

# An Interesting Life

A brief autobiography of Anthony Hodson, who was the second son of Harry Hodson, a high-flying economist and journalist. Harry, on his travels, had married a beautiful Australian girl from Sydney Australia, and they eventually had four sons. Nick, Anthony, Daniel and Charles.

Anthony had a well-travelled early life, for a period during the second world war living in India, where his father was Reforms Commissioner to the Viceroy. These were early days of discussions with Indian political leaders that were to lead to Indian independence in 1947.

After returning from India in late 1942 the family lived in West London for the rest of the war,

Becoming an Eton Scholar in 1950, Anthony did his National Service in the Royal Navy from 1955-57, before going to Oxford University to study Mathematics. His service took him to the Montebello Atom Bomb tests in 1956.

With a good degree from Oxford, he discarded the normal Eton/Oxford careers, going instead into industry in the world of avionic instruments, which were becoming increasingly computerised. This eventually took him full-time into computers. After 14 years with ICL, he started his own consultancy company supporting a specialist area of Information Technology, and has never really retired.

Music – as an instrumentalist, organiser and composer – has been a constant thread through Anthony's life, and continues actively so, even well into his 9th decade!

This short account of his life (so far up only to his teens) is being published as a serial set of articles in each monthly Winkfield Parish News since March 2021. See <https://fosmw.com/parishmag/> and press the [Serial feature] button.

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# An Interesting Life

## 1 Beginnings

Everybody's life has a book in it, narrating the familiar and the unusual, the sadnesses and the joys, the achievements and the failures, and the wealth of relationships in family and friends – past and present. That is my explanation, so 'here goes!'

I was born in April 1937, my parents' second son, just over two weeks before the Coronation of King George VI, in 14a Westbourne Terrace, a few stones' throw from Brunel's Paddington station. This was then a terrace of small houses suitable for aspiring middle-class couples, such as my father Harry, a high-flying young economist and his beautiful 24-year-old Australian wife Margaret<sup>1</sup>.

As was common then with middle-class professionals, they had a cook and a nanny to look after the children. They were probably living a bit above their means then – my father, as a high-flyer, would have had to entertain well-placed people – something at which my mother Margaret excelled. However, my father was more geared to being a first-rate professional rather than making money, so there was seldom cash over.

My father was born in 1906, the second child of four – two girls and two boys, alternating, all of whom were academic achievers, following in the line of their parents – the girls were Cambridge graduates, and the boys went to Oxford.

After Balliol College Oxford, Harry achieved the great academic achievement of being a Fellow of All Souls College, an ancient and select graduate college entered by a fiendishly daunting competitive entry exam. Many public figures of the time had proved their prowess by becoming a Fellow of All Souls; my father's being or having been a Fellow (a 'Quondam')<sup>2</sup> gave him connections that would strongly boost his distinguished professional career.

High intelligence ran in the family. My grandfather Tom Hodson (1871-1953) qualified in the difficult acceptance exams for the Indian Civil Service

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret and Harry Hodson's ashes are interred in St Mary's graveyard.

<sup>2</sup> Fellows of All Souls were not allowed to remain as Fellows if they married, but becoming a 'Quondam' on marrying did not harm the important friendships already made with other Quondams.

and later joined the Indian Army. He always took a keen and benign interest in the peoples that he worked with there, particularly as a magistrate, and helped conduct a comprehensive survey of the many ethnic groups of India, and of their languages.

He was sometimes unpopular with his fellow magistrates for spending time trying to understand the defendants' circumstances, leading to non-obvious outcomes that annoyed those who followed the conventional approach to petty crime: listen for five minutes and give a prison sentence. He was deeply concerned to understand the people.

He had an amazing language-learning facility – hundreds of dialects and languages were spoken in India – and this led to his taking a professional anthropological interest in the disparate ethnic peoples of India. He took a special interest in the aboriginal Naga Tribes of northern India (his book on them is still on the reading list). His growing academic interests remained active during his later career, and he eventually became the first Professor of Social Anthropology at Cambridge from 1932-37.

Returning to England at the turn of the century, he married my grandmother Kathleen Manly, whose father Henry William Manly was a senior City of London actuary – still recognised for his work.

In the first World War, Tom served in the army as a fine military administrator, achieving the rank of Colonel; but after the war he joined the rank of the many professional people who were unemployed or under-employed. However, he maintained his involvement with the academic world, eventually leading to his Cambridge professorship.

Money was always short in the Tom Hodson household after the war. The Mercers of the City of London, of which he was a father-to-son member, helped the Hodsons to send Harry to Gresham School in Norfolk, where he was educated well enough to go on to Oxford and greater things.

## **2. North Aston**

*In part 1, Anthony is born in 1937, near Paddington Station, the second son of young middle-class parents Harry and his beautiful Australian wife Margaret. Harry is a brilliant young man, an economist, and with the high academic distinction of having been a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford.*

*The ashes of Margaret and Harry lie in the graveyard of St Mary's church.*

My two earliest memories were at around the age of three, and they relate to North Aston Hall, overlooking the flood plains of the river Cherwell, 15

miles north of Oxford. This was not *our* house, but being there came about because of the interesting early career of my father, Harry Hodson, around which so much of my own early life rotated.

In 1928, aged 22, Harry, as an Oxford graduate and economist, became a History Fellow of All Souls College, an academic position with special distinction. It brought him into a community of brilliant and influential people, many of whom had retained the informal fellowship of Quondam ('at one time') Fellows of All Souls as they rose in the circles of government of the UK and abroad: leaders in the Church, journalism, economics, the academic world, and so on. Being a Fellow was not a full-time study position, but, rather, a career starting-point. Harry's many All Souls friends, Quondams and academics, led him in due course into the thick of the movement to rethink the British Empire and the developing Commonwealth.

These people were deeply and genuinely concerned with the well-being of the peoples within the British Empire – forget the stereotypes!

Harry's first position was as a journalist on *The Economist*, founded in 1843 and still going today, with its distinctive red name-plate on its cover. He turned down the Civil Service as a career (despite passing the demanding entrance exam very near the top of the list). He also (mistrustful of academic economists) rejected an offer to be Economics Tutor at New College, Oxford. *The Economist* was an influential journal, and Harry did well. He was invited by the Prime Minister no less (then Ramsey Macdonald) to join the staff of the recently formed Economic Advisory Council, a think-tank of eminent economists (including Maynard Keynes), trade unionists and other experts, under the chairmanship of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This was an offer not to be turned down. However, he was subsequently tempted away from the EAC by Lionel Curtis (another Quondam Fellow of All Souls) to become assistant editor of the Round Table journal.

Lionel Curtis was then the leading member of 'Milner's Kindergarten', which from 1910 had formed itself into *The Round Table*, a group dedicated to progressive and beneficent thinking on the future of the British Empire. Lord Milner had successfully brought the Union of South Africa into a being a successful country after the devastating Boer War, and wanted the ideas used to expand elsewhere. He formed a group of brilliant young men ("the oldies were too busy to join") – hence the Kindergarten – to rethink how Empire countries should develop. They

would eventually be under rule by their peoples (although that was too far off then to consider then as current practicality), following successful economic development based on good administration and infrastructure.

The Round Table in 1930 had a broad-ranging set of members, including leading industrialist Lionel Hitchens. Hitchens had had a successful colonial career, after which he became Chairman of Cammell Laird, an important shipbuilding company.

It was Lionel Hitchens who owned North Aston Hall, where he lived with his beautiful wife Hermione (who became my Godmother) and their six children.

The editor of the Round Table journal in 1930 was John Dove, who lived in a cottage in the grounds of North Aston Hall, and when he died in 1934, the editorship of the journal passed to my father.

Moving ahead to close this episode, when war broke out in 1939, Lionel and Hermione, my Godmother, persuaded my parents that London was no place to bring up young children (myself, aged 2, and my brother Nick, 5): we should live for a time with them in North Aston Hall.

They had a Nanny for the children, probably a local girl whose family lived in a house without electricity. I was clearly a lively child, for once, after annoying Nanny, she told me: "If you go on being naughty, I will apply a switch to your bottom!". As a curious child, I knew that switches carried electricity, and having an electrical gadget applied to my bottom was a major threat, so I was then as 'good as I could be'. To Nanny, a switch was a twiggy stick used as a mild whip for horses - and for naughty boys. This was my first memory.

The second memory was of John Hitchens, the oldest Hitchens son, who had been drafted into the Army and was shortly to leave for active service. He showed me his rifle, and how its bolt worked to retain the bullet cartridge, and I was intrigued (as I later was - and still am - by 'things that work'). John was killed in action in Normandy in 1944. His father Lionel had been killed in 1940 in London by a German bomb.

### **3. India and Australia**

At the last instalment, my father Harry Hodson had been persuaded to leave the high-level Economic Advisory Council to join the Round Table movement as assistant editor to its magazine, and this he did in 1931. He was seen as the future Editor, the successor to the ageing John Dove.

The Round Table was a group of genuinely high-minded and influential people who were sincerely concerned with the progression of the British Empire towards being well governed countries, with good physical and administrative infrastructure, and also moving (as already had done Canada and Australia, as Dominions) towards self-government at some time in the future, as independent nations.

Whatever the past had been like, the present and future of these countries was a vital concern for the Round Table. These senior people met as a kind of editorial board that they called 'The Moot'; relevant articles from them and from other influential people (of varying viewpoints) were published in the Round Table's magazine, 'The Round Table'. In due course, when the British Empire ceased to exist, this journal remained at the core of British Commonwealth thinking<sup>3</sup> and it still does.

Although my father might well have benefited more from staying with the government's National Economic Council, his joining the Round Table movement as subeditor of its journal was a matter of great significance for me personally, for it generated my own very existence!

The Round Table, in organising conferences, sent people on fact-finding missions and discussions, and Harry Hodson was one of those whose talents were harnessed in this way. And so it was that he was sent to India in late 1931 and early 1932 to meet influential Indian politicians and other public figures in the country. His father Thomas had been in the Indian Civil Service, and Harry was fascinated by India; like his father he took a keen interest in its own peoples, and he was very capable of making personal friendships with Indians that he met and later worked with.

He wrote much later that it is clear that: "if there was one lesson above others that I brought home, it was of the infinite variety of India's peoples and conditions, and of the complexity, close to insolubility, of the problems

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<sup>3</sup> For more details of the journal today and in the past, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Round\\_Table\\_\(journal\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Round_Table_(journal)), or visit its own website <https://www.commonwealthroundtable.co.uk/> (which documents the 'Harry Hodson Prize'). Then, as now, the Round Table organised international conferences on topics of general Empire and subsequently Commonwealth interest.



to which they gave rise." The future idea of Pakistan as an independent Muslim state was already in the air.

Following India, he went West to Canada and the Pacific, as part of a big delegation, and he also made several official trips to the USA. Those were the days before air travel, when one sailed across the oceans on big steamships, and train journeys were the means of land travel.

In late 1932, Harry visited Canada again, then proceeded south to Portland, Oregon, on to San Francisco, finally taking the ship to New Zealand and Australia. After heavy conferencing in Canberra, the Australian capital in early 1933, the work was done, and the delegates had the opportunity to relax for a few weeks in Sydney, Australia.

For Harry, Sydney brought a major life-changing event – romance.

#### **4. Sydney romance**

A great Empire conference tour for the Round Table in 1932/33 took my father, Harry, with other delegates, to the USA, then on to New Zealand and finally to Canberra, capital city of Australia. After the work on Empire policy was done, the plan was for the English delegates to relax in Sydney, Australia for a few weeks, being looked after by senior Sydney people, including the 'top people in society' in that city,

Sydney society took Harry and his fellow conference-delegates to their hearts, and this included introducing them to the Three Margarets, the prettiest young socialites in town: Margaret Fairfax, Margaret Honey and Margaret Vyner.

Soon Harry Hodson was able to invite Miss Honey to lunch - and she accepted.

After a few weeks, Harry asked Margaret Honey to marry him. Like a good girl she said she must ask her mother, who in turn very properly said: "Don't talk nonsense. Say goodnight to Harry and send him home," which she obediently did. The following day, he rang Margaret to say that, in the cold light of day, he still felt the same, but the answer was still no.

The stay in Sydney was over, and Harry travelled by train to Brisbane to prepare for his return by ship for the first leg of the long journey home. He wrote that in Brisbane "I received a message asking me to telephone Miss Honey; she told me that she had changed her mind and that she was coming to Brisbane, with her mother and stepfather and aunt, on the night train, to marry me."

Harry spoke to the priest of a local church, who told him: "You can't get married tomorrow: it's Lent – you'd need permission from the Bishop."

"What's his telephone number?" he responded. The Bishop gave his permission, and the short notice was no problem in Australia – the out-back culture had no time for banns to be read.

Margaret and her mother and stepfather had their luggage loaded on the train for Brisbane, and were enjoying a good-bye party on the platform with friends – when one of them, seeing a train slowly chuffing out of the

station, said "isn't that your train leaving? – we must be on in the wrong platform." Said another: "Quick, I have a fast car; jump in, and we'll catch the train up at its next stop". Questions were asked later as to whether the Governor General of New South Wales had been asked to hold the train up so that the wedding party could join the train and their luggage. But, whatever the answer, the fast car journey was successful, and the train delivered Margaret and the rest of her family safely to their destination – Brisbane.

And so, it was that on 28/3/1933 Margaret and Harry were married in a Brisbane church. The event was reported with enthusiasm in the Sydney Daily telegraph (see replica of the report).

The following day they boarded the ship at Brisbane.

Harry's old Oxford friend Ivison Macadam (later my Godfather) was there, and he recalled that Harry actually carried Margaret onto the ship, to start

the long voyage home.

Harry made a good choice for marriage, and so did

## ROSE PINK GOWN

BRISBANE, Tuesday. –

Fair and petite, Miss Margaret Honey, heroine of Sydney Society's thrilling romance, made a lovely bride at her marriage to-night with Mr. Harry Hodson, young English economist.

THE ceremony, which was very quiet, was performed by Rev. Father R. F. Bates at all Saints' Church of England. Mrs Byron Beans giving her daughter away.

### NEW NOTE

The wedding frock of rose pink flamsol struck a new note with its definitely low waistline, swathed bodice and full sleeves. The bride wore a turban of the same material, and carried a shower bouquet of frangipanni and tuberdecos.

Doctor T. P. Fry, who knew the bridegroom at Oxford, was best man.

Mrs Beans chose black riboulding, relieved with white satin and a swathed black turban. She entertained afterwards at Lennon's Hotel.

Mr. and Mrs. Hodson will sail tomorrow morning by the Nieuw Zeeland, en route for England.

### RAPID ROMANCE

Their romance began only three weeks ago, when they met at the Hotel Australia on the eve of the bride's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. The couple only became engaged late last Sunday and decided to be married almost immediately.

The bridegroom, who is the son of Professor Hodson, of Cambridge University, is a fellow of All Souls' Oxford, and an economist. His recent tour of Australia was in connection with the "Round Table," of which he is sub-editor.



Sydney Daily Telegraph  
29 March 1933

Margaret, and they both led productive lives together, until my father died, almost 66 years later, on 27/3/1999. Their first child, Nicholas Jeremy was born on 23 June 1934, and I, Anthony Edward, followed a discreet thousand days later, in April 1937. Daniel followed in 1944 and Henry Charles in 1955.

The ashes of Margaret and Harry lie together in St Mary's graveyard.

## **5 Approaching the 2nd World War**

Back in England, my parents soon settled in the small terrace house near Paddington in which I was born four years later. The world of influential people with whom he worked were impressed by the capable and intelligent wife that he had brought back to England, and who brought charm and grace to his life. We do not know how many young ladies were disappointed by his now being a married man - but he had been on the social list of eligible young bachelors.

Margaret, though highly intelligent, was no intellectual, as my grandparents had expected of a wife for their brilliant son, but they made a great team.

In June 1934, my big brother Jeremy (as he was then called) was born. I appeared in April 1937, just before the Coronation of King George VI. My first memories of Jeremy were of a strong-minded 5-year-old, much bigger than me, who could be very angry. When this happened, I soon learned that quick flight was essential, even when my beloved mother was close by to give a safe haven. At other times, he was a close friend. At 7, he firmly became 'Nicholas' (his first name) or just 'Nick', and that was that: he allowed no argument!

Harry Hodson remained with the Round Table magazine and the movement that it supported, until the outbreak of war in 1939, taking over the full editorship of it in 1934, when John Dove, his predecessor, died.

His international work continued, visiting North America (particularly Canada) for conferences, and in 1938 he took part in a big Commonwealth Relations conference. This was a strange time, when the true face of Nazism, and the possibility of war were becoming apparent, but at the time of the conference there was no feeling of panic - and, of course, the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, which began the final slide into World War II, was an event happening in a totally different world to that of most Commonwealth countries.

When Harry was away on conference in 1938 - they covered months - my mother Margaret went (by ship) to Australia to see her mother, Flora Byron Beans, always known as 'Mudder' and her formidable (but delightful) aunt Ethel Houghton, always known as 'Auntis', taking with her her two young children Jeremy aged 4, and myself, aged 1. Needless to say, I no recollection at all of this adventure.

However, soon after his return to England, Harry was coopted into the newly formed Ministry of Information, deemed, with war impending, an essential part of the maintenance of morale both home and abroad, by the control of news and propaganda. His knowledge of the British overseas countries and his journalistic skills made him a key player.

The family stay in North Aston to avoid London bombing after war came in 1939 was described in the 2nd episode of this story.

My father was never really happy in the Ministry of Information, and was uncomfortable as a non-combatant, even though he served in the Home Guard (when the day's work was done) on Air Raid duty. This gave him raw first-hand experience of the horror of London under German bombing attacks.

He was considering leaving the Ministry of Information to join the RAF when in 1941 he was offered the post of Reforms Commissioner in India. This post entailed helping the Viceroy formulate plans for India's future self-government. (As it turned out, Independence took place, in debatable haste, in 1947, earlier than anticipated.)

So Harry and Margaret and the children (7 and 4) left for India by ship using a diversionary route to avoid German submarines. My father wrote: "On a late winter day in 1941, we sailed from Liverpool for Bombay in an elderly Blue Funnel passenger ship. She set off towards the north of Scotland, passed not far from Greenland, then turned southward to the west of the Azores, and in the South Atlantic made a rendezvous with an armed merchant cruiser, the first ship we had seen since leaving the coast of Britain. She sailed alone through enemy-infested waters. The able-bodied passengers, at the captain's request, formed a rota to stand watch on the after-deck, looking out for submarines." No less than 26 Blue Funnel ships were torpedoed and sunk during the war.

The plan was that, while my father was coming to grips with his important new post in India, my mother, Jeremy and I would proceed to Sydney to live with my grandmother Mudder and Auntis, and we arrived safely there,

staying in Australia for about 6 months, before leaving for Calcutta to join my father in India. This required a six-day journey by flying boat. The next instalment will cover my many memories of these times.

## **6, Arriving in India**

Nearly a year after the War started, in August 1940 my mother, with brother Nicholas and myself, left for Sydney, Australia, to stay with her mother and aunt, 'Mudder' and Auntis, in their comfortable house near the shore of Sydney Harbour, within sight of the famous bridge. We lived there until May 1941, when we left for India to rejoin my father Harry in India, just after he arrived to take up his new post as Reforms Commissioner for the Viceroy, who was then Lord Linlithgow.

At age 3-going-on-4, I have very few memories of Australia at that time. I do remember being scared on a drive to Melbourne, when my mother pointed out Flying Foxes - very large fruit-bats - hanging upside down from the telegraph wires strung from poles beside the road. Foxes, I knew, were large fierce creatures, and the flying variety was clearly very dangerous to small boys.



Our journey to India was by Empire Flying Boat. In the days before few countries had hard runways, these amazing aeroplanes formed the primary basis of long-distance air travel, needing only a relatively calm stretch of water on which to take off and

land (on their bellies). Our seats were on the lower of two decks, and landing was a visceral experience, as, on touchdown, the sea splashed up, completely obliterating the view through the windows. A small open passenger boat was used to ferry travellers to and from the aircraft; we had to step from it onto a small platform that was lowered down beside the plane's door; all this was a great excitement for two small boys aged 4 and 7.

The flight to Calcutta (now Kolkata) took six days, stopping off overnight at five cities on the way, including Singapore. Circling around Singapore Island gave me an amazing cinematic memory of the land and the

surrounding water sloping upwards at an angle that was completely strange for a small boy, who was aware that bodies of water were not only flat but horizontal, and quite unlike what I saw then. Perhaps that was an early stimulus to a love of science, and physics in particular?

We were met by my father in Calcutta, which was an immediate introduction to the chaos of life in India. As we were being taken to the railway station for our journey to New Delhi, I remember a noisy crossroads in the city, full of people, animals and rickshaws - and a new hazard appeared: an ox-cart crossing the crossroads at speed, its driver urging on the draft oxen with his whip.

The summer had begun by then, and the Viceroy and his entourage had left for Simla (now Shimla), the Summer Capital of India, high in the foothills of the Himalaya mountains that include Mount Everest. So it was in Shimla that we spent the early part of our 18 month stay in India.

There was no official house available for my father and his family, so we lived in a bungalow that was an extension of the celebrated Wildflower Hall Hotel in Shimla; this little house was notable for having a large tree that grew up through its porch. The general shortage of housing at the time meant that new accommodation was created by a number of large multi-room tents that were erected on the hotel lawn; they were winter-proofed (Shimla could be very cold) by a fireplace above which was a tall brick chimney that poked up through the top of the tent.

Many of these were occupied by senior army officers in the Indian Army and the British armed services, some with their families. Later on, in December 1941, Japan entered the war, with expansionist intentions in South East Asia, including Burma and even India – so further forces were involved.

I remember once being allowed to climb inside a tank. It was a little disappointingly small, even by my standards as a small boy.

Our bungalow was roomy enough to allow for my parents to entertain colleagues and friends. Noting their sons' observation of guests, and our interest in their smoking habits, they invited the two of us to try cigarettes for a morning, in the hope that we would satisfy our



Anthony aged 5

curiosity and move on. So we did that, and it worked. Neither my brother Nick nor I smoked for the rest of our lives, barring an experiment or two, although in later life, Nick did enjoy a very occasional cigar. I never did, myself – I have never even tried it at any time.

Wildflower Hall still exists with a new building: the building of our time there was burnt down following an electrical fire in 1993.

Meanwhile, my father was carrying out his duties in a job that was beset by politics – politics among the British staff in India, politics within the Indian leaders and politicians, huge difficulties in even beginning to satisfy the desires of all parties in the quest to find a solution to India as a dominion or as a single independent country; and there was a gulf between the Viceroy and his staff (which included my father) and the politicians in London, who had their own complex wartime problems and who generally had no feel for, or experience in, the complexities of the Indian subcontinent. His memoirs document all this at length.

At the end of the summer, the Viceroy and his staff moved back to New Delhi, and we moved with him. I do remember our house there, and particularly our wonderful compact wind-up acoustic gramophone (not an electric cable in sight). We fed it with shellac 78rpm records such as 'Tea for two', 'London Pride' by Noel Coward, and (incongruously) Bach's Sonata number 3 in E for Violin and piano (well, perhaps harpsichord).

This record player lasted for years, until LPs and tapes replaced 78rpm.

## **7. Living in India**

*The previous episode told of the early days of living in India in the war years from May 1941 to October 1942. My father had been sent to India to help progress India's independence, with the post of Reforms Commissioner for the Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow.*

The shape of our life in India was defined by the extraordinary job that my father held for 18 months in 1941-42. In 1935, the Government of India Act had given further self-governing to India in its Congress, and in wartime 1941, as well as implementing the act, further reforms towards independence were seen as vital to keep India 'onside' during the war.

My father, Harry Hodson, well known to Government circles and with past knowledge of India from Round Table work, was chosen as the new Reforms Commissioner to Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, following his predecessor's promotion. Linlithgow had been Viceroy since 1936, staying beyond the normal 4-year term because of the war. He was

strong, competent, and experienced in Indian politics, and got on well with my father, bouncing ideas off him, and requesting proposals.

My father inherited a very competent and supportive office, all Indians, with VP Menon as his leading subordinate, and this was a huge asset for him. He and they worked well together, with great mutual respect.

To strengthen Harry's experience, Linlithgow sent him off to meet regional governors, including the rulers of the Princely States (semi-autonomous regions ruled by traditional local rulers, who, in general thrived under British rule). He also met and came to know well, the leading members of Congress, particularly Nehru, the Hindu leader, and Jinnah, head of the Muslim League. (Mahatma Gandhi was outside the scope of his job, but my father had met him previously).

India was a patchwork of regions, each its own mix of ethnic and religious populations, of which the strongest and most important were the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs, all of whom were powerful members of the Indian Congress. Under British rule, the tensions between these groups were just under control, but in an independent unified India these tensions would create almost insoluble difficulties: e.g. the Muslims would not tolerate Hindu dominance, and vice-versa. The establishment of Pakistan as a separate state was then Jinnah's dream, but carried with it huge dangers, as was proved in 1947.

In December 1941, Japan entered the war, attacking the US fleet in Pearl Harbor, threatening SE Asia, including Burma and even India and Australia; in February 1942 Singapore and Malaysia were lost to the Japanese. The USA joined the war following Pearl Harbour, and as a powerful ally, wanted Great Britain to give independence to India.

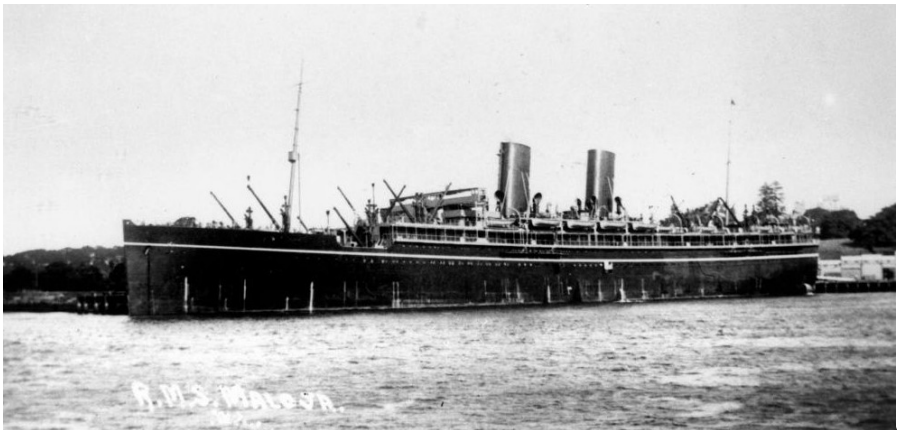
The UK wartime government believed in 1942 that early independence, if achievable, was desirable, to help make best use of resources in S Asia. However, there was little experience of India, and little desire to consult the Viceroy. Churchill proposed a plan that was quickly dismissed as impractical. A better plan was created, and the 'Cripps Mission' was sent to India under Stafford Cripps, to work out a full plan, and, if possible, gain Congress agreement. Linlithgow had to accept the mission as a fait accompli, but worked hard with my father and others to adapt it to a viable independence solution that did not split India. In brief, Congress rejected it, and Independence was put on hold until after the war.



Senior congress leaders were found to have been involved in plans for subsequent anarchy and violence, so these leaders were interned for the remainder of the war. This caused protests and rioting, and my father narrowly missed being caught up and killed in one incident when he was attacked on his bicycle.

My father (and mother) felt now that he would be more useful at home. Linlithgow accepted his resignation, and VP Menon took over his post.

We sailed from Bombay (Mumbai) in RMS Maloja (see picture below) in October 1942, zigzagging for six weeks in convoy up the Atlantic Ocean, and were lucky to escape German submarines. The mud-flats of Liverpool when we finally arrived one cold December morning are still in my memory.



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As young boys, my brother Nick and I were largely unaware of the globally significant happenings in India with which my father was involved.

Our second period in Shimla, when I was five, has many memories. We had a small house that had been built into a recess in the hillside; it had a tin roof, and the local monkeys would jump on it, with a huge clatter that I didn't regard as frightening. It was the intense thunderstorms that I found most scary, and I acquired a fear of lightning that deep down I still have. (When we returned to London, I do not remember the still-frequent German air-raids as being so frightening.)

When we went any distance in Shimla, we went by taxi. This was an ancient car with its horn-push at the centre of the steering-wheel. The push-button was long-broken, revealing the metal contacts that had to be pushed together to make the horn sound (which was frequently). I was

impressed by the mini-lightnings of the sparks that flew when contact was made.

Nick and I used to attend the local school in Shimla. Our Indian bearer led us there daily on our ponies Marley and Rosie, but I can remember nothing about the school itself.

I think that we must have been rather lonely children. I can only remember ever meeting one other child, Serena G., then aged 2 or 3, who was staying overnight with her mother in our little house. No doubt as part of our parent's plan for our early sex education, all three of us shared the bath-tub that evening, causing some debate between Nick and myself.

Gender was something that I was aware of aged 5 – but not particularly curious about. I remember noticing one day that women had boobs (not having thought about the significance before).

Going back to England was the end of a colourful and different way of life that left its unique mark.

## **8. Wartime London**

My father, having resigned in India as Reforms Commissioner to the Viceroy of India, was quickly appointed to a senior Civil Service post in the wartime Ministry of Production, eventually becoming head of its Non-Munitions Division. This was concerned with supplying everything except food and munitions (which were handled in different ministries), ironically not being concerned at all with the production process!

We left Bombay for Liverpool in convoy in October 1943 and were lucky to make the voyage safely, with only one scare with a German submarine, off the North West coast of Africa.<sup>4</sup>

We reached the Mersey on a cold December day of 1942, docking in Liverpool, and eventually arriving with our belongings in London. Of course, we had no place of our own to live, so we stayed with my

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<sup>4</sup> The alarm sounded, and everybody mustered on the boat deck. I remember being told that the convoy's escorting destroyers were going to drop 'death-charges' to catch the submarine, and I thought this very interesting, as I knew that death was a very important and exciting event, and people talked about it in a funny way. In the event I saw nothing at all that was exciting, or even interesting, so we all went back to our cabins.

godfather Ivison Macadam, who had a large house in West London. At that time he had a daughter and a son (now one of my oldest close friends). His wife Caroline was from Portland, Oregon, USA, and in 1940 they had sent the children to live in safety with their grandparents in Portland, not returning until 1944. So there was room for us with him in the upstairs 3 floors of 32 Chesham Place, planned as independent family quarters, but approached by a long climb upstairs,

Ivison (who first entered this narrative in Episode 4) was an Edinburgh-born engineer by profession, practical and efficient. After making a name for himself as a soldier and organiser, he became Director-General of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 1929. Like my father Harry (12 years his junior), with whom he often worked, he became well connected in government. He was widely regarded by ministers as a safe pair of hands to manage complex and delicate issues (e.g. with regard to the safety of the Royal Family in wartime Britain), and was knighted in 1955.

We ourselves moved to our own flat in Ennismore Gardens after a few months.

London was a frequent target of German bomber attacks. Although it was the east end of London that was hit far the worst, particularly the London Docks and the City of London, many bombs landed on West London. Lionel Hitchens, husband of my godmother Hermione, was killed by such a bombing attack in 1940.

Air raids were dramatic occasions - first the howl of the air-raid sirens, then the distant roar of the approaching bombers, and of the fighters sent to intercept them. Then explosions. Search lights would scour the sky for individual bombers, and when one was spotted, the anti-aircraft guns (the nearest to us were in Hyde Park) would open fire. Barrage balloons were up permanently; they were used to deter bombers (whose wings, if they flew underneath the balloons could be ripped off by the cables tethering the balloons to the ground).

When the sirens were sounded, night or day, everybody who could do so would go to the nearest air-raid shelter - some specially constructed, some just basements; and, of course, Underground Railway stations were used as shelters. Meanwhile, the emergency services went to work, and armies of Air Raid Wardens joined them to help people to safety, rescuing trapped people, and helping put out fires and make collapsed buildings safer. When raids occurred, my father and Ivison (and most of the able-

bodied non-combatants, mostly men) set out (voluntarily) on this dangerous and often grisly task.

Eventually, the sirens signalled the 'All clear', and everybody returned, hoping that their house or office had been spared.

My own family - mother and father and Nick and myself - spent many hours in the air-raid shelter, but, fortunately, we were never directly bombed. I do not remember being very frightened, and the main influence that stayed with me for many years was a fascination for aeroplanes, so much in evidence at that time in the war-torn skies above London.

Margaret-Anne – born in 1941 and my wife-to-be in 1961 – was not so lucky in 1943. She lived with her family (mother and father and two girls) in Surrey. Our families did not know each other then, but (as it happened) shared friends. One evening, she with her family were staying in London with her grandmother, who had a flat on the Old Brompton Road. They were in the block of flats when it was struck by an incendiary bomb. The building was set on fire, but they fortunately survived and were able to



evacuate the building without being hurt, except for some cuts from flying glass. A traumatic experience for a 2½-year-old, and still remembered.

Our own flat in Ennismore Gardens was about a mile from Chesham Place. Property costs were low then, and the flat was huge by 2021 standards, but it was not well furnished - my parent's furniture from when they lived in London before the war had been put in store, and the storage building was bombed, so they lost it all. I still remember bare wooden-floored and spartan

rooms: furniture and carpets were not high on the wartime production priority list.

Among the artifacts lost was a pre-war portrait of my beautiful mother with Nick as an infant. The artist, a close friend of my parents, painted a

replica after the war (see above), based on a photograph, and it hangs above the stairs in our house in Bracknell.

We stayed in Ennismore Gardens for the remainder of the war. Nick went in 1947 to West Downs, a boarding prep school that had been evacuated to Blair Castle in the Cairngorms in Scotland, and I followed him in April 1945, just a week, as it turned out, before Germany surrendered and the war in Europe ended.

The next episode will be devoted to personal and family experiences during the war period.

## **9. Life in wartime London**

*Anthony Hodson continues the tale – shortages– from 1942 to 1945*

In wartime London, daily life went on as best it could, despite the bombing raids, and the scarcity of food and much more. Of course, back in the 1940s, there were many familiar things that had not yet been invented. There was no Internet, no personal computers, no mobile phones; TV (although invented) was primitive and unavailable anyway.

Few people had cars - doctors who had to visit patients were one exception. Petrol was in any case scarce, and many cars that did run had big gas-bags on their tops, having been adapted to use the coal-gas then available for cooking and heating. We had bicycles to get about with, although the poor quality of rubber tyres led to frequent punctures. Milk was delivered on horse-drawn floats.

Fuel - and that included coal or coke for fires in people's homes - was rationed. Houses were cold in winter, and people wore woolly clothing if they could get it. Electricity was expensive and subject to cuts. We sometimes stayed with my much-loved paternal grandparents in Wiltshire. They avoided using electricity when possible, and we went to our rooms to go to bed by the light of little paraffin lamps. The smell of burning paraffin (which is a light oil used for lamps and heaters) has become a romantic memory in later life.

Clothes were also rationed, and resulting tensions were probably behind a sorry incident in the winter of 1944 - forgiven, but never forgotten. My parents had bought me a beautiful overcoat, but one day, just back from school wearing it, my mother found one of its buttons missing. She decided that, as the cut in the thread was clean, I must have deliberately cut it off with scissors. I was punished (smacked and beaten with a kitchen

wooden spoon) when I (truthfully) denied this, and was sent to bed in disgrace. In the morning, I realised that the situation would be resolved if I (untruthfully) confessed, so I did. The matter for the parents was now in the past, but not for me. I became more flexible, avoided confrontations, and became seemingly weaker, gentler and more aware of people-situations. I also became more resilient in difficult times. Inherited stubbornness provided a backstop.

My big brother Nick was a stronger character, and no compromiser; he had his own clashes with our strong-minded parents. His complex personality in later life was, I'm sure, shaped by these incidents.

My parents were good people. Mild physical punishment (I cannot remember being actually hurt by it) was the norm of the day, per Proverbs 13:24. Their love and support for their children was deep and proved by the many ways that they went out of their way on our behalf. On this occasion, they got it wrong, and when I became a parent, I swore to respect what my son or daughter had insisted upon, even if I thought it unlikely to be true – and did so!

Toys were scarce then, and the parents got it absolutely right for Nick and me when they bought, second-hand, a big Meccano set, and a magnificent Gauge-1 clockwork train set, with beautiful carriages and a good supply of rails. Nick was mostly off at boarding school (West Downs, evacuated to Blair Castle in Scotland), so I was rather a solitary boy. But, enjoying making things, I found Meccano in particular a real favourite. It offered steel components (in sheets, beams and many other shapes, including wheels and a clockwork motor), that could be fastened together with little nuts and bolts to form vehicles, cranes and much more – much more exciting than 'Minibrix', the hard-rubber 'Lego'-like toy of the time. All of this fed my enjoyment of 'things that worked', and ultimately led to a practical career in engineering.

The Radio was the main source of news and entertainment, and evidently 'worked'. I had not seen inside a radio set, but concluded that it was a box containing twisted wire. To prove my theory, I found a length of insulated copper wire, twisted it up, and put it into a Minibrix box. Then I took the two ends of the wire and plugged them into a mains socket. There was a big flash, and I found myself on the other side of the room, unhurt but knowing now that there was a bit more to radio sets than I had thought.

Food was heavily rationed - people were issued ration books to get meat, including bacon, eggs, butter and cheese, and other basic commodities. Queuing for items in short supply was a way of life. However, offal such as liver, kidneys and even brains, was not rationed, but not always available. Black pudding became a favourite in our family - and remains so, when on offer. Fruit, vegetables, and some other foodstuffs, were just scarce. People were encouraged to 'dig for victory' and grow their own vegetables- my godfather Ivison Macadam turned Chesham Place, the London garden near his house, into a 'Victory Garden'.

Paper was rationed, and newspapers were very thin. Toilet paper (thin hard paper in small sheets - quite unlike today's soft tissue) was scarce, and I remember having a child-carer who on several occasions accused me of using 'six double sheets' (I can still hear her indignant voice although I'm not sure that she clearly knew the difference between six and four). For many people, strips made from their newspaper served the purpose.

Doctors were in short supply, only to be called for severe conditions. I remember having flu-like illnesses on several occasions, including a childhood disease called 'croup' that impedes breathing. One way of stopping this, the parents found, was to put me under the bedclothes between them in their double bed - and breathing was immediately possible again.

Although I was a solitary boy, and used to my own company, I was affectionate with adults that I liked. But I cannot recall the name of any friends of my own age. The closest to a peer friendship until I went to boarding school was still my brother Nick (when he was home from school) - a constant companion, except when he was cross.

The next episode takes me into school life, and records the birth of my little brother Daniel.

## **10. Education 1942-1945**

### **Episode 10A – Earlier education**

1942 to 1945 were active war years, and London was a target right to the end. Even in residential west London, there was widespread bomb damage. As you look west down the Cromwell Road towards the Natural History Museum, the area between you and South Kensington underground station was flattened. A large watertank labelled EWS (Emergency Water Supply) in big letters was now established at the join of Cromwell Road and the Old Brompton Road.

Life had to continue, and, for growing children, that required education. My first real education was at a school in Queen's Gate, London, near the museums, and walking distance from our flat in Ennismore Gardens. Every day we walked by the flattened buildings and that EWS tank.

The school was run by a Mr Durnsford, and was co-educational – I remember at least one girl – the one who became dramatically ill one day. I know that there were other boys, but I have little memory of them except for participating with them at the outdoor games for which we were taken to a London park. There must have been fewer than 30 children in total at the school.

Of the classes I can remember nothing, but they must have included reading, writing and arithmetic. The last subject tackled critical matters like '4 farthings = 1 penny; 12 pennies = 1 shilling; 5 shillings = 1 crown; 4 crowns = £1'. More challenging was '12 inches = 1 foot, 3 feet = 1 yard, 22 yards = 1 chain; 10 chains = 1 furlong, 8 furlongs = 1 mile' and both created arithmetic complexities that put some people off mathematics for life. I enjoyed the challenge.

Poor writing tuition left me with such an untidy spidery 'hand' that, 15 years later, when I was still at university, and just engaged to Margaret-Anne, she requested an improvement. Love gave me the incentive to learn a good italic script that I still use.

One memory of Mr Durnsford's school was after-lunch rests: each child had a rug and was compelled to rest for an hour (perhaps less, but it felt like an hour) after lunch, and I found this very boring. Much later I realised that it was the teachers who needed the rest.

In 1944, at the time when my younger brother Daniel was on the way, my mother was not at all well, so we went as a family to live for some months near the Kent village of Groombridge. Daniel was in due course born in a Tunbridge Wells hospital. During this period, I went to the Fordcombe primary school, which was a memorable experience. It had two classes that were taught by the (only)





school-teacher; Miss Bird<sup>5</sup>. I was in the junior class, and I remember spelling tests, sitting on the floor in my group, next to the senior group, and, as a personal challenge, answering both groups' questions (spelling words like 'parachute' and 'camouflage').

At playtime, I and the other boys formed one group and the girls another group. On one occasion the girls reported with anxiety that the boys had found a 'cog-wheel'. So Miss Bird investigated what could have been a piece from an downed fighter-plane – Kent skies being a frequent wartime battle-field. The girls (and probably the boys too) had no idea what a 'cog-wheel' was – it turned out to be just a wheel from an old perambulator.

Meanwhile, my brother Nick had gone to the well-reputed boarding preparatory school, West Downs. This was at the recommendation of my godmother Hermione Hitchens (see Episode 2), whose two older sons, Mark and John, had been pupils. The school was based in Winchester, but,



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<sup>5</sup>The Fordcombe's School Log Book shows that the school opened in 1862, 'to be run by a mistress and monitors (child-minders)' and so it still was in 1944.

when the war came, its redoubtable headmaster Kenneth Tindall transplanted it to Scotland (the Winchester buildings now becoming military quarters). After a false start at Stranraer, the school took up residence in Blair Castle, outside Blair Atholl in the Cairngorms, a truly beautiful and remarkable place. Nick loved it, and so did I after I joined him there in April 1945, despite the miles from home.

### **Episode 10B – Blair Atholl**

Travel to Blair Atholl took a 15-hour overnight train journey from Euston station. There were many West Downs boys from London and the south, and we travelled together as a supervised group known as the 'London Mush', and, of course, big brother Nick was there for guidance and support. My 8th birthday was five days later, and the 2nd World War in Europe ended a few days later on the 8th of May.

I still remember the huge bonfire that we had to celebrate that occasion, with a turnip-headed Hitler effigy at the top.

West Downs was in many ways a traditional preparatory-school, educating boys (only) for moving on to good public schools, and with a good record for academic scholarships to these schools. This led to a focus on Latin (and later Ancient Greek), with French as the sole modern language. Science was not taught at all during my 5 years at West Downs, with the exception of 'nature studies' – indoors and outdoors, led by Miss Campbell, a young girl that I liked. I remember nurturing caterpillars, that developed into pupae and, to my fascination, suddenly produced butterflies. My oldest friend, Gillespie Robertson, remembers his big brother writing home to say that "Hodson Minor has a caterpillar".

As another unusual activity, boys were taught double-entry book-keeping so that they could control the pennies in their pocket-money – and I never forgot this, although Mr Ledgard, who taught the method, thoroughly disapproved of my awful handwriting, and the ink-blotches that too often accompanied it. He also taught Latin, and I was rather frightened of him, particularly when I forgot the dative and ablative of 3rd declension Latin nouns. He was quite old – probably in his seventies then, and a sweet old boy, as I realise, looking back over the years.

Mr Ledgard's age and Miss Campbell's youth were indicative of a real problem in education in finding good teachers in wartime. West Downs later acquired some excellent teachers., and some not so good.

In those days, all our writing was done with a nib-pen and inkpot. Controlling the ink on the nib – not too much and not too little – was a skill painfully learned. Later most boys graduated to fountain-pens with their own supply of ink. Writing with a fountain pen is still a pleasure, particularly with my current italic hand-writing.

Three interesting features of West Downs were the Boy Scouts, music teaching and drama. Scouting gave key outdoor skills and values and the whole school was divided into Patrols with bird and animal names – I was a ‘Curlew’ – in the Curlew patrol, of which I eventually became Patrol Leader.

In music, all boys (however musically talented) or not formed the school choir, and we learned Sol-Fa (doh-ray-me etc.) as a matter of principle. Many boys learned the piano, and I was one of them. I must have been an apt pupil, as I was put down in my first term of piano tuition to accompany Nick singing in the big annual Peacock Cup summer competition.

Our piece was the beautiful Shenandoah sea shanty. However, Nick and I drifted seriously out-of-synch during the performance, and, after this experience, I took a huge (and quite undeserved) dislike to Shenandoah. The book containing that song and many others is still in the family somewhere. The Shenandoah accompaniment is quite challenging – perhaps a bit beyond me (or was it Nick’s singing that was uncertain? I do not remember him singing after that experience).

Miss Plaisted, the piano teacher for the first half of my West Downs career, was old and arthritic, poor soul; she was competent but not inspiring. I only remember one pupil for another instrument, Andrew (son of my godmother Hermione Hitchens), who learned the violin. Piano practice was compulsory at planned times, and that was OK for me, and I made progress. Nobody ever took any external music exams (like ABRSM), and this was a sorry omission, in retrospect. ABRSM had established today’s Grades 1 to 8 before the war. Mrs Lunn took over piano for later years. Again, competent but not inspiring.

Drama was a core school interest, and the big school hall (the Duke of Athol’s feasting hall when we were in Blair Castle) was termed ‘Shakespeare’ to celebrate the influence of ‘The Bard’ on the school. When the school moved back to its Winchester home in Spring 1946, full-scale Shakespeare plays resumed, taking place annually each summer on the beautiful outdoor stage on the school’s woodland estate, Melbury. I

enjoyed acting in these plays, although brother Nick was the prize-winning actor of the two of us, particularly in his performance of Petruchio ('The Taming of the Shrew' – this will bring a smile to the face of those who knew Nick).

Parents' visits for boarding-school children were always a treasure, and when the school was at Blair Atholl, it was a once-a-year occasion over the Summer Half Term. I remember a visit that we made when Nick was at West Downs, and I wasn't. We enjoyed family walks in the wild Scottish countryside and its rushing rivers. Blair Atholl as a village was on the river Garry, and a few miles down-river was Killiekrankie, scene of a dramatic battle in 1689, during the Jacobite Rebellion, but in present times the location of the Killiekrankie Hotel in which our parents stayed.

*A few years ago, Anthony wrote a short story for a privately published collection of stories on 'Pennies' and it is a memory from Killiekrankie – (See his website at: <https://xdotd.com/literary/The%20penny.pdf>)*

*Episode 10C will start at West Downs school in 1946*

### **Episode 10C – Wartime travel by train**

During the wartime years, there were no foreign holidays, and holidays and weekends away were scarce and to be treasured. We had no car – petrol-rationing meant that very few people (except doctors, nurses and clergy) had any valid use for a car; and there were few long-distance buses operating outside London and other major cities.

So train travel was the core travel-means – vital for industry, and run by the Railway Executive Committee based at a secret location (that had been an underground-station). All trains were steam trains at that time.

Trains were often targets for German planes, and in March 1944, London's Paddington station had a direct hit from a large bomb. Even late in the war, train travel was not 100% safe. But there was usually no alternative for important journeys.

Apart from the Scottish travel to West Downs, which we used at least once as a family for wartime summer half-terms, I have only two explicit train-journey recollections.

The first was on an overnight train to Cornwall, which was very exciting as we had to leave for the station at 10pm – an unfamiliar time for a 6-year old (except during German air raids). My parents had rented a cottage in Cornwall, but it must have been a disastrous trip, as it was wet and so

windy that I was not allowed out of the house in case I was blown over. The trip was probably to see Betty Peter-Hoblyn, an old friend of my parents' from days in India, now married to a Cornish farmer, and noted by many as the largest woman that they had ever met.

The second was a holiday in Wales in the summer of 1944, when my brother Daniel was about seven months old, and my mother was still not very well.

Train travel was quite restricted, and we were unable to obtain seats in the normal seating carriages. So the only option was to travel for the long journey in the guards-van – a half-coach that contained the guard, special luggage such as Royal Mail parcels, and us, two boys aged 7 and 10, and a baby in a pram – and our bicycles. It was uncomfortable and noisy.

From time to time somebody pulled the 'Emergency Cord' – a long cord that had an opening in each carriage so that people could pull it to summon help. Once you pulled it, it dangled out of the opening, so that the guard found where on the train it had been pulled. The cords joined up and, when pulled, created a very loud siren-noise in the Guard's Van, to summon the guard, who could stop the train.

There were notices near each cord opening, threatening a £5 fine (a lot of money then) for improper use, but there were several pulls during this journey, for reasons that we never discovered.

On arrival in Wales, my brother Nick and I stayed in a 'holiday school, while the parents enjoyed a few days alone; we neither of us enjoyed it much, and I also had the humiliation of having to be rescued by an adult when I climbed up a big tree, and found that I could not climb down again.

Happier times were to be had in a loaned house, reputedly designed and owned by Clough Williams Ellis of Portmeirion fame. It was a 20th century house, distinguished by having eaves that reached down past the first floor (which had dormer windows all round it). The low roof area below the window level went all the way round the house, and was great fun to explore, feeding a theory that Man is a natural cave-dweller, and is naturally attracted to caves and tunnels (at least in childhood).

The house also had nearby a fresh-water shallow lake that was fun to swim in, and was close enough – perhaps 5 miles from the Carmarthenshire coast – to reach the beaches by bicycling there as a family. I remember being painfully sunburnt as a result of this expedition. Another expedition was to a local marsh, and I was fascinated by finding

little sundew plants among the moss (and was appalled by the nightmare possibilities of carnivorous plants).

We must have travelled in proper coaches on the way back from Wales, as I have no memory at all of the journey home.

The train trip that we made most often at this time was the two-hour journey to much-loved Gran and Granddaddy, my father's parents, who lived in Tisbury, a large village with prehistory, two or three train stops beyond Salisbury. They had a beautiful little Georgian house on the edge of town, with climbable trees and a garden that was big enough to maintain without too much additional help, although my grandfather, with whom I played endless games of cards (mostly Bezique), claimed that he could not distinguish between weeds and useful plants, and so escaped garden chores.

They had a cook, Nelly, who was sweet but not well educated, like many girls of her day, but she did have a store of comic-book annuals that (with no literary value whatever) were easy fun for visiting grand-children, even though not approved of by my parents. She had been nanny to my father and his siblings, and was very much 'part of the family', often scolded by Gran for giving a young visitor to the kitchen a currant grape or a few sultanas.

*Note. Episode 10C is not published in any edition of the Winkfield Parish News (the 'Parish Mag').*

## **11. Education – West Downs**

With the end of the war, both VE and VJ days past, it was time for West Downs school to move back to its home in Winchester, on the Romsey Road on the edge of the countryside. This was a major event even for pupils like me.

The school had its own large property: a big somewhat barracks-like building near the road, with playing fields that had originally been created for the Winchester Modern School (which failed); a successor school, Westfields also failed. Lionel Helbert, the remarkable founder of the school in 1897, rented the premises to found his new school, and in only a few years, fuelled by his vision and energy, the school became fashionable and well supported, the fees then being 45 guineas per term. It was said of him: 'He succeeded in making West Downs a thoroughly happy and

exciting place. Something was always happening there; the life was never dull because of Mr Helbert's vitality and surprisingness.<sup>6</sup>

The premises were extended to allow about 100 boys – its essential size in our day -including a swimming pool and 'Shakespeare' -a big recreation area – above which was the school's chapel – a place of calm that did indeed develop in the pupils, including myself, an awareness and some understanding of Christianity.

Lionel Helbert died, in 1919, aged only 49, and was succeeded by Kenneth Tindall, usually referred to as KT. Like Helbert, he was a Victorian in outlook and moral stance, although very much more the professional schoolmaster (having held the high post of Housemaster at Sherborne, the Dorset Public School); he was undoubtedly a strong organiser. His abilities were tested – and proved – by his successful move of West Downs, first to Glenapp Castle in Ayrshire, and subsequently to the better suited Blair Castle, that has already described. We younger boys were usually in dread of his footsteps, although he was a good teacher for the top classes, and respected for that when one achieved that level.

If moving to Scotland was a challenge, moving back to Winchester was perhaps even greater. Restoring Blair Castle to show few signs of infestation by boisterous boys were one thing. In summary, the boys had been respectful of the castle contents, although MacKenzie (we were always referred to by our surnames) had discovered a gallery, closed to boys, which contained the ducal Throne of the Dukes of Atholl. The throne had a velvet seat, and Mackenzie found this a good place on which to grow 'Mustard and Cress'. It was popular for boys to grow little seedlings from these granular seeds by putting them our wash-flannels and keeping them damp. This was not good for flannels, and, no doubt, even worse for the throne, but history does not record whether MacKenzie was found out, or got his due reward – a beating by Mr Tindall. (It is perhaps a good point to note that corporal punishment – beating with a stick, or, more commonly, 'slippering', with a size 13 slipper, bent over a bathtub, were very much part of school life. It must be added, though, that most boys, including myself, were at most slippered just a few times in their West Downs career, and few were actually beaten).

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<sup>6</sup> 'West Downs, A Portrait of An English Prep School' by Mark Hichens (The Pentland Press 1992)p

The school premises at Winchester had not been left in a good state, having been requisitioned by the Allied forces during the war, and many items of furniture and fittings had been destroyed. It took a huge effort by staff and a professional firm to restore the place for purpose, but this was achieved in time for a two-week-late return to school of the boys for the Spring Term of 1946.

The playing fields were generally not in good shape, but by the efforts of Tubbs, the groundsman, the main field was quickly returned to its intended use. The boys were coopted into helping pick up the stones that had been used to turn two of the fields into military parking areas, and I remember taking part in that activity.

The barracks-like nature of the school building has been mentioned, and one characteristic was the cold. The spring term of 1946 was cold enough, but a year later, 1947 brought the coldest winter in living memory. We boys slept in dormitories, with open windows, and we washed in our own personal washbasins, which were refilled with water in the evening so as to be ready for washing the following morning. During that cold spell, the water in the basins turned to ice overnight.

Other local preparatory schools used to call West Down the 'Cotton Wool Factory', because of the supposed cossetting of boys, but it never seemed like that to me, particularly after the winter of 1947.

Later episodes will recount more of my life at West Downs, and the varying attitudes that we pupils developed about the school. The next episode will set the family scene in the immediate post-war period.

## **12. Immediate post-war life**

Before continuing with my educational process. I must touch on the immediate post-war years, euphoric times for a war-battered Britain. In the previous episode, the European war came to an end in May 1945, and in September that year, the USA brought the war with Japan in the Far East to an end by the dropping of two atomic bombs. The immediate post-war period brought change to the career of my father Harry Hodson and thus to our family life.

After we all returned from India, my father was appointed Director of the Ministry of Supply's Non-Munitions Division. When the war ended, he found himself with no pre-war job to which to return. The editorship of The Round Table magazine was available, but at less than a pre-war salary. He



was invited to be director of the Conservative Party's new policy research department, but the salary there was not good.

My father had never been stable in his politics, and although he would have been useful to the Party, he preferred his own independent politics. In July 1945, the Labour Party under Clement Attlee had a landslide victory over the Conservative Party under Winston Churchill. This must have been the result as much of middle-class swing rather than reliance on normal Labour support. Probably many middle-class people saw a post-war conservative government as attempting to rebuild society as it had been before the war, and this was not good enough. I do not know how my father voted (and he never told anybody), but would not be surprised if he had voted Labour in that election. My father later wrote that two of the best post-war prime ministers were Clement Attlee and Harold Macmillan.

At this point Harry's brother-in-law Norman Crump, who had led Harry to his first job on The Economist, and who was now Financial Editor of The Sunday Times, introduced Harry to the proprietor of The Sunday Times, Lord Kemsley. It was clear from the meeting that Kemsley was keen to enlist him, perhaps attracted by Harry's academic record and public-service career, as a sort of prestige symbol for the Sunday Times.

As a result, he was given the post of Assistant Editor supporting the current editor, John Hadley (then 80 years old), evidently with the thought that, if he was successful at the job, he would succeed Hadley, who was likely to retire in a couple of years, over the then deputy-editor. In the event, he had to wait four years before Hadley actually did retire.

My father and mother saw that Harry, as a senior journalist in a major national newspaper, would have to meet and entertain many distinguished people and so it was desirable to live in a house that would be suitable for this purpose. My mother was a wonderful hostess, and would enjoy that part of life. (My brother Nick and I were trained by my mother to help with the table service at elegant dinner parties, although I have no direct recollection of actually doing so.)

My parents settled on renting 31 Tite St – quite a large house. Rentals were low in those days. (31 and 33 Tite St had been built as the London residence and studio of the American artist John Whistler, and John Singer Sargent later lived there.) When we were there, 33 Tite St, which had the studio, was occupied by the Welsh artist Augustus John. He had a butler who from time to time helped with my parent's social occasions. He had

been a waiter on transatlantic ships, and his party trick at parties was to come into our big reception room carrying a tray of full glasses on just one hand, swaying from side to side, as if at sea.

I also remember the selection of my father's first post-war car when there – a Humber SuperSnipe which served us for many years. My brother Nick and I had our first pets – rabbits in my case.

This was to be our home for only two years, 1946-1948, after which my parents decided that they should have a house that would be well suited to the bringing up of three boys, Nick aged 12, me aged 9, and Daniel aged 5. They chose Red Cross House, Seaview, Isle of Wight, while my father down-sized to a small flat in London – his office was at Grays Inn Road, just north of the City. Seaview will support a future episode.

Returning to my prep-school, West Downs, following the war years in Blair Castle, the main target was to return to being the kind of school that it had been before the war, without substantial change.

Overall, West Downs, like other leading preparatory schools, sought to be a reasonably efficient education machine for boys aged 8-13 who were to continue their education at major public schools like Eton and Winchester, and so it educated them for the 'Common Entrance' and scholarship exams for such schools. Its staff (some good, some not so good) provided the human touch that delivered the education, and there were very good sports opportunities, particularly when the move from Blair Castle to Winchester had been digested.

The school was organised on Boy Scout principles, and these created Scout 'Patrols', competitive teams, each comprising boys younger and older. There were many 'Boy Scout' activities to enhance practical skills and achievements, and the wooded valley of the school's Melbury estate provided a beautiful locale for outdoor games and scouting.

Melbury also had an outdoor stage and audience area, and each year the school acted out a complete Shakespeare play - a really memorable experience and good dramatic training for many of the boys.

The school motto was HBP - Honest, Brave, Pure, and this was indeed a set of qualities of which we were reminded and tried to fulfil, although I'm not sure that most of us, including myself, had much idea at the time of what was meant by Pure, other than just thinking good thoughts. Christianity was core to school values, and daily chapel services in the school's beautiful chapel provided an active Christian background. I was

confirmed at the school by Bishop Lumsden Barkway in 1949, and the beautiful Moroccan-leather-bound bible presented to me at the time was inscribed by my father with 'West Downs HBP'.

### **13. West Downs, the school**

In the West Downs prep school, the daily school-life was time-organised down to the minute, including each boy's after-breakfast visit to the 'foricas' - the Latin term used for the school's lavatory block, and even piano-practice sessions. I suspect that this imposed schedule helped lead to my 'incompetence' at Eton and beyond, when I had to organise myself - a trait, exacerbated by idleness, that had to be fought against in later life.

Health was a pre-occupation, with each boy's temperature being taken twice a day; school epidemics (e.g. of mumps or chickenpox) were handled efficiently. Failure to perform in the 'foricas' carried the threat of an enema!

Discipline was maintained by the teachers and other staff, who allocated three sorts of points for bad behaviour: 'late points' for not being at an allocated place at the pre-specified time, 'nuisance points' for an act of naughtiness of some kind, and 'all-rounders' for really bad behaviour. Kenneth Tindall would visit each dormitory (of about 20 boys) every evening with a list of offenders, each of whom would be questioned about their transgression or transgressions. Multiple nuisance points or single all-rounders usually called for a walk with Mr Tindall to the dormitory's bathroom, where a few strokes of a large slipper were applied to punish the small behind. Really (and very rare) serious transgressions called for caning in the Head Master's study. All this was an accepted part of the life at the school, in those days when corporal punishment was a standard sanction for ill behaviour, and I think that most boys took it without rancour - I certainly did. As I was generally well-behaved, I only suffered it a few times.

For most boys, West Downs provided satisfactory social and academic development. Each year, West Downs boys achieved scholarships to major public schools, and virtually all passed the Common Entrance exam that was used for non-scholarship entry to those schools.

In those days dyslexia was interpreted as idleness, and boys that today would have been identified as dyslexic often had a miserable time. My old friend Bill Macadam was one of these, and he describes West Downs as being an oppressive 'prison', and he hated his time there.

My big brother Nicholas was an academic achiever across all the subjects, and he loved the outside activities - he had thoroughly enjoyed nearly three years of Blair Castle days. His strong and confident character often led him into

trouble, but this was outweighed by his successes, which led to an Eton Scholarship, and a special prize for his acting in the Shakespeare plays.

I was a much more submissive child, in part as I was teasing, though not seriously, because I had (and have) a small speech impediment. I just 'played the game' as best I could. I was not sporty (except at swimming) playing in 'second teams' in football and cricket. I was good enough at most subjects to reach the Scholarship class, without thinking that I was bright.

I won an Eton Scholarship in 1950, substantially because I was intrigued by, a question on 'Boolean Algebra,' a totally new and unknown branch of mathematics for me, in the highly competitive scholarship exam. I had, it seemed, a nascent talent that the examiners recognised, to my good fortune.

My scholarship annoyed the West Downs staff, because they thought that another boy, Gillespie Robertson, who was not immediately awarded a scholarship, was much more deserving! (He was later included in the 1950 Election awarded scholarships that year, and remains a strong friend.)

I found Mathematics at West Downs interesting, although perhaps not imaginatively taught. I remember 'inventing' a graph to illustrate the behaviour of a mathematical function, The teacher told me that this was a standard representation, and later the school introduced 'graph paper' to help maths understanding. But what I did learn at West Downs led to my becoming a high-flying mathematician and physicist as an Eton Scholar.

The Classics (Latin and Greek) were then at the core of education, and Latin was taught at West Downs from the age of 8. Greek was introduced for the scholarship classes at about the age of 11. But with its complex noun and verb behaviour, I was still insecure at Greek when I arrived at Eton.

All the same, the roots of Latin and Greek grammar, learned at West Downs, remained in my mind. So the seeds that West Downs sowed in the Classics teaching really germinated in 2008, in work for an Open University degree.

The school had music built into its daily life. Every boy was a member of the School Choir, and I remember being taught Sol Fa as a new boy in Scotland. This led to my playing the piano, and achieving a useful standard.

Unfortunately, there was little real inspiration and music teaching, particularly in those immediate post-war years, so the musical talent that I had inside only came to light under the influence of inspired tuition at Eton. ABRSM music grade exams were not part of the teaching programme, and I only remember

one fellow-pupil learning an instrument other than the piano – Andrew Hichens<sup>7</sup> on the violin, not a favoured pursuit!

Memories of West Downs are coloured, generally favourably, by members mostly of the teaching staff. I have mentioned nature-loving Miss Campbell at Blair. <sup>8</sup>

Despite the difficult post-war years, there were some excellent teachers. I particularly remember David Howell Griffith, patient and kind – even to the not so sporty; Harry Risbridger who transformed the school's physical education – I remember swimming and fencing as indoor sports in which he particularly inspired me; the quirky Mr Tremellen, with his imaginative ways for remembering facts (I still remember the principle industry of Dunfermline); and others including the 'ancient' Mr Ledgard, terrifying for the youngest pupils, but loved by the older ones.

West Downs must be regarded as a good school – and has a 'biography' by Mark Hichens to record its virtues. It certainly was just that for most of its pupils, but (like many schools) questionable for boys that would, these days be given special attention, unless they were very able academically. My strongest criticism was of the almost complete lack of teaching in science and engineering, although to a degree the latter was offset by Jeremy Delmar-Morgan, a boy with an outstanding skill in making balsawood model aeroplanes that really flew – an interest that I embraced myself, although without his huge skill in precision modelling!

## **14. The Isle of Wight**

After about two years living in Tite Street, Chelsea, my parents made a decision to buy a house in the small town of Seaview, in the Isle of Wight.

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew, a little older than me, was the youngest child of my godmother Hermione (see earlier episodes). His passion was farming on the family farm at North Aston, and I remember him as a quite young boy being passionate about the milking statistics of the dairy herd – for example those of high-achieving Mewdrak Philpail III. He eventually moved on to being a farmer in his own farm.

<sup>8</sup> Another kind memory at Blair is of TMT - 'Tumty' - Theodora Tindall, the Head Master's wife. I was just 8, and it was bed-time, and my Patrol Leader, the boy in authority in the dormitory after 'lights-out' sent me down the winding stairs to the Head Master's Study for punishment, for some unremembered transgression. As I was going down, weeping for fear, I met TMT who sent me straight back to the dormitory, and that was the end of it!

They thought that growing up in London was not sufficiently broadening for their three boys: myself (11), my older brother Nick(14), and our younger brother Daniel(4) at the time that we moved to Seaview.

This must have entailed a great sacrifice for them, as it meant that the parents were separated for the working whole week during school holidays (Nick and I were at boarding school, Nick at Eton as a Kings Scholar – an academic scholarship – and I at West Downs, the preparatory school. For both Nick and me, moving to the Isle of Wight proved to be a life-changing experience, particularly for Nick, as it gave him a love of the water and the sea that was to be central to nearly all his life - and to me also, although not to that degree.

During his life, Nick became a Dartmouth cadet, an award-winning double-sculler, a merchant seaman, an intrepid sailor of his tiny keel-yacht Minique (in which he sailed round Scotland from the North Sea to the Outer Hebrides and beyond), and a leading member of the kayaking community, training many disadvantaged young people in the art of canoeing in Shadwell and elsewhere, including on the Isle of Barra.

He later worked with the shipping company P&O, where he coordinated its many international branches on a small personal computer. His P&O dedication and achievement has become legendary, like his sail around Scotland.

After he died in 2015, his ashes were consigned to the Thames, to be washed down to the sea that he loved.

Seaview was a very-well established sailing community, which had its own sailing boats: the 10ft Seaview Dinghy, and the Mermaids. The one-design dinghies were traditional clinker-built sloop-rigged centreboard boats, fast for their size and style, and there were almost daily sailing races, run by the prestigious Seaview Yacht Club. Competitive sailing of this kind would now be seen as good training towards Olympic standards.

The Mermaids were 30-foot keelboats owned by the Yacht Club, fast, but more sedate as racing boats, and mainly supported by the older members of the sailing community.

Having moved to Seaview, my parents were financially stretched, and could not afford the cost of a Seaview dinghy, which in those days (1948) was £100 for a new boat, so Nick and I were never integrated into the Seaview sailing world. The parents did their bit by buying us (for £40) a small sailing boat with a single sail and manually lifted daggerboard, which

we named Zephyr. The local boatbuilder, Mr Warren, had commissioned his younger brother to build Zephyr as part of his apprenticeship, and I don't think he passed the test, as Zephyr was not quite to standard; but we loved her, and would spend a lot of time sailing her up and down the north-east Isle of Wight coastline, from Bembridge to the East and to the little ferry-port of Wootton Creek, and beyond, to the West

Neither of our parents were sailors by nature, so we were entrusted to go sailing on our own and come back in time for meals, which, by and large we did. Nick grew up physically strong and self-reliant, and I did, too, although within the dominant life-framework that Nick provided.

Nick never missed the competitive sailing of the Seaview Community, relying on his own resources for a life-view. Our near-neighbours, though, were the 'Dobbs Boys', Noel and Jamie, who lived with their grandparents Neely Stoker and her husband Irving Noel (who was the son of Bram Stoker, the author of Dracula), in a small house down the road. Noel and Jamie, who were about our ages, were expert award-winning Seaview dinghy sailors, so, even if we had had our own similar boat, we would have hardly seen them as they would shoot ahead in any race.

All the same, we became great friends, living in each others houses, and playing dangerous games that would have shocked our parents if they had ever found out, and they are still shocking today. One such game entailed taking cover behind a deck-chair with strong canvas, while the Dobbs boys shot at the chair with an air-pistol from an upstairs window.

This was safe enough until one of them decided to try shooting with an air-gun, a much more powerful weapon. The lead pellet went straight through the canvas, embedding itself into the side of my knee, obliging me to rush out from behind to deck-chair and 'surrender'. The wound, fortunately, was superficial enough to hide. I don't remember continuing this game afterwards, but we took it in good grace and remained friends of the Dobbs.

Noel followed his grandfather, who was a Chartered Accountant, and went into a City career, finding enough time to research and document the life of his great-grandfather Bram. He was close to his grandfather (Bram Stoker's only child) and grandmother: they had adopted Noel and his brother after the death of their father just before the 2nd world war, when their mother, widowed young, married again.

Jamie became a professional sailor based in Antigua, and had the reputation as the leading yachtsman in the Caribbean. Following his death in 2015, the Antigua Sailing Week journal wrote that: "*James was an exceptionally talented sailor and one of the most winning racing sailors the Caribbean has seen. He won one major sailing trophy so many times that he was ruled ineligible to win it again.*"

Although we ever aspired to such elevated sailing achievements, our time in the Isle of Wight was a very formative period in other directions. For me, it amplified a lifelong of interest in things that work. Indeed, the paddle-steamer that plied across the Solent between Portsmouth and Ryde Pier, with a huge reciprocating steam-engine that worked the paddle-wheels, strongly enhanced my fascination with engineering. In addition, during that period after the war, there was a lot of kit like microphones and earphones; with these Nick and I set up a private telephone system between our bedrooms, so that we could chat when we were supposed to be asleep,

## **15. The Isle of Wight (continued)**

Our parents were fortunate to have found our lovely old house in Seaview. It was called Red Cross House, and my big brother Nick was convinced that it had a secret tunnel to connect it to Seaview Priory, the other side of the little town, but we never found it.

It had a big garden dominated by a big scots-pine. The house had been taken over by a military communications unit during the recent war (this about 1949) and they had used the tree to support a radio aerial using a thick wire that they had strung from about 25 feet above the ground to the trunk of a smaller tree on the opposite side of the garden.

Although no longer attached at the lower end, Nick found a way to re-attach it, and we used a seat slung to a pulley to create a funicular ride down the wire. One of us would pull the other sitting in the chair as far as possible up the big wire, and then let go; the rider would shoot back down the wire, with luck using his feet to slow sufficiently at the bottom. It was a lot of fun, even if not clearing modern Health and Safety standards.

Nick discovered how to make a gas-bomb using a golden-syrup tin with two holes: one at the bottom and the other in its lid. This was not seriously dangerous, but was very satisfying.

The gas-cooker in the kitchen had a pilot 'wand' to light the main rings. You used this, unlit, to fill the golden-syrup tin with gas; you then put your



fingers against the holes to seal them, and ran into the garden to place the tin on a brick, and light the hole in the lid of the tin.

The flame burns until the gas left in the tin is dilute enough to make an explosive mixture that explodes, throwing the lid off the top with a very satisfactory pop.

At that time, I was very interested in making model aeroplanes out of balsa-wood. This was then a popular hobby, and kits for designs of increasing size and complexity were readily available. Gliders were the simplest, and were satisfying just gliding from hand level, although more advanced builders could use long strings to tow them into the air like kites.

You could also make aeroplanes that used a long rubber-band attached to a light propeller. You wound the propeller up and it would then provide enough power to lift the 'plane into the air for up to half a minute.

However, at that time miniature diesel engines were becoming available at a modest price, and I managed to buy one, running it on a workbench in the small garden-house at the end of the garden, which I had taken over for my balsa-wood models. Just running my engine made a thoroughly satisfactory high-pitched snarl, and I enjoyed it a lot, although, no doubt, to the detriment of neighbours' peace and quiet. I did manage to test-fly a model using the engine, with the help of a friend of my parents who was the enterprising head of the Science department at the Dragon School, Oxford. The test of my 'plane resulted in a decisive crash.

These engines ran on a mixture of a special oil and ether. The latter was available from any chemist then – today it is listed as a dangerous narcotic, and not sold to the public. (The 'balsa-cement' used to glue balsa-wood components is also listed as containing a dangerous solvent.) I found another potential use for it.

A hazard of Red Cross House was the wasps that nested under the turf in the garden. Nick and I tried various means to destroy them, with some unexpected side effects. I once lit a small fire over a nest, and sought to bolster its intensity by casting ether out of my bottle of it onto the little fire, standing back perhaps 10 feet. When the ether reached the flames, to my horror flame instantly burned up the trail of the flying liquid, right up to the bottle that I was still holding in my hand. I dropped it immediately and was fortunately undamaged. I do not know how much ether remained. I never tried this experiment again.

A similar event occurred in a later attempt by Nick and myself to destroy a wasps' nest. We both clad ourselves in the best protective clothing that we could devise, and set out to rout the wasps by pouring boiling water into their nest. Just as we were doing this, our young brother Daniel, then aged about 6, came out of the house to see what was going on. The angry wasps emerged from their nest, looked around see who was responsible, and, spotting Daniel, turned their fury on him. He had multiple stings, and was naturally very upset, although, fortunately not seriously affected. He has never quite forgiven his brothers, and has certainly not forgotten!!

After two happy years, full of sailing adventures and naughty exploits like these, our parents returned to practicality. This was particularly important for our father, who had been living by himself in London, and, having been promoted to be Editor of the Sunday Times, needed our mother's social support. So we moved to a flat in London in the Mayfair area, and (apart from nearby Hyde Park) our main escape to country was visiting my much loved grandparents, Gran and Granddaddy, in Tisbury, Wiltshire.

## **16 As a Young Eton Scholar**

As a 13 year old boy in the scholarship class of West Downs, my preparatory school, I was put down to enter the very competitive annual scholarship examination for Eton College, and so I did in June 1950, winning a scholarship mostly on my perceived mathematical potential. The King's Scholars (known as KSs) – were 70 boys in number. As boys left, the places were filled by 'election' from the ordered list of boys who had taken the examination. So I was a member of the 1950 Election – I and the others of my year referred to each other as 'my Election'.

The arrangement had been set up as free education for 'poor boys' by Henry VI in 1440 when Eton college was founded, but it had evolved into an open scholarship system, and at that time gave a big rebate on fees. My parents, although certainly not 'poor', would not have been able to afford Eton fees, and having four sons that won Eton Scholarships was a huge bonus for them – and also for us, the sons, although not without problems. Many KSs came from non-wealthy backgrounds. They were traditionally regarded with some disdain by the 'oppidans' – Eton boys not in college – called so from the Latin word 'oppidum': 'boys from the town'.

I had very little idea of what Eton would be like; I knew that most pupils went into houses (that seemed logical but what kind of houses were

they?) The boys who were KS went into 'College', (and lived in an ancient building that was not very house-like).

Transition to secondary education has its problems for all children, small-fish in a pool containing adults or nearly so. Eton life had its own problems, particularly for KSs, and my first term was a misery. There were about 25 'oppidan' Houses in Eton at that time, each house named after the house-master (e.g. 'Wilkinson's'), and each accommodating about 40 boys. In College, the junior-most 15 scholars lived in a big dormitory, called Long Chamber, with one boy from the senior year appointed to supervise. He was called 'Captain of Chamber', with power to punish. Each boy had a semi-private cubicle, and there was a common area with a big round table.

The first days at Eton carried the task of memorising the names of all the Houses of Eton, together with the 'House Colours' of that House, used to identify boys from that house in sporting events. I found this very difficult, and I failed the examination in houses and their colours that took place after two weeks. The penalty for this was being 'syphoned' – a relatively mild but humiliating punishment inflicted on the culprit by the Captain of Chamber as he bent over that round table. Not a good start.

Worse was to come. The new Eton Scholars did not then start in the 'Entry' classes in E or F Block – they started their education in D block on the assumption that they could cope with the more advanced work of that block, which was only reached by non-KSs in their second or third years. In those days, education rotated around the study of Latin, Greek and History, and, although I was reasonably competent for my age at these topics, I struggled at the D block standard. The form master was known as Tiger Wykes, and for me, he lived up to his name. What he considered poor work by a boy was handed back torn with a 'rip' at its top, and the boy had to present it to his 'classical tutor' full due remedy. I had so many 'rips' that I spent a lot of my spare time in what was termed 'penal servitude' in the classroom of my 'classical tutor', Mr. Denys Wilkinson (known, like other Eton masters – 'beaks', we called them – by his initials 'DCW').

Here I must explain that each boy was assigned two tutors – the house-tutor who was his housemaster, with responsibility for welfare and general life, and the classical tutor, with responsibility for educational progress. DCW was a kind man, and knew about my other skills, but was required to attend to repairing my classical and history deficiencies. Meanwhile, I was

an unhappy boy. One day I said to myself: "I will show him" (Tiger Wykes) and spent an afternoon in the library researching for an essay on Hubert de Burgh; I then wrote a fact-filled account that I hoped would please the Tiger. Result: another 'rip'. 'This is a precis' he wrote on my mutilated text. Why? And why not?? I did not then know.

Meanwhile, a few much happier things kept me going. My work in mathematics and science was commended by the head of mathematics, the inspirational John Herbert, who had identified me as promising in the scholarship exam. He became my tutor after O-levels, remaining tutor until I left Eton.

Eton had a unique way of acknowledging good work by boys: you were invited by the appropriate form-master to copy your achievement onto parchment, and submit for archiving. I did this a near record number of times, and this helped counter the suggestions of Tiger Wykes that I was 'unworthy of my scholarship'.

Also in my own 'Election' was Nicky Howard, who as a potentially talented mathematician, had won a scholarship at the same time as I did. He declined to live in College, and became what was termed an Oppidan Scholar; Nicky and I tracked each other through Eton and university days, and we remained lifelong friends until his untimely death through cancer in 2010. He had a very distinguished career in GCHQ.

The other good thing was musical. I had a good unbroken voice. In those days, the liturgical work of the big ancient Eton College Chapel was supported by a professional choir. High voices were provided by young boys trained in the Eton Choir School (like those of the great English cathedrals), and the alto and lower voices in the College Choir were provided by professional men singers. For Sunday services attended by Eton boys (attendance was generally compulsory) the 'boys' and professionals were augmented by the Auxiliary Choir of Etonians – Alto, Tenor and Bass – who were mainly scholars (KSs).

Because younger non-collegers attended the quite separate 'Lower Chapel', the Auxiliary Choir's alto voices were provided by musical young scholars like me, and I was duly recruited by the Precentor, Dr Sydney Watson. This led to about two years of involvement with the wonderful tradition of English choral church music – a life-changing experience. Dr Watson had a powerful and very positive influence on my Eton life and

beyond, playing the organ at my marriage to Margaret-Anne in 1961, and remaining a friend until he died of Alzheimers in 1991.

Music became a core of my social life at Eton. This was helped by the Stephen McWatters, the Master in College (the house-tutor for KSs); a musician himself, he was supportive and enjoyed bringing together the musicians in College, and was attentive to the pastoral needs of boys, and enjoyed my 'quiet sense of humour', which was often self-deprecating.

At the end of my first term, I was demoted from Tiger Wykes' class and was placed for Classics etc. in the class of Reggie Colquhoun (pronounced Cahoon). Mr Colquhoun was inspirational, and recreated a latent love of the classics that developed 50 years later into an Open University degree.

Some social problems remained with other members of my Election, one or two of whom I regarded as bullies, and I was regarded as a little strange – though Gillespie Robertson, my friend from West Downs days, was always loyal.

These were difficult times, but they helped build resilience. Mental issues were seldom considered an issue in those days, although a very few boys (in other years) had serious problems (one, I remember, was outstandingly bright).

My Election was very able – one of us was later knighted - but we had no geniuses, and nobody who shook the world in their professional careers, except, perhaps, Nicky Howard, working behind the political scenes.

Anthony Hodson

Full set of episodes so far: go to <https://fosmw.com/parishmag/> and press the [Serial feature] button.

## **17 Nausikaa, skiing and the oboe**

In the Eton Spring Term of 1951, after a difficult term struggling with social problems as well as with persecution by the demanding Classics teacher, Tiger Wykes, I was demoted to a lower classics class, which was run by Mr Reginald Colquhoun. This was still not an intellectual pushover, since the main classics project was the translation and study of Homer's Odyssey in its original ancient Greek dialect. I was relatively well equipped by my previous studies of the Greek language, but the 2,600 year-old language, beautifully formed into vivid verse, was still a challenge. Nevertheless, I was charmed by the content, guided by Mr Colquhoun's inspirational teaching.

The Odyssey is a very long poem in hexameters by the 700BC bard known as Homer, and is the timeless chronicle of the return of the Greek hero Odysseus

after the long Trojan war: the war resulting from the Trojan prince Paris taking beautiful Helen, the unwilling wife of Menelaus, King of Mycenae, back to Troy.

With Troy eventually sacked, the Greek warriors make their way home; Odysseus, King of Ithaca, has a ten year journey home, facing obstacle after obstacle, but all the time longing to be back with his faithful wife Penelope and now-grown-up son Telemachus.

The demi-goddess Calypso (with persuasion from Zeus) at last allows him to leave her island; his luck turns when, after his raft is deliberately destroyed by a storm raised by the sea god Poseidon, he is washed ashore at the mouth of a river, naked and more dead than alive. There (as planned by the Goddess Athene) he is found by Nausikaa, the beautiful daughter of the King and Queen of the Phaeacians. Despite his condition, she empathises with him, and arranges that he should meet the King and Queen, her parents.<sup>9</sup> They eventually help him to reach Ithaca, his home.

Small wonder that I felt the resonance! I 'fell in love' with Nausikaa, and began to regain my confidence. My parents had planned a skiing holiday for the Spring holidays, and I feared being left behind if my academic performance was not seen to improve. But the corner was turned, and with a strong performance in maths and science, I was back on the way to academic success at Eton.

So the skiing holiday took place, and was a terrific success. In those days, the wealthy went to Switzerland or the French Alps for their winter sports, while the budget-conscious went to Austria. We went to Obergurgl, a few miles from the Gurgler Glacier, separated from the nearest railway-station by 7 km of snow-covered track. The favoured way of getting to Obergurgl was then by horse-drawn sled, and this option was taken by our parents (I think little brother Daniel, then just 7 was staying with friends?). Brother Nick insisted that I should walk, and it was a very long hard walk. My parents gave me a little brandy on arrival, to restore my exhausted composure.

Ski resorts were young then, and unspoiled by the demands of ever-more extensive ski-lifts, as the sport grew in ever-increasing popularity. The unspoiled snow-covered mountainsides were a complete contrast to a London that was only beginning to recover from wartime damage. Skiing was

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<sup>9</sup> Years later, when Anthony was running the Latin Club at Whitegrove Primary School, he wrote a short 'radio play' for the children that tells the charming story of Odysseus and Nausikaa, following the Homeric plot closely. It can be found at <https://fosmw.com/parishmag/Odysseus-and-Nausikaa.pdf>

fun; Nick, with skills already developed by an earlier skiing holiday in Obergurgl, bombed about, while I mastered 'stem-Christies'.

A favourite activity was ski-walking to the edge of the Gurgler glacier, several miles out, using 'skins' on the bottom of the skis to help climb slopes. I have a vision of returning through pristine snow in late-winter sunshine, while the Hangerer mountain, safely on the other side of the valley, shed snow dislodged by the sun's warmth in noisy avalanches.

My parents did not take to the snow with enthusiasm, but it was typical of them that they should make the effort, then and with a second such holiday a year or two later (I think that my father stayed behind for this holiday).

Living on the Isle of Wight was now just a memory. My parents had decided to be centred in London once again, and Harry Hodson needed my mother Margaret to support him in the social side of his job as Editor of the Sunday Times (to which he had been promoted in 1950). They acquired a small house in Chelsea, and this was the family base for a while. Little social contact for us boys!

However, being in London was a good thing, as the postwar government created the great 1951 Festival of Britain on the South Bank of the Thames, and this emphasised the great developments in Britain of Science and Technology. I was fascinated by what I saw, and I am sure that this was a significant factor in my starting a career in technology nine years later.

Back at Eton, there was another problem: I did not get on with my piano teacher, who was demanding and critical of the useful but perhaps undisciplined skills acquired at West Downs school. My parents thought that a change of instrument might be useful, and I chose the oboe. This was taught at the time by a Mr Geeks, a dear old boy but one who had lost his teaching flair, and I made only marginal progress in a year. Then, another piece of good luck struck: oboe teaching was taken over by Claude Taylor, who was a long-standing member 'Beak' (Eton schoolmaster). His inspirational teaching prompted me to practice hard, and I soon found myself winning competitions.

In 1952, we were shocked at the death of King George VI. Eton boys were allowed to watch the funeral procession at Windsor Castle, and the occasion remains a sombre but vivid memory. 1953 brought Her Majesty's coronation, and more memories for the next episode.

## **18. Coronation and North Aston**

1952, my second full year at Eton, started with the sad death of King George VI, whose coronation was a few days after I was born. Another sad happening in the summer of that year was an outbreak of polio, and this hit the school,

with one boy dying and several others (including a friend) suffering major paralysis. My parents were scared by this, and (with many other parents) accepted the school's option of taking me away for the rest of the term.

The end-of-summer examinations at the end of Kings' Scholars' second year, 1952 for me, were used to determine their new and permanent order in their 'Election' (scholars of the same year). Of course, I missed these exams. So I was placed near the bottom of the list. In College, it was the top ten Scholars only who, when they rose to be at the top of the school, were placed in 'Sixth Form'. This distinction of importance had the daily privilege (and burden) of wearing a winged collar and white bow-tie with the school uniform. As I had been placed below the top 10 scholars in my Election, I never was in Sixth Form! It didn't really bother me - just a niggle in my last year when I had earned very high academic and musical distinctions. I have never been confident in tying white bow-ties on the rare occasions when I have had to do so.

After that examination, scholars specialised in their favoured subjects. So I left Latin, Greek and history behind to study mathematics and physics as my main subjects. Boys' timetables from then on also included a changeable and diverse study of choice, and I used that facility over the years to learn some Italian and German, as well as embracing the art of the potter.

The following year, 1953, was the year of Her Majesty's Coronation. My father, who was then editor of the Sunday Times, was able to secure good seats for the family on the stands facing Buckingham Palace, and we had a good view (although dampened by the rain showers) of the great procession up and down the Mall. When that finished, we hurried home to Oxfordshire for a celebration party, and there encountered Television for the first time.

Before the Coronation hardly anybody had TVs - and certainly not us - but the Coronation really launched TV to a mass market, and we soon acquired our own (black-and-white only in those days).

The family had moved home again by that time, and we were living in 'The Lower House', a substantial thatched house overlooking the Cherwell valley, about 15 miles north of Oxford. This house, part of the Oxfordshire village of North Aston, was rented to us by my godmother Hermione Hitchens, who had a big (and very cold) house with a substantial farm, mainly based on its dairy herd of productive Friesian cattle.

It was a very pleasant place to live, and, during school holidays, I had the opportunity to drive a tractor and take part in the work of the farm, with 'rough shooting' (mainly pests like grey squirrels and rabbits) as a pastime (though one that I regret now). I enjoyed talking to the farm managers and



workers, and was occasionally taken ferreting with them (hunting rabbits with ferrets). My Guardian Angel saved me from almost certain death when I fell off a tractor on one occasion. I never told my parents about it - perhaps later, in Heaven, they learned from the G-A what had happened?

Her Majesty's Coronation celebration party took place at North Aston Manor, the house of Col Anthony Taylor DSO MC and his wife Vanda, neighboring North Aston farmers, who did have TV, and they asked all the village to come. They had two beautiful daughters, Vivien and Rosemary, as well as a son Jeremy and a baby daughter Celia, and I was particularly taken by Vivien, although, as a boy without any experience of discourse with girls, I had no prospect of growing familiarity. Vivien later married Nick Ansell, amateur jockey and son of Col Mike Ansell, a blinded war veteran who brought Show Jumping into prominence by heading the BSJA (British Show Jumping Association), later my future wife Margaret-Anne's employer.

We were also very friendly with the Lane-Fox household, who lived in a big one-time pub, the Fox, at the entry to North Aston on the main Oxford-Banbury Road. This was the home of three remarkable women - the matriarchal mother, Enid, and two daughters, widowed Pru Taylor (who had married into the Taylor family but whose husband had been killed at the end of the war), and Felicity Lane Fox, who had been paralysed by the polio outbreak, and was confined to a wheelchair.

Felicity later became Baroness Lane Fox, and was a government spokesman for the issues of disabled people. Pru Taylor had a daughter, Maria, whom, of course, I first knew when she was still a child, but who, as she grew up, found a place in my heart. She was a horsey girl, and, in later years, led to a serious interest in equestrianism as an aid to my wooing. I took wry encouragement at the Fox from the attitude of her horse, who, on one visit, clearly regarded me as a serious rival for her affections, and quite deliberately, and with no other provocation, kicked out at me. Fortunately, its sense of distance was at fault (or perhaps this was just a warning shot?), as its hoof connected with my clothing and, luckily, not me in its otherwise accurately-aimed attack.

## **19 Living at Bourton House**

The Lower House in which we lived in 1953 at North Aston, a beautiful thatched cottage overlooking the Cherwell valley, was a rented and temporary stay for the family. At that time, house prices were at a very low level. My father, who was at that time in the middle of his distinguished editorship of The Sunday Times, and my mother, were very attracted to Bourton House, a large and beautiful listed Georgian property in the Cotswold village of Bourton on the hill. With space needed for three

energetic boys, it had a large garden, stables and out-houses, a listed tythe-barn and a small paddock. They bravely bought Bourton House at auction 'for a song'. My father and mother were, I think, attracted by the prospect of becoming squire and wife in a country village, and they worked hard with the locals to be accepted as such. The house also gave many opportunities for my mother's talents at interior decoration. But I don't think that they quite knew then what they were letting themselves in for.

Bourton on the Hill was a place with a social life that my parents enjoyed. They already had a wide circle of well-connected friends, and at Bourton there were distinguished 'neighbours'. In one direction was [Sezincote](#), the property of Sir Cyril Kleinwort, a leading banker – the house was a mansion, uniquely styled like an Indian Mogul palace, and is said to have been the inspiration of the exotic Brighton Pavilion. At the other end of the village was another mansion: [Batsford Park](#), famous for its gardens and arboretum, and belonging to Lord Dulverton (a member of the big Wills family – tobacco tycoons – a family that will appear again later in my family history). It was then lived in by the dowager Victoria Lady Dulverton, who became a close friend of my parents; Margaret-Anne and I later also enjoyed her hospitality when we were young newly-weds. Lady Dulverton's widowed sister, Ruby Fleischmann, lived on the estate, and she was a very talented gardener, and as such was a very useful mentor to my parents, particularly my mother who now had a big garden to cherish. They were both good friends to my parents, with an endearing absence of 'grandness'.

With a growing interest in girls, my big brother Nick and I (aged 19 and 16) were aware of Sir Cyril K's three handsome daughters Serena (17) and Charlotte (15) and the younger daughter Susanna, but they were far outside our social scope. We also came to know well ex-cavalry officer Sir Andrew Horsbrugh Porter, who owned a large livery stables near the top of Bourton Hill. He and his wife Mary were very hospitable, and had a son John (who succeeded the Baronetcy on his father's death in 1986), and also a daughter Caroline, who later became the godmother of my youngest brother Charles. (Charles was born in Bourton House, and was christened in the local church in early September 1955, the day before I was summoned to Victoria Barracks to start two years of National Service in the Royal Navy.) Nick and I got on very well with Caroline, who had the charm and the frank directness of her parents. She told us about life as an

adolescent girl as a boarder at Cheltenham Ladies College, which gave new knowledge for us about the ways of girls.

Bourton House was not ideal for my father, who, while we lived in the country, lived in London all week to put together the following Sunday's Sunday Times. He was obliged by his contract to stay with the process of printing the paper until its last edition was put to bed late on a Saturday evening. He would take an early train the next morning, Sunday, to Moreton-in-Marsh, the nearest main station, and arrive exhausted. Little wonder that after a few years at Bourton we moved back to London.

My father's imaginative work as Editor of the Sunday Times had raised its status to become the top weekly newspaper. The Sunday Times was the first Sunday paper to have a pioneering Colour Magazine – this was quite an innovation. One of his lasting achievements as editor was to publish a ground-breaking and much discussed article in 1954 that drew attention to the unfairness and hypocrisy of criminalising homosexuality. This article led directly to the commissioning of the Wolfenden Report and the resulting progressive liberalisation of the laws.

As they came to enjoy country living in their own house, my parents evidently thought that horsemanship would be a useful skill for my younger brother Daniel, who was 9 when we started living there. They bought him a 14:2 pony called Nonny. I have no personal recollection of the process of learning to ride to which Daniel was subjected, but later reports suggest that he hated it and more-or-less anything to do with horses. So Nonny had a rather boring time doing nothing much.

The previous episode of this story drew attention to my own interest in Maria Taylor. She was very much a horsey person, and I thought (with the optimism of adolescence) that horsemanship could help me in my wooing. So I took over Daniel's pony, and presented myself and Nonny to Sir Andrew Horsburgh Porter in the hope that he would give me a crash course in equestrianism. This he did with enthusiasm, and put me through a demanding teaching programme, developed over years as a cavalry officer, to train strong horsemanship in young soldiers. After only a few days tuition, for example, I found myself having to ride in a small circle with my arms crossed and without stirrups, jumping a small fence, and often falling off. Fortunately, I had acquired the art of falling well, without damage.

Sir Andrew included me in the team of riders who exercised the horses in

his livery stables by walking and trotting around the surrounding beautiful Gloucester countryside and woodland, by permission of the local farmers and property owners. I even managed to ride a few times with the celebrated Heythrop hunt, not with any enthusiasm at all for hunting as a blood sport, but because it was such huge fun to ride across the countryside, jumping fences without falling off if possible. These days usually ended with great hospitality around a hearty fire at Sir Andrew's house.

All of this was a source of great pleasure, thanks to Sir Andrew, and I learned to enjoy horsemanship, although I never became an expert. Nor did I ever win over Maria, although we remained friends.

I had other interests, of which the most prominent was model aeroplanes. In practical terms, this mostly focused on building and flying 'control-line' models. I would stand in the middle of Bourton House's big lawn, while the miniature-diesel-powered 'plane went speedily and noisily around one at speed, at the end of control wires, with which you could urge it to go up or down, and even loop-the loop.

I also yearned to fly 'planes with radio control. I couldn't afford the commercial transmitters and receivers available to seasoned modellers, and so built my own (to designs supplied by Aeromodeller Magazine). I could transmit and receive and use signals to move actuators, but never got to make any model that would use the technology. These were the days well before transistors existed or had developed commercially, so the technology used thermionic valves. I was fascinated by being able to light up a miniature light bulb by connecting its terminals to a simple loop, and holding this loop near my transmitter. I also found that I could affect the television set reception by tuning the transmitter to the TV bandwidth (which was close to the 27Mhz allocated to aeromodellers). Not a good thing to do – illegal, in fact – so it was just a passing experiment.

Bourton House was a special place to live – although we never had the resources to do it justice, as have its present owners – see below.

### **POSTSCRIPT: Bourton House**

Bourton House and its gardens have been transformed over the years to become a wonderful place to visit, with spectacular gardens and other features. Visit <https://www.bourtonhouse.com/the-garden/>

## 20 Last years at Eton Part 1

After a difficult first two years, my last years at Eton were successful, both academically and socially.

Scholars in their third year specialise in their studies – a whole year ahead of most other boys in the school. ‘Oppidan Scholars’ were the exception – boys who had been successful in the Kings Scholarship, but had opted to go to one of the boarding houses (referred to by the House Master’s name). I specialised in Maths and Physics, and I was very lucky to do this in parallel with my dear friend Nicky Howard (introduced earlier).

We progressed together in Mathematics, and must have also done so in Physics, but I recall having to spend most of my last year in solitary study, as I was a year ahead of anybody else. This was not a very satisfactory time, as much of it was spent grappling with Jeans’ classic ‘Electricity’ textbook, which taught the theory based on the ground-breaking work of two distinguished physicists/mathematicians James Clerk Maxwell and Oliver Heaviside. This book was very hard going, and would have been superseded by the elegant notation and lucid exposition of Prof. Coulson’s ‘Electricity’<sup>10</sup>. So it was a relief to be called upon to teach Physics quite frequently to younger boys. This was occasioned by the frequent illness of Mr Charlie Mayes, Head of Physics.

This teaching experience was the start of a thread of teaching that I maintained, with enjoyment of passing on knowledge, all the way through my professional career – and still continue as an octogenarian.

There were other important educational strands. Boys could choose an extra subject, unencumbered by the need to pass exams, and I used this to study German, Italian – and making pottery (of which some relics remain).

Also firmly in my mind are the lessons taken by Robert Birley, the Head Master, on divinity, ethics and sociology. I found these interesting and informative, and helped development of my political stance as liberal left of centre. (As a Professor in South Africa, Robert Birley had been one of the intellectual leaders in condemnation of the ideology of Apartheid.)

At the end of the academic learning process at Eton, I was successful in what was then called S-level exams (aiming at Oxford/Cambridge

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<sup>10</sup> I only encountered this seminal book when preparing for Oxford during the later months of National Service. Prof. Coulson was an Oxford Professor at the time, and a great lecturer

scholarships) and won a minor scholarship to Balliol, as well as Eton's Mathematics and Physics prizes. (I never did A-levels!)

My academic successes did me little good socially with the rest of the Scholars of my year, who would have used the derogatory term 'nerd' of me if it had been invented, but by that time they had mostly come to terms with my oddities! Music was the real key to recovery of social confidence.

When I went to Eton, as a reasonably accomplished pianist for my age, I did not get on with the piano teacher assigned to me, and stopped lessons. My parents, bless them, encouraged me a bit later to take up another instrument, so I started oboe lessons. This had been the instrument played by my cousin Tommy Crump.

In those days not long after the war, wind instrument teaching was uninspiring, but in early 1953 Dr Sydney Watson, the Precentor (director of music at Eton) took action to hire teachers who were much more inspirational. So I started learning with Claude Taylor who was not only an excellent English 'beak' (Eton school master) but also a very talented amateur oboist, and his words still ring in my ears.

## **21 Last years at Eton part 2**

Many young people look back on their last years at school as among the most fulfilling times of their life, and I count myself very lucky indeed to be able to say that of my last years at Eton. As the last episode indicated, I made good enough progress academically, and a lot of credit goes to John Herbert, my tutor in mathematics, who ensured that I had a very strong control of practical mathematics, particularly calculus. He was a creative mathematician in his own right, and, during the war, had been a key player in the design of a floating airfield for take-off and landing at sea.

This ingenious structure comprised hexagonal steel cans fastened to their neighbours by hinges: the result created a surface flat enough for air operations, but resilient enough to work on a moderately rough sea. This was one of many inventions that never quite saw operational service. I also helped create Mr Herbert's diagrams for a Scientific Society lecture on 'non-Euclidian geometry' – an intriguing concept in which parallel lines can meet.

However, music was the key to my broader musical and social success.

After a year of half-hearted oboe playing under the ancient Mr Gecks, a sweet man who taught all kinds of woodwind instruments without flair, Claude Taylor took me over as an oboist at the beginning of the summer

term of 1952, and I started working very hard at the instrument. I loved it, finding, through Claude's inspirational tuition, a strong underlying aptitude. That autumn, I was a member of a group of KS (Kings scholar) musicians that won a musical inter-House competition; in it I performed a solo that received acclaim, and that led to even greater practising effort – and life-long love for the piece, 'Piece V' by César Franck.

The following spring, I entered the 1953 School woodwind competition (the Vaughan Cup) and, to my surprise, I won it. Over the next two years, I faced stiffer and stiffer competition, as the quality of musical tuition increased, not only at Eton, but at the preparatory schools that provided Eton's 12/13-year-old intake. These schools started sending boys to Eton with increasingly well-trained musical ability, and Eton's general level of musical skill increased hugely. Despite all this competition, I managed to win the Vaughan Cup again for 1954 and 1955 (my last year at school).

This three-year feat was feasible only because of the problems of post-war education, and I would never have been able to do it in competition with today's enormously talented and well taught young musicians.

All this put me firmly into the musical social life created by other boys of musical talent, many of whom were KSs. There was a strong sense of fraternity in the musical field, particularly in College, and we made a lot of music together, of all sorts and for all kinds of occasion,

I particularly remember Hugo Meynell, who effortlessly composed Handelian chamber music for the musicians available. He organised a group of about six of us, strings and wind, and we gave little concerts, indoors and out.

Ben De la Mare, two years my junior, was a brilliant clarinettist, whose prep-school had given him quality tuition; also in his year I remember Julian Hall (flautist) and John Waterhouse (bassoonist). In my election, only David Lort-Philips was a musician – he was a pianist, whose strains of Chopin fluttered up from the old piano on the lower landing of College. John Aris, clarinettist and composer, was a supporter then and later in life, although two years ahead of me.

The Head Master held soirees from time to time, and it was a great privilege to be invited to play in these. I also remember giving at one of these the one and only performance of a double-reed sextet that I had composed – three oboes, two cors anglais and a bassoon – a rich sound.

Claude Taylor arranged that I should join the Slough Philharmonic Orchestra, a very good local amateur (adult) orchestra, as '2nd Oboe' to his '1st Oboe'. This was also an inspirational experience where I had not only the great privilege of working and performing with talented adult orchestral musicians, but also the experience of playing many important works in the orchestral repertoire. I particularly remember playing in the orchestra for Dvorak's New World Symphony – many people's favourite

However, the one person whom I look to as the most influential in my musical life, then and also in the rest of my life, was Dr Sydney Watson.

I had first worked with him as a young chorister in the Eton Chapel Auxiliary Choir until my voice broke. Then, after I started making a musical name for myself as an oboist, I came to his attention as a potential musician.

I had put myself in to do Music O-Levels, which (as I hadn't quite grasped at the time) entailed an important Theory element, similar to ABRSM Grade 5. One summer's day, I encountered Dr Watson, about two weeks before the exam, and he said: "You are down to do O-Level Music – have you any knowledge of Music Theory?" "Not really", I said to him. "Then I must teach you", he said. So, over the next days up to the exam, I visited his house for a crash course of 1-1 lessons when we could find the time, and had no difficulty with the exam (which had a practical instrument element that also went very well).

After that, Sydney Watson took me on as a one-to-one pupil – almost as a personal project – studying music theory, harmony and composition, and he also gave me organ lessons. I do not know whether he charged my parents for this special educational opportunity that has served me well during all my subsequent musical life. It was a friendship.

By coincidence, while I was off doing two years National Service after leaving Eton, Dr Watson moved to Oxford to be Organist and Director of Music at Christchurch, which is Oxford's cathedral, and our friendship continued when I arrived at Oxford in 1957. Sidney was, as a guest, the organist at Woldingham Church for my marriage to Margaret-Anne.

My musical life at Eton was crowned by winning the School Music Prize for 1955, and by that time I had many musical friends in the school. After my last term, there was another memorable event – a friend of mine was a nephew of Rolf Gardiner who ran a summer residential festival – the Springhead Festival, and I was invited, and worked for two exciting weeks



with about 60 young fellow musicians, culminating in a concert in which we performed choral and orchestral works, including a concerto (with orchestra) for flute and oboe for which I was one of the two soloists.

There were some sad moments in those days. My much-loved Grandfather and Grandmother both died. Another sad occurrence was the death of a musical friend of mine, Edward Cartwright. The Cartwrights were an eminent Oxfordshire family and lived in their ancestral home Aynho Park, a big Jacobean property. I saw Edward not only at Eton, but also in the holidays, as we did not live far away. Edward and his father were both killed in a terrible car crash.

His mother had to sell the property, which became a care home. There I visited Sydney Watson, a resident there after he retired, as his life subsided into slow decline and death from Alzheimer's. He did not recognise me.

The last days of this era in my life were marked by two important events: the birth, in Bourton House, of my youngest brother Charles, 18 years my junior.

The day after Charles' Christening, I followed the directive by Her Majesty to report to Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth, to start two years of National Service in Her Majesty's Navy. The next episode will start there!

## **22 National Service in the Royal Navy 1955 part 1**

My youngest brother Charles was born at home in Bourton House on 20 July 1955 (in those days, being born at home was quite usual – I had been born at home at 14A Westbourne Terrace, Paddington, as had my big brother Nick). Charles was christened on Sunday 4 September 1955.

The following day I had instructions from Her Majesty's Navy to present myself to Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth, to start two long years of National Service. So I paid a fond farewell to my dear family at Moreton-in-Marsh station, and set out all on an early train, full of apprehension at a long life-journey into the complete unknown. I cannot remember the train-journey itself, but when I arrived at the barracks, I found myself just one of several hundred brand new Navy recruits. They came from all over the country, and from all backgrounds; regional accents were the norm, and my 'upper class' accent stood out like a sore thumb (although there were a few young men with similar middle-class backgrounds). I soon earned the nickname Clarence, which I didn't much like. My family were liberal-minded professional middle-class, and I had not learned snobbery at Eton. I didn't like the implications of the label; but it was there and it stayed, and I had to live with it.

We recruits were organised into 'messes' of perhaps 30, and there I began a process of social assimilation with boys of my age from all walks of life. They were young people just like me, generally friendly and tolerant, and I have no negative memories, although some of the tales they told about their home lives, particularly about relationships with women, were jaw-dropping – experience beyond my furthest contemplation.

At Victorian barracks, we were given full indoctrination into the way in which the Navy worked. I was interviewed for the possibility of a National Service Commission, but I was not accepted at that stage; it was nearly a year later before an opportunity to become an officer came again in my direction. So there I was, Ordinary Seaman Anthony Hodson, 954534. We were issued full naval kit, which included uniform and other items of clothing for work and ceremonial occasions, new polished shoes, a hammock pack that accompanied me everywhere, and other important things, like a 'housewife': a little bag full of things like needle and thread, for making repairs to one's clothes and uniform. I remember a lecture on personal hygiene, which was particularly aimed at people who had never owned a toothbrush in their lives. And there was 'square-bashing'.

We were also trained in many aspects of seamanship, some familiar to a boy with sailing background. New, however, was serious instruction in ABCD, dealing with dangers to RN ships in warfare. 'A' stood for Atomic Warfare, and included training in radiation and radioactive fallout. This would be relevant to my first ship HMS Diana, to which I was posted before Christmas. B stood for Biological Warfare; C stood for Chemical Warfare; D stood for Damage Control, meaning ad hoc repair of a ship damaged in warfare.

After about a month, we Navy recruits were sent to sea on HMS Theseus, an aircraft carrier converted to be a training ship. The ship set out, trainees and all, to the island of Cyprus, where we delivered army vehicles and equipment to help the army in Cyprus cope with the EOKA 1955 uprising. Theseus experiences will await the next episode.

## **23 National Service Part 2**

The years of my National Service brought me and my fellow sailors not only into active service in the Suez War on 1956, but also in geographical closeness to three other UK conflicts of the troubled time: the EOKA uprising in Cyprus in 1955, the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya in 1956, and the IRA troubles in Northern Ireland in 1956. Fortunately, I (and my ship) had no actual brush with the latter two – but we were in the Suez war.

There was a little more involvement with EOKA, since the training ship HMS Theseus, on which I served as a trainee in November 1955 carried military supplies to the British Army contingent deployed to Cyprus to try to control the Cyprus conflict, as well being the home and classroom for a few hundred trainee sailors. Needless to say, we young sailors had no idea of what the Cyprus conflict was all about, except that we had to take vehicles etc. to Famagusta, southern Cyprus. See the commentary article on page 61 for a summary of a now little-known (but still simmering) conflict.

HMS Theseus was a retired aircraft-carrier, completed just after the 1939-45 war, with some distinguished service to her credit, including having been the flagship for the British Pacific Fleet, based in Singapore in 1946-7. She served in the Korean war from 1950-1952, when she returned for flagship duty in the Mediterranean.



In about 1955 she became a training ship. The aircraft deck was filled with 'messes', each in the form of a hollow square, one for each group of trainees. The walls of the messes were built from aluminium personal-kit lockers, in two levels. Each trainee had his own locker that stored all his clothes and all other personal possessions, except from his

canvas hammock and bedding, which formed a big sausage when tied up properly, and stored in the mess. I think that the mess itself contained frames from which we slung our hammocks to sleep in at night - we each had to get used to sleeping in a banana shape that made it not easy to turn over at night. The doors of each sailor's locker were on the outside of the square mess-wall, so one had to dress and undress without any privacy, in the passageways between messes. The lack of privacy was occasionally abused, but fortunately not very often.

By day, there were classroom lessons for everybody, including those ratings more specialised than seamen (which most of us were). The term 'rating' denoted non-officer-ranks, and included, for example, 'stokers' who attended to a ship's engines, electricians and other 'artisans', and included a special clerical specialty, the 'coders', who helped maintain secret communications. I, like most of the trainees, was just a 'seaman' rating.

When I later joined my ship, I was able to take on a seaman-specialty of 'Radar

Plot' rating. This entailed taking radar information from a glowing radar screen on which the locations of other ships or aircraft could be detected as moving dots. This information had then to be noted accurately on a Perspex screen or mechanical table that would be viewed by officers. To avoid obstructing the view of this information, it had to be transcribed – in mirror image for a vertical Perspex screen, or upside down for a level mechanical table. This required learning how to read and write text upside down and back-to-front. Being a radar-plot rating was a little cushy, since watch-duties were taken within the ship's bridge, where the radar screens were, and not on the ship's deck, where it could be very exposed – wet, hot or cold. But all of this applied only when I later joined HMS Diana.

We must have been busy students on our trip to the Mediterranean. We stayed for a night or two in Gibraltar, and then began the long run to Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean. I remember the sea as absolutely calm and waveless under a warm autumnal sun.

We arrived at Famagusta, in Cyprus in mid-November, and had the opportunity to bathe off the ship's boats near the beach. A day or two later, we swam off the carrier itself in mid-Mediterranean - with 1000+ feet of water between us and the seabed (with the ship's boats to hand just in case).

A few days later, we arrived at exotic Tangier, with its suqs and other attractions for sailors, many of which were of a bawdy-or-worse nature. I can assure my readers that the latter did not attract me, but some of my fellow sailors saw them, and some even felt ashamed at having done so.

What I did do was to buy a rather pretty little marijuana pipe at one of the suqs. I had no intention of ever using it with real 'hash', but I did try it out back in England with herbal tobacco (a bit like smoking a bonfire). I should explain that, when one joined the services at that time, everybody was offered cheap cigarette vouchers -and, indeed, were encouraged to do take the option, perhaps to sell on to smokers (and perhaps to fall into the habit). Refusing the option was one of my best life decisions, and I have never smoked cigarettes. Perhaps my parents experiment with smoking in Episode 6 of this tale was the deciding factor? (See Parish mag for August 2021, page 17.)

The cheap tobacco was perhaps important because of low wages – a trainee's wage was only 28 shillings (£1.40) per week. The low cost of fags was matched by the low cost of beer - in the NAAFI bars 2d per pint (less than 1p) was the going rate. But, although we did not have much pocket money, there were few things to splash out on, other than beer, fags (if one smoked, as most did then) and NAAFI snacks. That is, until one went ashore. NAAFI ran subsidised shops, bars and recreation places.

After Tangier, HMS Theseus stopped again at Gibraltar, built as a sprawling town below a high rock that overshadowed a big harbour and naval base, strategically located at the narrow (only 8 miles) gateway to the Mediterranean. There a good proportion of my savings went to the purchase of two nicely carved wooden elephants for my dear late parents. I still have them now in the hall of my house.

HMS Theseus then returned up the Atlantic and back to Portsmouth. The weather off the Bay of Biscay was atrocious, with rain and gale-force winds, and even an aircraft carrier like HMS Theseus, a large vessel, heaved and pitched.

On return, we were deemed to have finished our training, so after a few days in barracks in Portsmouth, we were instructed to report to the Naval Base near the ship that we would serve on.

So just before Christmas 1955, I was dispatched to Devonport, near Plymouth, and spent a few days in Devonport Barracks, before joining my ship, HMS Diana, which was at the time in dry-dock in the Devonport Naval Shipyard. Ordinary Seaman Anthony Hodson was about to have real ship-experience, on a ship destined for a remarkable atom-bomb experiment and other adventures.

*See all episodes at <https://fosmw.com/parishmag/an-interesting-life.pdf>*

## **Commentary: EOKA and the Cyprus Uprising**

The Cyprus uprising was the result of a late-British-Empire adventure, that began in 1878, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, when the island was ceded to the British Empire.

The population was part Turkish-speaking (mostly in the North) and part-Greek speaking (mostly in the South). Huge tensions between the communities were caused, fuelled both by Greek nationalists (Enosis) desiring union with Greece, and by Turkish nationalism (ENOSIS) desiring union with Turkey, the latter motivated in part to better protect the Muslim population.

By the mid 20th century, Britain found government difficult, even with the Turks being less troublesome, because they valued British peace-keeping.

When EOKA (originally a youth movement wanting ENOSIS) became active (under Col. Grivas and Archbishop Makarios) with bomb attacks, British authorities recruited many Turks into the police to use them as an easier-to-motivate defence against the Greeks (who resented this), although this tactic was regarded with suspicion by Turkey.

EOKA went underground, with successful propaganda campaigns and acts of terrorism, some committed even by young children, while the British forces

conducted ineffective searches and military operations (even with the help of the equipment that HMS Theseus had brought). As a result, the British are alleged to have tolerated, encouraged or even practised some very unsavoury actions such as torture. Resulting litigation continued well into the 21st century.

Eventually, in 1959 the British decided to leave Cyprus, creating a republic, in a short-lived compromise between the two sides.

This soon collapsed in violence resulting from extremists from both sides being still armed and active. Archbishop Makarios then declared a new Greek republic, objected to by Turkey, who invaded the north in 1974 and again in 1975, securing this time 37% of the island of Cyprus.

Cyprus is still nominally a single republic, but the Turks have established the north-east of the island as the de facto 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus', which is only recognised by Turkey. Cyprus is thus still in a messy and unsatisfactory situation.

## **24 HMS Diana**

"Eric, OR 'Little by little" is the title of a moral Victorian novel, telling the story of a boy who fell progressively into error, small step after small step. Four steps of my smoking career seem similar, with catastrophe to follow.

[1] In the last episode, I bought a marijuana pipe in Tangier. [2] Back in England, I tried herbal tobacco, but the pipe's bowl was so small and unsatisfactory that [3] I bought a standard tobacco pipe, and smoked herbal tobacco in it. Then, on the way home from Devonport Barracks for a short Christmas holiday at home at Bourton House, in mid Gloucestershire, [4] I decided to try the 'real thing' (tobacco not marijuana). The first pipeful of 'St Bruno Grand Flake' tobacco was enjoyable, and, having changed trains at Gloucester, I tried the second pipeful, but then [5] Disaster - soon I felt sick, then very, very sick. The train carrying me was on the now-extinct Beeching-cut Gloucester-to-Kingham line, with unconnected cabins and no toilets, so this part of the story was a bad experience, hanging out of the window for much of the time. It took me 3 days in the comfort of my own home to feel myself again, and I never smoked even cigarettes again. (Except when generously offered a fag by a drunken shipmate, not to be gainsaid!)

The Christmas holiday was soon over, and it was back to Devonport Barracks for a few days.

On New Year's Eve, I and my kit were dispatched to join HMS Diana, and real naval adventures were to begin.

HMS Diana was a Daring Class Destroyer, 390 ft long, a large 'destroyer' based on a design for the Pacific war, although she was only commissioned in 1954, long range and fast. In sea trials, she had reputedly reached 45kt – more than 50mph – although in my time, I think that 35kt was the highest (about 45mph). She also had 'cruiser armament' - two big guns pointing forward, and one backward. There is a useful Wikipedia article on HMS Diana.

When I joined her, she was being prepared for the task of monitoring fallout and its effects for the Montebello Atom Tests in May and June 1956 (codenamed Mosaic 1 and Mosaic 2), so she was in drydock in Devonport Dockyard, and would stay there until recommissioned on 28 February. Her ship's complement was being put together and, at a later date, she was joined by a scientific party of senior scientists who were responsible for the experiments that she would carry out.

Life in drydock was relatively quiet, but there were tiresome aspects, not least that there were no toilet or showering facilities on board. We had to go to an onshore facility, which was a cold wet walk in poor weather, even to satisfy a middle-of-the-night need. There was a special separate toilet unit on-shore for when one needed to sit down. This comprised a long trough, with toilet seats in cubicles above it. From time to time, the trough would be flushed from a large tank, causing a tidal wave to rush down it, and it was wise to stand up when you heard the flush starting. The cubicle doors were not high, and the weather came in from above. It was a cold winter in early 1956, and if it had snowed (as it did), one had to flick the snow off the toilet seat into the trough before one sat down.

The scientific party arrived shortly before we were commissioned, and, having specialised in Physics at school, I volunteered to join it as an unofficial helper. This was agreed, and I spent as much time as I could, when ships duties (mostly concerned with cleaning) were done. I also had training for the Radar Plot work described in the last episode.

After commissioning, HMS Diana carried out some short sea-cruises, during which we all sea-trained on the armaments and other aspects of a ship that would apply in a wartime scenario, as well becoming familiar with normal ship's duties and sea routines. I remember being tried out as the 'trainer' (side-to-side control) of one of the big 4.5" guns, and found that

seasickness was a real problem. I was better in the 'Ops Room', which contained the radar and other devices for navigating and controlling the ship, and which was also the place where air-to-air, ship-to-ship or ship-to-shore gunnery was directed and coordinated. This was quite a busy time.

I remember us visiting the beautiful Lulworth Cove in Dorset, which was well able, in depth and scope, to hold a ship as big as HMS Diana.

At last, in March 1956 we set sail for Australia, with several stops on the way. I do not remember the voyage from Devonport to Gibraltar, as I was ill all the way, in the ship's sickbay with a serious flu attack; but I have a vivid later memory, after Gibraltar, of entering the Grand Harbour of Valletta, Malta and being stunned by the beauty of the place.

From Malta, we sailed through the Suez Canal. This entailed stopping at moorings at the half-way point to allow the northbound ships to pass safely by the southbound ones. Picking up those moorings was a real embarrassment to Diana. The commercial vessels, with powerful winches to handle the steel-wire ropes needed to draw ships to their mooring points, soon had themselves under control, despite a near-gale-force wind across the canal. We poor sailors, not motorised winches, were the rope handlers on a Ship of the Line, and we literally had hundreds of seamen struggling to apply enough pull on the steel-wire mooring ropes to draw the ship in to the assigned buoy. It took us half an hour, and gave very sore hands, to do a job that took the commercial vessels five minutes.

From Suez, we sailed along the Gulf of Suez and down the Red Sea to Aden, where we stopped to refuel. We then cruised on past Ceylon (these days it is Sri Lanka) towards the sub-tropical Montebello Islands off the northwest coast of Australia. After a short time at the islands, where, no doubt, our officers and scientists liaised with the scientists and engineers on the island who were setting up the scaffold towers on which the two atomic devices would be detonated (on different islands in the archipelago), we sailed for the major commercial port of Fremantle, West Australia, where we relaxed for a little.

Even on a routine journey, life on a warship is exhausting, particularly because of the naval 'watch system'. For periods deemed uneventful, a four-watch system is used. The ship's crew is divided into four 'watches', each of which takes its turn on-watch, giving the ship a regular 24-hour cover for normal ship-handling or other naval activities, with a break of 3 watches (for 'four watches') until watch-duty comes up again. There are



seven watches each day: the Midnight Watch (8pm to midnight), the Middle Watch (midnight to 4am), the Morning Watch (4am to 8am), the Forenoon watch (8am to 12noon), the Afternoon Watch (12noon to 4pm), and the short first and second Dog-Watches (4pm to 6pm and 6pm to 8pm), and back to the Midnight Watch. The seven watches mean that each day, the Watches change the hours on watch-duty. If on one day, one did the Midnight Watch, on the next day one would do the Middle Watch.

Everybody had to stay awake on watch, ready for duty; and the watch-duty was imposed in addition to normal daytime work (9am to 5pm). So three out of four nights were short of sleep, and on a long journey you became dog-tired. Under more stressful naval conditions, a 3-watch or a two-watch system is applied, and, in naval action, all personnel are at their assigned action posts without respite – action-stations.

Of the three night-watches, I preferred the Middle Watch, because you had the sublime pleasure of going to sleep twice in one night – a going-to-sleep before midnight, and another going-to-sleep after being relieved by the next watch at 4am, sleeping soundly in one's hammock until the ship woke up for the normal day's activities at 7am.

We experienced all of these later in HMS Diana, but all those stories are for later episodes.

## **25 Montebello atom tests ('Mosaic' tests, 1956) Part 1**

What was it like being on the lower deck of Her Majesty's Navy? By March 1956, when HMS Diana was commissioned, I had experienced six months of a new social experience. Although there had been some bad moments that had nothing to do with social 'status', I was comfortable and generally happy to be 'one of the lads'.

And, in a naval messdeck, where there is little privacy, I had been accepted as such - as 'Clarence' with my 'posh' accent and all. In any random section of society, one will probably find the same mix of intelligence and decency, as well as of the opposite, and in the 30 people that shared my messdeck towards the 'stern' (rear end) of HMS Diana, virtually all were of the former. I just got on with whatever were my social and mess-related duties (e.g. washing up in a rota after meals and keeping the messdeck clean and tidy), and grew to like and appreciate my companions, who were about half-and-half national-servicemen like myself. I remember only one or two instances of overt dislike shown to me. The messdecks were cramped - at night they were completely filled from above chest level by sleeping

sailors, jostling in their hammocks with just a few inches between one sailor's hammock and the next. There was no sensible alternative to embracing a peaceful and cheerful acceptance of how things were.

There was a strong musical presence on the ship, and we had a Ship's Band of about 10 sailors, with a very talented leader, who did lots of ad-hoc arrangements for a slightly unconventional ensemble. Originally, with my oboe, I was the only woodwind player, the remainder being brass, but after we reached Singapore, my oboe seized up in the salt air. So Tom, our leader, said, why don't you blow this (handing me a tuba); this will allow Fred (our former tuba player) to play the trombone, his main instrument. So I did, and enjoyed the tuba - and it cropped up again in my life about 25 years later. We played at ceremonial occasions, and social gatherings for the officers when they met top people at ports visited.

But let me return to the main story, which had taken HMS Diana to Fremantle, W. Australia, for a quick relaxation for a few days.

Freemantle is the most important seaport for W. Australia, and not far from the beautiful city of Perth, on the Swan River. It was not an exciting place to visit although I am sure that good beer was available – and more. The place was memorable, though, for the two expeditions laid on for the ship's company, one to the Swan Brewery in Perth, and the second to the big oil refinery for that region. The Swan Brewery was most enjoyable - a modern plant that made a lager that was quite distinctive in taste - perhaps because of the sea-miles that the hops had taken in their journey from England's Kentish hop-fields. The tour finished with refreshments: as much Swan lager as we could decently manage. I never saw the oil refinery the next day, as there was a bus mix-up, and I had a second visit to the Swan Brewery, and I didn't complain (as perhaps some did).

We were soon off back to the Montebello Islands to take part in a test with real nuclear explosions. We had been preparing for this for a long time, now, and I had enjoyed working in the Scientific Party with the scientists.

Of crucial importance, practical and scientific, was the preparation of the ship to keep its crew as safe as possible. A ship near a nuclear explosion would risk passing through air (and perhaps rain) that had been contaminated with radioactive dust. This required that all the living and working areas other than the engine room area were maintained at a pressure just above atmospheric pressure by being filled with air passed

through filters to remove the radioactive particulate matter. In the event, this worked very well, and later warships used the technology.

Unfortunately, providing enough filtered air was not a possibility for the engine room and adjacent areas. The engines, twin 35,000HP steam turbines, were driven by oil-burning steam boilers drawing huge amounts of air through the engine room area. This meant that engine-room staff had to rely for protection on what they could wear – masks and protective clothing. No figures are available to pinpoint disastrous effects of all this, but an article currently on Wikipedia states: "Since the exposure, around two-thirds of the crew have died, and survivors attest that a variety of fallout-related diseases are responsible."

It was clear that the weather was deteriorating as we left Fremantle, and we soon found ourselves through huge seas that were the result of a typhoon (locally called a 'willy-willy' that had blown through the area). For crew members, particularly for those prone to seasickness, it was a horrible experience with the ship being thrown about all the time.

My messdeck and the adjacent one in the stern, were just over the propellers, and when the ship's bows dipped down, the stern rose up, raising the big propellers half out of the water, which they violently flailed in their half-submerged state. I was on a four-hour watch that evening, the Midnight Watch, and lost such dinner as I had been able to eat several times. Going off watch at midnight, it was necessary to leave the enclosed bridge area and go out on the stormy open deck to reach the living accommodation areas near the stern. There was no covered passageway linking them. When I reached my messdeck, having gone on watch before hammocks were set up, I could not find the physical energy to rig my hammock, so I just lay down on the deck (floor in landsmen's terms), and passed a long night being bumped up and down every few seconds when the ship's stern came out of the water and the propellers flailed.

Fortunately, the weather calmed down overnight, which was just as well, as damage had been done, fortunately not critically, and the Montebello islands were calm when we reached them.

HMS Diana had two big gun turrets near the bows, each containing 4.5in guns, quick-firing – a round every few seconds – for ship/shore or anti-aircraft combat. Their shells weighed about 80lb. The turrets were big fully enclosed structures nearly 20ft wide, and could rotate by about 220 degrees. The second turret was set on a 10ft high metal structure that

allowed it to range over the first turret. The forward wall of this structure had attached to it a big aluminium locker used to store deck equipment; this was placed directly behind the foremost gun turret.

Although it was almost completely sheltered by the turret from waves coming over the bows, the storm waves over the bows still smashed powerfully into the locker, which looked as if it had been run into by a bus. The violent ship's motion had also dislodged anything that had not been fastened down adequately. The bridge area, behind the second gun turret had a room perhaps 10X20ft that was made into the scientists' laboratory - and it was here that I had spent a lot of time with the Scientific Party helping put together small electronic devices to perform recording functions.



With acknowledgements to Twitter #OnThisDay 14 May 2021

In those days, much of the electronics used 'thermionic valves', and these used 'accumulators' - small lead-acid batteries that powered the glowing cathodes of the valves. (Transistors had only recently been invented, so domestic radios of the time also used accumulators and well as special graphite/zinc batteries that provided high voltage ('high tension') for the

valves. Unfortunately, in the storm, quite a few of the accumulators had been thrown about and broken, so our precious laboratory was a mess, running with sulphuric acid, and everything had to be cleared up before the atom tests began in a short two days' time.

HMS Diana's primary task for both of the two atomic explosions of the tests codenamed Operation Mosaic was to sail through the fallout cloud when it reached sea level. Her task for the experiment was to evaluate the effectiveness of a pre-wetting system in preventing excessive contamination and in helping cleanup afterwards. Hoses were rigged up over and above areas of the ship that would need to stay relatively decontaminated, the idea being that contaminated droplets would not stick and dry onto a pre-wetted surface. The pre-wetting system continuously pumped seawater until measurement showed that contamination rates had abated.

I think that we were about 20 miles away from the first explosion, which took place on a scaffold structure on one of the islands. The test took place just after lunchtime, and those who could went up onto the ship's deck above our heads. The mess-decks themselves had only small, closed portholes that (although openable) would have been closed for all operational occasions like these.

It so happened that it was my turn in the after-lunch washing-up rota, so, arms covered with soap suds, I did not see the explosion itself. This could have been life-saving good fortune, as I was protected from the explosion and the resulting flash of atomic radiation by the ship's structure. At the time, I was disappointed, but I told myself that I would have my turn after the second test, which was to take place a month later on 19 June. Because of the weather, I missed that one too.

I completed my task and only then went up on deck to witness the mushroom-cloud spectacle, and it was just as spectacular as pictures of atomic explosions suggest. The seething head of the mushroom rose high, and the stem of the mushroom bent as the various wind-layers blew in their own direction. The mushroom soared to 21,000ft - about 4 miles high: still impressive even from 20 miles.

Many instruments were there to monitor contamination levels, and personnel in particular need of monitoring had badges with sealed-photographic-film so that their total exposure to radiation could be measured. And the ship was contaminated. But there is little more to

report at this point. After the first test, we sailed for a recovery period to Singapore, where the next episode will resume the story.

## **26–Montebello atom tests (part 2)**

Looking back at the first Montebello atom test of the previous episode, it is curious that, within the environment within which we sailors lived, everyone was so matter-of-fact about what happened. This would not have been the case for the scientists, for whom the tests were part of world politics and their professional careers. nor would it have been for the senior officers in HMS Diana and other naval vessels involved, since they carried a huge responsibility to make those tests as effective as possible, and as safe as possible, to the extent permitted by the available resources. All of the key figures in the tests would be aware of the limits of knowledge about the test outcomes, and alert to potential dangers.

For us ratings, the non-commissioned mass of the ship's crew, what we were doing was what we were trained to do, and we accepted the briefings that we were given, because they had been coherent and consistent.

So we sailed to the other side of the world for two Atom Bomb tests, and we learned the craft of being professional seamen in Her Majesty's Navy as we travelled, and we were prepared for the unforgettable sight of a real atomic explosion. And on a clear day, in the early afternoon, that first atom test took place, with a huge flash of light and radiation. The seething mushroom cloud rose, 20 miles away; it soared higher and higher into the sky, expanding as it went up, leaving a relatively thin stem below it, which was carved into a zig-zag as the differing winds at various levels distorted it. Yes, the image is unforgettable, and still in memory after nearly 70 years, even though the image of an atom-bomb explosion and its mushroom-cloud, was probably already familiar in days that never seemed so very far off from the possibility of nuclear war. Only six years later, the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world close to that catastrophe.

After the explosion, HMS Diana switched on the pumps for the pre-wetting system that was to keep the outside of the ship wet, to reduce the extent to which radio-active particles in the air adhered to the ship's surface. We found the fallout cloud, and, with all mess-decks and most working-areas locked down and fed with filtered air, we sailed through it, testing the multiple arrangements to make the ship continue to be human-habitable. When the external level of radioactivity had subsided, the pumps stopped, and life at sea resumed its normal course. Reports were written of all that

happened, and all that could be concluded from the experiments; and when that had taken place, HMS Diana sailed back to Singapore.

Today, what happened at that test, and others, has been described as an outrageous experiment. At the time, it was life as we expected it to be.

I do not recall much of Singapore at the time. The city is almost exactly on the equator, with warm and often wet weather. It was fourteen years after the city's traumatic capture by the Japanese in 1942 - "the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history" (Winston Churchill). In September 1945 Japan at last surrendered the city, amid local violence and disorder; recovery began, fed to a degree by worldwide demand for tin and rubber, although hindered by the communist-inspired Malayan war seeking independence. Singapore gained a degree of autonomy as a British Crown Colony. In the late 1950s Singapore was granted full independence.

To us sailors, it was a beautiful spot and there was no obvious sign of the difficult recovery. Our pocket-money did not run to exotic venues like the Raffles Hotel, but we enjoyed the local food, and bought trinkets from the traders and bazaars, and sailors did what sailors did. My main outlay was a cheap Japanese camera. Unable to go ashore weeks later in Penang, Malaysia, after the second atom-test, I lent my camera to a friend to take pictures for me onshore, and he dropped it. It literally fell apart, revealing the mechanism inside, which was fabricated by ingenious Japanese craftsmen from the only available resources: tin-cans that had contained food - descriptions of the tins' contents were still visible on the pieces.

I remember a cricket match arranged for our entertainment and diversion between Diana sailors - fore-decks-men vs after-decks-men, on a beautiful cricket field. After about an hour the heavens opened, and the air seemed to become 50% water – almost hard to breathe. As a place used to this kind of weather, deep monsoon ditches, several feet deep, had been dug to convey the water to the sea. In only a few minutes, it seemed, those ditches were brimming with water. A couple of hundred soggy sailors made their way back to the ship.

Soon we returned to the Montebello Islands about 1700 miles away, for the second atom test. This time, the weather was heavily overcast. The explosion was scheduled for the early afternoon, but there was no chance of seeing it. Instead, 40 miles away, we felt the deepest of sonic booms. Our task was then to find the radioactive fallout cloud as it reached the

surface, and, due to inaccurate meteorological information, we were unable at first to do so. Eventually, and after it was dark (darkness falls very quickly in those tropical latitudes), we did find the fallout, but a new problem arose.

To sample the fallout particles, the scientific party had a special instrument - a deep round metal tray that was divided up into many sector-like compartments. Above the tray was a slowly rotating mask with a single sector-like opening that generally covered all but one compartment below (except when making a transition from one compartment to the next. The rotating mask served to allow samples collected at different times to land in different compartments, so that it would be possible to measure the quantity and composition of the radioactive components of the fallout cloud at different times after the detonation of the atomic device.

The problem was that by the time the fallout cloud had been found, the rotating mask had run its course, and the instrument, which was on the ship's bows had to be reset by hand, out in the fallout cloud. The scientific party was assembled to discuss this; the professional scientists were not volunteering to do the job, so I volunteered, feeling rather heroic, and of course, aged 19, immortal. So I was dressed in protective plastic clothing and a gas-mask, given a film-badge dosimeter to record my total radioactive exposure, and out I went through a double-lock system of hatches. A bulletin was given on the ship's PA system: "Ordinary Seaman Hodson has gone out on deck to reset the scientific instruments". I reset the instrument (which I knew well, from my work with the scientific party) without difficulty, and returned to the double lock. There I was decontaminated and showered clean, and that was the end of the story. I felt that I had been professionally treated and cleaned up, and thought no more of it, other than having played a tiny, but possibly key, role in the big atomic experiment.

However, many of HMS Diana's crew were affected over the years by the radiation of the tests, particularly the engine people.



Was I affected? Not significantly, as far as I know. I am a very lucky man in many ways, and it is tempting to think that my washing-up duties at the time of the first test explosion were an amazing stroke of good luck.<sup>11</sup>

After the test, we returned to Singapore – where (in the delicate political situation on the island), and with parts of the ship still radioactive, we were not welcome in the dockyard. So we proceeded homeward, looking forward to an uneventful cruise back to England.

But that was not to be.

## **27 Homeward bound?**

With the atom tests behind us, HMS Diana started on her long journey home - a journey that proved to be far more eventful than expected. We sailed back to Singapore, where we were hoping to have some minor repairs. However, word of her atom-test mission had reached the dock workers, and the dockyard people refused to have anything to do with us. So after a day or two, on we sailed, with the ship still radioactive in places.

Life of a British warship is not like a cruise - the ship - and the ship's company - has to be ready at all times for action - possibly an emergency, and possibly hostile. Singapore and Malaysia at that time were in a very unstable state, and the 'Malayan War' was to continue as a communist-supported guerrilla war until 1960, so the tensions were there.

Fortunately, Diana had no encounter of which we were aware. All the same, we were permanently alert and on duty, and at sea this always

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<sup>11</sup> On <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/jan/06/military.nuclear> there is the following report:

"The destroyer HMS Diana was sent by defence officials into the zone of an atomic test in the South Pacific in 1956 to discover the effects of a nuclear explosion on naval vessels and their men. Of the 308-strong crew, around two-thirds have died, with survivors claiming that a range of illnesses including cancer, cataracts and lung disorders may have been caused by 'ingesting radiation'.

"Even the ship's captain, John Gower, was unhappy with the mission, writing that after sailing through the nuclear fallout he felt uneasy having to 'continue to serve in a ship, parts of which had been unacceptably radioactive'. An ardent champion for the crew members he believed were affected by the tests, Gower died in 2007 aged 95."

entailed running the watch system (see episode 24 on the January 23 edition, or in the all- episode collection noted at the end of this article). All members of the crew were 'on watch' for their assigned war-duty every 4th watch, and there were seven watches each day, whatever the day of the week. Three of the seven affected sleep - the midnight watch, 8pm to midnight, the middle watch, midnight to 4am, and the Morning Watch, 4am to 8am, and sleeping on watch was forbidden. In my case, I was assigned to radar and 'Operations Room' duties, which was always active, although often boring; but everybody on watch had to be alert..

All of this was on top of a working day. "Keep the men busy and occupied!" was the requirement. For seamen like myself (I was now an Able Seaman), this entailed a lot of work with bucket and mop or scrubber. So severe lack of sleep was always a problem at sea, and the muggy nights of those tropical latitudes did not help happiness.

That may explain why one humid morning, when I saw one of my fellow sailors, call him Fred, take the bucket that I had been using, I confronted him: "You took my bucket!", I said. "What are you going to do about it?", he asked provocatively. So I hit him.

This was no full onslaught: I struck his upper chest once, and not hard, and then with a curious sense of fairness, awaited developments for a moment. The onslaught came soon enough, and, by the time someone intervened, I had received many unstoppable blows, including to my face and lips.

Fighting was a serious offence against Naval Discipline, and we were soon both summoned to the First Lieutenant's Rounds to explain and answer for our actions. I had started it, I confessed. We were both put 'Under Punishment' for 14 days. This entailed working an extra three hours each day – an hour at the beginning of the day and two hours after normal work, and there was no shore-leave.

Those fourteen days seemed unending. Fred and I were often assigned a task to work on together - but by that time equability had returned, and we became friends to a degree.

One of the stops for HMS Diana was Penang Island, which is about 600km from Singapore – not very far, so the event must have been soon after leaving Singapore. I can still see us in my mind sailing up the narrow strait between Penang Island and the Malaysian mainland, and thinking that this must be one of the world's most beautiful places. Shore-leave was granted - but not for me or Fred. I loaned my camera to my friend

Coder Tom Rigby, to take useful photos, and, unfortunately, he dropped it, as recorded in the previous episode. So my memory of Penang is scanty.

My musical duties with the ship's band continued. As part of our duties, we provided musical welcomes and entertainment during visits to the ship by local dignitaries in places where we stopped. By that time, I was the band's tuba player, and essential for the low notes, so my bruised lips were not allowed as an excuse for not playing. I remember the pain now.

Boredom was, of course, a major factor to be countered in those days, and I did a lot of reading. Fortunately, JRR Tolkien's monumental Lord of the Rings trilogy was in the process of being published at the time, and my dear parents dutifully sent out copies to me. I loved them, although it took several readings over the years to digest the epic story in detail.

HMS Diana's next main stop was Madras, India, which was a few days sailing. By that time, I had done my sentence, and I was able to go ashore. It was a dirty and depressing city at the time, with overwhelming poverty. My souvenir was my treasured pair of small Indian drums, known as a 'tabla pair', which are used for rhythm in traditional Indian music.

More interesting was a visit to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where we moored some way up a beautiful creek near the port of Trincomalee. There was a narrow road on the waterside which had numerous little jewellery workshops, and I was intrigued to see the silversmiths at work, with big aprons to catch the smallest filings of precious metals. I bought a silver brooch for the girl I thought about at that time, Maria Taylor (Episodes 18 and 19).

We were taken on expeditions to interesting places, including the one-time capital city of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura. This was culturally fascinating, with many Buddhist temples and dagobas – rounded pyramids with a temple at the top, each said to contain a relic of the Buddha.

It was now late July 1956, and our next stop was Aden, where we were to stop briefly before returning to the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal.

Just before we reached Aden, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the President of Egypt, nationalised the Canal. What happened then is for the next episode.

## **28 – 1956 August to October in Aden**

*Continuing Anthony Hodson's 'An interesting life'. The article following on page 78 is a short brief on the Suez Canal history up to 1956.*

HMS Diana arrived at Aden, a big port near the Red Sea on the south side of the Saudi Arabia peninsula, at the end of July 1956. Now the temporary capital of Yemen, Aden was then a British Crown Colony. It is about 1,100 miles to the southern end of the Gulf of Suez, which leads to the Suez Canal. Aden was an important port for the British Empire: a fuelling station for ships sailing from Europe to India via the Suez Canal, saving a long detour round the south of Africa that could add nine or ten days to the journey. It was a big ugly town, with much poverty and deprivation.

We arrived there because it was on our way back to England via the Suez Canal. We stayed there because Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt, had nationalised the Suez Canal, and that presented a threat to British shipping and naval presence. We were to wait there in case something happened that would require HMS Diana's services as a warship.

The Ship's company were given occasional briefs by HMS Diana's 'skipper', Capt John Gower on what was going on (at least as far as he was allowed to tell us). We knew that Egypt was involved and we were made aware of Nasser as a 'baddie' who was hostile to the West. We knew about nationalisation of the canal, and it didn't take too much imagination to see that, with Egypt under Nasser the short route to Asia via the canal was threatened. Once we had arrived at Aden we simply waited for something to happen.

There were very few external developments over the long weeks— one that I do remember is meeting fellow sailors from British sloop, HMS Crane, that was then in Aden. HMS Crane, when out on patrol, was taken as an Egyptian warship and attacked by two Israeli planes using rockets and gunfire, causing casualties and minor damage. By an amazing coincidence, one rocket entered the ship at a point where there was a ventilation duct, and passed right through the ship within the duct, and out, without exploding. So we knew that this was real war, even though the attack had been from an Israeli aircraft, supposed to be 'on our side'. Our sailor friends said that Crane was "the only Navy ship with two blunt ends", having had a docking accident that had noticeably flattened its bows.

So the weeks went by. August is the hottest month for Aden, and that means very hot indeed, and it was also very humid. HMS Diana had no air conditioning, so the mess-decks were sweltering. The heat was so oppressive for the ships company that many of us developed painful skin complaints, at a time when antibiotics were not yet available.

One day, the hot sun gave way to a violent sandstorm, which created large waves even in the relatively short fetch of Aden's harbour. We were moored in the centre of the harbour, and the ship's boats, which were needed to convey personnel to and from shore, were attached to a big boom that jutted out from the side of the ship. The ship's boats were moored by a short rope to rings underneath the boom. With the power of the sandstorm, the waves were so high that the boats were in danger of being smashed against the boom or against each other, so they had to be manned as quickly as possible and released to survive the big choppy waves, each for itself, in the harbour. Meanwhile the sandstorm was busy pumping red sand into every nook and cranny, and penetrating every article of clothing that it could, as well as eyes, noses, and mouths. Our clean-washed day-clothing was tinged red for weeks.

Evenings were much cooler, and there was a very pleasant bar not far from the landing place run by an English couple, which was much frequented by us sailors. There was lots of beer (and no doubt more powerful beverages) and there was a big outside movie screen on which the bar showed popular movies. I remember seeing the classic 'Ain't Misbehavin' several times (the stock of movies was quite small) and continued to enjoy it; as the heroine was a rather pretty girl it was easy to dream about falling in love.

If we had time off during the day, my favourite spot was about a mile down the Indian Ocean coast; there was a rocky shore where half-submerged rocks gave an amazing place to swim. These rocks formed wonderful habitat for amazing creatures. Skin diving with a snorkel was perfection. Very varied sea-life was there, including cuttlefish who looks at you with solemn watchful eyes while wafting themselves along with the frilled band surrounding their bodies.

There was a rumour that someone in the British government offices had been killed by a shark at that place not long ago, but, by good fortune, I never encountered it. At that age one is immortal!

August crept into September and October, and we were still waiting. So much of nothing was happening that it was decided that HMS Diana and her ship company should have a short holiday at the Kenyan port of Mombasa, 1000 miles away.

There, we were able to spend nights ashore, accommodated in big tents that slept perhaps 10 or 12 of us. Despite the 6am wake-up call, it was a

delight to be in a cooler climate than Aden, in a place where tropical beautiful flowers abounded, with a shallow coral shore that was good for skin-diving, although care was needed not to stand on a stingray. The creatures that we did not like were the giant millipede, the size of a finger, that enjoyed investigating shoes and clothing. You had to check before getting dressed. They were said to have a painful bite.

After two weeks of a relatively easy life in Mombasa, HMS Diana was summoned to return at speed to Aden: The political situation had deteriorated, and now Diana's services as a warship were required. The next episode will tell the story of what happened next, and our part in it.

### **Commentary: Origins of the Suez War 1956**

This is a summary of the political situation as it developed in Egypt, leading up to the Suez War. It is intended as a backdrop to Episode 28 of 'An interesting life '.

The 120-mile Suez Canal runs through the state of Egypt, a country with a history too complex to summarise even briefly. It stretches from Port Said, on the Mediterranean Sea, to the port of Suez on the 190-mile-long Gulf of Suez (leading to the Red Sea), across the isthmus that separates Africa from Asia

In the 16th century, Egypt was conquered by, and became a Khedivate (province) of, the Ottoman Empire, colloquially the 'Turkish Empire'— an empire that at that time dominated the east and south of the Mediterranean Sea, from Greece all the way round to Algeria.

Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, and effectively conquered it; but of course, the French were eventually defeated by England and its allies, leaving a power vacuum in Egypt. Power in the country was seized in 1805 by the Mahommed Ali dynasty, but the country remained nominally a Khedivate and part of the Ottoman empire. The dynasty developed Egypt as both a military and a relatively prosperous exporting country.

The Suez Canal was completed in 1869 under Ferdinand de Lesseps, with funding mostly by French and English shareholders, but Egypt had shares too. Egypt's economic failure in 1875 led to all the Egyptian shares in the Canal being sold to the British government, leaving the Canal to be run by the English and the French, with local military forces.

In 1914, following Egypt's attempt, under Khedive Abbas II, to support Germany and its allies, Britain removed Abbas and put his brother Hussein Kamel in place.

Kamel declared independence from the Ottoman Empire, and Egypt was declared a protectorate of the United Kingdom. Following an uprising, Egypt became independent in 1922. In 1936, British troops withdrew from Egypt, except in the Suez Canal area where they still managed the canal with France. During the 1939 war with Germany, Egypt became an important place for UK operations against Rommel, the German desert commander, although the country was nominally neutral. King Farouk was then King, having succeeded his father in 1936. He was an inept ruler, a playboy at heart, and was useless at a time when nationalism in the Arab world was becoming a very strong force that needed at best channelling.

In 1952, there was a military coup, nominally under Col. Naguib, but in fact under the leadership of Gamel Abdel Nasser, with the Revolutionary Command Council as the power base. Nasser and Naguib subsequently disagreed; Naguib was deposed, leaving Nasser as President.

A few years later, it was arranged that the USA and Britain would help finance the Aswan Dam, a key step towards flood control, irrigation, and generation of hydro-electricity. However, after Nasser made agreements with the USSR for arms and finance, and also supported communist China, on 19 July 1956 the USA and Britain reneged on the deal. So on 26 July, Nasser nationalised the canal 'to fund the dam' - he had huge popular support in Egypt. Perhaps surprisingly, the Canal's shareholders had fair compensation.

Israel had been created in 1948, to the anger of surrounding Arab states, including Egypt. From 1950, not only was the canal closed to Israel but their shipping was not allowed to proceed out of the Straits of Tiran to the Red Sea. Israel's relations with Egypt further deteriorated by 1956.

A top-secret invasion of the Canal area was planned by Israel, Britain and France (the USA was not advised), and Israel started the invasion on 29 October, followed a little later by Britain and France, and they reached the canal.

The denouement is simple to relate: the USA was furious when, unwarned, they learned of the invasion; Britain and France had been earlier warned by President Eisenhower not to invade. The USSR considered and threatened armed intervention. John Foster Dulles threatened to place

sanctions on the three parties unless they stopped hostilities. They caved in and the war ceased after only a few days. Israel did gain the opening of the Strait of Tiran; but for Britain and France, the war was a humiliation and a diplomatic disaster, and weakened ties with the USA. It also brought an end to the political career of the Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden.

## **29 – The Suez War**

*Continuing Anthony Hodson's 'An interesting life'. In the last episode, Anthony's ship HMS Diana was holed up in Aden, near the mouth of the Red Sea, waiting developments after Col Nasser, President of Egypt, had nationalised the Suez Canal – a move viewed by France and the UK as endangering the shorter sea-route from Europe to India and the Far-East.*

*After a short holiday for the ship's company away from Aden in Mombasa, Kenya, HMS Diana's return to Aden was made in considerable haste, as military action in the Suez Canal area became imminent*

After a two-day stay in Aden on return from Mombasa, Kenya, HMS Diana set sail for the port of Massawa, which is in Eritrea, and about half-way up the Red Sea. However, while in transit, on 4/11/1956 or thereabouts, hostilities began and Diana was summoned to the very north of the Red Sea, at the mouth of the Gulf of Suez, to join HMS Newfoundland, which had been assigned the job of escorting British-flag shipping as they hastily left the Gulf of Suez for the safer expanse of the Red Sea, out of the range of Egyptian air-strikes.

For the next four nights, HMS Diana made sorties up the Gulf of Suez, in company with HMS Newfoundland except on the last night. We were at Action Stations for the whole of this four-day period – we never got into our hammocks once – and were only able to catch hour-long naps when we had an officer's permission. Two other frigates were with us.

My Action Station was in the 'Ops Room', which was the place from which all military operations were directed. My job there, with others in the ops room team, was to watch the radar screens carefully, identify radar echoes that looked suspicious, and to notate in pencil what we saw on big mechanical tables that adjusted themselves to keep the moving ship's position clearly projected as a marker on the table. I was concerned only with surface vessels; there was another team that did similar recording of aircraft movement.

We were aware that there was Egyptian naval presence in the Gulf of Suez, including fast motor torpedo boats, and we knew that that we were in



constant danger of attack by enemy warships. So we were all nagged by fear during each of these nightly sorties. Ordinary sailors like myself only had a very filtered idea of what was going on outside the ship. Fortunately, there are other more-informed sources of information.

On that very first night, just after midnight, we were advised by the Captain that an Egyptian warship was approaching us, and before very long our guns were firing. When the shooting stopped, we understood that the warship had been sunk, and that we must stay to pick up survivors from the ship. So we were stationary in the water for about 90 minutes, and during this time I and the team were scanning for attacks from the gunboats that might suddenly appear to attack us. We picked up about 50 survivors before we returned, as dawn approached, to the open waters of the Red Sea.

The Navy News of January 2013<sup>12</sup> published an eyewitness account from a member of Newfoundland's ships company, who was aimer of one of Newfoundland's secondary armament guns. Here is a shortened account.

As HMS Newfoundland was shepherding shipping, lookouts noticed that a ship had placed itself at the tail of the convoy, and Newfoundland went to investigate, with guns trained on the 'mystery contact'. Searchlights revealed a frigate, later identified as Domiat', with upper-deck loaded with mines. A signal was made to Domiat: 'Stop engine and surrender'. Domiat did not stop, but opened fire as, immediately, did Newfoundland. Newfoundland took some damage, and a member of the ships company was killed.

Domiat then turned as if to ram, and Diana as well as Newfoundland opened fire. Domiat was soon brought to a halt and sank in a few minutes, after which Diana picked up survivors, many of whom were severely injured, and some died after we had picked them up. The dead later were solemnly buried at sea in the timeless respectful ceremony of sailors.



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<sup>12</sup> Google 'navy-news-january-2013-issue-702.pdf' and the story is on page 29.

The following night, HMS Newfoundland was attacked by a group of fast motor torpedo boats that were detected at a range of 23 miles; she turned to head south for the open Red Sea, and engaged the MTBs with all guns firing, and eventually the group of MTBs gave up.

That whole experience was a very sobering one for us. We were well aware of the conflict between war actions and respect for human life, and having sailors from Domiat on our ship, and knowing that the ship's medical team were still busy doing their best with the many injured created very mixed emotions. Ironically, Domiat had been HMS Nith, a River-class frigate, but had been sold to Egypt in 1948.

We spent three more nights helping convoy ships in the Gulf of Suez, all without incident for us, although HMS Newfoundland did have the major encounter noted above. The nights were followed by days at the north end of the Red Sea, and at the end of the fourth night, the war ended.

Our first task was to take the Egyptian sailors to a neutral port, and this was the port of Djibouti, then in French Somaliland; and we reached there in a few days, before proceeding back to Aden to recuperate. By that time loss of sleep was really taking its toll – but we just had to cope with that, knowing that lack of sleep is a common-enough state at sea, but particularly in wartime, when ultimate awareness is needed.

This return marked the beginning of a new phase in my naval experience.

It was quite difficult to be selected for officer training at the beginning of National Service, and I failed that test, probably for good reason, as I was probably 'young for my age'. However, there was a second chance at the half-way point of National Service, and this point (with all the events of 1956) was past. An initial selection took place at the 'Fleet' level, where possible officer-material was assessed by senior officers on one's ship. It is not a big community, and I had made a mark (including a black one described in the May 2023 magazine in Episode 27) for being bright and equable (despite that incident).

Looking back, I can spot two situations in which I might have been in special scrutiny. Sailors were very often assigned special day tasks. One of these for me was to be the naval equivalent of an orderly to an officer, in my case Sublieutenant Kettlewell, who was a pleasant and able young man, a career officer, only a few years older than me. Dialogue between officers and ratings was, of course, necessarily formal, so it was a very general relationship.

The other was to be assigned to help with the Officers Mess steward duties, and particularly to do the washing up after lunch – a skill that has served me well in later life. I think it was a bit of a joke putting an Old Etonian into that position, but I did my duty with pleasure, although I would have enjoyed the officers' meal menus and wine (which was not at that time a tippie on the list for most people).

Three of us were selected to go back to the UK for officer training – myself, Bruce Mandell-Lynn and Mark Hendy, both of whom I knew quite well as the only ex-public-school National Servicemen on HMS Diana. (In those days private education was a near-necessity for selection as an officer.)

After a week or so in Aden, after our return from the Gulf of Suez area, the three of us set off for the day-long flight, including stopping places (including Benghazi, Libya), in slow noisy propeller-driven aircraft – the days of civilian jet-travel had not yet arrived. We arrived at Northolt early in the morning, and then had to travel by train to Portsmouth where we would stay for a few days to take a final officer-fitness test.

We all passed, and after Christmas leave, we were sent to HMS Raleigh, a barracks in Cornwall, just across the Tamar River from Devonport and Plymouth., for four months of training – hard work, but enjoyable.

### **30 – The fall of an Upper Yardsman**

*Continuing Anthony Hodson's 'An interesting life' memoirs.*

In early January 1957, I started the course at HMS Raleigh for officer training. If I passed the examination at the end of the course, I would become a Midshipman - essentially an apprentice Naval Officer, and socially a member of the Wardroom. Back to time immemorial, there was a great divide between Officers and 'other ranks'. The latter included senior naval staff such as Petty Officers and Chief Petty Officers, and other non-commissioned officers. An officer was 'senior' to a non-commissioned officer, although the relationship was maintained in general by professional and personal respect, and formally by the rules of naval discipline, which in all armed forces meant obeying orders of one's seniors.

We were ranked Upper Yardsmen – the sailors who would be allocated the difficult and dangerous job in a square-rigged 18th-century Naval Man'o'war, of furling and unfurling the uppermost sails, requiring, among other qualities, huge courage, and a head for heights. Fortunately, these qualities were not required at HMS Raleigh - which was of course, a barracks - humorously referred to as a 'stone frigate', although this one

mostly comprised prefabricated buildings around a big parade ground. We slept in double bunks, about 28 of us per building, with two toilets/bathrooms per building - a bit oversubscribed in the mornings. The buildings were warm in winter, but the canteen was right at the other side of the big establishment, so it was usually a wet, cold walk in the Cornish winter to get to meals.

The training covered the practicalities of Navy life, including organisation, naval law, navigation and seamanship, etc. Much of this was familiar territory (at least from the 'other-ranks' viewpoint) for me and others who, like me, had already been at sea for months (my sea-life experiences are chronicled in the previous few episodes of my story). It was a pleasant and social environment, where there was no sense of being an outsider, and I became reasonably proficient at billiards on the big table provided for us.

As part of our 'sea-experience' as Upper Yardsmen, we spent two weeks on HMS Grafton, a brand-new anti-submarine frigate based in Portland, and this included a day in a submarine. We gained an unforgettable flavour of cramped sea-life without sight of the sea, although any sense of danger is put to one side. They say that smell is a memorable sense, and I remember a pervading smell of old cooked cabbage.

Of course, in our Grafton fortnight, we were observers in a working ship, and this was frankly boring. Unfortunately, back at Raleigh, I was overheard by an officer making a comment to that effect. As part of the way-of-life, we maintained a personal 'log'. amounting to an essay submitted weekly. I earned another few black marks by writing for preference about technical things, such as the way in which a ship's gyro-compass worked, and was told off for writing about 'indigestible technical stuff'. (I do, however remember writing a genuine appreciation of the 'jack tar' friends that I had made in my 'lower-deck' experiences on HMS Diana.)

My divisional officer told me that I was the most stubborn person that he had ever met. At the time I had no idea what to do about this, while recognising that stubbornness was something of a Hodson 'family trait', perhaps enhanced by a somewhat impaired social life as a boy.

Many years later, by which time I had been successful in my career, a friend and colleague had the guts to say to me: "The trouble with you, Anthony, is that you are convinced that if you argue long enough, we will come round to your way of thinking!" Wham!! An object lesson that I could do

something about - and have acted, or at least tried to do, with that message forever lurking in my mind. Perhaps close colleagues will smile?

I did well with the final exams of the Raleigh course in early May 1957 but, when the results came in, I was told that I had 'failed', and would return to the Lower Deck. Determined not to be devastated by the blow, and with the resilience that I had learned in my young life, I insisted on joining the celebratory booze-up of my successful peers (and they accepted it). This was the only occasion of my life on which I got really drunk.

The following morning, I had to get up early, a truly sobering moment, to be taken at 8am by naval ferry across the Tamar River to Devonport Barracks, to serve out the remaining few months of my National Service.

Making the best of things, as I hoped, I applied to join the Barracks Band as a tuba player, and was accepted: This was an exciting time to play with them, as the band was working towards playing at the celebrated Royal Tournament that took place each year at Earls Court (though I had arrived too late to be included for that). I requested my new Divisional Officer to put me down to stay at the Devonport barracks for my remaining months in the Navy to play as a full member of the Band, and he readily agreed.

So it was another shock, three days later, to receive a drafting notice requiring me to report within 24 hours to HMS Whitby, based at Londonderry. My divisional officer apologised, saying he had thought it unlikely that I would be drafted to another ship, so had not put in my request. Unfortunately, the Navy Computer had selected me to join HMS Whitby, and there was nothing that could be done. So off I went to that dreary and tense town, only to find that HMS Whitby was away for a few days. I had to wait it out in a services hostel until she returned.



HMS Whitby was a new anti-submarine frigate, commissioned in 1956. This was at the peak of the Cold War, and defence against Soviet

submarines was a major military strategy. Russian warships would need to traverse the GIUK Gap (between Greenland, Iceland and the UK) to reach the main Atlantic Ocean, and Britain's main role in this area was anti-submarine warfare.

According to Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GIUK\\_gap](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GIUK_gap)), 'The GIUK gap ... became the focus of naval planning in the 1950s, as it represented the only available outlet into the Atlantic Ocean for Soviet submarines operating from their bases on the Kola Peninsula. NATO worried that if the Cold War turned 'hot', naval convoys reinforcing Europe from the U.S. would suffer unacceptable losses if Soviet submarines could operate in the North Atlantic. The United States and Britain based much of their post-war naval strategy on blocking the gap, installing a chain of underwater listening posts right across it during the 1950s – an example of a 'SOSUS' sound surveillance system. This deployment of sonar surveillance in the gap, and elsewhere, did successfully hamper the Soviet Northern Fleet's ability to deploy its submarines without detection.'

So when HMS Whitby arrived back, this was the ship's main task, patrolling the immediate Atlantic area, and training on ASDIC (sonar) equipment for submarine detection, in company with British submarines. Soviet submarines were due to be nuclear powered, so training for that eventuality was part of the job. Of course, this fitted in with my previous Radar Plot specialty on HMS Diana, and the tale will be continued in the next episode.

### **31 – Atlantic submarines and Malmö**

*In the last episode, Anthony Hodson's hope for a musical end to his time as a National Service sailor was dashed by his being posted to Londonderry to join HMS Whitby, an anti-submarine frigate.*

I enjoyed my time on HMS Whitby. By this time, social life on the 'lower deck' had no tensions, and the daily routine was relatively uneventful. The ship spent most of its time docked in the shipyard on the river Foyle in Londonderry, either preparing for its work of detecting suspicious submarines out in the Atlantic, or, for two days at a time, out in the Atlantic actually looking for enemy submarines – these were simulated by real British submarines pretending to be enemy ones, as practice for reality.

At that time, nuclear submarines were not yet deployed by the Russians – or by us either. Such submarines are able to travel at high speed (over

30 kts) for long periods of time underwater, so in order to have submarines for us to practice on with these characteristics, the UK had built two experimental submarines, HMS Explorer and HMS Excalibur, comprising the Explorer class. These used HTP (hydrogen peroxide) as an oxidant for diesel-oil-powered steam turbines that, as a consequence, did not need oxygen from the atmosphere. These submarines were very fast, and could stay running submerged for some time. But they did leave a trail of exhaust bubbles on the surface – rather a ghostly effect.

HMS Excalibur was the submarine that we worked with, and I think that our tests were successful, but I clearly remember an incident that underlined the dangers of the unstable and difficult-to-manage HTP oxidant.

After trials out in the Atlantic one day with HMS Excalibur, we were steaming in HMS Whitby to Campbeltown, our Scottish destination for the night, and HMS Excalibur was on the surface, a couple of miles behind us, just entering the sea-loch up which the town lies. Suddenly we saw a great mushroom cloud rising over where Excalibur had last been seen - a vivid memory indeed. We spun round at full speed, and raced to the spot where Excalibur was, expecting disaster and tragedy. To our relief, the submarine was intact on the surface. Her skipper advised us that: “a piece of equipment had got rather hot, so we pushed it over the side.” What's an example of British understatement! But what a great relief, after dreading a tragedy.

There is a short but interesting article on the Explorer class submarines at <http://rmsubs.co.uk/boats/subs/explorer-class.html> and this will enlighten readers on the HTP-based hazards faced by the crews of HMS Excalibur and HMS Explorer – the latter became comically known as HMS Exploder because of the fireballs and explosions – fortunately not seriously dangerous – that these ships had to face as a result of their dependence on hydrogen peroxide. The article quotes one RN submariner as saying: “I think the best thing that we can do with peroxide is to try to get it adopted by potential enemies”. The chemical is, of course, the same as what is used, in weak solution, as a hair-bleach.

We spent a lot of time tied up at the dock in the River Foyle at Londonderry. This was mostly without incident, as, with the troubles on, we were not allowed outside the dockyard in uniform. There was, however, a useful source of beer. There was a happy moment for me when another naval vessel tied up alongside, and there on it, was Mark Hendy, my one-

time HMS Diana friend and shipmate. He had successfully passed through the Raleigh course, and was now a midshipman on a real ship. We had a happy evening ashore together, in mufti.

Soon after National Service ended, I would be going up to Oxford to read mathematics. I would have preferred physics, my best subject at school, but was over persuaded by my big brother Nick, who had just finished his own Oxford reading mathematics. So I spent a lot of spare time on HMS Whitby on mathematical revision, and particularly enjoyed 'Electricity' by Oxford professor Charles Coulson, a modern mathematical text with huge insight into a branch of physics, with which I had struggled using a much older textbook in Eton days. At Oxford, I attended his excellent lectures.

The time on HMS Whitby event with greatest long term effect for me was the ship's courtesy visit to Malmö in Sweden. This port city, almost opposite Denmark's capital city Copenhagen, is Sweden's third largest city, and was blessed at that time with the largest and most versatile theatre in Europe. (These days, there is a very long road bridge crossing the sound between Denmark and Sweden, near Copenhagen and Malmö.)

After an uncomfortable sail through the cross-seas of the Skagerrak and Kattegat, which separate Sweden from Denmark, we arrived at Malmö where we were to represent the Royal Navy for a courtesy visit coinciding with a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's nautical skit HMS Pinafore, a light hearted tease on Victorian attitudes to the Navy and life at sea.

We were shown around the theatre in detail, and, although we did not see the production, the cast entertained the ship's company by putting on a little beer-party (below).



Perhaps influenced by the beautiful leading lady of the show, just behind me in the photo, I fell in love with Sweden – and Scandinavia, and in later years would visit Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland on many enjoyable occasions, on both business and pleasure.

*The following is a re-write dated 15/9/23 correcting the events leading up to Oxford.*



On 2 August my National Service was over at last: I went back to our family home, Bourton House, to recover and prepare for university at Oxford. To put a little money in my pocket, my father organised a few weeks of holiday job in London at Lazards Bank. This was an interesting work experience, in the City of London, where many parts were still flattened by wartime bombs.

Lazards had no clear idea of what a mathematician would do, and set me to study predicting stock values based on trends. There were no computers then - analysis was by hand-calculator, and I made no major breakthrough – but I did invent a useful gadget to compute ‘Yield to Redemption’ – a figure evaluating average income for a government bond.

Then I went to Oxford – for a major new phase in life.

*The next episode will cover Oxford years.. All episodes are in the text of <https://fosmw.com/parishmag/an-interesting-life.pdf>*

### **32 Oxford life Part 1**

*In previous episodes of his memoirs, Anthony comes to the end of an incident-laden two years of National Service in the Royal Navy, to start university life in Balliol College, Oxford.*

I arrived at Balliol College, Oxford to start my 3-year undergraduate course in mathematics in late September 1957. It was strange after the Navy, but not daunting - I think that coping with the life experiences of the past two years had rid me of that possibility, and I felt confident that I could now pursue the intellectual challenges for which I had been preparing in my school years. What I had learned mathematically at Eton soon came back.

There is a big difference between university maths and school maths, although the first year led to an exam called 'Honour Moderations' that was both an extension and a philosophical underpinning of school maths. At its heart was the practical mathematics represented by trigonometry and calculus. I knew most of this, and was helped when needed by my ‘tutor’ Prof. Jack de Wet, who was charming, and modest in his own great achievements as a leading educationalist in the daunting mathematical world of Quantum Physics. At the same time, I was introduced to the strange world of abstract algebra, and would continue in my second and third years on this rarified topic. I did very well in my 'Honour Mods' exam in June 1958.

Abstract algebra uses tightly defined jargon in hilarious gobbledy-gook to non-mathematicians. It is the antithesis of arithmetic and numeracy. For example, the course book that I used then states as the very first theorem on 'Group Theory': '*A transformation  $\varphi: S \rightarrow S$  is one-one if and only if it has a right-inverse; it is onto if and only if it has a left-inverse*', a statement incorporating seven different formal concepts (underlined). I can still understand this elementary theorem, but only after serious mental effort, although it can easily be demonstrated by simple diagrams.

Elaboration of this mathematical world is clearly outside the scope of these memoirs, but it is a curious fact that the branches of mathematics are linked with each other – and with aspects of the real world – in relevant ways that are quite unexpected. Group Theory, the mathematics of symmetries and permutations, is for, example, at the heart of the theory of peals for tower-bell ringing.

I never regretted having gone through the daunting intellectual challenges of abstract mathematics, as I gained great confidence in problem-solving in my career, even though my understanding of the concepts of abstract mathematics quickly died when I finished Oxford and went to work in the aerospace industry. So I will leave it at that, to turn to Oxford life.

First, a brief update on the family situation. At this time, my father Harry Hodson was at the pinnacle of his Editorship of the Sunday Times, an influential and distinguished post that he would continue to hold until 1961. 1957 saw the Wolfenden report, which stemmed from my father's ground-breaking leading article in the Sunday Times in 1955 (viz. Episode 19), and his invitation to Lord Wolfenden for a follow-up article.

Harry Hodson has been described as 'the last of the gentleman editors', a pertinent assessment as the Sunday Times would shortly be acquired by Roy Thompson, a hard-nosed Canadian entrepreneur with a keen interest in bottom-line profit through more edgy, more speculative journalism.

In May 1957, my sparky younger brother Daniel, now 13, had won an Eton Scholarship in May, and in September started his Eton life in 'College', the residence of Eton's foundation scholars - King's Scholars. My youngest brother Charles was a precocious 2-year-old. "Why do there be [sic] fences [pews] in churches, Mummy?" he asks, then answering himself: "to prevent all the people from going far away". So that left my mother alone with Charles, with Petra the cook/housekeeper in Bourton House in Gloucestershire for much of the term-time. She had local friends, and was

involved with the village, but she must have been hankering for a return to living in London, which took place in 1958, about half-way through my Oxford career.

I will leave my big brother Nick, now 23, until the next episode.

University academic life requires a lot of hard work if one is to get a good degree. Mathematics is certainly demanding, but not having to write essays, as was demanded of nearly all my friends (non-mathematicians), did leave me time for friendships, social life and even romance.

When I had left for the Navy, I still had romantic thoughts about Maria Taylor (Episodes and 18 and 19), although no opportunity for a girl-friend relationship had ever been possible in those years. In Trincomalee I had bought Maria a silver brooch. When I reached Oxford. I learned that she was taking a secretarial course in Summertown, North Oxford, and one day, I decided to bicycle there and perhaps spot her. By chance, I did, and went up to her. She must have understood my romantic attitude, but, coming from a direct Yorkshire family, told me that “there were plenty of other fish in the sea”. So that was that. I was very shy and inexperienced with girls, so this was not a good start to my romantic life at Oxford.

The unrequited brooch remained ungiven, and my mother thought that Petra would like it. Petra accepted it from her, but was unimpressed, and even rather cross at such a trivial gift.

Music led to another chance. Out of the blue, I received a message from a girl called ‘Tomt’, saying that she played the oboe, and had heard that I was an oboist, and could I help her, please, to buy some oboe reeds (the delicate device, made from special reeds, attached to the top of the oboe to produce the basic sound). I was charmed, and invited her to tea in my rooms. She was a delightful person, tiny, ‘up’ at Lady Margaret-Hall. She was really called Patricia, but had acquired the pet-name Tomt – after the name for Nordic sprites.

It turned out that she was the girl-friend of Micky Pery, who I had known at Eton, and liked a lot. Micky was also ‘up’ at Oxford, although I had not encountered him. So, although romance was not on, I became very much involved with Tomt and Micky and other close friends, male and female, and some became life friends. Tomt wound up marrying Micky’s brother, but tragically died in a sea bathing accident trying to rescue two children from a rip-tide.

Music, a lifelong thread, and the oboe had entered again into my life. The next episode will continue Oxford days from this point.

### **33 Oxford life Part 2**

University life is a great opportunity. Not only do you gain knowledge that will be a resource for the rest of your life, you also have valuable experiences of encounters and activities, and the making of friends. There may well be romances and more - although we should remember that nearly 70 years ago all this preceded the Pill and the resulting sexual revolution. Sex was for after marriage at those times - a rule very often broken, but with practical risk of disaster. I think that young men like myself hoped for occasions when breaking the rule became an inevitability, but I was not lucky (or unlucky) enough for this to happen. There will be no racy accounts in these memoirs.

I made some lasting friendships at Oxford, and of these, the most memorable was with Adrian Firth. I arrived at Oxford as a gauche and uncultured 20-year old, socially shy, and a little reluctant to go out and seek friends. I was fortunate not to have to take lodgings: I was allocated rooms in Balliol College itself for the first two years, extended by chance to my third and last year. College rooms were organised in vertical blocks, aptly labelled 'staircases'. Soon after arrival at Balliol, there was a knock at the door, and it was Adrian. We sat down to chat, got on well, and Adrian soon realised that there was work to be done on me!

Adrian was a good-looking young man, socially adept, very popular with girls, and an alumnus of Stoneyhurst College, which was a well-known Catholic public school, run by Jesuits. There was a strong Jesuit community in Oxford, which gave Adrian a fraternity that he immediately belonged to. He was studying 'Greats', a four-year course based on the classics and history, and was in his second year. As he had not done National Service (which could be deferred to after University), he was in fact a year younger than me.

Endless were our meetings thereafter, as Adrian gave me the blessing of being his project for becoming at least half-way cultured. We discussed religion a lot - he was (and is) a strongly religious person. We looked at art with enthusiasm, and we read poetry together (particularly Gerard Manley Hopkins). Adrian was not actively musical, as I was, but together we listened endlessly to classical recordings, and a particular composer that we chose to listen to was Jean Sibelius the great Finnish composer,

who had only recently died. On the artistic side, we studied the works of many artists, including Edvard Munch, the Norwegian 'German Expressionist' well known for 'The scream'. You can imagine that I was greatly transformed by the wealth of cultural knowledge and ideas that Adrian led me through and. although he has lived in Provence for years, our friendship remains, and I appreciate him irrevocably as an important influence in my whole life.

Oxford Music became a major part of university. My musical mentor at Eton, Dr Sydney Watson, had taken up the job of Organist and Director of Music at Oxford Cathedral, and directed the Orchestral Society, a good amateur orchestra that was not a part of the university, and when my oboe skills had returned, I joined that as 2nd oboe. Dr Watson became a personal friend. John Aris was another musical friend from Eton days, and helped me establish myself as a known musician, and this led to many opportunities, including becoming a friend of László Heltay, an ex pupil of the great Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly, who established the Kodaly Choir at Merton College. I had the privilege of playing in the orchestra under the baton of Kodaly himself, in a performance of his 'Budavari Te Deum'. Hungary had fairly recently been closed down by the USSR, so these were troubled times: László, a brilliant musician, was a refugee.

I became friends with several girls, including, of course Tomt (see previous episode), and was particularly fond of attractive and intelligent Jo Tod, dating her several times. I dreamed of going for a summer holiday with her on my motorbike, but when I suggested this, she said: "You didn't really expect me to say Yes, did you??" and I said (truthfully) "No". I wonder now at my confidence (or naivety) in even making the suggestion.

The motorbike was a core part of life just then. It was 2nd hand Triumph Terrier, a light-weight 4-stroke, in quite good order. I had yearned for a Terrier when at sea (my fellow sailors often had motorcycle mags to study), and saved enough to buy mine in April 1958. When I bought it, home was still Bourton House in Gloucestershire, but later in mid-summer, my parents moved to London. Needless to say, my parents were very concerned at the dangers of motorcycling, but reluctantly tolerated my important gain of mobility.

My big brother Nick (last encountered in 1956 in my memoirs) had given up the Merchant Navy, and started work with Atomic Power Constructions in 1957. We saw a lot of each other, and he had arranged a holiday job with his company at one point.

Nick was brilliant and able, but not one for convention, and he always had a complicated relationship with his parents. They loved him and supported him but found him difficult. His own escape outlet was staying with a farming family in Cornwall whenever he could, and he became skilled at farm business. So, one weekend in early summer 1958, he and I went off on my bike for a weekend with the Plunketts in Cornwall. On the way back to London, at about dusk, on the A30 near Basingstoke (there were no motorways then), a car drove out of a side road onto the A30 just as we came by, and we hit it. The motorcycle was a write-off, Nick landed badly and was unconscious with concussion, and I had a broken thumb. We wore helmets and were lucky to survive.

At the local cottage-hospital, to which we were taken by ambulance, Nick soon recovered, and they wrapped up my hand and told me to see a doctor in 2 weeks' time. When the doctor unwrapped my hand, the thumb-bone in my hand had nearly set with an angle of about 60 degrees between the one end and the other. I exclaimed "I'm a pianist - it must be fixed" So, I had a painful procedure in hospital to rebreak and straighten the bone, which reduced the angle a lot. I did play the piano at that time, but not seriously, and I decided, next term at Oxford, that I must justify the re-breaking by taking adult-piano lessons. Adrian housed my hire-piano in his bigger room, and the tuition played a very useful part in my later musical life, although I never made Grade 8 piano (I just failed, twice).

The summer holiday was long, and Adrian and I (still in plaster) decided to use the time available go on a hitch-hiking holiday in Scandinavia, a venue inspired by my visit to Sweden on HMS Whitby. We took a boat to Gothenberg (Sweden), then hitch-hiked to Oslo (Norway), home-town of Edvard Munch (whose works we enjoyed in the museum) and spent some happy days there, staying in a youth hostel. With some difficulty we got to Copenhagen (Denmark) and (by train) to Hamburg, then home by boat.

Term came and a court case decided that the motorist who nearly wrote us off should pay us £40 for 'pain and suffering'. Nick very kindly said that he would donate his £40 to me. So I had enough money to accept when Tomt and her group of friends invited me to join them for a skiing holiday in the Christmas holidays – and spent two wonderful weeks among these lovely people in the small Austrian ski resort of Gargellen.

The scene is set for the most important event in my life.

### 34 Oxford life Part 3

Oxford was primarily a place of academic study, and the social and musical opportunities, important though they were, had to defer to that.

In mathematics, the first year's work created a foundation for the second and third years, which would lead to a BA Oxon degree (this morphed into an MA Oxon degree after four years - embarrassing to have to explain). I did very well at the Honour Moderations exam that terminated the first year, with 1st Class Honours, and moved on to serious Pure Mathematics.

Prof Jack de Wet, my mentor for the first year, gave way as my tutor to Dr (later Prof) Graham Higman, a specialist in Group Theory, an area of pure mathematics rooted in symmetry and other ideas. It brought a large volume of mathematical theory to be learned, some of it extremely difficult.

Doctor Higman was a dear man, a leader in the field and a conscientious tutor, with a sense of mathematical humour that lightened up our relationship. My careful attention to his personal tuition and attending his lectures, right up to the finals led to my leaving Oxford with a first class honours degree. For this result I am deeply indebted to Prof. Higman, even though he was said to be disappointed that I did not stay in the academic world as a mathematician. Other matters intervened.

The requirement for deep abstract thinking was a very good basis for the progression of my technical career, even though Group Theory was not related to the branches of mathematics that I subsequently used in that kind of work. What I did gain was a confidence in being able to solve mathematical and other problems, and I did encounter some quite advanced mathematics in my technical career. In later life, though, I came upon all too many problems that defied solution – my youthful optimism had to give way to practical reality and compromise from time to time.

In 1958, the year of my Honour Moderations, another important seed was sowed that, like my strong mathematical base, would have life changing consequences in later life, although totally different in nature

In 1958 I reached my 21st birthday, and that entitled me to be admitted by Patrimony as a Freeman to the Mercers Company of the City of London. My father Harry Hodson was a Mercer, as had been his father and grandfather, the main membership route for becoming a Mercer being father to son – the meaning of Patrimony – or being a close relative.

I was admitted as a Mercer by the then Master Mercer, Norman Watney, a remarkable man who, until he retired had run the huge enterprise of maintaining the rolling-stock of the whole of post-partition India, with a workforce of around 18,000.

Mercers' Hall had been bombed to the ground in 1941, and rebuilding was only completed in 1957, so I was one of the first Mercers to be admitted in the new Hall. At the time, a lot of the City of London, and the area around, was still littered with bombsites.

However, after admission, for a time the Mercers had no major impact on my life.

For many years, I was just an ordinary Mercer, progressing from Member to Liveryman; I attended many General Courts when I could; these gave news of what the Mercers had been doing, and were a source of long friendships with a common interest.

Many years later, in 2001, I became Master Mercer playing a big role in the Mercers admitting women members for the first time for 180 years. Patrimony became extended to fathers or mothers of sons or daughters, a massive change to the Company for the better.

This amazing organisation is a leader in philanthropy in London and well beyond. Its original Royal Charter, in 1403, established it as a Trade Guild with many other trades in the City of London, set up to maintain quality of the trade within a fraternity of members. Starting with the well-being of members who traded as Mercers, out of this grew philanthropic interest in the church, education, old people and social benefaction.

In recent years, the Mercers have given grants to St Mary's Church for renovation of the organ and other costs and expenses. They also gave a big grant to the Winkfield St Mary's School when I was Master Mercer, and this went towards the school's Mercer Library.

Earlier parish mags have general accounts of the Mercers Company, including the December 2016 parish mag (p18) and the July 2018 parish mag (p16). These editions can be found via the parish mag web page <https://fosmw.com/parishmag/>

Going back to Oxford days, academic work was core but my musical and social life was expanding. In the latter, I was to a small degree (through my well-connected, although not rich, parents) involved in what was termed 'The Season' – the social 'launching' of girls of upper-class background.



At that time, girls of high social status 'Came Out' by taking part in expensive balls, in which they had the opportunities to meet eligible young men. These took place from spring to autumn each year, and the process was called 'The Season'. At the beginning of the season girls were Presented at Court to Her Majesty the Queen and in May the big balls started with the Queen Charlotte's Ball. (All this stopped many years ago as inappropriate extravagance. If I had been a girl, my parents could never have afforded it.)

I did get invited to a number of these great dances, and failed to impress any girls that I met there with my modest social skills, and lack of appropriate 'small talk'.

But there was one big dance, on the fringes of 'The Season' that did lead to a very special introduction. My brother Nick had a flat in Chelsea next to a well-connected lady, Pam de Meo, who arranged her own Ball to celebrate her son Roland's 21st birthday, and many girls doing The Season were invited. Pam invited Nick and asked if he knew any other young men of suitable age to invite. Nick suggested me, so I went to this great occasion.

It was later reported that two sisters, daughters of Hazel Incledon, an old friend of Pam (who had Come Out in the same year), compared notes later in the Ball. The younger sister, Heather said "I've been dancing with an atomic scientist", and the older sister Margaret-Anne responded "well, I've been dancing with a mathematician". That was Nick and myself. I was clearly very impressed by this direct, natural, funny, easy to talk to girl and, yes, she was very pretty. Although she had been Presented at Court, at age 17 her un-sophistication matched mine!

I had noted Margaret Anne's uncommon surname 'Incledon', and on return from the wonderful skiing holiday that I had spent after Christmas (1958) with Tomt and her friends, I knew that I had to take things further. The London telephone directory had only one possible Incledon entry, so I rang this number. "Yes, Margaret-Anne was there," the voice answered, "and would I like to speak to her?" Of course I did, and we dated and got on well.

I was soon invited to spend a day with the Incledons at their house in Woldingham, a Surrey commuter village. I was met by Margaret-Anne's father Gerald, and a few minutes later arrived at Highlands, to meet the family. Gerald Incledon was a successful businessman, a man of

considerable charm who was head of the family business Incledon and Lamberts; his beautiful wife Hazel was a thoughtful and delightful hostess, and mother of five daughters. Margaret-Anne, now just 18. was the oldest. Next was Heather, quieter but practical and competent. Next was Susan aged 14, bubbly and confident. Amanda, aged 12, was introverted and complex as she approached teenage years. Moya was the baby of the family. Apart from humans, the family incorporated two dogs, several cats, two horses and a donkey.

I was warmly welcomed, particularly by Gerald, who was happy to have another male to hand. Coming from a family of four boys, a family of five girls was something of a culture shock., but I was made to feel very much part of the family, and, being practical and useful with my hands was soon helping to repair stables and catch donkeys and suchlike. All of this led to a strengthening bond with Margaret-Anne, reinforced by a shared sense of gentle humour that found fun in ordinary happenings and things.

### **35 Oxford life Part 4**

My second and third years at Balliol College from autumn 1958 to summer 1960 were full and busy, but relatively uneventful. I had a good coterie of friends, many of them were related to my active musical life at Oxford, and of course, my close friend Adrian Firth, introduced in episode 34, was a stalwart companion.

In addition to the social stuff, yes, I also did some work. I still have a letter from my father, in which he sternly upbraids me for too much socialising and not enough work, but in the event, I did get a good degree, so in the long term he could not complain too much. It is true, though, that in my finals (the closing Oxford exam) there were areas of the curriculum in which I should have performed better, with more assiduous preparation. In defence, I may record that these included topics like 'fluid dynamics', which I never encountered in my later career as a mathematician.

In music I became known as a good oboist, and was involved in chamber music, solo, and orchestral activity. Dr Sydney Watson was very much part of my musical life, with my core activity being a member (as 2nd Oboe) of the Oxford Orchestral Society, a good amateur orchestra, which he directed. Sydney had moved from Eton to Oxford during my National Service to take up the post of organist and musical director of Christchurch (Oxford) Cathedral, and this put him in the centre of 'Town' music. (The Oxford Orchestral Society was not part of the music faculty of Oxford

University itself, which had its own orchestra and other groups the direction of Prof Jack Westrup. They considered themselves very much superior).

The Oxford Orchestral Society gave several concerts a year, mostly in the Town Hall, and sometimes at other venues in the area, including schools. We performed a wide selection of excellent classical works, and we generally played to good audiences.

Choosing good pieces for schools though, didn't always work, and I remember performing Wagner's beautiful Siegfried Idyll in a local school. As the piece made its stately and romantic progression, the increasingly noisy shifting of small behinds on hard chairs could not be ignored!

On one occasion, Sydney directed a performance of the splendid but challenging oratorio Belshazzar's Feast, written by William Walton, an alumnus of Christchurch College; this was to take place in the great Sheldonian Theatre with a big choir and a professional orchestra – he deemed the Oxford Orchestral Society not good enough. Membership of the choir was by invitation or by audition only.

My bass singing voice had a good 'profundo' with a weak high register, but I wanted to sing anyway in so eminent a performance. So I presented myself to Sydney for audition. It took two minutes. "Of course you must sing!" he said as soon as I came in, and that was the end of the audition. And I did. Singing this splendid work was a wonderful experience, almost my only experience in singing in a very big and accomplished choir.

Sydney was the principal organist for main services in the Cathedral. From time to time, I attended Evensong, and afterwards would go up into the organ loft to watch him deliver his voluntary after the service. "Hello Anthony," he would say, "and what you been up to?" Playing a complex Bach fugue, with active hands and feet, he would chat on, without a note missed. That takes a musician of genius, and I have always admired (and envied) the natural way in which music flowed from him.

Sydney was a staunch friend, and played at the wedding service of Margaret-Anne and me, a few years later. My sad last memory of him was visiting him in a retirement home in Aynhoe House (already a sad place for me, as I noted in Episode 20); he had developed Alzheimer's and didn't know who I was.

Julian Silverman, also a Balliol man, was another musical friend in the Oxford orchestral society was. He was a brilliant French horn player, and

his playing may well have inspired me to suggest that my daughter Lucy, then 14, should take up the French horn (Lucy was a 'natural' at the instrument and became a professional French horn player). Julian's father, Sidney Silverman, was a well-known radical left-wing MP, and Julian himself was a strong socialist. I have always been a political centrist, and well remember the hours that we spent in the Junior Common Room, debating political issues, sometimes far into the night, with friendly fervour and with neither persuading the other. Today, friends of very different political persuasions are rare indeed.

A musical memory that I well remember was meeting the great violinist Yehudi Menuhin at a soirée in Christchurch College hosted by Prof Hugh Trevor Roper, a distinguished historian and long-term friend and colleague of my father Harry Hodson. Yehudi was charming, simple and direct, and quite happy to talk to undistinguished young men like me.

Meanwhile, my friendship with Margaret-Anne strengthened, particularly as I was well accepted in her family, and my parents, so different themselves in a similar way, accepted her, as they did more and more, as in our marriage, when she established her firm place in the family.

One day Margaret Anne said but she couldn't easily read my letters, and could I improve my handwriting, please? In those days email was decades away, and all correspondence was in handwriting.

Things were evidently getting 'serious', as I accepted her challenge, and set out to improve, quite radically, by learning from scratch a well-formed italic script. I taught myself, with determination, from a useful calligraphy textbook, and solidified the technique over the summer holidays of 1959. It slowed my writing speed a lot, but, fortunately, essays were not part of my Oxford mathematical work.

Much the family summer holiday in 1959 was spent in the harbourside town of Blakeney, near the east/west coastline of North Norfolk. This was a favourite family spot for my father and his family, who had long Norfolk connections. There were many family friends in the area, and Blakeney was not far from Holt, a beautiful little market town that was also the location of Gresham School where my father had had his secondary education (he later became a Governor of the school) – so this was familiar territory for the family.

To the north of Blakeney is a broad spit. Blakeney is connected to the North Sea by a two-mile passage from the harbour entrance at the west

end of the spit to a narrow cut to Blakeney Quay to the south-east, via two tidal lakes. The passage with the tidal lakes, which call change in size as the tide comes in and goes out, are known as Blakeney harbour. Blakeney Point is the irregular westerly end of the spit and on the south side, not far from the north-pointing entrance is an old coastguard station, which was then a seasonal café. The spit itself is a nature reserve with the biggest grey-seal colony in Europe at the harbour entrance, and it supports undisturbed bird-life elsewhere. Local small-boat companies make a living by taking thousands of sightseers to the point to see the seals.

Blakeney has an enthusiastic sailing community, as the tidal lakes give good sheltered small-boat sailing.

We used to stay in the pleasant Blakeney Hotel and it was there, that summer, that I spent enough time to lay down the basics of my new italic script.

There was one other memorable incident that summer at Blakeney. A popular sailing event that year was the Daily Mirror race. Competitors had to sail from a start near the cut leading to Blakeney Quay to the old Coastguard Station, near Blakeney point, where they would pick up a copy of the Daily Mirror and bring it back to the race's starting point. How you got from your boat to the Coastguard Station was your choice.

I entered the race with my younger brother Daniel as crew, sailing a hired twelve-foot Firefly dinghy. Fireflies were fast and fun, but skittish, and needed careful handling to avoid capsizing. We decided to go as close as we could to the Coastguard Station, beach the boat, pick up our Mirror, and then proceed back the way we came, and so we did.

As we proceeded back, Blakeney harbour extends a bit to the north, and looking in that direction I saw a hand waving out of the water and heard a cry. So we went to the rescue. I capsized the dinghy close to the person in the water, the quickest thing to do, as the dinghy floated buoyantly and would be a safe place to rest a person. I swam to rescue the person just a few yards away, and found it was a girl of about 17 or 18.

I was a strong swimmer and had learned life saving techniques as a boy at West Downs School, so I easily reached her and swam back with her to the boat, using the side-stroke method; this entailed swimming with one arm while clasping the person being rescued around the chest. When practising this technique at school, we had used another boy as the rescue. This time it was a fully grown girl.

Although that was a surprise, probably for both of us, there was no time for niceties; I brought the girl back, and she rested safely on the sail of the capsized boat. Before long, the race's Nanny Boat, which was deployed to help with emergencies, came up to us, and took the girl back to Blakeney. Un-capsizing the Firefly was not difficult, and it had self-bailing, so we were soon back to Blakeney cut and home, wet but happy.

The girl had been a competitor in the race and had decided to anchor her boat near where we picked her up, swim to Blakeney point, run to the Coastguard Station and return the same way. She developed cramp on the way back, and got into trouble, and that was when we appeared.

Back in Blakeney I met up with the girl, who was called Wendy Cherry. She thanked me and said that she would have liked to give me a Ten Shilling Note for rescuing her, but she didn't have one (10/- was real money in those days). I said it didn't matter at all and I was very pleased to have been able to help.

This incident created a deep bond in me for her, although I never met her again. She was from one of the leading Blakeney families, so, from time to time, I inquired after her with people who might know her. In due course she married a Mexican prince and went to live in that country, and I was much saddened to learn that she had died of illness at quite a young age. I still think of her.

Following that holiday, Margaret Anne and I had a date in London in early September. I proposed marriage, and she accepted me. Of course, we were not able to consider any marriage date until I was earning good money with a job after my Oxford years, but getting that job was now a priority. I decided against remaining as an academic, to Margaret-Anne's relief, who didn't fancy being married to a Don and set out to secure a good job in industry that would make ample use of my mathematical and practical skills. The next episode will tell how all that worked out.

### **36 Five sisters**

*Continuing Anthony Hodson's serial memoirs.*

My last year at Oxford University was satisfying, in that my social life was full, and (as noted in that last episode) I had proposed to Margaret-Anne and she had accepted me. Life was busy, because I had to do a lot of work to try to achieve a good degree, and even more important, I had to get a good job that gave me the prospect of married life, 'in an adequate

life-style' in due course - which meant, at the time, sometime in 1961 if I was lucky. Jobhunting and my first job is for the next episode.

Of course, my proposal to Margaret-Anne was just the first step - it was necessary in those days to get the permission of the potential Bride's father, Gerald Incledon. By this time, I had met the family on several occasions, and my practical skills had been helpful.

Gerald was the chairman of the family business, Incledon and Lamberts, manufacturers and sellers of pipes and fittings. Metal was giving way to plastic, which was then becoming the norm for cold-water plumbing and many forms of industrial pipework. The company was also a 'mini-conglomerate'. It included Ansell Jones in Walsall, who made heavy-duty pulleys for industrial and nautical purposes, and other medium-sized but low-technology products such as anchors. This was a traditional firm, successful in its way, but subsequently rendered unviable (like many other traditional Midland metal-working companies) by Mrs Thatcher's high interest-rate approach to conquering dangerously high inflation. There was also H Incledon and Co, Builder's Merchants, and, most importantly, a thriving business in South Africa and Rhodesia (as it was then), supplying pipes, fittings, valves and other engineering products to the then booming sugar industry and also to copper mining.

Gerald was a man of considerable charm, a natural and inspirational leader, entrepreneurial and with sound business instincts. He was, as a result, a very successful businessman. The Incledon business (although West Midlands in origin) was a listed public company based in London for its head office, and it had a big plastics manufacturing plant in West Drayton, near Heathrow Airport. Going into plastics was a major entrepreneurial step taken by Gerald, and was very successful.

Gerald's father Herbert was one of three brothers based in the Birmingham area, descended from West Country squires, and solidly middle-class. Herbert married Alice Shore, an accomplished



organist already at the age of 18. She was part of a big middle class extended family that included musicians, port-wine growers, and the redoubtable Florence Nightingale. Alice was pregnant with Gerald when tragedy struck: Herbert died of sepsis following appendicitis (there were no antibiotics then) leaving Alice as a single mother. Herbert's brothers were supportive and paid for Gerald's education, and in due course he joined the family firm.

When he had sufficient business experience, he was sent to South Africa to close the family business's branches there because they were failing. He found that opportunities were bountiful, and that the business in South Africa was only failing because of corrupt staff. So he fired the dishonest employees, completely turned the business round, and it became the most profitable part of the family firm.

He eventually became Chairman of the family company when his uncles retired in the late '30s.

When war came in 1939, as head of a family business involved in the war effort, Gerald (then aged 34) was exempted from military service, but (like my own father who was just one year younger) he served as an air-raid warden and home guard in London, where he was then based, helping victims of bombing. As a young man, he had had an unsuccessful marriage, with no offspring. He later felt rejected by the Church because of its rejection of him as a divorced man, but he was an intelligent good and kind person, of traditional values. University had never been an option for him.

In 1940, aged 35, he met the beautiful and lively 20-year-old Hazel Beresford, descendant of the widespread Beresford family, with many ennoblements (her grandfather was the 6th Baron Decies, an Irish peer branch of the family). She was also a descendant of James I through the Coventry family. The colourful family background held heroes and rogues, and their being upper-class was by no means securely associated with wealth. After a 6-week courtship (the same date-span as for Margaret and Harry Hodson's) they were married. Hazel's marriage to Gerald was thought of as 'marrying into trade' - frowned upon by the upper-classes - but was accepted by Hazel's Beresford grandmother (her closest older relation, who had raised her through her teenage years) because of Gerald's considerable charm.



Margaret-Anne was born in February 1941, and was followed at about 2-year intervals by Heather, then Susan, and then Amanda. After a gap, Moya was born in 1956. After the war, they bought (for £5000) a big house with a field and a large garden, 'Highlands' in the businessman's commuter village of Woldingham, on the North Downs of Surrey. There they became part of a strong and distinguished community of successful people, and had dogs, cats and horses - the last being Hazel's lifelong passion. There were also mutual friends, as it turned out, with my own parents. Education for the girls was in local independent schools, culminating in a secretarial course, and also, for Margaret Anne, followed by a very valuable diploma in 'Domestic Science' in Cuckfield Park. In those days, it was uncommon for girls to go to university - ambitions remained as a good marriage, and (while working on that) having the skills necessary for a good PA.

With five daughters to cope with, I think that Gerald was pleased when I appeared, with a strong interest in his oldest daughter. He and I were able to have male conversations at length, and I (having had no sisters) grew more accustomed to the foibles of girls, starting at 2 years old, going through complex adolescence, to young womanhood. Hazel was endlessly kind and supportive. She was a great delegator and I fell in with the tasks set for me by both Hazel and Gerald, which often required carpentry and other practical skills that I did possess. Hazel liked to delegate tasks indirectly: "Would Anthony like to see if he can get the Hoover to work?", or "Can Anthony help you (Margaret-Anne) catch Heather's donkey?".

In short, I was accepted as a potential son-in-law, a little unexpected because of my strong educational background; my more liberal political views were accepted with grace. I was even permitted to take Margaret-Anne to the great Balliol 'Commem Ball' (a big dance in the Oxford college, traditionally followed by after-midnight punting on the river Cherwell), while being entrusted with preserving her virginity.

Gerald's marriage to Hazel was life-long and happy; at that time, he would have been regarded as wealthy (the Mercedes car was replaced by a Rolls Royce not long after I appeared), but wealthiness was, unfortunately, not to last to the end of his life.

### 37 Professional mathematician

*Continuing Anthony Hodson's serial memoirs.*

As my three years at Oxford University finished, my time was mainly taken up by working on the big Finals examination. The results from the examination determined, first, whether one was to be awarded the BA(Oxon) degree (Bachelor of Arts at Oxford), and also was used by the authorities to assign a Class of Honours Degree, First, Second (2.1 or 2.2) or Third. This was of course very important for one's prospects at job-hunting, and some employers would ask for a specific Class of degree.

Margaret-Anne and I were becoming used to being engaged, but the date of our marriage could not be determined until I was secure in a good job. I had ruled out staying at Oxford to take a higher degree (leading, perhaps, to an academic life), so, what could I do as a professional mathematician?

One prospect at the time was 'Information Technology', IT, although the term didn't exist then. IBM (International Business Machines) was then the world-dominant computer company, supporting businesses with large computers that were often room-sized. They paid a recruiting visit to Balliol College, my Oxford college, but at the time they had a reputation that you had to 'sell your soul' to the company, and that did not appeal. Programming computers to support business-customers was the main field offered, but I was neither attracted by the world of business and nor to programming as a profession – so IBM was not 'on'. I subsequently had an interview with BP (British Petroleum) (who had a major computer department that not only took care of business financial computing, but also used computers to optimise their world-wide logistics) I was not much taken by this, either, and was a bit relieved (although a bit miffed) that they were not much taken with me!

One organisation that did attract me was NPL (the National Physical Laboratory), which had a department that was investigating the science of robotics (then, still something of a world of phantasy!). I acquired a technical book called 'Automata Studies', which was full of mathematics of a kind that was unfamiliar to me, and I was prepared to dig into its wisdom if I got a job in the department. However, I think that they were looking for more seasoned mathematicians than me, and my enthusiasm didn't impress them. NPL did offer me a job programming DEUCE, a big scientific computer, one of the first of its kind, that had been designed

within NPL. I think in retrospect that I would have enjoyed this work, as it would tie in with my strong interest in physics from younger days, but, as noted earlier, being just a computer programmer didn't appeal.

I acquired another book, called 'Cybernetics', by Prof. Norbert Wiener, a mathematical pioneer in automatic systems, and this took my strong interest – in an area of engineering endeavour that was very much mathematics based, but driven by practical requirements. So I looked around for organisations involved that could employ me. My father knew an influential and inventive industrialist, Sir Leon Bagrit, who had made a major success of a company called Elliott Automation, and sent me to see him in his posh London office; this proved a lucky turning point.

Elliott Automation had grown out of Elliott Brothers (London) Limited, instrument makers, which had been founded in 1804 by a Mr William Elliott. The instruments were originally mechanical, but also included electrical ones as the technology developed.

Elliott Brothers had constructed the 'Difference Engine' designed by Charles Babbage in 1819 to create mathematical tables (remember Logarithms?). It took about 25 years, with several false starts, to develop into a practical device, despite a substantial sum being provided for its early development by the British government. It has been acclaimed as the first digital computer, and the poet Lord Byron's daughter, Ada Lovelace, has been acclaimed as the world's first programmer.

The company developed in the 20th Century, with Siemens being a major shareholder, but did not become much involved with the electronic instruments that started appearing in the days of 'thermionic valves' (these were the complicated little glass devices that glowed from their internal heater in very old 'radio-sets').

After the 2nd World War, the company was floundering, until Bagrit took over as Managing Director and Chairman. He brought the company into new fields, including electronic instruments for aircraft. A research centre was set up in Borehamwood, North London, and became involved in radar systems, and the Elliott 401 computer and later the Elliott 803 were developed there. The Elliott 503 was the transistorised version of the computer (transistors only came to commercial use in the early 1950s). The computer side of the business later became part of ICL (now Fujitsu).

The Borehamwood site also nurtured Elliott Flight Automation, to help satisfy the great demand for instruments for aircraft, both military and civil.

By the 1950s this market was large world-wide, and of critical importance, covering also missiles and other aspects of military avionics.

I had been fascinated by aircraft, and, at Sir Leon's suggestion, applied to Elliott Flight Automation in Borehamwood; I was accepted, subject to my degree. Fortunately, the results came in with the award of First Class Honours, and I started work in September 1960, and loved it. My starting salary at Elliotts was good (for the time) at £800 per annum. I commuted to Borehamwood from home in London - my parents and 5-year-old brother lived then in Brompton Square, quite close to Harrods - and had a reasonably easy (at that time) commute by train to Borehamwood. This was their second home since they left Bourton House in 1959.

I was very lucky in having a boss, Hassall Hanbury Brown, who saw the spark of creativity that I had, and nurtured it, and was an inspirational manager. He gave me interesting and challenging assignments in the interesting field of Inertial Navigation.

Inertial Navigation systems were cutting-edge self-contained instruments that used very accurate accelerometers to measure acceleration and derive speed from the measurement; sensitive gyroscopes were used to give a level platform that kept the acceleration measurement minimally affected by the effects of gravitation. My enjoyment of things that work kicked in, and I found myself in my element.

Borehamwood was an interesting place – the Elliot building was just down the road from the Borehamwood studios, and you never knew who you might see at lunchtime in the local pub. I remember seeing Orson Welles, David Niven, Diana Rigg (Avengers!), and others. In the office, I had a desk in a cubicle that I shared with another engineer, at one side of a big electronics laboratory. I worked, among other things, on engineering issues that often required serious computation, while outside my cubicle were the practical engineers, many creating electronic circuits with soldering irons (silicon chips with complex functionality were pie-in-the-sky then). I was interested in practical electronics, and had had hobby experience, but, without the rigorous background, perhaps derived from apprenticeship, I would not have been good enough for serious work, and anyway, I was a mathematician to be used for his brains not his hands.

There was one engineer out there who also was sometimes not making a success of electronics: from time to time there would be a loud explosion; one rushed out of the cubicle to find a mini-mushroom cloud rising above

the startled culprit. This was usually the result of soldering in an 'electrolytic capacitor' back to front – these devices were compact but sensitive components that easily blew up if maltreated.

I think that I was the first professional mathematician that Elliott Flight Automation had hired, so they bought me a top-class electromechanical calculator that cost £700 - a fortune compared even to the cost of early electronic calculators; however much of my work needed extensive numerical processing by computer programs, and I was soon a regular user of the big Elliott 803 that lived in a large downstairs area for general use (you had to book to use it).

Computers were primitive and slow at that time. IBM computers ran on information stored on punched cards – but the 803 ran on information stored on a big roll of 5-hole paper tape – the same as was used by Telex machines in those days. In fact, it took two tapes to run a program: the first tape was in a roll about 7 inches across and gave thousands of basic instructions to the computer for general use, and the second was the computer programme that one had punched out at a teletype machine. Typically, this was just a few feet of tape, and was written as text in a primitive computer language known as 'Elliott Autocode'. Results from the computer were punched out by it onto more 5-hole tape, and one used the teletype machine to convert this print. There were no video screens in those days, or fast printers other than for business computing.

When using the computer, you first had to make it suck in the big roll of tape through a fast tape-reader; and after that, the whole lot landed in a big heap on the floor. When reading the tape was complete, one then had to convert the two-foot-high heap into a neat roll, and this required considerable skill using a manual tape-winder. The narrow tape was fragile, and all too easy to break, or to cut itself into two (or worse).

Repairing one's own tape was not too difficult using a piece of adhesive paper tape. But damaging the 7-inch shared roll of tape was a serious offence. The offices near the computer housed the formidable ladies who looked after the computer, and one had to confess the wickedness to one of them and apologise. I'm sure that they were delightful people, but not when confronted with a cack-handed young man for the n'th time. There was one young lady there that I liked, Anne, and she later married Ken Warren, later a close friend and Elliotts colleague, and became a near neighbour. Ken later went into politics, and became an influential MP.

It is a sad reflection of the times that few women were hired as engineering or computer professionals. When later I worked for ICL, I found that enterprising women computer people had organised their own department of computer consultants, and were making a real success of it. Many women became substantial pioneers in the world of computers.

Despite my good job and successes in Elliott Flight Automation, my prospective father-in-law was not impressed. He wrote me a letter saying that he did not think that I could marry his daughter in the manner to which she had become accustomed unless I was earning a salary of at least £1,000 per year, and he supplied a short account of what my costs would amount to. This included an (accurate) assessment of £5 per week on food plus accommodation costs at £320 per annum, just for starters. The wedding could not go ahead until I was paid enough.

By dint of hard work, I was soon given a 'rise' to £1000 per year, and the Wedding was set for 29 April 1961, the day before my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday.

*All episodes are in: <https://fosmw.com/parishmag/an-interesting-life.pdf>*