

Fred Steadman

Born 22.2.1911.

Autobiographical life story.

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1. My Early Life

I was born in a rented cottage. It was the end of a row of three next to the lodge gates of a park surrounding a modest mansion. We thought they had been gamekeeper's cottages. The walls were thick and ivy covered, the roof Yorkshire sandstone slabs, and it might have been cosy enough anyway. But we maintained a perpetual fire in the kitchen grate, fed by the miner's perk of free coal.

We lived mainly in one room, the kitchen, with a large cooking range. We had one cold tap in the scullery next door, and there all ablutions, laundry, etc. and a weekly bath took place. The water for baths and laundry was heated in a gas boiler and ladled into the tin bath beside it. Dirty water was ladled into the sink unless you felt like lifting the whole bath and its contents.

Unlike the other houses we enjoyed the use of a small sitting room built on later. The room was cold and only used on special occasions. The piano was in there, hence our reluctance to practise. Over the kitchen was the main bedroom where my parents slept; a small angle off this was curtained off for my sister. My brother and I slept in a room over the scullery to reach which we had to pass through the main bedroom. The bedroom floor was of heavy planks carried by rough hewn tree trunks but the floor was not underdrawn, so much of what happened upstairs was audible below. The lack of privacy appals me now, but I don't think we noticed it much, it was just part of life.

Our toilet was an earth privy. There were two, one private to us and other shared. They backed onto a rubbish chamber where all domestic waste was dumped. At intervals men from the Council came with barrows and a cart and removed the mixture of rubbish and excreta. They took much of it to the many long black sheds in the district where rhubarb was forced - a major local industry. In the summer flies bred in the privy which became a mass of squirming larvae.

In hot weather the kitchen droned with a cloud of flies not much influenced by sticky fly paper. Various kinds of sieve were used to keep them off the butter, jam and meat. It is amazing that we were not ill more often. My elder brother got scarlet fever and my younger brother diphtheria; my sister and I dodged both. It was widely supposed that we were auto-immunised against polio by the unsanitary conditions.

We received the blessing of water borne sanitation when I was about twelve or thirteen along with all the village, except for the privileged few who had had it all along. It was still in the same place and involved a journey round the outside of the house.

Amazingly, when I went to Oxford in 1930 I found the conditions of life not markedly different. I had a sitting room with a coal fire and a small bedroom with ablutions consisting of an ewer, a basin and a chamber pot, all emptied regularly by the 'scout', a manservant looking after about a dozen undergraduates (a practice called 'slopping out' in prisons). The bathroom was a cold basement, the WCs a

longish walk away at the back of the college. These arrangements survived until after the 39-45 war when modernisation was necessary to cope with staff shortages, and to equip the college to compete in the new conference market.

2. Parents

My father was a coal miner, so was his father. We can trace our descent from farmers and farm labourers in the villages around Thirsk and Pickering - Kilburn, Coxwold, Ampleforth etc. They were tempted south by the industrial revolution to the coal mines and industry of West Yorkshire; it appears to have been a great grandfather who made the transition.

My father was the second of seven children. His father drank, was harsh on his family, became fat and immobile which is the only way I remember him. He died not very old. My grandmother came from a gentle background, had a cousin who went to Cambridge, and inherited a little money from which the family hoped to benefit. But it was frittered away in rescuing a younger son from going to prison for gambling debts. You can imagine what that did to the unity of the family!

My father suffered beatings from his father, one of which left a burn-like scar on one cheek, a permanent though not serious disfigurement. Possibly as a result of this he married my mother, who was also disfigured. She developed a disease called lupus in her adolescence and was treated with radium at the London Hospital around the turn of the century. Her nose and lips had been partially eroded by the disease. It was lucky for her that veils were fashionable in those days and she was able to go out veiled without attracting attention. For us it was just something we grew up with and thought little about. It shocked my first fiancée's mother almost into forbidding the marriage in case it was hereditary; she had an obsessional fear of doctors and illness which caused her to neglect an appendix and die of peritonitis.

My mother's family were a little higher socially, but unfortunate. Her father drove a brewer's dray and died in his forties. Her mother had to work as a cleaner and brought up seven children. The oldest left grammar school at 15 and eventually became a wholesale fruit merchant in Manchester. An unmarried daughter became a department store manager in Vancouver. Another son was social services secretary for the city and a prominent Quaker.

My childhood was heavily influenced by George, the eldest, who had a son of my age called Frank. George's wife died young and Frank and I spent many holidays together, first with Auntie Clara before she emigrated and later with George's new wife and family. My mother's family were Methodists - George, true to a common pattern, later turned Anglican - and this drew us into the circuit church in the city, a very large and prosperous one at the time. There we made better-off friends. I mention all this to show that although we were poor there were many influences drawing us socially upward, so to speak.

My father had a highish IQ, something he passed on to us. He attended evening classes in mining engineering and received certificates that could have taken him first to deputy (the equivalent of foreman) and later under-manager. Thus we might have been richer and more secure, but father declined promotion because of the 'responsibility'. What he meant by 'responsibility' was being expected to turn a blind eye to breaches of the law on shot firing, roof supports, and other safety measures. He did not care for this kind of 'responsibility' so we remained poor. As a reaction to this I have never refused 'responsibility' however much it frightened me.

There was one significant indicator in our family of what it meant to be a coal miner. I never saw my parents engage in even the smallest endearments, except that every time he went to work they kissed; it might be the last time.

There was almost a last time when a roof fall broke my father's back and he never worked in the mines again. He recovered after a long time and we lived on a small amount of compensation, unemployment pay, and a nest egg.

I must explain the nest egg. Coal mining before the first world war was prosperous and reasonably well paid. During the war wages improved dramatically to avert strikes. For some trivial reason my father was rejected as unfit for military service but he could manage working at the coal face! So for a time we were relatively well off. My parents bought a piano and other status symbols and saved a sum of money that saved us through the rainy days that followed. It guaranteed the education of their children, as although education as such was free, grammar schools demanded a few trimmings - uniforms etc.

My father was interested in what we would now call electronics. Before the first world war he built a coherer radio set and received morse code messages of no possible value. It was confiscated during the war as a security measure. After the war he built crystal sets and valved sets until the art became too complicated for him.

My parents both read for pleasure, my mother women's magazines and romances, my father fairly widely. We owned some books and as children we brought in more one way or another. My father dipped into Shakespeare and wrestled with Chaucer.

Although the whole village was working class, with a few exceptions, there were pockets of culture. Next door but one lived a miner whose front room was entirely filled by a grand piano. He played Beethoven at home for pleasure and popular tunes in the pubs for money. My brother became a competent pianist and played duets with him. Further away was a German who painted well but he was interned in the first war.

After the war coal mining was in decline and for the miners this meant short-time working, downward pressure on wages, and this trend caused frequent strikes - 1921, 23, 26, and I forget the later ones. In 1926 there was the short General Strike, but the coal strike went on for six months and our capital was further eroded. My father was a socialist and supported all the strikes while maintaining that they never did any good as the miners always lost. He pinned his faith in the Royal Commission under Lord Sankey that recommended nationalisation of the mines. He had to wait until another war for that.

It must have been frustrating to be imprisoned by his circumstances and not to be able to break out more into the world of mind and spirit. He didn't have time or patience to make relationships with us, and it is not surprising that my attitude to him was dominated by fear.

My father fitted into Thomas Gray's lines on Stoke Poges graveyard:

'But knowledge to their eyes her ample page

Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill penury repressed their noble rage
And froze the genial currents of the soul.'

I seem to have spent my life in fear or apprehension, of parents, teachers, bosses and the future. In these days we self-consciously analyse these matters but then I knew nothing of such thoughts. I don't think I was jealous of my father or had a crush on my mother. Perhaps the reader can detect what I can't.

3. Schools

My first school was a one-classroom infants school. A buxom Mrs Butterfield took the big class and a succession of pupil teachers the beginners. We began writing in sand on a slate with the forefinger like Jesus before the woman taken adultery. Mrs Butterfield taught by rote, the whole class reciting in unison the multiplication tables. I cannot remember learning any religion or meeting the vicar.

At eight we went to the local authority elementary school. My first visit must have been in winter as I have clear recollection of being painfully frozen and thawing out on hot radiators. It was a new building segregating the sexes at the entrances, cloakrooms and playgrounds, but with mixed classes.

The women teachers were gentle, the men stern and frightening as they took the older classes. I was brighter than most and always in a higher class than my age, so fear seems to have been my perennial condition. We were not a particularly unruly lot but there were always two or three villains. I remember two, a ferret of a boy and a Billy Bunter, having a stand-up fight outside school: fatty was knocked out cold and the spectators melted away. These two were often caned by the headmaster in his study off the hall and the strokes were audible to the whole school. The regime of discipline seemed to work, except for these two hardened sinners.

There were no opportunities of building bridges with the staff, no games to speak of and no after-school activities. There was no library - I must have read Treasure Island half-a-dozen times.

None of us thought of ourselves as poor but there were a few bordering on the destitute. One family had a father who drank and a mother of gentle origins who could not cope, and were always dirty, ragged, surly and stupid. They sat at the back of any class, doing nothing.

The great day was taking a scholarship examination with scores of others for a very few grammar school places. I got one. The school earned one other, an older boy whose parents preferred him to get a job. Within a few years he was riding a powerful motorbike, and I wondered who had chosen the better part.

Again, reputed to be bright I suppose, I was placed in a form with mainly older boys. Our form master was an ex-balloonist from the first war. Wakefield Grammar School was an Elizabethan foundation. At this period - 1923 - it was mainly fee-paying, with a minority of scholarship boys, distinguishable by our dress which was bought more cheaply and worn longer. Some of us were eligible for a free lunch as our parents were so poor. Lunch was served at a long table in a cellar below the school, the free lunches at one end and the paying customers at the other, with a wide gulf between. I only suffered this for a term and afterwards took sandwiches or walked home.

On the whole, teaching was didactic and non-evocative and was reinforced by occasional outbursts of temper from nearly all the masters. One or two were more terrifying than the others. Science teaching (I found myself on the science side which I preferred and was better at than the humanities - just to balance the

numbers, I think) was uninspiring and archaic. We were still taught about the 'ether' one or two generations after the Michelson-Morley experiments and Einstein's work.

It was in the sixth form that I began reading widely and to be excited by learning for its own sake. I put this down to three agents. One was a friend and classmate called Jewitt. He was cleverer than me and he also knew a girl in the county library central depot; through her we had direct access to books that would otherwise have taken ages to borrow even if we knew they existed. Thus we read ourselves up-to-date from sources outside the school.

The other two agents were the history master and the maths master. In those days students were required to take two subsidiary subjects and we chose history and English (languages were abysmally taught in the school). It was taken for granted in the school that scientists would go to Leeds University. It was fairly rare for any to go to Oxford or Cambridge. Jewitt was more ambitious, probably pushed by his parents, and both of us were strongly encouraged by the history master, who guided our reading of poetry, history and art. We struggled with Clive Bell, Clutton Brock, Henry Clay and others to produce a Christmas pudding culture.

The history master helped me in another way. He was one of the rugby team coaches. There was no coaching at the lower levels and so I was surprised to find myself scrum half in the second team and later front row forward in the first. I feel sure, looking back, that the history master did this to help me with Oxford scholarships; there were two or three other players who would have been just as good or better. Unfortunately I had to beg off football in my second term to put in enough work for the scholarship and responsions, and my replacement got the 'cap' not me. But I did get an exhibition to University College Oxford - more use than the cap.

The third agent was the mathematics master. He was a Third Wrangler but an idle schoolmaster and later was asked to leave. He was fat and jolly and used to enter the sixth form room, sit down, and say 'Well, men, any problems?' It was up to me and Jewitt and one other to manufacture a problem, whereupon we were invited to the front desk and given private tuition. The others tended to fail. At one stage Jewitt and I found ourselves helping with his homework an unqualified junior master who had previously taught us and was working for a degree!

Jewitt and I went off to Oxford on our own initiative to take a scholarship examination. We told the senior science master that we should be missing for a few days. 'Why?' said he. 'We are taking an Oxford scholarship exam' said we. 'Oh' said he, not even 'good luck'. Neither of us succeeded.

Then along came the Freeston Exhibition examination. The Freeston was closed to a number of schools in our locality and was nearly always won by our classicists. This time Jewitt was away taking another more valuable scholarship. I went through the papers doing my best. A few days later, strolling to school up the drive, I was met halfway by the school secretary (a man), very excited, saying 'You've won the Freeston; come into the Head's study'. The headmaster came in shortly and said the unforgettable words: 'Well, Steadman, they've given you the Freeston. I wouldn't

have given it to you myself on the papers you wrote'. He was a snob in many senses and perhaps I was not very prepossessing myself, perhaps a little scruffy, and I had been one of two sixth formers who were not made prefects. Even so, what a thing to say to a boy on cloud nine! I walked home that day knowing what it means to walk on air.



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Welfare Scholarships

The Trustees of the Miners' Welfare National Scholarship Scheme announce that the Miners' Welfare Scholarships for 1930 have been awarded as follows :—

1. To **Herbert Cunliffe**, of Clock Face, St. Helens, Lancashire, a scholarship tenable at the University of Manchester to enable him to take a degree course in physics.

2. To **Wilfred Lane**, of Treorchy, Glamorganshire, a scholarship tenable at the University College of Swansea to enable him to take a degree course in metallurgy.

3. To **James Lees**, of Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, a scholarship tenable at the University of Cambridge to enable him to take a degree course in history.

4. To **Robert Legg**, of Pontypridd, Glamorganshire, a scholarship tenable at the University College of Cardiff to enable him to complete a degree course in mining.

5. To **James Mitchell**, of New Cumnock, Ayrshire, a scholarship tenable at the Royal Technical College, Glasgow, to enable him to complete a degree course in mining.

6. To **David Phillips**, of Ystalyfera, Glamorganshire, a scholarship tenable at the University of Manchester to enable him to do research work in geology.

7. To **William Greenhouse**, of Abertillery, Monmouthshire, a scholarship tenable at the University of London to enable him to take a degree course in engineering.

8. To **Irene James**, of Llangennech, Carmarthenshire, a scholarship tenable at the University College of Swansea to enable her to take a degree course in physics.

9. To **Enid Simpson**, of Morpeth, Northumberland, a scholarship tenable at Armstrong College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, to enable her to complete a degree course in history.

10. To **Fred Steadman**, of Stanley, Wakefield, Yorkshire, a scholarship tenable at the University of Oxford to enable him to take a degree course in chemistry.

11. To **Arthur Thorpe**, of Brierley, Barnsley, Yorkshire, a scholarship tenable at the University of Sheffield to enable him to take a degree course in mining.

12. To **Robert Williams**, of Brymbo, Wrexham, Denbighshire, a scholarship tenable at the University of London to enable him to take a degree course in French.

Later, during my time at Oxford, I understood why I had got it. The examination took place at school and was supervised by the history don from University College. He had had more than his share of suffering in life and was compassionately disposed to favour the underdog.

One tends to criticise the school system retrospectively but I obviously profited by it. It was a factory system and had little time for individual coaching and encouragement. I was lucky to find some of it. By contrast, the schools of my own children gave the individual much more scope, mainly because they were private and had smaller classes. By this time I was living with a community of management class and the choice of first school was a private one run by the wife of a colleague, or the village school. The children were bright, so should they learn with their peers or where they would be governed by the pace of the slowest? There really was no choice, however egalitarian one might feel.

The next phase was more difficult to choose. There was a local grammar school but the headmaster was a rogue, discipline was bad and some of my older colleagues were taking their children away and sending them to boarding school. My wife had been a home student at Oxford, and her hostess had been an art teacher at the Dragon School. My wife had always wished, longingly and hopelessly, that if she had boys they could go there. So when my salary was £600 a year we put down our two boys for total fees of £300 a year. The ratio was more favourable when they actually went. I still think we had no choice but to send them away for their sake. At the back of my mind also was a feeling of inadequacy and a wish for someone else to share the responsibility for their upbringing.

The Dragon School was on the whole a great success and both boys got Winchester scholarships and later university scholarships. This book is not about them but I cannot resist one or two anecdotes.

When James started at Winchester, aged 12, we had no letter from him for several weeks. Finally, when my wife was getting frantic, we drove one Saturday all the way to Winchester from Cheshire to see him. We bumped into him outside College and we asked the rather elderly head of College if we could take him out to tea, explaining why we had come. He replied grudgingly that he didn't want to encourage the weekend habit. He is one of the few people in my life I have wanted to hit!

While James was at Winchester and Phil at the Dragon I was offered a senior post in ICI ANZ. The new young second master at Winchester told me no one in Australia could give James the education he merited, which of course I knew to be untrue. The headmaster of the Dragon School refused to see me when I sought his advice!

Another grudge I had against Winchester was that they were at times appallingly careless about the boys' health.

Our daughter went to boarding school because her friend went. She left at her own request after a couple of years because of the iron convent-like discipline. Our second daughter went to day school, and Wadham College, Oxford.

I formed the impression from girls' schools that some of the mistresses have an almost hysterical fear of failure and infect some of the girls with it. As in my own school days praise and reward were hard currency; our daughter spent five years at the city grammar school for girls, became the number one biologist in the school, did a great deal of social and public work, got into Oxford and eventually a first, yet she left school with no tangible recognition of her merits.

4. Sport

When I was a boy between the two wars, 'sport' scarcely existed for us. We kicked a ball about haphazardly in the street (there were virtually no hazards!), an occasional pig's bladder being the nearest we came to a football. Cricket of a sort was played on waste ground; the older boys or the owner of the bat hogged the bowling, batting and wicket keeping while the little ones stood aimlessly around. The games we played otherwise required no equipment and were of the kind that sociologists now collect as folklore. Most of them had a sung accompaniment; where it came from no one knew, it was just handed down.

One cheap game came near to being a team competitive sport. We called it peggy but it was related to knurr and spell. It was played with an axe handle and a short piece of broom handle tapered at each end. I won't bore you with the rules.

Sport proper began at Grammar School, and proper uniform had to be bought, a daunting expense for my parents.

At the beginning of the rugby season the new boys turned out in a free for all. Anyone showing promise, usually the bigger ones, was drafted into the colts; the rest continued to play in untutored ways unless they contrived to get themselves excused. Needless to say I was left in the ruck until I reached the sixth form. Suddenly I found myself in the second team as a scrum half. I have explained elsewhere why I attributed this to the history master. Playing in the second team was bad for morale as many matches were against first teams of lesser schools. Perhaps it was character building because we came good in the first team.

In my last year I reached the first team as a front row forward though I was neither big nor heavy. We were a weaker team than usual, having only one cap left from the previous year, and he was unfit to play. We suffered a few narrow defeats and then had to face Leeds Grammar School, our great rivals. They had a strong team including thirteen caps from previous years, and the captain of Yorkshire Public Schools at fly half. Three or four years before Wakefield had beaten them by a cricket score, and this was the year they expected to avenge it.

Before the game our forwards' coach, a clergyman and Welsh international called Morgan, told us not to worry too much about the ball but to make sure we got the man. I'm sorry to report that Leeds suffered a crop of minor injuries and one rather more serious. We had two very fast loose forwards and they took such good care of the Leeds half backs that they never managed a useful back movement. There was no score at half time and our tails were well up. In the second half we forced a scrum near the line, made a quick heel, the scrum half stood up, saw no one in front of him and scored under the posts. On the stroke of time they scored a try near the touch line. The wretched boy who had to take the impossible conversion to draw failed of course and we won 5-3. A Boys' Own Paper victory.

Forty years later I met the referee and found that he was a Wakefield old boy. I am pretty sure we were offside most of the game.

Cricket was much the same at school. New boys were bowled at in the nets on the first day, and any who didn't back away like I did were coached. The others messed about on the field all their school careers. Later in life I played village cricket, a game that is fun for most of the players and deadly serious for two or three who fancy themselves. I played mainly as wicket keeper and occasionally made a few runs, enough to suggest that if I had been given a little coaching at school I might have developed some skill in the game; there must have been many others who could have said the same.

I left school to work in a factory, for a year as it turned out. I played rugby with the Wakefield club second or third team. I can't be sure which, probably both. It was a much more physical game and it was not long before I had cartilage trouble. There was no physiotherapist in those days and I kept going back into the game much too soon and eventually had to give it up. Later I had an operation on one knee. The technique then was primitive and it eventually developed osteo-arthritis and I have had to nurse it ever since. The other recovered after a fashion of its own accord though not completely.

This did not entirely forbid every sport and I was able to play squash rackets at college and for some years after, until about the age of 45. Squash is an odd game. It is almost impossible to level up players by means of handicaps, and yet one can always enjoy a game even against a much better player. Much the same can be said of golf.

I played chess for the college in Oxford, largely because only five people would admit to knowing the rules and team was five. I played once for Northwich and once in a multiple game against a 'master'. Multiple games look impressive but for most of the time a 'master' is only playing one game as he plays white and dictates the play.

I rowed at Oxford for one summer term in the college fourth boat. We started bottom of the river. Everywhere was in flood and at the confluence with the Cherwell we actually stopped and had to make a fresh start. One day we bumped Wadham III. For the first time a bump had been made by a fourth boat. A modest record for the books! I once won a cup on the billiard table thanks to a partner.

When my first wife died I took up golf, not because I liked it or knew much about it, but to widen the scope of life that had hitherto been filled with home and family and work. Golf proved in the end to be a good therapy regardless of any social benefit, although there was also some of that. I have never been grabbed by the golf club bar element of the game, but it is a friendly pastime and one meets a lot of nice people. In my golfing career I have won a trophy - it was the Rabbits' Cup - and done a hole in one - all of 70 yards. My golfing career was promoted by joining the clergy; I was able to join a good club very cheaply indeed, and to play in the diocesan team.

As an inveterate loser at games I would like to put in a word for the losers, without whom there would be no winners. We often hear now that it is not worth playing unless you mean to win, but for most of us winning is out of the question.

5. Music

As we had a piano we had to have music lessons from a widow in the village. It was misery and we gave up as soon as we could. My uncle Arthur was a good amateur violinist, his wife was a singer and my cousin was groomed for a professional pianist's career. At Christmas and other family times there were ensemble performances, my father on the violin, my aunt and cousin on piano; and we had to do our excruciating worst. We were, however, introduced to music in the abstract so to speak and were aware of names like Suppé and Haydn; nobody in Yorkshire was unaware of a chap called Handel.

I was first really gripped by music at Oxford during the annual visit of D'Oyly Carte. We went as often as we could in the gods. The operas leave me fairly cold now but they are part of the aging furniture of my memory bank. At least I could play some of Sullivan and that was an incentive. Another impulse came from a school and college contemporary, John Gledhill, who was a good enough pianist to play at college and university concerts. He had learnt to play after his father - a butcher - brought home a piano in the pig float! He encouraged me to persevere with Mozart and Beethoven, though I never got beyond playing them for my own pleasure.

I date my own personal discovery of classical music to my experience in hospital at the age of 24 when I had my cartilage operation.

6. Oxford



University College Oxford.

I arrived in Oxford with muddy trousers having skidded in a tramline and fallen off my bicycle on the way to the station. My first shock was to be addressed as a gentleman. All communications to undergraduates began 'Gentlemen are requested ... or reminded'. I was lifted at a stroke from the working class to middle class and never looked back. Having personal servants was a novelty but I had some experience in industry which accustomed me to the relationship to some extent.

I found Oxford a paradox. It was inevitably stratified socially, from the very rich to the fairly poor - Prince Radziwill of Poland lived on my staircase, and one of my scholar friends lived on £180 a year which meant few pleasures and eating mainly porridge. Naturally people gravitated to their own kind yet there was a kind of equality and acceptance. I don't remember ever being teased about accent or class.

In fact my Yorkshire accent was not a handicap. It had mellowed at school but the broad vowels still remained: Professor Higgins could easily have placed me in a ten mile circle around Leeds. It was the idioms that hampered me. I responded to a favour by saying 'Thank you' and I was quite unable to say 'My dear fellow I am eternally grateful' or to the same effect. It was this rather than anything else that inhibited me in conversation.

Oxford in my day - 1930-1934 - still had one foot in the nineteenth century. Zuleika Dobson would not have been entirely out of place. Some of the dons dated from the previous century of course; some were eccentric almost to the point of certifiability. On the other hand we were in the period when atoms were being split, new particles discovered every month, science was being rewritten. Unless you had read this week's 'Nature' you were obsolete.

Having an exhibition placed me at the scholar's table in Hall for dinner (an obligatory meal five times a week) and with one exception we mixed easily; one was too rich and eventually lost his scholarship. I had two or three friends from school in Oxford in the second or third year and they helped.

Financially I was fortunate in that my Miners' Welfare scholarship provided for vacations as well as term - necessarily for those who came from the mines. I was lucky too in that I had been preceded at my college by a working miner from Glasgow, a revolutionary communist. He had read the small print and extracted every penny he could from the scholarship and I rode to affluence on his coat tails. So I was fairly well off compared with some scholars and did not have to watch the pennies.

The most memorable shock came on November fifth. On certain days of the year, usually after a sporting triumph, but always on November 5th, the young gentlemen rioted - there was no other word for it. Lavatory seats were festooned on the pinnacles of the college buildings, windows were broken, furniture burnt in the quadrangle and policemen's helmets were stolen. The authorities made no effort to stop it (except the police and they were pretty restrained) and the next day the damage was repaired, the cost was spread over everyone's bills and no disciplinary action was taken normally. I have noticed in later years members of the establishment pontificating about football hooligans etc but not for a moment admitting that in their youth they did it themselves. They didn't have flick knives but aesthetes were liable to be thrown in the river and on at least one occasion they forgot to ask him if he could swim and he drowned.

It is difficult to recall the humdrum routine of daily living. We were secure in a world that was anything but. With luck we were secure for life; my mother's perpetual fear about 'a roof over our heads' was exorcised at last. We were under no external pressures to work. Our tutor saw us once a week and we wrote essays for him but that could not seriously be described as pressure unless you were very idle indeed, as some were. Tutors in science tended to be narrow specialists and they had to farm us out for some sectors. Attendance at lectures and labs was optional and the soft option of coffee in Market Street or even a cinema was more attractive.

Some lecturers started the term with perhaps a hundred students and ended with a round dozen or so, probably their own students. A slight worry was that there was no yardstick for one's progress. In our seventh term, in finals year, there was the Gibbs prize examination and most of entered without any hope of winning but as a dummy run for finals. I got one of three or four 'Proxime Accessits' (sorry about the Latin) and felt a little better. It was an adult system with all the temptations of adult life and a private income, and it was not surprising that some did no work at all. Even so the minimum standard for a degree was so low that failures were quite rare.

A feature of work that irked me was lack of respect for other people's property. I later discovered that this was a feature of public schools too. My bicycle was anonymously borrowed and returned with a buckled wheel without acknowledgement or apology or recompense. Gowns were 'borrowed' freely for dinner in hall for which they were compulsory, leaving the owner no alternative to repeating the crime himself and causing a chain reaction. The same thing happened

in the armed forces. Having few possessions and those hard earned and very precious I found this immoral and offensive. Nobody had yet told me it was sort of Christian!


There were a few students for whom Oxford was the first step in a political career. The country was in such a mess that most of us were bemused and undecided, though not indifferent. The Oxford Union was a club and debating society where undergraduates took on leading politicians; a young German Rhodes scholar (his name was Schlepegrell) made quite a name for himself by standing up to Churchill at the Union. I think he changed his views later but I am not sure about this. The famous vote against fighting for King and Country came after my time but the same scepticism prevailed. I doubt if it influenced Hitler much. Many prominent figures in later life were up in my time, some of them American or Commonwealth statesmen; Quintin Hogg is the most memorable name I can remember, but they were legion.

One of my regrets about life is that I did not throw myself whole-heartedly into politics or Trade Union affairs. My origins seemed to dictate that I should yet I could not bring myself to be one-sided enough and anyway I was a hopeless public speaker. Perhaps I was Harold Wilson manqué?

7. Work

My first experience of earning was for picking raspberries and potatoes on a market garden during the school holidays, aged about ten I think. The wages were ten shillings a week.

My first regular job was as a laboratory assistant after leaving school at 18. I had gained an exhibition at University College, Oxford but no supplementary finance so I took a job in a small chemical works making ammonia products from gas works effluent. The college kindly held the exhibition open for a year during which I was awarded a Miner's welfare scholarship as I describe elsewhere. I earned a pound a week plus free lunches. The work was not particularly interesting or educative but the experience of the real world of industry from the grass roots gave me more confidence in Oxford and was invaluable in my career in management.

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PURE ALKALI.

GUARANTEED 58 DEGREES.

EQUAL TO 98 PER CENT. CARBONATE OF SODA.

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By far the Purest and Cheapest form of WASHING SODA.

Only 1 lb. of Concentrated Crystal Soda required to do the work of 2lbs. of Washing Soda.

SODA CRYSTALS

OF THE FINEST QUALITY.

BRUNNER, MOND & CO., LTD.,

NORTHWICH, CHESHIRE,

AND

SILVERTOWN, LONDON.

*Where they are now supplying SODA CRYSTALS
of the finest quality for the London Trade.*

Brunner Mond advertisement for its soda crystal products.

In my fourth year at Oxford I was interviewed by senior officials from ICI (Alkali) Ltd and offered a job at £300 a year. A first class degree warranted £300, a third only £250! I had not applied for any job. This was a forerunner of the modern 'milk

round' but ICI was the only milkman in the field. Needless to say with my background I could not think twice about accepting a job at £300 a year; it represented affluence, security, all that my parents had made sacrifices for. I had to go through the motions of visiting the company headquarters and being interviewed by all heads of department and directors. The only one I remember was the Chairman Bill Lutyens. He sat me down and said 'Tell me all about yourself'.

The company exploited salt deposits in Cheshire, turning the salt into sodium carbonate, bicarbonate, caustic soda and related products. To the man in the street these sound like small-scale domestic chemicals but we made thousands of tons a day, mainly for use in glass, detergents, paper and many other industries. The company was formerly Brunner Mond, one of the four that combined into ICI in 1926. Brunner Mond had been the blue chip of all time, paying 100% per annum. With Solvay et Cie of Belgium it had at one time virtually a world monopoly in its field. It was rich and elitist and looked down on its poorer partners. At one time after the second war we employed one Earl, one Baron, and three Baronets!

Just before I arrived the company had invented polythene and this was to influence my career later.

I started in 1934 in the research department but by 1938 I was junior manager in a large factory. There were two chemists, the other only slightly senior in age and service. He was in the Territorials and was mobilised or in camp for much of 1938 and 39 and then for the duration of the war. Thus the whole load of production fell on me; the works manager was an engineer and neither he nor the maintenance engineer knew much about the process.

My special concern to begin with were three small plants recently built without enough research, that were losing money. The managing director had a duty to report to head office to justify the money being spent on them. After a few months they were in the black and he was able to clear the item off his desk.

My last project in the research department had been concerned with a perennial chronic problem which it would be tedious to describe but which caused the managing director frequent headaches. I managed a sort of solution, at least enough to lift the burden from the MD. I did not realise at the time how important this was. I eventually discovered that I had become to the MD 'that fellow Steadman who cracked those troubles at Fleetwood and Lostock'. I can recommend this a path to promotion!

When the war started we had to produce as much as possible and we broke all previous records. The foremen mainly did this, but I got the credit of course in this unjust world. I also got taken away from the factory that I liked to a back room that I didn't.

However after two years - in 1942 - I was released again to be the deputy works manager of our newest factory. The management there, two chemists and two engineers, were barely on speaking terms with one another and communicated by notes. Needless to say the performance of the plant was abysmal but they were able to blame it on the war. I volunteered to go though I knew others had refused. The factory had four very able and experienced foremen, three of them nature's

gentlemen, and they knew what to do. I was able to stay on speaking terms with the other managers but not to get them to speak to each other much; nevertheless after a few months our performance was back to pre-war or even better, in spite of all the shortages, blackouts, and so on.

Again this was noticed in the board room and I got most of the credit, and my reward was to be put in the back room again! This time, however, we were busy with postwar planning, especially overseas. I became closely concerned with factories in Kenya, Australia and Pakistan, and with Solvay et Cie in Brussels and their many factories in Europe. I travelled to all these places and for the first time was concerned with businesses as a whole rather than the narrow business of production.

Eventually in 1953 my boss the Production Director left owing to personality clashes and I became, much to my surprise, Production Director. I must say I cannot believe it would have happened had there been no war.

I had tried the OTC in Oxford but there was not much enthusiasm for it in the early thirties and it seemed a bit pointless to be training for disarmament, so I left. When war came I was in a reserved occupation and as I have explained I was carrying a heavy load of responsibility and the phoney war dimmed any sense of urgency. It was possible to enlist but the company would have prevented it and all my life I have pretty well done as I was told. To strike out independently was hardly possible for me with no capital and a wife and child. Two or three of my colleagues did insist on being released. Most of them spent the war in non-combatant duties.

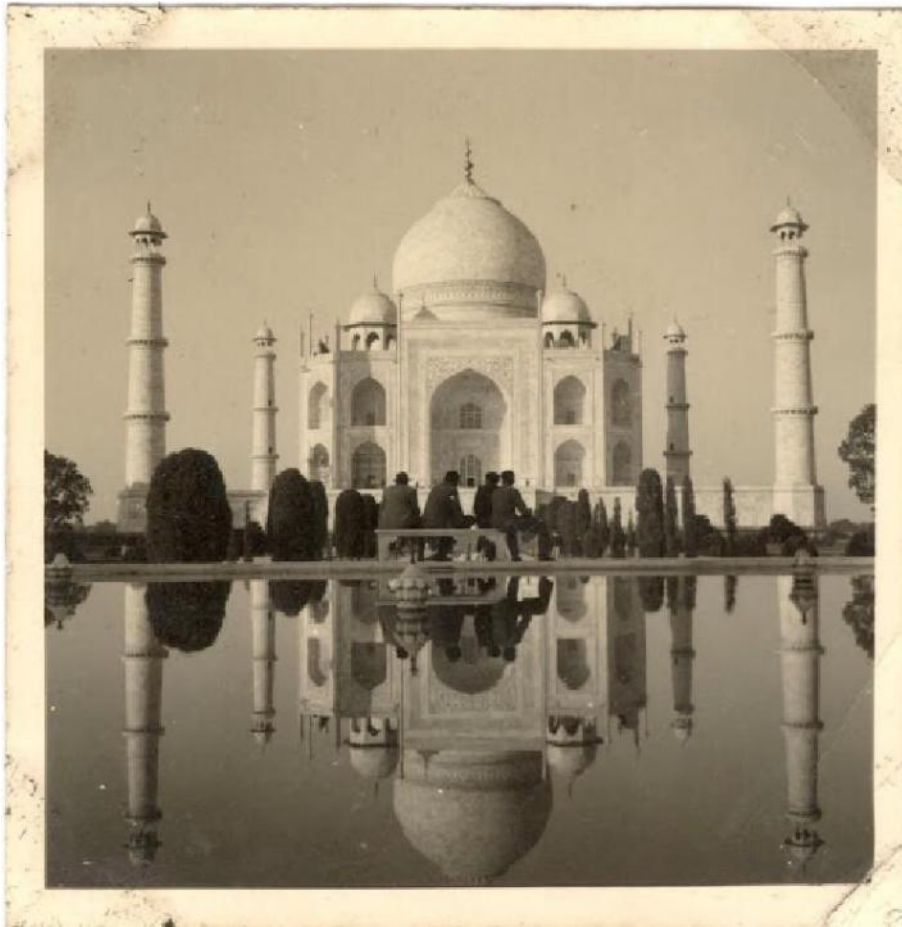
I worked hard and served in the Home Guard and later the Royal Observer Corps which involved twelve hours a week of night duty. However, one could never escape the question: 'Should I have insisted on going to the war?'. I have never really been quite satisfied with the answer; and it is undeniable that I gained a head start for promotion after the war on those who had been away. C'est la guerre?

I did not care much for directorship. We operated a kind of cabinet government with shared responsibility, a system that is out of favour now and replaced by individual overlordship. We were a pleasant bunch to live and work with, even so I missed wandering out on to the works and talking to the chaps. There was very little of the backbiting and aggro that is portrayed on television in boardrooms, though there was some.

I was quite pleased when I was asked to take charge of the polythene business. Although we invented the stuff we had been held back from exploiting it commercially by several factors and we were a year or two behind the Americans. In 1951/2 we acquired cheap ethylene and the business started to take off. I took charge of research, production and development while Archie Renfrew of Plastics Division took charge of marketing. Actually we functioned as twins.

Some idea of the stress and excitement of the job can be understood from the rate of growth of demand, about 50% per annum. Radar had been the main wartime use, but now film was expanding rapidly, followed by moulding of domestic articles and industrial products, and multifarious other outlets. Few of these products were new inventions; they had all been anticipated in the gutta percha trade several decades

earlier, although gutta percha (a kind of rubber) was not consistent enough. Polythene was the perfect substitute for gutta percha and a great improvement on nature!



The Taj Mahal in 1960.

For the next few years I travelled a lot in England and abroad, mostly with Archie. He was a bon viveur and it was seldom dull to be with him. Our travels took in America, Canada, Europe, India and eventually Japan. During this period I saw some of the wonders of the world - Taj Mahal, Niagara, Pyramids, places like Kyoto, and stayed in some of the best hotels in the world, most notably the Imperial in Tokyo. My boss maintained the best hotel in the world was 24, The Crescent, Hartford, where he lived. All the others were second best.

I could write a book about the years I spent with polythene. Two episodes will have to suffice.

The first concerned the transatlantic telephone cable. Shorter cables had been laid to Europe but this was the big one; technology was breaking new barriers. The cable was to be made by Submarine Telephone Cables, a British company. The Americans were to make the repeaters (boosters) and there were two contenders, ICI and Union Carbide of America, for the privilege and prestige of making the polythene insulation. The contest was partly about price, crucially about specification. The specifying authority was Bell Telephone of New York and Carbide kept persuading them to tighten the specifications, thinking we could not meet them. However, we had a man on loan to Bell Telephone, as it happened, and

he kept us in touch with the game. It also happened that whenever we matched Carbide on their strong point our polythene excelled theirs on other properties and so we got the job. It was an absorbing battle and a notable victory and it did my career no harm. The cable was made and laid and was an instant success until after a few months it died! It had been fished up and broken by a Russian trawler, but was quickly repaired and is working to this day, alongside another one and satellite links.

Polythene brought me my first real experience of high level negotiation. We sold know-how to foreign companies for large sums of money (the patent having expired) and it fell to me to make the opening moves in selling to the Japanese, to India and to Sweden. This involved choosing one of several suitors and clearing matters with government departments.

In Japan there was little of the oriental inscrutability that was expected and they kept their word scrupulously. India was a tangle of red tape. Sweden turned out to be too isolationist for us at the time and it was interesting to find how interlinked and collaborative the big firms and the government were; and of course the unions, although we did not meet them.



Sweden changed from left to right hand driving in September 1967.

Sweden was preparing to change from left to right hand driving and it was done over one weekend! I sadly took away from these negotiations and from Mexico and elsewhere the impression that British commercial counsellors were pathetically useless to us. One of them, in Sweden, did not have the sense to refer us to his friend in Price Waterhouse who knew all the answers!



The Hula Hoop played an interesting role in the history of polythene. Early polythene did not prove durable, and a new formula had to be developed. Large stocks of 'old polythene' became unsaleable, but were rescued when the Wham-O Toy Company of the USA launched its Hula Hoop in 1958. Hula Hoops did not need to be durable, and Wham-O swallowed up the stocks of 'old polythene'.

After polythene, my career, although still rising, became less and less satisfying. I was talked of as a future chairman of ICI by some people, especially Archie (he was older and out of the running), but that was not how it turned out - as if it ever would!

I became managing director which sounds glamorous and powerful now. In those days it meant I had nothing in particular to do. I eventually found a field in computer application, which we were just toying with. It gave me a new intellectual challenge, but better still it meant working closely with a bunch of young, keen and enthusiastic staff, a pleasure I was otherwise denied.

After this my career stood still. The polythene business was transferred from my division to the plastics division, a move which was logical but badly executed. Later again the division was merged with the neighbouring general chemicals division, again a logical move in the long term but hastily carried out. I was left as a deputy chairman of a larger business, one of three deputy chairmen under a chairman; all the others were from the 'other side'. The chairman was Machiavellian and one of the deputies a ruthless tycoon, and my gentle voice was mostly unavailing.

I stayed with the new division long enough to see fair play as well as I could in the treatment of staff of my old firm. Then various other influences persuaded me to leave and as described elsewhere I became a clergyman. It sounds rather a quixotic and dramatic decision, yet it was in fact a perfectly natural thing to do in the

circumstances and we just knew it was right. The press descended on us and made it a nine days wonder; how could anyone in his senses voluntarily give up the salary, the power, the grand house and garden etc etc? One answer to this question is that when you have had something you mind less about giving it up. It is not having that makes us envious.

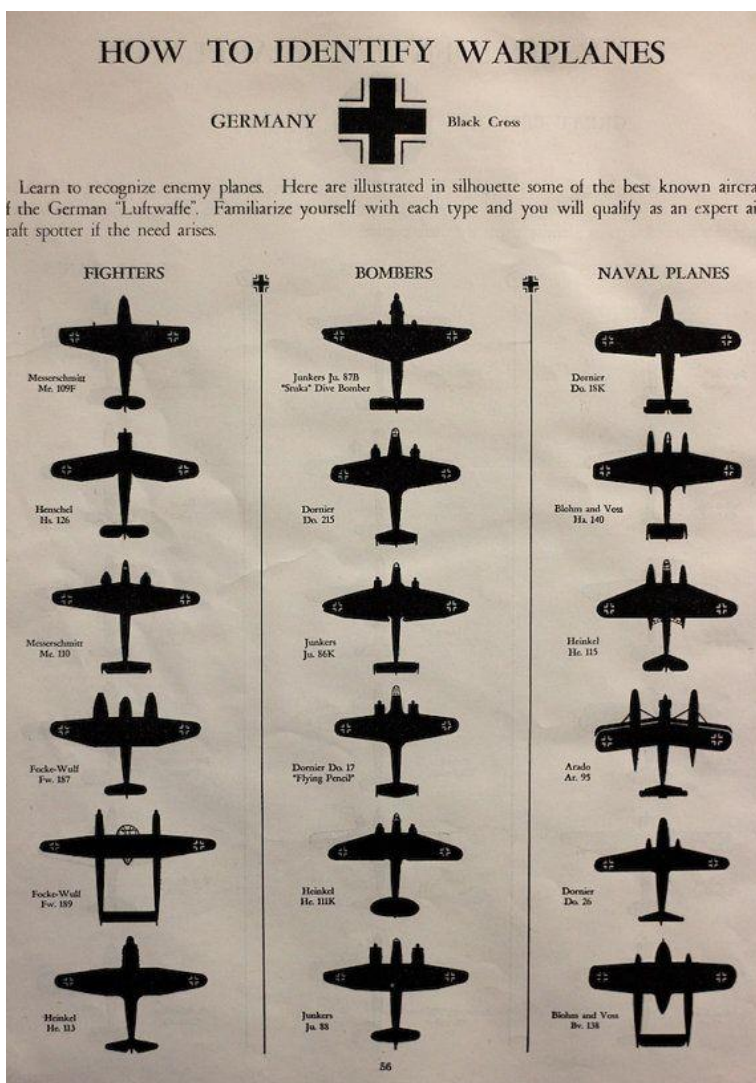
One of the factors in my decision to leave was that prospects in ICI seemed no better than static and it is uncomfortable to sit at the top going nowhere. In the event I probably would have become chairman as two or three junior to me later did. Even so, it was work I had never really enjoyed or felt good at; I would have missed meeting on more or less level terms the workmen and staff - real people in fact. It is lonely and isolated at the top. The church is a better place for meeting real people.



8. Air Travel



My first contact with an aeroplane was sitting in the cockpit of (probably) a Sopwith Pup (above) at an exhibition of military hardware in a local park in the first world war. I was about six or seven years old.



How to identify German warplanes.

During the second world war I was for a time in the Royal Observer Corps and learned the aspect and profile of every western aeroplane and some Japanese. So I was quite interested in flying again when I was asked to go to Australia in 1946. My employers had built a factory in Adelaide just before the war. By the end of the war it needed extending, and it also needed technical advice which had been difficult to supply by correspondence; there is no substitute for going to have a look. So in February 1946 a director was sent to attend the extension and I went along as technical adviser.



The BOAC air terminal at Victoria. Onward by limousine.

We started from the old Victoria terminal building in London. Six passengers were conveyed in two large limousines by two chauffeurs and two stewards to Hurn in Bournemouth, stopping for lunch on the way. After a cup of tea in a shed at Hurn we boarded the Lancastrian, a converted Lancaster bomber mainly intended for carrying mail. It had nine seats facing across the narrow fuselage and three bunks above, thus having a capacity of nine short haul passengers or six long haul, which we were.



The Lancastrian airliner, converted from a Lancaster bomber.

There was no pressurisation, the noise and vibration from four Merlins and their propellers could hardly be imagined by those who never experienced it. We were stuck with it for sixty hours. We were cared for by a young male steward who fed us typical English food of the (rationed) period.

The flight path was threaded through those parts of the world most free from the aftermath of war. From London we flew over France to Palestine then to Karachi, Colombo, Cocos and Keeling Islands (in the middle of the Indian Ocean), Perth and Sydney. There was a stop of five hours in Karachi to change crews from BOAC to Qantas, otherwise stops were for refuelling only, plane and passengers.

The first leg took us over the Massif Centrale in France where the weather was bad and we had to climb to 12,000 feet. I passed out and we were then given oxygen; my director was a former Wing Commander so he could feel superior. The other way round my career might have been set back a notch!

On the ground at Lydda we were guarded by black African troops, which seemed like an affront to the Palestinians, but I suppose we had no others at the time.

At Karachi we were given dinner at the Yacht Club. One of the passengers was the South East Asia director of General Motors. It was somebody's birthday and whisky was liberally available. The GM man was silent for the rest of the journey and spent two weeks in hospital in Sydney. He had an excuse in that he had started from California, crossed America and the Atlantic before joining us. It was my first acquaintance with severe jet lag (or propeller lag), something which never seemed to bother me in later flights.

On the subject of drink my director asked the steward if he carried any on the plane, and was shown a box containing half a dozen bottles of spirits. Being canny he asked the prices first and was quoted outrageous figures, even more than he was prepared to pay. The steward explained that periodically the 'office' calculated that this box was not paying its own air freight, so they put up the prices, and it continued to ride backwards and forwards making no sales!



RAF Negombo, Ceylon.

In Ceylon the airport was a Royal Air Force base at Negombo. It was breakfast time and after a shower and change we were offered varieties of tropical fruit not seen in England in living memory. It was my first experience of a tropical 'paradise'.



The Cocos and Keeling Islands.

The next stop was Cocos and Keeling Islands, coral atolls in the middle of the Indian Ocean. There was a small RAF garrison which judging from the orders on the notice board was in a low state of morale, caused by being marooned themselves but watching civilians pass through twice a week on commercial planes. Two weeks later a Lancastrian disappeared without trace having presumably failed to find the islands. After this the service was re-routed via Singapore and Darwin.

From Perth we had a middle aged veteran pilot instead of young RAF types. He handled the plane for the maximum comfort of passengers at take off and landing, unlike his younger colleagues.

I first noticed on this trip something that bothered me later. Many airports were near water, and the pilots seemed to make fetish of hitting the exact beginning of the runway without room for error. It was a bit unnerving.

The fare was £600 return, equivalent to say £12,000 in modern money, but even so we calculated that the passengers only paid for the petrol.

My experiences in Australia are found in another chapter and I will complete this account with the journey home in October. There were only two passengers from Sydney, myself and a barrister called Phillips who was flying to London to present a case before the Privy Council. He had visited the UK only once before as a NCO in the first war. His friends advised him to take plenty of warm clothing so he boarded the plane in his warmest tweed suit. However, our luggage was inaccessible until London so he suffered in thick tweed through Darwin, Singapore, Calcutta, Karachi and Benghazi! A distinguished barrister might have been expected to foresee this.

I remember nothing else of the journey home except landing at the new Heathrow Airport. Immigration and customs were housed in a little back shed on the perimeter and look at it now.

We did a little flying in Australia, between Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and up country to Whyalla, a steel town in the desert. The aircraft were almost all DC3s, the old wartime Dakota. One could not escape noticing how common commercial flying had become even then in Australia.

My next flight was to Kenya in 1949. We had a factory at Magadi, ninety miles from Nairobi, on the equator and at the bottom of the Rift Valley. It exploited a natural soda lake of which there are many in the region. I went, of course, as technical adviser.



Avro York.

Our plane was the successor of the Lancastrian, the York, a high wing monoplane. It was roomier, of course, but still unpressurised. At night you could see four fiery exhausts outside the window, not a reassuring sight. By this time air travel had slowed down a bit and we spent a night on the ground at Khartoum. Flying over Africa in daytime was a continuous roller coaster, riding on the many thermals made visible by little woolly clouds, and intensified by flying low to see the game!

Also in 1949 I made another trip to Australia to attend one board meeting. The extension was costing too much and as two finance directors were already there my director and I joined them for one day. Actually the trip lasted two weeks, but it was unusual in those days to hop over the Australia for a day! At this time BOAC and Qantas because of the dollar shortage were trying to run a thrice weekly service with five Lockheed Constellations and eight spare engines. On the way home we passed a broken down Constellation in Calcutta; we broke down finally in Cairo; and in Tripoli we passed another one. The whole service ground to a halt.

Our passengers were consoled by spending 24 hours in Cairo, seeing the Pyramids and Tutankhamen's treasure in the museum. I regret to say we were not nearly as impressed as the thousands who queued later in London to see the same objects. The Pyramids were my first 'world wonder' that I just happened to run into on my travels, the others being Niagara and the Taj Mahal. I am glad to say they all exceeded expectations.

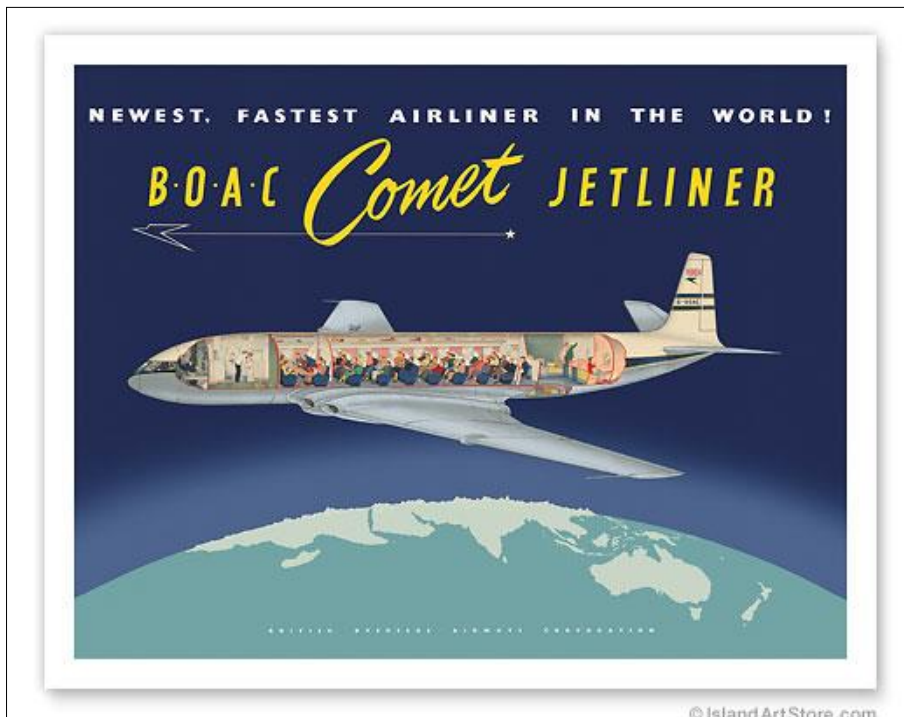
Incidents like the above gave rise to nicknames for the carriers; British Overdue Airways Corporation, Air Chance, and others. I remember sitting in a Stratocruiser

at Gander waiting, with about a dozen others, for the fog to clear before take off, while an Air France plane passed us all and took off into the night! 'They have different rules' said the stewardess.

In the succeeding years my work took me by scheduled flights to America several times, Europe many times, India two or three times and several in transit, Japan twice including a round the world journey via Montreal, Edmonton, Vancouver and Alaska and home westwards. I had previously made another round trip the other way, via the East and Australia then Hawaii, San Francisco, Mexico and New York.



In Mexico we dined with the ambassador and heard that Anthony Eden was returning to England on what seemed like the same flight as we had booked. Like a flash the ambassador said no, they were returning from Montreal; however they were on the same flight from New York, along with Douglas Fairbanks Junior (right). Douglas was a friend of the Edens and could have exploited the VIP channel at Heathrow, but he chose to join the common herd. A nice chap!



Mexico was memorable for a visit to Quernavaca. Our agent had a house there. It is about 50 miles from Mexico City and is popular with millionaires because it has a rainfall equal to ours in Britain but it never rains in the daytime. So they told us. Two flights stand out my memory.

The first was a flight to Karachi in 1951 in the Comet. The service had just begun and we were lucky to get on it. After normal air travel the experience was

transcendental. The noise was like a vacuum cleaner in the next room and vibration nil; you really could stand a penny on edge on the table. An American on the lane was ecstatic and pronounced it a world beater. Alas it later fell apart. I suppose this was one near death experience.



Merlin engine. Three out of four failed.

Another took place in Canada. We took off from Winnipeg in a snowstorm and just as we were airborne both starboard engines seized. As we landed on the other two one of them seized also and we taxied through ambulances and fire engines to the terminal. They were Merlin engines and someone had forgotten to de-ice the oil coolers.

I never worried about the dangers of air travel because it seemed so safe while you were on it. I realised after a time that the worrying was done by the wives at home.

9. Australia

In Australia I had an experience of a lifetime. More about this shortly.

My first encounter with Australia took place at the end of the first world war. I was about seven or eight and was taught by a pretty young lady. One day she brought her fiancé into class in full Anzac uniform, funny hat and all.

The second was being entered at the age of 13 for a scholarship to Geelong Grammar School. I have no idea how this came about. Fortunately I failed and was spared the merciless bullying that a Pom would have suffered.

Serious interest began in the second world war. My employers had built a factory in Adelaide which started production in 1940. We had done our best during the war to send technical advice by post, a very unsatisfactory medium. By 1946 the factory needed extending and licking into shape so a director went out to attend to the first and I tagged along for the second. I was to stay three months but it dragged out to eight, February to October.



Romano's night club, Sydney.

Our second night in Sydney we were taken to Romano's night club. The welcoming party was about twelve in all. I forget nearly everything except the dessert course which was a Bombe Alaska big enough to take a full year's sugar ration for a family in England. It was the first culture shock of the trip.

I do remember one other thing. I danced with a young lady and appreciated how avid the Australians were for culture. If you live in a 'culture' you take it for granted, but the Australians had to work at it and in some ways they made me feel the country cousin rather than the other way round. They were also very sensitive about it. I went to a performance by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra conducted by Szymon Goldberg, who had recently been released from war prison in the Far East. He played and conducted at the same time a Mozart violin concerto.



Szymon Goldberg.

Next day I dined with the family of a colleague and was asked how I enjoyed it. I said they had not played the Leonora Overture very well and was going on to praise the Mozart, but I could see by their faces that the damage was done! Times have changed! Most British popular culture is now in Australian hands.

My first impressions of industry were contradictory. There was an easygoing air about; and yet they would have a bash at any project with cheerful naivety and often succeeded at a price. They also spectacularly failed on occasion. The trades unions were a joke, typified by the no doubt apocryphal story of the Sydney stevedores going on strike for 'embarrassment money' when asked to unload a cargo of WC pans! However, on my way to work daily I crossed an area of scrub land near the port and people were just beginning to build their own houses, starting with a tent, then a garage, then a room or two until it was complete - living there the whole time of course. It was impossible to visualise that in England at the time.

I discovered that the job market for graduates was much narrower than at home, so to have a chance of finding a job one had to be competent in a range of skills. The technical people I worked with were good all rounders. We had an expert geologist doing organic chemistry research.

Now for the great Australian adventure!

One of my colleagues in the factory was Warren Bonython, a young chemical engineer, member of a well known, well-heeled family in Adelaide. They had owned the Adelaide Advertiser and sold out to Murdoch senior. Warren was steeped in the history of Australian exploration and longed to make his own contribution.

During the war interest was aroused in Mount Painter in the Flinders Ranges by the presence of uranium ore and this brought to a wider public, including Warren, native legends about a section of the Flinders called the Gammon Ranges.

The Gammons formed a horseshoe of mountains about 4000 feet high. From this range were heard from time to time thunderous peals of sound, audible miles away in the local sheep stations. The native legends claim the noises came from a monster called the Arkaroo. He had emerged in the past to drink at Lake Frome. It was - and is - salty and he dragged himself back suffering from stomach ache which continues to this day. The noises are his moans and groans.



The Gammon Ranges.

It is part of the legend that anyone venturing into his territory will have a nasty accident, so it was to all appearances virgin territory. A part of the legend says that a water hole nearby contains a deadly creature and the natives would die of thirst rather than approach the hole to drink. We thought it might be crocodile stranded from the time when Australia was cut in two by a 'canal' stretching from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Spencer Gulf. We didn't reach the water hole. It has since been visited and no creature found.

Warren invited a friend of his, Bob Crocker, and myself to spend a fortnight's holiday exploring the place. Bob was an expert on grassland, later professor at Berkeley, California. Warren fitted out the expedition using an ex-army truck. In the course of the expedition I mended nineteen punctures. We drove to a sheep station called Balcanoona, managed by a young man, Bill Thomas, and his wife. He guided us to the foot of the mountain some ten miles away but was strictly forbidden by his wife to go any further or visit the water hole.



Wool shed and yards at Balcanoona sheep station.

We camped in a dry creek bed, three in a Whymper tent which should have survived the north face of the Eiger but blew away in the evening wind down the gorge. Having fixed that we settled down among the Eucalyptus trees, flocks of white galahs (parrots) and smallish kangaroos.



A flock of white Galahs.

Our plan was to find a way up to the top of the horseshoe ridge and from there plan a walk of two or three days right round the ridge. We established a dump of stores at each end of the ridge so that we could either advance or retreat as things turned out. Having done this we climbed to the summit and set out on a ridge walk.

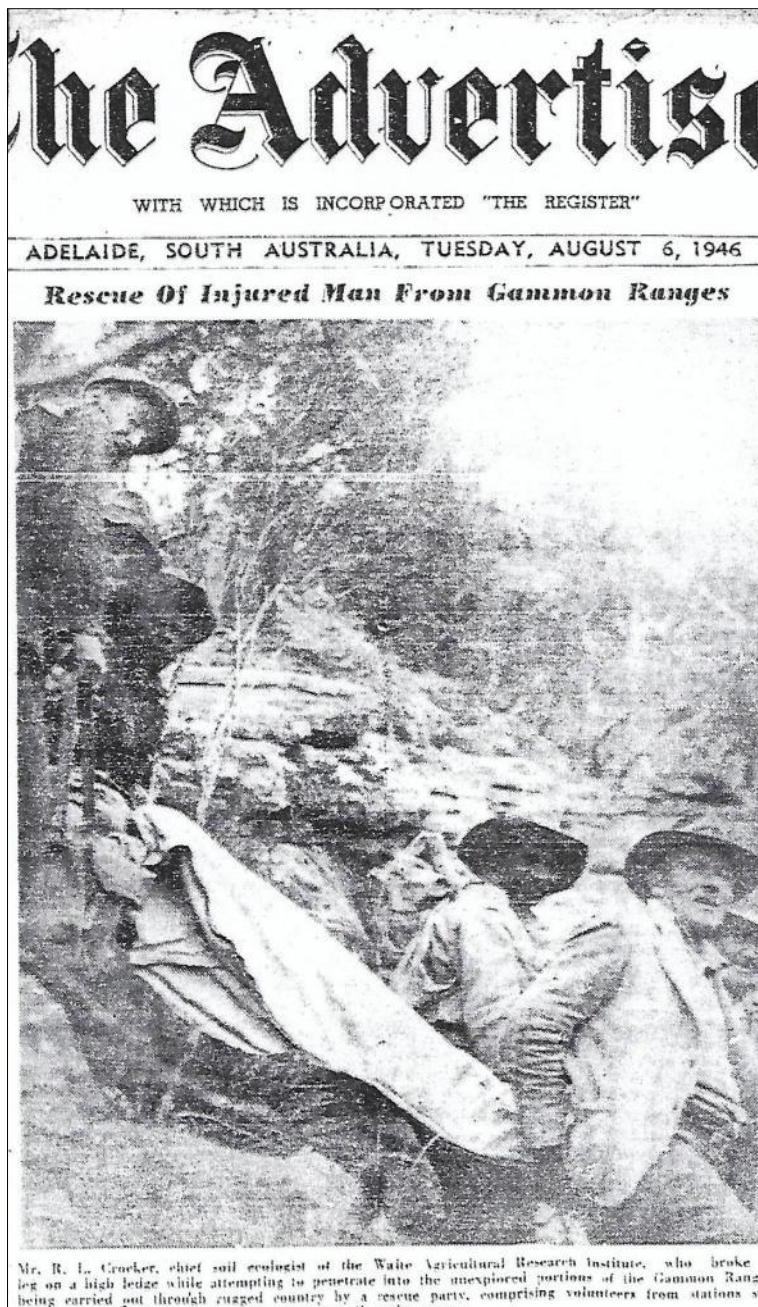
Warren had intended to survey the range using a stereoscopic camera-cum-theodolite that he had made had made himself. This added quite a lump to the weight we had to carry. Bob chose to carry it first and after more than a mile he slipped on a small rock ledge and broke a bone in his ankle.

It was early afternoon. Nobody had been there before and nobody knew where we were. Warren set off down the mountain to base camp and from there the ten miles to Balcanoona. After about three miles he found a ruined hut (scene of a famous murder) where amazingly there was a field telephone and he was able to contact Bill Thomas. Bill told him to follow the telephone wire and he would be met at the boundary fence. It was dark but Warren could just see the wire, and while concentrating on that fell into one of the few water holes for miles around! He made it eventually and organised the rescue.

Meanwhile Bob and I were on top of the ridge. We had a first aid box which contained an elastic stocking and that seemed to give Bob some relief. I kept the fire going, did the cooking and tried to keep Bob interested. We didn't have a great deal in common to begin with until he told me his brother had been a Rhodes Scholar and was currently Australian ambassador in Delhi. Considering that we spent the rest of that day, the night and most of the next day I can remember very little about it. Bob was calm and uncomplaining. We had no sense of fear or apprehension. I think we just took it for granted that help would come.

At about dusk the next day they came. The sheep stations in the area are about 25 miles apart and on a single party telephone line. Almost simultaneously from two directions came four parties of managers and station hands; five set out but one had to turn back. Our family of sixteen built a huge fire (I had been cautious about this)

and held a barbecue of lamb chops cooked in the embers. An aboriginal stockman cut a shaped splint from the bark of a tree and made Bob more comfortable.



Adelaide newspaper photo of the rescue. Fred Steadman may be on the left of the stretcher.

Rather quixotically the party had managed to lead two horses up the ridge; they were invaluable when we reached level ground again. In the meantime we had to carry Bob on a stretcher through a pathless waste of boulders and scrub. At three o'clock we reached the bed of a creek and Bob sat on a horse until we reached a road at about eight o'clock; for the last hour so it was dark and the horse and its leader were stumbling along unsure of any footing.

At the road we were met by a nurse and a truck. Bob was taken to the hospital in Hawker where his bone was set (badly as it turned out) and plastered.

The rest of the party spent the night at a sheep station called Yankaninna. Warren and I were picked next day by Bill Thomas, collected our belongings from base camp and joined Bob at Hawker.

It happened that the Governor of South Australia was inspecting coal mines at Leigh Creek, not far away as distance goes in Australia. There was a press corps with him and they abandoned the boring official routine to report our dramatic story of the revenge of the Arkaroo and the valiant rescue from the uncharted, untrodden outback. We made the front page of newspapers from Adelaide to Sydney.

Bob's leg never really recovered properly and he was left with a slight limp. My abiding memory of the whole episode is the gentle toughness of Bob and the station owners and their families. Bob's ordeal stretching over 48 hours, especially sitting on the horse plunging about in the dark, was a marvellous feat of endurance, and no breath of complaint. The young and old station hands were tireless in carrying Bob all day down the mountain through virgin scrub and rock with good natured humour right to the end. I have never met its equal anywhere else. These were, of course, the men who carried Australia economically through the last century or two.

Bob had some misfortune in later years. He and his wife had three sons. His sister and brother-in-law died within a short time of each other leaving two little girls and Bob extended the house and took them in. All seven of them came to visit us once in Walnut Lodge. But it was only a very few years before Bob himself died and left Helen with them all.

End joke. Warren belonged to a rich family and was not short of a bob or two. Before he cast up the accounts of the expedition to divide into three he made his wife Bunty buy the unused stores out of her housekeeping money!

Postscript 1991. The official Australian Ordnance Survey now shows Steadman Ridge and Crocker Saddle where we spent two nights and days.

10. Holidays

My father was a coal miner and was declared unfit for military service in the first world war. Miners were well paid during that war and such prosperity as we enjoyed later depended on savings made in that period. It was early in that war that we had our one and only family holiday in Blackpool. I have no memories of it but one or two photographs.

As a boy my holidays were often spent with a cousin, Frank, of my own age. His mother died young and at first we holidayed with a maiden aunt in Batley who kept a corner shop. She emigrated to Vancouver after the first war and we then spent our holidays with another aunt of Frank's (not mine) in Whalley Range, Manchester.

Apart from that I had no regular summer holiday until Oxford. My first was with two Oxford friends in the Lake District, subsidised by a fund commemorating Mallory and Irvine, lost on Everest. Later I was to become a colleague and friend of Irvine's younger brother Alec.

Also subsidised from the same source, two younger Oxford friends and I visited the Cevennes, our first venture abroad. That was in 1933 and it cost us £5 each, door to door! The franc was against us too. We followed more or less the steps of Stevenson and his donkey. We travelled by train to St.Etienne and by bus into the countryside at Yesingaux, then on foot round the source of the Loire and down to Le Puy.

Having to economise, we lived mainly on boiled eggs, French bread and coffee in large bowls. We tried ordering bacon but it came as a lump of fat melted on the outside!

My fiancée and I walked round the Ring of Kerry in 1936. One incident surprised us. We went to a cinema show in a village hall in Cahirciveen and waited in a queue of mainly teenagers. They spent the waiting time quoting long tracts of Shakespeare to one another. Where else in the world could you find that?



Paris Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life, 1937.

Our honeymoon in Paris coincided with the Great Exhibition of 1937 featuring the Russian and German pavilions glaring across at one another.

The war scotched holidays. Our first foreign holiday was in St.Gildas in Brittany. The nearest town was Vannes, where we saw sewage in the streets, and women bashing their laundry on the river bank, and overcrowded unreliable buses. There is now a motorway, of course.

Our next foray was to Cassis near Marseilles. Churchill painted there. The coast is indented by small fjords called Calanques where submarines of all combatants sheltered and painted their numbers on the rocks. We stayed in a small hotel which had sheltered Allied POWs in the war. It was not a success as a hotel. However, we introduced ourselves to the manager of the local quarry owned by Solvay et Cie, a M.Montaigneau, who was Maire-Joint of the town. He had the best job in the world. The work was light and he was provided with a large house on the Riviera, a large garden in which he grew vines, lemons, peaches etc. His son inherited the job. In Cassis we received an object lesson in applying the handbrake. An English family had left their car on the gently sloping quayside while they had lunch in an adjoining restaurant. The heat must have loosened the brake and it rolled into the harbour. The Pompiers turned out to help but they had no lifting gear and a crane had to be hired from Marseilles. What an end to a holiday, especially as cars were so precious at the time.

The unforgettable incident took place on this holiday. We went to Marseilles for a day and of course sailed across to the Chateau d'If, of Count of Monte Cristo fame. Owing to a muddle about returning, Phil, aged nine and speaking no French, got into a boat and was taken away to Marseilles leaving the rest of the family on the island. Agitated mother and James took the next boat back while I waited on the island in case he returned; the boats knock off for lunch so I waited a long time. Fortunately there was an American destroyer in the port and Phil went up to the sentry and explained his predicament and all was well.

Our most significant holiday in view of its consequences long term was in Cannes in 1955, as paying guests in a villa. The hostess was English; she was a widow, Ethelind Fearon, who supported herself by freelance journalism and for the sake of her health rented the villa and took in guests. Elind, as she was called, was shrewd and competent in many spheres and wrote a series of books called *The Reluctant Cook*, *The Reluctant Hostess*, *The Reluctant Gardener*, and others. The children enjoyed it except for the mosquitoes. Some years later, after my wife died, my sister and I and my small daughter spent another holiday with Elind, and through her I met my second wife, her niece Wendy Ratcliff.

When our daughter Helen was two years old and the boys fourteen and ten, family holidays were a problem. Our family car was a Land Rover and the boys and I went off to the French and Italian Rivas, sleeping in the car which was specially adapted by me; Phil was short enough to sleep behind the steering wheel.. This was in the early fifties when Italy had not recovered from the war as well as other countries; I remember driving through Ventimiglia and Genoa and feeling the menace of groups of unemployed lounging on corners. Consequently we didn't stay long in Italy. I am amazed now that I took the risk of going at all with only one

driver, although I think James could have driven a short distance if needed. My wife took the babe to Norfolk.



Adelboden in the 1950s.

Dorothy and I had a blissful holiday in Adelboden when she was recovering from an operation. It was spring 1954, the meadows were blooming. The most intriguing sight was of crocuses flowering right on the snowline, washed by warm water flowing from the snow under a bright sun.

A holiday that gave us plenty of dinner table conversation afterwards took place in 1958 in Yugoslavia. It was a package, by rail, to Rovinji and was for amateur painters. Philip was quite competent, I enjoyed daubing and James came for the sun. Dorothy and Helen had a winter holiday. Our train journey began at Victoria; in our compartment were a Dublin doctor and his wife who usually organised their own holidays but he had not been well and on this occasion they had entrusted themselves to others.

Soon after we pulled out of Victoria the courier came along and explained that there were two parties, one going to Rovinji and one to Italy, and would the doctor take charge of the Rovinji party? He appointed me as his assistant. We had a communal ticket, but we never managed to reconcile our charges with the ticket. We lost a few in Calais but they joined up in Paris, except one girl who made her way alone and without ticket or luggage or language or money to Rovinji! We lost a suitcase in Venice but recovered it on the way home.

The hotel was basic. Beds were longitudinal wooden slats with a thin mattress. One had to grade the slats to minimise sharp edges. Water came on only a few hours a day. The food was monotonous but edible; it was no use dining out because all restaurants served the same standard menu as the hotels, by government decree.

There was nothing to do in the evening except sit and talk. We got to know the mayor and a few Yugoslavian visitors. There was a doctor from Belgrade and his wife who had concealed the holiday from the friends because of the envy it would arouse. Doctors were very badly paid. We sent them tea and coffee afterwards but had no word of its arrival.



President Tito of Yugoslavia in one of his numerous Rolls Royces.

One afternoon about 3pm a huge launch roared up to the jetty and Tito and a guest from Outer Mongolia disembarked and walked the length of the jetty with virtually no escort to a waiting Rolls Royce; they were visiting a local hospital. It was a demonstration of the value of surprise in security matters.



Pula in the 1960s.

The most adventurous day involved a sea trip to Pula, a Roman city and former Austrian naval base. A few people were sick on the way down and came home by bus. The return journey began in a mirror-like flat calm and we despised the timid bus passengers. However we had not sailed far when we saw ahead a curtain of cloud from sky to sea level advancing towards us. When it reached us the sea behind it was seething like a boiling kettle and presently this turned into huge waves and a gale force wind. The captain turned back and ran with the storm until it abated a little and resumed our journey when he judged it safe. We were hours late home

and even given up for lost. They do occasionally lose ships in these sudden Adriatic storms. It reminded me of the storm on Lake Galilee!

The homeward journey was a nightmare comparable with some of our air journeys today. How do you find the right train in Milan on Saturday night when many are running in duplicate? Or at Dover in the small hours when nothing is on time?

My second honeymoon was to be spent in Paris, the Italian Lakes and Venice. However, I developed glandular fever in Menaggio and had to fly home, leaving Wendy to drive home by herself. Not a good start.

Soon we had a daughter and all we needed was sun, a pool and a 'little friend'. So package deals became the norm. There was always a hitch of some kind but no disasters and on the whole satisfaction.

In recent times my second son has owned a cottage in Tuscany – originally without any services – and later a 'chateau' in the Dordogne and we have taken advantage of these since our daughter has left home. We also have friends who own an apartment in Tenerife and that too is at our disposal although we have little inclination to go a second time. My wife now likes to combine sea, sun and mountains, which we have been able to do in Stresa, Malchisine, Porto in Corsica and even with luck in the Lake District!

11. Religion

Religion should not be separated from life but it is technically convenient, as it were, to give it a chapter to itself.

My upbringing was in the Methodist Church, first in a little local church with preachers and teachers whom I now shudder to think were entrusted with the Good News! That sounds like pious snobbery, but honestly they knew almost nothing about it and their way of life was not noticeably affected by it.

I transferred to the circuit church in Wakefield where the intellectual level was higher and there were a few deeply committed and devout Christians. A church like this was usually supported in those days by a few prosperous local business people, so the social level would be mainly lower middle class in modern terms. Accidentally almost we made some 'nice' friends, especially girls.

At Oxford I went to church but still mainly out of habit. The University Church was opposite my college – its clock kept me awake – and friends went there to hear distinguished preachers. William Temple, Archbishop of York then, preached every Sunday for about a term. Grenfell of Labrador preached once and all agreed that he had not finished a sentence during half an hour. The things one remembers!

The Methodist Church had a distinguished minister called Roberts so we went there occasionally. There was also a Methodist Church in Leeds with a minister called Lesley Weatherhead so we paid him a visit or two.

However, my religion was pretty conventional and non-obtrusive.

During one vacation I heard from a girl friend at home about the Oxford Group and she lent me a book, 'For Sinners Only'. It was written by a journalist who was originally sceptical; it was a very racy and intriguing account of the movement. This was at the beginning of the third year, with finals a year away.

The Oxford group was a loosely knit fellowship led by Frank Buchman. He was an American evangelist and like his kind he had a technique. He used catchy slogans and 'buzz' words. One of his slogans relating to 'changing' people was 'Confidence, Conviction, Confession, Conversion'. His challenge was a series of absolutes – purity, honesty, love.

The 'rule' of the group – although it had no rules – involved a quiet time and Bible study and a pre-breakfast meeting with nearby neighbours for 'sharing', ie confession. There was a regular lunchtime meeting at St. Mary's Church and Sunday evening meetings in college rooms for 'witness'.

The group was not a church and had no formal structure. Members were expected to support and leaven their local church.

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I found the members – most of them – friendly and helpful and discovered for the first time that other people had the same problems and difficulties. I certainly shed a

load of shyness and inhibitions – one girl said ‘Fred, this life has made you playful’ and I have been that ever since, some would say.

I took part in one or two campaigns including one in London.

Evangelical movements like this almost always become exclusive and I was tempted to leave my ‘secular’ lodgings and move to a house in North Oxford run as a guest house by one of the group and his mother. He was a jazz trumpeter from Pembroke College! It was a ‘genteel’ establishment served by one Irish maid who slept in the coal cellar! After a little while I was asked to transfer to another ‘group’ house; possibly I was not to their liking or something. Anyhow the new place was not to my liking either and I moved back to my old lodgings in a bedsit. It was my only experience of a bedsit but it seemed to me a very good arrangement! I mention these experiences, partly to illustrate the fact that Christian communities do not find it as easy to tolerate one another as their words suggest. It is a universal problem as I have since discovered.

Outside the ‘bosom’ of the movement I became less enthusiastic about it and neglected its discipline.

However, I have always been grateful to the movement because during that year I enjoyed a kind of freedom of spirit and absence of fear or anxiety that prevented me from being obsessed with examinations or success. I am quite sure this was an important factor in getting a first in my final examinations and one of the two top firsts at that. My tutor was one of the examiners, and without suggesting any conscious bias or favouritism it was an advantage in that I knew the kind of questions to expect. In one sense the examiners made a mistake as I was never a good chemist, least of all in the laboratory. However, I think I could think which was perhaps what they looked for.

My tutor told us of one candidate who wrote practically nothing on his papers, having spent most of his time at Oxford hunting, shooting and fishing. He was given a viva as a last chance but failed to answer a single question. Finally he was asked to talk about something, acetone for example. His reply was ‘I believe I’ve heard my tutor mention that’. He was the only failure that year, a yardstick of the standards of Oxford in those days.

During my final research year at Oxford I drifted away from the movement. There were two reasons. In February I was offered a very good job and salary by ICI through the agency of a recruiting team – the only example of the milk round at that time. I discussed this with one or two of the group including the chaplain at Hertford College and of course they were all doubtful whether it was God’s plan for me to accept. With my history it was inconceivable to refuse. I still think they were wrong to take the line they did; God has a use for everybody and there really was no other avenue open to me.

I had also met a young lady during the year who was a Home Student and lived in my home town. By the summer, and it was a gorgeous summer (1934) we were in love.

It took another year or two for me to come to the conclusion that the Christian life is too difficult – the ideals are too high – and I settled down to believing in God but accepting that he and I were not on speaking terms.

Afterwards I came to see that the Oxford Group had serious shortcomings. For one thing it overtly set out to change the world by changing top people. This seems to be the exact opposite of the Master's methods.

The movement had no social gospel as far as I knew; it made no conscious effort to help those in need though its members presumably did individually. The maid sleeping in the coal cellar was a vivid illustration!

Not being a church it had no sacramental life of its own and on the whole it gave the impression of being indifferent to sacraments anyway.

Its main fault came from its leader's nationality. Buchman was American and had the typical paranoia about communism, heightened in his case by its atheism. Consequently he was favourably inclined towards the dictators who seemed to be bulwarks against it. I remember a Nazi storm trooper in full uniform being well received at a meeting.

With the approach of war the movement lost credibility to some extent and reappeared after the war with the new title Moral Rearmament. Under this title it continues to exist and operates mainly by means of conferences at luxurious country houses in various parts of the world.

For the next thirty years I was a conscientious non Christian. It would be wrong to say atheist or agnostic because I admired the gospel – I had some doubts about the church – but found it impossible to practise. My first marriage was in a register office, the children were not baptised as infants and I avoided church weddings or funerals unless courtesy emphatically demanded attendance.

I must say my wife, who had only nominal contact with churches, never understood my all or nothing attitude. On her deathbed I asked if she had hoped in our early acquaintance that she could 'catch' faith from me she said 'Yes'. It was almost our only allusion to the subject in 25 years.

I now pick up the threads that led me back to the church.

I mentioned in the chapter on holidays how I came to meet my second wife. At our first meeting it came out quite accidentally that she was a regular communicant and because of this I backed off having any more to do with her. However it did not stop there and eventually I decided to have another look at the church.

I first went to one or two remote churches where I would not be recognised. Eventually I braved the local church which had a new vicar, a retired army brigadier recently ordained. He had a kind of spiritual worldliness that I had not met before! I think the brigadier is worth a digression (he is dead now).

He had retired early from the army and was wondering what to do with his life and went to see the vicar. His faith was typical C of E though his wife was a devout person. The vicar told him to be ordained a minister in the Church of England, the

last occupation he had in mind. Nevertheless he took himself and his family to a theological college and was ordained. Our parish was his first after a curacy in a rich suburb of Manchester.

The vicar who gave him this advice was a former Welsh miner. In his early twenties he was attracted to ordination and called on his local vicar. He didn't get over the doorstep and was told simply to go away and learn Greek. So he did!

I called this a digression but of course it was one example that influenced me later on.

After a few months' acquaintance my new girl friend took me to Lee Abbey, a Church of England conference and holiday centre in Devon, at about Christmas time. The chaplain was Jack Winslow, a former missionary to India, a distinguished minor figure in the church; he had formed a Christian ashram in India to which other faiths were welcomed. I had met him in Oxford. I had a long session with him at Lee Abbey during which he said very little and made no attempt to steer me one way or another; the significance of it for me was that he did not put any obstacles in the way.

I still had the scientist's scepticism about some aspects of the gospel – nature miracles and such like – and I was helped in this matter by a rather strange coincidence.

I went to India to open a polythene plant in Calcutta for which I had done the early negotiations. (Incidentally I shared a platform for this occasion with Moraja Desai, then Finance Minister and later Prime Minister of India). Usually I acquired a serious book to read on the plane but this time I didn't have one. Browsing the bookshop at Heathrow I found little of interest but I came across 'The Phenomenon of Man' by Teilhard de Chardin. As far as I know I had not consciously heard of it though I may have casually read a review in the Sunday papers. Anyway I bought a copy and read it in the plane, and it shed a whole new light on the religion/science question.

Chardin was a Jesuit priest, a scientist, a palaeontologist, who accepted Darwin and for this reason was silenced by the church until he was very old. His books make a valiant attempt to reconcile the scientific view of creation and the cosmos with Catholic theology. This and his other work assured me that I did not have to strangle my scientific framework in order to let in Christian beliefs. I should say that not everyone agrees with Chardin; he did, however, have secular supporters, notably Huxley.

The next phase started when I attended the parish church Annual General Meeting. I thought one ought to go to these affairs but found they were so unfashionable that when the vicar insisted on proper elections unlike previous occasions when the PCC had been re-elected en bloc, present or not, and there being only 28 people present and 30 places on the PCC, we were all elected.

The vicar was pressing the PCC to undertake a stewardship effort. It was to be done by a private company and the fee was £2,000 paid over a period. The whole income

of the PCC was £1,500 a year and not surprisingly their feet were very cold. The company promised to increase the income to £4,500 a year.

The vicar had visited every house in the parish and found 500 households with affiliation to the church, however slight. Being the Managing Director of the major local industry I knew what people earned, and a quick calculation in my head assured me that the task was a pushover. Little did I know about churches and money.

So they made me the chairman of the stewardship committee and it was a pushover, the income rising to £3,000 a year. Sadly I discovered that when we had done all the obvious things like building a vicarage, relighting the church etc etc, we had no idea what to do with the money. They had never had money before!

In the process of stewardship I got to know the congregation pretty well and eventually the vicar asked me to help him by becoming a lay reader. My ignorance was abysmal and the course of study I was offered was even worse. I was attached to a tutor, the Vicar of Aresbury (Alice in Wonderland's church, appropriately) and he spent most of our time complaining that he could never have a conversation with his parishioners about religion – anything else, but not that.

I was quite unfitted to lead a congregation but I blundered on. At least I gave the vicar a Sunday off occasionally. I was also in demand for other churches, quite illegally as I had no licence to travel. Eventually I discovered that I needn't have worried, practically all the members of the Church of England were more ignorant than me, but this took a long time to find out.

Our vicar worked exceedingly hard and at one point I suggested that as we now had money we could pay a curate. His reply was 'You should be the curate', the ultimatum he had been given himself.

What a stupid idea! I was Managing Director of a multi-million pound business. I had children at school and university, a babe in arms, and monumental ignorance of scripture and church affairs.

However, I learnt that the Church of England was willing to ordain men in secular employment. They always had, but only schoolmasters and farmers, and now it was extended to any reputable employment. I therefore started a course of study in my spare time under the guidance of Wolsey Hall, a correspondence college in Oxford. The aim was the general ordination examination of the Church of England. Looking back I see how old-fashioned and unimaginative it was and how impossible it would have been for me to complete the course in what little spare time I had. However, I persevered for a year or two.

I had reached a point in my career at which I could take a sabbatical of ten or twelve weeks. Some people used it to visit their married children abroad or to take a holiday in the Bahamas, but anything like this was out of the question so I spent a term at St. Deiniol's Library at Hawarden near Chester. It is the national memorial to Gladstone who lived opposite and contains his library. The warden was Dr Stewart Lawton who is blind; he is a distinguished priest and scholar. His deputy was

Martin Thornton, a young and robust priest and scholar who specialised in English mystics.

Martin Thornton encouraged me to drop the ordination course and read as widely as I could. I read Tillich, Bultman, Vidler, Gregory Dix, Luther, Keble, Newman etc and some early fathers of the church. I did actually take and pass the G.O.E part I!

For the first time in years I rediscovered the joy of an academic life. At first it seems like a game but as you learn it becomes almost an addiction and a fascination. Apart from the fun I was getting closer to the heart of scripture, getting wider horizons and shedding the cramped traditions I had carried with me from the past. I also met among the other theological students one or two who had given up everything to serve the church. One in particular had given up his job and pension.

At this point I will revert to an experience I had five years earlier. My fiancée and I had spent a few days at Scargill, a conference centre in the Yorkshire Dales, the counterpart of Lee Abbey in Devon. The warden was a priest who had been ordained late in life from industry. In conversation with him he said one should never force the issue of ordination – or indeed anything else – but wait. ‘The Lord will tell you in his own time’ he said, or to the same effect. Now it seemed that the Lord had spoken.

The situation at work I have described elsewhere. I could retire with a pension savagely discounted by the Inland Revenue but still comfortable for our needs. So I made arrangements to retire from ICI and spend another two terms at St.Deiniols and was ordained Deacon in December 1965.

It all seemed fairly natural for us. But it was a nine days’ wonder to others. The press heard about it and descended on us. Seeing our seven bedroom, four loo, two garage house and 1.5 acre garden they decided I must be mad or stupid to give up what for them would be the fulfilment of all their dreams. They didn’t understand that when you have had it you don’t miss it much. Some of them tried to guess my salary and to my annoyance badly underestimated it, except the Daily Herald; they got it nearly right.

12. A Parson!

After St.Deiniol's I was ordained (along with Moody, Parsons and Dean!) and began a new life as a curate in Timperley near Manchester, a parish of 30,000. We squeezed into a small semi-detached clergy house and bought another one in Rhos-on-Sea.

The curacy was a three year period of probation which we didn't really enjoy. I don't know of any curates who did enjoy it, largely because vicars tend to be autocratic, not trained to work with other people, oddly enough. So I will just mention a few highlights.

One of the earliest happened before I took up my duties in charge of a daughter church. We attended a service incognito – a family communion service. The congregation assembled, said a prayer and proceeded to gossip extensively. There were many families with children, and a Boys' Brigade. I had never come across this kind of informality and tolerance of young children. Later I found it almost universal in the Roman Catholic Church.

My vicar was a gentle man. He was supposed to train me but he was overawed by a top executive and left me very much alone. There were a couple of Manchester Grammar School boys in the choir and they introduced me to new 'pop' hymns that were just appearing. I had left a well-organised establishment where duties and discretion were quantified in terms of money.

The Church of England is in theory closely controlled by law under Parliament. In practice I found no sensible attempt at delegation. I later demanded from an archdeacon a definition of my limits of discretion but he didn't seem to know what I was talking about. The result of this is anarchy, each defining his own discretion. It was a long time before I even got a copy of Canon Law for what it is worth; it was like sending a manager into a factory without at least an abridged copy of the Factories Act. As every incumbent had a 'freehold' and could not be dismissed it was quite impossible to maintain discipline except in rare and flagrant cases. Nevertheless bishops and archdeacons in my experience sometimes tried to behave like business executives; the most severe rocket I ever received on paper came from the Bishop of Chester, not in industry. It was the kind of letter you write and tear up and try again!

I came across two or three examples of very insensitive treatment of junior by senior clergy which exceeded anything I had met in industry where we took more trouble. I once went to Karachi to sack a man; we didn't dream of writing to him!

The congregation was another matter. As a clergyman you make friends in all ranks of society. I was better equipped than most, perhaps, having been working class but also mixed with academics, workers and foremen in factories, directors and top people of various sorts. I could call without embarrassment at any house in the parish. In many ways I was at a disadvantage with the career clergy through not knowing the (undefined) ropes. My advantage was not as popularly supposed knowing more about sin, or having sown wild oats, but being able to treat on level terms with practically anybody.

The most influential event of this period in the light of later experiences was a conference on Social Responsibility at Swanwick. The Bishop of Stockport took a delegation and included me, why I don't know. There I met people from all over the country who were dedicated to serving neighbour and society, a basic principle of the Gospel but strangely neglected recently by the Church of England. The 'social gospel' then became my special interest. I became part of a token structure within the diocese but we met with almost stupefying indifference from the clergy and parishes and even from the hierarchy. However we persevered over many years and now there is a strong base for social outreach, mostly developed after my time, but my wife is a key influence in it.

(I remember later talking to someone about it who said 'But you have no social problems in Willaston'. I offered to take him to every house in Willaston and tell him what the problem was.)

At the end of three years I could expect to become a parish priest but no parish wants a vicar of 57 years of age, however youthful he looks. The bishop offered me Wilmslow, a large and rich parish, but neither of us liked the other. We were proudly shown the new vicarage, an executive house in the best part of the town, with expensive fittings and manicured garden. As the shop window of the church it appalled us.

I was offered a parish in Australia on the north west coast – Dongara – which has the best climate in the world, the locals claim. I was offered two other jobs, one in the Richmond Fellowship dealing with mentally disturbed students and the wardenship of a beautiful but remote conference centre. We had to turn them all down because of our daughters.

Eventually I was offered a small parish of about 3,000 consisting of rich commuters from Liverpool, the remains of farming families – the backbone of the old village – and upwardly mobile families in new developments.

This period affords another example of a crisis point resolved not so much by agonising decisions between several openings but by the appearance in time of one clear way ahead. The answer to prayer, you could say. We felt led rather than driving.

However it came about, my wife and I found it probably the best ten years of our lives, at least up to then. It also suited our eight year old daughter who could attend in Chester the best day school thereabouts.

We were fortunate that the previous vicar had refused to live in the Victorian vicarage and a family size thirties house had been bought for him. It had a large room for meetings and a large garden for parties, so the inside of the vicarage became familiar to the parish, something unknown before or since.

The parish was a relatively new one dating from 1873. The village had changed in a short time from a rural parish with seventeen farms to a predominantly dormitory village. Two examples might show how much it had changed.

The burial register for 1875 shows 30 deaths from diphtheria in the month before and after Christmas, mostly young children. What a disaster in a parish of about 500!



Christ Church, Willaston.

I cherished a letter in the files from a solicitor who was chairman of the governors of the church school on the village green to the Board of Education inspector. The inspector had complained that during playtime children were mixing freely with cattle on the green. The governor reassured the inspector in elegant prose that the children ate and slept with cattle at home and no danger was apprehended. A new modern school had been built by my time and cattle were never seen on the green.

The churchmanship was low and traditional. There had only been five vicars in a hundred years and the last two had stayed for 19 and 25 respectively. The worship was Book of Common Prayer except for a children's service at 10 am. The BCP services were not well attended and many adults preferred the children's services as a soft option. The tone was legalistic, establishment C of E and puritanical – no dancing or raffles at church functions. I gradually realised that born again and spirit filled Christians went somewhere else.

There were, of course, a few flowers blooming in the desert. The first to appear was an architect who was a churchman of wide experience and learning. I think it was the second Monday morning that I received a letter from him in the post (this was the olden days of the postal service), a most courteous and encouraging letter. These notes continued to arrive most Mondays until he formed the habit of dropping in after church for a glass of sherry. He was critical at times but his prompt approval kept me going in a general air of disapproval compared with my predecessor. Any layman who reads this is earnestly begged to say nice things to the vicar whenever possible; not many people comment favourably on the sermon and it is manna when they do.

In my experience a new vicar has to cope alone without any help from bishop, rural dean or archdeacon. The bishop paid me a surprise visit but he and his chauffeur

couldn't find the vicarage and had to ask! Years later the Chief Constable of Cheshire came to dinner and he got lost too!

So one had to carry on with one's own policies as best one could. Gradually, empirically, things took shape.

First a Sunday School to replace the children's service where teaching was minimal. In this we were fortunate as God had provided in the parish a family who were heavily involved with a very thriving Sunday School in the next parish and I was able to tempt them away. They became our most stalwart supporters and close friends. The husband was later ordained as a non stipendiary minister, the wife became a member of General Synod and prominent campaigner for the ordination of women, the eldest daughter became Chaplain of Clare College Cambridge, and another daughter married a priest. I claim no credit but bask in the reflected glory.

Secondly, we introduced a family communion service every alternate Sunday. Fortunately this was the period of liturgical reform and we could move to Series II and III.

Third we introduced modern hymns and forms of worship that appeal to the young and don't frighten the old as much as people imagine.

Fourth, we widened the horizon of the parish. From being almost solely concerned with personal piety they became much more a caring community in the church itself and alive to opportunities of service to the village the great world outside. As I have said already I had a strong interest in the social gospel – the Kingdom of God as I prefer to call it – which was badly neglected by most Church of England parishes, especially rural ones. I remember one of my most faithful and endearing old ladies saying when we tried to introduce sharing the Peace. 'But you might not like the person sitting next to you in the pew!' I hope we thawed out the congregation just a little. As another example of their blinkered churchgoing, it was only in my time that the PCC fully realised that it had lost control of its primary school in 1944, thirty years earlier.

A very early preoccupation of mine had become practical politics in the parish after a year or more. As soon as it was safe to do so I pointed out to the parish that they were living on dead men's money; a church that included several near millionaires was not paying its way! Eventually we did hold a stewardship effort and were able to look outward and support, by way of example, our own adoption society, a battered wives' hostel, hostels for homeless men in Chester and Liverpool, a nurse from a local family working in Ruanda-Burundi, and many more.

My wife was, of course, the 'eminence grise' in all this, and she had her own special contribution. Our daughter went through Guides and a Ranger company started by my wife meeting in the vicarage. She also cultivated the young wives of the parish for whom if they had very young children the church had been virtually a no-go area. She started a Wives' Fellowship meeting in the afternoon with a crèche for the children. We did get the church to tolerate small children, and I always thought an important factor in this was a cheap portable amplifier that I used. This had a double purpose. Those near to small children could still hear; and the children themselves were less likely to create if they could hear something going on. Thus the 'Is it time

to go home?’ scenario was broken. I am impatient of clergy and laity who obstinately refuse to use amplification as if it was the invention of the devil.

There were two ‘transfiguration’ experiences in our ministry, if that is not a blasphemous term to use.

One was a mission to the parish when a team from Lee Abbey, the Devon Conference Centre, spent two weeks in the parish and met groups of individuals from inside and outside the church. The team consisted of two late teenagers (one German), a farmer, and a mature woman with long experience of evangelism, a game warden and his wife, and a retired businessman; all of them for some period or a lifetime had left their secular careers to serve the lord ‘full time’ as it were. (There is no part time really). They were all whole-hearted committed Christians, winsome, light-hearted likeable people. At least the parish had a good look at true Christian life!

The second ‘peak’ was a parish weekend at our own Diocesan Conference Centre in Frodsham, Cheshire. Again this was led by the game warden and his wife. It drew the key people in the parish closer together and they went on subsequently meeting for bible study and fellowship. Some of the young people found what a Christian life is really like and took to it themselves.



Willaston.

Another aspect of our life in Willaston was involvement in the village. When local government was reorganised the village had chosen not to have a parish council, with the result that local loyalties were very weak. There were separate interest groups, Women’s Institutes (two), British Legion (virtually a Wirral officers’ club), Scouts, Guides, Brownies, parent-teachers association etc but no unifying force.

The centre of the village was disfigured by decrepit empty buildings and sites bought up by developers. The village included a small army of estate agents, solicitors, insurance brokers and stockbrokers who had all opted live in the village

because of its early charms, but none of them had the wit to invest in and develop their own village and thereby preserve its character. They could have made a killing on their own doorstep and made it into a show place. I think it is fair to say that the church played a leading part in forming a village society which organised village festivals, raised money and cleared up the mess, and we were able proudly to enter the best kept village competition instead of hanging our heads in shame. They also succeeded in having built sheltered accommodation for old people in the village; previously any old person obliged to give up private living had to go one of the nearby towns for sheltered flats.

What did we achieve? This is the question one never asks a parson. In other walks of life achievement has to be measured and assessed if only for personal satisfaction. In the church God alone knows the results. However, being human we like to achieve something. I cannot point to a striking number of conversions but I think we helped a few people to stand on a more solid ground of faith.

Perhaps the most rewarding sign, looking back, is that several people have been ordained, encouraged in one way or another by my example. In my experience God does not call people by a voice in the night but from person to person, like Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel.

I think we helped to raise the social consciousness of the village. In a wider sense I played a part in challenging the diocese to take its social responsibilities seriously. I and a few others persisted against a discouraging scenario for a few years and eventually saw the church come alive to the needs of the world around it. The whole 'Faith in the City' awakening capitalised on years of patient ground work by men like Eric James, some others – and me.

13. Faith



An experience like mine should leave one with a fair idea of what a Christian is and what he should believe.

In my time I have met so many people who call themselves Christian yet it would be hard to define even the lowest common denominator among them. Their highest common factor must be Jesus of Nazareth – this is beyond dispute – but what else unites them? They vary from sour faced intolerant moralists to radiant cheerful optimistic vulnerable ‘sinners’, from close-fisted rich to generous poor and vice-versa.

Religion is a deposit of life wisdom and enables people to respond to the influences and pressures that their circumstances impose, changing, of course, as they grow in years. It should help people to preserve their sanity and personality in a mass of confusing claims upon them, not to mention the slings and arrows of fortune.

Obviously, then, people’s faith is very much determined by their birth, upbringing, education, friends, family and so on. This is commonplace but it means that my structure of faith is one among millions. I try to spread it around in the hope that it might help some in like situations, and not do too much harm to others.

When I began studying theology I had mental reservations about much of the bible text. There was much that was unbelievable *prima facie* and one to pigeon hole it as

perhaps superstition and perhaps embroidery. However, as I read modern and not so modern scholars who have taken the bible apart and put it together again I saw that it had depths profound enough to keep armies of scholars busy for all time. There are levels that cater for all tastes. Occasionally some levels that had been hidden or ignored come to the surface when scholars like John Robinson or David Jenkins let fall ideas that have been common knowledge among them for decades and send shock waves through the clergy who have not kept themselves up-to-date and congregations whose simple faith seems to be under attack.

The church, being an organisation in time and place and yet times and universal, has to maintain a tradition that looks timeless and universal, but in fact the tradition has been formed continuously – or nearly so – over the centuries. It does not conform exactly to scripture. It is almost certain that Jesus was not born in a stable (for example!) and does not embody the only conclusions that can be drawn from scripture. The formation of a tradition can itself work against the tradition, paradoxically.

One of the key doctrines of the church is the divinity of Christ. Jesus is both God and man. The New Testament does not say that Jesus was God; it is a derived doctrine. It is an inescapable conclusion from scripture logically yet it has been an obstacle to the tradition because it is almost impossible to believe.

There have been many heresies in this matter. One is that Jesus was on some occasions man and on others God. Another is that Jesus was half way between God and man and this probably what most Christians would say if pressed. Yet this item of the tradition has worked against the tradition by preventing us from thinking of Jesus as an ordinary man like us. It is difficult for people to read the Gospel without having in their minds the idea that this man had superhuman, even magical, powers and could do anything that God could do. This is not quite what the authors of the Gospel intended.

Scripture and the church have to communicate with all levels of human capacities and one device for doing this is myth. Young children cannot absorb abstract mental concepts and for them myth is a way of putting abstract ideas into concrete form. Thus the notion of creation is expressed in a story about two people, Adam and Eve.

Unfortunately the physical aspect of the myth tends to become the dogma and puts off those who cannot accept it. Angels were mythical messengers and became a real feature of creation but they can no longer hold their place in our universe.

The weakness of tradition is that it tends to lay claim to certainty and in our own time the foundation of culture is uncertainty. No one in any field of knowledge can now lay down immutable rules, except the indeterminacy principle itself. Whether this is a phase mankind is passing through remains for the future but we are stuck with it and have to work out our faith in this situation.

Much of the tradition is expressed in categories and formulas on the lines of Greek philosophy and mediaeval moulds. Oddly enough the one inescapable basis of faith, 'God is love', does not appear in any creed or confession.

It seems to me that theology needs rewriting in terms of relationships rather than in rigid principles. Relationships are by their nature flexible, adaptable, expendable, vulnerable and not the easiest material for intellectual exercises. Peter Abelard tried to explain the Cross in these terms nearly a thousand years ago and I feel we could pick up where left off. Alas he blotted his copybook by a scandalous love affair with Heloise and hasn't commended himself to later puritanical generations!

My belief is that God is identified with people. Mankind has tried every other place to find God and in Jesus has come back full circle to find him in the people next door.

Knowing the people next door must be the most difficult creed of all, and yet it seems to me that it is the core of much of Jesus' teaching and that of his immediate followers. The people one admires most in history and one's own life are those who ignore their own interests and devote themselves to others.

I have written another little book in which I tried to derive this position from scripture. The theme is that God's purpose in the universe is the creation of love. That is its end product and whole purpose, and what we are here for.

This book is what follows.

14. Funeral Oration

The following is a transcript of the address given by Rev. Bill Fall at Fred Steadman's funeral on 15th November 1999.

Pamela, my wife, recalls ringing the vicarage on occasions and hearing the voice at the other end say "Steadman". She says it nearly frightened her to death. Certainly it put one on the back foot. And yet, he was always known as Fred. And going round the village of Willaston, his purple patch, last Saturday morning, people spoke only of Fred to me.

There's a mixed message in that somewhere, which takes a bit of unpicking. So let him first of all speak for himself. "Let me start from the present and work backwards," he writes. That's classical Fred, or more particularly, classical Steadman. "I am now retired from my last appointment, which was that of vicar of a Church of England village parish" I was there for ten years. Before that I was curate in a very large suburban parish near Manchester.

My training for the ministry took place at a small theological college, and was shortened because of my age. I was 54 and had just retired from a large industrial company for whom I'd worked for 30 years. I was a chemist by training, from Oxford, and had filled many management posts in the company from research chemist to managing director." And that's it.

Most of that is pure Steadman, with very little glimpse of Fred. And it hides so much, doesn't it? His father, a Yorkshire miner. A free place at Wakefield Grammar School and a scholarship to University College, Oxford, and a first in chemistry. Part of a team at ICI which developed polythene. And as he recounted with a telling twinkle, they developed a plastic bucket, which he was told would never catch on.

Fred's subtle, kindly humour was always bubbling through, wasn't it? I'd forgotten until Vivienne reminded me that he once came to a village fancy dress party with merely his birth certificate in his pocket. He dealt in understatement, heaps of them. Listening to his brief sermons was addictive. You always wanted more and more explanation, but never got it, for he'd finished. I used to think, "Fred, I've only got one grey cell working at the moment. I know you've got four, but one idea at a time, please, not four, to digest and take away. And as a young family we would argue about them on our way home from church. "Fancy doing that!"

He, Steadman, goes on to write: "Going back a little further in my biography, I must tell you that I have not been a lifelong churchman. In fact quite the reverse. But some five years earlier a personal tragedy and its sequel brought about a change in the direction of my life." Full stop. What's all that about, Fred?

Well, he met Dorothy at Oxford, where she was studying English literature, and they married in 1937. And he lost her in 1959, after battling with cancer for four or five years, and all that that means. And you, James and Phil and Helen, lost her too. and perhaps lost him as well, for of course he got on with things, and all over the globe. And the Steadman in him prevailed. And perhaps the Fred got lost too. That Steadman in Fred wasn't always a comfortable person to have about, was he?

He lived off and on challenges, and the cut and thrust of confrontation in the boardrooms. I think I would have found him a difficult father to grow up under, and with. Even as a reasonably confident professional adult myself, I often backed off him, but he never did. We met head-on on occasions, such as when he called me a "heretic" in a discussion group' and I remember thinking, but not daring to say, "You're a fine one to talk, Fred!"

But then he goes on to write: "There was a sequel which brought about a change in the direction of my life." Full stop, period. Guess what? That sequel, as he put it, was Wendy' I've been told - but not by Wendy - of their first date at the Savoy Hotel, no less, in London, when Wendy said that she had to get home early, so she could be in church the next morning. And that became a lifelong commitment which Fred continued to honour.

So, being Steadman as well as Fred by now, his response was to go for ordination at that small theological college for a shortened period. But, he writes "My ignorance of biblical and church matters, and the instinctive search for simple propositions, proved to be handicaps in studying theology and ministry." And he says: "in science and industry you have to fit masses of data into simple frameworks on which you can hang your ideas and actions. In industry especially, you have to reduce complex issues to a simple basis for action. And in industry, unlike some other spheres of life, you have to take action, and cannot usually postpone it". That's pure Steadman, isn't it?

Despite these handicaps, he made it, and thankfully he and Wendy came to us in Willaston, like a breath of fresh air. I can still remember when it was rumoured in the family and in the parish that we might be getting a clever bigwig from ICI to take over as vicar. And his younger wife was also an Oxford graduate, and a hockey blue at that. With a young daughter called Jo, more or less the same age as ours. And we said: "Yippee!" And we've been saying "Yippee!" ever since.

Alan Niblock, who I met the other morning at the chemists' in Williston - one of the bearers lifting Fred shoulder-high here today - proudly admitted to being the first person to put up his hand for Fred and Wendy at the deciding PCC meeting. There are lots of us who are very proud. I suspect the Steadman in Fred saw the parish as a challenge. And he loved those, didn't he?

He would have accurately sussed the place before coming, and probably saw it as full of potential, but conservative, with a small and a capital C, and he was neither. For he was a radical, unclerical clergyman, used to engaging with well-off business people and professionals, and Willaston was full of them. He may have thought it was a handicap, in his studies, to be like Steadman - but, dear Fred, not for us. For you wonderfully cut things down to proper size, including the Church.

Only last Saturday, someone said to me: "Fred knew what he was about - he'd been there, he made sense, and what's more, he walked and cycled everywhere, making sense, doing it and getting things done without fuss, or committee, or secretary." I was amazed that someone in his position at ICI always refused to have a secretary. So you could always get hold of Fred. His speed of thinking and doing things was a byword in the parish. "Fred would have started" became a family saying and joke as

we habitually hurried to be late for a service. It is recalled that he got through a Eucharist for Sunday school teachers after the main service in 25 minutes. Is this a record, my informant asks? But she goes on to write: "Unlike some, Fred's efficiency didn't get in the way of God. Somehow, the vertical dimension was still there despite Fred's almost awkwardness in liturgy and suspicion of ritual." He inherited an elderly organist and I remember him gently doing battle with her, for we watched him from the congregation, trying to speed things up a bit by signalling a faster beat with his fidgety right hand, that he thought we couldn't see. He just about got a verse ahead before giving it up. Needless to say, the next organist was a brilliant young musician and everyone wanted to join the choir - and everything was speeded up, a lot.

His and Wendy's time in Willaston was a purple patch for us, wasn't it? And I suspect for them, too. to have someone who read and read and made sense of it for the likes of us. He always had a book on the go, and based much of what he said on the latest - which meant he was always new in thinking. Thinking about new things to say - challenging, controversial, changing - and he gave us permission to do the same, and set us free. He even read theology in Doctor Who and the Dales, so the Sunday School flourished. Fancy a scientist making the church - us - think again. He cut through and even cut out chunks of liturgy.

The church became the intellectual and spiritual centre of the village. We were into everything, and everything was into us. The church and village felt like a seamless whole, a community with young, middle aged and elderly having lives fashioned and touched by the Fred who we and they learned to respect more and more. And simply to love. Not surprisingly, perhaps, he was not naturally a good listener. Not like Wendy, anyway, and to have him in a discussion group - well, it wasn't. but then Steadman liked to irritate, didn't he? And he didn't let go.

And yet the Fred in him, the Fred had keen antennae. And that allowed him, on more occasions than I know about, or that any of us could know about, allowed him to be a quiet presence for those in distress. Someone said that he had a plastic centre, and he was amused by that. But Fred never allowed us to be superficial, and certainly not parochial. His gospel didn't allow that, and he was too widely travelled and socially sensitive to allow us to look inward and lack generosity.

He had an ever-increasing sense of social commitment and community involvement, which was infectious. And that went on into his retirement, which - not surprisingly - was about the only issue I saw him prevaricate about. In the end he told me that he wanted to leave because he thought he'd said all he had to say. , So he and Wendy and Jo left for Chester, and we got lost without him.

And for a while he was shamefully lost to the Church. Actually he had a lot more to say, and he missed saying it and a place to say it in. And that was an awful waste. So he painted, played golf with ICI pals, watched sport on television and nursed his rugby knee, enjoyed his Mozart and things that needed to be blown, like the horn and Yorkshire brass bands, and of course he read. And at last he had more time with Wendy, who, he said, "'got better and better."

He was thrilled and proud to see women getting ordained, first as deacons and then as priests, knowing in his heart that he had much to do with one of the first of them. He wouldn't have missed that for the world, he told me. And he and Wendy at last had more time for one of their major concerns and interests, the Diocesan Board for Social Responsibility, which in the early days was mainly involved in adoption work, but he pushed it into many other spheres, and was proud to see it getting properly recognised and staffed.

The collection at this service is for a cause he cherished and he would expect us to give without counting the cost. He often spoke of the nearby Lache and stories about personally getting involved in decorating and repairing bits of accommodation - and above all the mix of real pals, rich in experience that he met there and worked alongside. "When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and would not help you? I tell you, whenever you refuse to help one of these, you refuse to help me."

Thankfully Fred also found another suitable base, both occasionally at St Matthews but also more regularly here in Chester, the Ecumenical Centre at the Cross - where else? Here he met people again, a community and, a chance to talk to all shapes and sizes from all over the world. I remember meeting him, really not very long ago, and he apologised for not staying to chat with me - not that he was ever very good at chatting - because he spotted an American couple that wanted to know more about the centre. And I saw before I left that he'd ended up at the font and was showing them, as he put it, how it worked.

As he became less active, this wholesome small centre was just what the good doctor ordered for him, and for his sense of purpose. When he became uncomfortably and hopelessly breathless, he said: "This won't do!" So he persuaded the hospital to give him a coronary by-pass and valve replacement op, and he was quite soon back on the golf course again - in his mid to late eighties.

His recent cataract op, only a few weeks back, he said was 'fun'. As he finally lay unconscious in the cardiac care unit, I noticed a picture over his bed - a large photo of the total eclipse, with its corona still lighting up the golden earth below. And as Wendy and I finally left him, we followed this single arrow pointing to 'The Way Out', and with Wendy humming 'Finland', I knew we were not alone.

So let him have the last say, from his 'Little Book'. This is what he writes: "It is impossible now to construct a coherent account of the experience of the disciples which they and we call the Resurrection. The experience, however, is communicated in the Gospel. That is what it's for. The experience of being transformed by Christ's presence from a rather insipid existence, bounded by death, to a new life of purpose, of joy and peace, which is deathless, like turning water into wine.

Thank God for Fred Steadman. Amen.

15. Family

Note on Fred Steadman's children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, added by his son Philip in 2020.

Fred and Dorothy had three children: James, Philip and Helen.

James became a chemist and followed Fred into ICI, later becoming a scientific civil servant. He married Pat, and they had two children: Martin, a micro-chip designer, and Judy, a professional ballerina who now works in retail. James died in 2017.

Philip studied architecture and is a professor at University College London. He married Ruth, a writer, and they have a daughter Lily who is a museum curator.

Helen taught English as a foreign language and then became a journalist and editor specialising in careers advice. She married Bill and they have a daughter Caitlin who also teaches English abroad.

After Dorothy's death Fred married Wendy Ratcliff, who joined Fred in the church and is a vicar. Their daughter Jo is a general practitioner married to Andrew, a hospital consultant. They have two boys, Sam and Tom.

By 2020 Fred had acquired five great grandchildren.

6.2.2020.