare, even though it had been booked and paid for in advance with the Official State Bureau – Intourist. You would find that instead of a room at the National Hotel, you could be shunted into the Hotel Leningradskaya, sharing a room with another person

in this non-central, and shabby substitute. Once in the hotel of Intourist's choice, not yours, the task of getting meals could be unbelievably tiring and slow. The Russians were not accustomed to "serving" people to their satisfaction, and were we found, terrible organisers. To divert briefly, I managed, after the usual struggle, to obtain a ticket at the Bolshoi Theatre, to see "Romeo and Juliet". Bearing in mind the dreadful organisation one discovers in Russia, the production and performance at the Bolshoi was exquisitely presented, and beyond comparison with anything else I had seen elsewhere in the world. A strange race. On another occasion I had arranged to take a number of our people to dinner, including some Russian customers at a restaurant in Moscow. Intourist had already allocated a chauffeur-driven car for my use during the stay. But I needed two more cars for the evening's outing to transport the rest of the party. Intourist's reply was " but you already have a car, you cannot need any more". They remained perplexed because I insisted the need to carry a number of guests, and would not budge. It was only when I bandied such names as Comrade Klentsov that their ears pricked up, and they conceded me one more car for the evening. Honour was satisfied.

When I arrived in Moscow my heart sank. There was snow on the ground, and it was bitterly cold with an east wind trying to slice the legs off below the knee. In Sokolniki Park the site was bleak, with hundreds of packing cases, large and huge, lying on the ground on the outskirts of the designated site of the exhibition. Many of the pavilions were still in an early state of construction, and much of the tarmac had yet to be laid. It was hard to imagine that anything would be ready for the opening, and if so whether any people would venture out to visit the

exhibition in that appalling weather. Nearer the time of the opening, winter ended with incredible suddenness , the sun came out surprisingly hot, and the snow turned to a sea of mud. Earthmovers and all sorts of equipment were brought into play, and the tarmac carpet was laid very quickly. Bright green leaves appeared on the trees, except for those still being brought to the site by huge cranes to be planted among the pavilions. These trees were not saplings, but maturing trees twenty or more feet in height. It was not long before these new arrivals also had their foliage, and the instant garden and exhibition ground was complete. We suspected that the knowledge that Chairman Kruschev was to visit the exhibition had a lot to do with the rapid surge of construction. Somewhat relieved I returned home to put the last touches to our own preparations.

Each of the Rustyfa companies arranged to send engineer representatives to man the stand, and I took two lady secretaries. I had also contracted with the now infamous but then more obscure Captain Robert Maxwell, of Pergamon Press, to send two Russian-speaking interpreters. The fee was considerable, and we of course had to pay for their accommodation, meals and travel costs for the three weeks duration of the Exhibition. During the second week they were arrested and detained by the Soviet police for allegedly selling currency on the black market. I had to ask the British Ambassador for help in securing their release, which was granted on condition they returned home. It was an embarrassment to the company, and a foretaste of the character of "The Captain".

The flight of our large party to Sheremetyevo Airport, Moscow in the magnificent Comet airliner was uneventful, and our pride in the airplane was enhanced

when it was pointed out to us that the "gentleman sketching various parts of the interior is Mr. Tupolev, the designer of many of the USSR's own airplanes". We arrived at the airport on time, but then, thanks to Soviet bureaucracy, progress came to a halt. Of necessity everyone had been required to obtain a visa in London, and to have adequate Intourist vouchers to cover the costs of their stay. The whole planeload waited in the Arrival Hall for nearly two hours, whilst documents were checked and counterchecked, we were counted (several times) by officials, and then random checks were made on the baggage. Our frustration was only relieved once when an official with a loudspeaker stood up on the counter and announced that he was going to do a roll-call. "And if anyone is not here please will he call out and let me know". That brought the house down!

Then began the seemingly interminable bus ride into downtown Moscow, through some nicely forested country, and then past a couple of miles of dilapidated shacks into the centre of Moscow. I had always felt ashamed, when travelling from Heathrow airport into the heart of London, at the shabbiness we were revealing to incoming foreigners. That ride into Moscow assuaged that shame, and the condition of the roads, including those in the heart of the city, was appalling. It was as if they had been traversed a thousand times by Tiger Tanks. The bus pulled up at the Ukraine Hotel, in off-centre Moscow. We were told that the Soviets actually had a Ministry for Tall Buildings. What marvellous fodder that would have been for John Cleese! The hotel Ukrainia was one of those, with grand, tall, spires flying into the sky in its centre and at each corner. True enough there were several of these monstrosities in Moscow, including several ministry

buildings, and I gathered that they had been favoured by Joseph Stalin as typical of the victorious socialist revolution. Later, when I was in Warsaw, the city was dominated by an exact replica – "The Peoples' Palace of Recreation" donated by the USSR to a "grateful Polish people".

By the time of our arrival, everyone was tired, and totally unprepared for the next several hours. Optimistically we had hoped that once there we could relax in our rooms and have a meal. Not likely! The foyer of the hotel was full of a milling crowd, some in long queues to the reception counters, some waiting hopefully for their luggage, and lots arguing with officials. The Soviets, who had recently shot Yuri Gagarin into space as a triumphant first, just could not cope with the matter of accommodating large numbers of angry westerners into rooms they had previously booked. I am sure that it was a standard experience, but with their own countrymen they could just shrug their shoulders with a "hard luck comrade". The operation took hours; few people got the accommodation they had wanted, and numerous business dignitaries had to share rooms with others they had never met. When I visited the foyer at bedtime there were still several people down there arguing with the weary officials.

My room was on something like the 32nd floor; there were several lifts, some of them out of order, and all of them were slow, there being no express lifts in this egalitarian country. So whether going up or down needed careful advance planning, as it could take half an hour from 'a' to 'b'. I remember one of our party came down to breakfast wearing carpet slippers. Hsquared, who was there for a day or two, took violent exception to this

transgression of etiquette, exploded noisily, and sent the luckless man back up to his room on the 32nd floor to dress properly. Breakfast was finished by the time he returned.

Getting any meal in the hotel was a lengthy business. Quite a simple meal could take over an hour before it appeared, so that as with the lifts one had to plan well in advance. The Russians had to weigh every item before serving the dish; the menus gave the weight in grams of each course, and I presume that the weighing was to prevent short-changing. On each floor there was a beefy lady Commissar, who would watch every movement, and whose primary purpose, we suspected, was security. Certainly they were not there to help make guests more comfortable. Probably they were graduates from Siberian camps. Before we had visited Moscow we had been warned about the plumbing, and advised to take a plug for the wash basins and baths for our own use. It was sound advice – such items must be stolen by the natives as are things like towels from western hotels. Mornings were greeted by piped music which was obligatory listening, as there was no way to turn it off, and fear of the floor commissar prevented one from wrenching the loudspeaker from the wall. Long before that though, one was greeted by brilliant sunshine as early as 2.30 in the morning. Being so far north dusk was late and dawn followed only a short time later. It was hard to sleep with the dazzling brightness, until the sun disappeared for a while behind one of the towering spires.

We had cars at our disposal, for which we had paid Intourist in advance. There were three types of car then in Moscow : the Moskvitch – the smallest: the Zim – a medium sized saloon; and the Cheka, which seemed to be

reserved for communist party officials. Ours was a Zim. They would not have sold well in the west. When leaving the car the drivers thought it wise to remove their windscreen wipers, otherwise somebody else might do it for them. As not many private citizens then possessed a car of their own, one must assume that, like the bath plugs, they were fair game even if you didn't own a car or a bath. Often I chose to travel to Sokolniki Park by the Moscow subway. I believe that Britons had participated in its design and construction before World War Two. As with the Bolshoi Ballet productions, the subway was a contrast with the usual shoddy soviet achievements. Its tiled walls at the subway stations carried very good paintings, usually of the glorious Soviet workers on tractors harvesting hectares of wheat or of stakhanovites excelling themselves at building. Above all, the cleanliness of the stations was outstanding – you felt almost that you could eat from the floors, they were so clean.

Another noticeable characteristic of the Russian people was their apparent honesty. In each carriage and on each bus there was a box into which the fare could be paid. All passengers were on their honour, without supervision by a conductor, to put their five kopek piece in the box. For 5 kopeks – one twentieth of a rouble – less than sixpence you could travel everywhere on the extensive subway network. There was a strange contrast – it was OK to steal windscreen wipers, bath plugs, and probably toilet paper, but not to cheat your fellow comrades. Incidentally the soviet toilet paper was hardly worth stealing. A copy of Pravda was more comfortable.

Miraculously, most everything was ready in time for the opening day of the exhibition, and Chairman Nikita Kruschev graced it with his presence. Reginald Maudling, at that time the President of the Board of Trade, came too.
Kruschev visited every stand, asked quite a lot of questions, and was very affable, shaking all hands that were proferred. Quite a few Brits, for the rest of the day, carried their right hands as if they were sacred ikons, so proud were they. During Kruschev's visit there were no unseemly confrontations as with Vice President Nixon on the occasion of the American Exhibition in Moscow. Reginald Maudling was not the confrontational type, and anyway, with the Yuri Gagarin exploit fresh in the news the Russians naturally felt proud rather than defensive.

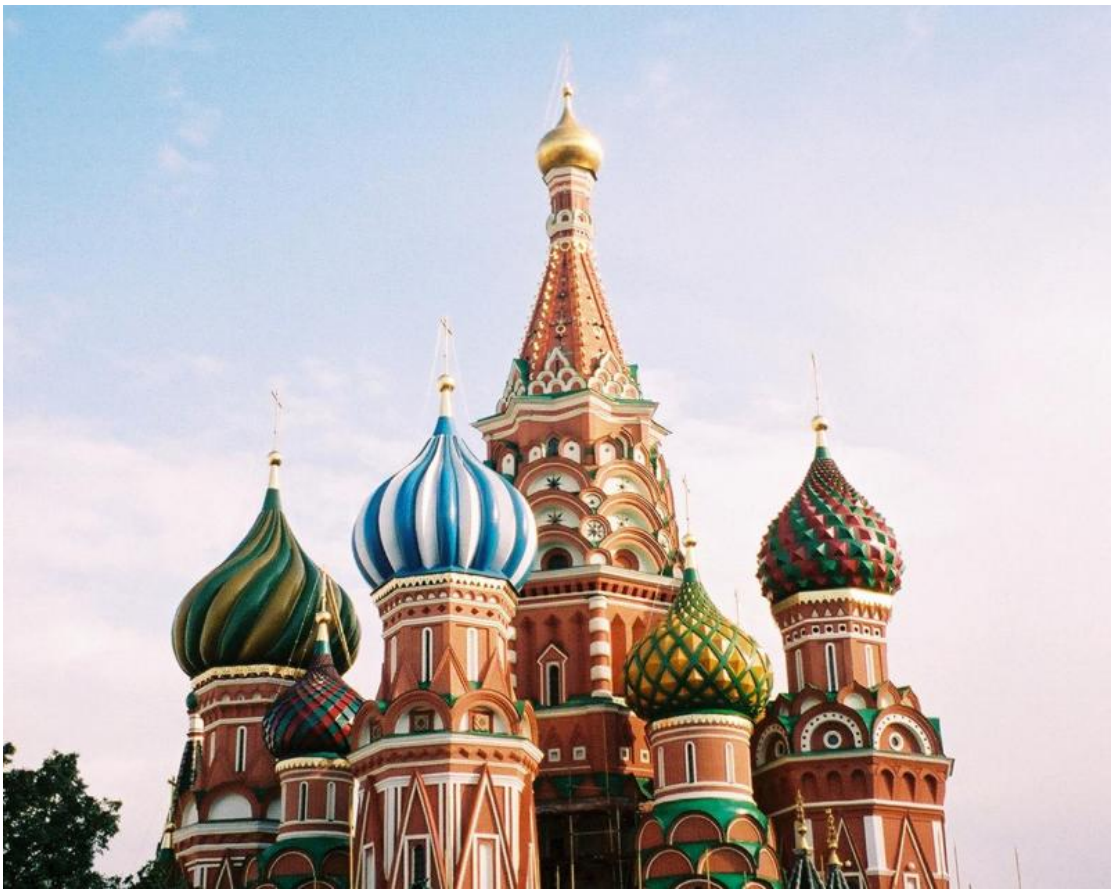
The British Exhibition attracted vast crowds from afar to view our efforts. They were anxious to learn everything they could about our machinery, glad to find that westerners did not have two heads, and interested even in our clothes, which some of them without

embarrassment would put out a hand and finger. The Russians have a great and robust sense of humour of the slipping on a banana-skin sort, and I found most of them very likeable, curious about our obvious prosperity, but not jealous of it. To decorate the stand we had brought out and positioned, a large quantity of artificial flowers. They were of the Harrods quality and were very attractive. I am afraid that they went the way of bath plugs and windscreen wipers, and by the end of the exhibition they had all disappeared. We felt that if we could not sell many Tyre Factories, we could, if we had come stocked-up, have sold millions of artificial flowers.

The shrewd Russians let it be known that, if we wanted to avoid the cost of shipping all our exhibits home, they might be interested to purchase them. When we came to do business though they proved willing only to buy them at knock-down prices. Some we sold, but most we brought back home. Having already received the contract for the Dniepropetrovsk factory, we hardly felt that any more business might be forthcoming from the USSR. But it attracted visitors from all over Eastern Europe, and in due course we received enquiries for similar projects from Romania, Poland, Jugoslavia, East Germany, and Bulgaria. It is fair to assume that the exhibition had played its part in making those countries aware of Rustyfa.

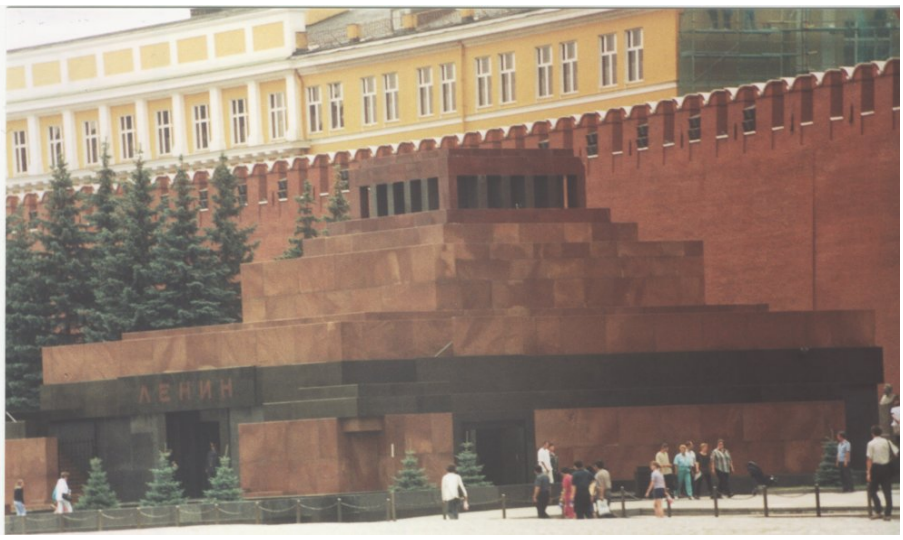
There were many things and places of interest to see on those occasions when we were not working at Sokolniki Park. Firstly there was the Kremlin, a walled and turreted area of about 15 acres, in which some modern buildings were included, and the Praesidium was there. The cathedrals within that enclosure, and all their rich treasures had been beautifully maintained. Within the grounds also

were pretty gardens and some monuments including the enormous Tsar Cannon weighing 40 tons, with a barrel 5 metres long, and a calibre of 890mm (36 inches), and the Tsar Bell, weighing 200 tons.The public were free to wander around and inspect everything. Outside, at the bottom of Red Square is the breathtakingly beautiful, or monstrously ugly, depending on your sense of taste, St. Basil's Cathedral. I think it is beautiful.



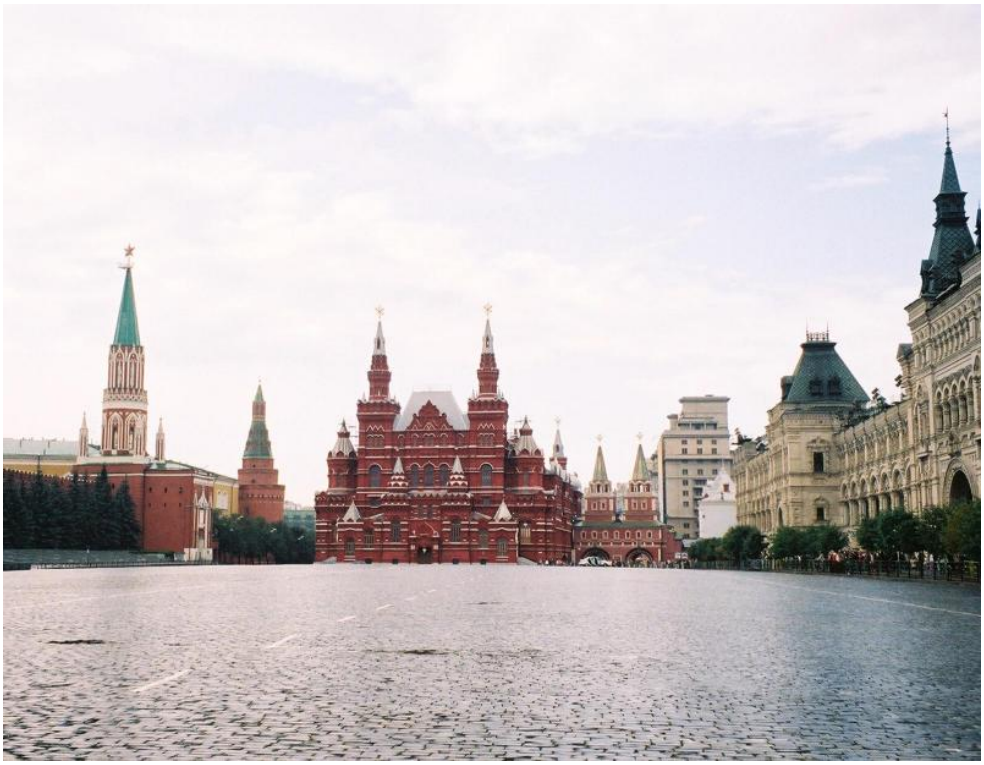
St. Basil's Cathedral, Moscow.

On Red Square, below the Kremlin walls were the "Gruesome Twosome". The preserved bodies of Stalin and Lenin. Only later when Stalin had been thoroughly discredited by his former pupil, Kruschev, was Stalin removed. There was always a queue, snaking across Red Square, of citizens waiting to enter and shuffle past the bodies. Our experience was common – it being seen that we were joining the queue, we were hustled forward to the head of the line, not by officials but by the waiting people.



Above: Lenin's tomb outside the Kremlin Walls in Red Square. It once also housed the preserved body of Stalin.

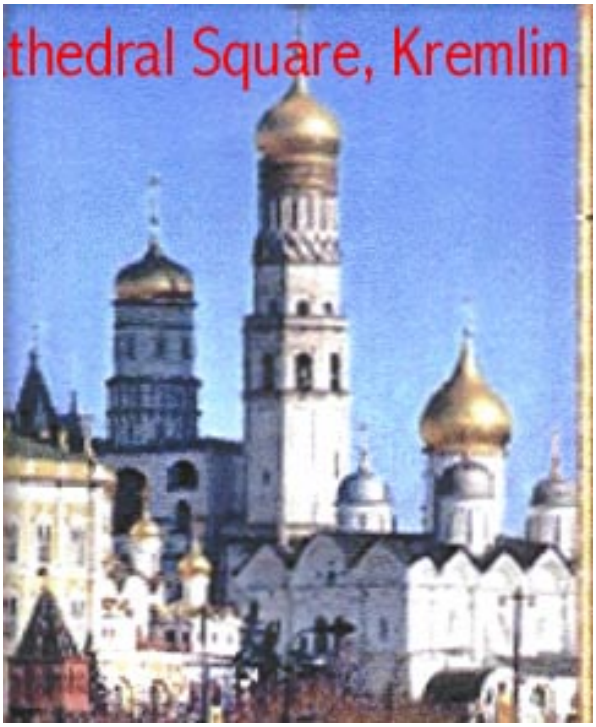
Lastly on Red Square, opposite the Kremlin entrance, was GUM, the soviet equivalent of a department store. In fact this rambling building housed a collection of "shops", except that western shops have goods to sell. Many of these shops had bare shelves, and everywhere there were more queues of people lining up to see what they could buy, if anything. The only thing of which there was not a shortage was the smell of garlic. Below: Red Square.



There were several good restaurants in Moscow, and although their speed of service was little better than in the Hotel, the atmosphere in them was rather less institutionalised, and the selection of menus was much better. Also the Hotel Moscow, being rather Victorian in its style of architecture, was a pleasant place to dine in the evenings. On one afternoon we asked our driver to take us out of Moscow, and he drove us to the canal which links the Moscow River with the Volga. There we saw our first Hydrofoil boat – so designed that as it picks up speed, the hull is lifted out of the water, resting on the vanes (foils), and the boat careens over the surface at a much higher speed than any conventional craft. That was in 1961, and we occasionally see one in European waters nowadays. Another enjoyable trip to make was to take the boat on the Moscow River, which almost encircles the city, giving a fine view from all angles. Like most things in the USSR the fare was very cheap.

The Kremlin from the Moscow River


Bolshoi Theatre


thedral Square, Kremlin


Ukraine Hotel, Moscow


WINTER IN
RED SQUARE
Frank Joan
Fawcett Sherring

Tardily our members completed their delivery obligations, and I don't think that our Russian counterparts were too dissatisfied; after all, lateness on their part in delivering the 5 year plan could have had dire consequences for them individually. But our lateness probably let them off the hook. We have already noted that they were not exactly efficient themselves. Latterly they seemed more interested in extracting from us what they termed as a "Red Plush Book". What they meant by this was an expensively bound comprehensive write-up of the project. This was not an unreasonable requirement bearing in mind the size of the investment to which they were committing themselves. A proper tender document from Rustyfa, at the outset of the whole scheme would have done the job, but neither we nor our consultants had the experience in that field to perceive that and to bring it about. This reflection was to aid us when next we had to set about another project.

This was not long in coming. Shortly the Romanian Government gave us an enquiry for a factory designed to manufacture 1 million tyres annually. So a delegation travelled to Bucharest to ascertain the detailed requirements, and the project "parameters", (a term of which engineers were fond, and which was coming into fashion about that time). This was done, and it emerged that, whereas the Russians had been willing to stump up the cash "on the nail", the Romanians wished for 7 years credit. I will deal with that matter first. Our bankers were willing to participate in a credit deal, (that is what they are there for) provided that it was underwritten by ECGD. (The Board of Trade managed Export Credit Guarantee Department). Agreement for this was obtained from ECGD, for a 5 year credit term, after a lot of coming and

going. A sticking point for a long time was the knowledge of the likelihood that any contract would contain penalty clauses for late performance on our part, and also strict terms relating to the "guarantees" – in other words that, when commissioned, the plant would produce the output specified in the enquiry. So the same old arguments of dependency on worker skills, material quality, etc., etc., passed to and fro. The Germans have a very apt word in their vocabulary – "stunde", and my best translation is "to do your bit". It was necessary, in their negotiations, for the communist officials "to do their 'stunde'. " Having done their best, duly recorded in the negotiations records, the officials were off the hook. This kept cropping up, for instance at one stage the Romanians insisted that payment for the factory should be by reciprocal purchase on the part of Rustyfa of an equal value of Romanian goods. "Well, if not all of the value, then part of the value". We asked the nature of the goods they had in mind to sell to us. The answer appeared to be flowers, wine, spirits, cement factories, and other items. We did our "stunde" by meeting with officials wanting to sell these commodities, and reporting back that, after considerable effort and enquiry, we regretted that we could not identify a market for these products. Honour was satisfied, and the matter was dropped. We knew that the "spirits" would be "Tvica", the most abominable drink that has ever passed my lips – more likely, in the west, to pass for diesel oil after 20,000 miles!

Mindful of our lessons learned in the Russian contract we determined to make a more professional job of the Romanian tender. Firstly, because the "second" language in that country is French, we would put the whole tender in that language as well as in English, stipulating that the English would prevail in case of any dispute as to

meaning. It would also be properly printed instead of the collection of the documents typed separately by our members for the Russian factory. Finally it would be nicely bound – not red plush, but leather bound with gilt titles on the covers. In the event the whole tender document, including specifications for the equipment, layouts, etc., filled six leather bound gilt-printed volumes, each about five inches thick. Including the French versions the whole totalled twelve volumes.

The staff of Rustyfa was still quite small, and the whole in-house work was done by the redoubtable Phyllis Grigg and myself, and it took six weeks, including most weekday evenings, and quite a few weekends. It is fair to say that I owe not a little of my career success to Phyllis, who was at that time close to retiring age, and whose wisdom, cool demeanour, patience and sense of humour were invaluable. There were not many "career women" in those days, and those who made invaluable contributions usually saw the recognition go to their male bosses. Phyllis was very unassuming at all times. When we had the twelve volumes completed we took them into show them to our boss, Hsquared. He had just returned from one of his wet lunches in the Devonshire Club. He stared glassily at our handiwork, was gently reminded that if he turned the layout drawing the right way up it would look better, and grunted half-heartedly. Later he was rather more effusive, but after our labours, his initial reaction was rather deflating.

Toward the end of May 1959 I flew out to Baneasa Airport, Bucharest, to hand over the weighty tender documents. The effort of obtaining quotations from the suppliers, negotiating with ECGD, and preparing a tender

was much more professional than our first project, and Phyllis Grigg and I felt justifiably proud. We now awaited a call from the Romanians inviting us to send our delegation for the negotiations. This came quickly and our party went out in mid-June, comprising, as before, Dr. Mackay as leader, directors of each member company, Phyllis Grigg, Joan Sherring, Hsquared, Charles Drover, our solicitor, and executives from our consultants. I remained in England to co-ordinate any action required. Charles Drover was a key delegate; he was not only a first-class lawyer, but as much of the negotiation centred on the clauses of the contract, he managed the course of these negotiations superbly. In the course of my time with Rustyfa, having a basic grounding in law, I learned much indeed from watching him at work, to my future benefit.

The Romanians, are unlike their neighbouring countries in eastern Europe. These neighbours are predominantly peopled by branches of the Slavic tribes, the one exception being Hungary, which is predominantly of Magyar origin, (and who under Attila had terrorised Europe almost as far west as the Atlantic coast). Although they have quite large ethnical minorities of Magyars, and Germans, the Romanians bear great similarities to the Latin races, and in fact their natural second language is French. They have the same excitable temperament as the Latins, they describe Bucharest as "The Paris of the East", and if, on a summer's evening, you are dining at one of their many alfresco restaurants, you could well believe you are in France. The Romanians do not have a suspicious nature like their Slavic neighbours, and they are generally of a happy temperament, and are lovers of the romantic music, which follows you everywhere . They therefore found the communist regime much harder to bear, and particularly

under Ceausescu, who was especially brutal. The Transylvanians – those of Magyar origin – had a specially hard time in communist Romania. Many of them came from backgrounds which, pre-communism, had been more prosperous and better educated than the Wallachian majority. They tended therefore to be envied and disliked by the latter, and the communist domination gave the added excuse for them to be oppressed. Generally, in communist Romania, as with other countries in the communist paradise, those who had prospered before the communist takeover (and their offspring) were not allowed to hold key jobs. One engineer, Mr. Cartas, was of Transylanian origin, and he was such a key person with relevant knowledge of Tyre technology, that he was retained in a key post. But he needed eyes in the back of his head, and had to behave very carefully indeed.

The delegation spent six weeks in Bucharest, during which time there was frequent coming and going by some members, usually to sort out some technical query, or to obtain supplementary quotations. I was the goalkeeper, back at base, dealing with scores of queries, tackling the ECGD for improved credit insurance, and also, as before, helping to keep up the morale of the exiles during their long stay. They finally brought back a contract, worth initially £7 ½ million, which was to be supplemented by an order for spare parts, and for some equipment needed to upgrade their existing tyre factory at Floresti, near Ploesti. The new factory was to be located a few miles outside Bucharest, at a village called Popesti Leordini. Whereas in the case of the Dniepropetrovsk factory, westerners had not been allowed to visit the site, there was no such problem in going to the new site. The Romanians did not have the same suspicious nature.

There were numerous loose ends, particularly of a technical nature, after the signing of the contract, besides which the Romanians, unlike their Russian brothers, were not too shy to say that they wanted to learn all they could from our engineers. So then began a series of mainly technical visits to Bucharest, comprising myself, senior engineers from Dunlop, and sometimes a representative or two from member companies. My most important role during these visits was to look after our commercial interests. Engineers have usually only the technical interest to occupy their minds, and it was too easy for the Dunlop people to agree with the Romanian engineers to modify specifications of the equipment, without entering a caveat to the customer that there were probably cost implications. So I had to sit through countless hours of discussions with my ears alert, so that I could remind the customer of that fact, and then later to sort out the new specifications and submit prices for them.

It was an interesting experience, if often a very tiring one. We would sit on one side of a long table, and the other side would be packed with lots of supernumeraries sometimes three thick – they wanted as many people as possible to learn, not only technicalities, but also the English language. At the outset I think there was only one with some sort of understanding of English, and the discussions took the form of bad French, some English spoken loudly as is our custom, and lots of arm waving. Amazingly, to us, our counterparts became competent in English quite fast, whereas none of us could utter more than a couple of Romanian words, even after numerous visits. The Romanians were not very hospitable with drinks – one cup during a morning or afternoon session, was our lot. But we noticed that during the sessions, at

some time or other, each of them would get up and disappear for a time, often twice. We concluded that they were breaks for coffee. So we did the same, popping out to the drinks dispenser for a brief gulp. The hint was taken, and subsequently we were looked after rather better. As our ability to communicate improved, or I should say their ability to communicate, our relations became much easier and less formal. Their party included one very capable lady engineer, whose expression always seemed severe and unfriendly. One day she uttered the phrase which would haunt her ever. Getting up and moving her chair slightly, she said " I have something hard between my legs". This brought the house down with laughter, in which she joined when enlightened.

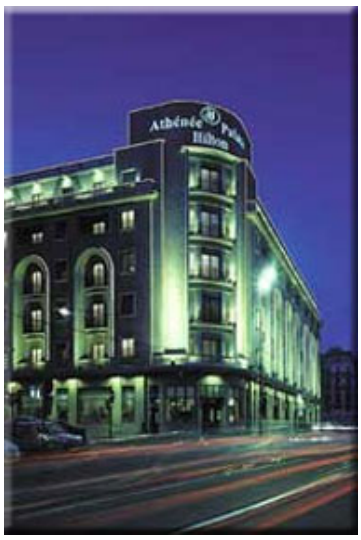
Particularly during the summer months, Bucharest was a very pleasant place in which to spend time. It could be very hot, but nearby in the Lido Hotel, there was an excellent pool, and a few miles from Bucharest there was a lake resort, where the swimming was quite good, and in the evenings, the lakeside restaurant served good food, and the music, as always was good. A cigarette to the leader of the orchestra brought slavish devotion, one for all the group made them yours for the evening, and a packet more or less bought the whole Romanian Peoples' Republic for life. They adored western cigarettes. Quite openly, and in fact government sponsored, there was a "black market shop" just to the rear of the Athenee Palace Hotel. (now called the Athenee Palace Hilton). Here you could offer all sorts of goods plentiful in the west, but scarce in eastern Europe: a pair of nylon stockings, available at home in Marks and Spencer for 5/- (25p) fetched £2 in Romanian money; a packet of Gillette razor blades fetched over £2; a packet of 20 cigarettes, the same. It was customary when entering the

country to specify them as gifts, and they were waved through. The black market shop was, of course, for the benefit of party members and their wives. Some pigs were more equal than others!

In those days, there was no direct flight to Bucharest from London. Our route was from Heathrow to Brussels, then by Sabena, Belgian Airlines, which flew to Bucharest, stopping at Bonn/Cologne, Budapest in Hungary, then over the Transylvanian Alps to Baneasa Airport in Bucharest. It took the whole day. In winter the journey often took longer. We could be held up in Bonn, but more often at Budapest Airport. Not the city, but the Airport, because we didn't have visas to enter the Peoples' Republic of Hungary. So, often we were stuck overnight in the airport building which was not equipped to have guests. All the staff, including the bartenders, locked us in the airport building, and went off home, returning in the morning. During the night no heating was available, and because we usually had been held up by snow, it was perishing cold, with not a drop to drink.. Export could be fun!! After those stop-over nights the plane would be frozen solid. They were Douglas DC7Cs , and often it took the crews a worrying long time to put life into their engines. Later Austrian Airlines opened a route to Bucharest, and it was much more pleasant to fly via Vienna, especially if we were going to be stranded by foul weather over the Transylvanian Alps. Austrian Airlines at that time were operating the highly successful jet-prop Vickers Viscounts. Dr. Mackay had determined that all flights to our customers' countries should be by first class. The idea was to impress our customers. It presumed that we would be met at the airports and would thus be noticed. In my case we always made our own way from the airport,

but we travelled first-class whenever that was available, all the same. After the initial glamour of travelling it was, after all, a long drawn out bore and a few creature comforts were welcome.

I have already mentioned the Athenee Palace Hotel. There were more modern hotels in Bucharest, for instance the Lido Hotel. But the Athenee Palace was like a comfortable old pair of slippers – well worn but welcoming. It is situated centrally on a large Piazza, with the royal palace of the Romanian kings alongside, and has only four or perhaps five stories. The rooms are large with high ceilings, and although, typically the lifts were slow and unreliable, wide staircases lent elegance to the hotel. The food was sometimes good, sometimes bad, but always slow. But having said all that, the service generally suggested that the staff remembered the better days before communism. It was even possible to order creature comforts delivered to the room. I remember one occasion when we ordered some soda water to go with the scotch whisky we had bought at Heathrow. We offered a glass of whisky and soda to the waiter, which he swallowed as if it were lemonade. He didn't make it to the door before he collapsed. We carried him out to the broad landing, laid him out on an Ottoman, and phoned down to the room service. Another waiter appeared and he behaved rather contemptuously of his colleague. We offered him a drink which he downed. He did better than his colleague. He got as far as the ottoman before he too collapsed.



Left: The Athenee Palace Hilton today
Rather smarter than it was before!

Like most countries Romania had its national drink, which I have described earlier. This is matched by a national dish, called "Mititay" (I have spelled it phonetically, not knowing how really it is spelt). This is made up principally of Moldavian sausage, which tasted as if it had been left in strong sunlight for at least three weeks, and is heavily laden with garlic. It tastes revolting, and once when a dinner was laid on in honour of me and my colleagues, we had to face tvica and mititay, followed by a muscular unfilleted fish. Those who know of my dislike of fish will realise what I did for England on that night.

The newly appointed director of the factory-to-be was Mr. Marinescu, a party member of course, but communism and he made a marriage of need, I am certain. He was quite hospitable to the visiting delegations, and one Saturday evening I mentioned my interest in Rugby Football. The next morning, at an unspeakably early hour, I received a call from him saying that he would call in half an hour to take me to see a Rugby match including the Romanian national team. This he did, and we were the only spectators of this event. Since then I have seen Romania acquitting itself quite well in International matches, but at the time I was intrigued to find that they had even heard of the game. But there, Romanians play bag-pipe music, and I suppose mititay is rather like Haggis!!

Shortly afterwards we began to have our meetings on site at Popesti Leordini. (Note that with words in Romanian ending in i that letter is silent – hence Popest Leordin), being transported there by a company bus. At these Mr Marinescu, the factory-director designate presided, and to give him credit he kept our meetings going apace. Dunlop had provided foundation drawings for all the machinery,

and they quickly noticed that some of the foundations had been laid the wrong way round. Marinescu barked instructions to one of his minions, obviously directing that they be dug up and replaced correctly. Later watching them at this work we noted that a very high proportion of the labour force carrying out this heavy manual job were women. They had eliminated gender discrimination earlier than we had in the west! Over the succeeding year, during our frequent visits to Romania, we were now able to witness the progress of the factory construction, then the installation of the plant. They worked very hard, their enthusiasm compensating somewhat for their comparative lack of skills. The new factory was to named "Danubiana Tyre Factory.

The contract had also provided for us to accept a number of their engineers into Britain for the purpose of enabling them to acquire skills in the running of the machinery and plant. This we did in due course, and we went out of our way to be hospitable to them. My wife June laid on a dinner for a party of them at our home, which opened their eyes to the apparent prosperity of company employees. They also wanted to go and see "Dr. Zhivago", as had the Russian visitors. The contract had also provided that we would send engineers to Popesti Leordini to give advice and assistance in the commissioning of the equipment. In total, at the peak, we had over 60 men, under the supervision of our site manager, living in Bucharest, for spells of several months. This required some logistical organising, for we arranged to send out a range of comforts for their stay – cigarettes, spirits, confectionery, etc. These men were accommodated in a block of dormitories in Bucharest, food and lodging included. The Romanians had agreed to pay handsomely

for these men, and to pay for first-class return flights, including journeys to and from leave.

I never ceased to marvel at the way in which these men, speaking no language but English, managed to communicate with Romanians, particularly with Romanian girls. Several of them had nubile Romanian girlfriends with whom they were co-habiting, some of them at the parental home, some in the dormitories. The British are very resourceful.

I, having learned a lot listening to Charles Drover, found it much easier to fend off threats and claims for penalties for late deliveries, and other breaches in performance. We had many a battle of words with their officials, and as usual in the Communist countries, they had to do their "stunde", and then, having done that they backed off silently. In any case, they had achieved, as with the Russians before them, their principal aim – of buying the latest state of the art of Rubber Tyre technology.

On one weekend in Bucharest, when we had worked hard all week, Mr. Marinescu arranged for the party to take a couple of days off and visit the Carpathian Mountain area of Romania. In fact it turned out to be more travel than anything else, but we enjoyed most of it all the same, as it did us all good to take a break. We set off in the morning in the direction of Brasov. Not long after we had left Bucharest behind the roads deteriorated significantly, and it was a bumpier and slower journey from then on. It became hot and dusty We also noticed that, every twenty miles or so, we passed police or military checkpoints. We were not stopped, but waved on, so word had obviously been passed to expect us and let us proceed. At about mid-

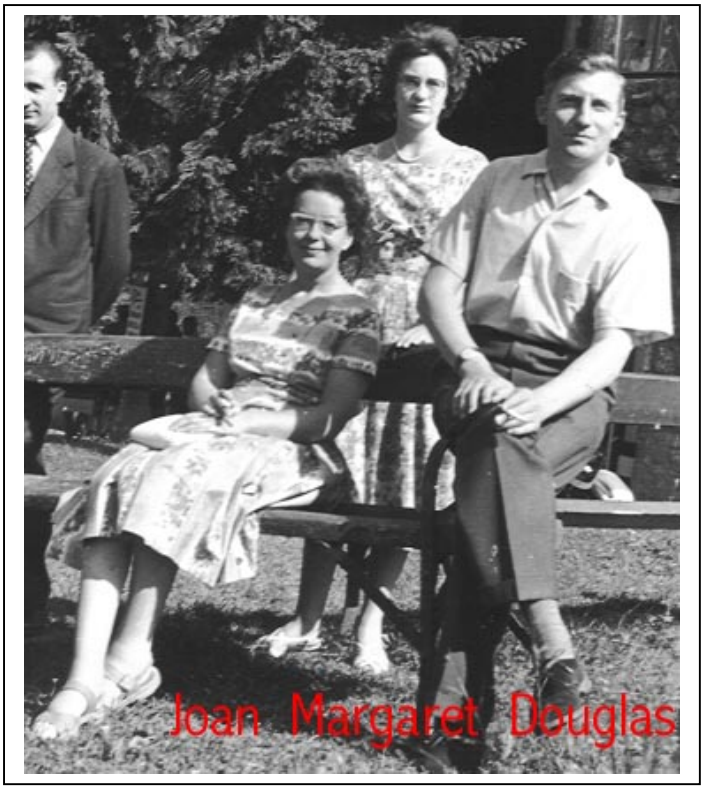
day we stopped for a picnic by the wayside, on the banks of a stream. The food and refreshments had been stored in the boots of the cars, where they had been heavily impregnated by diesel fumes. Consequently although we were all hungry we found most of the food inedible.

In the mid-afternoon we finally arrived, hot, tired and hungry at the Romanian resort of Lacu Rosu (Red Lake). The accommodation was hutted and basic – a bit like an Outward Bound Camp. It was set in very attractive mountain surroundings, but as a meal was imminent we did not have much time to explore. We could see the lake about 600 yards from the camp. At that latitude darkness falls quite swiftly, and it became too dark to explore. Most of the party were ready for bed, but one of the three ladies in the party – Margaret Haines, who was a young newly qualified solicitor working for Charles Drover, suggested that we should try a swim in the lake, as it might refresh us. There was only one taker – me. So we set off in the dark to the lake. We changed, one each side of a screen, ran to the lakeside and dived in head first. It did refresh us – it was perishing cold! Mountain lakes tend to be cold, being fed by streams from the heights. So we made do with a couple more dives, changed back, and returned shivering to the huts. I was sharing a room with the boss of Dunlop Advisory Service, who was snoring contentedly, so I had to creep in and get to bed very quietly.

The next morning, the party refreshed, we went down to the lake to explore. In daylight Margaret Haines and I saw that the lake looked like a petrified forest under water. The surface was dotted with rotten tree stumps, and lots more were visible just below the surface! We had been very lucky not to have impaled ourselves, Dracula-like,

when we dove in. The day was very enjoyable, and the scenery was excellent. I believe it is now quite a popular resort for holidays. The long journey back to Bucharest was tedious, devoid this time even of novelty. But it was a pleasant interlude, and we appreciated Mr Marinescu's thoughtfulness in providing it.

Above: The Lacu Rosu (Red Lake) in the Carpathian Mountains. There are numerous tree stumps under water, invisible if one is foolish enough, or unaware of the fact and dives in at night.



Above Left: Standing Margaret Haines, seated Joan Sherring Secretary to Dr. Mackay and Douglas Huntington.
Right: Dr. John Mackay, CBE., Chairman of Rustyfa Limited, Margaret Haines, Lawyer and Joan Sherring.

We had in the meantime, negotiated a contract with Jugoslavia for the extension of their tyre factory. This required no high-powered delegation, as they just wanted up-to-date machines, not know-how, to supplement the output of their factory.

The next major enquiry Rustyfa received was from the Polish Government for a tyre factory of size similar to the Romanian factory at Popesti Leordini, this to be located at Olstyn. We duly repeated the exercise of preparing a large and impressive tender for that project, and having submitted it, sent a delegation to Warsaw in

1961. This comprised Dr. Mackay as leader, some members of the consortium, Charles Drover, our solicitor, Maurice Bartle the boss of Dunlop Advisory Services, three ladies – Phyllis Grigg, Joan Sherring, and Margaret Haines, and myself. Before things got going however, I had to return to England to bring some more information. So I did the journey twice, the second time flying to Warsaw with a change of planes at East Berlin. Several of the delegation met me at the airport, which was very welcome.

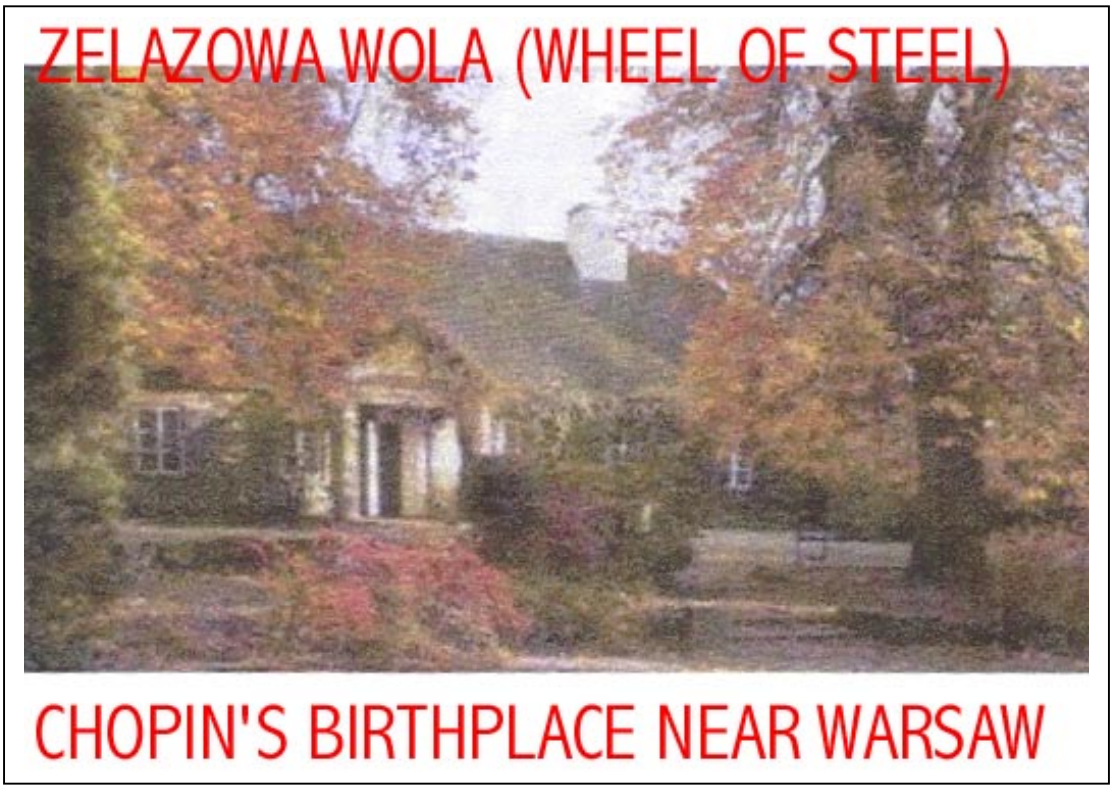
We stayed at the Grand Hotel in Warsaw, which was quite comfortable. I occupied a suite, the second room of which was used as our office. Here both Charles Drover and I had a similar experience straight out of one of John le Carre's novels; we received a phone call in our rooms from females, offering to come up and give us "a good time". We had read about this sort of approach, and believed at the time that it was prompted by someone hopefully for purposes of blackmail later in connection with the forthcoming negotiations. Certainly, in both instances, the caller knew and used our names.

The negotiations began, like those in Bucharest, with a large array of Poles facing us across the table, and as in Bucharest, the refreshment drinks on the table were in short supply, our hosts refreshing themselves by frequent exits from the room. Whereas, in the USSR and in Romania, we had sensed that the prime objective was to secure the know-how, the agreeing on prices and other contract terms being of secondary importance, the thrust of the Poles' approach was markedly different. The prices we had quoted were , according to them, much too high. We had had some inkling of this in our advance discussions with ECGD, which had been to ascertain the

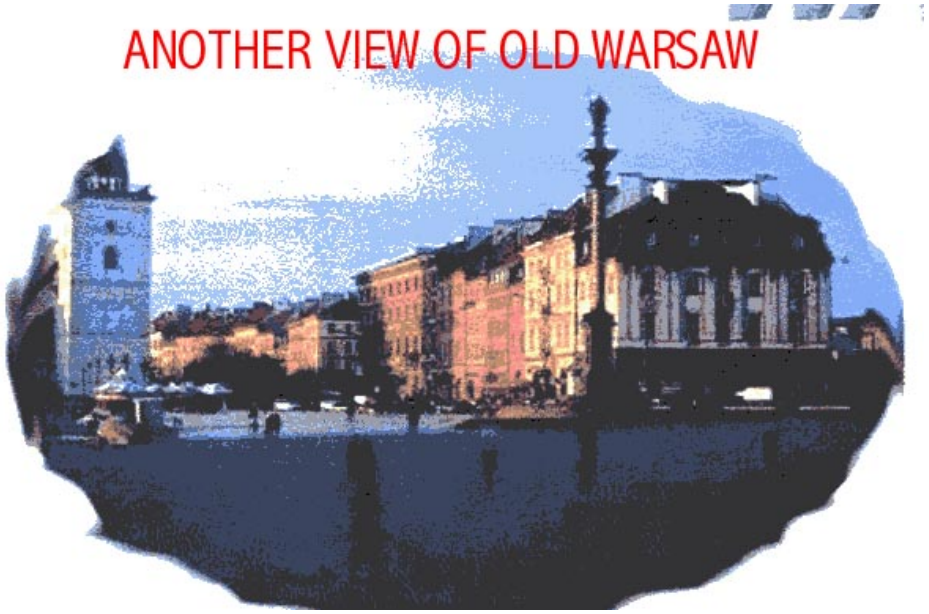
possibilities of credit insurance. We had been aware of their knowledge that the Polish economy was "strapped". Poland's is essentially an agrarian economy, and their principal export for earning western currency was bacon. At that period Danish bacon had largely usurped the Polish exports to the west, and the Poles required lower prices, longer credit, and, no doubt had we got that far in our negotiations, some pressure would have been exerted for us to help boost Polish exports of pigmeat.

I have described that situation in just one paragraph in order not to bore the reader, but our discussions dragged on for about three weeks, it becoming ever clearer that we were on to a loser in Warsaw. Eventually the Poles announced that they had abandoned the project, and so far as I am aware, the Olstyn factory never did materialise. Most of the delegation returned home, leaving just a small party in Warsaw to wrap things up. With spare time to fill we took time off to view some of the places of interest in and around Warsaw. In 1939 the city had been heavily bombed into submission, then later, as the Russians advanced into Poland in 1944, and the Poles had risen to free themselves of the Nazis, it had been very badly ravaged by the Germans in revenge, particularly the Jewish Ghetto. Afterwards the Poles had rebuilt the old part of the city, brick by brick, from the drawings and plans, so that it re-appeared just as it had been before 1939. This had been done lovingly and beautifully. Likewise the old palaces of the Polish Kings had been restored faithfully. We also visited the Peoples' Palace of Culture which had been donated by the USSR; it bore a striking resemblance to some of Moscow's tall buildings.

We also, one Sunday, drove out the few miles to Zelazowa Wola, the name translates to Wheel of Steel. This was the birthplace of Chopin, and is a fair sized house standing in its own grounds of perhaps 2 acres. It was a pleasant sunny day, and most of the windows of the house were open, so that one could wander around the gardens at will, or browse in the house at memorabilia of Chopin, all the while listening to renditions of Chopin's music by a pianist playing in the music room. It was very enjoyable, though to British gardening enthusiasts it was tempting to grab a mower, or scythe, or garden fork, and to tidy up the very overgrown grounds. Polish culture was on tap in the Warsaw Opera House, and some of us sampled that. It was passable, but not breathtaking as had been the Bolshoi productions.



People's Palace



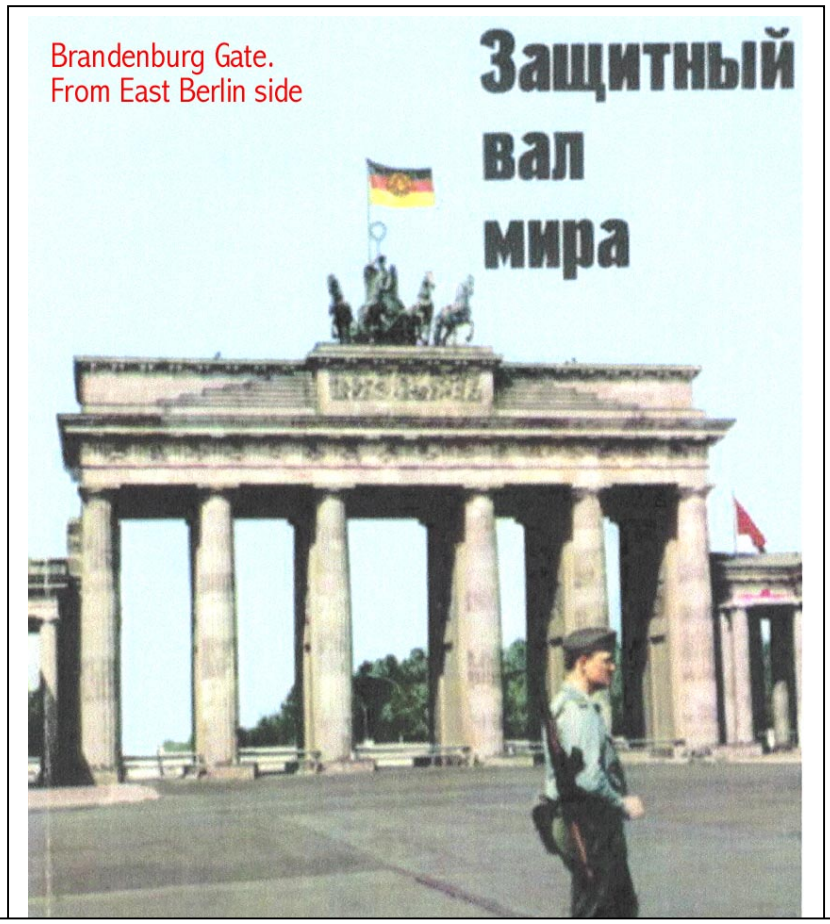
The next enquiry we had to deal with was a smaller one, worth about £1 million, from East Germany, and for an extension to their existing factory. This involved several visits, via West Berlin, to East Berlin. Having quoted, we sent a delegation to East Berlin in the spring of 1962 for negotiations. This comprised Harold Spencer, myself, a young lawyer from Charles Drover's firm, and a lady secretary – Margaret, from Rustyfa, Phyllis Grigg having retired from work.. For our own comfort we stayed in West Berlin's Kempinski Hotel, just off the Kürfürstendamm, and travelled across to East Berlin each day. This meant going through the notorious Check-Point Charlie each time. At this check-point there was always a long queue of Berliners wanting to visit their relatives, and the wait could be for hours. However, as citizens of one of the occupying powers, we were always waved through swiftly. The contrast between East and West could only be believed by witnessing it in person. Otherwise it might be put down to propaganda. Whilst West Berlin glittered with prosperity, restaurants and bars throbbing with life, and shiny cars using the streets, East Berlin was drab, shabby, and gloomy. Whereas West Berliners' clothing was generally smart, their relatives on the other side of the Wall were shabbily dressed, and even the newer clothes were badly cut. It was hardly surprising that the Communist dictators did their best to make visiting West Berlin as hard as possible. But the West Berlin showcase could not be hidden or disguised. Television made sure of that, for provided that the East Germans had access to a television it was all there plainly for them to see.

Our negotiations stumbled along with difficulty, and nearly stalled on several occasions. Hsquared was far

too impatient for the job of reaching agreement by any method other than intransigence. We missed Charles Drover, who had always managed to break deadlocks by finding a formula to satisfy the honour of both sides. After two or three days, Harold Spencer totally lost patience, got up and walked out, suggesting that I tie up loose ends and then return to the Kempinski Hotel to pack.. This provided me with a chance to try the "Drover" approach, by exploring chinks in the discussions which might lead to a solution. The attitude of the East Germans changed as soon as they perceived that I was trying to do this, and their intransigence melted visibly. After all, they too wanted to make a contract with us, but as usual they had to make a tough battle to get there. Within a couple of hours we had reached the point where both sides felt that they had won some points, and we arranged to return next day for the signing of a contract. They let me telephone to West Berlin to advise Hsquared to unpack!

We returned next morning to do the signing, after checking that the agreement drawn up represented truly our verbal accord of the previous day. That done, our customers graciously invited us to stay for lunch, which we enjoyed. They then asked us to join them to visit some lakes on the outskirts of Berlin, which turned out to be a convivial picnic on some hills overlooking the lake. They had brought plenty of liquid refreshment, and we all ended up great chums. Out in the open country, with no prying ears they dropped their pretence of party loyalty, and spoke their feelings about communism very frankly. When we asked why, if they felt like that, they did not escape to the west, their answer was that to do so would cut them off from their loved ones, relatives and friends for ever. On

reflection it was an understandable sentiment that having ties in the east they did not choose to desert them.



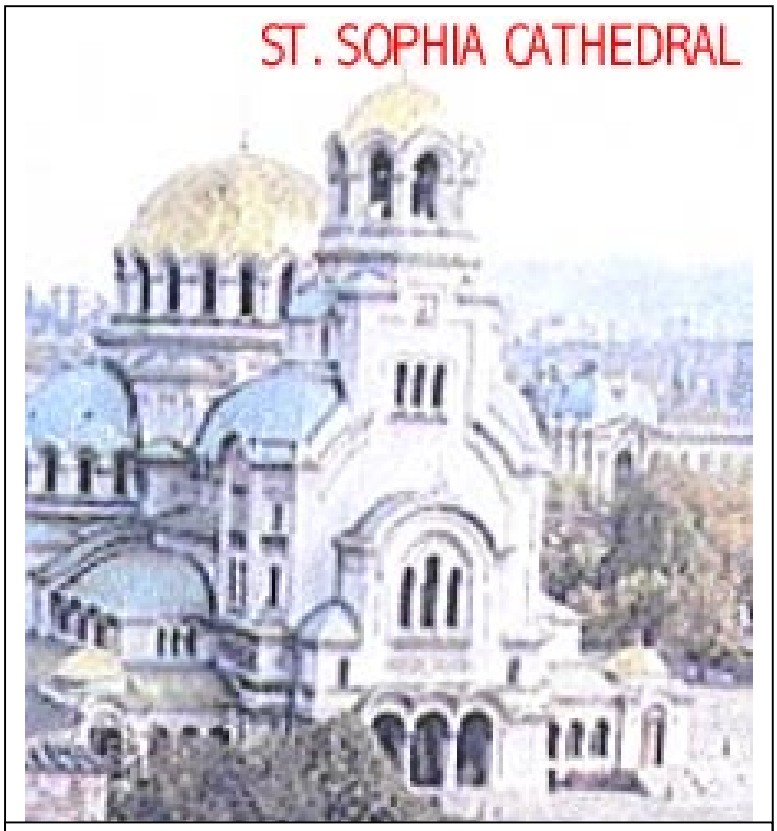
There were more trips in 1965, to Romania, and in 1966 to Bulgaria. The Romanians were interested in adding the technology of radial tyres to their repertoire. Our consultants, Dunlop, were not able to participate, because although making radial tyres themselves, it was under licence from Pirrelli of Italy. At that time only Michelin and Pirrelli possessed their own radial tyre technology. So we approached the latter to discover whether they were able and willing to sell their know-how in conjunction with a Rustyfa contract for the necessary equipment. They were, and we had discussions with their Dr Trotto, a charming engineer from Milan. I travelled to Milan, being by then General Manager of Rustyfa in succession to Harold Spencer. We had long discussions with a party of Pirrelli engineers, who were very much on the ball, and were keen to participate with us in Eastern Europe.

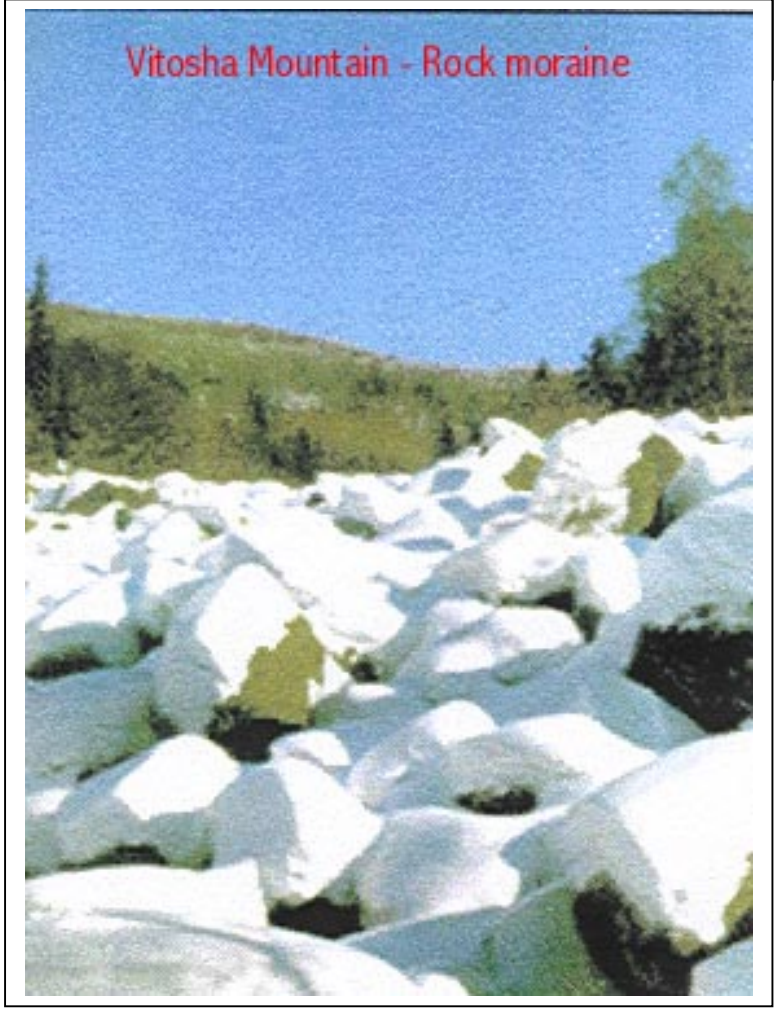
To handle the enquiry from Bulgaria, we prepared a tender for the design and equipment for a proposed tyre factory near Sofia. This was followed by a Rustyfa delegation to Sofia for negotiations. Dr. Mackay could not lead this as he had recently suffered a motoring accident in Italy, whilst on holiday. So it was led by Kenneth Bradshaw, a Director of another of the consortium members – David Bridge & Co. Ltd. We flew to Sofia via Vienna, and on this occasion June, my wife accompanied us. The Communist paradise was an eye-opener to her, and we experienced the usual problems, our room was flooded by faulty plumbing arrangements, food took an age to arrive when ordered; everything smelled of garlic, and the people were shabbily dressed. We went to the opera and I

am afraid that I fell asleep amongst a rapt audience, to June's embarrassment.

The negotiations dragged on for a week, but it became very obvious that if we were not willing to pay the Bulgarians to have the factory, then the least we could decently do was to let them have it for nothing. It was another Polish job. They wanted to get on the band-wagon of industrialisation, but could not really afford the bus fare. Not even Dr. Mackay could have cracked that one, and we prepared to return home. Before that though, we did some exploring. There was not a lot to see. Turkey, the Sublime Porte, had been in charge for so many centuries that the Bulgarian culture had been submerged for too long; even St. Sophia's Cathedral had been used as a mosque. Under communist rule there was no interest in reviving religious fervour, and the cathedral was little more than a museum. We inspected the attractive countryside surrounding Sofia, and visited Vitosha Mountain. This was interesting in a geological sense, in that, tumbling down one side from quite an altitude, was a "river of boulders" a moraine consisting of huge smooth-sided rocks, which had obviously been worn smooth by long-term erosion of water in far off times.

Those years at Rustyfa had been very fascinating and productive, and I had thoroughly enjoyed the opportunities which they had afforded me. The travelling had been exciting but had become too demanding. I could not see the eastern European trade lasting for much longer, so I decided to look for new pastures. My first foray, which took me to Winchester did not last for long, but the next one led me on to a career which absorbed the rest of my working life, and this I shall describe in the next chapter.


ST. SOPHIA CATHEDRAL


Vitosha Mountain - Rock moraine

Chapter Five
1967 – 1990 Golden Years.

Fully armed with my London commuter's uniform – bowler hat and rolled umbrella – I attended an interview in Crawley, at a company called W.C.Youngman Limited. It was for the post of Company Secretary, and the interviewer was himself a Chartered Secretary. He was shortly to retire, and the person chosen was to succeed him in that post. As the reader might have gathered, I was not particularly keen on the Company Secretary's role, but it is at least a post where the whole of the company's activities can be encompassed, and I firmly believed that the role can be whatever the incumbent makes of it.

With all that overseas travel experience my c.v. looked very interesting to the reader, if only because he might wish to find out more about an intriguing job behind the Iron Curtain. So I think my interviewer was keen to enlist me. Before replying to the advertisement I had never heard of Youngman, but I did my homework before the interview, and knew that they had a factory at Crawley making ladders and other access equipment. However, I realised later that I had not done nearly enough homework before applying. Had I done it properly I should not have applied. The company was ailing badly, and my inherited instincts of caution would have made me steer clear of Youngman. I had a family and a mortgage to provide for. But I dived in and started in September 1967, leaving my bowler hat and umbrella behind me at home. 'At home' by

then was our newly purchased house close to the Mormon Temple near Lingfield, and only seven miles from Crawley.

Crawley was one of the New Towns, built round the ancient village of the same name, on the A23. Its main role, until then had been a convenient place for changing horses, and for refreshment, on the London to Brighton road. Several new towns, developed by the New Towns Commission, had been designated to attract businesses out of the crowded London metropolis. Crawley was the best inspired new town of the many which were developed around London. It is set in lovely rolling country, close alongside Gatwick, the fast growing second airport. It was developed as a ring of communities circling the old village, so that each, in addition to proximity to the amenities of a town, had its own community life, with churches, pubs and shops, etc. A major industrial estate, to the north of the town was beautifully laid out, and for all of the twenty-odd years that I worked there, it was a constant source of pleasure. The estate, following the example of Welwyn Garden City and Letchworth, had wide, tree-lined boulevards, and the planners thought far enough ahead to make provision for access to a motor road should that come about. The incentives for companies to move there were considerable: Youngmans was one of the first to move there, and was granted a 99 year lease on a 10 acre prime site in Manor Royal for an annual rental of £2000 fixed for 99years! It was also granted a 99 year lease on another 10 acre site, half a mile away from the factory, for use as a sports ground, for £5 per year also fixed for the term of the lease. Obviously it was covenanted for recreational purposes only. For people who had been brought up in the smoky, run-down, inner London areas, such as Dockland, it must have seemed a dream. Though I

did hear that some of the population missed the cosy pub-life of their erstwhile districts.

Youngmans was a relatively small company, founded in 1926 by Charles Youngman, which had prospered by virtue of that entrepreneur's energy and drive. As it had grown, he had made the company public and attracted some outside shareholders. The activities of the company, also, had widened as Charles Youngman saw and exploited new opportunities. When I arrived in 1967, the company, all under one central management, was involved in making access equipment, making site hutting for builders, making prefabricated buildings, mainly for 'temporary' schools, making and selling a variety of Materials Handling equipment, hiring and selling Fork-Lift trucks, selling and hiring industrial paraffin-fired space heaters (factored from the U.S.A.), selling and hiring builders' equipment, making scaffold boards, and separately in another small factory in nearby Three Bridges, custom-making vehicle bodies. It had also recently developed a, for then, futuristic, remote-controlled materials handling system for moving components and materials around within a factory. Whew!!

The company was ailing principally because Charles Youngman, its dynamo, was ailing. A year or so earlier he had suffered a major heart attack, and although he got back on his feet, his activeness was sorely diminished. Not only that but I believe his personality was drastically changed, and he became a rather suspicious person, difficult to get on with. He had fallen out with his Deputy Managing Director & Company Secretary, my interviewer, who with the years had also become crusty and suspicious of others, in his case, more from inherent characteristics rather than from failing health. Charles Youngman could

still be the warm and charming man he was reputed to have been before his illness, but he could also suddenly erupt with anger. He was based at the Battersea Depot, always referred to as Wandsworth, which had been the founding place of business. Whenever any executive visited Crawley from Wandsworth, or vice versa, he could be subjected to a cross-questioning by the incumbents at either of those places, as to what the other had said. Hardly a recipe for a harmoniously managed company! Charles, on one of his weekly visits to Crawley, was there when I returned from signing up a contract with a south coast firm for the 5 year hire of twenty fork-lift trucks. I was quite pleased with myself. I should have been, for the five year hire eventually extended to twenty years, and became one of the "gravy trains" which Youngmans enjoyed. After hearing about the contract, Charles exploded and tore me to shreds in his rage. I was a young whippersnapper, and we would not make any money from that disaster. When I had explained to him the arithmetic of the contract, Charles apologised profusely, complimented me on a professional job done, and said I musn't take too much notice of an old man. He had that rare generosity. But that didn't stop him from erupting on further occasions, always subsequently apologising to me. Earlier in my career I had come across others who, after they had suffered heart trouble, became very crusty. I think Charles really was at war with himself because of his reduced capacity.

But I have diverged….. Youngmans was an ailing company because, as I have described, it had so many diverse activities. It was impossible, even with the bosses in good health and in harmony, for all those things to be managed properly. So nothing was managed properly, the bad feelings at the top seeping down into the lower

management levels. When I joined the company had recruited a Managing Director, Bill Cash-Reed, who was about 45, and had seen violent action in World War II. He had managed the well-known firm of Poole Pottery for some years. Bill was a leader of people, who gave every member of his organisation scope to speak his mind. His strength was in leading rather than in doing. He was a very attractive character, full of fun, with a hearty appetite for life. He drew me and Geoffrey Bowden, the Chief Accountant, close to him as his top team. Geoffrey had been Chief Accountant already for 6 years, but had never been valued by the Deputy Managing Director; on the contrary he seemed to have been consistently humiliated by his boss. Subsequently, given space to manoeuvre, and encouragement by Bill, and later by the company's new Chairman, Geoffrey blossomed. Because he blossomed so did the company, for in truth Geoffrey became a tower of strength. It was thanks initially to Bill Cash-Reed's leadership qualities. Below: Geoffrey Bowden in 2004.

Bill was a person who instinctively thought "big", and it was his proposition that we should approach Toyota

in Japan, and propose that Youngmans should undertake the UK distribution of their Fork-Lift trucks. We duly sent off a missive for that purpose, and shortly received a message that Mr. Takeda who managed Toyota's European branch in Dusseldorf would like to visit us at Crawley. So far so good. To impress this potentate I hired a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce and met him at Heathrow airport. We had useful chats at Crawley, and after his return to base we received an invitation for me to visit Toyota in Tokyo, also Nagoya and Toyota City. June, my wife accompanied me on the flight over the pole, by Japan Air Lines Boeing 707, taking 17 hours, including a stop for refuelling at Anchorage, Alaska. It was a very uncomfortable journey because, apart from its duration, the seating, designed for Japanese of small stature, was very tight. The stop at Anchorage might have refreshed the plane, but it did nothing for the passengers! It was in the land of the midnight sun, or more accurately for then, of the midday night, and was perishing cold and bleak. It was the nearest thing to being on the moon!

Above: Anchorage today. In the winter of 1968 it presented a scene of cold desolation, the only signs of

coming development were the numerous snow shovels, diggers and excavators working in the permanent twilight. Arrival at last at Tokyo however was consoling, for the plane was stacked, and circled several times round Mount Fujiyama, looking beautiful with its snow-capped cone bathed in sunlight.

Above:A charming portait of Fujiyama.
Below: Modern Tokyo from the air.

We stayed overnight in Tokyo and were called for by a gentleman from the company, who escorted us, baggage and all, to the station, where he had us safely and comfortably ensconced in reserved seats for the ride southwards to Nagoya on the "Bullet", and bade us goodbye. The Bullet train at Osaka Station.

At Nagoya we were met and driven to a hotel, where in the evening, we dined with a party of smiling Toyota men. It was our first experience of eating on the floor, though being westerners, we were granted the concession of chairs with no legs, but with back-rests. We were told that the next day we would be collected and taken to the factory. This was one of several factories run by Toyota, and was mainly making cars, masses of them. Remembering that this was in 1968, and although I have been to numerous mass-producing factories, still by the year 2000, I haven't seen any so automated as that factory was over 30 years ago. To give an example, there was a large part of the building, about 25,000 square feet in size assembling car gearboxes; it was one continuous conveyor belt operation.

There was only one man working there – a troubleshooter, in charge of the smooth operation of the whole unit. This revelation was repeated throughout the factory. At the output end, where the completed cars finished up, we watched open-mouthed whilst cars, moving up the line where checkers were inspecting every car as it moved, ran off the end, ready to drive away. A big clock clicked away, not the time, but the numbers of that model finished that day, alongside of another big clock clicking away the numbers which should have been completed by that moment. No wonder the Japanese could see off their European competitors!

We came to the part where Fork-Lift Trucks were being assembled. Before I left England I had met the Sales Manager of Coventry Climax, one of the leaders in our country. He told me that the Japanese were years behind in the Fork-Lift business. "Douglas", he said, "take a look at our assembly line. There are twelve trucks in various stages of assembly there. You won't see anything on that scale in Toyota." He was quite right. Toyota had several assembly lines, each with uncountable trucks stretching away into the distant end of the Assembly Room. This is an example of our native complacency which, since the peak of our technological supremacy in the mid-nineteenth century had enabled other nations to catch up and then outstrip us industrially. For lunch we were taken out into the country to an ancient Japanese house, where we sat on the floor through numerous courses of "delicacy", one of which was a small bird mostly of feathers and bones. On asking our hosts what it was, we regretted having enquired – it was a starling. We ate many different courses, including several of fish, and none of which I could truthfully say I enjoyed. It was all washed

down with numerous tiny glassfuls of warm Saki. It tasted like Fairy Liquid to me.

June (at centre with umbrella) being shown sights of Nagoya 1968

In the afternoon the Japanese and I adjourned back to Nagoya for more talks, whilst a young lady took June on a tour of the shops and buildings of historical interest. This was pleasing to me because another friend "who knew" had advised that it would be unwise to take June. Japan was a male-dominated country, and they would not welcome June. In fact they made June very welcome. At dinner that evening our hosts at Nagoya said that we should go back to Tokyo, to the Toyota headquarters, where the Directors wanted to talk to me. The ride in the "Bullet" was very fast, the speed indicator in each carriage reading 120 m.p.h. for much of the time. It was interesting studying the country we went through; the houses had diminutive gardens, but the most noticeable thing was that every inch seemed to be put to some use. Hedges were of shrubs which produced edible food. The next morning I met several of the

Directors of Toyota at a meeting which was affable, and which involved the exchange of presents. By then I was short of presents from England, which was embarrassing. After going round the subject for some time, the spokesman explained that they did not intend to offer us the distributorship. I think they had done what I ought to have done before I joined Youngmans, that is examined the company's financial state, and decided, Rolls Royce or not, we were not the right choice for them. We were seen off at Tokyo Airport as if we were royalty.

From Tokyo we flew east, over the Pacific Ocean, and over the International Dateline to Vancouver, a city with which we fell in love very quickly. My purpose was to see the Canadian Foresters who were our suppliers of the very special timber needed for the manufacture of wooden ladders. We had lately found it difficult to source the quantities we needed each year. We arrived on the Saturday and found that we had three days free. On the Monday British Columbia celebrated Queen Victoria's birthday with a holiday! If you want to see the town, walk; if you want to see the country, drive. So we hired a VW car, and explored north past where the road in those days just ran out onto dust tracks. We got as far as Whistler, which is nowadays a popular ski-resort. Below: A slope at Whistler.

We drove west to Lake Rupert, where the road became difficult. We drove south, over the border into the U.S.A., and up Mount Baker as far as the snow line. We explored Vancouver, which is beautifully set in a ring of mountains, the tops of which were snow-covered. The city then was a bit of a cow-town, with lots of spare plots, and with festoons of electricity cables, suspended between poles, rather in the style of early American settlements. Every few minutes a seaplane would land in the large harbour. Vancouver has the fine Stanley Park, full of trees and shrubs, and is populated by black squirrels, so tame that they shin up your trouser leg hoping for food.

Below left: Vancouver skyline from Stanley park across the harbour. Right: Vancouver with Stanley Park in middle ground and mountains beyond.

On Tuesday I made the rounds of the lumber people, said my piece about supplies, and asked a party of them to dinner in the Vancouver (Hilton as it then was) Hotel. That has a dining room entirely made of very large logs (of the sort which I wanted to buy), and it became a must for us to dine there on every subsequent visit. The party was a success, we made lots of friends, and adequate timber supplies were promised for evermore. The ten hour flight back from Vancouver to London was tiring but we were both looking forward to rejoining our children at home. The trip had been partly successful in that we had secured the promise of timber supplies.

In the following year, 1969, we tried once again to expand our Fork-Lift truck activities, this time by approaching Clarks of Michigan. This necessitated a visit to the USA, this time accompanied by June and our youngest son Guy, then 5 years old. Another wearying flight to Chicago where we were met by a Clark stretched limousine. The drive up to Battle Creek, with a night stopover in Buchanan, was again tiring. We were treated very hospitably by the Clark executives, but once again, on meeting a Director, I was told that they did not propose to appoint us their UK distributors, as they intended to set up their own branch there. So another blank card was drawn. Before returning home, I, June and Guy travelled to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, intending to visit a cousin with whom I was related through common great grandparents – Bob Simonds, and his wife, Edie, and several children. The Simonds families in America had maintained their connections with the England which their parents had left in order to emigrate to a more promising land in the late nineteenth century. Bob's father, Tom had invited my parents, during the 1939-1945 war, to send me to live with

his family for the duration. I had instead been sent to other relatives in Cumbria for a few months. We enjoyed the brief visit, though embarrassed that Bob and his wife had vacated their own bedroom for our benefit, whereas we had intended to stay in a Pittsburgh hotel. Guy made friends with his American cousins, and they intrigued each other by their different uses of a common vocabulary – for instance "backyard" in place of garden, "trashcan" instead of dustbin, "sidewalk" in place of pavement, and so on. They were very hospitable, and we have kept contact ever since. Back then to base.

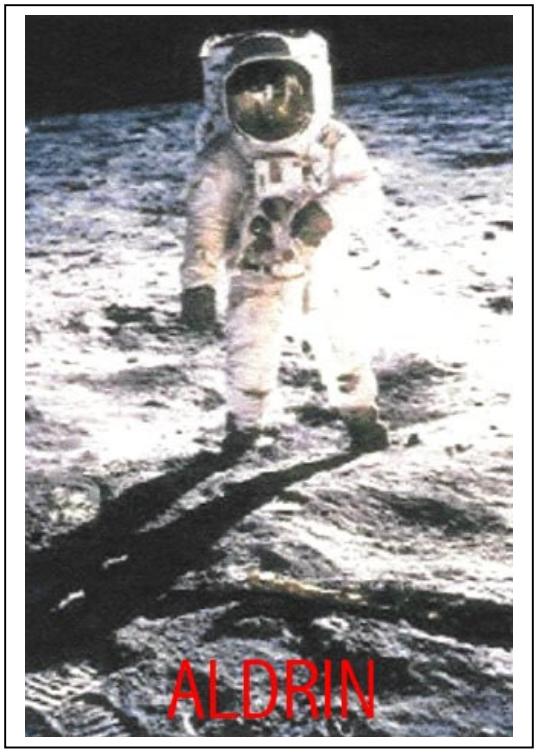
Before proceeding to narrate the fortunes of Youngmans I must dwell upon events which had occurred in the wider world – well, to be more accurate, in the wider universe. In April 1961 the world had been fascinated by the accounts of the first man in space. The Russians had initially sent a dog off into orbit, followed by Colonel Yuri Gagarin, the handsome son of a peasant from a village near Smolensk. He became a hero not only in the USSR but to the world. His flight into orbit lasted just 108 minutes. When I had been in Moscow later in 1961 his picture was proudly emblazoned everywhere, and justly so. Colleagues who prized their memories of a handshake with Nikita Kruschev, just as equally prized their photograph of Yuri. The light of the bright star of Gagarin was extinguished on March 27th 1968 when his aircraft crashed close to Moscow, and he was killed.

Yuri Gagarin did not therefore live to see the Americans' almost inevitable response to his magnificent achievement. Gagarain's feat had caused considerable embarrassment to the USA, who considered themselves to be the leaders in technology of all kinds.

With the expertise of the developer for the Nazis of the V2 rocket missile bombs – Dr. Wernher Braun, (or was it in fact Peter Sellers?) they had been working toward the same objective. President John F. Kennedy had accordingly announced an urgent programme to put a man on the moon in order to retrieve the West's lost prestige. This programme bore fruit in July 1969 when the American space capsule, carried by Apollo 11, succeeded in landing not one man but three men on the so-called Sea of Tranquillity on the moon. The three men were Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins. Television viewers, only 20 years after most people had watched a television screen, and watched Armstrong and Aldrin walking on the moon's surface, taking long, bouncing strides due to the lower moon gravity, planting the US flag, and leaving the message "Here men from Planet Earth first set foot upon the Moon July 1969 A.D. We came in peace for all Mankind". (They were, at the time, blasting the Hell out of the North Vietnamese on Planet Earth!). They stayed on the Moon for 21 hours and then made their way back to splash down in the Pacific Ocean, and to a triumphant homecoming.

Michael Collins Neil Armstrong Buzz Aldrin

Yuri Gagarin.



Because, with Bill Cash-Reed, we could speak freely, which involves sometimes saying stupid things or making unworkable suggestions, we began to analyse our company's problems, and soon came to the obvious conclusion that we needed to rationalise the company by dropping some activities, and putting others, offering promise under separate managements. I had been delighted to be appointed Marketing Manager, then later on Marketing Director. Geoffrey Bowden took on the additional responsibilities of Company Secretary, a job he

did a lot better than I ever did. Our loins were just girded for this new direction when Charles Youngman died, in June 1968. The company solicitor, with an eye to protecting the Youngman family interests, became Chairman. Charles had left a widow and one son, David, a 29 year old, at the time Sales Manager of the division which sold the ladders to retail outlets. David and his mother then owned about 69% of the Youngman shares. David was rightly appointed a Director simultaneously with my board appointment. He was young, with a youngster's tendency for precocity, but with an attractive personality, and he was also vigorous, making us 41 year olds feel like dinosaurs.

One day, after having been entertained to dinner by his boss, David said to Bill "Oh, by the way Bill, I have sold the company to SGB". This was a real show-stopper for Bill Cash-Reed, who had left Poole Potteries because the family majority shareholders had sold out their company, from under his feet to the Pilkington Glass Group. The sale was to the SGB Group, the largest national scaffolding outfit. We had been visited by Alan Walker, one of their Directors a few weeks previously, but not, as far as we understood, with the overt purpose of an acquisition. It seemed a pity that the matter had not been handled openly at our end, because it set Bill's mind into a negative attitude toward what, in the event, became a most fortunate outcome for Youngman, and more or less pre-determined Bill's departure. Probably he would have quit anyway, for his was a free spirit which prospers when unfettered, but it was a pity that he chose to leave in the wrong atmosphere. Alan Walker was nominated as Chairman of Youngmans by the SGB Group, a person of whom we knew nothing, but into whose guiding hands the job security and prospects of 600 people fell.

We need not have worried. Alan, very different from Bill, knew exactly what he wanted to do with Youngmans. It was to make it prosper on the scale in which he had played a big part in creating SGB's growth. In fostering the purchase by SGB he took a big personal risk. He was not part of the family hierarchy which dominated SGB, having risen to board level by sheer hard work, and his native Yorkshire down-to-earth sagacity. Particularly in the soft, nepotistic South his common-sense approach to management did not sit too easily. Almost instinctively he could recognise waffle and bluff, and ,not unkindly, could strip the bluffer of his dissembling clothing. As the reader might have guessed from the foregoing, Alan had the supreme wisdom to nominate me as Bill Cash-Reed's successor as Director and General Manager, after the latter's resignation!

Life was not a bed of roses under Alan's Chairmanship, any more than it was for him as the proposer to the SGB Board of the purchase of Youngmans. We had capital spending problems, largely brought about by the ordering of 50 Fork-lift trucks for our casual hire fleet, with no long term contracts in view. The blood had gone to my head. All Alan did was to suggest that, as I had brought about this problem, I was the best person to extricate us from it, so I had to go cap in hand to the manufacturers, asking them to accept cancellation. Likewise when an executive under my charge had ordered from Sweden an unjustifiably vast quantity of scaffold boards, he suggested that I should accompany the man to Sweden and obtain acceptance of cancellation. These were lessons to be learned, not just by me, that we should shoulder responsibility for our actions. The message got across. Each year we had the customary

stock-check throughout the company. It always revealed a "stock loss" of sizeable proportions. The first one after the takeover caused such disquiet at SGB headquarters, that Alan Walker's own boss at Mitcham, Neville Clifford-Jones came down to Crawley and inspected the locks on the many factory doors. The Group sent down several men from their own staff to investigate and report back.. It was not theft that gave rise to the discrepancies. Largely it was unavoidable wastage in the manufacturing process not accounted for in our costing system, and bad administration in the consumption of our materials. We had been trying to account for the consumption in too precise and tight a manner. Later, when we got to know how SGB accounted for consumption, and therefore seldom recorded a discrepancy after their stock checks, we realised that they made a generous allowance in their costing to allow for wastage and unrecorded consumption. We were creating our own problems and headaches by our own tight allowances. We initially arranged to have quarterly stock checks, later changed to every four months in our endeavour to eliminate or reduce "shocks". I think only Alan Walker accepted the belief that the solution was for us to do as the major SGB company did, and that was to increase wastage allowances, more or less eliminating the "shocks", enabling us to get on with our business rather than wasting time chasing illusory thefts. I doubted very much that the SGB board knew how their accountants dealt internally with that matter.

So it was a difficult introduction to the new ownership by SGB Group. What eased it however, was that our new Chairman, Alan, troubled as he might have been by the scepticism at Mitcham, was never anything but kindly but firm, involved himself personally, and determined to

make the company succeed through the medium of Youngman management. I think the normal occurrence in takeovers, especially with those initial problems, would have been to clear out the existing management, and replace them with new faces. He was the first really effective company boss I had come across and I had come across a lot!

Under his Chairmanship the company took stock of its activities, and of its strategy, and decided to place far more concentration on its hire activities, and generally to orientate itself much more toward users of its manufactures and equipment rather than to the retail trade. The latter, though being a volume activity, yielded very small margins for a lot of effort. This strategy required more depot outlets than just the two we had – Wandsworth and Derby. So, over the following few years, carefully selecting their locations, we opened branches in north London at Willesden, the West Midlands at Brierley Hill, Leeds, Royton near Manchester, Glasgow, East London, Bristol, Heathrow, at Crawley itself to develop hire, Edinburgh, and Teesside. Our new owners looked askance at the Space Heater activity, because it bore no relationship to our other activities, and was speculative, depending on the sort of winters we experienced annually. Each year in advance of winter, we had to commit ourselves to purchase large volumes of heaters from the American manufacturers from whom we held the UK franchise. So there was a big risk that, given a mild winter, we might be left with large quantities of stock on our hands. The gross margins on the sale of these were very high, and we managed to convince an apprehensive Alan that the "game was worth the candle". That even if we carried over lots of stock from one winter, the margins

when they were sold were so high as to compensate for the cost of financing that stock. It says a lot for Alan that he trusted us and approved annually our bulk purchases. His trust was well rewarded. In most of the succeeding years the Space Heater activity contributed handsomely to our profits, and we, in due course added other models and types of space heaters to our range.

Alan Walker in 2004.

In 1972 the Building Industry Unions called a general strike in order to secure higher wages for their members. Although not directly involved in that industry, our union membership was, in that our hourly-paid employees were either members of the Union of Construction and Allied Trades (UCATT), the Furniture Trades and Allied Trades, (FTAT), or the Transport and General Workers Union, (TGWU), the latter being the catchall for many unrelated trades, and at that time the most militant of them all. By their nature, most building companies were not necessarily vulnerable to union action, as their workers were dispersed among thousands of building sites, and not easy to impress

into strike action. Companies like Youngman, however, represented a concentration, within a factory building, of accessible union members. So although Youngmans paid wage rates well in excess of those agreed with the unions, and in factory conditions far better than building site conditions, we found ourselves in the front line of the dispute. Most of our workforce, though not feeling badly treated, obeyed the union call for strike action out of loyalty to their unions.

This was a testing time. Those workers who were union orientated, and who had been perhaps apprehensive about our ownership by a large company which was very much connected with the building industry, watched closely to see what would follow. Would the heavy hand of SGB come down to destroy our freedom of movement? Would it be obvious that any negotiation with the Youngman management was pointless because the real decisions lay with their owners? Thanks again to Alan Walker we at Crawley were left to arrange an outcome. This required a lot of self-discipline on his part. He was dying to come in and get involved. He resisted that urge; I couldn't have done so in his place. We got down to talks with the Regional Convenor of UCATT. To the relief of our workers, and to Alan Walker, and to ourselves we got our men back to work, and happily avoided a setback in our company, just as it was starting to show signs of recovery.

Right: Leonard Elliott

Our factory at Crawley, directed by the excellent and likeable Leonard Elliott, was showing signs of strain. Two incompatible ranges of product were being made there. The ladder products lent themselves to some sort of standardisation by virtue of their volume, whereas the System Building products were very much custom-designed, one-off in nature. The opportunity came up of buying an ailing company, located in Thame, Oxfordshire, involved in the same sector as Youngman System Building. (YSB). This was duly purchased in 1974, and the key executives of that operation moved to Thame to manage the newly merged outfit. From within the parent company – W.C.Youngman Ltd., (which became the Youngman Group) we promoted two key figures. To become Finance Director we appointed our Cost Accountant, Tony Bradburn. And we appointed the Youngman Production Manager, Fred Mabbs as the Works Director at Thame. These proved to be inspired appointments, because they both tackled very difficult jobs with outstanding success, as the later results of YSB proclaimed. Later we changed the name of YSB to ROVACABIN to identify the company with its eventual main product. It really prospered when Brian Woodham was recruited as Managing Director.

The team comprising Brian Woodham as the leader, Tony Bradburn as the Finance Director, and Fred Mabbs as Works Director was quite formidable, ably supported as it was by Michael Hunt, responsible for business-getting, and for the efficient execution of the building contracts. Steadily and carefully, as resources allowed it, the Thame factory was transformed from a rickety collection of buildings into a modern production unit able to meet the growing demands which the sales efforts placed upon it. Product developments enabled the

company to set a new course, specialising in the manufacture of a range of portable cabins good enough in design and cost of manufacture to compete with the market leader, Portakabin. To draw the analogy the company's name was changed to Rovacabin. Since my retirement in 1990 the company has survived the many variations in the economic climate, and I understand, many changes in group structures.

Below: Tony Bradburn, Brian Woodham, Michael Hunt, and Fred Mabbs

W.C.Youngman Ltd., acquired its Manchester branch at Royton by the absorbtion into the company of Johnsons Ladders, a small ladder manufacturer, owned by the SGB Group, and the responsibility of Alan Walker. It not only brought us a much needed branch, but also its Managing Director, Bill da Costa. He became, initially our Northern Regional Director, and later, Sales Director in charge of our expanding list of branch outlets for hire and sale. He was an excellent, hardworking and conscientious

colleague, who materially helped the company on its way to success, and eventually to becoming the star performer in the SGB Group. We tried to persuade Bill to move south so that he could more effectively contribute to the policy-making of the Board. In the end, for family reasons, he declined to do so, and though regretting his decision, the Board understood his reluctance. To the grief of his colleagues as well as of his family, Bill died suddenly in 1977, at the wheel of his car, working as usual. Although like all the senior executives of the SGB Group he had a detailed Medical examination every year; at his last one only a few weeks before his death, no sign of any problems had been brought to light. We missed Bill da Costa very much indeed.

I should add that the Royton branch was an old disused cotton mill, complete with a tall factory chimney emblazoned with "King Mill". Fred Dibnah, now of BBC fame for his infectious enthusiasm over memorabilia of the Industrial Revolution, was employed to demolish it.

Bill da Costa.

I should at this stage dwell on the nature of the group which had acquired the Youngman business. The Chairman at the time of the acquisition was E.C.Beck, who was shortly afterwards to become Sir Edgar Beck.. He was also Chairman of Mowlems, one of the leading construction companies, not among the top 5, but certainly

among the top 10. He was a shrewd business man, highly thought of in the industry. I do not know for sure how and why he was honoured, whether it was for services to the Industry, or to the Conservative Party – he certainly never waited for hours in a N.A.A.F.I. queue! He gave Alan Walker, who was by far the most able member of the SGB Group Board, a hard time on several occasions, but I believe he was generous enough to acknowledge that Alan wasn't too bad after all! Sir Edgar had two sons, Philip, who succeeded him as Chairman of Mowlem, and Clive who was installed as a Director of SGB Group. The Group Managing Director was Neville Clifford-Jones, whose father had, together with E.C.Beck's father, been the founders of SGB, the leading national Scaffolding and builders' equipment company. To be more accurate, the pair had brought an obscure also-ran to the position of market leader. Neville was a Chartered Accountant by training, and was a much liked and admired leader of the group. The Group Secretary and Finance Director, Derek Halsall, also was a Chartered Accountant by profession, and had a brilliant mind. The employees and past employees of the group owed much to Derek for the benefits of employment which they enjoyed, as do those drawing pensions, for his wise and humane counselling to his colleagues. The rest of the group board were, with one exception, men who had succeeded in their roles leading up to Board appointments. They had "stood in the N.A.A.F.I. queue", and I believe that many of them should have stayed there.

It was during my twenty three years at Youngmans, until my retirement, that I really appreciated the periods I had spent alongside "working men" – those who are usually paid by the hour, starting work before the streets have been

aired, and usually getting their hands dirty to earn their living. I did feel an empathy for them, totally unrelated to any political leanings, and I do feel at ease with them. After all, as with most people in this country, I do not have to go very far back in my ancestry in order to find that they too were farmers, or more likely farm hands, or carpenters; that many of them ended their lives in poorhouses, for as soon as they were too old or infirm to work they lost their tied dwellings. Earlier I have expressed my opinion about the very large numbers of company directors who owed their position not to merit on their part but to inheritance. It was natural that working men historically were cynical as a result. Incompetence or lack of concern at the top often meant the loss of their jobs. The men and women at Youngmans were apprehensive of the takeover by the SGB Group. Would the ailing factory be closed? They knew what a struggle it was to make a profit from manufacturing products of a low technical nature. Most of our competitors were much smaller firms, working out of low-cost premises, and paying low wages. Would SGB move in with yet more new management? It was true that there were plenty of jobs available in Crawley at that time, but they liked the work and the atmosphere at Youngmans; furthermore many of them were skilled craftsmen – carpenters or joiners. Very likely their next job might mean working on a building site, or necessitate moving elsewhere.

Alan Walker, born in Yorkshire, was a person who thought out very carefully every move. He realised the advisability of retaining the existing management, minus Bill Cash-Reed who as had been expected left for pastures new. This continuity gave comfort to the workforce. They knew the remaining Directors well, except for me. I had

only been with the company for two years. But I followed the Works Director's example of walking round the ten acre site every day, getting to know my colleagues, and giving them a chance to say whatever was on their minds. It was one of the most enjoyable parts of my working day. With very few exceptions the men enjoyed their work; they were naturally interested in the progress, success or otherwise of the firm. In all this Alan Walker participated keenly, and it soon became plain to our workforce that from him downwards we were determined to make Youngmans succeed.

Success did not come easily; we took some time to crack that "stockloss problem". We did not relish the procession of Accountancy experts from Mitcham, the SGB Goup's Head Office. All of these were quite nice folk, just sent down to do a job, but without exception Geoffrey Bowden was, in my opinion, far more able than them, and had he been of the temperament to do so, he could have seen them all off before breakfast. One of the experts, Gerry Simister became named "Ominous" by John Robus, then our Cost Accountant, later Chief Accountant, then Finance Director after Geoffrey's translation to Mitcham as Group Secretary. "Ominous" was well-named but it was a nomenclature given with a degree of affection by us.

I have mentioned the Cost Accountant. John Robus was a very competent one, and like his immediate boss Geoffrey, he had the knack of choosing competent people. So many executives, either deliberately or by instinct, choose underlings with less apparent ability than they themselves possess. It was John Robus who recruited Tony Bradburn to replace him as Cost Accountant following his own promotion as Chief Accountant. For a long time

mention of Tony's name would usually be followed by the words "you know the unqualified accountant". Tony made himself into a first class professional by dint of his own learning and disciplined application. Starting with Geoffrey Bowden, then John Robus and Tony Bradburn the Youngman Group fielded an outstanding team of Accountants and Administrators.

Below: John Robus and Di his wife

I have dwelt at some length on those accounting methods, even though as the reader might recall, I had found accountancy to be boring and dry. Working in tune with these people I have mentioned above was definitely not boring. It was with the use of a really efficient costing system that we eventually made that factory profitable, by recognising the real cost of everything that went on, and by designing products whose method of manufacture made them competitive. How lucky we were. Not only were Geoffrey, John, Tony and I numerate people, but we were blessed with a Works Director – Leonard Elliott – who had

at some time studied the science of cost accounting. So we all talked the same language, and recognised the same priorities. I have related earlier, while dwelling on the stockloss problem, that we had everything too tightly costed. This failing now became a benefit especially as we recorded everything with the same precision.

Over the succeeding years we steadily improved our profitability, from the initial break-even situation to modest profits, then to not so modest profits, then to real success. When Youngmans turned in an annual profit of £1 million Alan and Jean Walker hosted a Dinner for all the Directors at the Burford Bridge Hotel at Dorking. In the course of this dinner he announced that the next target would be £4 million, at which point the venue would be the Savoy Hotel. Did he have his tongue in his cheek? I am sure that he did not. Alan always knew where he wanted to go, and the acquisition of Youngman, despite the apprehensions of Sir Edgar Beck, gave him the vehicle to steer gently but firmly toward that goal. It was not long before we made that £4 million, and enjoyed our dinner at the Savoy.

During this period I made several visits to America, one of which lasted nearly four weeks. It combined a search for new technology with an almost perennial search for the right specification of timber for our ladder products. We knew that we badly needed our own aluminium ladder range. For some years already we had factored, from another manufacturer, a range of alloy steps, and from another a range of alloy ladders. But we needed, as one of the leaders in the field of these products, our own products, manufactured at home. Aluminium was taking over from timber, and the correct timber was becoming

harder to come by. So I set up a programme of visits to carry out this search. It seemed a good idea to contact the A.L.I., (the American Ladder Institute) the trade association in the USA. They responded with an invitation as a guest to their biennial conference, which was to be held in April 1978, in Naples, Florida. My wife June accompanied me on this trip, which started with a visit to Toronto, Canada, where we visited a manufacturer of alloy ladders in Ontario who had a novel patented design which sounded good. Indeed it looked good for we had some samples shipped over to Crawley for our examination prior to the trip. The Canadian manufacturer was willing to give us a licence in return for royalties. The factory was in Chatham, Ontario, just over Lake St. Clair opposite Detroit, and involved a flight of ninety minutes in a light plane from Toronto. I duly noted the prospect for later consideration.

June and I then flew on to Nashville, Tennessee, changing planes at La Guardia, New York.. Nashville had a series of business conventions in progress – it is popular for this very American habit and style of convention – but a business connection had kindly booked us a suite on the 28th, top floor of the Nashville Hyatt Hotel. This was a "security" floor, which could only be reached by an express lift using an access code. I hired a car to visit a ladder manufacturer in a town called Portland in the north of Tennessee, about 50 miles away. This was my first experience of the American view of credit cards. Asked how I was going to pay for the hire I replied "cash". This drew a distinctly suspicious scrutiny from the "clurk". The correct answer should have been by "credit card", which on production brought an obliging smile from the young lady. The reason was security. With a credit card they had a

handle on you, could check your credit status, and presumably had some recourse to the card issuer if you took to the hills, so to speak..

I drove to the factory in Portland, Tennessee to find that the owner was absent, despite my appointment with him. Nonetheless I was courteously walked round the factory, before returning to Nashville. Back there I found the factory owner at the hotel, in the next suite and quite unperturbed that he had stood me up in Portland. We did not allow time to visit the "Grand Old Opry" before leaving Nashville, and flew on from there, changing planes at Atlanta to fly to Tampa at the northern end of Florida. From Tampa the drive down to Naples looked like a pleasant and easy coastal drive for about 150 miles. Our departure from Tampa was delayed by a social obligation we had acquired on the flight from Atlanta. Seated next to us had been a charming, gushing southern lady, with whom we had a flight-long conversation exchanging pleasantries. She was the wife of a Florida orange farmer; it sounded as if he owned most of the sunshine state. On reaching Tampa airport, and discovering that we were hiring a car there, she asked for a lift to her home, saying that it was more or less on our way south. Noblesse obligait. So we took her miles out of our way to her magnificent period style house, where she insisted we came in for " a Sandwich or something". This was served by a big black mama who was straight out of "Gone with the Wind", full of "yo'orl"s. This took a long time for the south is never in a hurry, and by the time we had extricated ourselves, we were getting tired and concerned about time to complete our journey.

However, we comforted ourselves that it did not look too far to Naples. On the contrary it was a long, long, way to Naples. The coastal road, though close to the coast, was not scenic. It was interspersed every half-mile or so with traffic lights, as that side of Florida has numerous settlements for retirees on both sides of the main road. We arrived at Naples at about 6 p.m., very weary, and not a bit enchanted with Floridian scenery. On stepping out of the plane at Tampa we were both struck by hot, wet sandbags. Well, it felt like that! The humidity was extreme, so we had been glad that the car, as virtually all American cars are, was equipped with air-conditioning. Unlike most air-conditioners in the UK, the American versions freeze you, so you can never quite win.

The venue for the ALI (American Ladder Industry) convention was The Beach Club at Naples. In addition to the main building housing the public rooms and upstairs, some bedroom suites, the site of about 3 acres contained several separate dormitory blocks. On arrival at the entrance to the Beach Club we were greeted by two burly, armed uniformed guards each with purposeful looking Alsatian guard dogs. Florida has been the gateway to America for hordes of Cuban refugees, some of whom are illegal entrants, and most of whom had been illegal, but who were allowed US citizenship. The crime rate in Florida is exceptionally high even by American standards. We were shown to our suite in one of the blocks. It was

fabulous. There were two very large bedrooms, each with two king-size beds, and with wardrobes which looked the size of an average English house. Adjoining was a large lounge, a fully equipped kitchen, and two bathroom/toilets with showers. Being air-conditioned the suite was perishing cold, until you opened the door to the balcony where those wet sandbags were lying in wait.

Above: Aerial view of Naples Beach Club by waterside with their Golf Course in foreground.

Above: View of Naples beach Club Hotel from the 18th hole.

We had, in advance of our arrival, invited several dignitaries, the President and officers of the ALI, and their wives to our suite for pre-dinner drinks. Did I forget to mention the fully equipped bar in the suite? This went off alright, and we were invited to accompany them to the opening night dinner as guests of honour on the President's table. But not before the President had asked me to address the convention next day. Everybody was extremely affable, and the dinner passed off very pleasantly. Our suite oscillated between arctic and tropical temperatures as June and I continually adjusted the air conditioning all night. In the morning we breakfasted well in a dining room which overlooked the club golf course. Outside it looked like a car park, or rather, a buggy park.

Golfers in the US, especially in Florida, the wrinkly retirees' state, do not walk if they can ride, and although the golf course is as flat as a snooker table, every one of them played off with his motorised buggy. We used to walk round the course daily, attracting sympathetic looks from golfers who probably thought we poor British could not afford a buggy.

On the opening morning of the convention in the conference hall, I was surprised to note that all the delegates were casually dressed in either golfing clothes, or in tennis gear, several of the latter, I thought somewhat impatiently, fingering the rackets they had brought with them . We listened politely to the President's opening speech, duly applauded, and then he introduced (introdoosed) me, the visiting President of the UK counterpart to their own association. In anticipation of this event, whilst on holiday in Cornwall, I had persuaded a local shipyard owner to obtain for me a ship's bell, to affix it on a hardwood stand, and to inscribe the bell with a suitable message of greeting from the UK to the American Ladder Institute. The intention being for the President to use it for calling his meetings and conventions to order. The delegates were enraptured with this goodwill gift, and when I mentioned that I had bought it from one of the many antique factories in England set up specially to serve Americans , their senses of humour were tickled. The next item on the agenda was a discussion about ANSI, (American National Standards Institute) the equivalent of our British Standards Institute; to consider proposed changes to their ladder standards. At this point all but about twenty people got up and left to head for the playground. I began to realise that the convention didn't really involve serious business, but was a charming means

of meeting and playing with their friends and competitors twice each year, the next one scheduled (to which I was asked) to be held on Mauwie, one of the Hawaian Islands. Business was entirely perfunctory during the whole period of five days, the wives going for sightseeing trips, the men playing golf, tennis or doing a spot of deep-sea fishing, ending their tiring day with a nice dinner in the evening. We enjoyed it very much, but I was frustrated because I was on a technology search, wishing to interest one or two of them in licensing their products and manufacturing methods. It was virtually impossible to sit them down for a discussion on my subject.

Eventually one of them showed an interest; he had a plant making Glass Fibre Ladders near San Francisco, and as that city was on our itinerary, we agreed to meet up there so that I could visit his plant. The final of the five days of convention did not even show any pretence at work. A boat trip was organised for the whole party to go round the Florida coast towards the Everglades. This was very enjoyable and we were entertained all the way by Pelicans, flying clumsily, looking like clowns with wings, constantly diving beak first into the sea, and coming up with their catch. We also passed numerous beautiful villas on the waterside, and have often thought about them when hearing about the hurricanes which devastate the coastal regions each autumn. Below: Pelicans.

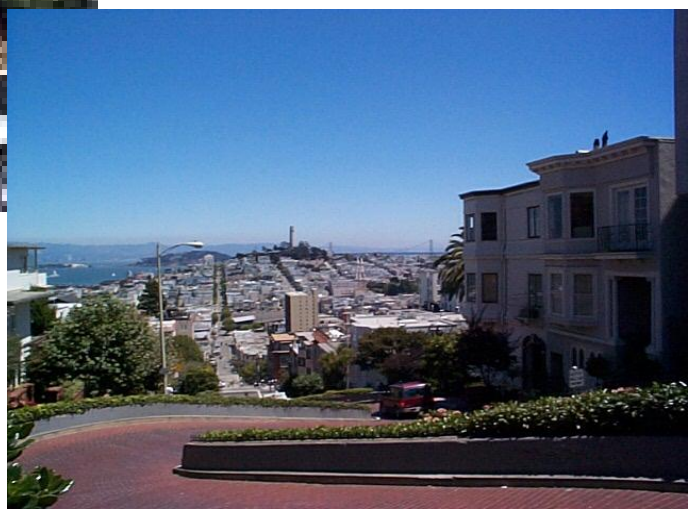
The convention was wound up with a celebratory dinner, several speeches, followed by a dip in the Mexican Gulf from the hotel's private beach. We had enjoyed it, if guiltily, said our farewells, were thanked again for the ship's bell, and made off to pack our bags. I often wondered afterwards just how much the successive Presidents thanked me or cursed me for the bell. It was very heavy, and I had found it tiring to lug around until relieved of it. Probably after its first outing it was silently left at home!

We had decided to drive down Alligator Alley, which runs from Naples across the peninsular to Miami. The road is flanked all the way on both sides by water, and is alleged to be teeming with Alligators. We did not see one. From Miami we flew in a Douglas DC10 to Los Angeles, stopping off at Houston, Texas. Then on over the deserts and mountains down to Los Angeles. Here, after a wait, we changed planes for San Francisco. Whilst waiting we heard several calls for "Mr Andrew Lloyd Webber". The name sounded vaguely familiar, and we debated whether he

was an architect or film star. Later of course his name was on everybody's lips.

Our next stop was San Francisco, which June and I looked forward to visiting. We were not disappointed. It is a most attractive city with a setting, not as dramatic as Vancouver, BC., but very beautiful just the same. We stayed in a fine hotel on Fisherman's Wharf, so had an excellent view of the bay, with the bridge and the brooding prison island in the middle of the bay. As in Nashville and Naples, the security arrangements in the hotel were comprehensive, which, although necessary, did take the edge from the enjoyment of it. Next morning, whilst June explored downtown, I took a car and drove over that bridge which took so much hammering during the earthquake a few years ago, inland through attractive country, for about 45 miles, where I was shown round this factory making Glass Fibre ladders. It was interesting, but by the nature of the product, and especially its expense, would not lend itself to volume production. The main use would be as non-conductive ladders in high voltage applications. Indeed the Americans use it for "high-wire" maintenance of overland electricity transmissions. Whilst waiting for our plane to take us onwards, we explored San Francisco more thoroughly, and included a ride down those steep hills on the tramway, and a ride in our car down the famous "Crooked Lane". Whereas in older countries, the disused dockside warehouses would have been demolished, the San Franciscans had converted them very tastefully into shopping malls and dwellings. We also ventured into Chinatown but decided that we would not like to venture there at night.

The Crooked Street in San Francisco.



We flew northwards up the Pacific coastline to Eugene, Oregon by "Banana Airlines" – Western Airline, originally founded by the millionaire recluse Howard Hughes. Now we were in the timber country, for much of the state of Oregon is still heavily forested, despite the ravages of man's hunger for lumber. Eugene is a small town, whose main reason for existence is timber harvesting. These days the tree felling is strictly controlled by law, and carefully monitored by environmentalists and wildlife conservers. Any felling must now be compensated by the planting of new trees. Many of the mill owners and workers seemed as if they had just stepped off the boat from Scandinavia, and spoke English with a thick Swedish or Norwegian accent. The ones we visited were very welcoming, and once again, as in British Columbia, we were treated to an inspection of

the violent conversion of tree trunks into batches of planks. We were taken to the beautiful Willamette Valley where the trees of the species and quality Youngmans was seeking are profuse. The state of Oregon has a climate familiar to the British, with lots of rainfall; when the sun comes out the Oregonians joke about catching a glimpse of an unidentified flying object. The pace of life in that forested region is far more relaxed than is found in most other parts of that vibrant nation.

Resuming our Banana Airlines flight, we flew northwards once again, past Portland, the capital city of Oregon, situated at the mouth of the mighty Columbia River. To our right we flew past Mount St. Helens just over the border of Oregon and the state of Washington. Only a few years later Mount St. Helens, which is on the Pacific Fault line, erupted with such violence that a large section of the mountain was blown to pieces. Much of the surrounding countryside for miles around was devastated, and the damage to the forest was far greater within a few days than Man had inflicted in decades. Back at Naples Florida we had befriended a couple who lived quite near to the volcano, and writing some years later they described how terrifying the experience had been. Even later on we flew past the volcano and could witness for ourselves the mighty power which nature had wielded. The same catastrophe occurred many years later on an island in the Caribbean Sea with devastating results.

Below : photographs of the mountain before and after.

We spent a few days in Washington, the home of the Boeing planemakers. Normally Boeing is very prosperous, but there was a period in the 1960s when a dearth of orders seriously embarrassed that giant company. A lot of people were "let go" as the Americans like euphemistically to express sacking. Some wit had posted a sign at the southern approach to the city "Will the last person to leave Seattle kindly switch off the lights?" This

very effectively underlined just how dependent that northern city was on planemaking.

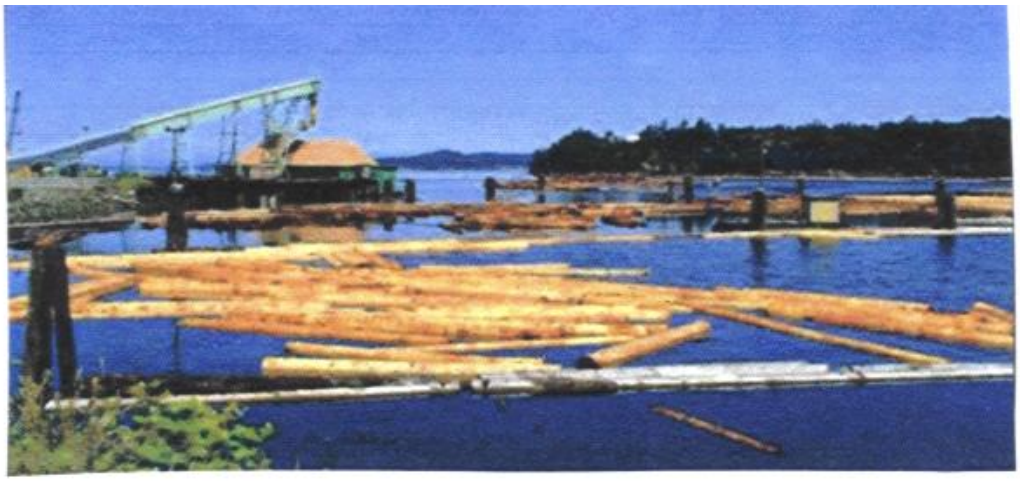
Seattle harbour with Mount Rainier in background.

We were not in Seattle to buy airplanes, but once again on the timber trail. The state of Washington has a lot of trees, and it contains numerous mills. We visited several, making useful contacts for the future. Seattle, though large and bustling, is a very attractive city, somewhat like its northern neighbour, Vancouver B.C., a hundred miles away. It is a large harbour ringed to the north and west by snow-capped mountains, and beyond Puget Sound one can see the island of Vancouver, and the San Juan Islands, belonging to the U.S.A. The best view is gained from the top of the rotating tower which replicates our BT tower in London, the one in Toronto, and many other cities worldwide. Another friend made in Naples had kindly booked us in to the WAC – the Washington Athletic Club, in downtown Seattle. It was a men's club, and we expected its members would look askance at June. If anyone looked twice at her it was only to admire her beautiful red hair. On

later visits we would stay at the Olympic Hotel, which was a splendid, totally refurbished hotel dating back to the previous century – hence its large rooms and high ceilings. Using the weekend for exploring, we drove inland to Cedar Falls, a place which a few years later we recognised as the setting for that TV serial, with the haunting music on the double bass, "Twin Peaks". We also visited Gilmore Village, a rustic place frozen in time, with timber buildings, and later we inspected a locomotive graveyard full of fine old locos and rolling stock..

From Seattle we flew northwards once again to June's favourite city, Vancouver B.C. (I necessarily write the suffix of British Columbia because the state of Washington, U.S.A. also contains a city of the same name, where some of June's distant cousins, the Maddys live). This time we stayed in the newly built Four Seasons Hotel, occupying a suite on the 20 somethingth floor. The view of the city and its surrounding mountains was fabulous, despite the fact that numerous skyscraping buildings had appeared since our last visit. We still walked across the road each evening to have dinner in the "Lumber Restaurant" of the Vancouver Hotel, where I had to ask for a "squaw's portion" of steak, so big were the men's portions. This visit again entailed calling on lumber mills, some up the Fraser River, one in Westminster, on the outskirts of Vancouver, and another by ferry to Vancouver Island at Nanaimo, and a drive to Port Alberni. Here we saw logs of huge girth, craned out of the water, stripped of their bark by water pressure, a second's exposure to which would have stripped a human frame clean down to the bone, and then craned over to a battery of large circular saws. Presiding over the complex of saws was an operative who, after a brief glance, selected a choice of saw cuts which

would slice the trunks up into the lengths and widths best designed to yield the highest payback for the tree. It was all very swift, very violent, and impressive.
Below: Debarked logs floated in the river ready to be craned into the sawmill.

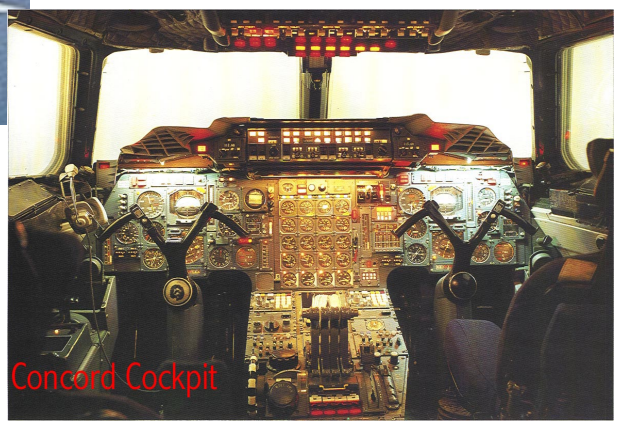


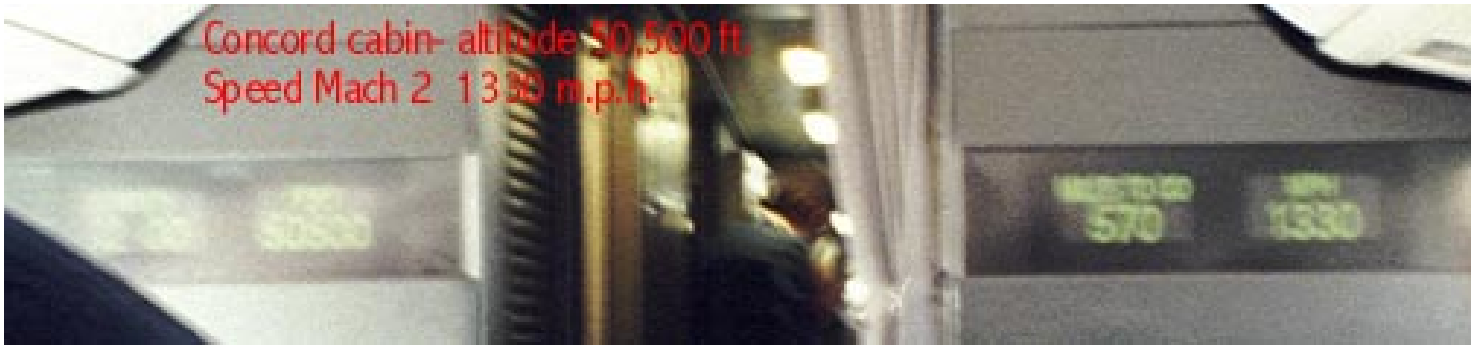
Below: The huge logs are craned into the cutting chamber where a battery of saws cuts them to length.

Our long itinerary all but complete, we joined the Air Canada plane bound for the ten hour long flight back to London. At the end we were badly jet-lagged, June worst of all. On the flight I spent most of the time writing my report for the rest of the Board. It had been a fruitful trip, very tiring,

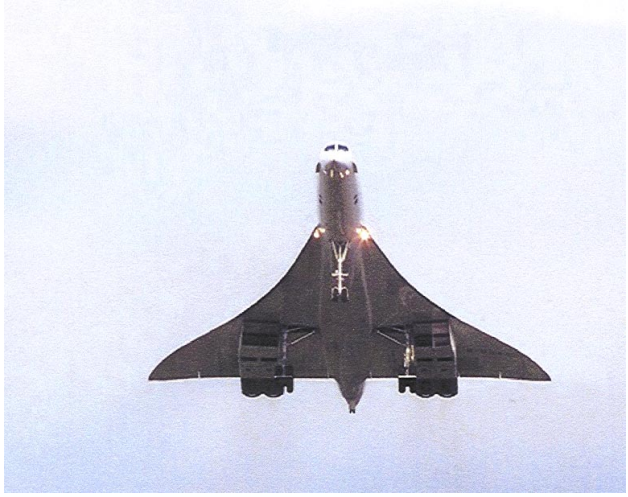
very interesting to see so much within the space of just under four weeks. But we had not cracked the technology problem. We arrived home just in time to attend a Dinner party, attended by most of the Youngman employees, to honour the retirement after 40 years' service of our Works Director, Leonard Elliott. It was an occasion of mixed feelings, as Leonard and Betty his wife were much loved by all. They retired to Polzeath in Cornwall, where they had purchased a small hotel, the guests at which would, for some years hence enjoy Betty's exquisite cooking.

That period should not be passed over without mention of the introduction into service of the Concord/Concorde (French version) designed and built by the combination of the companies the French Aerospatiale and Bae (British Aeronautical Engineering). First flown in 1969, the plane went into service with both British Airways and Air France in 1976. It was a magnificent airplane, of which both participating nations could be rightly proud. It was not the first time that Britain had led the way in aircraft design. Our country had pioneered jet engineering for planes. Thanks to its invention by Frank Whittle; we had pioneered the use of jet airplanes for civil airline purposes with the de Havilland Comet, and now we had played a major role in the first civil faster-than-sound airliner, which reduced the flight time from London to New York by half, from about 7 hours to about 3 ½ hours.





From top:Taking off
In flight
Flight deck
Speedo Mach 2 1350mph
Landing.



As with the Comet, I am sorry to opine, in spite of my love and admiration for our American cousins I have to note that they led other countries in banning the overflying, over American soil, of the Concord. Not that they had banned the Comet, but, emerging as they were after the war as undisputed leaders in political power, (and technology which was their power base) they could not contemplate being upstaged by anyone. The problem lay with the explosive noise which on the ground followed supersonic flight, frightening widows, pet dogs, and others of a nervous disposition. For myself I have never had the slightest doubt that an American supersonic civil airliner would have been welcomed as yet another proof of national excellence. Plenty of non-civil supersonic planes had been permitted. We, as a nation, seem to have lost that competitive drive which demands that we win whatever the cost; hence our poor record of success in many sports of which we had been the inventors. Personally I like it that way – to play the game, not necessarily to win suits me fine. Whoever leads the way inevitably encounters the mistakes from which every one else learns lessons. We did this in the case of the Comet, which was a superb airplane. We learned from its disasters the lesson about metal fatigue, (so well presaged in one of Nevile Shute's novels – he had worked for the Ministry of Aircraft Production in the war.) We are about to learn more lessons following the recent Concorde disaster. We can be proud of our achievements in this field.

I was lucky to experience two flights in a British Airways Concord. Both were to and from Bordeaux, where I accompanied an executive from our best customer for an exploration of France's best product – Bordeaux wine.

Although the flight to Bordeaux direct would have taken less than an hour, our pilot turned right over Biscay and flew us half way across the Atlantic Ocean at supersonic speed. We reached over 2 mach, about 1350 m.p.h. at an altitude of about 50,000 ft – (nearly ten miles up). I photographed the speedometer displayed in the passenger cabin which recorded the event.

Just as we were coming to rest after landing at Bordeaux a squadron of French Jet Fighters made a supersonic bang above the airfield, then flew very fast down the runway at nought feet plus about ten just to establish their presence. Anything we could do they could do better! We visited two well known vineyards in St. Emilion, at the second of which we had a seven course lunch, well washed down with plenty of excellent wine. Then we inspected the underground vault, which was a tunnel more than 200 yards long, stocked to the ceiling on both sides with thousands of bottles of the precious liquid. Interestingly the prices at which they offered their wine for sale to us was a good deal higher than were the prices for the same product in Britain. We returned, rather overfed and definitely over-irrigated to Heathrow. They were very good trips, and I regret very much that I did not take the opportunity to take June on a similar outing.

In 1978 I made another visit to Sweden, this time not to cancel contracts, but to try and secure our future supplies of Spruce "Poles". Among our manufactures were the Pole Ladders – single section, rather crude ladders for scaling scaffolding and similar structures. Not as sophisticated as extension ladders, but sturdy, they tended to be treated, as so much else by the the building trades as consumables, often run over by site vehicles, and often

sawn up and used for burning on building sites for heating purposes. They were becoming less easy to come by. Taking June and this time our youngest son Guy, we flew to Gothenburg, and drove a hired car up to Karlstad, the ancient capital founded by King Charles IX in 1584. When I had first visited Karlstad in 1970 its streets were not paved, and just mud lay under the snow. The sidewalks of the main streets had been wooden boards. This time, only eight years later, the streets were paved, the sidewalks were also paved, and many new buildings had arisen. I called on several of the leading timber merchants in Karlstad without any satisfaction, so in the evening, leaving June and Guy to watch a western with Swedish subtitles, I drove up into the Varmland Forest to find two brothers whom I had been told were in the business of felling trees. I finally found their shack deep in the forest, but the witch-like lady who answered the door managed to convey to me that the brothers were away doing their military national service. The Swedes had profited for several centuries through not being a warlike nation, so I was surprised, and made my way back to Karlstad feeling that my family had made better use of the evening than I had.

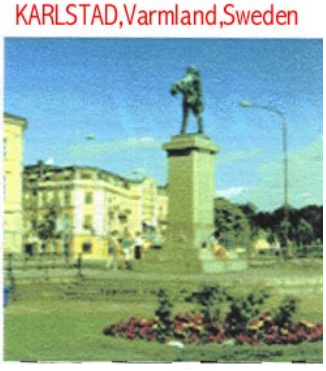
Next day we drove on to the small town of Köping, spelt with an umlout over the O, and pronounced like Chirping. It means market town, and there are lots of ---köpings in Sweden, such as Linköping. The name of our Cheapside in the city of London is undoubtedly derived from that, thanks to our Scandinavian ancestry. Koping is a small market town about twenty miles from Stockholm, and I went there to call upon Bo Jonasson who had replied to an advert I had placed in Swedish newspapers, which stated that I was seeking to contact persons who were interested in supplying "ladder poles" on a regular annual

basis. Leaving June and Guy to explore the little town I found Bo's house, where I was asked to stay to lunch. His wife Inger was out at the time, and he was cooking something in a fairly large utensil rather like a cauldron. It was elk, the Scandinavian equivalent of a moose, and I swore afterwards that its hooves and horns were hanging over the side. June didn't believe me, and perhaps I was exaggerating a little bit. But the sight of it banished any appetite I might have had, so I lied that I had already had an early lunch. I needn't have lied to Bo. He and Inger later became good friends of ours, when they made yearly trips to England; he to negotiate Pole supplies with me, and Inger to shop in Marks and Spencer. Shortly after I retired they visited us here at Bonaventure, our home, for an elkless lunch, when Bo gave me welcome advice on the new trees which we had planted following the 1987 hurricane. It was a fruitful trip to Sweden, and in Bo Jonasson we established a good supplier in the many years to come. He went to a great deal of trouble to identify the quality we required, spending some days in our factory witnessing any reasons for rejection.

Below: Bo Jonasson and Douglas at Nice Airport 2005.

From Köping we drove to the university town of Uppsala to find a bed for the night, because we had been warned that all hotels in Stockholm would be full. Next morning we drove to Stockholm, where I again parted from June and Guy; they to explore; I to meet more Swedish timber merchants. Not knowing where to park, I saw a likely entrance to a building where cars were entering, drove down to its basement, and found a convenient space in which to park. When I returned in the late afternoon to collect my car I found the entrance gate closed and locked. I went into the building to complain and found myself in a Police Station. I received a solemn telling off from an officer before recovering my car. I was building up a serious police dossier in Sweden, because in Karlstad, after parking my car outside the hotel for the night I found a parking ticket on the windscreen, which the hotel clerk told me to ignore. When driving toward Karlstad I had been flagged down by a Swedish policeman for exceeding the speed limit of 40 k.p.h. He was rather put out because my driver's licence did not include a photograph. He phoned back to his HQ, or maybe it was Interpol, to check my assertion that British licences did not include photos. He was diverted from further action by Guy's fascination with his revolver. He obligingly took it out of its holster to allow him a closer look..

We returned home with a taste for Swedish coffee. Their secret is to use lots of ground coffee beans, and we adopted the practice, for our pleasure, but not always to the liking of our guests.



Another aspect of company buying to which I gave regular attention was the Space Heater business. For years prior to Charles Youngman's death we had held the UK exclusive distributorship, and we realised that we could only retain it if we performed well, which meant giving it that attention. The 'Master' range of paraffin-fired space heaters was the best in the world, and the products had been engineered down to enable a low cost of manufacture in the U.S.A.

The market was, however, very dependent on the vagaries of the British winter. A mild winter meant poor sales, a cold winter mean brisk sales in that year, and a pretty sanguine attitude on the part of our dealers with regard to the following year's purchases. The ideal winter was one during which there was a significant spell of cold weather before mid-december. Then the dealers would re-order more heaters that month for the expected cold January to March. We had dealers who had outlets on a regional scale; other dealers who specialised in a particular market, such as to farmers, to factors to the garage or motor car accessories trades. Often the garage equipment suppliers had outlets on a national scale, and could buy in bulk if they caught the flavour. The key was to get the dealers committed to stock a substantial quantity before the onset of winter, at favourable discounts, with the promise of maintenance of that same discount for succeeding purchases.

Our young Marketing Manager, John Bungay, had the right mind for devising options for that market, was a good salesman, and worked wonders for the company in that speculative field, as he did in many other ways. He became Marketing Director, and set about widening our

range of other types of space heaters, in order to open up wider opportunities. Space heating led John on to space cooling, and he introduced a hire operation for Air Conditioners – also a speculative activity, dependent on the climate, but one for which we felt there were huge market opportunities. Air Conditioning was just not part of the British scene, but neither were lots of other amenities, which, once tried people wondered how they had managed to exist without them. So I made a few visits to America on account of heaters.

The trouble was that the ownership of the Master manufacturing rights changed several times over the years; the owner of 'Master' sold it to a firm in the heavy construction equipment business, called Koehring, who additionally kept changing their base of operations for the heaters, and also changing the personnel managing it. They in turn sold it on to a firm called Desa, based in Bowling Green, Kentucky, who also changed their personnel, then their ownership in quick time. So we had continually to meet new people looking us over to see if we were the right distributors for them. Change is inborn to Americans, which is why they are so refreshing, and generally successful compared with the conservative British.

One constant factor in the heater business was George Rutt. Originally he was Youngman's heater sales manager – a sharp cookie indeed, and very likeable. He had the American enthusiasm, and spoke with a transatlantic accent and vocabulary. He was head-hunted by Koehring, and stayed on with the Desa ownership. So he was our one constant link, understood our minds, and gave good service to both employer and customer. He was quite outspoken to both also. I remember one visit to us he

made with his boss. This boss was one of those who phrased his thoughts in a rather pompous manner, and when I asked him a question about some aspect of policy he replied " we are not yet in a decision mode". George, without hesitation interjected "he means that he can't make up his bloody mind!"

Our search continued for new and better technology for making aluminium ladders. I had been quite struck with the method and design I had seen in Chatham, Ontario, and had had some samples shipped to us from Canada, for closer inspection by our production and design engineers. These continued to interest us, and I made arrangements to visit them once again, this time in company with our Chairman, Alan Walker. If we were to enter into a licence agreement for the know-how we would be committing ourselves for a long time, plus undertaking the cost of some very expensive machinery. When I had returned from my previous trip with June all over North America, he had commented that, for such a long journey we should have travelled first class. This was Alan Walker, he would measure every consideration and sort out those who were "working the system", and those who were not. He and I travelled to Ontario first class.

Next day after arrival we met the boss of the host company, Reynolds Aluminium, or Aloominum, as it is pronounced over there. He accompanied us on the light plane down the length of Lake Ontario to the factory at Chatham. They had laid on a demonstration of their magical plant making ladder sections very quickly. It was a disaster; as we stood watching the machine destroyed several hundred yards of aluminium beams, buckling and tearing the metal "something dreadful". I was terribly

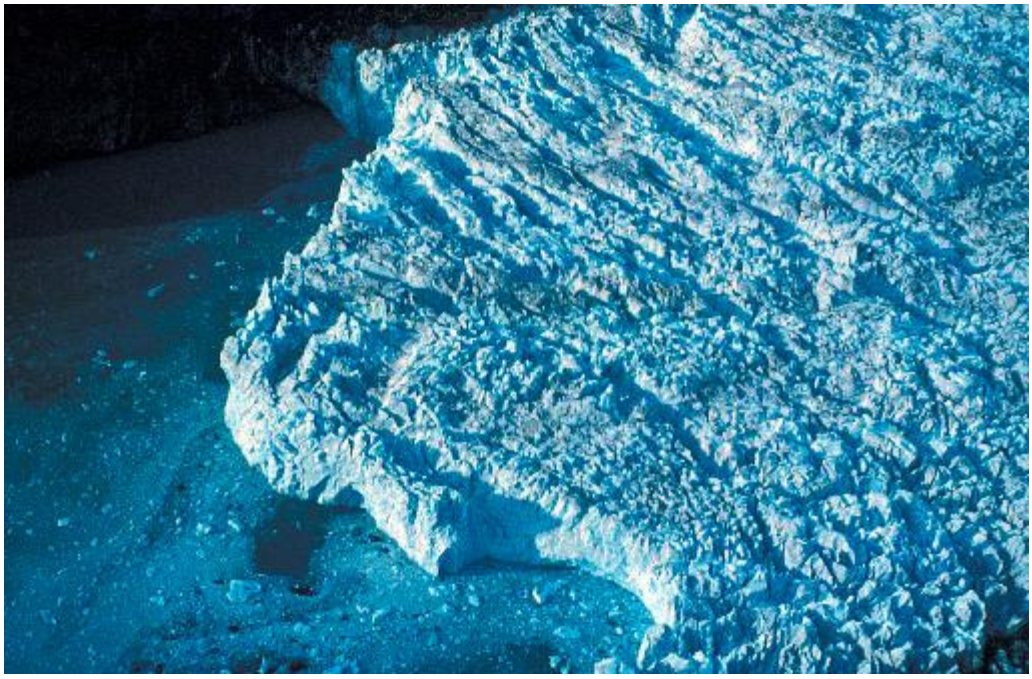
embarrassed, having brought Alan all that distance only to witness a dismal failure. Our hosts tried to assure us that it was just a bad day, but they could not disguise the fact that they had not really seen the thing through at the project stage. The process involved "cold forming" (forging without heat to make the metal malleable) and required a grade of aluminium malleable enough for its shape to be changed, but tough enough to make the ladder stiff and sturdy. Quite an equation, and any deviation from a very tight aluminium specification caused the sort of failure we had witnessed.

Toronto

We both travelled home very dejected. On that route the top deck of the Boeing 747 – that little hump you see on the top of the fuselage – was part of the first class accommodation, and whilst Alan caught up on his sleep, (we were travelling overnight) I had that whole deck to myself. The Great Circle route over the Atlantic flies over the southern tip of Greenland. It was summertime, and in those latitudes the sun shines round the clock.. I was able to marvel at, and enjoy, the sight of vast icebergs breaking from the edge of the glaciers, falling into the sea, and wallowing in the water to begin their journey south into warmer climes. It was breathtaking. On subsequent

journeys I always booked a seat on the left hand side of the plane, but never saw a repeat of that magical sight.

Above: Aerial photograph of Icebergs about to "calve" from the Icesheet.



Below: An iceberg already calved.

We drew several more blanks in that search for the elusive technology, visiting and flirting with a French company for a time. I think it was John Bungay who identified VAW. They are a West German company,

and a big producer of aluminium extrusions, who had a fellow member of their group making ladders by an interesting process, not unlike the Reynolds system. John and I visited their Hanover plant, and were impressed by their approach. To cut a long story short, we equipped ourselves, at great expense, with the necessary machinery, and for several years until I retired I think we became their best customer for tonnage of metal. They proved to be a good partner, not only in the matter of supply, but also in their policy on price when, at times, the exchange rate between the Deutschmark and Sterling moved against us. They were honest and totally co-operative. I had to make numerous visits to Hanover, and they also visited our plant frequently. Hanover, though an industrial city, was nicely laid out, the one-time seat of the George, Elector of Hanover (who became also our King George I). It is set in a beautiful, now public, park, which contains glass houses matching Kew, full of exotic shrubs and plants. I was also taken once to Celle, another beautiful historic city, not far from Hanover, which had been the Elector of Hanovers' Windsor to our Sovereigns' Buckingham Palace. Another visit which I enjoyed was to Hameln. (Hamelin of Pied Piper fame) This is still very quaint. Hanover is in Lower Saxony, and the people, unlike the stern and serious Prussians, enjoy a good belly laugh. They are not so jolly as the Bavarians and the Austrians. One can be comfortable in their society.

The big attraction, for which we had been searching a long time, was a method which would reduce the "labour content" of the product. The three elements of cost in manufacturing are material cost, labour cost, and overheads, the latter being rent rates and other running costs, such as energy, depreciation of assets, and so on.

The first is a function of good purchasing, but the market price is the final arbiter; the third is a matter of discipline, to suppress overhead costs as much as possible, but the volume of production which is to support and pay for those overheads is also a key factor, and this depends on cost and pricing. Labour cost is the factor which so often destroys a manufacturer's ability to compete. Machinery is very expensive, and too often factory managers hang on to their machinery long after it has become obsolete and overtaken by better equipment. The Japanese and Germans adopt a different policy, frequently dumping old or middle-aged or even new for newer and better plant, thereby attacking their costs of labour. Sorry, here ends the economics lecture!

We acquired the best plant and the best method, and I am glad to say that it put us into the lead in the Alloy Ladder business, and the factory was at last making a worthwhile profit in return for the investment in land, plant and premises. It also secured employment for our excellent workforce, and they gave their co-operation to the full. We were not entirely out of the wood yet though; the British Standards Institute (BSI) standard for alloy ladders did not provide for the metal specification we were using, referred to as "seam welded" sections, as distinct from the "extruded" sections which were traditionally employed. The extruded section was effectively "squirted" through a die at very high, almost molten temperatures. Its disadvantage was that the thickness of the wall of the section could vary a lot, and to be on the safe side you had to specify the minimum thickness knowing that much of the section could come through the die at a higher thickness. This was in effect putting too much metal into the section where it would serve no useful purpose. The

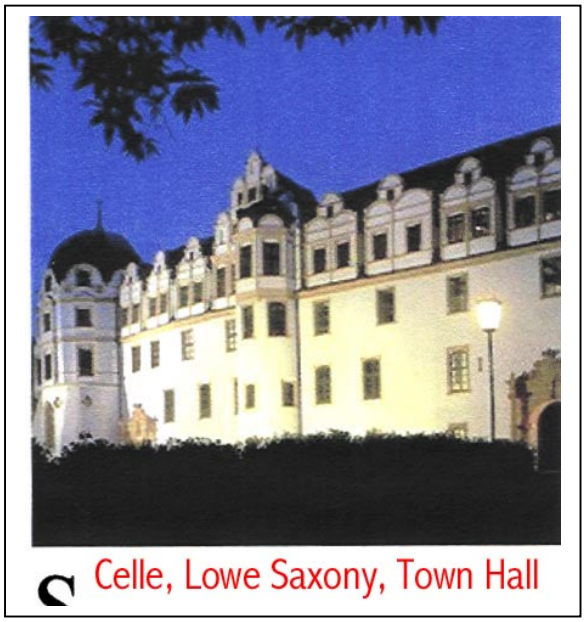
seam welded section, on the other hand is made from aluminium sheet of a uniform thickness, the thickness specified to provide the necessary strength for the ladder, This is folded over into the rectangular section. Then the joints are heat welded. Hence waste is eliminated.

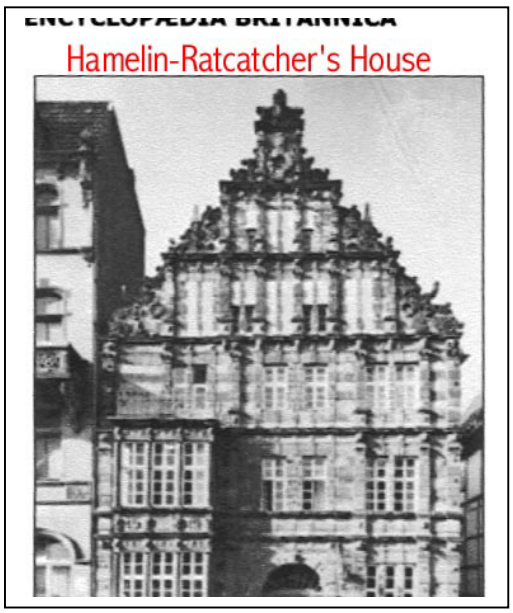
Fortunately, the British Standard No. 1137 for Aluminium ladders and steps was under review, with a revised version being finalised by the British Standards Committee for those products. It was normal for the manufacturers of the subject products to be well represented on the committees. I was a member, and I introduced the necessary amendments to the draft to permit the use of seam-welded aluminium section. At this point the typical British protectionism reared its contemptible head. Anxious to head off a competitor with something new, and in spite of the fact that our European neighbours were safely using seam-welded sections, some ladder competitors raised objections on the grounds of safety. They even brought in an "expert" from a leading British aluminium extruder to give evidence that he didn't believe the proposal to be "safe". Of course he didn't, he did not himself have the process, and stood to lose a lot of established business if seam-welded section became popular.

It was fortunate that the Committee Chairman was a senior and very experienced officer from the Department for Health and Safety. He also sat on the European Standards Committee, and knew a bit. He could be very outspoken, and did not tolerate a lot of unsubstantiated waffle. Metaphorically he stripped the "expert" of his clothes, leaving him rather exposed. We succeeded in obtaining inclusion in the new standard. It

was not long before several of the other ladder and step manufacturers, most of whom had sat on the fence, if not opposed the new technology, adopted it.

The complete arms of Celle





Another new product which we introduced into our product range was the Aluminium Access Tower. Three other manufacturers, plus a couple of minnows had the market to themselves, one of them dominantly. We were initially interested in buying towers from this

dominant company for our hire operation. We were refused as a customer, and only then decided to design and manufacture our own. This was another example of obstinate conservatism on the part of British business managers. By their refusal to sell to us they forced us to follow this path, as a result of which it was not many years before we were by far the leaders for this product, the reluctant bride was in trouble, and the company was put up for sale. Here again we owed a lot of credit to John Bungay, pictured below, for his input to the design of the product, and later for the marketing strategy which made us so successful. This is not to diminish the credit also owed to the Group Research Engineer, Stafford Thomas for his contribution to the development of the design.

Because of our good relations with, and the mutual trust between, the management and the workforce, our innovations were accepted without problems This was despite the usual fear that improved methods which attacked the labour content of manufacturing were usually treated with suspicion if not hostility. I should add as a side note that our proposals to introduce a decent contributory pension scheme for the hourly-paid workers in place of the derisory scheme which was in place, were similarly regarded initially with hesitation. Men who work with their hands like to have their earnings in bendable pound notes, and any deviation such as deductions for pension contributions, or even payment of wages into bank

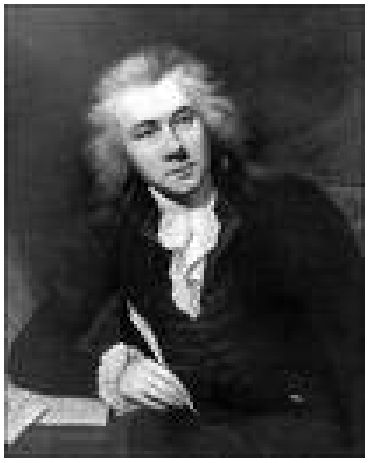
accounts was regarded with apprehension. I am glad to know that hundreds of our employees are now receiving, or will receive when they retire, a pension as good as salaried staff. I admired the Board of SGB Group because we were pioneering this matter of decent pensions, which inevitably had to spread to apply to other members of the Group

This trust was speedily justified because, with increased demand for our new products, the volume of production was enhanced, leading to recruitment and overtime working. These good relations also extended to the Union representation, who backed us to the hilt. Only one of the trio of unions to which our workforce belonged remained sceptical, and that one was in the minority, and had to hold its counsel. At this time many of the powerful unions were exerting excessive power, which was not necessarily wielded to the ultimate advantage of the workers. On the contrary they caused massive, untimely unemployment by "winning" crippling wage advances for employees in struggling industries, which included most manufacturing companies.

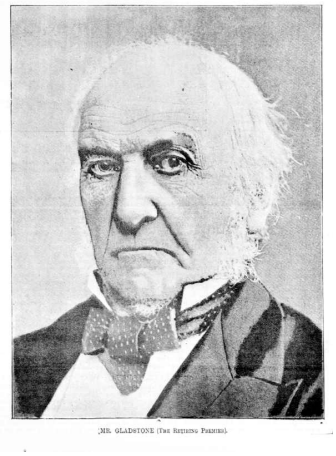
Mrs. Thatcher was a bossy woman, who eventually made herself unpopular and out of touch. But in her golden years she rendered a tremendous service to the nation, managers and workers, by curbing the excessive power of the union leaders. Readers may have gathered that I hold a great deal of sympathy for the British working man, being descended from a line of them. But neither employers nor the unions should hold too much power. And Mrs Thatcher levelled the balance of power with her firm line, the same firmness which she exercised in the face of bullying tactics, as she did within the councils of

Europe. The chagrin she earned was because the Germans and the French, as usual, tried but failed to impose their wills upon us. For those valuable services we should be eternally grateful to her.

Pitt the Younger



William Wilberforce



W.E.Gladstone

Winston Churchill

Margaret Thatcher

As a nation we have, a few times in our history, had a Prime Minister who faced much opposition, but who by dogged adherence to their beliefs, prevailed with history sooner or later judging them right. The first one to come to our minds must be Winston Churchill, but Wilberforce must qualify for his work for the ending of slavery. William Pitt for championing a less obstinate policy by Britain toward the American settlers, against the wishes even of his King. I guess also that Gladstone deserves praise for his efforts, unsuccessfully, to solve the "Irish Question." In retrospect history may adjudge Margaret Thatcher to have qualified for inclusion among that courageous band, and to

have given us briefly a golden age of balanced power between employers and employees.

We have lived through a golden age for music; we may still be in it, but I am not sure that it might not be approaching its end. So called Classical Music, meaning Beethoven/Brahms/Mozart/Tchaikovsky, etc., held sway in respectability, and lighter music, of the Gilbert and Sullivan genre was enjoyed by a wide audience. At school music lessons meant the classical sort. At Wallington County School a Mr. Smethurst presided over the music lessons. To him goes the credit for many pupils' coming to like his classical music, for despite his love of it, he was open-minded. One day he suggested that, for the next music session, we the pupils should bring along records of the music which we liked. A few were brought along, only one of which I recall, and that was Artie Shaw's Clarinet Concerto. And this bridged the gap. He praised its construction, to which some wit said he liked the noise as well. In the following music lessons he would play one of his favourites and the pupils did the same. In this way, our honour, satisfied I think many of us listened to his offerings with more respect and enjoyment. At this point I bought the records (four of them at 78r.p.m.) of Tchaikovsky's No.1 Piano Concerto, took them home, and asked my long suffering father when were we getting a radiogram. He took the hint, and we acquired a Marconi model, and both father and I started to buy records, and to enjoy them together.

The upshot was that we both became music lovers, both with catholic tastes, enjoying modern music as well as the "classics". By modern I don't mean Mahler type music, which my father dubbed as "music from the Swindon

Locomotive Works", but "popular" music. We were lucky that Croydon had a long tradition for music loving. I recall going to several concerts at the Davis Theatre where Benianimo Gigli gave performances, and more than one "Last Farewell Concert" at which Sir Thomas Beecham conducted the orchestra. I also went to many Proms at the Albert Hall, as well as sitting through "The Messiah" on numerous occasions. But I always enjoyed many of the pop music records which jumped out on us in the late 1950s. And I regard as geniuses the Beatles, Elton John and many others of our contemporary melody writers, along with the composers for the rich harvest of musical shows we have enjoyed since the 1940s. To remain popular for forty or fifty years, and still counting, such music must be considered classical.

Although Mr. Smethurst had been willing to meet us half-way on the subject of music, our Headmaster, Walter Hutchins would not bend when it came to English Literature. I was an avid reader, and when I came across an author whose work I enjoyed, I would plough through all of that author's books on which I could lay my hands. One day, speaking about Figures of Speech – those metaphors, similes, oxymorons, which colour descriptive narrative – the Headmaster turned to me and said "Huntington, you always seem to buried in a book; which Author do you admire most for use of figures of speech?" Without hesitation I replied " P.G. Wodehouse sir". He was not impressed and made some disdainful comment, turning to another pupil for a more acceptable nomination. I didn't push my luck by contradicting Mr Hutchins, but he had himself aroused my interest in the use of figures of speech. Wodehouse's books are generously sprinkled with really brilliant and witty figures – they won't go down in history like John Milton's "Looking through a glass darkly", or

"No light but darkness visible". But Wodehouse was a genius in his use of our language and should not be derided because he was funny also.

Other writers whose books I devoured several times over were C.S.Forester, whose novels were full of action, and clearly the author had done his homework about ship construction, sailing techniques, and historical accuracy. Evelyn Waugh's novels were beautifully written, but very witty; he could set the mood very well. I have read Arnold Bennett's books so many times but I never tire of reading them yet again. Neither could June for they were so descriptive of the people and places from the potteries, and were helpful when we were researching her Staffordshire ancestry. On the same theme, when we were researching her Welsh ancestors, we read several times the books of Alexander Cordell. They were set in Nantyglo, where her great, great grandparents, had lived and where her 3 x great grandparents had lived and died. The latter had both been born in Carmarthenshire, near St. Ishmael, overlooking the Towy estuary, and another of Cordell's books had been set there too. His books enabled us to understand the dreadful working conditions, poverty, and awful cholera outbreaks which were part of life in the Welsh Iron-making towns.

It goes without saying that as a commuter to London, and lover of music and the theatre, I did not miss out on seeing the major west end musicals – except of course for "Annie Get Your Gun", on the infamous 10th May 1948! Of them all I think that I enjoyed most "The King and I", run a close second by "My Fair Lady". In the first the scene in which the King's children gathered round him in his court, the atmosphere was enchanting. In the second Cecil Beaton's costumes were out of this world. During the

late 1940s and 1950s I saw most stage play productions, and enjoyed most particularly Peter Ustinov's plays for their wit-laden dialogues. I saw "The Mousetrap" within one month of its premier, before it went on and on for decades. The final twists to the mystery plot escape my memory now though.

As the reader might have gathered I have always been a cricket fan. Surprisingly, though working in London within reach of Lords and The Oval, I never did play hookey from work to sneak a day off. The only time I can remember visiting the Oval was in company with my brother Gordon and our grandfather, William Huntington, who was in his ninety-somethingth year, and who went on to make 100 years. Instead I used to take a portable radio to work, and sit listening to the test matches over lunchtime. Never could I feel right about taking time off from work for that purpose, though numerous of my Mitcham SGB colleagues made a habit of doing so. Now, in retirement I have been making up for lost time, not for going to cricket grounds, but for watching the game on the TV. Being able to do so, with a glass or two of wine, and not having to face the trudge home after the game, is to me sheer heaven. Happily June shared my enjoyment of watching both cricket and tennis tournaments.

The period about which I am writing, that is, most of the twentieth century, has not been a notable one for the education of the nation's children. I feel sure that the doctrinaire socialist attitudes, pursued by third rate politicians, bear a serious culpability for this. This attitude has been that no child should have a better standard of education than others, so let us level the field by abolishing grammar schools. This meant in effect levelling <u>down</u> the

field, and our schooling has suffered as a consequence. This policy has necessitated parents who wish to ensure that their children receive better than state schooling must spend money out of their taxed incomes by paying for private schooling, whilst the taxes they paid were frittered away by socialist tinkering with state education. Many such private schools, unfortunately do not deserve to be allowed to continue in business. Our eldest daughter attended East Grinstead Grammar School until it was blackmailed into becoming comprehensive, but fortunately this did not happen until she had passed her "O" Levels, so her remaining two years were spent in the 6th form, and her education was not spoiled. Our sons both went to private schools, both of which in my opinion were rip-offs. Sherilyn definitely had by far the best education of the three. But one has only to look at the Comprehensive schoolchildren to notice that motivation has gone. As I have earlier explained my education was a county grammar school, and although I was not streamed with the bright lads, I am grateful for a good education.

The other factor which blights our education nationally is that so many parents not only do not value the proposition, but actively sneer at it. Peer pressure persuades children to follow their parents' lead in scorning good schooling. This is not the case in Scottish schools, nor is it in French, German or Japanese schools. In all of these the weight not only of parents, but of the nations as a whole, thrusts in favour of taking education seriously. When researching the conditions in which my paternal ancestors lived in Cumberland, I found that their attitude had been and was similar to the Scots. This is hardly surprising as that county shares borders with Scotland, and historically there had been a flow of Scots, particularly of

women seeking husbands or jobs, or both, over the border and into England. Today's politicians act as if throwing more and more money – other peoples' money - is the solution to the problem, ignoring the fact that our money has been thrown at education since 1945, whilst the standards have been declining over the same period. Neither does juggling with examination standards nor with marking policy fool us; one has only to listen to young people speak today, or to listen to how they attempt to express themselves, you know, and, you know, they are not very, you know, good at it.

Another sad sign in current times is the all too familiar reaction – something nasty has happened to me! Who can I sue for damages. This is an unfortunate disease which has crossed the Atlantic. It used to be illegal for lawyers in Britain to canvas for clients, and illegal for lawyers to offer no win no fee services. It had a name, which was Champerty, whereby it was against the law to give assistance in a case in which the giver had no interest in the matter and was to be compensated by a share of the proceeds. No self-respecting lawyer would be involved with this sort of deal for fear of being struck off. Nowadays the airways are being clogged with adverts urging people to enter into this arrangement. It is a sick trend, and only today I heard of a lady, who had attended a fertility clinic, saying that she required twins, and having given birth to triplets, sued the clinic successfully not only for negligence, but also for pain and suffering. What a feeble society not to laugh her out of court, and also not to unfrock the lawyers involved. Doctors are a group particularly vulnerable to the risk of this sort of litigation, and in America it results in many refusals to treat patients. It will not be long before this disease reaches our shores.

Nobody is immune from this trend. Having been involved in ladder manufacturing for some years, I came across some bizarre cases. Many people who fell from a ladder or stepladder seemed to be writing out their writ on the way down. We were considered fair game for claims. The most "way-out" claim I heard of was about a man who had stood his stepladder on the refrigerator in his kitchen. Both man and stepladder overbalanced and fell to the floor. His claim was that the manufacturer's warnings sold with the product had not advised him against doing this! The industry received so many claims arising from the dangers of electrocution by leaning ladders against live electrical transmission equipment that all manufacturers stuck a warning against this practice on their products.

The worst case which I personally experienced involved the Director and Company Secretary of a large mail order company. He had bought one of our combination ladders, and whilst standing on it reaching up a wall to do some task, he had fallen off and on to the ladder, his weight buckling its frame , and injuring his back. As was usual in such occurences our engineer visited the site of the accident. It was worthwhile doing so because often there was evidence pointing to the cause. The evidence did so in this instance, and indicated that, at the top of the ladder he had been reaching laterally to his right, as a result of which he and the ladder had overbalanced. He persisted with his threat to sue even when shown the report. He obviously hoped that we would make a settlement before it got to court. I visited him at his office. When I pointed out that the accident was the result of his own negligence he agreed with me in the privacy of his office, but said that the wrecked ladder wouldn't look too good in court, and

wanted us to pay. I told him to go ahead and sue. We did not hear from him again. And as for the two old ladies simultaneously climbing the stepladder, one each side of it, who wondered why it had overbalanced..!

Although June and I had spent a holiday in Italy in 1965, whilst the children were looked after by grandparents, we had not taken the family abroad before. But in 1967, before we moved house to Lingfield, we took them, plus June's mother, by car to France, for a stay at Hossegor. This resort was about 60 miles south of Bordeaux, on the Atlantic/Biscay coast. We stayed at a private hotel at which you needed to enjoy eating fish. June and I didn't. Apart from that, and I suppose Brits resign themselves to the torture of unpalatable food when they venture abroad, we enjoyed it at Hossegor. The Atlantic waves were mighty, and especially after a terrific overnight storm they were downright dangerous. We nearly lost Warwick, then 9 nine years old, when a huge breaker started to drag him out in the direction of America. On the overnight cross-channel ferry Thoressons advertised that diners could eat all they wanted for ten shillings (50p). Sherilyn and Warwick vowed that they would eat all night. They tried, but we had scarcely cleared the harbour entrance before they gave up, full up!

The 1960s and 1970s saw the growth of "package holidays". They still exist today, of course, but generally are more sophisticated, and certainly are more expensive. My first sampling of them was at their heyday, in 1968, when I took the family, mother-in-law, pet parrot and all to Majorca. The all-in price for fifteen nights, fourteen days was 38 guineas, (just under £40) per person. This included overnight flights from Luton airport, transfer

by coach from Palma to the resort, and full board with wine for dinner. The wine was pretty sharp, but at that ridiculous price you could not complain. The resort was described as at Alcudia on the northern coast of Majorca. By the time we landed at Palma it was 5 a.m. and getting light. A chaotic scramble ensued but eventually we were sorted out and boarded the bus to Alcudia, and approached Alcudia at about 6.30 a.m. We saw, in the distance a half-built hotel with no glass in its windows, and June, unnecessarily witty for that time of day, predicted that that was our hotel. She was right, it was in fact our designated hotel, far from complete. The coach drove past it and on to another much older, and very nasty looking hotel. The driver halted, and the holiday courier bade us disembark and check in. I cautioned the parrot and the rest of the family to stay on the coach whilst I had a look inside. Once inside my suspicions were confirmed – it really was decrepit; on the marble floor of the vestibule were a pool of wine and broken glass from the night before; the place was shabby and smelt unpleasant, with a sure sign, which I recognised from Eastern Europe, of either bad drainage, or no drainage at all. Meanwhile the busload was gathering in the entrance, complete with baggage. The Huntingtons refused to disembark from the coach, and we demanded that we be returned to England. The courier was obviously prepared for the odd rebellion, and she took us and one other family to another hotel a couple of miles further on, at a resort called More. It paid to dig our heels in, and there was no Anne Robinson in those days! We were taken to the Panoramic Hotel, a brand new hotel, just opened. It was comfortable and clean. We were given a bottle of wine with dinner each evening. Considering the price we had a good time with good weather, and glorious scenery surrounding us. The resort was in course of construction,

and the noise of Spanish builders and road drills clattering away spoiled it a bit, but we were young and not as aggravated as we might have been later in our lives.

We had several family package holidays in the ensuing years, whilst the children were all of beach-loving age, going back several times to More in Majorca, but to a better hotel than the Panoramic. All three of the youngsters had learned to swim and dive at the age of five, so they could enjoy swimming in the warm climate. We also had a holiday in Pina del Mar on the Spanish mainland, north of Barcelona, and also to Ibiza, where we stayed at another brand new hotel, whose plumbing was appalling, and the whole place stank of sewage. Also the sewage outfall from the hotel to about 300 yards to sea was in plain view in the clear water. The resort was in an almost landlocked bay, so the health hazard was considerable. We thought the hazard was almost as bad in the hotel. All the same the package holidays opened up prospects for millions of people to go abroad cheaply, and broadened the British taste for food other than roast beef. They were incredibly cheap, and not surprisingly many of the package holiday companies folded as the competition forced them to offer ever lower prices.

Nevertheless the taste for foreign holidays burgeoned, and we enjoyed numerous such holidays in later years. But before that, because the children had grown out of purely beach holidays, we enjoyed several spells in Cornwall, usually self-catering. Our favourite resort was Mevagissey, or "Fishygissey" as the family named it. It could just as well have been nicknamed "Kellygissey", as much of the resort seemed to be owned by a family of the name of Kelly. For several years, often twice a year, we would rent a second floor apartment right on the quayside,

with glorious views from the large picture windows in its lounge. This was ideal for our youngest, Guy, who was a keen deep-sea fisherman. Though not keen on fishing I did enjoy spending whole days miles out to sea with him. The fishermen had an amazing ability to navigate their boats and position them above sunken wrecks miles out, the wrecks being popular haunts of fish. They did this navigation by triangulation, lining up with two landmarks, for instance churches and trees, several miles apart on the distant coastline. We knew they were accurate because the hooks and lines often got snagged on something below. Guy was at first a rather impetuous angler, wrongly thinking he had a fish on the end of his line. As he was only 10 the job of winding in from 60 feet fell to me. An empty line at this depth, to the winder, felt like 5 tons! Later he befriended Bill, an ancient fisherman who used to take him out for days free of charge – provided Dad gave Bill a bottle of whisky on his return!

Mevagissey Harbour.

Eventually Guy grew out of, or tired of fishing, so we turned our attention once more to overseas holidays, this time arranging our own venues and choosing to rent apartments. We had always liked the South of France, and we were lucky to find an apartment to rent in Antibes, owned by a very nice British widow. This apartment was in one of what the Americans term condominiums. Set on a hill about 500 feet above sea level, and about one mile behind the ancient town of Antibes, a British construction company had built this delightful condominium, comprising five blocks of apartments, some 5 storey and the two furthest from the sea, about ten storeys.

A lot of Brits had bought these at the outset for holiday retreats. The site is of about four acres, and is well maintained , with laid out gardens, a large swimming pool, plus a kiddies' pool. The views from the apartments are breathtaking, both from the front, overlooking the sea and the Cap d'Antibes, with a panoramic 180 degree view, to the left as far as Nice, Monaco, and the distant Italian coast of Liguria, and to the right are Juan les Pins, and Cannes. Behind are the Maritime Alps as a backdrop to the lovely Provencal scenery. We usually chose to holiday at Antibes either in June, or October, or both, as the climate was normally good but not overpoweringly hot. The people of Provence tend to be more friendly than the northern French.

Starting in 1979 we holidayed there every year, sometimes twice a year, sometimes alone, and sometimes taking the odd offspring at a loose end. Over that period we occupied four different apartments in the same condominium. Each of the apartment blocks was named after one of King Louis XIV's favourite mistresses,

"La Valliere", "Mancini", "Montespan", "Le Fontange", etc., and the whole unit was called "Le Roi Soleil", (the Sun King, as Louis XIV was named). They were truly blissful, carefree times, and we made numerous friends, despite June's firm refusal to speak a word of French, just as she refused to accept the use of metric for measurements, weights, etc. She made an exception for the Celsius temperature scale. We used the pool a lot, but our favourite pastime, if it wasn't too hot, was to explore the country, and the mountains inland. Within 30 minutes one could be 3000 feet up in the mountains, which ranged, parallel to the coast – line after line, stretching into the distance, where they became part of the Alps proper.

In June the French Open Tennis tournament was staged at the Roland Garros stadium in Paris, and we would enjoy watching that on TV. There are a couple of tennis courts in Le Roi Soleil, and it was interesting to see over the years how popular tennis became when French professionals did well in their own grand slam tournament. National success does wonders for younger aspiring competitors, note Sweden after Bjorn Borg, Germany after Boris Becker, and Jugoslavia after Goran Ivanisovic.

Another event which we enjoyed over many years, when staying in Antibes, was Bastille Day. The French make a great day of it. June used to enjoy, most of all, going out on that day to one of the many country restaurants. Parties of French families and friends, maybe 14 strong, would have a multi-course lunch in the open, with wine flowing freely down throats – of adults and children. The jollity was immense, and although June couldn't or wouldn't understand a word, she enjoyed the merry atmosphere, and would join in the laughter .

The evening of July 13th, the day before Bastille Day, was also celebrated with massive firework displays. We nearly missed our first one because they normally began at about 10 p.m., and when we were on our way to bed. I happened to go out on to the balcony just before retiring and saw that a display was in progress. I called June out to watch it. Bearing in mind that we were on the fourth floor of a building which is about 500 feet above sea level, we had a magnificent view, God-like, of the proceedings. Not only could we see the display put on by the Antibes municipality, but many others along the coast – Monaco, Nice, smaller resorts intervening putting in their four eggs, Cap d' Antibes, Juan les Pins, and Cannes. They were competing with each other, and timing their shows in rough sequence. It became an annual ritual to stay up and watch these shows, and when a particularly good display rose into the night sky, the crowd of watchers on neighbouring balconies would roar their approval...Oh la la!

During this period in the 1980s we also found, and visited. for holidays the Italian resort of Lerici, (pronounced Lerichi) with its famous Bay of Poets. Situated in the large Bay of Spezia, Lerici is a small fishing port just inside the province of Liguria, but close to the border of Tuscany. Here again we hired an apartment high up above the town, about 500 feet above the sea level, this also with beautiful panoramic views. The apartment was not as excellent as those at Le Roi Soleil, being neither so well laid out, nor so well furnished, and with only cold running water. Neither is Lerici so sophisticated a resort as those in the Cote d' Azur, but we enjoyed ourselves nonetheless. For Brits from the damp, temperate climate of the UK, the warm velvety evenings on the balcony,

swigging wine and enjoying a cigar, generally without the annoyance of flying insects, was bliss.

From Lerici there are numerous places to visit; following the coastal road south of Lerici there are some attractive villages and little picturesque coves; to the north there is the pleasant resort of Santa Margherita, and a couple of miles further on, lies Portofino, quite startlingly pretty, and startlingly expensive. To the south of Lerici there is the town of Lucca. Within reach of a 90 minute drive is the city of Florence, which is full of interesting and beautiful sights. Likewise Pisa is about 90 minutes drive, but as we used to fly from Gatwick to Pisa, we normally saved that visit and exploration to the day of our return home, allowing several extra hours for the visit. From Lerici itself a boat left each day to do the return trip to the Cinque Terra, a row of very attractive small coastal villages to the north.

Another place of interest quite close to Lerici is Carrara. The name stands for "quarry", and the hills above the town are mainly chalk white, for they are of the famous white marble treasured by builders of monumental buildings etc. all over the world. Below the quarries there are lots of small workshops containing the sculptors who fashion their products with great skill. The sculptors are quite happy for the inquisitive to walk in and watch them at work, and of course to buy a souvenir, such as an ashtray or paperweight made from offcuts of marble.

Our last foray to Italy, in the mid 1980s, was an umitigated disaster. We saw an advert in the Sunday Times, which read roughly as follows:

" Twixt Rome and Naples, in delightful countryside, lies the seaside resort of Sperlonga. Here we have for renting by the week, a superb villa with three bedrooms, bathroom shower, lounge/dining room, and kitchen, fully furnished, with sea bathing a few minutes away." I forget the rent but it was something like £250 per week. It sounded a good deal, so we booked for two weeks starting early October, for which we paid in advance. Faced with the choice of flying to Rome or to Naples, it seemed to us best to fly to Naples. So we booked our flights with British Airways, which flew out of the new, northern terminal at Gatwick..

Reporting time at Gatwick was 1 ½ hours before departure time. Those who know me will not be surprised to learn that I arranged for the taxi to get us there more than 2 hours before reporting time. This is where the disaster began. As an innovation at the new terminal, instead of certain check-in desks being dedicated to given flights, BA had <u>all</u> the desks checking in <u>all</u> flights to wherever.. A stewardess directed us to one of the queues saying she would look after us. The queues moved very very slowly; it appeared that the new computer system was still having glitches ironed out. Just as we finally reached the desk at the head of our queue, the clerk told us that the flight was "closing", and we had better hurry down to the departure gate and check in down there. What about our luggage? we asked. " You will have to take it with you." We hurried for the departure gate together with our trolley heavily laden with luggage. It was down a steep spiral corridor, and, trying to steer and restrain the nearly runaway trolley, I suffered my first ever back strain.

Arriving at the departure gate, where we could see the plane standing outside, we were told by an officious

young man that the plane had closed, and was about to taxi off. Furious, and feeling in pain, I told him angrily to "unclose", as we had been waiting hours to check in. He said he could not do that, so I told him to get hold of someone who could. He suggested that the controller was upstairs if I wanted to see him. June and I could hardly believe it! So I had to push the trolley upstairs – even more painful than going down. We saw the controller who was full of apologies, but now the plane was out on the runway and about to take off. The truth was that BA had overbooked, which is their standard practice, on the expectation that there would be a few "no show" passengers. This dubious practice was exposed later, but I believe they still get away with it.

The "sympathetic" controller gave us a voucher for a drink at the bar, and said he would fix us up for another flight. But there were no other flights to Naples that day, where incidentally we had reserved a car to await us on arrival. Eventually he came back to say that he had booked us on a flight, taking off later in the afternoon, but it was from Heathrow, and it was to Rome instead of to Naples. He promised that he would book us a car to pick up at Rome, telex to cancel the car from Naples, telephone the owners of the villa who were to meet us with the keys, telling them we would be arriving next day, and book us a hotel room for the night. With those promises we waited for the coach to take us to Heathrow Airport, where we had to wait for the Rome flight. We took off from Heathrow at about 5 p.m., having left home at 7.30 a.m. for our holiday.

We arrived at Rome in the dark, where we were met by a BA official, taken to the car hire office, and given a

voucher for one night's stay in the Hotel Satellite, not in Rome, but in Ostia, the port on the Tyrrhenian Sea about 10 miles west of Rome. It was late when we found the hotel and checked in to the run-down hotel in a run-down area. This seedy hotel was the last place we should have agreed to spend a night, but at that time of night we had no choice but to book in as we were tired and my back was hurting a lot from the dry run down the spiral corridor at Gatwick.. We went down to the dining room, which was full of internationalia – mainly pilgrims from every part of the world, obviously going to, or coming from, the Vatican for a blessing from the Pope. Many of them didn't seem to think it necessary to have washed or shaved before meeting the Holy Father, the culminating event of their lives. The food was poor, and the smell was noisome. The hotel bedroom was hot, and all the night was noisy from the traffic passing outside. Neither of us slept much, and in the end, at about 5 a.m. I gave up and walked around the port.

In the morning we left early and made for the Autostrada leading round Rome and to the south. We had a drive of about 1 ½ hours, then turned west toward Sperlonga on the coast. Arrived there we discovered that our villa was not at Sperlonga, but about eight miles inland, and separated by a mountain range from the sea. The road was like a switchback, and of very poor standard, potholed all the way. When we finally arrived at the villa, which was set back about 400 yards from the minor road, and in a very empty and desolate place, between high mountains, we were met by the villa owner and his wife, who gave us the keys. Before departing they said "By the way go easy on the water, all that you have is in that tank over there, and it hasn't rained since April."(This was in October!)

We were one day late in arriving and tired, so we ate some bread and cheese which we had bought on the drive south, and went to bed. The night, for overtired elderly people, was noisy with what June insisted were hungry man-eating wolves, just outside the door. Certainly it was eerie, made worse by a very noisy storm in the middle of the night, and June felt very nervous in that desolate place. Our mood was not improved by two more shocks next morning. Firstly the owner's "go easy on the water" was an euphemism. I tried to have a shower, and the water reduced to a trickle after half a minute. June's planned bath was out of the question. Nothing daunted we prepared breakfast and took it outside for an alfresco meal. We were the alfresco meal for thousands of very large flying insects, who, not believing their good fortune, pounced on us with relish! We drove to Sperlonga over the very rough, winding mountain passes, which we realised was going to be a bind twice a day – hardly the relaxing holiday which we had sought.

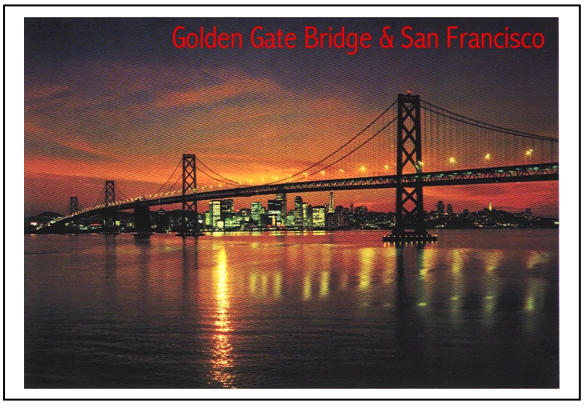
Quite reasonably June said that she did not want spend the remainder of our two weeks in that desolate, steaming place, and would rather go home than stay. After a parley we decided to drive south to see if we could find a hotel we liked in Sorrento, south of Naples. So I telephoned the villa owner and told him we were quitting, and cutting our losses. We drove down past Naples and began looking for a hotel with vacancies in Sorrento and nearby resorts. They were all full, it being the season for conferences. So we drove on round the Amalfi coast, which was beautiful. Finally we found a room at a good hotel in Positano, with superb views along the coast and seawards out to Capri. Unfortunately the hotel could only

accommodate us for three nights, as they were closing after that until next season. On the phone to British Airways at Naples we found that we could not fly back earlier than our scheduled date unless we paid a huge excess. Told the circumstances they were quite uncaring. We did not feel we could afford the excess, so we decided to drive the 100 miles or so back to Sperlonga, and to stay in a hotel there for the remainder of our "holiday".

We found the Sperlonga Hotel had room as the season was nearly ended, so we sat out the rest of our holiday there. It had some crude aspects, such as, when sitting on the toilet, the incumbent received drips of water on his neck every few seconds. The hotel management shrugged their shoulders when told as if they thought we were lucky not to be charged extra for the experience. In truth we were so demoralised by the succession of miseries which we had suffered at great expense, that we were not in the mood for enjoyment any longer, and were thankful when the time came for us to pack our bags and drive to Naples for our flight home. In the interval we had enjoyed witnessing a typical Italian wedding, whose reception was held in the hotel. There was much eating, drinking, pinching of ladies' bottoms, and dancing to which we were invited to join. We also took the opportunity to drive down to Cassino, and climbed up Monte Cassino to the rebuilt monastery. We were refused admission because of our casual clothes, but we did visit the cemetery dedicated to the numerous Polish soldiers who, under their General Anders, had fallen in the savage attempt to capture the monastery during World War Two. A pyrrhic victory, as it had been flattened and then reduced to brick dust by massive bombing raids by the allies.

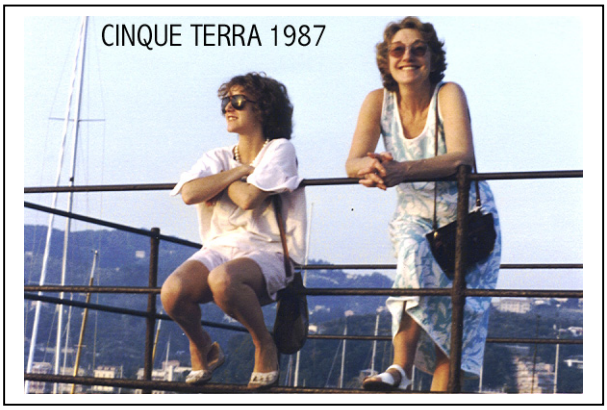
Our flight home was uneventful until we approached Gatwick. Here there was thick mist and low cloud. The radar assisting landing aircraft was out of order. We descended on our landing approach, and were little more than 100 feet above ground, when the plane violently revved its engines and climbed steeply. We could see the sewage farm below us where we were on course to land. The pilot sensibly went round another time with the same result. Even more sensibly, and to the cheers of the grateful passengers, he set course for Heathrow, where we were landed, and eventually put on a coach for Gatwick. The next day our local radio mentioned the close miss of our aircraft of the sewage farm.

June always insisted that we should write a book about that holiday of disasters, so there it is. We were unable to enjoy even the tranquil portions of the fortnight; my back was painful, and we were certainly not relaxed afterwards – a pity because June worked hard at home, and three days a week for the Citizens' Advice Bureau on a voluntary basis, and I too worked hard and long hours. British Airways sent us a £500 voucher in compensation, and just in case we ever wished to fly the Flag again.




Pool at Le Roi Soleil


CARRARA


CINQUE TERRA 1987


Portofino


Florence


CARRARA


Florence


Pisa


Seattle with Mt. Rainier in distance

The fortunes of the Youngman sub-group continued to prosper throughout the 1980s, and in fact, into the 1990s, the foundations having been soundly laid in the preceding decades. Other influences, however, were at work within the SGB Group which would eventually have an effect on Youngmans and all other members of the group. In an effort to diversify and to expand the SGB Group had made a large investment in the newly burgeoning business of Timeshare. They set up a new company to buy and build, in Spain, apartment properties to promote their sale to timeshare owners, and subsequently to maintain them. A great deal of money was invested in this venture, including the very high-cost promotion needed to attract would-be investors. It was not a success.

The SGB Group had also expanded their once modest investment in North America to one of far greater commitment. The US market has been a notoriously difficult one in which to graft on an extension of a foreign company's business. They speak our language but their business culture is very different. The enterprise in the US obstinately failed to succeed. The group was faced with the options of cutting their losses or of throwing more resources into the venture. They doggedly chose the latter course, but still success continued to elude them.

They also invested hugely in the middle east, hoping to benefit from the results of the oil boom which made once poor countries into oil-rich sheikdoms. Certainly rich profits could be made there, and for a while things looked promising. However political influences could and did undermine the trading prospects in that region. Firstly Iran, in which the Group had invested heavily, became a disaster

area as Muslim Fundamentalists toppled the Shah, and effectively closed down trade with the west. Other countries in the region, whilst not experiencing such a drastic upheaval, became far less attractive for trading relations, as did the Republic of South Africa and Australia, in which also, the Group had heavy investments. These big overseas commitments also distracted a Board which had traditionally kept a close eye on its core businesses in the UK.

Earlier in this narrative I remarked how, looking back, I recalled that in the 1940s and 1950s the City investors did not seem to trouble too much so long as a company was making a profit. Very little analysis was made to relate profits to assets managed. People like Slater and Cotton changed that. Running a cold, critical eye over a company's structure they would calculate that the sum of assets, valued separately would aggregate far more than a company's valuation according to its share price on the stock exchange. They calculated that the assets of a company could be stripped off, and disposed of profitably without necessarily damaging the underlying business prospects.

Buying ailing companies, and those whose profit streams were faltering, became the fashionable thing, and whole new enterprises sprang into being to exploit such opportunities. The City became full of analysts and takeover experts. The SGB Group, with profits faltering, and drained by poor results from several unsuccessful ventures , became a likely target for predators, whereas earlier it had been regarded as being in the position of hunter. After defending one serious takeover, the Group in 1986 adopted a dramatic defensive posture, metaphorically

jumping from one frying pan into another, potentially hotter situation, in the course of which it sacrificed the services of Neville Clifford-Jones and its wisest and most able director – Alan Walker. The Beck family had a powerful position in both the Mowlem Group, of which Philip Beck (later Sir Philip) had the Chairmanship, and the SGB Group, where Philip's younger brother, Clive was Deputy Chairman. The Beck family had substantial shareholdings in both Groups. The defensive measure proposed was that Mowlem should take over SGB Group, thereby shutting out any other predator, and that is what transpired. It led to the voluntary, premature retirement of all but two of the original SGB Group Board Directors, one of whom, of course, was Clive Beck, who was appointed Chairman.

Whilst SGB, and with it Youngman, was very much orientated to the building industry, their philosophy was very different from that of Mowlem, their new masters. The first thing we had to get used to was that, whereas we, business-wise, thought in terms of profit related to assets employed in the business, the question always asked by Mowlem executives was "what is your turnover?" We prided ourselves on making a high ratio of profit to turnover. Such statistics brought incomprehension to the faces of the Mowlem folk.. This was because their turnover might be measured in many millions, with their profit, if any, was 1 or 2 percent of that figure, if they were lucky! In short we were talking an entirely different language.

That is not to say that they were anything but very agreeable people, trying very hard to get along with us. The executive who most put himself out to understand us

was their Joint Managing Director Arthur Charlesworth, who like us, I suspect, had come up the hard way. But he was on the verge of retirement. But despite their obvious pleasure with having absorbed the SGB Group, the Mowlem Board kept their eyes firmly on their own core businesses, and left the running of their new possession exclusively to Clive Beck.. He was a pleasant enough person, but one who was lazy and not cut out for confrontational management. We were back to management by inheritors.

I have dwelt a few pages earlier on the need for companies to maximise the management and exploitation of their assets. For if they fail to do so, some other predator will one day come along and do it. I also mentioned earlier the terms on which Youngman had originally occupied their ten acre site on Manor Royal Crawley way back in 1951 – that was, a 99 year lease from the New Towns Commission, at a tiny annual rental of £2000. During the 1980s the Commission was wound up, having fulfilled its function of overseeing the development of "satellite" towns to redress the overpopulation of London. Their Crawley properties were to be presented to Crawley Borough Council, but first, the tenant companies were offered the sale of the freehold of their properties. The freehold of the Youngman site was offered for the price of about £500,000. It was a gift and we accepted it.

Property values were climbing fast, and it was not long before speculators were knocking on the door enquiring whether we were willing to sell the Manor Royal site. We owned ten acres of prime industrial land, arguably among the ten most valuable sites in the area, and it was reckoned to be worth about ten million pounds. It is hardly

surprising, therefore, that our owners – then the SGB Group, and later the Mowlem Group – tucked away into their minds, the prospect one day of selling it for the rich pickings. To be fair the SGB Group, before realising that sale, would ensure that its sale did not damage the profitability of Youngman, by then one of its star performers. I was not so sure about Mowlems, the nature of whose philosophy was much more akin to quick opportunist profits. No doubt it had been a factor in their decision to buy the Group.

Sure enough, within a year of the merger of SGB Group with Mowlems, we were visited by Philip and Clive Beck. I don't think that they were on their way to Goodwood. They had a good walk around the site, only paying polite and cursory attention to the bustling factory. Later, at lunch, the conversation turned to a possible purchase by us of a competitor's business about 12 miles away, near Horsham. It seemed inevitable that we could stay no longer at Manor Royal, because with the value of our assets having been magically enhanced by ten million pounds, the ratio of our profits, though excellent, to our assets employed would otherwise take a steep dive. These were the cruel facts of life in a capitalist society, (and I cannot think of a better arrangement) that we could not afford to continue at Manor Royal, despite the hard work of six hundred or so employees which had helped to bring about our success, and also helped to make that site so valuable.

We were not alone. Over the ensuing few years a large proportion of the factory sites had been sold, with developers' "for sale" signboards in place. Quickly factory buildings were being demolished, and replaced mainly with

"high tech" office buildings. From having been a manufacturing estate, Manor Royal became largely a series of administrative buildings. Some speculators bought too much and paid too much. The Youngman site, with the exception of one building, is unoccupied, its former buildings having been demolished in the late 1980s, it was still, in the year 2000, awaiting a purchaser who would pay the price asked by the developer. The sad fact is, that having once been the world leader in engineering and manufacturing, we can now no longer compete with those who set out to emulate our achievements. Only service industries survive, the business of making things is left mainly to others. Many foreign companies, owning factories in Britain, have taken over the manufacturing role, taking advantage of the skills and work ethic of British workmen, but introducing their own management. That simple statement sums it all up: workmen good; managers inadequate.

Youngmans made its bid for Gravity Randall Limited, based at Slinfold, near Horsham, which was successful, and we began to make plans for the move. The Board shared my hope that we could make the move with the minimum loss of our employees working at Crawley. It was inevitable that some would choose to leave, but we made it our aim to be able to offer continuity of employment to all. We devised a package with this objective in mind. There were some who were approaching retirement age, who probably would not want to take on journeys to and from work at Slinfold, and we made those who wished to do so a generous offer. We planned a fleet of people carriers for those who needed or wished for a bus ride. For those who wished to use their own cars, and to bring some of their colleagues, we made a generous

offer towards the running costs. We kept everybody informed of all relevant matters at all times. To cut a long story short, by virtue of the trust built up between workers and management, we brought about the move very smoothly, and with no animosity. We had the backing of the Trades Unions in all our plans.

Naturally some things went wrong, and it took some time to work the new factory up to good productivity levels. Our new colleagues at Slinfold were not neglected. Very few left, and they and the Youngman "immigrants" merged well into a harmonious working partnership. In fact the Slinfold workers welcomed the more purposeful management set-up. Mention of "immigrants" has reminded me that I should not overlook commenting on the Asian workers among us. They were mostly Pakistanis, but there were one or two Sikhs from India as well. We found them to be very hard workers, and most of the time, happy and co-operative. They loved working overtime, a feeling shared by their paler colleagues. A reason was that many of them had left families behind in their home country, but that they habitually sent some of their earnings home. For years I was used to getting everybody together in the works canteen, telling them what was going on, and how the company was faring. It gave them a chance to ask questions or to air any grievances, and, I hoped a feeling of belonging. On one occasion I thought that as we had quite a few Asians among us, I should attempt to say a few words in their native tongue at one of these meetings. A shop near my home was owned by some Asians, the wife always dressed beautifully in flowing garments. So I asked her to tell me how to say some words in Urdu. She obliged, but sadly, on the day, nobody appeared to understand me.

My tutor, I found out later, was an Armenian from Bangladesh!

Although the move to Slinfold was successful, and everybody seemed to be settled in comfortably before I retired, I retain to this day a sadness at that which we left behind in Manor Royal. The New Town of Crawley had been a tremendous success, having lifted thousands of families out of the grime, squalor and rising unemployment of inner London and the Docklands, to a new life in decent houses, in Crawley, surrounded by beautiful country. Manor Royal, the main thoroughfare in the Industrial estate, was a wide boulevard, with broad grass verges, lined with glorious trees, which I never tired of gazing at. The people who inhabited this new town, particularly the first generation, did appreciate their good fortune, and brought down to Sussex their irrepressible cockney good humour.

Once we had moved into the factory site at Slinfold our problems did not end. For a start we discovered that the drainage culvert which ran under one of the buildings was blocked. A remote closed circuit television camera revealed that the blockage was caused by a dead sheep. We were truly into the country. Then we started to receive complaints from the villagers of nearby Slinfold about excessive noise from our machinery. It was noisy, as had been our predecessor's machinery. The only difference was that, because their business had been comatose, ours was not, and so our plant was going for longer periods. Because of demand we were also running a night shift in several areas. Geoffrey Bowden, now Deputy Managing Director, and I arranged a meeting with the villagers in the Slinfold village hall. This allowed them to air their grievances, which were many. Reasonably so or not, they did not like our

presence near to their village, despite the fact that several of our employees, inherited from Gravity Randall Ltd., lived in the village. We agreed to fit some baffles to suppress noise from some of the noisiest plant, which with reluctance satisfied their honour.

A further sequel to the departure of the factory from Crawley, relates to the Sports Ground, which had been leased to us for 99 years at an annual rental of £5. Although about 65% of the employees of Youngman still lived in or near to Crawley, peoples' needs had changed. The employees' use of the ground and of the clubhouse had diminished to the occasional soccer match, large proportions of whose teams were not in fact Youngman employees, and for use as a social and drinking club. The Crawley Borough Council had been approached by developers on behalf of J.& J.Sainsbury Limited, who wished to locate a superstore in the district. Naturally the leasehold now was in the possession of Mowlem, complete with the proviso that the land was to be used only for recreational purposes. I do not know the details of consideration which passed between Crawley and Mowlem, which released that proviso. But I believe that Mowlem were seeking planning consent to build houses in another part of Crawley, and that they were granted this consent in exchange for surrendering the leasehold of the Sports Field. From there it would need only the stroke of a pen for Crawley Borough Council to permit the user for the land to enable Sainsbury to build their superstore. This is how things happen behind closed doors, and I believe my guess to be accurate. Sainsbury's at West Green, Crawley is a marvellously spacious emporium, which I used every week. Whilst living in the district.

It is a much more useful amenity to far more people than it was when serving as a Sports Ground for one company. I suppose that I am a reactionary to regret that things past have passed for ever.

Above: An Archive photograph of Manor Royal, Crawley in 1955, just two or three years after the beginning of its development by the New Towns Commission. Note in the foreground is the first newcomer to the town – W.C.Youngman Limited. In later years motor traffic rather than the lone cyclist became the norm.

Below: Manor Royal in December 2007.

Note: Nearly all the original factories and their offices have been demolished.

Chapter Six
1990 – 2000 Retirement Years

In December 1989, when I was 62, I suffered a prolonged bout of virus infection, presumably influenza. I did not shake it off until early January 1990. During this period after talking it over with June, we decided that we would like to retire, she from working for our son Warwick, whose business was now well established, and I from the Board of SGB Holdings, and from the Youngman Group. It was arranged that retirement should take place effective from June 30th 1990. Ken Mansell would succeed me at Youngmans.

The Board of SGB Holdings Limited in 1989.

It was sad to be leaving Youngmans after 22 years, the sadness being matched by the earlier wrench when quitting Manor Royal. It was mitigated by the knowledge that W.C.Youngman was well settled in at Slinfold, the

factory was producing well, and the Youngman Group was on course to make record profits before tax of £10 million for the year. It was good to go out on a high. There must have been a whip round by a very persuasive person or persons, because, conspiring with June, my colleagues on the shop floor and on the quarter deck, presented me with a magnificent mahogany desk.. This sits behind me in my den, along with all the paraphernalia, on another, less excellent computer desk. The present is used every day, and reminds me of happy days, and marvellous friends at Youngmans, including the Rovacabin factory at Thame, and the twenty branches round the country.

The round of farewells, through the factories, and the branches was saddening; one highlight was being given lunch by the Rovacabin Board at Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, which is only about ten miles from Thame. We had normally lunched at the "Spread Eagle" in Thame, which was always excellent, but this was a novel treat.

Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons.

On June 30th I chaired two board meetings, my last act, the venue for which had been arranged at the Effingham Copthorne Hotel, about 1 mile from my house. The lunch was excellent, made more enjoyable by the

attendance from retirement of Alan Walker, Neville Clifford-Jones and Geoffrey Bowden. I was presented with a zimmer, made by Youngmans, and a whiskey decanter and glasses. Then after final farewells I was driven home by Geoffrey Bowden. Below: The Desk a gift from colleagues.

The desk which was a parting gift from Youngman colleagues

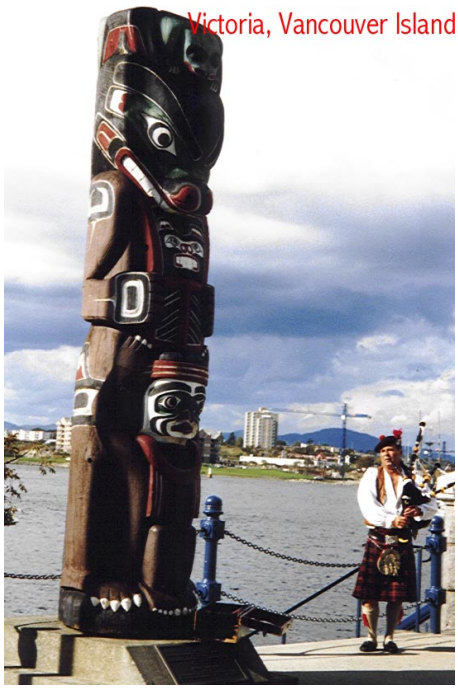
Simultaneously June was saying her farewells to Crawley Industrial Press Limited, Warwick's company, then located at Salfords, south of Redhill. June came home with an enormous bouquet of flowers, and as thanks from Warwick for her help since he had launched the business, she was generously presented with two business-class return tickets to Vancouver for a retirement holiday. Waiting for June at home also, was another huge bouquet of flowers from Youngmans.

We flew to Vancouver in October. We had planned to hire a car, and firstly to drive inland into the Rockies, where we had made hotel reservations at Banff, and also at the Lake Louise Hotel. We were then aged respectively 63

and 61. The flight to Vancouver, which we had made several times in earlier years, takes 10 hours. Despite our having business class seats, with plenty of room, the journey creased us both. June's feet had swollen so much that she could not put her shoes on. For the first time ever I had back pains. We were a couple of hobbling old wrecks! Our luggage was very heavy, and the trolley I had got hold of was similar to many of the Sainsbury models – it went one foot forward and one foot sideways. The terminal pods at Vancouver are linked to the main arrivals building by a very long tunnel, and on that occasion the distance seemed to us both to be interminable. After a restless night in downtown Vancouver we decided that as a first priority we should call upon an Osteopath, and we visited one that morning. As our daughter Sherilyn is a practising osteopath we knew that one visit was hardly likely to help much, except in the instruction for some exercises which might ease the pain. We did not believe that we could endure the two day drive from Vancouver up to the Rockies, apart from which there was talk of snow making the going difficult up there. So we decided instead to go over to Vancouver Island, and to stay in the capital of British Columbia, at Victoria.

The ferry journey across the strait is very attractive, passing several small islands, to which Columbians like to retire. The city of Victoria is also very attractive, facing south across the Puget Sound to the San Juan Islands, and to snow-capped Mount Rainier in the state of Washington. We stayed at the Empress Hotel. This is built in the typical Canadian early 20th century style, with steeply sloping roofs, and tall spacious public rooms. It faces out across the harbour, watching the ships and seaplanes coming and

going. On the quay outside the hotel there was always a man in full Scottish rig, playing the bagpipes.

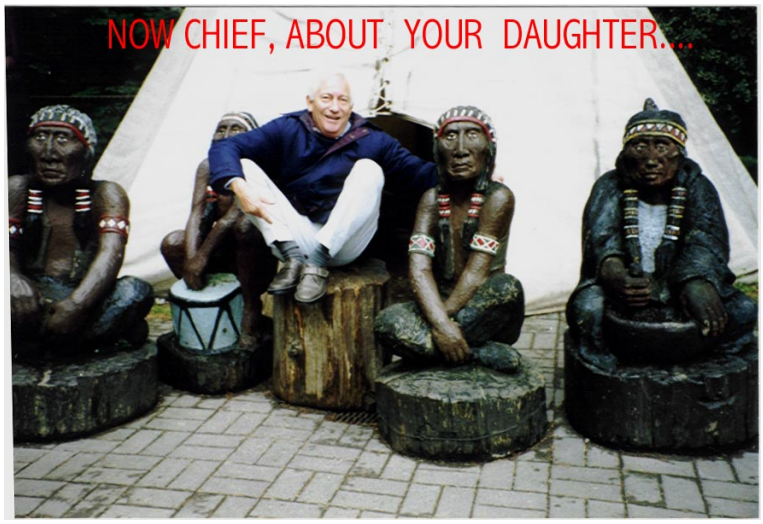


Victoria, Vancouver Island

There was plenty to do and to see on the island; the Chinatown which every self-respecting north American city boasts; totem poles of every possible size and description; museums and well-laid out gardens; a "Shakespeare's house"; sightseeing boat trips; and the piece de resistance for us were the Butchart Gardens. This was a disused quarry which a couple had bought, and at great pains and cost, converted it into spectacular gardens of about 8 acres. Every conceivable tree, plant and shrub, including tropical species, seemed to be there. It was possible to spend several hours there, and still not to have seen everything. At night the gardens had lighting displays to give a different perspective to what the viewer had seen by day. For years afterwards June sent to Butchart for the calendar.

We also took a long drive up the island, as we both wanted to see, once more, "Cathedral Glade". The leading lumber company, MBM had preserved a grove of

giant Douglas Fir trees, of enormous height and girth. Once up-country there, a long way from the towns it really is frontier-like. People live in log cabins, shave once a month, and wash once a year. All, however, were very friendly to us pale, puny townies. Staying at the Empress Hotel, we decided that our fate was to be haunted by fire scares. Once in Toronto, staying on the 20th floor, the alarm had sounded just as we were falling to sleep. That was the occasion when we gauged our fellow guests' scale of values when we eventually reached ground floor level. Some women had come down scantily clad, but complete with all their jewellery; some arrived belatedly but fully clad, including ties; some struggled down with their luggage; our own priority had been passports and money! Then we had had two night alarms staying at the St. Francis in Bath; one at 5 a.m. in Boston. Then in Victoria we had alarms two nights running. We were alright Jack; our first-floor room had a balcony which was in fact the roof of the portico to the entrance. We felt that we could be safe out there. So we took with us an unfinished bottle of wine, two glasses, a cigar, and of course our passports, flight tickets, and money!



Left: June and friend.

After ten days we felt that, before flying home, we would like to stay for a couple of days at a suite in our favourite hotel at Vancouver, The Four Seasons, and dine in our favourite restaurant, across the road in the Vancouver Hotel. Here we had befriended a waiter who had always looked after us in the past. He was of Belgian descent but not a Walloon, loathed and despised the French-Canadians, and always pretended that he could not speak French when serving them. In the intervening years since our first visit, French had become by law, Canada's alternative language; even in British Columbia, which is a long way from Quebec! Despite the discomfort at the start, we had enjoyed ourselves immensely, and we flew home, taking care to get up and walk around the plane frequently in order to keep our joints supple.

With retirement I found that not going to work was easy, but not getting up early in the mornings was very hard. June didn't, and I let her stay in bed until 7.15 a.m., except for weekends when I relaxed it to 7.30 a.m. as

a special treat. Throughout the ten years that were left to us as a couple I used to go with June to do our weekly shopping. We shared the job, I was to do the easy things, and June sorted out meats and vegetables. I am doubly glad that I did, for at least I knew where things were, and developed a circuit round the store. We also developed a habit of going out to lunch at least once in the week, sometimes with friends, sometimes alone. We also went to the Gatwick Hilton for Sunday Brunch just about every week – again sometimes with family or friends, sometimes just the two of us. We enjoyed those ten years a great deal.

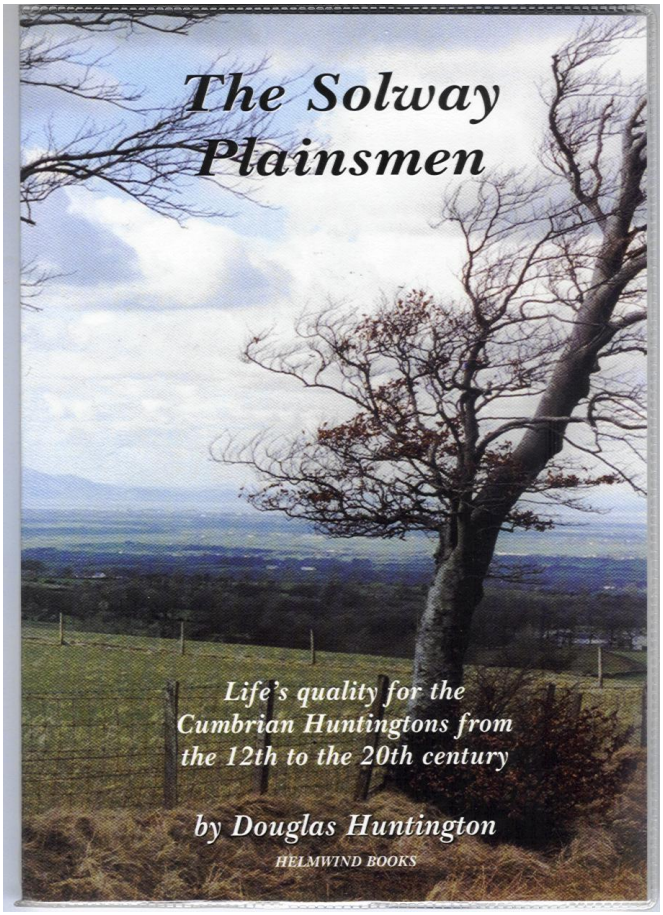
In the early 1990s we still holidayed in Antibes, at first. Then one day Guy asked me about our ancestors. I knew very little except that I thought there was a Cumberland connection. That prompted me to begin researching the Huntington ancestry. The first port of call was my brother Gordon, who gave me quite a few useful leads. The next step was to get in touch with the Mormons who have carried out a vast ongoing genealogical research programme. They had a library in their Crawley temple, and it is open to anybody to use their resources. It is free to all, and just in case anyone is wondering, they do not attempt to evangelise researchers. The libraries are heavily used so it is necessary to make a booking, and to state which records one wishes to examine. This is because some records need to be read using a micro-film projector, and some others require a scanner; still others require the use of a computer. These libraries are manned by lay volunteers, who will give help and advice on how to go about the research.

So much did I enjoy that work that I attended the library one half-day every week for over two years, and

gathered so much data about the large numbers of Huntingtons who had lived in Cumbria, that I ended up devising ancestry trees for all the branches, not just my line. It kept my brain active, which was a good thing for a retiree. I have always been interested in history, and I wanted to know, not only who my ancestors were, but what they did and how they lived. This took me to researching books on every aspect of social history over the centuries. In this I received a lot of help and advice from the Cumbria Record Office in Carlisle.

I also wanted to know where they had lived, and fortunately buildings have survived well in that county, having been built of local stone. This took us to Cumbria for holidays, which June loved for the beauty of the Lake District. We found many of my ancestors' homes, including one in which my great, great, great great grandmother, Martha Huntington breathed her last in 1788. By 1994 I had so much material and information that I decided to write a social history round the lives of my Huntington ancestors. It was titled "The Solway Plainsmen", the early Huntington settlers in Cumberland having gone to the Solway coastline in the 11th century, to help keep the Scots at bay.

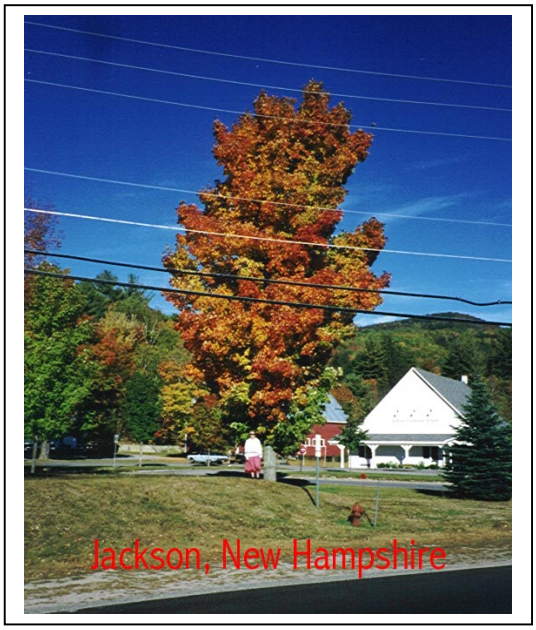
I borrowed a book from our excellent public library on how to self-publish, which was very straightforward, and with Warwick's generous help had it printed, complete with lots of illustrations. All the experts had told me not to have more than 100 or so printed, unless I wanted the house stacked with lots of unsold books. Warwick printed 1050 copies, and with the help of a direct mailing campaign which I carried out in-house, I sold out within 18 months, and still, many years later frequently received requests to buy it.



We then, June and I, embarked on researching June's maternal, and also her paternal ancestors. This in turn involved several stays in the Pottery towns of Staffordshire, where her mother's Birks family had lived for centuries, and also South Wales and Herefordshire, where her father's Rees ancestors had lived. We enjoyed these holidays, finding some beautiful country in places which we would not otherwise have considered visiting, and learning a lot about the sort of lives which the ancestors had experienced.

Having enjoyed what we had seen of North America, and of its people, starting in 1997 we had a series of holidays in New England. We chose to go in the Autumn, to see the colours of the trees as they turned before falling. Being "stick-in-the-muds" we chose every time to go to the first resort we had chosen – the village of Jackson, in New

Hampshire, under the White Mountains. Here the region was particularly beautiful, and we found that we could see a large area of the total New England terrain, using Jackson as its centre. The people were extra pleasant, and the hotel, the Christmas Farm Inn was very comfortable, run by a charming couple the husband of which is or was a Federal Congressman for the state of New Hampshire. As usual I found that I could not cope with their helpings of excellent food.



New Hampshire in the Fall.

In truth I had not been overly enthusiastic about travelling 3000 miles just to see leaves falling, but I had to admit that it was special, and much better than our autumn show in the UK. Our last visit was in October 1999, June's last holiday. I am glad that we went, although, on our return we both admitted that the journey had been exacting, and should be our last foray across the Atlantic; a pity because we had just discovered, and warmed to, some cousins of June's, the Maddys, living in the USA, whom she had not previously known existed. I know that June would have liked to meet them face to face.

June suffered a massive stroke and fell into a coma early on the morning of April 1st. She was rushed to Crawley Hospital where she died on the 4th. We had enjoyed nearly 37 years together for which I was grateful. Her demise was a dreadful trauma not only for me, but also for Guy, Sherilyn and Warwick. However, all three of them were very supportive of me in my grief in every possible way, Guy particularly so in accompanying me in all the formalities which follow a death. To all of us there was the small comforting realisation that June knew nothing and had not suffered.

Chapter Seven
Reflections on the Twentieth Century

And what a century it has been! I well remember my father saying on several occasions "If my mother had been alive today, she would have had such a surprise." She wouldn't have, because had she been alive it would have been happening all around her, just as it had to us. But I knew exactly what he meant. My paternal grandmother had died in 1907, and whilst she would have been aware of inventions like the motor car, the aeroplane, and the telephone, she is hardly likely to have realised just how much modern innovations such as those would be transforming the lives, certainly of the populations of western industrial nations.

Flight in an aeroplane must have appeared to her as something outlandish which happened to a few adventurous people, and not likely to be experienced by ordinary folk.. My knowledge of modern history is not detailed enough for me to know whether the cat's whisker to her would have meant merely a part of feline anatomy, or whether she might have some inkling about radio communication. Even if she had it is very unlikely that she was able to project the revolutions which were about take place as a result of interesting scientific discoveries and developments, such as television, refrigeration, computers, manned rockets to the moon and all stations beyond, and so on. The century witnessed so many changes beyond even our beliefs, who were born part way through it. To us in the 1940s to 1960s the communist dictatorships seemed likely to be a permanent fact of life, but they decayed from within and disappeared. As recently as the early 1930s, or so I have read, a British embassy official in Saudi Arabia

reported home that a place he had visited had masses of black tarry stuff oozing out of the ground. Neither he nor his masters in London thought the news of any significance. But a few decades afterwards we are wondering just how long world supplies of oil will last, and when it runs out exactly what shall we put in to our cars and aeroplanes?

It is a recent innovation that we can, if we wish, buy strawberries in deep winter, or indeed any comestible that my parents bought or grew seasonally. We can now go out to the supermarket and feel angry if that item of food is not there on the shelves for us to buy.

Turning these thoughts on their heads it is interesting to conjecture what changes lie ahead in the century which we have just entered. What energy shall we be able to harness to replace oil and other fossil fuels? Shall we find a safe way to harness nuclear energy? Shall we be able to harness solar energy on the scale to supply our needs? Can the wind and the waves do the job? And what about this so-called Global Warming? Is it truly being caused by damage to the ozone layer from our waste gases? Or is it yet another scare created by "experts"? Once I read of the dire warnings issued by the experts of yesteryear in the 19th century, that all this smoke from railway locomotives would bring about our destruction. We are still here; where are the locomotives?

This is interesting speculation, and it would be facscinating to stay alive to witness how the 21st century unfolds. I might see a bit of it out, and I shall do my best to cling on. Whatever the future holds, one thing is certain. There will be massive changes to come. Our

human race did not stop last December to bring about "progress". Who knows, even our moral attitudes might change, and that could possibly be of greater benefit than any scientific innovation. In fifty years time we might even have ceased to regard killing animals for "sport", and to regard those of the 20th century and earlier as barbarians. The eating of flesh might itself, in this century, be regarded as barbarous. Us barbarous? We only wiped out a mere 25 million people in our 20th century wars! All generations live by the mores of the day. Slavery eventually became regarded as sinful. Women's liberation was chained to the railings until the 1920s. So what shall become the mores of the 21st century? If we were told today I am sure that we would scarcely believe what we heard…

Above all my reflections are that we have lived through exciting times, and I am grateful for having been granted , so far, a wonderful life, in the company of a marvellous wife and lovable children. It is my hope that, towards the end of their lives, those children and their descendants will be able to look back on an equal happiness.

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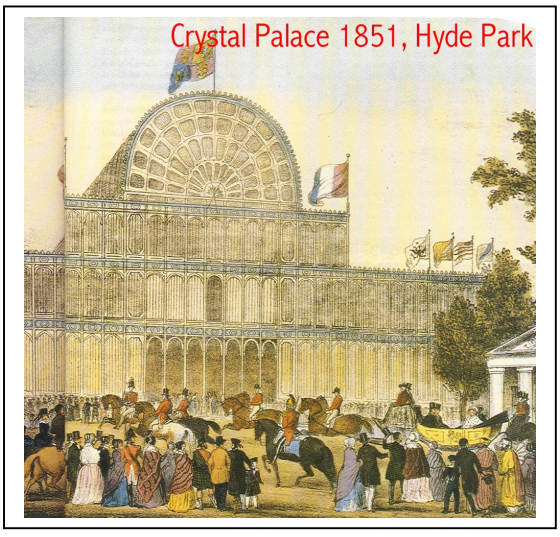
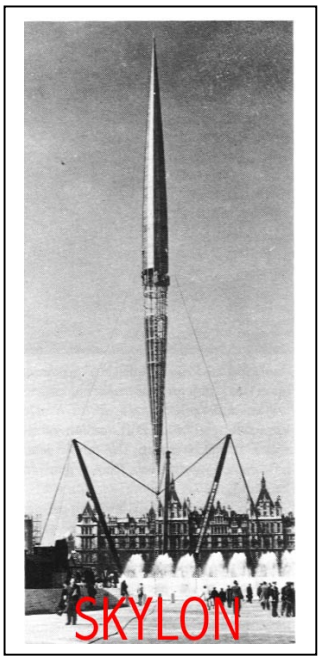
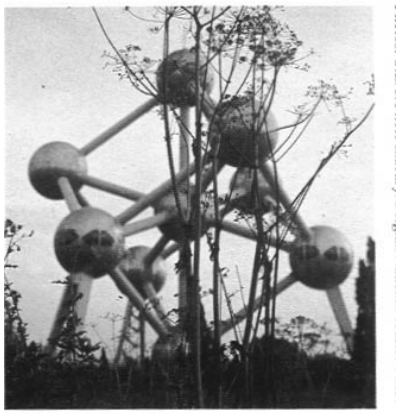


1851 & 1951





The Atomium, Brussels

AND A FINAL THOUGHT…..

Early in the 21st Century I learned that Phyllis Grigg had died. She had been a superb colleague and friend of mine in the Rustyfa years. We had kept in touch regularly and June and I had visited her in her home in South Wales in 1998 where she had given us a warm welcome and provided lunch for us. After her death a friend contacted us with the news and sent us a copy of a quotation by the late Joyce Grenfell which Phyllis had left in her papers. It reflected Phyllis's philosophy accurately……

If I should go before the rest of you
Break not a flower or inscribe a stone
Nor when I'm gone speak in a Sunday voice
But be your usual selves that I have known
Weep if you must – parting is hell
But life goes on – so sing as well

Joyce Grenfell

Chapter eight
Postscript dated 2007

Among the many friends and relatives who helped me with their consolations was one who had known us both for about eight years, having, with her team of helpers, looked after our garden during that period. Both June and I had been fond of Lyn and had been appreciative of her work.

To cut a long story short, Lyn joined me at Bonaventure in February 2001 and we married in the following February – on the 14th – St. Valentines Day.

L-R: Bridget, Guy, Us and Anne.

Despite the big age difference of 24 years we share a number of interests, particularly in music whether it be classical or modern , in travel and in gardening. With regard to the latter, regretfully I cannot match Lyn's vigour and energy but do the best I can to contribute to the physical activity as well as to the planning.

When we lived at Bonaventure we spent a lot of time in caring for the woodland area which had become

overgrown and too dense. By thinning it out we made it far more attractive – to use a cliché – we could then see the wood for the trees! In place of the small pond we devised a water feature, using as a centrepiece a pillar of Westmorland stone, through which water flowed and re-circulated. It created a pleasant, soothing sound and sight by our terrace, on which we grew several pots and tubs of flowers. Lyn also designed a "New Zealand" rockery where she grew a variety of grasses bedded in pebbles. Then she created a new herbaceous bed along the northern end of our large lawn in which she planted dahlias, lupins, and other perennials. In the front garden we had the ancient and crumbling boundary wall demolished and replaced by a rustic ranch fence which was much more in keeping with the open aspect of New Domewood.

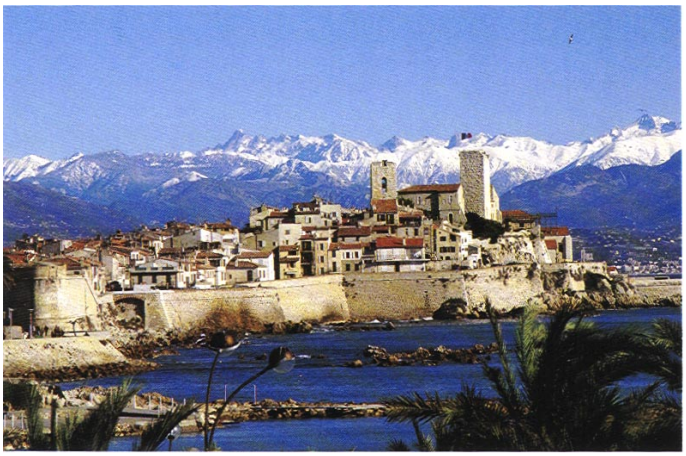
Below: Thinned woods & The Bonaventure terrace.

Left: The front garden at Bonaventure.

We had, in the summer of 2001, spent a holiday at the apartment of the Dupires in Antibes and we returned there for a stay over Christmas and the New Year. Lyn fell in love with the French Riviera, so, after our marriage, we planned a honeymoon which included driving down to the beautiful Lake Annecy in the Haut Savoie for a two day stay. Our route then continued southwards to Avignon on the Rhone and after an overnight stay drove on to Antibes. Here we planned to remain for two weeks before driving on to Italy and spending two days at Portofino and Santa Margherita. Our homeward route took us northwards up the Po Valley to Aosta. After a night there we were to continue to Mont Blanc, through the tunnel under the Alps into France once again. Our destination for that leg was the pretty lakeside village of Yvoire on the French side of Lake Geneva. After two days we drove on to Rheims and sampled the Champagne before, next morning, proceeding on to Calais, to the Eurotunnel and finally to home. In all we spent 25 days on that fabulous tour.

Below left: Lake Annecy.

Right: Sur le Pont D'Avignon

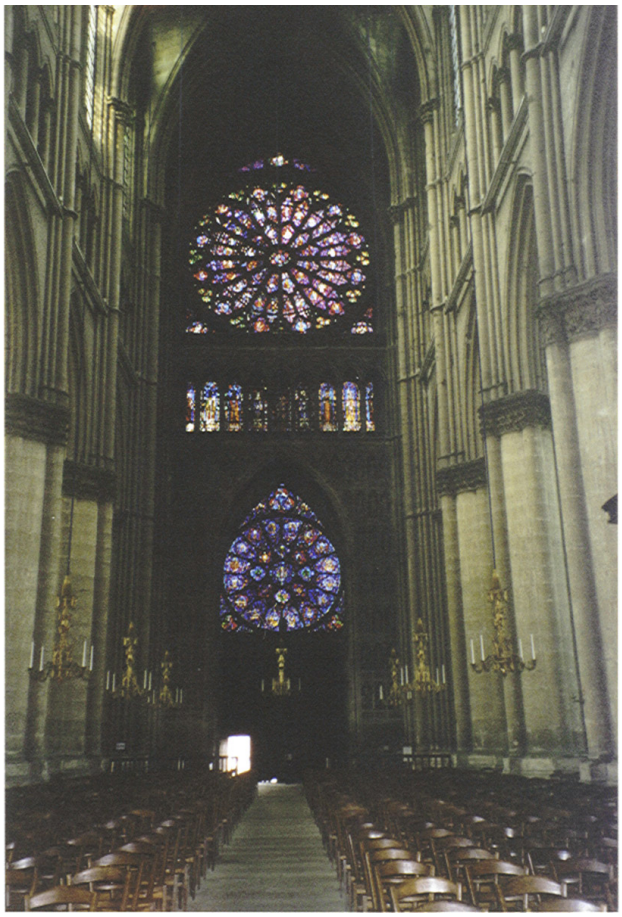


Above: Antibes from the Cap and right: Portofino
Below: Sta. Margherita and Swan family on Lake Geneva

Hotel du Port, Yvoire

Left: Lyn on Yvoire quayside.

Lyn at Gourdon 2002



Above: Rheims Cathedral

In the following year, 2003, we enjoyed another "once in a lifetime" holiday, this time travelling the length of Norway by coastal cruiser. We booked a return passage on the Norwegian Hürtigruten from May 8th to the 20th, sailing from Bergen and calling at about 20 ports on the Norwegian coast, exploring several fjords en route, rounding the North Cape, only 1000 miles from the North Pole and then on to Kirkenes, a few miles from the Russian border near Murmansk..

The vessel we chose was the S.S. Midnatsol, a brand new cruise liner only commissioned a month earlier.

The Midnatsol in Geiranger Fjord

It would have been difficult to fault any part of the cruise. The crew were magnificent and attentive, the catering was excellent, our cabin was comfortable and the weather, we were told, was far sunnier and warmer than normal for that time of year.

We found the Norwegian people to be extremely courteous and the motorists would courteously stop

if one showed signs of intending to cross the road. On board we cruised a mile or two from the shoreline so that we could enjoy the fabulous scenery, making stops for a few hours of exploration at some of the ports we visited. To distract our attention from the lovely views we were entertained every evening in our favourite lounge by a very talented musician – Bjorn Andreasson.

There were many highlights to this spectacular holiday; one was when the Midnatsol crossed into the Arctic Circle. We were each presented with a certificate commemorating this.

Another highlight took place toward the end of our cruise on the National Day of Norway. Without a trace of jingoism the Norwegians are very proud of their heritage and they celebrate this day with quiet pride and joy. The day started with the crew erecting flags and tree branches round the vessel, was followed by glasses of Champagne all round to passengers and crew alike, a speech by the Captain and a parade round the top deck waving small flags by all who wished to participate. Many Norwegians wore national costume. It was a happy day.

Parade round the ship.
Lyn & the Captain.
Winter scene.

Lofoten Is. Wall of Granite,

The North Cape

Sunset 1000 miles from Pole.

Trondheim

Left : Stamsund

It was later in that year, in November 2003, that Lyn had a blood test. In the evening she received an urgent telephone call telling her that she should report to the hospital in Tunbridge Wells immediately. Lyn had severe anaemia and needed a massive transfusion of blood. We drove over to the hospital, Lyn equipped with the necessary basics for an overnight stay. On the next day she had numerous tests, received the necessary transfusion and was discharged on the following day.

It was very worrying that Lyn persisted in suffering this anaemic tendency and we were anxious to discover the root cause. Because the analysts at Tunbridge Wells seemed uncertain about this we pleaded with Lyn's doctor, Jeremy Hill, for her to be examined by a private Blood specialist. He obliged with a referral to Dr. Anne Nandine at Crawley Hospital. Lyn duly saw this lady late in January 2004 who, after several tests, pronounced that there was no chronic problem. She was very reassuring and a tremendous weight was lifted from our minds.

We were so relieved after some months of anxiety that we decided to treat ourselves to a few days in the south of France. We tracked down Easyjet's website on the internet and booked a very cheap return flight from Gatwick to Nice for the following week. By now Lyn had come to share my love for that part of the world and as we approached Nice Airport over the Bay of Angels she remarked "You know, I really feel at home here" – a sentiment I readily shared. The hotel we had hurriedly chosen in the centre of Nice turned out definitely not to be one of our best choices; it was as seedy as they come. So we picked up our bags and quit immediately, walked a few yards up the street and found an apartment to let for the

week.. The few days spent in Nice proved to be a perfect "pick-me-up" for our spirits and over that period the idea developed that as we both felt at home there perhaps we should move permanently. So we hired a small car and began to tour and inspect an already familiar region but this time with a view to deciding whereabouts we would like to live.

Our search for this Nirvana plus the sale of Bonaventure occupied much of the rest of the year 2004. It has already been chronicled extensively in a separate book entitled "Non!!! A love affair with France" Suffice to say that we made our home here in the Maritime Alps, we do feel at home still and despite all the trials endured over the past two and a half years our only regrets are that we miss our beloved family and friends whom we left behind. We endeavour to remedy this by keeping in regular touch, mainly by the telephone.

AND SOME WHO HAVE VISITED US

John and Dee West, May 10th 2005.

Guy and family, August 2005.

PK the friendly cat.

Anne Phillips, September 2005

Lyn's parents, September 2005.
Below: Jean and Alan Walker, May 2006.

Douglas's niece Angela and Nick Winter, June 2006

Anne Phillips, September 2006.

Audrey Boome, October 2006.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE SOLWAY PLAINSMEN

HAPPY APRIL FOOLS

BEFORE I FORGET

DAS KAPITAL

HENRY IV PART TWO

TITUS ANDRONICUS

THE THEORY OF RELATIVITY FOR DUMMIES

HOW I WON THE WAR -PART 1 EUROPE

HOW I WON THE WAR – PART II THE ROSES

PARADISE REGAINED

HOW TO SPELL NEECHK

NIETZSCHE EXPLAINED