



Pen and Palette

Club

Memory Lane

Introduction

This idea stems from an article in a magazine whereby contributors search through their brains or what's left of them, and set down some memory or other which comes to mind. This is the result from some of our members and we hope it will provide some enjoyment over the dark days of winter!

Brother Malcolm Yorke

A trip to the Pyrenees

The other day I took down from my shelves *The Pyrenees* by Hilaire Belloc, which triggered vivid and rather painful memories of a trek which I made in 1961. Among the many routes in those wonderful mountains which Belloc described was a walk from France to Andorra, which I determined to follow.

I recruited Cliff, a friend from university and we took train from Victoria very early one July morning. Our equipment was typical of the time, an army surplus framed rucksack, Vibram soled boots and a groundsheet plus a French Army map of the region.

Travelling via Paris and Pau by 8pm we arrived at the village of Cabanes and found a pension where we spent the night. Early the next morning we were on our way up the valley of the Aston and climbed steadily all day to the Port de Fontargent at about 8000 feet. We crossed into Andorra and saw just below us the lake which gives the Port its name, "The Silver Water", which did not appear very silvery with the sky clouding over and the light beginning to fade.

Descending to the lake we began to cast about for the path which would take us into Andorra as indicated on the map but we found it impossible to identify on the ground the path we needed, knowing that the wrong path would be very dangerous. We were beginning to realise that we were in serious trouble when we saw a man walking round the lake with the easy stride of a mountain man. He beckoned us to follow down one of the many paths which we did with a huge sense of relief. After an hour and in pitch darkness we reached a farm where our rescuer left us. We put up in the barn and next morning following the valley of the

Embalire reached Andorra city where we slept in our groundsheets on a hillside.

From there we crossed back over the watershed into the Val d'Aran and after a further week of hard walking we returned to France via the Portillon where we found Bagnères de Luchon and its railhead. Nothing much was said on our journey home but we both knew that we had been extremely lucky, my sense of guilt being the greater for having led Cliff into such danger. We parted at Victoria with barely a word and we have not seen or spoken to each other since that day.

Peter Wallace

A Graduate Apprentice's Slip

I started my industrial life as an apprentice at the old Frazer and Chalmers works in Erith Kent. There we filed and hammered away in helping to build steam turbines for the power industry. Once they were installed on site - usually at remote windy and fairly isolated places around the country it fell on the hapless apprentices' to assist in the testing of these very large machines. I was duly deputed to go to Barony Power Station where we worked under the eagle eye of the Test Engineer. Our job was to check all the instrumentation and take various readings during the test. This took some time as the machine had to be kept at full load for a set period and you know new machines can be temperamental to say the least.

After about two weeks testing all was well in the eyes of our Chief Bernard Wemban the head test Engineer so it was time to dismantle the instrumentation. By this time I knew it all and set about disconnecting thermocouples and pressure gauges. For the pressure gauges you had first of all to close off a valve to isolate the instrument and this was my undoing. I turned the valve off (so I thought) and without checking the valve to see that it was in fact closed proceeded to disconnect the gauge. Suddenly there was this bang and I was left holding the gauge whilst superheated steam whistled around me at around 2,500 psi and 900 C and anyone who happened to be near. All hell then broke loose as engineers and apprentices rushed around to turn the valve off! This was done quite quickly but then it was then my turn to be castigated and told the dangers of superheated steam and to ensure that it is kept in its place in the pipes! A salutary lesson and one never to be forgotten!

Pat Cooper

National Service!

IS IT REALLY 67 YEARS AGO? As a rather sheltered 18-year-old the prospect of eighteen months of National Service gave me mixed feelings of apprehension and excitement. I would be free from parental influence, but how would I react to service discipline and with whom would I have to live? For some reason – perhaps they looked up the records of my grandfather who had joined as a Boy in 1855 – I was drafted into the Royal Navy. First stop basic training at HMS Drake at Corsham: I was seized by a WREN, pushed into a barbers' chair and my hair shaved to within a millimetre of my scalp. My future role had already been decided; I was to become a Radio and Radar Electricians Mate. Well, I had taken physics as a subject at school. So I was issued with a seaman's rig – tight serge top and bell-bottom trousers, with a buttoned flap instead of a zip – curious. Six weeks later I was in Devonport Dockyard aboard a 'liberty' boat – some humour – being transported to a collection of old hulks looking like prison ships, moored below Saltash Bridge. This was HMS Defiance, which was to be my home for the remainder of my sentence, as it seemed to me at the time. Taken down below, I could have been aboard HMS Challenger, my grandfather's ship; if you have visited the Trincomalee at Hartlepool, that was it. Scrubbed wooden mess tables and hammocks; once you had mastered the art of getting into them without falling out the other side they were very comfortable. The mess of ten was presided over by an old hand awaiting discharge, who played cribbage, and would take all your pay if you were foolish enough to engage with him. As we were all national service ratings we bedded down pretty well together: one chap could not read or write and reading his girlfriends' letters to him became so embarrassing that we taught him the basics. Another knelt down on the deck under his hammock each night and prayed; there was some embarrassment but no one took the Mickey. As soon as I had shore leave I marked the end of my old life by walking down the main street of Plymouth eating fish and chips out of a newspaper – of such small things is rebellion made! After 6 months training I was posted to the Seaward Defence Base on Drakes Island in Plymouth Sound. This was responsible for the protection of the Fleet against underwater attack when in harbour. I was under a Petty Officer not much older than myself, and our job was to maintain a high definition radar set which it was said was able to distinguish the periscope of a mini-submarine from floating seabirds. The equipment was in an isolated post which also contained the radar screens monitored by WRENS. The Petty Officer was a real Jack-the-lad and a neglected area of

my education was soon filled in, by proxy, of course. As long as the radar was working we had little to do, except for when there were Exercises, so filled in the time with sun-bathing, swimming, and crabbing. Was it always summer and sunny then? When I was demobbed in 1950 my National Service experience gave me the confidence to face the reality of finding work, and for that I was very grateful.

WREN: A member of the Women's Royal Navy Service.

John Penn

Greener Grass?

I had always aspired to be a general practitioner, but 5 years after qualifying with 5 junior hospital posts and 10 G.P. "locums" the prospect of doing so according to my developing ideas seemed remote, so I decided to consider emigration.

I thought that a good way to prospect Australia, New Zealand and Canada (my target countries,) was to become a ship's surgeon on a passenger liner, so I joined the P. & O. in 1958.

Selection was not a problem because the company had no interest in the quality of medical care, but only that their ships had enough doctors to meet Board of Trade regulations.

The larger "mail ships" carried two doctors; a senior surgeon who was usually an alcoholic, unable to obtain a similarly paid job ashore, and a junior surgeon whose motives were variable.

During the daytime the senior looked after the passengers (who paid him fees), while the junior looked after the crew, but after 7.0 p.m. the junior cared for all, and was paid only a salary.

I was posted to the S.S. Himalaya, with a complement of usually about 1,500 passengers and 700 crew, many of whom were Goanese or Indians.

I had anticipated a rest cure but was surprised to discover how busy it could be.

Passengers had all the ailments of life ashore (strokes, heart attacks, etc.), the accident rate was high, especially in rough weather, and any infections spread very rapidly.

Deaths on board were not uncommon, and I would watch frail elderly people totter up the gangway and wonder if they would survive the trip. Those that did not usually went over the side with few questions asked!

The only crew member to die was a young midshipman who contracted meningitis, and expired after a two day illness before we could get him ashore.

At first the Indian crew seldom attended my surgery, until I discovered that my interpreter made a killing by relating to a paying audience details of the medical problems that had presented that day, (often venereal disease!). I cut him out be learning enough Hindustani to manage a simple consultation from my Goanese steward who spoke five languages fluently.

Single young women would often call the doctor at night but usually cancelled the call when informed that the nursing sister would also be in attendance! Most of my “operations” were dental extractions to remove Indian rotting teeth.

I visited my three target countries,- all wonderful for a holiday,- but for the long haul I preferred England, and after a year prospects ashore had improved so I decided to stay.

John Charlewood

Of Choirs & Choirmasters

"Am I going to be good enough?" "What's the conductor like?" "Will rehearsals be interesting?" These are the sort of questions you think about when joining a new choir, which I've done many times.....

Despite a childhood in Huddersfield surrounded by Messiahs the first choir I joined was at school in Cumbria in the 1955. The first anthem I learned was Charles Wood's O Thou the Central Orb and other memorable pieces were Stanford's The Blue Bird and Allegri's Miserere, not often heard in Whitehaven! We learned good choral habits, like putting up your hand if you know you've boobed in rehearsal.

At college the first fellow student I met was Christopher Hogwood, who had the next room to me, but I never heard him sing. I sang in a small “a cappella” group led by David Munroe, another student who went on to make a career in music, although he died in 1976.

Then to London, where I joined Hampstead Choral Society, conducted by a perfectionist called Martindale Sidwell. We hired the Festival Hall and a

London Orchestra for one concert a year, which used to worry the treasurer, and we sang Bach's B Minor Mass and Beethoven's Missa Solemnis in the two years I was there.

After that, frequent changes of employment resulted in brief periods with, among others, Salford City Male Voice Choir (Just a Song at Twilight in the Methodist Church at Irlam o' the Heights); Watford Philharmonic Chorus; and Sale & District Musical Society, where we gained third place in a class at Buxton Festival (there were only 3 entries that year - the test piece was Vaughan Williams's Valiant for Truth). I also remember one conductor who complained that he couldn't keep up with us. I failed the audition for the Halle Choir (what a fine chorus that is) where I had to sing "The Trumpet Shall Sound" on a platform in front of the whole committee. I think my trumpet was a bit strangled.

60 years of choral singing; what have I learned? Firstly, never sing the final "s" of a word as it's sure to be in the wrong place; secondly, conductors threaten to resign twice a term, but never do; and finally, 100 people meeting together every week to be told what to do sounds like madness and probably is, but isn't it good fun?

John Wilkin.

Reminiscences

Born in Rowland's Gill, the son of two schoolteachers, grandson of a miner and a Jarrow shipyard worker, I went to my father's school at Pickering Nook near Hobson Colliery before we moved to Middleton Moor, where again I attended his school before getting a scholarship to Spennymoor Alderman Wraith Grammar School. From there, in 1941 I was accepted for entry to the Newcastle Medical School. After considerable thought and after having an interview with the RAF, I was selected as a suitable pilot/observer but was then told that as I was a medical student I would be in a reserved occupation, as the country needed pilots but they needed doctors just as much. I graduated on a shortened wartime course of four years and three months in 1945, and after House Officer appointments in the RVI in medicine and paediatrics, I was called into the army and became Embarkation Medical Officer Glasgow and then Southampton, before being promoted Major and Second-in-Command of the hospital Ship 'Oxfordshire', which, among other fascinating duties, covered the final evacuation of Palestine, when the British troops left and we evacuated all the staff and patients of Haifa Military Hospital.

I married my lifelong sweetheart Betty, from Spennymoor, in 1946 while I was in the army, and was horrified to find that, after earning £1000pa as a major, I returned to the RVI as a medical registrar on £400pa, but happily the NHS soon arrived with a significant, though not great, increase in salary. After training as a neurologist and spending some time at the National Hospital Queen Square in London and at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston on a Nuffield Foundation Fellowship, I embarked, under the influence of Professor F J Nattrass, on a programme of research into muscular dystrophy and other neuromuscular diseases, which has continued to the present day in Newcastle, even long after my retirement. I was given a personal chair in neurology, but then to my surprise was asked to be Dean of Medicine in Newcastle, a post which I held from 1971-1981. I was also fortunate to be elected successively as President of the BMA, then of the GMC, then of RSM, and finally of the World Federation of Neurology. When my dear late wife Betty told me, after the children had left home, that she had been through my diary and had found that I had left her alone in the house in Gosforth on 169 nights in the previous year, the offer to become Warden of Green College Oxford was attractive to us both, though I had never intended to leave the northeast. We had several happy and fruitful years there and I was able to travel backwards and forward to London in a day, instead of having to stay overnight or travel on the sleeper, as had been my habit from Newcastle.

Years of training and research and major international travel, usually with my wife, followed, until, finally, after living for a while in Burford in the Cotswolds, we returned to our lovely country home in Detchant, Northumberland, in 2002, which Betty loved, although sadly she died in 2003. I am delighted to be back in my native Northumberland, and honoured to have been made an Honorary Member of the Pen and Palette Club many years ago, though my attendance, I fear, at meals, has been very infrequent. However, when I have been able to attend such occasions I have enjoyed them immensely. In my dotage I still attend the House of Lords as a Crossbench Life Peer; I was knighted in 1979, when the Berwick Advertiser said on its front page that Mr George Crawford, a Tweedmouth trawler skipper, had received the OBE in the New Year Honours List, and that the Captain of Bamburgh Castle Golf Club (me) had been knighted. My Crossbench Peerage was conferred by Margaret Thatcher in 1989, and I have had 26 very active and fruitful years in the House of Lords, although I am now sharply winding down and will probably retire at the end of 2015 to enjoy the beauties of my home in Belford and the surrounding countryside, as well as a few holes of golf from time to time at Bamburgh with Dad's Army Golfing Society.

John Walton, Lord Walton of Detchant

Teddy Bears Picnic

Some years ago, a friend of a friend was looking for an artist to paint a mural in a child's bedroom. The child was weeks away from being born so it was needed in a hurry and I was recommended. The father-to-be explained that he wanted a 'Teddy Bears Picnic' theme covering all four walls of a very large room. Mum-to-be was excited that work was starting and couldn't wait to see "every inch filled with teddies in a country scene". The pressure was on. I worked every night for four hours after my day job and every weekend.

On the first weekend, a shy little girl appeared at the door and asked to see the mural. Daddy had told her about it and she was excited. She was full of questions: What sort of brushes did I use? How did I mix the paint? How many teddies would there be? Could she be my little helper? I soon figured out this was a daughter from a previous relationship. Daddy and Step-Mum weren't quite sure how to handle her. Every weekend she would excitedly join me in the room and check on progress. We chatted about what could be added, she helped to mix the paint, clean the brushes and offered endless suggestions. She even counted and kept a running total of the teddies. Then one day I was finished. The mural was complete and I left that room, never to return and sorry that I didn't get to say goodbye to my little helper.

About 12 years later, I arrived at a friend's party and was startled by a loud shriek from across the room. A pretty teenage girl ran up to me, wrapped her arms around me and was squeezing me as hard as she could. My wife was standing with her arms folded and an expression which suggested I had some fast explaining to do. I was confused. With tears in her eyes, the girl explained that it was her who had been my little helper all those years ago. She had arrived one day to find the mural was finished and knew she would not see me again. She wanted to thank me for sparing time for a little girl and for giving her an interest in painting. She was now studying fine art at University and wanted to start her own business: painting murals.

Paul Hutchinson

When I was very young

A random string of bombs fell on our street one hot summer afternoon in Ipswich. An old lady across the road slept through it all, but the back of her bungalow had disappeared. My mother and I were down the shelter in the garden, and we emerged into a fog reeking of gunpowder. All our windows had been open and we were almost the only house without any broken glass.

So we moved to nearby Hadleigh in Suffolk, a wool trade village, but now given mostly to farming. My Grandfather's large four storey house had originally been built for a brewer, John Ansell. It overlooked the central square where pigs, cattle and sheep were auctioned on Mondays. We occupied the empty top floor, and only had electricity in the living room, gas for lighting and cooking in the 'kitchen' and candles in the bedrooms. Water had to be carried up from one floor below.

I was lucky. I was sent to a school above the local Farming Hardware store, which was run by a wonderful elderly lady called Miss Partridge, for about 10 children. I was 7 years old and was taught how to hold a pencil, and write copyplate rows of letters, learn poetry by heart, use watercolours and even learn French using French ABC books, and English grammar. On the staircase there were marvellous oil paintings of Clovelly with its stepped stone lanes, painted by a relative.

My grandmother was very artistic too, and copied oil paintings at the Laing Art Gallery in her younger days. There were six of her paintings in gilded frames in the entrance hall. Later, she was in Hankou and learnt the technique of painting mother-of-pearl on black lacquer, and the house was full of Chinese artefacts, especially the drawing room with its grand piano, where my father usually practiced Chopin, which I could hear in bed upstairs. There were musical soirees when friends brought an instrument along, and on one occasion an opera singer in uniform from the Carl Rosa. The power of one man's voice was astonishing in that room.

Our first encounter with American allies was 4 or 5 huge army lorries roaring through the High Street, black driver's faces hardly visible, rushing material to a new airfield at nearby Raydon. Very few private cars about in those days.

A squadron of Thunderbolt fighters arrived and the smart American uniforms were seen in the village. One or two lorries used to wait on Saturday evenings to collect girls for dances at the camp. Two American officers used to come in a jeep regularly to Barclays Bank. An armed guard stood each side of the doorway, tommy guns at the ready while the officers went in. To avoid knife fights in the village, between black and white Americans, some nights had to be white and others, non-white. They were always very friendly and once, when I was being chatted to, I uttered the dreaded words, "got any gum chum?" and too late I knew I had lost any chance of friendship.

The Hadleigh community was split between 3 main strata. The landed gentry, horse and hounds etc. headed by the local Duke who lived on his estate down Duke Street. Most villagers were farmers and shopkeepers, and would be members of the bowling club, and then there were the professionals, Bank Managers, Solicitors, and office people like my father who were working for organisations in Ipswich, and they tended to support the tennis club.

I used to play tennis with a girl called Ann, whose sister was 'Maggi', or Margaret Hamlin, and is now an acclaimed artist. My best friend was Tim, and he had a neglected orchard where we played and shared his air rifle, and he kept ducks and geese and 2 pigs and four very productive walnut trees. His brother Jonathan Newth, became a star of 'Tenco' and 'After Henry.' Based on a Cambridge bookshop. There seemed to be a very strong undercurrent of artistic people in Hadleigh as my doctor's son, Patrick Newell, too, was the 'fattest actor on TV' and appeared several of the 'Avenger' series.

With most men being called up, my mother, who had been a GPO telephone operator in the City, helped in the Post Office and this unexpectedly let me occasionally deliver telegrams up to 3 miles on my bike. I was paid about one shilling and sixpence at most, based on distance, and on one of these trips I heard a doodle-bug coming with its gurgling spluttering roar. They had started to release them from under their aircraft out at sea, and this one passed me about 150 feet up and maybe 50 yards away. I was fascinated and felt no fear, and just waited to hear if it would eventually explode. German rocketry was in its initial stages at this time and some mornings we would see a cluster of 3 vertical vapour trails rising from the horizon as the V2's were being developed. One day there was an almighty cracking bang in the sky above. The surprise and fear literally brought tears to the eyes, and it turned out to a V2 which had exploded in the stratosphere. Ugly bits of metal and wiggly wires and tubes littered the ground about 3 miles away. The damage would have been unimaginable.

Grammar school started when I was 10, and went on a school bus to Sudbury. Monty was doing well in the desert, and when we were on the bus the morning skies were full of Flying Fortresses circling, and red very lights as they formed up, and the fighter squadrons would follow shortly after. The school playing fields were about a mile outside the town and a large US airfield was just alongside. The Flying Fortress crewman would stand by his open blister on the side and give us a wave as they took off. Sometimes we would see them limping back with only 2 of the 4 propellers still working. On one occasion I was lucky to have a trip with 6 schoolmates in a Halifax bomber with a Polish crew. No seat belts and we had complete freedom to look out of every window!

The family left Hadleigh in 1948. Rationing was still severe, and cars and petrol were still scarce, but Suffolk was a very fertile county with an abundance of natural food and large orchards and extremes of weather, beautifully hot in summer and snow in winter. I was about to find out what it was like to live in Newcastle where life was real and smoky and earnest and the RGS was going to prove very tough indeed but rewarding.

Ian C. Brown

Clogs

The usual response to the idea of clogs is to ask whether they are wooden and restricted to Holland, or part of some eco-freak's outfit, or something that belongs to the Victorian working class. But I remember going to the clogger for my first pair of clogs when I was in junior school, and didn't think this was somehow demeaning. My father had good working class roots, it is true, but my mother, who I imagine was more instrumental in the decision, was solidly middle class, and we weren't, so far as I can see, in great need to economise. Perhaps she just thought clogs were decent, weather proof, and durable footwear.

The clogger's shop was at the top of Abel Street, an easy walk away. It was a small front room in a terrace of nineteenth century weaver's houses opening straight onto the pavement, but it contained everything he needed: his stock of wood for the soles, the leather for the uppers on the shelf, and the bench with his knives, those great blades with a hook at one end to fit into the metal eye on the base, and a ball at the other end of a long handle to provide the leverage. The only one I can remember was the blocking knife.

I put my foot on a piece of wood and the clogger drew round it with a pencil, so I would be guaranteed a better fit than any other shoe I have had since. And having decided whether I wanted black japanned clasps or laces (clasps always seemed to me easier and quicker), I left to call back in a week or so to see whether they fitted properly. I can't remember whether they needed any adjustments, but I wore these common-or-garden black clogs for quite some time. I can still feel the way you had to kick the floor to get the clog irons to spark on the pavement. It was good fun and when the clog iron came off, as it did from time to time, the rubbing on the floor had made it so sharp that it was quite a good knife. There was only one problem with them. When the snowy weather came, they were good and snug and gave a good grip. But one of the pleasures of snow for schoolboys is to make slides, and I was never allowed on the slides, because the clog irons gouged great scrapes into the slick surface, so that the other boys had to polish it again. Perhaps that was the impetus to take to shoes.

Kelsey Thornton

A Tale of two Honorary Members and their first visits to the Club

Sir Thomas Allen CBE

Sir Yehudi Menhuin KB

Steven Dracup, President 1973/78, was a regular attender at luncheon the ground floor of the Club when it was in Higham Place and often told the story of when on the 30th September 1994 he was deputed to meet Yehudi Menuhin , who would be standing on the steps outside the Royal Station Hotel. Steven was to greet him and then drive him to the Club. This he did. By way of conversation Steven told Yehudi a bit about the club--the tuppenny end, the loyal toast and the open toast and the fact that the Club always had steak and kidney pie on Club Supper nights but that evening in deference to his Jewish faith , the main course would be fish. "But I would have loved steak and kidney pie" was Yehudi's response.

The moral of the tale is always find out from guests if they have any dietary requirements.

Sir Thomas Allen was a guest of the Club on the 23rd March 2000 , the year of the Club's centenary.I was deputed to collect him from the Vermont Hotel, Castle Garth. I drove to the hotel and parked in the courtyard between it and the Moot Hall and then met him in the foyer of the hotel. We got into the car , a more than ten year old Ford Granada but try as I did, I could not start it. I was beginning think that I would have to ask the hotel to arrange for a taxi, when at last the engine came to life. Sir Thomas commented that he was beginning to wonder if he should get his car out. After the Club Supper, which was attended by just short of 60 members and guests. I took him back to the Vermont without mishap. However, shortly after I traded in the car for a new Volvo which lasted about eleven years

The moral of the tale perhaps is do not have a car older than ten years.

Bill Meikle

Komptroller of the Kalendar 1997 /2004