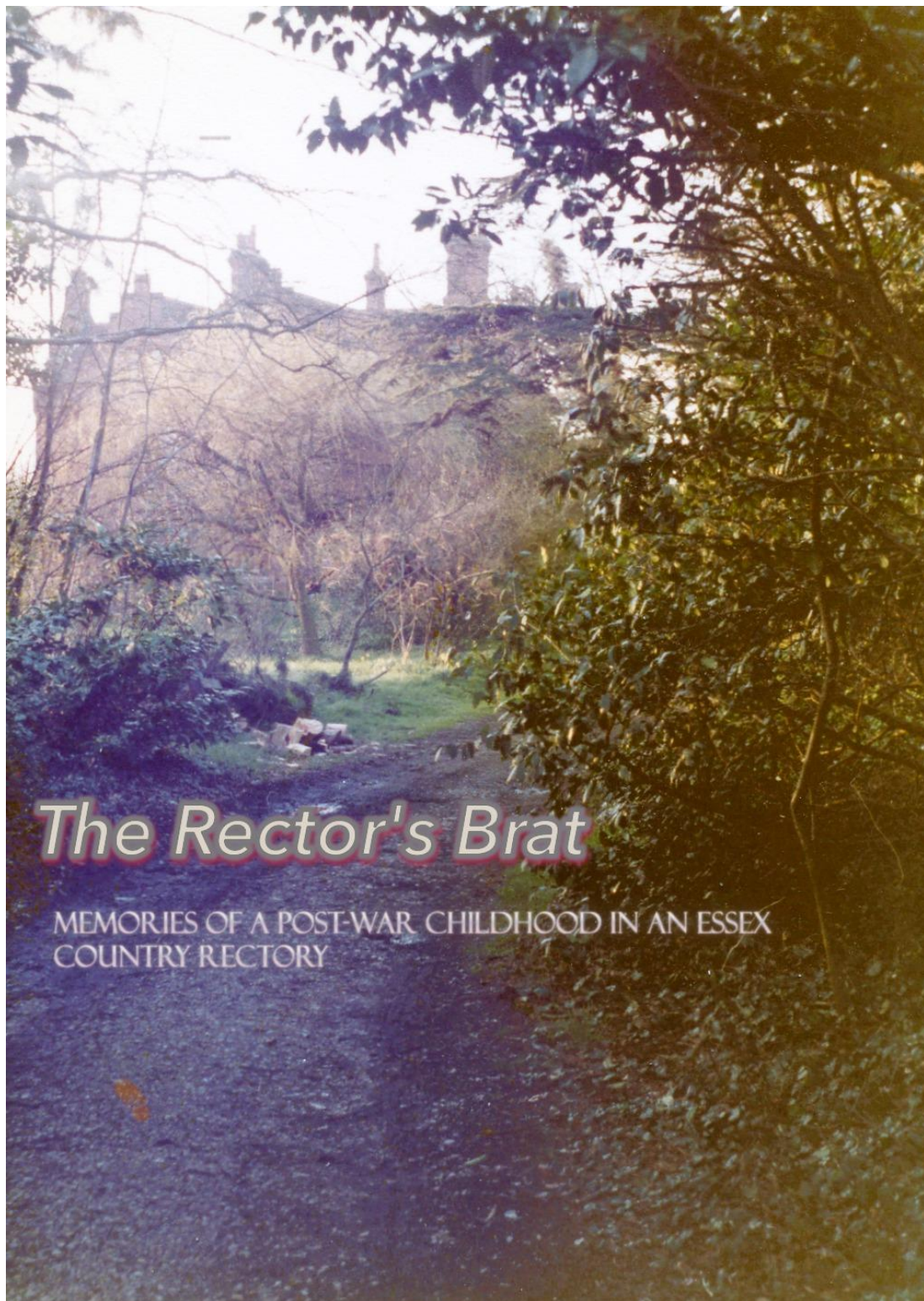




The Rector's Brat

MEMORIES OF A POST-WAR CHILDHOOD IN AN ESSEX
COUNTRY RECTORY



Pat Ost with Desmond Ost, Rector of All Saints East Hanningfield, 1982

THE RECTOR'S BRAT

(Memories of a postwar childhood in an Essex country rectory)

by

Pat Ost

Dedication

To the memory of **Dr James Alexander Ost**

Sometime Head of Department and Reader in Applied Cognitive Psychology, University of Portsmouth and
first editor of this book

1973 - 2019

Also, in fondest memory of my parents **Desmond** and **Dora**, and the very, very happy childhood that they gave me. Both Martin and I had support and endless love while growing up, and space, and huge tolerance, to make our many mistakes.

This “rambling and disjointed account” was written with love, for the amusement of my children James and Katharine, for the amusement and instruction of my grandchildren Joshua, Joseph and Samuel, (and for any friends or wider family members who might also be interested in my ramblings) in my attempt to get all this clutter of memories out of my head, and down onto paper. Please don't judge me too harshly for trying, but I am at this moment (2020) at the center of, and having personal knowledge of, five generations of our family, two in memory, three now living, and if *I* don't attempt to tell the story of those who have passed, who will? I hope some of it, at least, will inform and amuse the reader, but I'm sure there may be boring and repetitive bits too. You don't have to read it all, but I thank you for your interest so far!

One way to know a little of shared family history, of me, and of your grandparents, great grandparents and those older generations, may be through these stories I choose to tell you, but telling them could take some time! This way, you can choose what you wish to read about, and when to read it, and it saves me having to annoy you, by repeating myself!

This is for you all.

Pat

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Foreword

Sadly, the death of my mother, and more recently of her sisters Beth and Nancy, has forcefully reminded me that the details of the way I was brought up, and the world in which I grew, is now almost entirely inside my own head, while the busy world of the present has moved on. Only tokens remain of the world in which I grew up, and in which my parents lived and worked.

I'm aware of the photographic images of this vanished world I can still see in my head, but these are not well matched by real or tangible collections of photographs or descriptions. So many images and memories crowd in, but knowing what has been lost from this procession, with the passing of my parents, and the blurring of the memories themselves, I'm now prompted to try to record at least a shadow of these things.

In my conceit, I imagine that at some point in the future, my grandchildren or even my children may have the leisure to reflect on the lives of their forbears and may find that they have distressingly little with which to flesh out the bare skeleton of dates of births, marriages, and deaths, of those 'faces in those pictures'. What sort of lives did we live? What did we feel and wish for? I can't hope to do more than sketch out, while I can, a little slice of my boyhood, and what I remember, and more fleetingly, what my parents did and what they told me about their parents.

I hope to record some of those memories and a few of those family stories that will never appear in the 'official records' but may throw some gentle light on those members of our family, who lived their lives to the full, but who threw almost no shadow in the wider world.

Some religions talk of life after death, holding out promises for those who follow them. I know the form of such things but take no comfort in their dreams and mysteries. An older, wiser, tradition spoke of, and took comfort in, the memory of those who had gone before, and who made 'the now' possible. This work, with all its faults, is offered to my children in that spirit. I hope that they may be amused by my attempt to record events and people so that they come in time to know a little more about those who went before, who made their life, and mine, possible.

The views of events and the characters portrayed are my reflection on my own memories. I apologize to the reader if you find my account wanting – the faults and omissions are entirely my own.

Thomas Patrick Arthur Ost

Mary Anns Cottage, Newhaven, East Sussex

December 2020

Chapter 11

Visits, recreations and holidays –

more holidays with mum, dad and donkey infested tents

Like many families in the fifties and early sixties, we had the choice of having a camping holiday, or bed and breakfast, or no holiday. When we were little, Martin and I went on holiday with Mum and her sisters, and I remember two holidays with Dora with great pleasure.

Mum, Beth and Nancy had one or two holidays in Sidmouth, Devon, in the early 50's, as alternatives to the dizzy heights of Walton-on the-Naze or Clacton. I have a very clear image of swimming in the sea at Sidmouth, aged four or five, and the water was crystal clear, unlike the murky depths or almost anywhere on the East Coast, and I think Sidmouth was as near as one could get to 'foreign climes', at least if you were on the budget that prevailed at Hanningfield at that time. How we got to and from, I really don't remember except that it wasn't by what passed as 'personal transport' at that time, so it was probably a coach excursion or possibly by train. I thoroughly enjoyed what I remember.



1953: *Me, Martin and Aunty Beth on holiday in Sidmouth.*



1953? *Dora on the beach at Sidmouth*



1953? *Dora and Aunty Nancy on holiday in Sidmouth*

I also have a happy memory of going on holiday with Dora to Great Yarmouth. At that point in time it was still a very active fishing port, and we all got up very early (it was still pitch dark) to go down to the fish dock to see the trawlers unloading their catch onto the dockside. Mum must have smiled at one of the trawlermen, and he lifted Martin and I onto the boat and we got a quick tour around below decks! I do remember a huge amount of men in oilskins, rushing around on the wet dockside, with big boxes of fish packed with ice. It was pretty smelly, but also incredibly interesting if you were five. I don't think the rules would let 'little uns' on board any sort of working fishing boat in the middle of unloading these days!

I'm sorry to say I disgraced myself during this trip, at the bed and breakfast establishment Mum had booked. I was used to having a potty (the venerable 'Gozunder', which has not really been a part of adult bedroom equipment for some time now) and for some reason, there wasn't one in our room. I must have sensed that I needed a wee and staggered out of bed looking for the gozunder; having not found one, I tried to find a loo and opened a likely door. Unfortunately, the door was the door of the wardrobe, and I was discovered still half asleep, peeing vigorously into the corner of the wardrobe. I don't remember the subsequent discussion with the landlady, but Mum seemed to have got it sorted without having us thrown onto the street!

These particular holidays were without Desmond, as far as I can remember. The one occasion when Mum and Dad and her sisters all went together was the memorable time, referred to above, when we hired a wooden bungalow, backing onto a backwater, in Wroxham in Norfolk. It was a particularly cold and damp Easter break, which I don't think anyone particularly enjoyed.



1959: That bungalow in Wroxham again, a chilly, wet Easter holiday that I don't think anyone enjoyed very much!. I had horrible dreams of drowning in endless, boggy lakes while there; we later discovered that the last person to live there had committed suicide, which didn't surprise me at all.

I think about that time, as we lads were growing up a bit, that there must have been some sort of agreement between Mum and Dad that it wasn't really a holiday for Dora if Desmond and the boys were all there, (after all Dad was there at home most of the time, and Dora needed a break from the routine) and so I think there was a reversion to the three sisters holidaying together. Martin, I know, spent some time up at Acton, staying with his granny. I was probably too young, too disobedient or too incontinent to be really welcome there.

I think it must have been around that time that the camping option began to be explored as a serious option. It is fair to say that we went camping as an economic choice, and it was a choice that Dora did not really relish. She wanted to know where she was going, when she was likely to arrive, and to find a

comfortable bed when she got there. I entirely sympathise with that attitude now, but we kids and Dad had a disturbing streak of optimism about the whole 'camping thing'. I have often thought that Desmond was not well advised in holiday planning.

I can remember an occasion when Dad had finally rigged up a trailer for the sidecar outfit, the idea being that the tent and 'camping gear' would go in the trailer. Being Desmond, the trailer was of course ex-RAF (I think it was originally used to carry Spitfire starting equipment and weighed not much less than the bike itself) and several sizes larger than one might think was really advisable for towing behind a motorbike. Undaunted, he had the local agricultural engineer devise a massive tubular tow bar connection for the bike and trailer; I don't suppose either of them had made anything for a motorbike, while Dad's engineer colleague was more comfortable with ploughing tackle and balers for Massey Ferguson tractors.

Meanwhile Dad hired a tent and managed to pack it into the trailer, along all the other 'stuff' deemed necessary for a camping holiday. However, strength and 'massive' do not always go hand in hand, and once loaded and underway, the tow bar suddenly straightened out and was about to drop the trailer. The MKII version of the tow bar was immediately commissioned and put into production but the start of the holiday was somewhat delayed. We finally rolled off to our destination (somewhere in the west country, from memory) but rather more slowly than planned, and we didn't get to the campsite until after dark.

It was then that we found out why the packed-up tent was so big and heavy. Dad had in his innocence hired a bloody great marquee with six-foot high sides, side poles and two big central poles, and had not thought to do a 'trial assembly' on the lawn at home. This caused a little stir in the campsite, especially at that hour, but instead of saying what was on their minds, they took pity on us, and helped us put the damn thing up by the light of our headlamps. Unfortunately the only pitch available was on a slope....happy days.

On a later occasion, we had acquired a rather nice four-man patrol tent – ex army this one, and camouflaged. It was made of linen and black on the inside – the slightly disconcerting aspect was that when you were inside, you could see out through the fabric. It took a couple of trials to assure ourselves that the reverse was not possible! After our trials with Dad's first choice of tent, we had practiced on the lawn at home, and slept out a couple of nights to try it out. We ended up using a flysheet twice the length of the tent so that there was in effect an extended porch, which helped in damp weather. So that there was no obstruction coming and going, the outer end of the flysheet was supported by a linked pair of bamboo poles. This setup was easy to put up, and put away and wasn't too heavy, although it was a good deal heavier than today's proofed nylon tents. We did quite a bit of camping with this setup, and now we were travelling by van, most things were easier.

I can't remember quite why we ended up camping at Woodbridge in Suffolk, in a farmer's field. This being the rugged time it was, we took along a little toilet tank to go around the 'hole in the ground' which served as a loo, so we were out in the middle of a large field, near some trees, and miles from any other campers. So far so good. 'You don't mind animals, do you?' we were asked and of course we said no, we were used to them. However, from my recollection, there were quite a few animals in that field, and, more seemed to join them as the week went on, as if our little encampment had hidden attractions

for them. There were the chickens, plus what sounded like several cockerels in competition. They hadn't read the rule book about 'no crowing in the hours of darkness', and they were aided and abetted by several bullocks who crowded around to stare at the tent at rather close range and when asked to go, would rush off around the field in a mad panic – fortunately they did then keep away from the tent itself, although we had visions of being stampeded. Another more sedate resident was an enormous Shire mare, who was really no trouble except when she parked herself across the field gate when we needed to exit. Her response to being asked to move was to fart loudly and very pungently, which put us in our place as pesky newcomers in *her* field.

What really had us scared was the night we woke up to realise that something *very large* was right there in the tent with us between us, we were trussed up in thick sleeping bags and not really able to move fast. Whatever it was, was smelly and making crunching noises next to my head. Dad, I think, was first to find a torch to discover that a donkey had forced its way into the tent and now had its head firmly wedged in to the plastic bucket where we had left an open packet of chocolate biscuits. It's not a very comfortable feeling to be lying on the ground almost underneath a large and unpredictable animal with hooves and large teeth but Dad had been brought up with donkeys and persuaded it to depart without it stepping on anyone or causing further havoc.

All I can remember about being up in that neck of the woods was something about the chance of using our canoe on the River Deben and I think we did, but there must have been other problems around our doing that, as we didn't go back. I suspect the *idea* of canoeing on the Deben was more exciting than the reality of paddling against a falling tide and avoiding mud banks and salt marsh, and then getting wet, muddy and exhausted while dragging the canoe out again. Most people would have joined a sailing club to do that sort of thing in company with like-minded souls, but my teenage years seemed to be full of occasions when I ended up trying these things in almost glorious isolation, luckily without serious mishap.

Chapter 12

Music, music everywhere and not a drop to drink

Dora's passion was choral music. Encouraged by one of our lodgers and short -time upstairs folk, Carol Satchell, Mum was involved in local choirs throughout our childhood, or at least that is my recollection. Although Dad had acquired a studio grand piano, probably with a view to Martin and I learning to play, I don't think they could find a teacher in the village and travelling into Chelmsford for lessons didn't seem to be an option. Simply, money was very tight at home, and music lessons couldn't come very high up the list against putting food on the table and trying to heat even the smallest part of the Rectory. So none of us actually learned to play the piano, although Martin was a very competent bassoon player while at grammar school in Chelmsford. Martin was also actively involved in the choir based (I think) at the King Edward VI grammar he attended.

Music, rather than decorated trees or parties, persists in my memories of Christmas at the rectory. Carols and carol services were all part of the 'lead up' to the festive season, interspersed with the lessons of the Advent services in church. I get quite emotional when I hear '*Oh come, Oh come Emmanuel*' or the Holst or Dark settings of '*In the bleak midwinter*', as I can hear Dora singing them both, always with a pronounced Suffolk accent which wasn't so obvious when she spoke. She was often involved with the local choral groups and the church choir, often at home, so choir music was a constant background in the runup to Christmas, but across the rest of the year as well. (Dora's *non-musical* planning for Christmas really started in the previous January, when she made the Christmas pudding, had it steam cooked in the primary school kitchen, and then hid it away in the back of the larder until the 'big day').

Appropriately for a rectory household, there was a fixed routine around Christmas, with activities strictly allocated to specific times. We did not waste any time or energy on excessive decorations, mainly I suppose because decorating a place as vast as the old rectory was no mean feat, and the odd bunch of holly or 'decorative candles' would simply have looked silly. I don't remember ever having a tree, as I suspect Dora didn't like the mess of dropped needles and maybe felt the 'tree thing' was maybe a little *pagan*.

Apart from the runup during Advent, Christmas proper started on Christmas Eve, when in the early evening, Dad and the church choir went carol singing along Hanningfield Tye, stopping outside groups of houses or in the drives of the larger properties. I don't remember ever singing outside the 'Three Horseshoes' or the 'Windmill' (at either end of the Tye) as I don't think 'Church' and 'Pub' mixed very much, and not at all in Dora's case.

Dad then conducted the Midnight Service, which was slightly odd, both because there was no organ music and because we got in a noticeably different mix of congregants, some of whom may have been slightly the worse for drink. Most of the building was in darkness as well, which added to the atmosphere and was somehow comforting and intimate.

On Christmas Day morning there was Morning Prayer, sometimes with the regular organist, and after that it was home for dinner, or straight on to Desmond's mother at Rayleigh. I can remember Christmas Day afternoons at Rayleigh, but for various reasons I don't think we had any sort of formal meal there.

When 'Granny Rayleigh' was between houses, and staying at the Rectory, I think we all had Christmas dinner together, but she was soon back in Rayleigh again, and I don't ever remember going to her second house in Eastwood Road.

The real family 'Christmas dinner' was in Acton on Boxing Day, and was much more of a family celebration.

Returning to music, the piano was a sort of constant reminder of musical hubris in my case. Trying to play the recorder, or the guitar, when I actually had lessons somewhere in Chelmsford every week gradually proved to me that I had zero ability as a musician. Such was my latent talent that I could play less when I finished than when I started, because at the start I felt that I might be able to produce some sort of music, and when I finished those lessons, I knew even that much was beyond me. Despite my singing in public at secondary school and enjoying the experience, that never came back once my voice broke. That occurred about the same time as I left Sandon, and after that I could never convince myself (or anyone else) that the noises I made counted as singing, and I found I could not hold a melody of any sort, if at any time someone else was singing in a different key. I did not enjoy making music then, and that drove a bit of wedge between those members of the family who did, and myself and dad who definitely couldn't.

The irony was that my new headmaster (Bowman) had made the assumption, since he was a music buff of sorts himself, that someone from my background must have some musical knowledge or ability. That would not have been an issue but for his constant reference to his erroneous belief at most points of contact with me, including packed school assemblies. Curiously that did very little to correct my impression of him, shared by most of my form group, as a snob and a dickhead. I was chosen, as a form of humiliation, to operate the record player that he used to play 'suitable musical excerpts' at the start of school assemblies on Friday mornings. This involved crouching over an old record deck, in semidarkness behind the curtains on the school stage, whilst trying to select a particular track on one of his precious LP records.

I recall that my efforts were not always well-timed or accurate, resulting in a satisfying crash as the needle dropped onto the disc, or sometimes, horror of horrors, the wrong piece of music, as the whole system was a bit rickety and totally lacked the track selection precision we think of as normal these days...needless to say the assembled pupils and staff on the other side of the curtain got rather more fun from this than Mr Bowman....

In an attempt to find some other hobby, I found an old WI book on wine making, and decided to convert some of our apple surplus into apple wine, little knowing that I was walking in my grandfather Ost's footsteps. However, my early attempts clearly offended Dora, who I now realise had fairly strong personal views on the evils of the demon drink, and even stronger views about keeping a foul-smelling bucket of what appeared to be yesterdays's vomit in her airing cupboard. I was instructed to eject the mess, and from then on the only 'drink in the house' was the bottle of Woodpecker Cider I was sent to buy (by Dad) from the 'Three Horseshoes' to go with weekend dinner.

However, music soon reasserted itself, as we provided accommodation for members of the visiting choir, which is how we met Beate Eberle. She stayed with us during the time the choir was in

Chelmsford, and she and my parents hit it off. She was great fun to be with, and Mum liked her. For Desmond, I think she was the daughter he never had, and the relationship they struck up remained strong for years. In later years, Dad worked at learning German, having never studied anything other than Latin at school, so that he might take up her long-standing invitation to visit her hometown in Southern Germany. Eventually, with a reliable vehicle at his disposal, he and his van went on the ferry to the Hook of Holland, and from there he drove down the autobahn to Stuttgart and Schorndorf, having never previously driven on the other side of the road or travelled abroad on his own.

When Mum and Dad found out that Beate was studying to be a translator for the European Parliament, and part of that involved several months residence in the UK as well as elsewhere, they asked if she would stay with them to do her time in England and use the Rectory as her base. One Easter, Beate expressed a wish to see Coventry and the two Cathedrals, and Desmond immediately borrowed my car, a fairly battered but reasonably reliable Standard Vanguard (I think he was 'between vans') to take her on a tour of the East Midlands, and this before much of the motorway system (apart from the M1) had been built, so it was not a short quick trip from our part of Essex. There was definitely a bond there, and one that lasted the rest of Desmond's life.



Pat, Beate, Dad with my Standard Vanguard just before
Dad drove Beate to see Coventry Cathedral
Easter 1970

Easter 1970: *Beate and Desmond about to visit Coventry Cathedral in my old Standard Vanguard, which despite its battered appearance, made the journey there and back in relative comfort, it having survived a trip to Lonmay, Scotland the year before. Desmond's vans were probably less reliable, and much less comfortable! I'm just visible, looking out of the front door. Dad in his version of clergy cathedral visiting garb: duffle coat and flat cap!*

I think I was quite nervous at lending Dad my first decent car, but he didn't bend it...

Beate stayed for a long time with us at Hanningfield; and both my parents became very fond of her. She was godmother to my first nephew, Tom. I'm afraid I was so busy with my work and family in Sussex that I lost touch with her, but Mum, Dad and Martin happily kept in touch. Martin and Val visited her back home in Southern Germany. The special bond, I think, was between Beate and Desmond; she was the daughter he had never had, and in the seventies Desmond took German language lessons, and once he had finally acquired a reliable vehicle, (another van, inevitably), in 1978 he took the Harwich ferry to the 'Hook of Holland', and then drove across Holland and down to Schorndorf, where Beate and her husband lived, to pay them a much delayed visit. He managed to get lost a couple of times on the drive down, but the German traffic police were very kind, and gave him an escort back onto the right part of the autobahn! I think, to judge from the photographs, he had a very happy visit and was well received by the rest of Beate's family, although his German was by all accounts a little patchy!



1970: September or October. Beate Eberle as godmother, at my nephew Tom's christening at All Saints, East Hanningfield. Left to right at front: Valerie Ost, Tom's mother, Beate, Judith. Standing at back Dora, Desmond and myself. Judith and I were married in August that year but were living in East Sussex by then.

After Beate got married to Tasilo in March 1975, and set up home, they invited Desmond and Dora to visit them in southern Germany, to spend some time with her family. Dora was in the midst of teacher training, and in the end Desmond accepted the invitation, having got himself (at long last) a reliable new van. He had also started lessons, in a valiant attempt to learn German.

Dad decided to drive, on his own, via the Harwich Ferry, to see Beate and Tasilo, braving the motorway system 'on the wrong side of the road' as he had never driven on the continent before. He said that the German motorway police were very helpful, despite his poor grasp of the German language (they were probably amazed that someone would attempt such a journey at his time of life) but thankfully he got there without major incidents other than getting lost from time to time. I was staggered that he was prepared to do it at all, at his age, having never, to my knowledge, driven that far at any time in his life.

He was clearly warmly received by their family and enjoyed the company of some of the older family members as well, including at least one who was, Desmond said, an ex-SS officer. He then said his goodbyes (very sadly, I suspect) and then drove his lonely way back down the German and Dutch motorways to England. This must have been his last brave adventure, as not long after that, he was clearly becoming unwell with the disease that ended his time in the parish.

Chapter 13

The smell of the hive, the roar of the smoker

If music was Dora's passion, then beekeeping was Desmond's enduring occupation, for as long as I can remember. Both Martin and I, by turns, helped him as his 'smoker boys', all kitted out in veils, gloves, boots and boiler suits. I now know that his father also kept bees, in Ireland and probably at Hanningfield as well and it would make perfect sense given their shared circumstances. Bee keeping was often a hobby among country clergy. Desmond took his occupation seriously and it was far from being 'just a hobby'; in Dora's memorable phrase it was defined as 'one of your father's enthusiasms'.



1950: *Probably late May, or early June. Martin as Desmond's smoker boy, helping his Dad collect the swarm hanging in the bush in front of him. Desmond is about to brush the swarm into a skep.*

Towards the end of the nineteen fifties, it was beginning to be apparent that the 'DDT revolution' was destroying the pollinators across the countryside, and, rather similar to the situation today, something had to be done. Dad and his friends in the EBKA, the redoubtable Miss Avery among others, set up the Essex Beekeepers Pollination Scheme which made agreements with arable and fruit farmers in their area, to supply hives of bees into the vicinity of their crops in return for an agreement to restrict or change the time of insecticide spraying while their hives were present, so that pollination could be boosted. Dad had space for about a dozen colonies but managed to succeed in dividing colonies and capturing swarms

so that eventually we had around 20 -odd hives available for hire and distribution. Martin and I then came into our own again, assisting in the slightly furtive business of moving hives to customers across our part of Essex.

Transfers had to be made at night, while they were not flying. Moving hives with the entrance sealed (despite sealing with dry grass to preserve air flow into the hive) had the risk of overheating the colony if the night was too warm or the journey too long. So we had a well-rehearsed routine for quickly securing a few hives at nightfall and then moving them in the cool of night to their new locations. Inevitably this involved interviews with the police. ***Old scruffy man, in an old rusty van, accompanied by a younger accomplice, complete with tools and equipment with the back of the van full of boxes? At the dead of night, in those parts of rural Essex there are many expensive properties?*** I believe the technical term is 'going equipped' in police speak....

Anyway, the night-time interviews took place along routine lines. 'Good evening sir' 'Is this your vehicle?' 'Where are you off to at this time of night?' 'What have you got in the back of the van?' Bees. 'Very good sir' Check if you don't believe me. The next few moments were interesting, especially if one or two stray bees moved once the doors were opened – if there were no bees visible, then the throbbing buzz from the 'boxes' made the point as clearly as necessary. Luckily for all involved, we did not meet any officers who insisted on opening 'the boxes', and we were quickly sent on our way!

I can remember an obsession with 'heather honey' – while you might think of 'north of the border', grouse moors and the like, Desmond found a number of spots in East Anglia where an enterprising beekeeper could find heather, and hopefully and eventually persuade a colony of bees to do their stuff with heather nectar. Often these outposts of heather were on remote spots of poor land, in the middle of forestry plantations, at the end of unmade roads, somewhere near Brandon in Norfolk. I knew it as 'somewhere near Grimes Graves' in the middle of Thetford Forest. It is probably a Center Parcs holiday village now, but then it was on the edge of an army firing range and not a well-known destination, and frankly, a very long way to take bees! I know we took hives up there but for the life of me I cannot remember ever seeing a single jar of heather honey for all that travelling.

I don't quite know how the Hoopers ended up in our top flat, but Ted Hooper was the resident lecturer in beekeeping at Writtle Agricultural College, so dad had a source of inspiration and assistance with his hobby for many years. Ted, I believe, was quite well known nationally as an expert on bees, and his book on beekeeping is still (at time of writing) in print. His daughters Lynne and Jeanette grew up at Hanningfield, and I believe Jeanette still lives locally. Some while after I departed to Sussex, Ted retired to Devon.

I think it must have been one of Ted's courses at Whittle that inspired Desmond to make hive bodies and other bee-keeping equipment – Dad even decided that he needed a bench circular saw to do much of this work, so not having the cash for a factory-built unit, he constructed a very workable saw from plywood. With a few purchased items such as spindles, other hardware, and a half-horsepower electric motor, the resultant article worked well and much better than might have been expected. Red cedar hive bodies were produced as well as roofs and hive bases. At one point there were so many extracted combs that needed reworking that he built a very impressive solar heated wax extractor, that melted the old, dirty combs, filtered the muck from the liquid wax and collected the purified wax on top of a bowl of

water. This device was simply loaded with old comb and left to its own devices in the corner of the garden. It seemed to be a remarkably simple and effective device, again made out of old bits and pieces for very little outlay, a typical 'Hanningfield' solution.

Desmond got very absorbed in his hobby, particularly during early summer when nectar flows were under way, and swarms were appearing. This sometimes resulted in absent-mindedness about the day job, and I can remember a number of times, when he had to be hurriedly summoned from behind the coach house, (where the home apiary was set up), to take a christening which had been booked and then forgotten – sometimes this would happen as a result of a concerned member of the christening party arriving at the rectory to see if something dreadful had happened to the rector! I'm glad I wasn't there at the church to hear the explanation, or the comments from the christening party....

June swarm time brought Desmond other interesting requests. His skill in collecting swarms had got about, and he was often contacted to come and remove a swarm, since most people find the arrival of a swarm extremely frightening. The best, to my recollection, was an extremely urgent request from the Essex Constabulary to attend Chelmsford High Security Prison. On arrival, he found that a swarm had appeared during the reconstruction of the outer security wall and settled on the handle of a wheelbarrow. Unfortunately, the work had left an inviting breach in the wall, to the discomfort of the warders and police. Dad didn't know who was more upset, the warders and the police with a gap in the defences, or the labourers who had downed tools and cleared off to a safe distance. Neither group would go anywhere near the wheelbarrow and the buzzing clump on the handle. Suitably veiled, Dad flicked the bulk of the swarm off the wheelbarrow with a goose wing into a cardboard box. After 30 minutes or so, most of the bees had clustered around their queen in the box, and Dad, box and bees departed leaving (I suppose) relieved police and prison warders to supervise the security arrangements. I never asked, but I hope there was a substantial donation to parish funds shortly thereafter!

For some reason, Dad also got called out to deal with unwanted wasp nests, a job that these days would fall to a pest control officer. The usual method of destruction was a large spoonful of 'Cymag' (the spoon being on the end of a long cane) on the ground next to the nest, or into the flight hole itself. For those not familiar with 'Cymag', it produces copious amounts of hydrogen cyanide gas on contact with water. Farmers and landowners often used it for gassing the burrows of rabbits and badgers in their unending war against other inhabitants of the countryside. That it also had a more sinister historical role was not unknown to me, and I wasn't very happy with Dad carrying this stuff around in the back of his van, unsecured. At home, the tin of 'Cymag' sat in state on the mantelpiece of the old bake and brew house which served as Dad's workshop and junk store, slowly rusting. It formed the subject of a difficult conversation between myself and my father towards the end of his time at the old house, when he had more or less given up directing the clearance of the outbuildings. I was at that time in charge of the chemistry labs at | Parker, and I also had cyanide compounds under my charge, and had some difficulty in persuading Dad that the tin of Cymag had to be properly 'taken care of' by a responsible hazardous goods agent (in Dad's case, Essex County Council) and not just left to 'the demolition men to clear'.

Bizarrely, I was to have a similar conversation, a few years later, about the same poison, with the then Newhaven Town Clerk. It is fair to say that I was rather blunter with the Town Clerk than I ever was with Dad!



1980: The sad end of an era. Two generations of Ost Rectors had kept bees at East Hanningfield Rectory, but beekeeping here had come to an end, along with the innovative 'Essex Pollination Scheme' and much else. Dad was too ill to carry on, and neither Martin, or I, were on hand to assist him..

Just outside the wreck of the entrance to the old stables and coach-house, stands a jumble of disused hive bodies and roofs. Leaning against them, the body of the old cycle trailer used to transport Martin and myself when we were babies, and Desmond and Dora were a young married couple in the late 1940's.

It symbolizes the end of the three generations of the Ost family at the original East Hanningfield Rectory, along with all those memories.

The developer of the Rectory and gardens was obliged by contract to provide a new Rectory building on part of the site; in this case, the corner plot of an overgrown and boggy field adjoining the old orchard, close to the walled garden. It was a substantial building, and because of the nature of the clay subsoil, provided with a steel reinforced concrete foundation integral with short pilings. Pretty expensive groundworks, but designed to totally resist swelling and contraction of the clay subsoil. Building took around eighteen months, as part of the wider development, and Desmond and Dora were able to move into the new house sometime in 1980. I was contracted (by Dora) to construct a rabbit-proof wire mesh fence around a portion of the new garden, so she could move her plants from the old Rectory garden, to be sure that the local pests would not be able to damage them!

Unfortunately their tenure of the new Rectory was short, as Desmond was already ill by the time of the move, and he retired little more than eighteen months later, when he and Dora moved to another house in Ingatestone. He didn't really bond with that house either; by early 1984 he was increasingly confused, sometimes getting lost if he went for a walk. Following admission to hospital for a 'routine' operation, he became very disturbed and violent after the premed, and as a result was 'chemically pacified' and sent

to Severalls Mental Hospital in Colchester. He went very rapidly downhill there and died late in November of that year.



1981: Dora's rabbit-proof plot, fully occupied, behind the new Rectory.

After a few retirement years in Ingatestone after Desmond's passing, Dora expressed a wish to move back to Sudbury, where she grew up, and close to her sisters in Acton. Although Judith and I helped her to buy a small house there, and organized her move from Ingatestone to Sudbury, she was showing signs of dementia, and not very long after we had moved her into her new house, it became obvious that she needed full-time care. Thankfully we were able to find her a place in a good private care home in Sudbury. She was admitted to the West Suffolk Hospital in Bury St. Edmunds after suffering a fall in the care home, dying in the hospital in 2008. Sadly, she had spent the last 11 years of her life in the care home.

Her ashes, and Desmond's ashes, are buried in the family grave next to 'All Saints', East Hanningfield.

Chapter 14

Lodgers and the 'family upstairs'

Although I did not understand it when I was growing up, post-war Britain was busy but very short of housing, mainly due to the bombing damage, but also in part to the continuing expansion of industry after the war and to returning service personnel. Chelmsford had a number of industrial concerns, Marconi of course, as the principal major military radio and radar contractor and a centre of research (it is now Elliot-Marconi), but there were also other manufacturing industries around Chelmsford, such as bearing manufacturer 'Hoffman Ball Bearing' and several food companies like Britvic, (which I believe is still going strong).

Hanningfield was relatively unscathed, despite near misses from some significantly destructive weapons (according to Dad, a V1 between the village and Rettendon, and a V2 somewhere to the Bicknacre direction, neither of which seemed to have caused major damage). The V1 strike I have seen confirmed from other sources, and anyway, he was in the parish from November '44 and would have been there to record these things. He claimed (although I never saw it) to have acquired a small hatch cover from the V2, which landed somewhere nearby after the missile struck.

My parents, with twenty-two rooms at their disposal, were well placed to help out with letting accommodation, and certainly needed the money with a parish to run, and us two to raise. My memory is of always having 'other folk around' when we were small, and I know that the rectory housed school-teachers and young engineers from Marconi in Chelmsford. A succession of married couples lived in the 'upstairs flat', which was the whole of the top floor, the 'nursery wing' of the Victorian house. By this time, it already had a bathroom and a kitchen, so it is possible that it had been in effect a separate flat pre-war.

The single folk lived in some of the rooms on the first floor. From memory, the young women lodgers (Doreen Lunn and Sylvia Roberts) who both taught at Hanningfield School, had the 'best' room, directly above the kitchen. It had the supreme advantage that the hot water pipes from the Aga in the kitchen ran under the floor, and so it was slightly warmer than the other rooms on that floor.

My parents had the front bedroom (on the right-hand side, as seen from the front garden) which were originally built with two adjoining dressing rooms above the front door, which were our bedrooms. The other 'principal front bedroom' was used by the young men, engineers from Marconi, who had a good view of the front garden. As this included the pond with its fine growth of bulrushes, there was some opportunity for air pistol practice from the first-floor windows, using the bulrush heads as read-made targets. If you hit one, you got a puff of white fibre along with the thud. I suspect this helped to encourage my interest in 'weaponry' which I'm afraid still remains with me. I used the same firing point, and the same targets some years later when I acquired my air rifle....

The engineers, who were around for several years, left significant amounts of electrical bits and pieces about the place (I seem to remember a half-built contraption which I was told was to be an electronic organ – however as it didn't possess a keyboard, or speakers, I wasn't convinced. I suspect the research side of Marconi was happy to encourage creative personal build projects in their spare time, and a bit

more junk around the rectory was hardly noticeable. I can only remember one name from that that occupation and that was Barry Rawlings, of whom I have a photograph taking the sun on our terrace in a deckchair. I think Barry also came to us when he worked for 'Western Incubators', a small company near the school.

My list of tenants is almost certainly incomplete. I remember, however, our 'upstairs folk' as:

Carol and Peter Satchell

The Ashleys (with daughter Linda and son Nigel)

The Hoopers (Ted Hooper and his wife, and daughters Lynn and Jeanette)

The lodgers who had the spare bedrooms on the first floor only remained with us until I was eight or nine, when presumably Dora was able to work longer hours at East Hanningfield School, or perhaps there were by that time a greater selection of rent able properties nearer to the factory in Chelmsford. I missed having 'big brothers' around the patch, but it was also nice to have more of the house to ourselves.

The 'letting out' of the top floor continued right up to the early seventies, as the Hoopers were still in residence when I left home. As has been mentioned before, Ted taught bee keeping at Writtle Agricultural College, and as Dad was passionate about bee keeping (it was rather more than a hobby) there was the basis for a long relationship. Although Ted moved away from Essex when he retired, both Lynn and Jeanette still live near Chelmsford, as I found out when friends arranged for us to meet Jeanette again in February 2015.

Carol and Peter remained friends for a long while after they left the 'attic flat' for a more interesting house in Woodham Mortimer, towards Maldon. Carol and Mum shared a love of choral music and choirs, while Peter was still an art teacher at Sandon Secondary Modern when I went there in 1960.

The house they moved to was of some age and was reputed to be a miller's house, as it was built at the bottom of a hill on which had stood a windmill. I can remember going up to the site of the mill and being shown what was described as the 'basement' of the mill building. This had the remains of a tunnel which ran down the cellar of Peter and Carol's house – the tunnel has apparently housed a type of 'inclined plane' which could lift bags of grain from the cellar, counterpoised by bags of flour descending to be stored in security.

It was only 'one room deep' front to back, with no passages or corridors between rooms. The first floor was arranged in the same manner, so you went through each bedroom in turn. From memory, there were two staircases to access the first floor. I went there on a couple of occasions to 'cat sit' their Siamese cats – why they needed to be 'cat sat' at all I can't remember, except that between the odd noises of an old house, and the very odd noises of three cats who were suspicious of intruders like me, it was a slightly disturbing place to be at night, on one's own.

I don't remember much about the Ashleys, except for one or two incidents. I don't think they could have been with us very long, although I have a photograph of Nigel and Linda on our front lawn, in the company of our Khaki Campbell ducks. I do remember that they came from Barnby Dunn, 'up north' and Mrs Ashley made loud comment on the first occasion when she saw Mum's washday routine, when she said that Dora left the washing to hang outside for far too long. Apparently where they had come from, any washing left outside for more than a couple of hours would need to be washed again, such was the pollution from all the coal fired industry.

We did get mucky air at Hanningfield from time to time in my childhood, but it wasn't quite as bad as 'up North!' In the early 1950's, Hanningfield suffered from 'London Smog' overspill, and the school log-book records several occasions in the winters of 1950 – 52 when visibility was down to 50 yds or less, with the children sent home early from school, and the No. 11 bus being led by a man walking in front with a torch.

My other 'Ashley memory' was from when I was about 7 or 8, and playing upstairs with Nigel in his bedroom, which was in the old Victorian night nursery. Each of these top floor bedrooms had and probably still has two very small windows as the only light for a large attic room. On this occasion there was a thunderstorm, which often resulted in power failures in Hanningfield if the storm was prolonged. We both went to one of the windows to marvel at the weird light and count between the flashes and the thunder, to guess the distance from the storm.

Looking over towards the line of 'pollarded' willows in front of the stables and coach house, we both suddenly became aware of a luminous glowing spherical object, moving at walking pace along the top of the line of trees. Almost as soon as we had begun to watch it, it disappeared without any sound that we could hear above the storm. My suspicion is that we were lucky lads, as we had witnessed that rare phenomena of 'ball lightning' which has been reported over the years in various guises, and is so rare as to be somewhat controversial. If you have never seen it, I can understand doubt, as it is such an inexplicable thing. I've been lucky and seen that ball of plasma for myself, at a safe distance....

Returning to the Hoopers, I've often thought that Mrs Hooper must have found Hanningfield Rectory much less comfortable than Ted appeared to do. Running a household up four flights of narrow steep stairs must have been inconvenient more often than not and having to bring her girls up in the close company of two noisy lads (Martin with motorbikes and cars, me with guns and motorbikes) must have been disturbing to say the least. Having talked to Jeanette about this, I think she and Lynn didn't mind the noise and chaos, but I'm not sure that Mrs H. was quite as relaxed about it. To make matters worse, she didn't like geese, and they knew it and made her life hell if she and they were in the garden at the same time, which fortunately wasn't too often. The geese were clearly crafty and unpredictable, to add to her burden of nervousness. I'm afraid I left Hanningfield before the Hoopers did, so I didn't know anything about the process of their departure. From later contacts, I found that both Lynne and Jeanette are still in the area of Chelmsford, although Ted Hooper moved back to Devon, and published a well-regarded textbook on bee keeping, before he died.

Chapter 15

We made our own entertainment then (or mischief revisited)

I suppose my earliest memory of 'keeping myself amused' was trying to keep up with Martin and his friends (principally David Davies and Nick Tricker) on the art of cycling – I can't remember a time when I couldn't cycle, but I don't suppose I started at a very early age.

The rectory was blessed with a ready-made circuit of paths and driveways which invited exploration. This varied in style from the formal drives between the top and bottom gates, and the carriage drive from the coach house in front of the pond (which were water-bound, gravel/pebble surfaced roadways) and the 'foot ways' along the terrace in front of the house, and through the shrubberies either side of the house. Finally there was 'Thieves Walk', which was the original access to the farmyard and fields which formed part of the 'home estate'. This may have had some sort of roadbed originally, but in my time, it was a muddy track leading from the bottom gate (nearest the church) and running parallel to what is now the road to Hanningfield Primary School. Between 'Thieves Walk' and the rest of the village there was a line of huge elms, on the side of the garden, this path was shielded by a hedge / shrubbery of holly, lime trees. This path was rather rough and muddy (even by Rectory standards) so wasn't easy to cycle.

As I've said earlier, none of the circuit was surfaced or particularly smooth, to the extent that tricycles were dangerous to ride. So bicycles were the only practical mode of wheeled transport, (other than a wheel barrow) around the place, and I have memories of my first bike, which was a child-size copy of the famous 'folding bikes' supplied for parachute troops. It was, of course, only single speed and had lever brakes and it was practically bombproof, an ideal mount for a careless five-year old. Where it came from, I know not but like everything else in my childhood it had had an extended 'earlier life'.

Looking back, the potential for injury in 'unsupervised play' was pretty high and several of us have nasty scars to remind us. As well as our bicycles, we had all sorts of agricultural implements to experiment with and I believe David Davies still has a scar on his scalp from a glancing axe blow – my brother had left an axe stuck into a tree trunk, and David was unlucky enough to be underneath when the axe came out....I can only assume that child injury rates and fatalities were pretty high in the nineteen fifties, and certainly much higher than today.

Mostly we were left to our own devices, and I don't recall telling my parents where we were disappearing off to. They in turn were always certain that we would come home when we were hungry! Being able to cycle meant we could roam significant distances, to get into mischief away from home. A favourite circuit, once we got bored with going round and round in the rectory grounds, was a run of about a mile around the village – out of the 'top gate' along the road towards Chelmsford and Howe Green, and then once beyond the village taking a left turn into Back Lane towards Great Claydons, and then along Back Lane until it joined Old Church Road, back towards the village past the old primary school, and then back onto the Tye, past the Windmill pub on the left, and the village shop and sub-post office (and only public telephone box) on the right. Carrying on up the Tye past the 'old post office' you came to a farm on the left, opposite the church, and right next to the bottom gate of the Rectory, and once through that, I was back on home ground.

Circuits were really just for practice. More interesting places to explore were the sand and gravel pits around the base of Danbury, along with the streams and fords that run around the higher ground of Danbury. Our nearest approach to such places was via Bicknacre, which was on the far end of the parish. The remains of Bicknacre Priory were a little further on, into Bicknacre village itself, but if you turned left, past the Leper Home (run by the English house of a South African order of Anglican nuns), and on past their graveyard on the other side of the road, you come to the nearest set of fords to Hanningfield.

The stream ran between high banks before the ford itself and cycling up and down these banks (a fifties type of BMX, but with ordinary bicycles) was the prime attraction. Going through the ford itself was not for the faint-hearted, as the road surface was covered with green slime and very slippery, and it was almost impossible to stay upright on a bike in the ford. There was, I remember, a footbridge with a handrail on one side, and most of us crossed the water on that. Oddly enough, although I remember going further afield, to the sandpits themselves, I cannot remember how I got there, or who I was with, since I wouldn't have been on my own.

The sandpits had lots of banks and dips which were fun to try to ride up, but inevitably there were big pools of very deep water just alongside., where all the sand and gravel had been dredged from. In one or two of the pits there was a central hillock, usually with a concrete base for some sort of dredger, surrounded by a deep circular 'moat'. Naturally, we 'weren't supposed to go there' but did anyway. I don't remember anyone falling in, or indeed getting hurt during these escapades.

It helped that there were very few cars around. There were cars, of course, but not compared to the hundreds in the same area today. Road speeds have increased as well, and the little roads and lanes I remember from childhood are now pretty dangerous places for 'kids on bikes'.

The other 'forbidden play zones' were the ponds. While the pond in the garden (still in existence in 2016, I'm glad to say) was muddy, relatively shallow and benign, and full of Great Crested newts and bull rushes, some of the 'field ponds' were more hazardous. The pond in the backfield (patronised by the flock of geese) was apparently a clay-pit for the production of brick, possibly for the cellar and well of the original rectory, although no records exist. As a result it was pretty deep, and being a pond dug out of clay was effectively bottomless and very soft. Dad always said that a cow had strayed into the pond (in an attempt to get into the other field) and had drowned, with only the tips of her horns sticking out of the water. So that one was forbidden, but it wasn't an 'inviting pond', with the only approaches via deeply pugged mud, and the rest of the banks being overgrown with shrubs and bramble. I think it has been filled in, but you can still see where it was on Google Earth. There was another 'wet area' if you walked through to the field which bordered Back Lane; as the footpath towards Great Claydons went beside an osier bed (a plantation of willows in a boggy patch) which had so little water, and so many overgrown willows that I'm not sure it really counted as a pond in the traditional sense.

My brother's contemporaries specialised in tree-climbing, and I've already mentioned the competitive side of this activity, which sometimes got a little out of hand. I confined my activities to the 'tree house', which was a variety of conifer where the branches grew out just above ground level, and then grew

upwards and inwards, to form a sort of hollow conifer 'cone', with lots of level branches to sit on, inside. This was one of the three 'specimen trees', planted on the far side of the pond in the 1860's remodelling, and now grown to impressive maturity. The three, from left to right as you looked out of the house were:

The Wellingtonia or 'Giant Tree' (115 feet high)

The Monkey Puzzle Tree or Chilean Pine (past its best by my time, as the lower branches had dropped off.

The Tree House (I can't remember its proper name, but there is a specimen in the Arboretum at RHS Wisley)

There was also a mature oak tree in the shrubbery which could be climbed, and which had a very secure branching crown that several people could hide in.

For we wicked children, the monkey puzzle branches formed ready-made weapons, with their clusters of sharp leaves, and there were quite a few 'chase and fight' games with our friends using these vicious plants. Apparently, the pond was really dug to ensure that the Wellingtonia and the Chilean Pine were adequately supplied with water, as well as being a useful 'garden feature' in a damp, boggy area in a big formal garden.

As it didn't stay a formal garden for long, but reverted to its wild side, there were lots of less used and populated areas, there was space for idle experiment. We dug quite a large pit beside the Thieves Walk, quite close to the bottom gate, where the ground was not too hard, and covered it with dead branches, turves, leaves and other debris, to make an 'underground den'. This area was later used for the November the 5th bonfire, as again there was plenty of dead wood around, and it wasn't in anyone's way. Building dens was almost superfluous, as there were so many buildings in the gardens underused, to our way of thinking. There was a choice, from the old pig sty, the cattle byres, the barn and of course the stables next to the garage / coach house, unused for many years since the passing of the Buxton-Smyths. I seem to remember trying to build little gliders and planes out of balsa, under the instruction of some of the young Marconi engineers who rented the spare front bedroom (and also used the heads of the bulrushes in the pond as targets, as one of the lads had a Webley air pistol) firing out of the bedroom window. We were very impressed, and when I later acquired a decent air rifle, I used later generations of bull rush heads as targets as well!

Above the entrance between the stables and the coach-house was the room built to accommodate the stable hands, later used as battery room when the lighting set was installed in the 1880's. This room was only accessible via a ladder, permanently hung on the wall of the coach-house and leading to a small door about 15 foot above ground which was the entrance to the room. This was a magnet for small people as it was in effect a ready built tree house!

The elms along Thieves Walk were home to an extensive rookery, and the young rooks sitting out on the branches in the rookery were seen as a legitimate target for 'sportsmen', including myself and my friend Stuart Mackinnon, the grandson of the farmer next to the bottom gate. He possessed an air gun which we both used. Unfortunately, it was a really feeble smooth bored .177 effort, and although we could see

the young rooks, they were actually quite safe as the pellets from this weapon could not actually reach them, 70 or 80 foot up in the air. The slugs could however reach us on the way down (which some might think poetic justice) so we quickly gave up our ill-judged assault and were left wondering if we might ever lay our hands on anything capable of reaching those rooks! Stuart and I turned our attention at ground level to moor hens for his granny to cook.

I did manage to acquire more accurate and lethal weaponry later, but the effect of 'shotgun on moor hen' convinced me that shotguns were not the way forward if you were shooting 'for the pot'.

Inevitably, when I got to secondary school, the interest in 'things pyrotechnic' was almost irresistible. I have distinct memories of a period of experimenting with unstable chemical mixtures, including potassium permanganate and sugar, and more lethally, sodium chlorate and sugar. For some reason I stayed well away from the latter mix, possibly because I had been warned about its sensitivity to friction and generally unpredictable nature. I also had some feeble and disappointing attempts to make black powder, not realising that the grinding and intensive mixing of the ingredients was the key to a successful product, not just the proportions of saltpetre, sulphur and charcoal. This did not stop some of my classmates at Sandon Secondary Modern from running practical trials of these and other mixtures, packed into metal tubes and old pipes, and ignited with Jetex fuse. The fragments from the successful trials would then be brought into school on Monday morning, to show to our science master for comment. He was probably the source of the advice about sodium chlorate.

Probably as a result of Dad's club cycling days pre-war, we still possessed some Lucas acetylene bike lamps, which were more powerful, and slightly more dependable than the early battery torches or the early bike dynamo sets (which of course only gave light while you were moving). These depended on generating acetylene gas by dripping water onto calcium carbide, a very smelly process, and both the gas, and the soggy solid residue, are potentially anti-social. Acetylene, of course, is tricky to handle under pressure as it is liable to spontaneously detonate if heated or otherwise abused.

Acetylene (and the calcium carbide which generated it) was a prime target for experimentation for me, as an alternative to the usual firework stuff, as we had a couple of old tins of it, not being used by anyone else. Given the sort of place it was, the back yard at Hanningfield was where unloved and derelict domestic equipment ended up, as there was no 'large item collection service' available from the dustmen, who in any case didn't service far-flung rural bits of Essex. Among other junk, there was an early, defunct, electric stove. I realised that if I put an empty tin can on the lower shelf of the oven, tipped some carbide into it, and added water, acetylene, which is heavier than air, would slowly fill up the air space in the oven, before finding its way to the night light candle burning at the bottom of a second shallow tin, artfully placed on the topmost shelf. Shutting the door carefully, having added a very tiny amount of carbide, I retreated to a 'safe place' (behind the door of the back kitchen, about 30 yards away). The first bang was quite satisfying, and a clear 'proof of principle', but not as loud as I expected. Returning to the stove, the door had been blown open, and the dark red flames of acetylene in air were still burning above the lower tin. After flushing out the carbide tin, it was clear that the experiment needed boosting with a bit more carbide. (I can only assume that Mum and Dad were out, and that the Hoopers, the occupiers of the top floor, were also elsewhere, as they must surely have been, or I would have been checked after the first trial).

I recall a couple more runs, with increasing amounts of carbide, louder each time. The final run went very quickly, and I hardly reached the relative safety of the house before there was an enormous blast. Thinking that this must surely have demolished the oven, I nipped out to see the effect. Dark red flames were still belching from the open door of the oven but nothing else (disappointingly) had been damaged. As I stood contemplating the next stage of the experiment, the village bobby appeared from a gap in the yew hedge which separated the back yard from the front drive.

“I don't know what you're doing, but I'm telling you to stop, right now. You are rattling windows 400 yards from here and people were concerned enough to phone me.....”

I of course stopped, and there were no more 'large scale' experiments with acetylene from then on. I assumed that there would then be an awful follow up report to Mum and Dad. For some reason (I don't really know why) this apparently inevitable consequence never happened, and no element of retribution (which one might reasonably expect) followed. It stopped at the verbal caution, and I don't think Mum and Dad ever knew.

A little while later, I was able to return the compliment by loaning the same policeman my Webley air rifle, to sort out the rabbits who were invading his vegetable patch. I've always had a soft spot for 'community policing' after that. A word at the right moment can be very effective, although some aspects of my activity at home was from then on 'under surveillance', and I can remember him looking very suspiciously at a large coil of twin flex, joined to a push button switch on a handle, next to a 12v car battery. I omitted to say that by that time I had moved onto electrical ignition of small charges of shotgun powder, packed into tubes, but exploded in deep holes packed with earth (hence the wires....)

On a more positive note, about this time I started to be involved with the Sandon School Sailing Club (which met in Maldon, within cycling distance of home) and I became obsessed with the idea of getting a small boat and getting out on the water myself. From somewhere we acquired a wooden two-man canoe, and then dad and I constructed one of the 'canvas and wood frame' canoes that were popular then, before the advent of the glass fibre kayak. Both of these were tested on the pond in the front garden, although it was hardly big enough to really train us as competent canoeists. Had we tried the 'Eskimo roll' we would have got our heads stuck in the mud....The second canoe arrived at Hanningfield as a kit of parts; typically for the time, the kit was delivered by rail, not road, to our nearest station, Battlesbridge on the branch line to Burnham-on-Sea (this branch line had survived Dr Beechings “efficiency drive” of the mid-nineteen fifties on account of it being close to the nuclear power station at Bradwell Waterside).



1962: Stability testing the converted 'canoe into trimaran' on the pond in the Rectory garden; it was stable, but very, very slow and unwieldy to transport. More by luck than judgement, I managed to avoid drowning while testing this contraption somewhere on the Blackwater Estuary, and I soon lost interest, as did Desmond, who had to transport the thing!

I think we got the kit to Hanningfield in the back of Dad's van, with the rear doors open but tied together.

Anyway, this got built in the front room at the rectory (the one used for jumble sales and later for a playgroup) and I still had it when I was at 49 Meeching Road, tied upright to the railings outside the back door. Despite now having a perfectly usable canoe, I hankered after a sailing vessel of some kind, and we arrive at the idea that we could convert the two man canoe into a sailing canoe (I think we bought some sort of conversion kit for a lug-sail rig) and for stability we converted the whole thing into a primitive trimaran, with home-made outrigger floats and lee boards as there was no room for a dagger board or a conventional centre board. I think we managed to transport this monstrosity to Heybridge Basin, and then to somewhere near Woodbridge on the Deben, for 'sea trials'. Frankly it was all more trouble than it was worth, and I had a couple of bad moments getting launched, and a few more, getting the rig (and myself) back on dry land. I do remember a sense of huge vulnerability once on my own, out on the water, with a very slow, heavy boat, and probably for very good reason, given my total lack of experience and common sense.

I think my enthusiasm for 'lone sailing' finished there, although as part of the Sandon School Sailing Club I helped with maintenance work on the Thames barge "Memory". My interest in boats has been confined to my memories of that weekend trip, which I've described elsewhere, and I have no further wish to 'mess about in boats'.

Desmond bought me a .22 air rifle for my sixteenth birthday; not any old rifle, but a 'Webley Service Mk II', a very solidly made, and no doubt very expensive when first made. (These are still very collectable 'classic' pre-war air rifles). The gunsmith told Dad that this is a properly constructed air rifle (not one of these cheap modern 'wire and tin plate wonders' I think is what he said) and I still own it, and it still works well. It was nearly as heavy as heavy as the Mk IV Lee-Enfield it was named for, and due to its peculiar design, it could not be fitted with a telescopic sight, but used military style peep rear sights, adjustable for range and wind drift, (but more accurate than the usual open sights) and as a result potentially more accurate than the usual run of air rifles, all things considered. Don Abbey and I were often out and about in the Rectory gardens, setting up the usual tin can targets, but we had one special target that was unique. A former rector (probably the Rev. Sacre) had a fire station bell fitted high up on the west facing gable wall of the rectory, above the kitchen at that end of the house. According to Desmond, this would be rung to call the groom / gardener / handyman from whatever he was doing, to bring the car (an electric car, no less), from the coach house, and round to the front door. It made an irresistible target, as there was no doubt when you'd hit it! As the bell was about 16" across, it wasn't difficult to hit, even from the top of the kitchen garden. Unfortunately, slugs ricocheting from the bell, or the brickwork, seemed to find their way into the yard outside the coach house, and we had to make quite sure we had no visitors in and around the stable and coach yard, otherwise complaints were sure to follow!

Model aircraft were, and I suspect still are, very popular with small boys, and I was no exception. The young Marconi engineers who stayed at Hanningfield in the early fifties started Martin and I on the gentle sport of making balsa wood gliders. There was a kit manufacturer somewhere in Wickford, and I suppose it was a useful early introduction to wooden construction. My memory is that the building took rather longer than the flying and crashing....However, the construction of fragile frameworks of balsa and tissue paper fascinated me, and I was proud enough of the results the building that I was reluctant to try them in the air. Although we had a very large garden, the planes seemed doomed to end up in tree, or in the pond.



1953: Martin and I testing our gliders on the front lawn

It wasn't until I was at Sweyne, and friends with Don Abbey, that the 'powered flight' thing grabbed me. Don and his Dad were into control line aircraft, with diesel and glow plug engines, fuelled with mysterious and pungent mixtures of paraffin and castor oil, or castor oil, paraffin and nitro-methanol (for glow plug engines). Don and Don Senior had several 'flying wing' type acrobatic aircraft, although Don Senior also made the most exquisite balsa and tissue models of First World War aircraft, for display rather than free flight. I had not come across control line aircraft before, and I found the idea of spinning round and round with the plane on the end of two lines hard to get used to, not least because I'm prone to motion sickness, but eventually I got hardened to it, and had my own small aircraft for a time. I suspect these days both Dons would have been into radio control, but R/C equipment was at that time (1961/62) both very expensive and very heavy, resulting in very large aircraft, which were a bit too much of a specialist interest.

Despite all that, Don and I persevered with some very basic aircraft (I think we managed to get a wooden plank into the air with the aid of a 10cc diesel engine); I think that must have been at least part of the inspiration for Don's expertise with all things hand-made, mechanical, and driven by petrol, diesel or steam. By the end of the 5th year, that had morphed into Don working at weekends in the Hullbridge scrapyard, and my enduring interest in mucking about with engines of any sort, bike, car or tractor.

A friend of the family took advantage of Hanningfield's wide open spaces to park his Austin Seven saloon. This had a starting handle, running boards and a simple (not to say primitive) engine and ignition which made it an excellent teaching aid for young people wishing to learn about cars. As it belonged to someone else, we had to treat with respect and remember to drain the cooling system and radiator before storing it away again. However, I remember a few trips around the rectory drives, with Martin driving and myself on the running boards, gangster-style.

If it had a motor, it was fair game for experiment. I know that there was an early species of moped, which came to us somehow, and which had a small petrol engine which drove the front tyre of the bicycle via a toothed roller, which could be raised or lowered in lieu of a clutch. I can't remember what happened to this rather dodgy form of power assistance, although I drove it most of the way to Bicknacre and back on one occasion (without benefit of driving licence, tax, insurance and all those good things). I think I was too young for a licence, anyway, but managed not to get into trouble over it, by great good fortune. The 'MOT failure' Austin 12 previously mentioned was perhaps a better way of learning to drive 'off-road', although my driving skills were not too brilliant even after this early taster of powered transport.

I finally got my first driving lessons, (I think in Mum's Ford Anglia) on the airfield runway which was still in existence in the mid-nineteen sixties, in between Acton and Waldringfield. This had been a Flying Fortress (B17) base during the war, and the road to Waldringfield ran across the runway, about 300 yards from Granny and Granddad's house. There were gates on the Acton, and on the Waldringfield sides of the runway which shut off the road during take-off and landing, and the gate posts were there in the hedgerow, either side of the road, until just a few years ago.

Hanningfield continued in its role as a 'vehicle storage area', with dad's blessing, until after the time I left home. Don had by this time moved on from helping out in the scrap yard to setting himself up as a very competent car body repair man, and several of his 'own projects' involved insurance written off of sports

cars (usually Sunbeam Alpines), which needed a secure (or at least 'out of sight' storage until they could be worked on, and the far corners of the Rectory gardens were ideal. I don't remember Dora being consulted on this arrangement, but I suspect Dad would not have thought there was any need.

I don't know why we got it into our heads to investigate the collapsing lean-to shed against the north wall of the church, just along from the door to the north transept and the vestry. To our surprise it contained a curious type of four wheeled handcart, with wooden spoked wheels. The two smaller wheels at the front were mounted in swivelling forks so that the cart could be steered. It had a slatted platform about 30" off the ground, with two wooden rollers set into the top surface. The wheels had solid rubber tyres. This was a 'local hearse' used, I suppose, to assist the moving of coffins during funerals. It clearly hadn't been used for a long time, and I wonder how practical it could ever have been, given the difficulty of lifting it over the threshold of the church door loaded with a coffin 'on board', so to speak. Certainly, I had never seen it in use at any of the funerals I attended at All Saints. This being so, we then commandeered it for some wacky races around the drives at home.

The previous contender for '*pushing each other around on the paths*' games had been an old wickerwork-bodied 'bath chair' which was designed to be pushed from the back of the high seat. There were two large wire spoked wheels under the seat. The occupant of the bath chair had to steer the thing with a long handle which connected to the tiny single wheel at the front. They weren't designed for speed, were pretty unstable on any rough surface and, on account of the very long steering handle, had a very poor turning circle. The bath chair had eventually disintegrated with overuse and abuse long before the opportunities of the hearse presented themselves.

To add a certain class to the performance, one of us got into a army surplus Arctic sleeping bag, which zipped up to leave just the face exposed (and looked, when occupied, not unlike a wrapped Egyptian mummy) and was strapped on, in place of a coffin, to give some semblance of 'correct loading' to try out the suspension of the cart. I think we did several circuits of the gardens before we got bored, or before someone complained about the disrespectful performance.....

Chapter 16

Dubious employments

I suppose being surrounded by agriculture in various forms, as Martin and I got into teenage years it was natural perhaps that occasional 'farm jobs' came our way. I seem to recall that both of us considered temporary jobs fruit picking and the like. I don't think any of them lasted any time and may have only been 'helping out' rather than employment. As cash was always short, casual jobs and 'cash in hand' would have been ideal, were such available. I got my first real (but part time) job as a relief summer postman for the village in 1965 – I cannot remember the exact circumstance that led to the job, but Mr Graham, who ran the village shop, was also the sub postmaster, and must have been asking around for someone to help out. Anyway, I was asked if I would like to 'fill in' for Charlie, the postman, when he took annual leave, as I would be on my school summer holidays, I had nothing else planned, and I certainly needed the cash!

It was my first introduction to working with other people who were not family, school or church, and I rather enjoyed it. It meant getting up around five (no problem in summer) and turning up at the sub-post office when the post van dropped off the local mail for Charlie to sort.

My memory is that I worked beside Charlie for a day or two, to 'learn the ropes' before he went off on his break. I think Charlie by that time was in his mid-sixties, with a deformed spine (a 'hunch back' in non-PC terms) which made physical effort look very painful. This was a concern to the sub-postmaster as well as Charlie; as Charlie had relatively 'restricted speed' over the ground, it was made very clear to me that I was not to try to make the mail delivery more quickly, in case I raised 'customer expectations' during my two weeks of a speedier delivery that Charlie couldn't match on his return. Don't rock the boat, in other words!

Inevitably, I was slower than Charlie when I was left to sort out the incoming mail myself, but faster at the actual delivery, even allowing for Charlie's single speed post office 'bomb-proof' bicycle with the bag carrier over the front wheel. So, all in all, no unreasonable customer expectations were raised to trouble Charlie on his return from a well-earned break. He had also given me 'chapter and verse' on where troublesome dogs might be encountered, and how to avoid them, in some cases by leaving mail in some very unorthodox and insecure places, to avoid having to cycle up a long uphill drive to an isolated farm, only to meet a rabid dog running down the hill to meet you! There were a couple of places where the dogs were dangerous and a real nuisance, but also one or two where the dog was obviously a little bit lonely and pleased to meet any new company...

There were two deliveries per weekday and one on Saturday. The morning delivery was the big one, and I covered all the village, and the outlying farms, out to Rose hill Farm Creephedge Lane (just round the corner from what is now RHS Hyde Hall), Hill Farm (off Pan Lane, and where there was a 'highly dangerous Airedale– according to Charlie,' and over to East Hanningfield Lodge, off Old Church Lane and accessible by a long, uphill ride on an unmade track. This was guarded, apparently by another extremely dangerous and unpredictable canine, and so for both those locations I didn't go to the farms themselves but left their post, by prior arrangement, in a bit of field drain in the hedge. According to Charlie, if they didn't like that, they could collect their post themselves from the office! I was quite

pleased as in both cases it saved me quite a long, rough, cycle uphill. I should put it on record that there was a huge bloodhound at Rose Hill Farm that had frightened our local bobby (my friend from the acetylene 'incident') when on quiet 'no lights' night-time patrol on Creephedge Lane. He claimed that he only got away from it by fending it off with his bike and hitting it with his bike pump.

I met the same dog by daylight, and yes, he was huge, but all he really wanted was a friend. After being licked and slobbered almost to death, he would then accompany me back along Creephedge Lane right up to the junction of the Hanningfield / Rettendon Road before turning for home. I quite missed the bloodhound when the job finished!

The afternoon delivery was much shorter. There were a few stops in the village itself, but then I had a longish ride out almost to Bicknacre, with post for Common Farm, Salesfrith Farm and for the nuns and the patients at the Leper Home, as we called it. If, as sometimes happened, I had a recorded delivery, I had to knock and wait patiently for one of the nuns to break off from their duties to come and sign for the package. To judge by the reaction to my presence once one of the Sisters appeared, I was a very unwelcome intrusion to their day, despite the delivery. The Leper Home has long gone (although it appeared to be a Church nursing mission, not unlike that portrayed in 'Call the Midwife', but in rural isolation). The home was located on the junction to a small lane that led towards Danbury Common, and Great Gibcracks. The cemetery for the nuns and the patients can still be seen a little further down that lane, on the right as you head towards Danbury.

I had the same job again the next summer holiday, 1966. By that time I had motor transport, and whether or not I was 'officially sanctioned' to do so, I did some of the longer and more troublesome outlying farms by motor cycle combination, which still upset the dogs, but allowed me a faster exit...

Martin had also found a part-time job, sometime before my Post Office work, helping out at a local farm. Where it was, I can't remember, but I do remember Dora insisting that he got undressed in the back passage by the back yard, and not to come into the house until he had clean clothes on. Apparently as part of the job, he had to muck out a barn that had first been used for chickens on deep litter, and then for calf rearing, so there was about two foot deep of chicken shit and straw overlaid with soft green /brown calf shit. I did wonder at the time if Martin had upset his employer, but my later experience with agricultural research at Fyfield made me realise that there are a great many shitty jobs in 'farm work', and that youngsters generally get the worst jobs.

Martin's jeans stood up by themselves at the end of the day, covered in stiff green feculence. I suspect they may have been burnt when the job finished!

When I was on my Post Office job, Martin found employment at Marconi, helping the team that went around the country to map out the reception across different areas, in preparation for new TV or VHF transmitter stations. This took him away from home for extended periods and involved him in some real adventures, but that is a tale for him to tell.

After completing my A-Levels in 1968, I fell out finally with the head teacher at Swayne and resolved that on no account would I return to resit any exams, in an attempt to improve my grades (which were dire, two scraped passes at A-Level) but if I wanted to go on to college, I needed better grades. I

investigated the College for Further Education, then based in the centre of Chelmsford, as I was informed they ran A-Level courses. When I arrived, they suggested that I shouldn't bother resitting A-Levels as with my current results I could sign on to do a Higher National, which was a part-time course, one day per week at college and four days in work. They had a list of firms that might employ me on that basis. I went to a number of interviews, including one at May and Baker, the chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturer in Dagenham. Although I wasn't particularly keen to work in Dagenham (it was a long way from home, and I might have to find digs near the factory) I got a second interview at the Dagenham outstation at Fyfield, near Chipping Ongar. This was a fifteen-or-sixteen mile cross-country drive from Hanningfield, so I could (if I got the job) live at home.

It turned out that there hadn't been many applicants for the job (or at least not many who didn't head for the door once they knew what it involved). The first question was: did insects bother me? That was easy, as I said I was helping out with large-scale bee-keeping at home, and no, I was OK with the idea. Then they showed me the set-up, and I could see why there weren't many takers.

May and Baker were developing insecticides, to control pests in orchards and in livestock farming. They were having to develop new types of sheep dip to control fly strike – DDT had previously been used, but resistance was developing to DDT, and there were other reports of issues with these persistent chlorinated compounds, and May and Baker were working with the less persistent organo-phosphorus insecticides. The fact that these very effective acetylcholinesterase inhibitors were closely related to nerve gases was not really flagged up at interview, for some reason. The really disturbing aspect of the work was the need to grow large quantities of blow-fly maggots to use to assess the effect of the insecticide. As Fyfield also produced lots of chickens for other unspecified projects, they ended up with lots and lots of dead chicks, on which they bred the maggots.

The laboratory was set up in buildings along the drive to a large farm. M&B didn't own the farm itself, only some of the surrounding land. Our bit was a converted stable block, still with the two section stable doors. Each stable now held different parts of our Veterinary Entomology Section, laboratory with balances and fume cupboards, an office section, several small test areas, a dressing, locker and boot room, and an insect breeding room, with cloth cages of adult flies, and several dustbins containing decomposing chicks crawling with maggots. Given the short life cycle of the *Lucila* sheep fly, this was a production line that produced thousands of maggots for testing. I will leave you to imagine the smell in the insect room, a heady mixture of bodily decomposition and ammonia. I was almost sick on walking in for the first time at the interview, but was told, "you'll be surprised how quickly you'll get used to it".

It certainly helped to get my own seat on the bus! It was said that any books that had been in our section retained their own curious fragrance for months after they had been returned to the library, but that only became apparent on flicking the pages...but for some reason I was let back in the Rectory after work without leaving my clothes outside in the back passage.

I got the job (at £480 per annum) and I took it, as I badly needed the chance of better qualifications, and money, as my parents couldn't afford to keep me, unless I brought in something other than a smell. What I did there, and what it led to, is a tale for another time, but I did get my HNC in Applied Biology with decent grades, which enabled me to get my next job, in a research institute at Sussex University. That must also be a tale for another time.

Chapter 17

Guns 'n bikes n' rock & roll (and cars....)

Unusually for a 'man of the cloth, my grandfather Ost trained as a gunsmith. We suspect this could well have taken place during his time in East London, (before he enlisted for missionary work in British Guyana) and the family explanation for this venture, that has come down to us, was “if they won't come into my church to hear about Christ, they will have to come into the mission to get their muskets repaired....”. I quote this to support my claim that an interest in firearms has been a bit of a family tradition. There were bits of cartridge reloading equipment still around in Dad's collection of assorted bits and pieces, which I'm sure were part of *his* father's equipment.

In his turn, Dad had his 'air rifle equivalent' still around at home in my formative years, which was a dreadful bolt action 'No. 3 Garden Gun'. To those unfamiliar with such things, this was a 9 mm rim fire shotgun that was both illegal, and (in my experience) totally ineffective. You can probably still get ammunition for it (Flobert made the stuff I used) under a normal shotgun licence. It had a copper rim fire base and a cardboard case for the powder and shot – however, the cardboard bit usually got lodged halfway up the barrel after a couple of shots, as the barrel was a little corroded and, in the inimitable phrase from my laboratory specimen preparation days, was as '*rough as a bears arse*' inside.

Not only was it badly corroded (and probably unsafe if one were using a more powerful round), the barrel was rather shorter than the legally prescribed 18 inches minimum for a shotgun. Underpowered, illegal and inaccurate, it made a loud noise when fired but that was about all – I think you could knock tin cans over if you got close enough. Apparently when Desmond was growing up you could buy 'solid shot' rounds for the thing, with a 9 mm spherical lead ball instead of the shotgun pellets, which would be slightly more dangerous to both user and passers-by, but no more accurate.

Little did I know that Desmond had also kept a totally illegal Colt .38 revolver in his possession, probably acquired during Home Guard days. Since my Suffolk granddad also had a small-bore rifle from his time in the Home Guard with no sign of a Firearm Certificate (together with loads of American-made .22 ammunition to fire), I may have been the first in my family to actually legally own and use a firearm, although clearly not the first to possess one. I put on record that when we discovered the pistol it did not have any ammunition with it. I suspect that Desmond did have some, tucked away somewhere at Hanningfield, and it's just as well I didn't find any when the pistol emerged from hiding, as I would have been sorely tempted to keep it as well, as part of the long-standing family tradition.

Sadly, as with so many of those things, it only saw the light of day when I was asked to clear Dad's roll top desk after his funeral. I had the same experience with my Suffolk granddad, when Martin and I were asked by Granny Brown to perform the same sad task for her. In his case, I suspected that there wasn't much in the way of .22 ammunition left, as he and I had disposed of it over a hectic afternoon of target practice some little while before. (Despite firing some 50 or 60 rounds into the end of granddad's paint shop, I've often wondered why no-one was concerned or lodged any complaint at the time – I guess if we repeated the exercise in Acton today we would find ourselves at the wrong end of the local constabulary Tactical Response Unit within minutes).

Granddad's desk contained, along with much else, some odds and ends of cartridges, including some very odd calibres – prize exhibit being a pin fire shotgun cartridge, which probably had not been made for 80 – 100 years. Neither his desk, or Desmond's, contained a shotgun licence or a firearms certificate.....

For my part, as I think I've already mentioned, I first fired a shotgun in anger when I was in primary school. My best friend, Stuart Mackinnon, used to visit his gran and granddad at weekends. They had the very small farm by our bottom gate, farming the land where the new Hanningfield Primary School was built. His farm drive ran parallel with the road inside our garden (known as 'Thieves Walk') and his small, deeply muddy farmyard backed onto a wooded part of our 'garden'. The sheds on the farm were mainly derelict vehicle bodies, and Stuart and I were not above doing a little exploring as there was rarely anyone around.

His granddad had an old 12 bore shotgun, and a wealth of ammunition for it. Leaving aside some of the solid shot rounds, (which included a tubular shot with internal fins, these being meant to spin and stabilise the bullet from a smooth bore gun), we selected more normal shotgun cartridges and set out to hunt some moor hen we had seen on a pond in his granddads field. Why moor hen you may ask? Stuart's granny was brought up on rural economy and would prepare and cook any feathered thing that Stuart (or anyone else, for that matter) would drop by her door. Moor hen didn't seem to move too quickly, they were pretty common on the ponds and ditches, and anyway no-one round about Hanningfield bred game birds of any sort, at least none that wandered our way.

So, moor hen it was. Stuart had already tried to get one moor hen with an elderly air pistol, and missed, so we thought we stood a better chance with the shotgun. We stalked our prey (not the most difficult of operations, since the moor hens seemed to be largely indifferent to our presence) and let fly with the 12 bore at no more than 20 yards. We hit our target, but so well that there were virtually no recognisable bits of moor hen for his granny to cook. We reluctantly returned the shotgun to where we had found it, and from that moment on I was convinced that the 12-bore was not the best tool for 'acquiring game' for the pot.

I acquired a firearms certificate for a small-bore rifle before I passed my driving test at around eighteen. I should say that I had been driving a motor-cycle combination, on a provisional licence, for at least a year before that, so when I did get a full licence, I already had some road experience. But more of that later. I had been given a robust and reliable air rifle for my sixteenth birthday, the aforementioned 'Webley Service Mk II', (which I still have) and I was already getting rabbits for the pot, on the basis that I had to gut, skin and remove head and feet said rabbit, and then Dora was very happy to casserole the carcass. I guess it was a pretty small contribution to the overall diet, but it seemed to be both a contribution to the domestic economy and a validating reason for my interest in firearms.

Whilst still at home, I joined a local shooting club, which had a small-bore range in the grounds of the 'Cock' public house at Stock. They also organised 'full bore' sessions on a range near Colchester, where I was able to try the Mk IV Lee-Enfield .303, (by that time no longer the rifle for front-line troops in the British Army), as well as a number of handguns. As part of the 'range experience', we spent some time at the other end of the range, in the underground target gallery, marking the targets for the other shooters. At 300 yards the bullet holes were not visible to the rifleman, and the marking was essential to judge

high, low, left or right. The gallery was underground, and open fronted, facing the high backstop bank at the end of the range; immediately in front, was a broad dry ditch containing a light railway for moving the target boards into storage. There was a low brick retaining wall for the backstop bank on the other side of the ditch, about forty to fifty feet away.

The targets were large boards, mounted on a counterpoised mechanism, with a second board on which could be displayed an indication of where the shot had hit the target. You could see the target board, and the point of shot impact, from below. Once the indicator board had been marked up, it was sent up to inform the shooter of his performance, and the actual target was brought down and the shot hole repaired by pasting a piece of white paper over it.

We were in communication with the firing party by field telephone, so that we knew when to exchange target with marker board. Sometimes one of the firing party would get confused, or just cheeky, and put a shot through the marker board, which usually resulted in 'harsh words' being exchanged on the phone, and you could not always be sure exactly when firing had stopped. So, it was a reassurance that the marking team was protected by the gallery being several feet below ground level, and in theory totally protected from 'direct fire'.

However, about a month after our expedition to the range, someone was killed while working in the same marking gallery. Apparently one bullet had been fired very low, had hit the soil under the target board and above the gallery. Instead of deflecting upwards from the ground contact, it entered the soil, was deflected down, came out above the gallery and hit the brick wall below the backstop mound. It bounced off the wall, and back into the gallery....

I don't think that was the reason for my not carrying on with full-bore rifle shooting (the ammunition was very expensive compared to the .22 rim fire stuff I used in field and target work) but it certainly made me think about the destructive power of even an obsolete high velocity round such as the .303. Over the next few years, in the smallbore club in Seaford, I acquired two more single shot target rifles, as well as a self-loading 'Star' pistol, to use on the indoor range.

(All the .22 stuff (except the air rifle) went, really as soon as James and Katharine got to the age of curiosity 'about the guns in Dad's cupboard', as I realised I was just collecting firearms for no real purpose (I suppose my interest in target shooting had waned), and the possibility for nasty accidents was worrying. The guns (especially the pistol) had to go, as I had neither the space or the spare cash to make secure lockable cupboards for the arms and ammunition. The air rifle could stay, as it was very difficult to cock the spring mechanism, and in any case the barrel (which was the cocking lever for the rifle) was stored disconnected from the rifle itself. It was the end of an era for me, but really for the best.)

My transport to the Army firing range on that occasion was a Renault 4L, which had good ground clearance and enough travel on the suspension to go easily over the uneven ground of the range. I believe it belonged to Martin; the engine was showing signs of extreme wear, with disturbingly high oil consumption, and 6-volt ignition, which made for unreliable starting unless the car was used every day. It has to be said that 'personal transport' was a primary consideration, living where we did, and for that reason I very quickly acquired a vehicle as soon as I legally could drive one!

My vehicles were a motley crew by anyone's standards!

I had (in relatively quick succession):

- an NSU 'Quickly' 50 cc moped (optimistically named)
- my brother's BSA Gold Flash 650 cc motorcycle combination (illegally converted, as I found, with fashionable (for solo bikes) drop handlebars). Much too quick to be safe!
- a totally clapped out Triumph 500 (condemned at MOT for the state of its front forks)
- a BSA B33 500cc single (an excellent bike for side car work)
- my aunt's BMW Isetta bubblecar (of which later)
- a brown Standard Vanguard, 2 litre
- and later a Standard Vanguard 'Sportsman' 2 litre (just as heavy as the earlier car, but with twin carburettors and a Borg-Warner electric overdrive to supplement the 3-speed gear box)

I inherited a Watsonian side car which, while not being the most fashionable, or lightest model, was very useful, and ended up on the BSA B33 as a very practical, rather old-fashioned workhouse bike which served me until I needed 'all weather' transport (the bubble car). I used to roll up to school on the Gold Flash combination, (a few of us had vehicles by that time) which produced interest and derision from pupils and staff alike. My headteacher totally condemned my bringing it to school, so to annoy him, I parked it just off school premises, where he could do nothing about it. One of the top stream 'hard men' (who had annoyed me and threatened me from the first day I started at Sweyne) mocked me for having a side car on such a machine and tried to show off in front of his mates by trying to kick start it and ride it off on it. That bike had its ignition timing fixed at full advance, so starting had its hazards unless you knew what you were doing. He didn't, and the massive backfire that followed nearly broke his leg as the starter kicked back. As he was showing off in front of his mates and mine, then to having to hobble away afterwards, his 'loss of face' seemed like poetic justice, really. He never bothered me again, and my friends all thought it hilarious and just desserts!

The bubble car I bought from my aunty Beth (for £15) after she got herself a Morris Minor. The reason for the change was that the bubble car had tipped her over into a ditch, upside down, where she was trapped until the fire service lifted the car bodily out of the ditch. While she was trapped in the car, she could smell petrol which was running out of the tank behind the rear windscreen, and down into the body of the car.

This should have alerted me to certain shortcomings of that vehicle, and encouraged me to research its other common faults, which apparently were quite well-known by owners of the vehicle by the time I bought it.

To those who are unfamiliar with the 'bubble car' concept, these were light weight two-seater vehicles usually made using design concepts found in motor scooters or motor bikes, first devised in the late fifties and I suppose aimed at those drivers who typically drove a motor bike for reasons of economy. The 'Isetta' had two front wheels, a single rear wheel driven by a 350cc single cylinder engine with the engine, final drive and rear wheel mounted on a single swinging arm. Passenger and driver sat side by

side on a bench seat: access was by a wide front door which hinged to the right, with the steering wheel attached to the back of the door. The steering column was joint so as to allow the column and wheel to swing outwards with the door. There was a tiny gear stick to the right of the driver, which operated a conventional motorcycle 'up and down' box integral with the engine unit, which took a little bit of practice, as with bike boxes, to get a reliable change to the gear you thought you had selected!

As a practical form of everyday, economical transport, it was quite a good concept, slightly let down by the engineering. Martin, who by that stage had graduated to a Triumph TR3 sports car, took one look at it and condemned it as a 'death trap'.

The problem that caused Beth's problems, wear of the swinging arm bearings, had caused the rear wheel to wander and in effect, caused the 'tail to wag the dog' and made it unpredictable to steer, especially on such a short wheelbase (the car was effectively spherical), was easily fixed, and for many months it gave me reliable all-weather transport. I was going on country lanes to work at Fyfield, about 20 miles across country, and its top speed of around 55 m.p.h. was not an issue. Martin would still not go anywhere near it and wished me luck when I drove it.

There were other little vehicles in a similar vein, the Messerschmitt (which had two seats, one behind the other, in an aircraft type cockpit) (Desmond actually got stuck in one of these when he tried it at a London motorcycle show) and the unlamented Bond Minicar, again based on scooter technology, but this time the engine and wheel formed the steering unit of a "two wheels at the back, one steering wheel at the front" configuration. I have driven one of these bizarre vehicles on a test drive, only to have the bonnet break loose from its straps and hinge back onto the windscreen, blinding me, at which point I handed it back...

On the final occasion I drove it any distance, I took it down to Brighton to visit Judith. On the way down I hit black ice just south of Uckfield, the back wheel lost all grip and I spun 360 degrees from the back, eventually ending up still going in the same direction, (but in the opposite carriageway) doing 10 m.p.h. Nothing was coming the other way, or I would have almost certainly been killed.

Coming home the next day brought further problems. The besetting fault of the BMW single cylinder engine was a problem with the design of the exhaust valve, which would intermittently stick open causing a misfire, reduced power, and extremely rough running, resulting in overheating.

After several stops en route, in unsuccessful attempts to cure the problem, the car finally died after very slowly negotiating the Dartford Tunnel, on the A13 in Essex, very late at night. The final indignity on that memorable drive home was to be stopped and searched by police on the roadside of the A13 during my walk back to the emergency phone box.

Not very long after that, I bought a 'proper' car (the Standard Vanguard, advertised as '*looks like a tank, goes like a tank*') But 'go', and keep going, it did, to my great relief. I should also say, that I sold the Isetta, with its declared exhaust valve fault, to a bubble car collector, for £40!

The Standard Vanguard served me for some years (longer than any of the bikes) and was my first reasonable reliable transport, but it was always difficult to really maintain **any** form of transport at home, on a tiny income, and although I was not adverse to 'having a go' myself, having always done that with my motorbikes, I wasn't really up to the job of proper vehicle repairs for many years, and really by that

time, I would be happy to let someone else, who knew what they were about, sort out my vehicles. The problem was as always, having the cash to do that.

The Standard Vanguard, my first 'proper car'. It was significantly more reliable than any previous vehicle (even than my beloved B33). It features in a photograph of Desmond and Beate Eberle, when Dad borrowed the car to take Beate to see Coventry Cathedral.



*Beate and Desmond,
Easter 1970.*

I was living in London Road, Brighton, and for practical reasons I had left the Vanguard back in Hanningfield. I was within walking distance of London Road station, and could go to and from Sussex University, where I was working with the Agricultural Research Council. I didn't take the car down to Sussex until Judith and I were married, and living in Ditchling, where we couldn't commute by public transport. Dad was using the car from time to time, and Beate had wanted to see the new Coventry Cathedral while she was in England.

My last Vanguard, (the optimistically named 'Vanguard Sportsman') with twin Amal carburettors and a thirst to match! I bought for £15, ten minutes ahead of the scrap man. It needed two new diaphragms for the Amal carbs to get it back on the road. Like the earlier car, it had a column changed, three speed, transmission (hardly sporty) but it did have a Borg-Warner electric over drive, giving five gears in practice, which was very flash, and meant that you hardly ever had to use the clutch. It finally died when the seals on the 'wet cylinder liners' failed, as it was not worth the cost of repair, even if we had the money. Judith's parents rescued us by passing on their 850 cc Mini to us, and this was the car we used once we lived in Newhaven.



And then – the guns.....

A selection of my arsenal propped up against the sitting room bay window at East Hanningfield Rectory, circa 1978.

(Left to right: FN trombone action .22 magazine rifle with telescopic sight, dodgy .410 hammer shotgun, and the Webley Service Mk II air rifle.)

The Webley Service Air Rifle Mk 11 didn't have a case until I made it one!

An FN trombone action .22 magazine rifle was bought new when I was 17. An excellent, accurate and very reliable rifle, ideal for bringing home rabbits and pigeons, (without filling them full of shot). I used this for rough shooting (ably assisted by Don Abbey) in and around Hanningfield. It saw very little use once I moved to Sussex.

A rather cheap purchase – an old hammer .410 shotgun. Not the safest firearm, with pitted barrels in my case. I had no problems with it, but it didn't chamber the most powerful cartridges (probably just as

well). It had too short a range to be really useful for rough shooting. Hammer shotguns had a bad reputation for causing accidents in field use, as the hammers could snag on fences or bushes....

My first target rifle was with a falling block breech operated by the underlever behind the trigger guard. It was also the type of rifle owned (illegally) by my grandfather Brown, who taught me to shoot. A reliable, sturdy, single shot 'miniature rifle' design from the early 1890's, and almost indestructible in .22 calibre.

My second, bolt action target rifle (a BSA Century) which could be used with a 5 round box magazine. I don't remember it being any more accurate than the underlever rifle, but I did want to fit it with a telescopic sight. Unfortunately, the rifle club rule was 'iron sights only'!

Last but not least:

Pistols (other than air pistols) are no longer legal to own in the UK, for good reason.

Before they were banned, after the Dunblane incident, they were reasonably common in private ownership, usually as target weapons in .22 calibre. We had several at the club: a Walther PP with an extended barrel, and a very curious Russian target pistol, which was very rough in external finish, but was surprisingly accurate.

I owned for several years a Star (Spanish made) blow-back self-loader, a simple copy of the basic Browning design. I quite enjoyed shooting with this, but pistols in any calibre are really loud, and Dad got complaints from neighbours on the one occasion I used it in the walled garden at Hanningfield! The foresight was adjustable and was prone to fall off at critical moments.

I came to the conclusion that pistols are extremely difficult to use accurately and that I didn't have the technical skill to use one...and this one looked so much like a toy pistol, it wasn't safe to keep once my kids showed an interest in it. Moreover, the revised requirements for secure gun cabinets made it very difficult and expensive to keep my firearms safely at Mary Anns Cottage. They all had to go.

And then, finally, to the rock and roll!

My musical tastes formed early with exposure to classical musical, and church choral music. But listening to old 78 records of Stravinsky's 'Firebird', I realised I had a weakness for emotive and dramatic music. In my teens, Dad acquired a 'Magnetophone' reel to reel tape recorder, and I acquired my first recording of the Bruch G Minor Violin Concert, which definitely ticked the box for the emotive bit. After a year or so, tape stretch, (all too common with all but very expensive tape machines) put paid to that first, much loved recording.

Having then bought ourselves a more modern record player deck, I was able to acquire a copy of the 'Rite of Spring' which ticked the box for both emotive and dramatic music. Some might say that the rot then set in, as at about the same time, I bought an old valve radio set at a local jumble sale. Setting up a long wire aerial between my bedroom window frame and an oak tree 60 foot or so down the drive, I could listen in reason privacy to the radio stations I could tune the set to, which were limited then. The BBC dominated of course, but one could pick up one commercial station (not in the UK, of course)

which played a much wider variety of music than was tolerated by the BBC (which would only play classical or so-called 'light' music, on the Home Service)

Radio Luxembourg actually played, occasionally, the stuff you could never hear on the Beeb, American rock and roll and the up-and-coming English bands, Beatles, Stones, The Kinks, etc. etc. Tamla Motown was there as well.

My friends listened as well, and some of those (with more cash in their pockets than I had) went to band concerts in Southend or in London. Don did a bit of both, and as he was now earning some cash from his weekend job at the Hull Bridge scrapyards, he invested in some expensive Hi Fi equipment, and had fun demonstrating it to more cash-strapped friend like myself! He went in for both record decks and tape players, but having dabbled with tape decks myself, I was impressed with the top of the range Ferrograph he acquired, together with an early Dolby system for suppressing 'tape hiss'. No danger of tape stretch on *that* baby.

(A couple of years before that, Dad had been offered a Ferrograph machine from a batch found in a local 'electrical equipment scrapyard', but it only had extremely low tape speeds, well below those in normal use for musical recordings. We believe these machines had been used for monitoring phone calls, as when Dad asked Ferrograph if they were convertible to normal tape speeds, and quoted the serial numbers of the machines he'd been offered, he was told that these machines didn't exist.....) Of course a 'proper' Ferrograph was well out of our price range, so when I saw Don's set up I was very impressed.

He also found himself a set of electrostatic speakers – large but very thin front to back, so that didn't take up much room in his bedroom (a matter of some importance, given all the other stuff Don stored there) but the sound quality was something I had never heard before. We listened to all sorts of stuff but 'Cream' (Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton) were on peak form, and 'Sunshine of your love' and 'Crossroads' were my favourites then, and still are. My equipment back at Hanningfield was pretty basic, and there was the issue of annoying Mum and Dad with my shallow taste in musical entertainment, (Mum despising all 'pop' music as beneath contempt, while Dad had alarmed us once by expressing his extreme dislike for 'modern music' (the Rite of Spring), in public, during an Albert Hall concert) so I didn't listen much at home except to the radio in my room, or out in the room we used as the motorbike garage (it had been the parish room and junk store), while doing the very frequent repairs on the bikes.

On one occasion, with my parents out of the house, Don and I settled the question of the sound absorbing properties of the Rectory, which I had been going on about for some reason. With Don's hi fi installed in the sitting room, we put on the 'live' recording of Cream playing 'Crossroads' and turned the volume to 10 (11 wasn't an option on his kit) and then both of us retired to the kitchen, at the other end of the corridor. You really couldn't hear a thing – the 14 inch solid brick walls between rooms muffled the lot!

As a result of annoying others in the household, I tended to listen on headphones (I still do) but once I had my own place, I invested in a half decent turntable and amplifier, and built a pair of substantial speakers ('Wharfedale Super 8's, from memory) which sounded OK but which took up the space of two

occasional tables. After moving to CD's and passing a few of the LP's to James and Katharine, the overall space taken up by the setup shrank over time, until at the present time, apart from a folder file full of CDs, the music lives as MP3 files on my phone, and the speakers consist of one Bose Bluetooth speaker, which amazingly seems to sound as good as the full hi fi setup, taking up half a room! Or perhaps my hearing is not what it was, on account of a lifetime of loud music....

I didn't actually get to hear a band live until 1994, when James and I went to see Pink Floyd in concert at Earls Court, when both James and Katharine tipped me off that tickets for the concert were on sale. I must have acted with unusual haste, as I managed to get two tickets before they sold out, later that day. PF then booked the venue for a further week, filling the hall each night.

We went by car from home, and parked at a station in South London, and then to Earl's Court by tube, where we met some of James' friends from Portsmouth, also going to the concert. We were not disappointed by the 3 hours of music, and with ears ringing, got back to our car in South London. I then drove from there to Portsmouth, getting in about 3 the next morning. My ears were still ringing on my way home from Portsmouth the following morning!

The only other concert I've attended in London was Gary Moore at the Hammersmith Apollo. That was brilliant in its way, but not a patch on the full 'Pink Floyd' experience!

Chapter 18

What the Brat did next....

It must be said that Mum and Dad did their very best to give both Martin and I the best education they could afford, and for that, both of us give our unconditional thanks to them. Despite what could be regarded as a 'disrupted' primary education, we both ended up at local Grammar schools, which were at that time seen as the best secondary education option for any pupil that could make the grades for the "11-Plus" entrance examination. As I've said before, I didn't pass that hurdle, and had to wait two years for a second attempt (the "13-Plus") to reach my parents preferred option.

In retrospect I must have been a great disappointment to both as I failed to rise to the 'Grammar School' ideal of academic brilliance and soundly respectable sporting achievement. The school and I didn't really hit it off, but because of entering the school sixth form I had the great fortune to meet Judith, my best friend during my time at Sweyne, and once she had completed her Chemistry degree, my wife, and life-long companion. As well as meeting Judith, I made several good friends and co-conspirators in the group that joined the school in that 13+ cohort, including Don Abbey, who was best man at our wedding. We still see Don every year, and many of the other friends from that time, even though many have since moved to far-flung parts of the UK, or France. Although I hated the school, it was a social success for us.

Maybe I haven't got the talent for formal study, but the 'Grammar School magic' certainly didn't work for me, and I left Sixth Form with two Grade 'E' passes and one fail, clearly not the mark of a natural academic, and certainly not enough to take me on to what I had assumed was the natural path to higher education. It didn't help that I had completely fallen out with Sweyne Technical/Grammar School and was determined never to go back to retake 'A' levels there.

To retake my 'A' Levels and improve on my crap grades, I called in at the South-East Essex Technical College in Chelmsford to see if they 'did "A Level" courses. I remain eternally grateful to the very sensible and helpful interviewers I met, who simply said "You've got two A levels. Why don't you move on and do a Higher National Certificate in Applied Biology (one of my 'E' grade passes was in Biology)? Oh, and by the way, it's a day release course, so you should be able to get a job and study with us one day per week. Here is a list of employers who will consider taking on HNC students. You should be able to find an employer among this list."

May and Baker (1966-68)

So, it was that I found myself in Dagenham, at the May and Baker chemical and pharmaceutical works, at interview, a couple of weeks later. Slightly daunted at the prospect of living and working in Dagenham, after the rural peace and quiet of Hanningfield, I was relieved to find that the only day release jobs on offer were not at the factory, but at their outstation at Fyfield, just outside Chipping Ongar. If I got a job there, I could drive across country and still live at home, it being a little under twenty miles to Fyfield 'as the crow flies' - in earlier days I had cycled to Chipping Ongar from Hanningfield with Mum and Dad.

The fact that I had worked with bees, and wasn't instantly repelled by insects, seemed to have struck a chord at the interview, I knew not why. I found out a couple of days later, when I visited Fyfield for a second interview. Fyfield Out Station ran the field trials for products under development by M&B, which fell into two areas, horticultural and veterinary. I was destined for consideration in the veterinary section which tested products for farm animals, as they were developing new types of sheep dips, and products to control liver fluke in sheep, and they desperately needed staff who were prepared to help them breed the flies that attack 'mucky sheep'.

So that section of Fyfield was a happy combination of maggot farm and animal husbandry, and while I hadn't worked with farm animals of any kind, I had 'previous' with insects. However, although beehives have a peculiar odour of their own, no-one would compare them with the indescribably vile stench which came from the maggot breeding section at Fyfield! M&B also developed products for egg producers, which meant mass production of chickens, which appeared to result in the mass mortality of chicks. In the spirit of a perverted sense of “domestic economy”, our section was making use of those dead chicks to breed huge quantities of blowfly maggots, for use in testing the sheep dip formulations under development.

The maggot breeding took place in plastic dustbins, covered with muslin sheets, half full of a seething mass of maggots in a soup of decaying chicks. This produced a miasma of ammonia and decaying flesh, which could be unsettling for the uninitiated, which was anyone at all who didn't work in the section. Clearly, some earlier candidates had been shown the maggot breeding room and had simply rushed outside to throw up on the lawn. For some reason, I didn't (although I found the sight and stench appalling) and so I was offered the job, day release, for the princely sum of £489 per annum.

Even then, for a naïve, gawky kid with no 'street wisdom', the job options in rural Essex were not unlimited, and so with the prospect of putting my A Level failure behind me over the next two years, and earning a little cash in the process, I held my nose and took on my first proper job. Best of all, it supplied the money I needed to run some form of motor transport, so I could continue to see Judith, who was by now doing her Chemistry degree at the University of Sussex, some ninety-odd miles away.

ARC UICB, University of Sussex (1968 - 1972)

With Judith coming towards the end of her Chemistry degree at Sussex, and having completed my HNC course with reasonable grades, I set about trying to secure employment in or around the University so that we could see more of each other. I have to say that I didn't consult either my parents, or Judith's parents, about this move, and I don't think they would have been particularly pleased about our decision or the implications of such a move, so I didn't! However, I suspect Dora was quite glad to see me out of her home, as I was simply another mouth to feed, and a *son*, not a daughter.

I started with job applications for assistant jobs at the University. Fairly predictably, the University itself was snotty about job applicants without a degree, and I have to say that the administrator doing the interview was rather unpleasant about that, and very dismissive of my application. I was sent off to see one of their research staff, 'who would assess my academic potential' (with the clear implication that I was “dirt on the soles of his shoes”). The researcher, however, could not have been more helpful and pleasant. He hadn't got a place for me, but he knew of a government research unit which was relocating

to Sussex, who had an interest in insect physiology, where my experience might well be valuable for them. He would pass on my details, as he knew they were recruiting for a move in around six months.

A new 'Unit of Invertebrate Chemistry and Biology' (hereafter **ARC UICB**) was being formed out of two older Agricultural Research Council (ARC) units, the '**Pest Infestation Laboratory**' (**PIL**) at Slough and Sir Vincent Wigglesworth's '**Unit of Invertebrate Physiology**' at Cambridge. At that time, ARC research units were established around one outstanding academic, but the unit would be reorganised if the academic died or retired, so these two units were being put together to carry on Sir Vincent's work on insect hormones, in particular 'juvenilising hormone' which held out the prospect of developing new methods of insect control. Oddly enough, development of insect control systems, was also M&B's inspiration, although they chose to develop organo-phosphate cholinesterase inhibitors (closely related to nerve gases) for their products, rather than hormones, since the chemistry for nerve gas related compounds was much better established following several years of (German) research during the Second World War.

In a month or so, I had a very friendly interview at Slough PIL (which seemed to be more about 'what sort of chap I was') Stan Lewis, my soon-to-be boss, seemed more taken by the fact that I was reading translations of the Roman classic authors (Suetonius, Juvenal), and T.E Lawrence's 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' than by my work around insects. I finally moved to Sussex in September of 1968, on the same day as the Slough PIL arrived in several furniture vans, and my first job was to move the van loads into our allocated laboratory space in the Biology Building, which was our temporary accommodation until our own purpose built laboratory (under construction on the other side of the Molecular Science block, about 200 yards away) was finally habitable, about eighteen months later. I continued my studies with an attempt to gain membership of the Institute of Biology, to build on my HNC in Applied Biology.

Judith and I got married during my time in ARC UICP, after she had completed her teacher training course (PGCE), and she did her in-school year at Priory School in Lewes, while we were living in rented accommodation in Ditchling.

Time in the wilderness – casual employment between 'proper jobs' 1972 - 1973

By 1973 I was established as a 'Scientific Officer' in the ARC, having started on 'Assistant Scientific Officer' grade; the next grade was 'Principal Scientific Officer' but that was usually degree or doctorate level entry, so it would never be open to me. I oversaw the Unit's insect breeding programme, which included wax moths, houseflies, several species of blow flies, cockroaches, blood-sucking South American assassin bugs, and desert locusts.

Unfortunately, by this stage I was seriously unwell with locust dust induced asthma (which no-one had thought to warn me about) and had reached a very low point in my relationship with at least one of the research staff, so low that, unusually for me, I came very close to physical violence towards the person involved. After one final incident, in which I only just restrained myself from putting a knife into my tormentor, I walked into the Director's office and resigned. It was not a good way to go, but the alternative would have been bad for both me *and* my tormentor.

It was not a 'considered or planned' job change, as Judith was pregnant with James, and she would also have to stop work in the next few weeks. My job options were rather limited, once again, but fortunately at that time Newhaven still had many casual labour opportunities, so when I turned up at the Employment Exchange on Church Hill in Newhaven, they took one look at me and said 'Why don't you turn up at the dock gates on North Quay and see if they'll take you on?'

Newhaven docks still were in the old 'dock labour' scheme where there was a mixture of full-time stevedores (all from one Newhaven family, I discovered) and day-hired casual labourers, of which I became one, on the following morning. If you stayed the whole day, you got just over five pounds in your hand. If you got a week's work (it was autumn turning to winter, when most of the cargoes requiring manual work came in, so that was a definite possibility), the money compared favourably with bench jobs like Vacco or Concord.

It was, I soon discovered, much more dangerous than either of those places (although Vacco apparently ran it a close second, with mountains of broken glass around the shop floor). Safe working practices there were not, and I had some close calls, with swinging loads, and crowbars dropping off pallets being winched out of holds. I saw several people injured through brushes with moving vehicles or crushed by slipping baulks of timber. North Quay at that time imported 'beech boles', pre-sawn and strapped beech trunks imported and left to season, stacked up in the open air of the quayside, and ton upon ton of granite 'setts' (6-inch granite cubes) for roadways, slippery plastic sacks of fertiliser, and exported scrap iron as well. We were fortunate that the scrap iron was loaded by grab, not by hand.

I think I did about two months, over that autumn, before getting a job as a 'Unigate Milk Salesman' in the January. While I know I am not the only East Sussex County Councillor to have been employed as a milkman, I'm probably the only member to have worked as a casual dock labourer on Newhaven North Quay, *and* been a milkman (and a scientific research officer, and a shepherd, and a postman, and a bee keeper, and a locust breeder, as well).

While it might not have been an ideal "career structure", I do know what it's like to graft to earn a living, at a variety of occupations, at different levels of social acceptability. I suspect it has been '*useful preparatory experience*' for being an elected town and county councillor in Newhaven, with no opportunity for the 'isolation by altitude' which some (but not all) of my more 'entitled' councillor colleagues seemed to display. On reflection, I wouldn't have it any other way.

Armour Pharmaceutical 1973 to 1976

I worked on the milk round in Rottingdean from January 1973 to late summer that year – James was born towards the end of my time on the round. I had seen by then, and made a successful application for, a job at Armour in Hampden Park Trading Estate in Eastbourne. I had originally applied for a research assistant's job at £1400 per year, but, as at Sussex University, they were very sniffy about my lack of a degree and 'relevant experience' (apparently breeding locusts and shifting sacks of fertiliser didn't count) but said that the Quality Control Laboratory was looking for staff, and their needs were 'less demanding'. I was offered a job as a Quality Control technician, but only offered £1600 per year, so I wasn't disappointed!

I went through all the pleasures of the 'three-day week' (only three days per week of electricity, due to the miner's actions elsewhere) but we were ingenious and flexible (so much so, that we wanted to stay on the unusual working hours when the crisis came to an end).

I liked the people, and the work, but when an opportunity to work within walking distance of home came up, I was very happy to drop the time and cost of the daily commute to Eastbourne. This change also coincided with the birth of my daughter Katharine, so all in all I was nearer home, with more time to spend with Judith and the children.

Parker Pen 1976 to 2008

I shan't bore you with the details of this as I've written about this at length, elsewhere. Suffice it to say that for a bloke with very little in the way of formal qualifications (*although I took and successfully completed a second HNC (in Applied Chemistry, this time)*) at Brighton Technical College, as a condition of employment at Parker Pen, I survived and thrived where more formally qualified colleagues fell by the wayside at crisis points in Parker's work.

I've been able to add 'ink chemist, chemical engineer, health and safety officer' and 'dangerous goods transport adviser' to the long list above. I started out at school thinking that I might train as a draughtsman, which seems a pretty long way from where I ended up!

I suspect personal flexibility, a constant wide-ranging interest in the practical world around me, and a willingness to work hard has helped over the years, possibly as much as having those desirable qualifications. What the school's careers officer would have thought of the 'Brat's progress', I leave to the reader to imagine!