

## **Peter Tracey**

### **My Life, My Business and My Boats**

#### **A brief account of my life which has been written for my children and grandchildren**

I was born into a happy, conventional family with a privileged background. I struggled to pass exams at school and the only sport I was good at was sailing. It was only when I started to lead Herga Electric Ltd that my flare for innovation and my love of change came to the fore.

At Herga there then came a flow of new products selling to new markets and exploring new ways of management.

Eventually I gave away my controlling interest to create an employee owned partnership.

For those who wish to concentrate on the Herga years, turn to section 13.

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## 1. Early Years

When I was born in 1937 my parents had many challenges. My brother William had died recently, age 3. Mother's brother Tom had died in his early thirties followed soon after by my grandfather. My father, a doctor, felt that he should have acted on the symptoms which killed Tom and was mortified. On top of this was the looming fear of World War 2. So I was a welcome change. According to my sister Jill, 5 years older than me, I was spoilt rotten.



My parents looking out from their hill top house in Norwich circa 1965

My first home, 62 Thorpe Road Norwich was immediately above the railway station. This was a target for enemy bombs during World War 2 which rained down all round us. So we spent a lot of time in the cellar whenever the air raid warning sounded.

As a doctor, father had a little more petrol than most so we were able to get out of Norwich at weekends to a rotten old caravan which mother bought. It was parked in a field at the top of a hill above Belaugh near Wroxham. It was a heavenly place for a small boy. I slept in a tent outside. We collected water from a farm at the bottom of the hill and I still have the yoke for carrying the two buckets. The farm was totally traditional with all manner of animals and fowl. There were no large tractors or other machinery.

Mother had never cooked before (servants you know!) so I remember her getting furious when she had to throw away precious rationed food which had gone wrong. I was free to roam and to get covered in mud in the ditch at the bottom of the hill. We also had a rowing dinghy on the river.

On one occasion I offered to make mother and father a morning cup of tea. We cooked on a primus which used paraffin as fuel and you had to start it by lighting a bowl of methylated spirit near the base. I spilt some methylated spirits on my hands which then caught fire. I waved my hands which made things worse and father had to leap into action and cover them to put out the flame. I had great blisters.

Father had a consulting room at home and patients called regularly. So I set up a shop to sell whatever rubbish I could find. I don't remember making any sales.

My grandmother lived at Oaklands Thorpe about two miles away. It is now a rather second rate hotel. It was a fine house with beautiful gardens and a great view over the

River Yare valley. There was a wonderful wood attached. I loved staying with my grandmother and had free rein to explore. Grandfather's study was full of designs and inventions and amongst them I found the invitation for him to accept a knighthood. The story goes that he shouted up to his wife "I don't want it, the hotels bills would go up".

Father became clinically depressed during the war and had to go away at one time. I do not remember any detail. I do remember mother trying desperately to help him and on one occasion swearing at him. I had never heard a lady swear before. Father fought depression most of his life and continued to have times when he found going to work very hard. He was a lovely sensitive man and a brilliant family doctor.

Mother was the perfect wife for father because she was so resolute, so true and so kind to us all. She was also very practical whereas father was not. Father was the enthusiast, always talking and always wanting the best for us all. As mother was not an experienced cook, she got some work helping at the Naffi (the forces canteen) which had been set up in the railway station). I loved wrestling with her until the day came when I won. She also taught me to sew, darn and knit. In those days socks with holes always got darned (mended). Because food was short, father took up pike fishing and I went with him. We hired a row boat but had little success on Barton Broad. Then father remembered that he had a rich patient who owned a lake at Hoveton. It was full of huge pike. You wrestled the beast for some time then dragged it to the shore and hit it on the head with a hammer. On one occasion we took it home and put it in water in father's surgical basin in his consulting room to rinse it out. As we sat at supper the pike revived and leapt out on to the floor. They tasted very muddy so father had them smoked at a fish shop in town.

After fishing we would call in at the great house at Hoveton where we were received by the footman. Father was then directed to the front of the house whilst I was sent to the kitchen or the nursery.

As soon as the war ended father got out our Norfolk Punt, Rushlight, which had sat in our drawing room all the war (we had not used the drawing room as it was cold and we had lived in the kitchen and father's consulting room to conserve the heating). At Thurne Mouth I stood on the bank wearing my life jacket which consisted of two small kapok filled pillows front and back. Father and mother set off then shouted to me "It's windy, we need more weight, come and join us". What excitement. I leapt on board and sat between them. Father said "Lean out". I had not realised that they had their feet under toe straps and I toppled over backwards in to the water. Father continued to sail on and called out "Are you alright" "Y-Y-Yes" I said. "Then swim for the shore". He was not going to miss his first sail for five years.

A medical condition referred to as Low Renal Threshold meant that Mother got very tetchy if she did not get tea. So we would always stop when on a journey and father would light a fire in a special metal box (which I still have) designed by my grandfather. It boiled water very quickly but we did once get into trouble when we stopped very near to a hay barn.

## **2. A new home**

In about 1947 we moved to 50 Cotman Road, a large cold house with no central heating and a few gas fires in the big rooms. There was a large tall window at the top of the long stairs and you could almost feel the cold rolling down, bumpity bumpity bump. Several of the houses nearby had been bombed and it was possible to explore round their empty shells.

I started my education at a rather useless school in Thorpe where the plaster was falling off the ceiling. Then on to Town Close House Preparatory School where they found that I could not read the blackboard and that I needed spectacles. I was not good at sport and

lagged behind academically. The best thing was when I played Pyramus to Thisbe. I dressed as a roman soldier and hung an old brass doctor's nameplate round my chest and a number of discarded long brass door plates round my waste. I tried to use my best Norfolk accent.

The food at lunch was poor. I remember the rotten potatoes. So my parents arranged for me to walk into Norwich and have lunch at a restaurant attached to a department store. They found some nice regular users I could sit with. What great parents to give me such independence.

As a left hander my writing was poor and father found a very nice lady at the town hall to teach me.

For my last year at Town Close my parents decided that I should have experience of boarding. The headmaster was OK but strict and with no imagination. He enjoyed beating boys and had a selection of canes which he kept in a box in the corner which he rattled to frighten you. On Sundays we went to church at St. Peter Mancroft in town. I had my first experience of fainting, particularly after a hot sunny day.

After the war, my parents started racing their Norfolk Punt on Wroxham Broad. We still had the old rowing dinghy which we had brought down the river from Belaugh. In order to sail it, I found a redundant wooden curtain rail for a mast and made a sail from an ex WD (war department) parachute (you could get them very cheaply then). To stop her going sideways I fitted leeboards. To steer I used an oar hung over the stern. I could just about make 90 degrees to the wind and was shouted at by the serious sailers who were trying to race. Next my parents found me a beautiful little varnished dinghy, 8 feet long with laminated carvel planking and ribs every two inches on the inside. I misspelt her name Molicule on the transom. I decided that the sail was too small so got a larger one. The only problem was that, going down wind in a blow she tended to nose dive. I also made a very crude boat out of scrap wood. With a friend we paddled it down the river and nearly sank it.

A fantastic feature of life at Cotman Road was the large piece of ground under the trees at the bottom of the garden. I had it all to myself and amassed a collection of bricks, corrugated iron and other rubbish. I made fireplaces, chimneys and houses, never concreting them together as I knew that I would want to pull them down and start again. I made fires and cooked on them. I must have been quite a solitary boy as I do not remember anybody else being involved.

Most of my school friends lived at the other posh end of town. My father, not being practical, left me to my own devices and my mother encouraged my experimentation. I owe the first discovery of my inventive spirit to her and that scrap heap. I also had a crystal set radio. I hung long wires around the garden as an aerial. By poking a wire round on the outside of a crystal you could get radio reception.

### **3. Early Holidays**

We were fortunate in that my parents had a small amount of private income and so we were able to take many good holidays. The most memorable was when we went to France and Switzerland with a hired caravan. Getting across the Channel took the whole day as car and caravan had to be lifted separately into the hold of a ship in great nets. (no drive on drive off in those days). I will never forget our first breakfast in France when I had melon for the first time. Northern France was incredibly poor in the countryside and I was amazed by the ancient cars and small boys wearing dresses. At Paray Le Monial the wheel of the caravan nearly fell off. It had not been bolted on tight. We had no spare. We had to stop on the side of a long straight stretch of road and to stay there for the night. I put my little tent up on the grass and the noise from the passing trucks was terrific.

A local engineer welded a complete new hub into the wheel, not something which would happen today.

We continued to Annecy where rich folk lounged on sun beds in front of smart hotels, such a contrast from the north. Caravans were not allowed in Switzerland at that time so we continued on by car. At Chamonix, father hired a guide for us to climb the Mer De Glasse on Mont Blanc. We wore crampons and climbed to the Refuge de Requin where we slept in rows on the floor, all together, side by side. Next day we came back down the glacier. I tried to carry a rucksack which was too heavy and nearly fainted when we came to a stop.

On one Easter holiday we stayed in a B&B near High Force waterfall in the Yorkshire Moors. Father took Jill and myself on a long walk over High Cup Nick. We lost our way in the fog and stopped at a farm where they gave us tea and told us about their tough life on the moors. We found a stream which we had to cross and the only way was to take off our shoes and socks and wade. My feet were frozen! Then we walked up over a high pass where the wind almost blew us over the edge. Coming down the other side, there was mother who had driven round to find us.

Another holiday venue was St. Mawes, home of Uncle Christopher and Aunt Babe and my beautiful cousins Belinda and Mary Faith. They also had beautiful friends and one day we went round the corner of the bay to a cove which was only accessible by water. Climbing along a narrow ledge on the cliff I fell off on to a rock covered in barnacles. What must my parents have thought as I was rowed home with my chest covered in blood. Next day was the St. Mawes carnival and I went as a wounded pirate with a huge chest bandage.

My parents spent ages looking for the best school for me to go to. As I was no academic they decided on Radley because I could sail there. It was the one thing which I was good at. Father had been a scholarship boy and thought that I should be as well. I must have been a big disappointment as I only just scraped in with common entrance.

## **4. Radley**

Teaching was poor and the rules were stifling and stupid. For example one had to wear the regulation (and poor quality) tweed jacket with all three buttons done up for the first year. Only prefects were allowed to take the short cut past the clock tower. On Sundays one had to wear a white shirt with a separate starched collar and studs back and front. I had never worn one before and had great trouble getting it to fit the first time.

There were three saving graces: The carpentry shop, sailing and Chris Ellis. Sailing was not considered as exercise so one had to take out a fennie (sculling boat) for a spin first. Soon after arrival at the school I went sailing in a cadet dinghy on the Thames. No supervision! My skipper, at least a year older, capsized her. There was a strong current and the end of the mast got caught in a tree and snapped off. We capsized again and I got trapped under water because I was wearing wellington boots. To get out I had to pull them off and lose them.

There were no Health and Safety Rules in those days and I could do whatever I wanted in the carpentry shop. I used to make wooden bowls on the lathe which I gave away as presents. I made a desk with a roll top. I also helped to service the sailing club boats. Chris Ellis was nominally in charge.

Whilst being somewhat below average academically and on the playing field, I knew more about sailing than anyone. I had crewed my father racing in his Norfolk Punt and his great

competitor was Gerald Sambrook Sturgess. Sambrook Sturgess was the worlds expert on Racing Rules and had been responsible for changing them fundamentally. So when I luffed and hit the boat of an opposing team (allowed in those days) on Frensham Ponds, I knew that I was in the right. However all the masters thought otherwise and I was disqualified. We lost the match. Very annoying.

I hated the army corps and failed Cert A part one (the most basic qualification) because I refused to load a bren gun by numbers. It got much better when I was able to join the naval section.

To support your Social (house) you had to achieve various sports levels called Standards, such as running 100 yards within a certain time. I invariably let the side down.

I dislocated my shoulder when playing rugby. The infirmary at Radley took a long time working out what had happened. Afterwards, they gave me a long bandage to wrap around my chest to hold my arm to the side. To take it off before going to bed I had to attach one end to a window handle and twiddle round. The smell could be awful.

I enjoyed singing and was in the choir. Incredibly, I was quite religious in those days. I also much enjoyed going to the drawing room in the Mansion one evening a week to sing madrigals.

We were taught to obey, to follow the beliefs of the church and that the British Empire was God given. Before a General Election, I surprised my social tutor by asking if we could have a socialist paper in the common room so that we might get an alternative point of view. We were not taught to think.

Chris Ellis lent me his kayak and I learnt to roll it. More than once I played a naughty game on the river Thames. Large passenger boats plied the river and when one appeared I would turn my kayak over in full view. I would then wait until I heard their engine stop before pulling myself back above water.

Chris was the only master who encouraged us to think for ourselves. On one occasion, driving us back from a sailing match at Cheltenham in his open Lagonda, he suddenly said "I am a paid up member of the communist party". "You can't be we all cried". "I will show you my membership card when we get back", he replied. And a valuable discussion followed.

## **5. Cariad**

I was thirteen when I went to Radley. During my first Autumn term a notice was posted concerning a possible sailing adventure to Norway the next year. Wow, what an opportunity! I attended the meeting and put up my hand immediately.

Frank Carr, then Director of the Greenwich Maritime Museum had lent Chris Ellis his Bristol Pilot Cutter Cariad. She had not been sailed for many years. We would have to spend our Easter Holiday getting her seaworthy.

We arrived at Pinmill on the Orwell when it was low tide. There she was in the distance, glowing a dirty white with mud all round her. No way could we sleep on board, so we settled in to the nearby sail loft with all the rest of her gear. When the tide came up we sculled a dinghy out to her to explore.

One or two planks above the water line were rotten and she needed a lot of paint. She had two miles of ropes all made of hemp and some were rotten. The only way to test them was to stretch them over one's back. The sails were incredibly heavy and needed eight of us to get the mainsail on board. The mast had twisted with the sun and had to be lifted out and rotated.

We worked from dawn to dusk and I did not wash for a month. It was heaven. Just once we went to a Ipswich for a meal in a very basic but welcoming cafe.

As ever, my parents were wonderfully supportive and helpful. For cooking they provided a two burner primus in a housing which had been designed by my grandfather.

Before we set sail at the start of the summer holiday Chris got the Kelvin engine going in order to reassure the assembled parents that we did have reserve power. As we left Harwich in a brisk head wind the engine moved on its rotten bearers and never worked again. That was sailing as Chris liked it

Someone said to me "Mule (that was my nick name) you left your porthole open". I had been told to share a double bunk with an older boy and a plank had been fixed between us. It was so narrow that, to turn over, you had to lift yourself up above the plank and drop down the other way round. Every time Cariad plunged into a wave, a shot of water poured on to my bunk. It was really hard to close and latch the port light before the next wave hit. Coming back on deck it was a race between me and the cat to be the first to be sick. The cat became a good seaman and could be enticed to walk to the end of the bowsprit. He jumped ship in Norway, probably to find a fair Norwegian mate.

"I have closed all the seacocks" announced Chris as we left Harwich. "Now you do everything over the side" Actually, sitting on the stern counter with one's bottom exposed to the elements was very refreshing.

As we got out to sea the wind came round behind and we set our square sail with another smaller sail on top called a raffee sail. These square sails were very heavy to get up and are not used today except on traditional square rigged ships.

I wanted to wash some clothes and was told to use the powder on the shelf over the galley. I had never washed clothes before and was surprised that the water did not froth up. Eventually I was told that I had been using flour. To rinse the clothes out I towed them in a net bag astern.

Now aged fourteen, I was the youngest on board. There were five other boys and one adult, Archie Nicholson, who had not sailed offshore before. Half way to Norway Chris got pneumonia and lay in his bunk teaching Archie how to navigate in the event that Chris became unconscious.

In the early morning, after five days at sea, the lights of Mandal in Norway could be seen on the horizon. We hove to waiting for the dawn. There was little wind and a fishing boat towed us in. Mandal is a beautiful small town, right on the southern tip of Norway. There were almost no leisure craft outside Oslo in those days. At Mandal there was just one yacht. She was British and Chris knew the family who made us welcome.

The East coast of Norway is very beautiful with many islands and inlets. For much of the way we hardly had to go to sea at all. Norwegian charts were good but we had none of the modern means of navigation that we have today. Luckily we had good weather and Chris, being a brilliant seaman, managed all this without an engine.

Three days later we got to Oslo and moored up alongside the Royal Norwegian Yacht Club. We looked very shabby next to the shiny yachts around us and had to do a quick paint job to be more presentable. Friends in Oslo were incredibly hospitable but we soon had to start for home.

One evening I was asked to make supper. I decided to produce a really good stew and filled the old cast iron pressure cooker to the top. I lit the primus stove and waited for the cooker to boil. However no steam came out of the pressure relief valve on the top. I pumped up the primus to hurry it up but to no avail. Eventually I decided something was wrong and unscrewed the relief valve with a spanner. A shot of stew went up into the sky. I was lucky that the cooker had not exploded.



Threading our way back down the east coast we went through one passage near Karagero which was so narrow that the boom almost touched the rock on one side. At Christiansand we went on board the Sorlandet, a Norwegian square rigged training ship which is still in use today.

We were delayed by bad weather but eventually set sail for England. It was not sunny enough to use a sextant and there were no electronic navigation systems. The best was called Consols which could only tell one's position, occasionally, within 5 miles.

The weather was good to start with and one evening we had a wonderful display of the Aurora Borealis in the northern sky. On early morning watch with one other boy, Robin Sellwood, a ship started to approach from astern. We tried shining a torch on the sail and then my friend decided to try a message in morse. "What shall I send" says he? We decided on "Go to hell". The ship passed us without incident. Then the weather got really bad and we had to reduce sail because of the strain on the hull and we could not keep up with the pumping of water from the bilge. I got very sick and was very frightened. I retired to my bunk where I could dream about how I would really like my life to be. Eventually we had to heave to until the gale had passed.

It was incredibly peaceful entering Harwich harbour and flat water. Chris had brought us safely home at a cost of 81 pence each per day including fitting out. We had sailed 1322 miles at an average speed of 3 knots.

Chris Ellis was an amazing man. At school he taught mathematics. He also ran the Art School, the Carpentry Shop and the Pottery Shop. He played the flute and the cello. He also designed everything for the Marionette Society. His experience and leadership at sea was outstanding. He was one of the few adults we could all talk to about our lives beyond schooling, about politics and about life in general. His strong social conscience led him on to work with youth groups in Stevenage and eventually to founding the Ocean Youth Club. Our friendship continued all his life and all his children came to work at Herga at some stage.

The adventure on Cariad was dangerous and could not happen today, thank goodness. Cariad had no guard rails, no flares, no VHF radio, lifejackets were never worn, there was no life raft and the engine never worked.

## **6. Theodora**

Two years later Chris purchased another Bristol Pilot Cutter, Theodora, and again we spent the spring holiday doing her up. This time the destination was Spain. As well as Radley boys, a good friend from Norfolk, Simon Cator and my sister Jill came as crew.

Theodora (now back to her beautiful original name of Kindly Light) is a greyhound compared with the stout bulldog Cariad. After the war she had been used for Ocean Racing. Not only did she have a square sail and a jackyard topsail but a raffee topsail and studding sails as well. The raffee topsail is another square sail which is flown above the square sail. Studding sails are long thin rectangular sails which hang to each side of the square sail from poles which are carried in metal loops on the square sail yard. You have to slide the pole out along the yard before you set the sail. It is then very hard to get them in again if there is too much wind.

Theodora had sat at anchor on the river Orwell all summer and the chain had got all tangled up below water. I elected to go down and sort it out. We had gathered a lot of weed on the bottom and pulled up alongside at Brixham to clean her off. Crowds

gathered to watch us and I remember walking up to the local sailing clubhouse dripping water and mud. As we were approaching the Raz Du Sein inside Ushant, Chris was concerned that we would miss the tide and so we put on every stitch of canvas including the studding sails. The wind increased and we tore along with the wind on our quarter. The extended booms for the studding sails were bending so much that I thought they might break. Once through the Raz we were able to bear away and reduce sail.

We had to anchor well offshore in the bay off Vigo and our smaller dinghy almost got swamped rowing ashore. There were few other yachts and no marinas in those days.

We carried a 12 square metre sharpie (which Chris had built himself many years before) on the deck of Theodora. Some of the crew elected to go off on her on their own and it was agreed to meet up with them further down the bay. Next day there was a thick fog and we were lucky to find them. They had had a good time, naked on a deserted island. However their sunburnt bottoms had made rowing agony.

Chris always had amazing contacts. A trip was planned to a fish canning factory at Arosa and we were joined by two very beautiful girls, one rejoicing in the name of Pili Alan Colin Perkins. They came with hampers of delicious food. We sailed to the nearby bay and inspected the canning factory. After that we were given 7 courses of fish. We were bursting. However Chris then declared that the weather was changing and that there would be a strong and unexpected wind from the south. Time to set sail for home. I do not remember the next 24 hours.

In the middle of the Bay of Biscay the wind left us and there was a heavy swell. Swinging on a rope from the end of the square sail yard into the sea was great fun.

On return to the UK we attended a Royal Cruising Club rally in the Beaulieu River. Anchored on either side of us were the Pyes just returned from Vancouver and the Hiscocks who had sailed round the world. We were suitably humbled.

As on Cariad, the engine never worked.

## **7. Other Adventures in my Teens**

Between Theodora and Cariad I had some good family holidays. On one occasion we went north in a hired caravan and visited Alnwick. My great grandfather had been architect to the Duke of Northumberland and my grandmother had had free range of the duke's estate together with her 5 brothers. Then we stayed at Craster on the coast and went fishing with the local fishermen. Their accents were so strong that I could not understand them when they were talking to each other. They knew the sea as if it was their back garden and could go from one buoyed pot to another without glancing at the land. The other major delight of Craster was the kipper factory. It is still there.

I nearly killed our border terrier. I was in the process of hitting a ball with a stick when the dog went to grab the ball and I hit him instead.

Another good holiday was when we went to Holland together with my Uncle Christopher and his family. We hired two little steel yachts in Friesland, the Weterflugel and the Weterfruen. Father and my uncle raced each other all the time. Somewhere there is a photo of our boats in Enkhuisen harbour next to the dromedary. No other yachts there in those days. In Marken the people all wore national clothing all the time and the small boys wore dresses.

I entered the Public Schools Dragon championships on the Garelock, staying with my aunt Joan at Cardross. The boats varied a lot and we had rather poor ones for most of the week. On the last day we were lying third and I had the best boat whilst those ahead of me had duds. I was way ahead on a long reach and had to choose whether to take the

short course to leeward of a mothballed navy ship or go the long way round to windward. We went to leeward and into a flat calm. The boats behind got a gust which carried them right past me.

My aged grandmother paid for me and Jill to accompany her to Majorca. On the last day I decided to have a last swim and my shoulder dislocated again as I dived in. I was given chloroform to make me unconscious. As I came round with several white coated medics around me, my grandmother appeared at the door. "What is happening" she said. "Just saying goodbye to some friends" I replied.

I did not work very hard at school and only got 5 O levels. Father was very keen that I should go to Cambridge University. Unfortunately you needed latin O level and I managed to fail it 5 times. The teacher preferred reading greek fables to us rather than teaching. I only got two A Levels, in Maths and Physics. For my Physics thesis I wrote about sailing hulls using hydrofoils. I had seen a picture of one in America. The teacher said it was all nonsense and gave me low marks. An early example of being ahead of my time!

I bought a very basic converted lifeboat from a Mr Frogley of Fisher's Moorings in Brundal. The loo was an old fashioned Elsan ( a large metal can with a seat on top) and we all slept on the floor. I hung two seagull outboards from a bracket on the stern. To steer one stood on the roof with an oar hooked into the tiller. To slow up it was necessary to lean over the stern to get at the controls. We took her from Brundal through Yarmouth and up to the Northern Broads. It was great fun and we used her as a base from which to sail our parent's punts.

After leaving school I offered myself as crew to the Royal Cruising Club. As a result I travelled to La Baule by myself and met up with David Kimber and his wife who wanted an extra hand to get back to England. They had a lovely old gaff rigged boat. It was a real privilege to sail with David. We got on together from the start and he is another of the few people in my life who really taught me to think for myself. He was a senior London lawyer, a socialist and a member of the Fabian Society. The two of us had a wonderful walk across the Isle de Groix, talking all the way. We found three houses in a little cove. Hurrah, maybe they can give us some cheese and a glass of wine. We were greeted at the door and asked what we would like. A superb fish meal followed accompanied with ice cold wine.

## **8. Laurence Scott and Electromotors**

I was very fortunate to join the first engineering sandwich course at LSE. It gave me a better understanding of a part of society which I knew nothing about. It also taught me how a badly run company misses out on almost all fronts. For me the good part was that I lived at home free and our house was a short downhill walk to the factory. I was also paid. It consisted of 6 months in the factory alternating with 6 months at the Norwich City Technical College.

The management did not like having a posh public school boy who was the grandson of the founder foisted upon them. So they put me in the subassembly shop finishing brass components (that means polishing them on a belt sander). Most of the others were women. Christmas came, they all got drunk and the only escape was to hide under a bench. I asked to be moved on many times and got no help.

I eventually moved on to assembling electric winches and then to the test bed. At every stage there was no plan, no discussion and every move was resisted. I never got to the design department and ended up in job estimating which involved no brain work at all.

It was the first year that the sandwich course had been run at the college and the staff were good and very committed. I sometimes felt that they were only one lesson ahead of us.

I bought a Lambretta scooter and came off on an icy bend driving it to London. No damage done.

I bought my first car, a 1926 Austin 7 which I found being used as an advertisement on top of a garage. It cost £18. I took it to pieces at my grandmothers house. When I put it together there were a lot of bits left over. However it worked. I made a new hood for it. It only had brakes on the back wheels. It was often a push start down hill at the top of our drive. Sliding on to the main road at the bottom of the hill I had to hope there was no traffic coming as the brakes were so poor. I drove with Jill all the way to Cornwall at max speed 35mph. Petrol was in a tank over the engine, feeding it by gravity. If the level got low, you went up hills backwards,



My first flying fifteen Fflirtatious at Lowestoft, Father sailing

A new class of Flying Fifteens was being started at Lowestoft at the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club. I found a half finished hull down in Cowes. It was an old fashioned design with tiny ribs every two inches and two layers of thin wood laid diagonally on top. The owner builder was about to become a father and could not afford to finish it. My wonderful parents went with me and we manhandled fathers trailer on to the ferry (to save money), manhandled it off again in Cowes and brought the hull back home. I then had to fit the deck, all the fittings and buy the rigging and sails. I had one of the first aluminium masts produced by Ian Proctor. It was all rather experimental and the forestay fitting fell off during trials on the Broads. She was named Fflirtatious and was no. 201.

David Rowley, who is very tall, crewed me. We had a huge mainsail which was never measured and we won every race off Lowestoft. There were no safety boats in those days and we all helped each other.

I made a trailer which was very basic. There were no companies selling trailer parts then and I used an old car back axle. Uffa Fox came with his royal flying fifteen Cowslip upside down on top of his large Humber car and with the keel in the boot. I beat him twice. The first time was because, tacking against the tide down the shore, he hit a mole. The second time he broke a forestay. I took her to Falmouth one summer and to Hayling Island two or three times.

By this time I had acquired larger cars, an Alvis 1260 and then a Morris of about 1927. I took the shooting brake top off the Alvis and fitted an open body from a Jaguar. It had port and starboard painted wings and would never have met any of today's MOTs. The Morris had been discovered in a barn with only 15,000 miles on the clock and had been beautifully restored by a builder. It had a hood and a dicky seat and was not able to pull the Flying Fifteen up very steep hills. My parents were wonderful in the way that they let me litter their drive with old cars. My mother even let me bring a cylinder head into the drawing room so that I could decoke it (scrape out the cavity in the head) sitting in front of the gas fire with the rest of the family.

I was very conscious that I could come back from the college after work every evening and have tea provided by our maid and then have peace and quiet in my own room to do homework. Most of the others on the course had to manage with no such advantages. They were a great bunch of guys and played various tricks on me like a condom on the exhaust pipe and a kipper on the exhaust manifold.

For the first time for many years I was living at home with my parents and got to know my father really well. As well as sailing punts on Sundays, we went swimming each morning in the summer at Lakenham baths. This was an open air swimming pool a short drive from home. Father and I discussed many things and did not always agree. On one occasion he took me to a medicochirurgical dinner, all very posh with all the local medics. Walking home he said to me "Well my boy you have just dined with the most intelligent group of people in Norfolk" I exploded and we agreed to disagree.

I met Jayne at a party in the home of Paul Mathews. She was much the most beautiful girl there and I was smitten. Our roller coaster relationship eventually blew up and I could not see how we were going to have a future together.

With all this fun it was not surprising that work came second and that I nearly failed at the end of the course.

I went to see the Managing Director and told him that I wanted to travel. So he arranged for me to go and assist in the company's office in Sydney Australia.

To get some experience I was sent to Manchester and I helped a nice service engineer whose idea of work was visiting one electric water pumping station a day. Then I was given responsibility for installing a roller table drive in Consett Iron Works. The control systems did not work as designed and I was able to change them on site myself working very long hours. This was a great experience and I got on very well with the other engineers in charge of the site. I had bought a lovely old 1936 Morgan with a coventry climax engine which went at 50 mph on the straight, uphill and downhill and round all the corners. I made good money driving my economical car up to Consett and back using the generous petrol allowance.

## 9. Sydney Australia 1959 to 1962

Heathrow airport was just a collection of Nissan Huts. These were curved corrugated iron sheds dating from the war years. The Comet aircraft had to make several stops on the way to Sydney. My boss in Sydney had arranged nice accommodation with a little old lady. Boring. I soon found a berth on a beautiful retired inter island ferry on a mooring in the middle of Pearl Bay near the Spit north of Mosman. I bought a tiny pram dinghy to scull myself ashore each day. Imagine a wet day, holding an umbrella in one hand and sculling ashore each morning with the other.



My houseboat home in Sydney

I had the forepeak and there were two other residents. We got over 100 people on board for parties, at which time the boat would settle in the water and submerge the gaping holes in her sides. So part of the fun was getting everyone to help bailing. There was no electricity on board and once a week we stretched a water pipe from the shore so that we could have cold showers.

After about a year I met David Godfrey Fausset and he came to live on board. He had no money but knew the Governor General. As a result he had access to cheap booze. When he had to go to a posh funeral he borrowed my shoes.

My first and much treasured Australian friend was Warren Wright, known to all as Cascer. He sold me his old Finn so that he could buy a better one and introduced me to the Royal Prince Edward Yacht Club. We kept the boats under the club house and rolled them down to the sandy beach every Saturday morning which was much frequented by lovely sun tanning lasses. So getting the boats ready took ages and was followed by great racing with the nicest crowd imaginable.

I decided to import a new sail from Elvstrom. It came with instructions how to get the right amount of mast bend. You set the mast up on two supports at the ends and hung weights in the middle. You then measured the deflection and planed away until the bend

was right. I did this in stages and at each stage the boat went faster and faster. On the last race with the old mast I was way ahead at the last mark with a beat to the finish. There was a crack and I knew that its time had come and I had to ease sheets. I just got over the line first before the guy behind caught up with me.



My finn with Elvstrom sail

A wonderful couple, the Rileys(?) let me build a new mast in their garden. You cut the rough shape then split it down the middle and glued the two halves back to back to even out the natural stresses in the wood. I used a triangular cross section with the biggest cross sectional area at the back. I did this because i had observed that most wooden masts failed in compression. The idea was good mechanically but made a shape which was not good aerodynamically.

We tried all sorts of ideas for self bailers. One was an aluminium block screwed on the bottom which had a slot to create a vortex. It never really worked and created lots of drag. Then we tried a plastic tube which pushed down vertically though the bottom of the boat. The only problem with that was that it got stuck with the sand from the beach before launching.

After racing I would have a few beers and my only hot shower of the week. Cascer and his lovely wife Lindsey would then give me dinner at their home nearby and more to drink. Her parents were also great characters and we had many happy evenings. The only problem was that I then had to drive right across Sydney and over the harbour bridge to my houseboat. There were no drink drive laws then.

I trailed the Finn to Canberra to inaugurate their sailing club on a nearby reservoir, and on another occasion to Melbourne for the National Championships. The Kiwis came as well and were super good. I came 3rd overall, winning one race with a lucky wind shift and capsizing on another which I was able to use as a discard.

The only bad things about that experience was taking Ross Grieve's collie dog on the trip down. Ross gave me some meat for the dog which was bad and got worse. Eventually I had to drive with all the car windows open.

After a good sail from the harbour to Pittwater on a friend's boat, we ran aground in the dark. With the engine on full throttle in reverse we jumped on the bow and then the stern. No go. "Into the dinghy" says the skipper. We got in. It was still tied on. With 5 less people on board the boat came off in a rush, the dinghy swung round and capsized, dunking us all in the water. "I can't swim" says one. Remembering my bronze certificate for life saving, I grabbed him and tried to swim to the boat. Unfortunately there was a current carrying us towards shallower water where the boat could not go and I was making no progress. My feet felt like matchsticks. We started to go under. Emerging for the second time I shouted for help and a much stronger swimmer came to our rescue.

I had a lot of introductions to wonderful people. The Mackerras's (Parents of the conductor) were particularly welcoming. I stayed with them in their summer house near Wolongong. I made my mark by recognising Don Pasquale on their record player (about the only opera that I did know well). Perhaps the most intelligent family I have ever had the privilege to know, they were all new Roman Catholics. We discussed religion for ages ( I was a good little C of E boy in those days). I decided that these highly sensitive people

needed one aspect of their lives which they could put in a box and accept without question as the word of God.

The Mackays were Sydney society and more Scottish than the Scots. I went to stay on their property beyond the Blue Mountains at Scone. They owned a valley and lived on a hill in the middle with a house which was more like a baronial castle.

My best non sailing friends were the Lows. I would ring Dumps (Mrs Low) and ask if she had anything which needed repairing. Whether or not she did, there was always an invitation to supper. Through them I stayed with more Lows out at Forbes way beyond the Blue Mountains and I was always given a great welcome.

I decided to build a speed boat to go to work. I bought a huge ex WD outboard. The boat was twin hulled and the idea was that I would get lift from the low gap in between the middle of the hulls and the water. I built it on the top deck of our houseboat. On the first trial I found that the amount of lift was not enough and the bottom was not strong enough for the waves which thundered underneath.



Me. Age about 23

And I did work hard as well. I had much more responsibility than I could have got at the same stage in the UK. Most of it consisted of commissioning large motors in power stations and other industrial plant. I got on very well with the engineers there and I remember them showing me how to make an omelette during the lunch break. There is frequently a very special atmosphere when engineers are working flat out on a great project. On one occasion I had to insist that a power station was shut down when one of the motors caught fire. I used to make suggestions for design modifications and never got a reply.

For 6 months when my boss returned to England I was left in sole charge. He was a small pompous man, keen to scale the ladder and we did not get on well. He found the bumptious young odd ball and grandson of the founder of the company hard to cope with.

I found Australian girls rather boring. When challenged with some outlandish idea they would just say Yees. So when Jayne wrote to say that she was coming out on the £10 emigration scheme I sent her a formal letter of welcome. By the time she arrived we were hooked on each other again.

Jayne worked for an employment agency in Sydney and the experience she got there stood her in good stead when she started her own business in Cambridge later on.

The year we had together in Sydney was fun. She bought a VJ, a sort of sailing plank with her friend Sue Padley. They only sailed it once as it was really meant for small children.

We also had a Flying Dutchman for a time.

After three years in Sydney it was time to decide on the future. Should we stay in Sydney and find a different job or return to the UK? A friend who had a company making heating elements wanted to take me on as a partner. After much thought we decided that we wanted to get married in the UK and came back via South Africa. On the way we crossed Australia including a trip on the old Gan railway up to Alice Springs. It was clear that the aborigines there were treated as inferior beings. We flew out to Ayres Rock in a tiny Cessna which bumped its way over huge wind turbulence from the hot mountains below. We were told afterwards that another plane had come down that day when its wing fell off. Ayres Rock in those days consisted of one homestead and was not a huge tourist destination as it is today.



On a day outing, sitting for packed lunch in a hollow in the scrub, we heard of the assassination of George Kennedy.

A term coined there and always remembered was Pitchi Ritchi. It applies to all junk shops which sell huge amount of tat.

On the way from Perth our aeroplane stopped at the Cocos Islands and then had engine trouble on the way to Mauritius. So we stayed there for 3 days. No tourists then and very beautiful gardens. Unfortunately the engine problems had really scared Jayne from flying and she wanted to go home by sea. We went to the harbour but no ships were going to the UK. So she put up with the flight to Johannesburg where we were collected by my Uncle Hugh. At their home that night we were told scary stories of African attacks on homes. This completely upset Jayne and she flew back home as soon as possible.

South Africa was a new experience with apartheid separating white and black people completely. Uncle Hugh tried to emphasise the difference between whites and blacks, for example because their hair has an oval cross section which curls whereas the cross section of the hair of whites is round and stays straight. When they sing they go sharp whereas we tend to go flat. In his view we were destined to be forever different with little overlap.

I flew on to Salisbury, now Harare, where my Uncle Leonard really loved the natives in a kindly fatherly way. On the top of the only skyscraper we met his friend the King of Botswana and his white wife. The country was so peaceful that my Uncle left his car keys in the ignition at night. He had come to Africa after the first world war with no money to take advantage of land granted to ex service men. His first farm had been 50 miles from Bulawayo by ox cart with few people, blacks or whites and there he had raise his family and prospered . He was a lovely generous man and much respected.

## 10. Back in the UK

We got married early in January 1963 on a mild sunny day then went to Kitzbuhel for our honeymoon. The landlady in our apartment took our passports. I had put our marriage certificate in Jayne's passport which still had her maiden name in it. The landlady soon came back "So this is your marriage holiday, we have a much better room for you". We were taken from the attic to a lower floor and a large room with six beds. We found a flat in

Abingdon Road Kensington and I started work as a sales engineer with Laurence Scotts in their London office near Covent Garden. I was very much a junior and the work was really boring.



Narrow Boat Water Kelpie. Mother at the door, dog Wellington on top.

We decided that boat life would be fun and found a 70ft narrow boat, the Water Kelpie, in Aylesbury which had been used as a trip boat. It had a simple light-weight roof and open sides. With Jayne's brother Bill we towed it by hand down the canal to Harefield basin, a

flooded sand pit. After passing three pubs in the late afternoon Bill, not unreasonably, mutinied. We sold 50 seats to a passer by at a lock.

We filled in the sides and I bought some redundant bus windows with stainless steel frames. Water was contained in two large asbestos tanks over which I mounted a bath, cost £5. It took 15 minutes to fill with hot water from a Valiant gas heater. I got the engine going, a slow revving National diesel with a huge flywheel which was started by hand.

I bought some ex WD batteries to give us some electric light but we mostly used paraffin lamps. I used an aircraft fuel pump motor to provide running water.

Our bed was crossways across the back of the cabin. Unfortunately the two windows at each end of the bed always dripped with condensation and so our bed was never really dry.

We had a coal fired stove and were really cosy. At that time there were a lot of strikes and frequent power cuts. From our warm cabin we could laugh at the rest of the world as the lights went out.

I decided that I wanted to learn how a small company worked and applied to Herga as assistant to the Managing Director. Harry Poxon, the MD visited us on board when we were working on the boat and covered in dirt and paint. I asked him later if it had put him off. Being Harry he said that it confirmed his choice to take me on.

My father was surprised that I was giving up a reliable job and that I would become a director eventually if I was patient. Mother said "well done".



I owe a great deal to Harry Poxon. He was a wonderful engineer, totally honest and with the highest principles. He was hugely enthusiastic and a great lover of rally cars. He had lost half a leg when monitoring racing at Snetterton.

He had started Herga when he had

Our carefree home for 5 years in Harefield basin

been also representing another company supplying heating elements to Kodak. Kodak needed a new type of heating element for a new copier and also wanted to have a foot-switch. He enclosed the heating element in duresstos, a form of asbestos which was heated and pressed. So a heating panel and a footswitch were the first two products which he made in his garage in Harrow

During my time with Laurence Scott's I had never had anybody who really believed in me. Harry changed all that and enabled me to grow my self confidence.

When I joined, Herga had a small factory in Uxbridge with about 12 employees. Gerry Kent was technical director and had invested in the company. We made electric heating

panels, electronic timers, subcontract wiring assemblies, electric motors for aircraft fuel pumps and two types of footswitch. Harry was also still selling heating elements made in the Midlands.

We were not making any profit. Eventually Harry had us up to his house and broke the news that Gerry Kent wanted to leave and take with him the money he had invested. Harry needed £1,500 to survive.

Living cheaply on a houseboat we had saved quite well. I agreed to take a 50% share in the company on condition that I could move it out of London once we had become profitable. This took two years. I knew which products were losing money. We put up the prices on the unprofitable products and concentrated on footswitches.

Meanwhile I had suggested to Harry that we should start exporting. Being the amazingly generous man that he was, he immediately said "give it a go". So I started to find agents around the world.

Jayne found a great job as assistant to the MD of a hearing aid company. He was a small astute Welshman who had built up a very profitable business from scratch. They got on really well and we learnt a great deal from what he told her.

Our first dog Wellington was a highly strung rough collie who lived on the bank by the boat. He was much loved but could not stand high pitched noise. So if we were driving he would go bananas when he saw a road up sign, just in case they were going to use a pneumatic drill.

Wellington broke his back leg climbing out of the boat when Jayne was in hospital recovering from an emergency appendix operation. The sight of the dog dragging one plastered leg behind him caused her to laugh so much that her stitches were in danger of bursting.

We took Water Kelpie up the Grand Union Canal to Birmingham. Jayne drove the boat whilst I bicycled ahead with the dog to prepare the next lock. Once the boat was in the



Water Kelpie by Tardebigge Lock

lock, I closed the back gate, opened the sluices and set off again. When full, Jayne pushed the top gate open with the bow using the engine in full ahead. The maximum days run was 24 miles and 40 locks. The canal through Birmingham was really run down in those days. Supermarket trolleys had been thrown into the canal from bridges and the boat would heave up over the top of them.

Tardebigge was the top of a long flight of locks going down to the Severn. Our boat had steel sides and a wooden bottom. With time she had suffered from middle age spread which was rather more than the six foot six inches for which locks were designed. So we got stuck in the top lock. Lucky. We were told that the bottom lock of the flight was narrower.

So our plan to do a circular tour was cut short. On the way back it snowed. I have a good memory of stopping in the middle of nowhere, coming below, sitting in a steaming bath with cows standing outside in the snow and looking in at the windows.

We looked for places to move the factory and to live in East Anglia. We nearly bought the railway station in Framlingham. We did buy a tiny cottage south of Earl Soham, two up two down with a loo in a lean too outside. We added a bath. It cost £2000 and included a water meadow and barn. After 2 years we sold it for £4,000. We also bought a flying fifteen to sail at Aldeburgh. My wonderful parents helped.



Earl Soham Cottage with loo and bath in the lean too outside

## 11. Our Move to Suffolk

We discovered that the government was encouraging companies to move from London to overspill towns in the country. Furthermore, they were providing housing for key employees, something very difficult to find near Uxbridge.

We chose Bury St. Edmunds because it was well established and had a great history. We took the Uxbridge employees on a bus to visit the proposed site. One of the ladies kept shouting at her daughter "Tracey come here" which made me jump.

The greenfield site on Northern Way was adjacent to a large council estate. It was a bit more expensive than elsewhere and I could have got it with a fifty year lease. But it was well worthwhile buying the freehold.

Cousin David Church designed the building with grey sombre walls inside and a huge water tank in the roof. This was just in case, Africa style where he had grown up, we should run dry.

Three young men came up from Uxbridge and secured their houses to live in.

Before moving in I put an advertisement in the local press. The factory had walls and roof but no windows and was unfinished. A long line of potential employees gathered outside. I set up a plank on two barrels and interviewed them sitting in a row, three at a time.

Meanwhile we had been looking for houses in the area. We rejected Crofts Place initially because it was so derelict. But the project was very tempting and full of potential. It had



been empty for nine years, had no water or electricity connected and branches from nearby trees were growing through the windows. There was a derelict cottage in the grounds and a small lake and a bridge over a moat. It was said that an earlier building on the site had been lived in by one Ernest Crofts a bastard son of Charles 1st and that Charles stayed there

Crofts Place Little Saxham as we found it

when attending horse racing at Newmarket. A descendant, Ernest Crofts had been a member of the Royal Academy. Years later we discovered a painting by him in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York depicting the beheading of Charles. There was a written history of Crofts Place and it is possible that Jayne still has it.

Buying the factory site, building a factory and buying Crofts place (cost £7000 with 5 acres) meant that we were borrowing a lot. The manager at our bank suggested that we were “burning the candle at both ends”. Sister Marion was still single and took a share in the factory cost.

When we moved Herga in the autumn of 1969 we still had no water or electricity at the house. We lived in two rooms on the first floor and put locks on their doors. Everything else was open. I used to bring a large can of water back from the factory each night.



When leaving her job in Middlesex, Jayne said to her boss, who thought highly of her, that she might find someone to start a business with in Suffolk. His answer was “Why do you need a partner when you are perfectly capable of doing it yourself?”. She got a job in Cambridge but

Crofts Place Little Saxham  
Mother in the foreground

then discovered that there were no employment agencies there. So she started Cambridge Personnel in an attic office near the centre and we agreed that we would shut it down once we had gone through the £500 we were investing. She put two advertise-

ments in the local paper, at one end advertising wonderful jobs and at the other end wonderful temporary and permanent staff. It was an instant success.

We worked all hours, both on our businesses and on Crofts Place. I installed all the electric wiring and plumbing including central heating. A lot of floorboards were rotten and had to be replaced. Luckily the roof was OK.

Electricity and water had to be brought across nearby fields, about a mile and a half. We had a septic tank fitted, much too small as it turned out because it flooded in wet weather. A lot of trees had to be removed from the garden.

I remember mother coming to visit, cancer was beating her and she only had about a year to live. Standing in the hall, full of enthusiasm but zero energy she said "Do I have to go upstairs?"

Jayne's business grew rapidly and she had a knack of understanding what customers really wanted. If an architect asked for a secretary who was very efficient and typed rapidly, she might send a blond bombshell who was barely literate. "What a wonderful choice" would come back the reply. Work included Saturday mornings after which she would dash from Cambridge to Aldeburgh where I would be waiting with sails a flutter ready to start the afternoon race. She soon moved to a larger office and started taking on more staff.

## **12. Herga in Bury St Edmunds**

I have written a short book about the first 50 years of Herga which was given to all our team.

Here is a lot more, particularly regarding the financial side.

When we came to Bury, I owned 50% of the company. Harry Poxon was very happy that I was making a success of the company in comparison with what might have happened if I had not joined him. He was educating a son at Public School, was in his early seventies and needed to have a reasonable income. I needed much less. So I built up a cash pile in the company and eventually asked that it should be converted into shares. Harry kept open a sales office in Uxbridge. In the early seventies Harry got cancer and sadly died very quickly. I was then able to pay his widow Christine for all the remaining shares in the company. Harry had kept the freehold of the factory in Uxbridge and this also provided an income for her.

It has to be said that I always wanted to be in total control so that I could try out new ideas and take time off when I wanted, such as going sailing. Making a lot of money was not my objective. I do not regret pushing for my opportunity to achieve this.

The initial factory covered 3000 sq.ft. Then we added a two storey building behind followed by another two storeys to one side. Later we bought the factory next door which had become vacant and then a unit on the other side of the road. All of this was financed by the profits of the company.

In the early 70's turnover was increasing by 40% a year and we continued to be self financing. I also paid off the money I had borrowed from my sister Marion with interest.

### 13. Herga Product Evolution

*The ability to think differently today from yesterday distinguishes the wise man from the stubborn*  
*John Steinbeck.*

*Even with things you have been doing one way for years, it is always possible to make improvements.*  
*Me*

The products we developed and manufactured had to meet at least some of the following criteria:

- \* Uniqueness or having special market appeal
- \* Patentable or registered design
- \* Products to be attractive, look good and feel good
- \* Not huge volume which would attract competitors with a lot more financial muscle than us.
- \* No customer to take more than 30% of business.
- \* To be cautious regarding volume car components and the defence industry.
- \* Potential export market concentrating on developed countries.
- \* Must use either existing technology or sell to an existing market or both.

When I joined Herga the only product which appealed to me was a small foot switch. Harry Poxon had never thought of exporting but when I suggested it he gave me every support. So sales of that one item started to grow.

Then I met a very bright guy who said he did not like foot switches because of the electricity on the ground. We threw ideas at each other, a wonderful game of verbal ping pong which I will never forget. Out of it came the air operated switch, using a bellows on the ground creating enough pressure to operate a pressure switch in the machine.

We exhibited at a trade show in New York where I met Gil Bassin. Hot tubs and Jacuzzis were coming into fashion and he found a ready market for our air switches. We developed several types of air switch and numerous bellows. I let Gill create his own company Pressairtrol to sell them. This was a mistake, as will be revealed later.

We were soon exporting over 50% of production.

We produced a sensitive air switch for use with tubes which are strung across roads for counting. A similar switch went into vacuum cleaners to indicate when they were full of dirt. With increasing demand we installed semi automation. However competitors continued to drive the price down and I decided that it was not sensible to follow with further capital expenditure.

Another similar switch was developed for use with sensing tubes on the edges of doors. We had a lot of trouble getting reliable extrusions for the door edges from UK manufacturers. Competitors in Europe had better extrusions and so the market did not take off as rapidly as it should have done. However it did lead us into the safety market which was developing rapidly.

So we created air operated safety sensing mats which would turn off machinery when stepped on. They consisted of a tube laid in the mat connected to a control driven by an air pump and pressure switches at each end of the tube to sense the flow. For the air pump we used an aquarium air pump. Very reliable. It worked well and was the beginning of fail safe systems.

After two or three successful years I was not happy with our rather cumbersome technology and was looking round for an alternative. So I went to a conference in London concerning the new field of fibre optic sensing. Battelle, the largest research organisation in the world described how the passage of light through a multicore fibre could be reduced by applying pressure at regular intervals. No mention was made of applications or the special advantages of their development. I could see that it was a fundamentally fail safe system because any fibre breakage would result in the system shutting down.

After the conference I walked up the hill to see Keith Beresford, my patent agent, and asked him to apply for a patent for me covering the use of optical fibre sensors in fail safe applications.

Next I went to Geneva to the offices of Battelle in Europe where they told me how clever they were and I just about understood what they were saying.

Walking across the garden at the centre of their imposing headquarters on the way to lunch, I told them that I had applied for a patent covering all fail safe applications of optical fibre sensors. They stopped dead. "Just a moment" they said. A few minutes later they returned and the atmosphere was totally different.

I had a wonderful relationship with Battelle who carried out further development work for me, for which I paid. I became particular friends with their chief patent officer who was a charming senior American known as a tough negotiator. I secured a worldwide exclusive license. Years later one of their senior people asked how I could have secured such an advantageous license. I just replied that we were friends who trusted one another.

Battelle developed a machine which spun a spiral of plastic around the fibre at a specific spacing. We then produced the production machine.

Colin Botting had joined our development team sometime before and designed the electromechanical controls to go with the air operated systems. Overnight he then had to become an electronic engineer to go with the fiberoptic sensors. Colin had had no formal training but learnt quickly and produced brilliant designs which were original and met all the emerging standards. I just gave enthusiastic encouragement and tried to keep up.

For many years Gordon Oscroft was our Technical Director, who with his wife Petle also became good sailing friends. Like Colin, Gordon filled the gaps in our technical team where I was lacking. He was particularly good at knowing and understanding the detail of international standards. I could throw ideas at them and wait whilst they worked out solutions.

The problem with designing safety mats was to produce something which was sensitive to the lightest footfall but which would not fail and break the fibre when pounded constantly by heavy boots. The solution was to sandwich the fibre between a metal base and a thin layer of cork containing nitrile rubber with a 10mm thick rubber mat on top. I rigged up a life testing machine in the outside shed at Risby using an old oscillating saw and a heavy weight. It made a terrible noise.

The market for automated guided vehicles (AGV's) was growing and they needed pressure sensitive bumpers, an ideal application. We had to build a special paint shop and learn how to coat them. Competition from Germany was strong although they did not provide the same level of safety.

The german car manufacturers sent us car doors to fit prototype sensors on doors. Bosch showed great interest and then applied for a patent behind our backs. Fortunately this was squashed as a result of our relationship with Battelle.

London underground had had a scare when their emergency stop system did not work in tunnels. We got a good development contract with them and fitted a specially extruded sensor which met all their requirements. Then they had other priorities and forgot about it. In Brixton prison the authorities were concerned that inmates could throw a rope over the wall and get out. We fitted a sensor all round the top of the wall. It was incredibly hard



work, not only time wise but with the bureaucracy of the authorities. Colin Botting worked far beyond the call of duty in getting it done.

We also had some scary moments. We had sold a lot of mats to Belgium for a car plant. I was in the north of Finland and got a message to say that none of the mats were working. It turned out that they had been stacked on the floor horizontally on top of each other. The weight of the top ones had squeezed all the air out of those at the bottom. It was easy to solve.

We got quite a lot of publicity with our sensors which resulted in being broadcast on the TV programme Tomorrows World. We had mats and sensors on bumpers and brought a car installed with sensors on the windows. At the final rehearsal the electric drive on the car window failed. They loved inventions which did not work. "No problem" I said. "We can turn the car round and use the sensor on the other side". With Toby and Hugo we watched the whole performance through a remote window, crossing our fingers that nothing else would go wrong

We also won the Queen's Award for Export and the award for innovation.

The air switch market continued to grow and I got a nice order for them to be fitted to electric lawnmowers made in Norway. After the first successful year I showed the engineer in Norway a new bistable switch which I had invented. He wanted it for the next year's production but I said it was not ready. However, being keen to oblige I agreed and we made thousands for Norway and France. They all worked well initially. However I had made the fatal mistake of gluing nylon mouldings with epoxy and after a short time they began to leak. There followed several visits to France and Norway, eating humble pie and somehow I got out of it without being prosecuted.

Another good market for many years was with kitchen sink waste disposers made by In-sinkerator in the USA. I had an excellent relationship with their people and developed new switches which could be built in to the body of the machine. I even produced a sample for them at home. We lost that market after I had stepped aside, entirely due to lack of attention by the sales team. Insinkerator incorporated my novel design in a later model. I should have patented it.

I got a patent on the bistable switch and a government development contract to make it work on domestic lighting. I nearly sold many thousands for council houses in Glasgow where they were having to replace string pull switches in bathrooms at a cost of £15 a time.

Airswitch controls are still used today on a wide variety of applications from medical to marine equipment.

Meanwhile the foot switch market continued as a safe profitable line and I developed many new models. RS components asked me to design a heavy duty foot switch. We did not have computer aided design in those days. I got an artist to produce illustrations of five different designs and presented them to RS, starting with copies of the competitor's boring design. Lastly I showed them my streamlined model and they fell for it. I made a prototype, finishing it off at home in the evening. Although more expensive than the competition it has been part of the range ever since.

I also had several good markets for pressure switches. Pirelli bought them for car seat sensors for several years. However I disliked supplying the car industry where margins were poor.

When at the Norwich City Technical College I had struggled to get through exams, never having had a good memory. However I had eventually passed and became a graduate of the Institution of Electrical Engineers and subsequently a member. I thought it might be good for the company to be able to add more letters to the letter heading and so applied to become a Fellow of the institute. I was interviewed by some senior folk who asked me

what I knew about railway electrification.”Nothing” I replied. “ But if you ask me about air-switch controls I am the world’s expert”. No more questions.

We followed the evolution of injection moulding technology, firstly with a plunger machine and a tool made in a friend’s chicken shed. Then we had Dr. Boy screw machines followed by fine Arburg machines which are still in use today. To go with this we built up a very effective tool making shop.

On one occasion it was taking a long time to set up a tool on the moulding machine because of problems with alignment. “Have you ever installed an engine in a boat?” I asked. “Here he goes again.” I heard them mutter. “Because it took me a whole day to align the engine with the propellor shaft. You need to dowel the tool so that it always goes back in the same position”. Broad experience helps, even with boats.

Towards the end of my time I did not fully foresee how electronic systems would develop. Mats and bumpers have now been replaced by distance sensors. Car windows now use current monitoring on their drive motors.

## **14. Computer systems**

I had a very bright guy who wanted to develop our computer system. Welcoming all initiative and innovation, I let him loose. The result was a large stack of computer boards on trays. We were frequently running out of memory but the system worked. After a while this bright guy was head hunted away by another employer who would pay him much more. When leaving, I told the team that we could no longer afford him and that he was to be congratulated. Opportunities like this were open to everyone at Herga.

Much later the Science Museum asked us what had happened to the old computer. “Why?” we asked. It was the first example they could find of a networked system.

## **15. A Special Visitor**

I had a call from the police. “ I need to speak to you in private”. Help, what had I done wrong?

A senior inspector arrived. He had put on a tweed jacket for disguise. “ You are going to receive a visit from a very important person but I cannot tell you who and you are not to tell anyone that I have come, even your wife”.

As he left, one lad said”What’s the fuzz doing here?”

It turned out that the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher was going to visit us as part of her election tour. But still we could not tell anyone.

I suggested that we should show her how our bumpers worked by driving a fork lift truck at her. “ You will be knocked to the floor by security right away.” Was the reply. The night before, sniffer dogs toured the factory and found a firecracker in a locker.

Everyone enjoyed a great day out. Mrs Thatcher was charming and nice with everyone including my kids. We did drive a fork lift truck at her and it stopped as intended. “We Torys are not a pushover” She declared.

## **16. Exports**

I appointed many agents overseas. Most I found by looking at the back cover of companies making similar products. A few I found through British Embassies. They all became friends. They often represented large companies where it was not possible to build long term relationships because the managers kept changing. So they always gave me much more attention than average.

I made whirlwind tours around Europe, visiting up to eight agents in a week. I arranged International Agents Conferences every two years, mostly in the UK but once in France and once in Germany. They paid to get there and we paid the rest. On one of the first I demonstrated samples of many of the products where our products were used, such as electric lawnmowers. At lunchtime during the conference we would get some of our folk from assembly to join them. Having a dinner in a Cambridge College was a great attraction and we went to great lengths to produce wonderful food and to provide singers. The best was when we went to Kentwell Hall and asked them all to come in Tudor attire. We also hired clothing for those who did not bring their own. The food was truly authentic and we ate with our fingers. We had singers and conjurers. Providing such unique events was wonderfully bonding. Realising the potential of the German market, I decided to start our own company there. I used head hunters to find the right man. He was good for a while but refused to follow my lead of selling all our range of products. In particular, he ignored the foot switch market and concentrated only on safety. So he had to go and his no. 2 who took over but was not really up to the job. Later, after I had stepped aside, they decided to close the company rather seeking a suitable replacement.

The American market under Pressairtrol boomed but I became suspicious that Gil Bassin the MD was getting copies of our products made behind my back. One of my customers in the UK started selling into the American market and I was powerless to stop him. Eventually I started our own company Herga Inc. Gill Basin sued me for more money than I had ever thought about. The judge turned out to be from the same background as Gill and the result was that I paid up and gave him a pyrrhic victory. The new company started well until I discovered that the new MD was cheating me. At a conference in Anaheim I found that he had appointed sub agents who were taking a percentage of sales without doing any work. I did not sleep all the next night worrying about who would sue me when I sacked them. That is what I did the next day. No one complained and I knew that I had been right. So that MD left and was replaced by the son in law of a long time friend of Jayne's.

I had a delightful agent in Switzerland, Jacques Levi. After dinner one evening in their apartment in Lausanne, he suggested that I might add 2% to my sales prices which he could look after and I could use for myself. I told him that I did not do that sort of thing. His lovely wife immediately said "Jacques, he won't, he's British". Some time later I had to change to another agent and there was, of course, no problem. In all my career only one other customer ever tried playing corrupt games. He telephoned and asked if I might contribute to his cricket club, say £500. I smelt a rat and asked my sales engineer who told me that the customer had contributed £50 to his boxing club. So I sent him £50. He telephoned to ask if I had made a mistake and missed out a nought. I said no. The customer still continued to buy from us.

## **17. European Standards**

When we started to manufacture safety mats, I found that proposals were being drawn up to write new European Standards. I went to Berlin (it was before the wall came down) and got appointed as the convenor of the group which would write the standard. We met two or three times a year, normally going south in the winter and north in the summer. The others in the group consisted of competitors or representatives of standards organisations in different countries. The strongest delegation was always from Germany.

I got to know these bureaucrats very well and obtained their respect by always hearing all sides of an argument and seeking the middle ground. I was probably too tolerant. In particular, one charming senior German became a real friend and there were tears in his eyes when our work finally ended.

The German safety organisation built huge machines in the basement of their building which would life test mats under different conditions. They made a great noise. With a typical German laugh they referred to them as the Tracey Test Machine.

The work took a long time because of the detail insisted on and the difficulty in writing English which everybody understood and which could then be translated into other European languages. Every proposed text had to be sent to Brussels where a European of unknown origin would try to question my grammar.

When we finally produced the standard, I asked around the room how the different countries proposed to apply it. The Scandinavians said that they would follow it. The Germans said that they would interpret it in their way. The French said that it was a good objectives and the Italians waved their arms in the air and said that the main problem was staying in business.

A very useful advantage of our collaboration was that, with Gordon Oscroft, we got to know many people in standards organisations well and they taught us what was required in terms of design, particularly with electronic systems.

## **18. Learning How to Lead**

When Herga came to Bury St. Edmunds I initially thought that running a business was all about getting people to do what I wanted. Their job was to make things.

On a visit to Norway I met the owner of a large manufacturing company and I referred to "His company". "No" he said "it is OUR company". I had a lot to learn and my attitude began to change.

From then on I always tried to think of Herga as a team effort where everybody was important and it was up to me to encourage and to get the best out of them.

I introduced flexible working long before it was common. It meant that most assembly people could do all their work in four days and have Friday to go shopping. But flexibility had to work both ways. If extra time out of hours was needed to get a job out, they had to help. It could only work if there was complete trust on both sides. After I stepped down, the management stopped the flexitime system, a clear indicator of the lack of trust which had then developed.

I also put in electronic time keeping so that assembly people could work at their own pace. Some wanted to have regular tea breaks, others wanted to work without stopping. Again, this could only work if there was trust and flexibility on both sides.

A lady mentioned that it did not matter if work was not right because it would be picked up by inspection. I stopped inspecting nearly all production and promoted the principle that each and every one was responsible to the end customer for the work they produced. It engendered a great sense of personal responsibility. I followed the principle of Japanese car manufactures that anyone on the production line could stop it if they thought something was wrong.

I also had a system of monthly prizes for new ideas.

In those days smoking was allowed in designated areas. By chance I turned up at the factory one morning at 6.30, half an hour before they could clock on to the flexitime system. I found a group of them in the smoke hole having a coffee and a smoke. "What are you doing here so early?" I said. They said that they liked to come in early for a chat and to agree what they would be doing that day. Some of them had very difficult family situ-

ations and I am sure that Herga was a place where they could feel safe and be appreciated.

The factory was painted in bright colours, much to the dismay of the local planners, because I wanted people to smile as they came to work.

My next objective was to encourage learning in order to make the best of people's innate abilities. I had discovered that many, especially ladies who came to work on production had missed out on education, often because of their lack of any expectations.

Perhaps my greatest satisfaction was finding ladies who had real hidden ability, encouraging them to learn and some going all the way through to university.

Another principal learnt from the Japanese was to encourage learning even if it was not directly relevant to their work. So I paid for them to go to evening classes at the Tech.

I also had a shelf of management books which anybody could borrow without permission. It was a good sign if we lost some of them. Much better to lose a book than to lose an enquiring mind.

Another fun idea which cost nothing was Lunch Time Learning. Anybody could ask to discuss any subject they wanted. We put up a list and once a month provided sandwiches to discuss the subject requested during the lunch break. It did not necessarily have to be related to the company and no subject was out of bounds.

We learnt a lot by having open days where families were invited to see round the factory. I encouraged people to come and display samples of their hobbies. The talents they revealed were amazing. One lady made beautiful Fabergé eggs. Ken Wiggins put up a display of his family tree. Another lady had a fine collection of silver spoons which she and her husband had collected when travelling round Europe in their camper van. "There is a problem Mister T", she said "they are rather valuable". No problem, we displayed them on a table in my locked glass fronted office so everybody could see them from the outside. She was so proud to show them to her mates.

One lady had a big problem because her very disabled husband was stuck in awful accommodation. I got our local MP to sort it out.

There was a short period when we got short of work and we had to put all assembly people on to a three day week. The local radio barged in uninvited and reported that Herga had "sacked" people. Over the radio on line there followed a call from one of our ladies. "We were not sacked, Herga has just had to cut back because of lack of orders".

The Industry Sailing Challenge was created for middle and large companies and only permanent employees could be involved. It was sailed in hired yachts going twice round the Isle of Wight without stopping. As Gordon Oscroft was the only other sailor, I took a group of them to Aldeburgh for an evening sail in my MGC27 for several weeks before the event. I would put cottage pies in the oven whilst we sailed and we would end up with a meal and a beer on board. Such fun.

The language we use has evolved with time and often uses words and expressions which we do not really mean. So I tried to change the language we used. I dislike the expression "shop floor". No one sits on the floor working. Instead we had assembly teams. I also dislike the term "Manager". People need leaders, always looking for better ways of doing things, not managing the status quo.

One of my principles was to lead by example without putting myself forward as the great "I am the boss". I was recently reminded about one occasion when there was a public holiday for the wedding of Charles and Diana and the factory was to shut down. I had got the plastic moulding machines to work automatically but nobody wanted to fill the hoppers every 6 hours. So I dashed back from the celebrations in London to do so myself.

Total Quality was a great government influenced management theme and we got grants with young students spending quite a lot of time with the company training all our

people. Unfortunately my Production Director at that time could not see the point of it. It cost money but I had to pay him off. All our team had to be on the same train going in the same direction.

For many years I did not realise that our culture had another feature which was not common. Nobody swore at each other.

There is no reason why you cannot tell everybody almost everything about what is happening, from results to problems to opportunities and everything in between. However you have to try to keep a confident smile on your face when there are problems which you cannot share with them.

I had two sayings concerning all the people for whom I was responsible:

*"If it is important for them, it is important".*

And

*"Put people first and they will put you first".*

They knew that if they came to me I would listen. So often it was some worry which was niggling them and could be easily answered.

I had a wonderfully loyal team and many of them stayed with the company for a very long time.

As a successful business one received a lot of requests for charitable giving. So each year I gave a certain sum based on the number of our team. Half went to national charities and half was given to causes chosen by our team. The church roof and the girl guides were typical. The poorest of our team often wanted to give to causes such as an old cats home. It was sometimes difficult to get them to come up with ideas.

Long before I created the partnership, I decided that I wanted my team to have a material interest in the company. So I created a separate shareholding system for the team so that they could all be involved. Jayne was furious and tried to stop me doing it.

Towards the end of my time, a business friend came into my office and told me that my business was special, just one in a hundred and not like any others he knew. I was honoured but did not fully appreciate what he was saying.

Seeking to learn as much as possible, I sent myself to Ashridge Management College for a weeks course for small businesses. At the end of the week I sat down to review how I saw Herga developing over the coming years. I drew a set of curves showing how sales might develop in different product areas and projected sales in ten years time. Years later I found these curves. Of course we had not followed them exactly but the overall achievement was correct.

At the end of the course we all sat together and we asked each one to set out their experience regarding corruption in their field. They came from very different sectors of the market. Everybody said that their business was honest except the car salesman who had connections selling to local government. "Surely local government is honest?" We asked. "Unfortunately they are the worst" He replied.

Having such a loyal team meant that there was no need for me to micromanage everybody. As a result I had time to take on other responsibilities as will be explained later. I in turn learnt from this wider experience which I tried to bring back to Herga.

Unfortunately I failed to realise the importance of my leadership on a regular basis. When I did step back after creating the partnership company the rot soon started. Investigation

of new markets, particularly with fibre optic sensors dried up. The sales team split up and one was found to have a second job on the side. The flextime system failed. Overall, continuous innovation came to a halt and the company stopped growing and making money,

## 19. Financials

Making money was not my top priority. The objective was to create a friendly working environment, to give me an outlet for my ideas, personal independence and enough income after retirement to enjoy a good quality of life. So I never relied on outside shareholders to invest in our growth because I did not want others to pressure me for dividends or to control my independence. I only took from the company what I needed to live on and in spite of growing turnover at up to 40% per annum at one time, we were always self financed. This showed how making the best out of one's team is more successful in the long run than driving them to maximise profits at all cost.

I got on well with the local Bank Manager but eventually their corporate business was transferred to Leeds. A gent in Leeds phoned me. "I have your results here, we are worried that you are not making any profit". I had to explain that I did not like paying corporation tax and so all our profits went straight back into new developments.

How did we manage to retain financial independence? Having experienced how the company was managed before I took over, I knew which areas were not making money. Costings were all wrong. So we increased the price of the unprofitable items and lost most of the business there. Turnover reduced and we started to make a profit. Because I was living cheaply on a houseboat and Jayne had a good job, I was able to take out very little as salary.

We were lucky to get one or two good contracts early on.

I developed simple financial controls based on engineering principles. By the second week of each month we produced figures, accompanied by graphs, which we shared with our management team. These were:

*\*Sales and orders monthly and over the last twelve months, divided into product areas and market areas.*

*\*Debtors and creditors for twelve months, UK and export.*

*\*Cash flow over the last twelve months and projected three months ahead.*

*\*Profit and capital investment, financial year to date.*

We ran a small overdraft most of the time, always between agreed limits with the bank.

I had an excellent accountant, John Burgess, who kept the books correctly, as good accountants do, but was not a financial planner. He did a huge amount of work with almost no assistance. Once everything was computerised, producing the monthly figures was not a problem.

With such a dedicated and loyal team I could also follow the 20/80 principle. This is that you are only really useful 20% of the time. So I was able to delegate, enjoy my family and hobbies and take on other responsibilities.

## **20. Decline and Renewal**

When I got to 60 I decided that I wanted to step back from day to day running the company and to enjoy the boat which I was buying. So I decided to give away my controlling interest in the company to create a partnership. I had separated the company from the factory property and the intention was that the latter would provide me with a pension.

The other directors were minor shareholders and my three children also had shares.

The intention was good but the result was almost disastrous. The guy who had been my Sales Director became Managing Director. Tall with a firm handshake, he exuded enthusiasm. Meanwhile my first marriage came to an end and I moved to the south of England, eventually to marry Ruth.

All started well and I made regular visits. Then I fell ill with something which I have only recently come to understand. I had to stop my regular visits. I did not realise the extent to which everything was going downhill. The booklet I had produced, setting out my principles and the lessons from the first 60 years of the company was completely overlooked or discarded and the enthusiasm of the workforce was destroyed.

Eventually I got a friend, Michael MacSwinney to go and investigate. He found poor management and low morale everywhere. We were about to get rid of the MD when Roy Mofat of Variohm came to us and said that he would like to buy the company. Fantastic.

Variohm paid a good price from which my children and all the team benefitted. They were paid in proportion just to their years of service rather than their position in the company and the payment occurred over 5 years. I was also able to make special grants to some former employees who had serious health problems. Variohm soon sold out to a public company Acal, now known as DiscoverIE.

At a meeting with the MD of the holding company, he suggested that I should visit Herga to see how things were going. He said that a new Production Director had made great changes. I was very uncertain and emotional about what might have happened to what had been my baby. So it was with great trepidation that I made an appointment. It was one of the best days of my life.

The entrance to the factory was bright and newly decorated. On the wall was a sign "The Adventure Starts Here".

Then friends from my old team began to appear. The girls wanted to kiss me and the men to shake my hand. Sixty percent of the old team were still there. The interior of the factory had been transformed. Signs on the walls showed the up to date performance of the company. The atmosphere was one of involvement, fun and optimism. What I had started was not only alive but thriving. My dedicated team had all benefitted financially and still had jobs where they were appreciated. My only fear was that almost all production appeared to be of things I had invented or designed 20 and more years ago.





## 21. Boats

I think that I have lived on boats for over 11 years of my life, starting with three years in Australia and five on our narrow boat Water Kelpie. My great friend Alan Eade produced two wonderful pictures, about ten years apart, illustrating my boats. The second is reproduced here and includes most of them, from the Molecule to Synergy. After moving to Suffolk we had two flying fifteens, starting with a cold moulded wooden one then a smart plastic job with a scoop on the bow to stow the spinnaker. This worked well on the Alde but when we took her down to Hayling Island, I had not realised that everyone else had fitted covers over their scoops. So when we got out in the chop off Hayling, the scoop



took in buckets of water as we dipped into the waves. We started to go down bow first and decided to retire. As we came in, the water trapped in the scoop pushed the spinnaker to the back and it appeared as two bright bosoms at the front of the cockpit

Then we had a little plastic cruiser Twinkle Two which we unkindly referred to as Tupperware followed by a gaff rigged straight bowed cruiser the Pearl.

She had a petrol engine which broke down as I was entering the Alde one cold December day with Nick Ratcliff. I had fun fitting a new Lister diesel and learnt a lot in the process.

I arranged to bring her alongside at Slaughden Quay for a scrub and did this at the top of the tide at first light. As the tide went down she did not seem to be leaning against the quay. There was a great crack and water started pouring through the

bottom. She had settled on a conical cement mooring weight which the bosun had forgotten to tell me about. We stuffed the holes, pumped out and had her repaired. We sold her to Michael Hopkins who became our architect for the Crystal Palace.

The most challenging boat to sail was an International Sailing Canoe. Sitting on a board 6 feet from the side, going to windward in force 3 or 4 was magic. Capsizing was a problem as the high hull quickly swivelled round with the sails up to windward. The answer was to climb on to the centre plate, bring the boat upright, then hold on and go underneath the hull ready to jump back on board as soon as she came back up.

I also had a laser.

Next came Botter Johanna. We bought her from Judge Adrian Head as she lay on the mud in the inner harbour at Lowestoft. Adrian did not like the standard conditions of sale and wrote out his own longhand on foolscap paper, probably when bored in Judge's lodgings. It stated rather obviously "The condition is that which you would expect of a vessel of its age".

We brought her down to Aldeburgh then lost one season when planking had to be replaced (very expensively) up at Lowestoft. After relaunch and letting the seams take up ( they have to swell up after being in the dry for a long time) we set sail back to Aldeburgh. Charging along before a fine wind we created a large bow wave which covered the planks which were normally above the water line. I had to tear out the internal covering in

the bow to get at the leak and hammer in caulking.

When the kids were very small we took her up to Barton Broad going under several bridges on the way. To lower the mast we had a powerful metal wishbone and an enormous block and tackle. Here she was used as a houseboat whilst Toby and Hugo started sailing in optimists and I had a white boat. A particular pleasure was racing with T&H against their grandfather in another white boat whilst Lisa bounced up and down hanging

from the boom on the Botter.



Botter Johanna on the Alde

We took Botter Johanna to Cowes to act as the finishing line for White group during Cowes Week. We had an adventurous trip round. The engine failed in the entrance to Dover Harbour, but we somehow managed to start it again. Down channel there was almost no wind and we had all sail up plus a spinnaker. With music and dancing on deck, Lisa danced into the sea. Nobody panicked. A strong man, Vincent Geake, plucked her out.

We would put the Botter on position on the finishing line first thing then go and race our Squib. Afterwards we would go back to the Botter where they were still finishing other boats. T, H and L would then climb all over the rigging. The local club's officials found this



rather off-putting on their day in charge. I was more worried when the finishers were to come from The Royal Yacht Squadron. I need not have worried, they were all well lubricated and could not have been nicer.

Before leaving we went out to watch the start of the Whitbread race. There was no wind but quite a swell and so the water in the flat bilge was sloshing about. Jayne thought we were sinking and her fear got through to Lisa who cried. She had already been through gales and storms with no complaints at all..

T, H & L all had optimists. I built one for Toby and it became somewhat octagonal as he sailed it age two to three round the swimming pool at the

Crystal Palace. We went to many optimist meets in the UK and one at Carentec in Brit-tany where all their competitors were french.

Next we bought a Squib. The first national championship which we sailed in Squibs was at Seaview. My crew was Toby 6? Hugo 5?, Lisa 3? and one other lad.

Squib Rushlight at Cowes Toby helming We sang our way round the course and never came last. Years later a lady asked me why I had not put up the spinnaker on one occasion. I told her that Lisa had been asleep on it.

We took Squibs to Cowes Week for many years. Toby took the helm from the age of 14. We went to a national championship in Weymouth and had two very nice guys staying with us on Shambhala who where very good. Each evening they would tell us what they had done to sail faster. We learnt a lot and Toby went on to win Cowes week afterwards.

Squibs are wonderful boats to sail with kids because they are not over canvassed and there is a cuddy where they can hide. I took care never to frighten them. On one occasion on the Blackwater we went out to race in heavy weather which gradually got worse. Eventually I asked them if it was too much and if they were not enjoying it. So we headed for home and soon all the racing was cancelled.

Selling the Botter was not easy and she has disappeared from view.

I wanted to try some offshore racing and decided on EAORA, the East Anglian Offshore Racing Association.

Electric Air was a half tonner which was supposed to be a copy of King One which had won the world championship. However she would not measure and we had to saw two feet off the stern. Addo Jardine was my helmsman and he brought along an experienced crew. Addo is the best skipper I have ever sailed with and I learnt a great deal from him. I was responsible for navigation. We did the Eaora races for three years and also several of the winter series off Lymington.

Our most hairy sail was coming back to the East coast from Lymington one early spring. I had Alan Eade and the boys on board. The wind got up and up and I put the boys in wet suits and lifejackets and made them stay below. We dropped anchor in Dover harbour and the patient Alan finally lost his cool when the boys spilt their pee all over the floor.

Our best result was winning the Buckley Goblets sailing across to Ostend. The wind was light and visibility was poor so I navigated a course using the Decca Navigator which few others had and which was state of the art at the time. We saw no one else all day. Arriving off Ostend in the early morning we could see that the other masts were all on boats much taller than us.

Next we bought "Dash" an MGC27 with a lifting keel. 27ft long and designed by Rob Humphries, she sailed like a dinghy and we won some races. We bought her from a careful chap who had never put up the spinnaker. The only problem was that he had never run the engine at more than idling speed. As a result the inside of the cylinders had glazed and she had lost compression. It was fairly easy to take the engine out and get it repaired. When Toby wanted to do his Duke of Edinburgh Gold adventure it was agreed that he could do it in Dash on the Deben with Colonel Robin Forrestier Walker as supervisor. Some Supervisor! I came down to Slaughden Quay where Dash lay alongside to find Toby's crew, Jim Marsh and one other finishing off a bottle of whisky with Robin. We then sailed down to the Deben together. As I was leaving them to their own devices there was a light rain (it was October) and I suggested that if they got wet they would never get dry in the coldish weather. "No problem Mr. T", They said. They had a great week including running the battery flat, managing a big squall with the spinnaker up and ending with a large mound of soaking clothing on the floor.

After winning Cowes Week in the squib, we decided to have a go at something larger and bought a Dragon, "Perspicacity". We did quite well with her during the first year at Cowes. The next year the rudder broke and we lost most of Cowes Week whilst getting it repaired. Toby trailed her up to Burnham for Burnham Week. As I was going up the river in Shambhala he hailed me from Perspicacity to say that it had a large leak. He had forgotten to put the bung in before launching. So I tied a rope round his chest and made him dive in. It was not easy fixing a fiddly bung under three feet of rushing water but he made it. The top dragon sailors bought new sails for every regatta and we were soon out of the top class. I eventually sold her to a chap in Sweden.

I had a wonderful sail with Frank Carr, formerly Director of the Greenwich Maritime Museum, in his miniature copy of a Thames Barge from Kings Lynn to Pinmill. He was a great raconteur and very amusing company. Coming into Harwich we anchored for the night close to the shore. The wind went round in the night so that we found ourselves on a lee shore in the morning. Trying to get the anchor up by myself without a winch, I damaged my back. This eventually led to an operation and many years of pain before exercise finally cured it.

Two other problems for my hands associated with sailing were Dupitrens Contraction and Carpel Tunnel. These were ably operated on by surgeons in Bury.

Yellowdrama is a Swan 57 owned by Stephen Matthews. When he purchased her he knew little about sailing. So we got together a crew with Addo Jardine helming. With the crew learning how to sail her in the Solent, we dropped a spinnaker over the side which split into several pieces. Stephen was dancing about complaining about how much it had cost. Addo quietly commented. "If you will sail big boats you have to put up with this sort of thing".

We sailed Yellowdrama in one Fastnet race. I was navigator and made the mistake of going for a course close to the shore in light winds. Stephen still owns Yellowdrama and has sailed her all over the world.

In about 2003 I bought a Laser SB3, Symbiotic with Ruth. The winter series in the Hamble was really hard work, getting up at 5 am to go down to launch her from the marina. Then there would often be too much or too little wind. There were 80 starters for Cowes week for which we got a free spinnaker with VW on it. We had a very strong crew who could pull up the spinnaker much faster than Ruth. It was very good fun but difficult to win against much stronger teams.

## **22. Canoes**

My first canoeing was on the Thames in Chris Ellis's kayak, which I learnt to roll. Then I made a canoe with a wood frame and a canvas cover which nearly destroyed mother's sewing machine.

I bought a fibreglass Canadian canoe which I took to France with Jayne and went down the Seine from Never to Nantes. We camped either in camp sites or "sauvage" on islands in the river. The main problem was going under bridges where the water level could drop rapidly. The bridges had all been blown at the end of the war and after rebuilding a lot of bits of metal stuck out into the stream. We made over 25 holes in the canoe and had to buy fibreglass to repair them. In those days there were almost no other canoes on the Loire, very different from today.

We also took it to Scotland and canoed down the River Tay much to the dislike of local fishermen. When the kids were young we had many adventures on the local streams of the rivers Lark, Whissey, Thet and the Waveney. We also canoed down the River Wye.

## 23. Shambhala



Shambhala near the Needles

When I got to the age of 60 I was able to take a considerable (by my standards) tax free sum from my pension fund.

I had always wanted to own a boat of substance and searched the secondhand market. Plastic boats such as Oysters did not seem to weather well with age and were not particularly special. There were some interesting copies of Slocum boats (he was the first guy to sail round the world by himself) but they were going to be slow. There were also interesting steel boats but many had too much rust and it was difficult to know how far gone they might be below the water line. So that left aluminium.

Shambhala was the largest boat ever designed by Peter Brett, famous for his Rival class of ocean cruisers. She was commissioned by Nick Franklin who had built up a very successful company, Aries making wind vane steering systems. He was a brilliant, out of the box, unqualified engineer and had put many of his ideas into Shambhala. I suspect that most of the profit made by his company went into Shambhala. On finding the advertised details, Jayne and I dashed down to Cornwall to see her. On the way we telephoned to say that we might be early for our appointment. "Don't worry" said the broker, "I have other people to see as well". O dear, maybe we will be too late. We need not have wor-

ried, nobody else was interested. We arrived to find Shambhala leaning up against the quay in Penryn at low tide with weed hanging from her bottom. She was painted a sickly light green. She was so beautiful and I fell in love with her immediately.

The hull of Shambhala had been built in a bog in Woking by a company which had also built aluminium yachts for Ted Heath. Why Woking? That had been a centre for the aircraft industry where there were expert aluminium welders. After Woking Shambhala was taken to Cowes where Nick lived and several years were spent on completion. From the drawings it is clear that several different layouts were tried.

The galley was beautiful and included a marinised version of an Aga. It never worked very well but somehow Shambhalla got the nickname of the "Boat with an Aga".

After launching, Nick had sailed over to France and spent the winter on her in Paris with the mast removed. He then took her through the French canals (just room for an egg cup on both sides he said) and on to Malta. Here he had a heart attack and a friend had to sail (or mostly motor) her back to England. And that was why she was for sale.



Shambhala on the Solent

As an engineer and inventor looking for a challenge, she was just what I wanted. Painted lifeboat blue and with new varnish work, she glistened and smiled as she emerged from the shed.

I worked from dawn to dusk getting her ready for sea. With David Semken and George Chapman we set off one sunny afternoon for Cowes motoring into a force five easterly wind and a sizeable sea. A noise behind the cockpit made me look into the storage under the aft hatch. The outboard motor was floating in a foot of water. We were taking in seas over the

bow which were sluicing aft. There were no limber holes to let the water escape and it was going straight through the unsealed hatch cover. From there the water was going down in to the bilge. There was no electric water pump and we had to bail by hand with a saucepan under the whirring flywheel at the front of the engine.

As it got dark the engine started to sputter and we almost put into Fowey and then Plymouth. However we kept going and arrived in Cowes next afternoon just as many of my friends at the Thames were coming in from racing. I had to buy wine off other friends as we celebrated her arrival.

The engine continued to be unreliable. On one occasion I had the embarrassment of the engine failing when in the fairway at Cowes and having to be towed to our mooring by a Squadron launch.

Approaching Harwich at the end of the summer our young crew started to wind in the mast furling system. "Its going in really easily MrT". "yes but the sail is not moving". The gearing had broken.

That winter I had a lot of work done. I disliked the ugly mast furling main and decided to have a new fully battened main with lazy jacks. To do this I had a special aluminium extrusion made to fit in the aft side of the mast. Everybody at the yard tried to tell me that it was not possible. I also fitted an electric winch to the mast to hoist the new main.

I fitted a big new inverter and extra batteries. The main saloon was transformed with new seating.

Nick Franklin had half fitted a system to take the place of a bow thruster. This consisted of a large pump which was to connect to four tubes going to outlets on the four corners of the boat. Water was to be brought in through a connection in the bottom. The pump was to be driven by a flywheel and clutch attached to the front of the engine. To work it would have meant that the engine had to be going at full revs, just what you do not want when coming alongside. So I threw it all out and fitted a calorifier and a generator in its place.

I also fitted a water maker but never used it because we had such large water tanks.

In the galley I fitted a microwave. The gas bottles for the stove had been in the stern connected by a rubber tube through the engine compartment. Totally illegal. So I made new boxes for the gas bottles on deck by the mast.

A very old electromechanical Necko autohelm had never worked but was fitted with a good electric motor drive to the steering. I was able to match this to a new electronic system.

I fitted a good canopy over the cockpit which was not beautiful but worked well, particularly when sailing in poor weather. Later on, at Ruth's reasonable behest I fitted a plastic window in the roof so that you could see the sails when steering. One day we came on board to find that the binnacle had partly melted and had burn marks on top. Initially I thought that it was an electrical fault. My bad wiring? In fact water resting in the canopy above had made a lens so that strong sunlight had focused directly on the binnacle. A lucky escape.

Next year we had the engine out at Fox's yard because it was leaking oil and the bilge was full of grot. I also fitted a big electric water pump.

Coming out of Ramsgate I turned left rather too soon and touched the bottom. Suddenly the boat started to fill with water. Help! The pump did its job but we stopped in Dover to see if I had put a hole in the boat. The problem was that, although there was a U tube connection, the outlet for the pump was below the water line. Hitting the bottom had caused a pressure wave and the water was siphoning backwards into the boat. Easy to correct with the outlet above the water line.

It is hard to remember when I made the many other mods. Fitting central heating was fun with a water born system and fan driven radiators in all cabins. I used 140 push on connectors and only made one mistake.

The Seapro navigation system was the best at that time and rather expensive. However it worked well. I had a computer by the chart table and connected it to a colour printer. At the end of each trip I was able to give my crew a print out showing where we had been.

Another of Nick Franklin's inventions were the legs which wound down on each side of the boat out of holes built into the hull. The only problem was that he had used home made Tuffnol fittings on the screws and they were very hard to turn. It did mean that she did not need chocking up when ashore.

For Nick, attention to detail was everything. Beautiful woodwork which was not quite right first time had to be reworked. One cabinet maker told me that he had spent six weeks making the desk in the main saloon. Norman Gaches, the renowned woodcarver from Ryde, created carvings on both sides fore and aft to represent a Garuda, a large mythical bird-like creature or humanoid bird, that appears in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology. In Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu traditions, Shambhala is a mythical kingdom, whose reality is visionary or spiritual as much as physical or geographic. Shambhala is said to have inspired the concept of Shangri-La.

Nick applied his inventive mind in many other ways. A stack of tubes in the bow, our 'missile launchers', was installed to carry legs which were to support the mast on deck for



transport. They all had to be removed. The aluminium drop keel, was too tight in its box and was always jammed by the smallest of stones.

Because the original designer, Peter Brett, had died early in construction, Nick was able to change the design rather more than was wise. He increased the height of the mast and, to compensate put several more tons of lead in the bottom. As a result she sat about 6 inches below her designed water line. Nick had also decided to build the hull with a double bottom for safety's sake. The inside skin of this double bottom did not reach above the new water line.

I was very proud of the table I made for the main saloon. It came in two pieces and up to nine people could fit around it. I also made a bath using inflatable boat rubber which fitted in the cockpit behind the steering wheel.

Fitting a new engine comes as part of my adventures with the Royal Thames yacht Club. I owned Shambhala for 14 wonderful years. Towards the end the paintwork started to blister. We took her to Levington where they did a poor job. Next year she blistered again. We got the experts from the paint company to inspect and we were told that the problem was with the aluminium. I tried to tell them that the problem was with damp coming from under the wood gunwale and getting in the filler between the metal hull and the paint. I wanted them to put a seal line at this point. However they were adamant and so she was painted again at their expense. Soon she started to blister once more, just before I put her up for sale. Most aluminium hulls need a lot of filler to produce a smooth surface on the outside. Filler is porous and I am sure that this was the problem. I should not have listened to the "experts".

Shambhala was a difficult boat to sell as she needed someone with sufficient money and the ability to maintain a complex craft themselves. I nearly sold her to a very nice man from Yorkshire. Unfortunately he had to back off when his wife became aware of the cost of antifouling each year. I eventually sold her to a 78 year old overweight ex Shell executive who wanted to anchor her off his home in Formentura. He put in a bowthruster which was, totally unnecessary and which disfigured her. She was last seen in Spain with weed growing from her hull and a window stove in.

## 24. Synergy



Synergy

I thought of replacing Shambhala with a folk boat. However Ruth said that she was not going to cook sitting down.

"How about an MGC27? I have read these details about one" She said. "That is exactly the type of boat I had before". I replied.

We looked at a number of them and were very pleased to find Synergy. We have spent rather more on her than we originally paid and she is now in fine condition. We do not venture much beyond the Solent and the two of us can handle her in any weather.

## 25. The Royal Thames Yacht Club

In 1973, a good friend who also had a company from whom I purchased microswitches, (that's how life goes) suggested that I might like to join the Thames as it was good to have a London club in a nice location.

So I was proposed by Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess who rewrote the sailing rules after the war and was seconded by Stewart Morris, who was the only Brit to win a gold at the 1947 Olympics.

I did not use the club much for some time but eventually applied to join a team event in the USA. I was interviewed by David May at his flat in St. Katherine's Dock. At the end of the interview he asked me what I thought about some paintings of nude young men which were on his table. "Not really my thing" I replied. He was a brilliant skipper and a very interesting man so we got on well and I greatly enjoyed my introduction to team racing.

I got to know many other Thames members and went to many team racing events in America, at Bitter End in the Virgin Islands and at home.

Eventually I got on various committees but found many of the leading lights pretty staid London legal types. It was at about this time that I took the Botter to Cowes to be used as the finishing line for White Group.

When Peter Hunter was Vice Commodore and I was again on the General Committee, I suggested that someone should do something about celebrating the Millennium. Peter immediately said "Good idea Peter. Over to you".

I spent much time investigating various possibilities, talking to various authorities such as the London Port Authority and trying to engender enthusiasm from Peter's successor.

We had a good cruise to Southern Holland in 1999 in order to plan another visit there after the Thames rally the next year.

I arranged for Shambhala to be the saluting vessel for the sail past opposite Greenwich. Four weeks beforehand I asked our excellent engineer to attend to a small knocking noise in the engine. "Ooo, could be a little end, or even a big one. Could go at any time". A fine new engine from Sabre Perkins was fitted just in time.

On our way up the Thames to St. Katherine Dock, I was preparing lunch below when Shambhala hit a glancing blow on a buoy just below the surface and above the level of the double skin. Water started pouring in. One crew member was sent over the side to plug the leak from outside. I set to, trying to locate the leak from the inside at the back of the substantially built galley, tearing at doors and linings using blocks and tackle lowered through the skylight above. There were no boatyards nearby or places to beach her easily, so we decided to go into the dock. Careening her caused some consternation but did lift the hole above the water line. An excellent local boatman did a fine job patching the hole with fibreglass.

With our Commodore and the Commodore of the New York Yacht Club on board we anchored opposite Greenwich and took the salute as 50 yachts passed by. Although it rained heavily, no one was put off getting to the ball in the Painted Hall at Greenwich that evening. The next evening we had a grand party in the London docks with the other boats, all organised by Paul Antrobus. The race planned for the next day was abandoned due to gale force winds and several of us ended up with another party moored to a barge in the wastes of Queenborough. The subsequent cruise to Holland had been perfectly organised by Julian Hooper with moorings waiting for us in every port. On the way home we were privileged to come upon an assembly of Dunkirk Little Ships outside the harbour commemorating the Dunkirk evacuation at the beginning of the World War 2. The sight and sound of two Flying Fortresses passing overhead was overwhelming.

Shambhala was in regular use as a committee boat both in the Solent and in Burnham on Crouch. One year, motoring out of the River Alde in rough weather with one senior and much loved crew, Robin Forrestier Walker, there was a great noise and vibration. I thought we had caught a fishing line. Forward and reverse, forward and reverse, eventually it cleared. On arrival in the Crouch Robin went forward and called out "where is the anchor". I then remembered that the day before I had brought Shambhala alongside the quay at Aldeburgh by myself and had the anchor attached to a light line ready to drop, just in case something went wrong. I had forgotten to stow it properly afterwards so, bouncing around offshore, it had thrown itself overboard, as anchors do.

For the official launch of Bear of Britain in 2001, Shambhala came to the London Docks as escort. This also involved a memorable sail through Tower Bridge. On our way back down the deserted Thames the next day with two senior crew at the helm, mardling (Norfolk for deep discussion) as seniors do, we were under head sails with engine assistance. A call came over the VHF.

"Port of London Authority here. You are on the wrong side of the river".

Shambhala: "Just trying to keep our sails full".

PLA: "Get to the south side."

Shambhala: "We are sailing with due care and attention and there are no other vessels under way".

PLA: "Get to the south side".

So we did but a little later our crew drifted across again.

PLA: "You have failed to keep to the south side and are liable to prosecution".

Shambhala: "We hear what you say".

PLA: "Why are you flying a blue ensign?"

Shambhala: "Because we have every right to do so".

The RTYC Rally to Ireland in 2002 was memorable for several reasons. A distant cousin came along for two weeks. As a windsurfer she found the maze of ropes challenging but was soon handling everything perfectly. So Ruth stayed for six weeks and then took me home with her. We had mostly good weather and stopped twice in the Scilly Isles, returning via Brittany.

We arrived at Crosshaven during Cork Week, so had to go up the river from the Royal Cork Yacht Club to find a mooring. In Drakes Pool we hooked the loop from a vacant mooring over a cleat on deck and settled down for a quiet supper. As the tide rose the mooring lifted off the bottom and we started to float away. Try as we might, we could not get the loop off. An anchor watch was set. We moved the anchor position when the tide turned and towards dawn the mooring dropped back onto the bottom with no harm done.

The following year we sailed round to southern Brittany as far as La Trinite for another club rally. It was gloriously sunny, but Shambhala was uncomfortable in the heat. She was much better suited to colder climes. However, we enjoyed the cruising and, in particular, the Morbihan before setting off homewards again. At Etel the sands are flat and the entrance is obscure. Eventually the sole lady French pilot came on over the VHF "A droite, tout droite, a gauche" then something difficult to understand. Fortunately John Stork, who speaks good French was able to make out that she was saying "We should be sure to miss the fireworks barge in the middle of the river". It was Bastille day, the fireworks were splendid, and we were thanked by the locals for dressing overall.

In 2004 we sailed to Oslo, achieving this, as those who like their creature comforts (and a good restaurant for dinner) do, without a single night at sea. We went through Holland with the mast up, along the north German coast and through the Kiel canal. The Danish islands, Copenhagen, Gothenburg and the west coast of Sweden took us on to Oslo. From there the beautiful east coast of Norway led us down to Arendal. This was followed by a hop across to Jutland, then retracing our route home. 14 weeks, 6 crew changes, mostly with Thames members, and we were back before the season ended in the UK.

We normally wintered on the East Coast. After a very rough passage from Brighton we entered Dover harbour under engine in 45 knots of wind and big seas with the bowsprit plunging in to the waves. Next day we had a peaceful sail to Ipswich in a light wind. To my surprise I found water coming up through the top of the gearbox cover. The heat exchanger had failed and the gearbox was being lubricated by seawater only. The thought of gear failure in the entrance to Dover harbour the previous evening was sobering.

Shambhala was able to win the coveted Victoria Cup at the Cumberland Regatta just once, in 2006. She was not too good upwind, but courtesy of Malcolm's Cumberland handicapping system, a course which seemed to be mostly reaching, and with the tide under us in the good breeze, we prevailed.

We joined a number of Thames cruises to France and the West Country. In 2007, after a good lunch with other boats near the Rade de Pommelin we touched bottom taking a buoy too close. Water came in through the bottom of the keel and we dried out in Treguier with the top of the mast attached to a local pissoire. Fibreglass was used for a temporary repair.

Under the influence of an excellent Laying up Dinner in 2008 I agreed with Peter Hunter that we should do the Round the Island Race. With a crew of twelve and trying to avoid others in the melee, we were eight minutes late starting and were berated by the next fleet to start who could not believe we were racing. In the narrows passing Hurst Castle a small boat tacked on to starboard immediately under our bow and called for water. We were fortunate to have Gwynne Lawrence on the mainsheet who could ease everything quickly and enable Shambhala to bear away. On the broad reach down the south side of the island Shambhala was in her element and as fast as anyone. We finished two thirds of the way down our class which was really quite creditable.

As our young families grew up and wanted their own adventures and as some of our crew dropped off their perches, we felt it was time to move on. So in 2011 Shambhala was sold and we changed to a much smaller boat which the two of us could handle comfortably. No regrets, but what fun Shambhala has given us and so many others.

My time as Rear Commodore Sailing was very enjoyable. I was able to increase the number of team racing and cruising events considerably. Even when not in the team, attending team racing in America and watching four aside young teams battling it out was fascinating. We got back from that trip only to hear of the 9/11 disaster soon after.

Other innovations included a day on the water for all the Thames staff. We had lots of cooperation from other boat owners. For the Thames staff, a day on the Solent was a complete revelation and we all get to know each other much better.

I also organised several regional events on the East Coast. The first was when we had Dash and included a dinner in Ipswich then a sail up to Aldeburgh. Off the coast in force 7 with the wind behind, my crew including Tony Bird and Bob Durie were alarmed by the sandy colour of the East Coast water and our almost blind entry into the river Alde.

On another occasion we had a fine dinner at the Jockey Club in Newmarket. With the same traditions as the Thames, you only had to change the pictures on the walls. It was always necessary to sit down with the phone for an evening beforehand to contact all the local members (they seemed to be totally illiterate). The only other person to organise an away weekend was Bob Durie who gave us a very enjoyable event in Bristol. I still believe that it is a great way of getting new members and keeping out of town members involved. Again, sadly it has been lost.

Another of my innovations was The Committee Room Challenge. The objective was to bring together racing, cruising and social members with teams from the different committees.. We went to Malta twice in the late autumn and had some good two boat team racing.

It was good to be able to apply my out of the box way of thinking to something completely different to manufacturing. I acquired a reputation as being mildly eccentric, which I am happy to acknowledge. Part of this is my continued love of wearing stripy trousers. I made the first pair myself then got them made by my secretary's sister. I used deck chair canvas , then ticking and now there is a wonderful on line source.

When I stepped down as Rear Commodore Sailing my friends gave me a very fine painting of Shambhala by Martin Mackrill.

My involvement with the club has continued with supervising berthing on the Thames Hamble Pontoon. I have now done this for many years, in recent times with the essential computer input from Ruth.

## **26. Moving On**

Jayne worked incredibly hard developing her business, Cambridge Personnel. To start with, it was the only employment agency in Cambridge and she built up a very successful and profitable business. This eventually ran its course and she needed new pursuits.

She was particularly keen to get away from Crofts Place and so we motored all round Suffolk and Cambridgeshire looking for alternatives.

And this was how The Crystal Palace was born.

## **27. The Crystal Palace**

We spent a day bicycling around Bury St. Edmunds. I found a south facing field behind a high brick wall, near the centre and sloping down to the river Lark. I said "If that site ever became available, it would be ideal to build on".

Lo and behold - it was for sale. For £18,000 we got three acres and a range of outbuildings.

The Crystal Palace Looms Lane Bury St. Edmunds



I had ideas for a low rise thermally efficient house similar to ones I had seen in Portugal. But then we sold our boat Pearl to Michael and Patty Hopkins and they invited us to their state of the art house in Hampstead. We were smitten.

Michael was known as one of the leading architects of his time. He put in clever plans and a photo montage showing that our house would not break the skyline when viewed from the far side of the river. The planners attitude was "Well we had better allow one ultramodern house in Bury". So permission was granted without comment.

I wanted an interesting house which was full of my ideas and was also within my budget. Michael wanted to build an award winning house. And that is where the conflict between us began.

I wanted more insulation on the roof. Michael wanted just building regs which was minimal. The local building regs people looked at the spec for the steel columns and questioned whether they were strong enough. I tried to remember my maths regarding bending moments and thought that the building regs people were right. Michael was incensed that locals could know better than his posh London designers. So we parted company.

Huge concrete foundations had been specified. The Building Inspectors questioned the mix of the cement which had to go off for testing. They were right but it was impossible to remove the concrete which was already set. So we put in new foundations offset diagonally from the old.

In order to save cost I awarded different contracts for different parts of the construction. This worked quite well. I also did some of the tricky bits myself when local builders were scratching their heads. This was an enjoyable challenge.

The largest glass panels at that time were 8 by 8 foot and I wanted as little obstruction of the view as possible. This meant that the frames had to be as narrow as possible. So I designed my own frames and fitted rolling slides. I had seen seals on aircraft using a tube which flattened when evacuated to allow the door to open. So I tried the same thing using sensing edge extrusions from Herga. They never worked very well because of problems sealing the tubes on the corners. However the overall effect was good.

The floor and the ceiling were built using corrugated steel. This made it easy for laying miles of piping for heating to cover the whole floor and ceiling. The object was to have a low temperature heating system which did not take much to heat up. That part worked wonderfully and the overall feeling inside was very pleasant.

The part of the heating system which was really mad was to install a huge straw burner which would take whole bales of straw. Rolling whole bales into the house was not a good idea.

We built a swimming pool at the front and the intention was to cover this in the winter and to use it as a heat store. Unfortunately we did not live there long enough to try that aspect out.

I built a wet bathroom. The bath was of canvas slung on a stainless steel tubular frame. You pushed this up against taps on the wall to fill it. It had a tube like an elephants trunk in the bottom to let it out. If you wanted half a bath you put a chair under one end.

The big overhanging eaves shaded the windows from the sun in the summer and with these large windows open it was very pleasant to live in. In the winter, the low sun did fall on the windows and so provided a lot of heat gain.

Another lovely experience was being in the warm with a snow storm whirling around outside.

We only lived at the Crystal Palace for three years during which time Toby and Hugo were born. I built an optimist inside the house and Toby sailed it on the swimming pool. However open plan living did not suit family living and we decided to move.

We found a wonderful large ancient brick house in the countryside and even moved some of our rubbish into their outhouse. The contract was on table to sign. Then Jayne discovered Risby. "You must come and have a look" she said. I was dismayed. I had made up my mind. I was soon to change it.

It took 9 months to sell the Crystal Palace and our dentist, the delightful Martin Lightfoot then lived there for 30 years.

## **28. Risby Place**

The origins of Risby Place are obscure. Wood panelling in the dining room and some of the old doors appear to be of great age. The exterior was probably remodelled and expanded about 100 years ago when it was purchased by the Burrell family who had made their money constructing steam engines in Thetford. They then purchased a lot of land around Risby and had a large apple farm. It is clear that their life style before the war was comfortable, with two tennis courts and a squash court. Huge water tanks were installed in the attic where there were also large storage cupboards to store food in case of invasion during the war. They sold out to the Rothschild family after the war. The Rothschilds never lived at Risby Place and the whole estate was allowed to decay gently. The squash court and more large sheds were converted to produce turkeys. It is probable that the locals were able to quietly milk the situation. It was said that on one occasion Lord Rothschild invited the MD of Marks and Spencer along to give his advice on what to do with the place.

Financing the purchase of Risby Place was a challenge as we had not sold the Crystal Palace. However we were able to use the Pension Fund to buy the adjoining barn.

Once the Crystal palace was sold we were able to make improvements. We put in a swimming pool. The squash court was easy to repair with a new floor. We also had to fill the ventilation holes in the walls cut when it was used to breed turkeys.

Risby Place has 15 bedrooms, three bathrooms and lots of room for entertaining. Unfortunately Jayne resisted my suggestions regarding making any changes or improvements.

## **29. Family Life**

As sometimes happens, Toby was born after we had sold Crofts Place and before we could move into the Crystal Palace. However, fortuitously, we had purchased a fine stable

block behind the Crystal Palace. We spray painted the inside white and had plenty of room to camp there including our furniture. So this was where Toby spent his first few weeks. Hugo arrived just over a year later and Lisa after we had moved to Risby Place. They all went to Moreton Hall Preparatory School. This catholic school was run by the Varleys and had quite a number of pupils from overseas. Most of the parents were a generation younger than us and we made many new friends.

Toby went from Moreton Hall directly to Radley, probably a year earlier than necessary as he found the first year at Radley very difficult.

Eventually we were not happy with the level of education at Moreton Hall and moved Hugo to Orwell Park near Ipswich. From there he also went on to Radley. I do not think that Radley suited either of them particularly well.

Lisa was the first girl to go to Orwell, starting as a day girl. When she came home after the first day I asked her how she had got on. "Well dad, some of the boys were a problem so I kicked them where it hurt most and have had no problem since". After the first term she went as a boarder and then on to Oundle, a good choice.

Sailing started in Optimists with a wooden boat I built in the Crystal Palace. Toby sailed it on the swimming pool, rounding off the corners. Later on they all had optimists but Lisa was far more attracted to horses.

We acquired a wonderful pony, Ginger Biscuit who had already had several owners. Later on Lisa had more horses. She was fortunate to have a wonderful stable to go to where she acquired great skill and the ability to look after the horses and the stable really well.

Juggling the needs of optimists sailing and riding was not easy. Jayne drove many miles taking them to every kind of event, not forgetting swimming.

When Toby was 14 he said that he would like to go sailing on the Broads for a week with his friends. I asked my friend Tim Whelpton if we could hire a sailing cruiser from him. His answer was "If I cannot hire a boat to a Tracey, I cannot hire one to anybody". Jayne insisted that an older boy go along as well. So Alex Von Molle, aged 17 joined them. Each evening they played Monopoly with an egg cup of whisky as a penalty. As a result most of the sailing was in the afternoons. They had a great time and Toby was proud to tell me that they had "shot the bridges".

We went skiing most winters starting in Flaine. The advantage there was that all the slopes ended in the same place so that it was more difficult to lose them. However the boys would keep disappearing into the trees, going under branches where I could not follow. On one occasion Hugo fell into a hole when out of my sight and it took a long time to find him.

The squash court at Risby was well used and enabled me to enjoy many games with my family. Later on, when Toby was at home, we regularly went bicycling locally before breakfast. It was very good for both of us and we discovered many tracks and byroads.

### **30. Other Involvement**

Having a great team at Herga, I was able to direct affairs with a light hand. My role was to innovate and to guide, checking that we stayed on course. So I had time to get involved elsewhere and in so doing learnt a great deal. It was experience which I was then able to pass on to Herga.



## **The Builder Group.**

All the shareholders had to be members of the family. My uncle had been the family representative on the board as had Ruth's father. It was pure nepotism to be offered the role which I held for over 15 years. Fortunately for me there were no other family members who knew much about business.

When I started to attend monthly meetings, the Chairman was a solid but unimaginative accountant and the company had not moved forward for a long time. Publishing a well respected weekly journal had produced regular profits for many years. This all changed when Brian Griffin became chairman. He took on a fine team. As long as they kept to publishing, the journals they produced all made money. I was made chairman of the publication for the Institution of Building Service Engineers, a role which enabled me to add Fellow of that institute as well as Fellow of the Institute of Electrical Engineers to my name. Totally undeserved, it was a role for which I had no qualification at all.

I was also a director of an exhibition display company. This was not successful as it was outside my experience or that of Brian Griffin. Never mind, it was all part of the learning curve.

The Builder Group prospered and we eventually floated on the Stock Exchange. Then came the day when the whole company was to be purchased at a great price, no less than a PE ratio of 42. My job was to get 75% of the shareholders to agree to the sale. Sitting on the bank of Grafham Water while my boys sailed their optimists, I telephoned my relations using one of the first portable phones, a huge affair with a briefcase size control. Some of the dodderly oldies in the Cotswolds wanted to go and consult their accountants in Bath. "Listen to me" I said "You have never had an offer like this in your life".

Soon after we had completed the sale the stock market plunged and the jobs pages in the magazine evaporated. These had been the backbone of the company's profits which evaporated as well.

## **The West Suffolk Community Health Trust.**

My invitation to become a non executive director of this health trust was not exactly nepotism but fairly close. The Chairman, Rosie Varley had been head mistress at Moreton Hall School where I had got to know her quite well. I sat on the board with another entrepreneur, Andrew Deacon. We were known as Tweedledum and Tweedledee because we kept throwing our rattles out of the apochrifal basket and asking why all the time. Also on the board was Kay Fisher. I had a high opinion of all three of them. The rest were sincere bureaucrats who were kind enough to listen to us and follow our lead.

I was impressed by the dedication and hard work of everybody I met. Not surprisingly, they were not people who were accustomed to thinking laterally.

Two events illustrate how we helped. They wanted to rebuild the Newmarket Hospital and were excited to have £8 million approved to spend from central funds. "No" I said, "We are going to build the best possible hospital in Newmarket to meet the requirements of Newmarket with a maximum of £8 million and we will see how much less can do it for".

How about architects? "We pay RIBA fees" they said. "Nobody pays RIBA fees" we replied. "Let us find architects who will accept payment for what they save rather than what they spend". The hospital was built on time, cost considerably less than £8 million and everybody was delighted with the outcome. It also meant that we could charge lower rates for bed places.

On another occasion they were having a dispute with a building contractor and their lawyers were advising them to pursue their claim. I discovered that the contractor had gone bust and pursuing their claim would only line the pockets of the lawyers with nothing left

for the Trust. We suggested that they should speak to the head of the law firm and they dropped the case.

I did this job for about three years and enjoyed the very different environment. I did not have time to pursue some of the areas which were clearly very inefficient. It was also clear that the bureaucratic NHS found it almost impossible to get rid of useless staff.

## **31 Our African Adventure**

At the start of her gap year, I went to Africa for four weeks with my daughter Lisa. She had wanted to include riding in the adventure, so I had a session or two on Michael Mc-Swinney's retired polo ponies, my only experience of riding at that time.

It was before everything really went downhill in Zimbabwe. We stayed with my cousins on their three farms there. At Bridget's her son treated the Africans as mud. CG was completely different and had had an African manager for 15 years. Everybody there smiled. He was full of the latest farming projects including tomatoes grown hydroponically and onions in large heated storage units so that they could be put on the market at the best time. Martin was different again with 500 workers who treated him as god, a role he was pleased to accept. He told me that he had a very bright chap who could repair everything electronic. "How Lucky for you, where are you sending him for training?". "O no" was the reply "He was self taught". Then his wife took Lisa to another room to paint her picture. Lisa came back gobsmacked. "She wanted to know if I am saved" she said.

Then we went to a wonderful safari park on the edge of Lake Kariba, very simple with only two other guests. After that we canoed down the Zambezi for four days followed by white water rafting below Victoria Falls. From there we went to a posh safari park in the Okevango. Flying out there I heard the pilot call ahead "I think we have a newly married couple here". I told him that I was happy to sleep in the same room as Lisa but not in the same bed.

In Lesotho we stayed at a wonderful camp high in the hills and danced, o how we danced. Next day we set off with a guide on four Basuto ponies, two for us, one for the guide and one was a pack horse. There was a deep gully with a stream at the bottom. The pony went straight up to the edge and proceeded to zig zag down the precipice. The zigzags were so tight that the ponies had to stop and shuffle round at each corner. When we got to the bottom I said to Lisa "I don't think I am going to cope with this". "Don't be a wimp" she replied. We stayed in wonderful remote villages where the wheel had not arrived. There was just one chief's wife who could speak English and she said to Lisa "Are you his nurse?"

Next stop was Grahamstown staying with cousin Andrew. There was a festival downtown and Andrew took us there, the only white people. On the way in they all knew Andrew and treated him with great respect. All types of acts followed from school choirs to gum boot dancing. After an hour or so Andrew said "Are you bored? do you want to go now?". "No way" we replied. Grahamstown was in an amazing time warp with shops as they were 50 years ago. For example, in the book shop the books were all behind glass doors and the cashiers used a sort of zip wire system to move receipts around.

It was a fantastic adventure, carefully planned beforehand. What a lucky chap to go with such a lovely girl.

## 32 New Horizons

Life got increasingly difficult at Risby and I decided that it was time to move on. I did not have a plan for the future. However my sister Jill suggested that I should meet up with our third cousin Ruth whose husband had died 3 years before. We met up and agreed that she should come sailing on Shambhala for a couple of weeks on my planned trip to Ireland. She soon found her feet as a quick learning crew.

## 33. Maidenhead

After our voyage to Ireland, coming back to Ruth's house in Maidenhead was full of surprises. I did not want to stay there indefinitely and so we embarked on a lot of work to get it in good condition for sale. Everything needed painting, a fireplace needed removing, flooring and rotten windows had to be mended or replaced.

We had a good party when we invited many of the earlier crew of Shambhala to come for lunch.

Then we started looking around for our next move.

At about this time I was concerned that I was having to pee too often and wondered if my prostate was the problem. I went to a local consultant who was keen to spend my money so took no further action. After we had moved this eventually this led to an operation in Winchester to clear my urinary passage. Fortunately there has been no evidence of cancer there.

## 34. Gangbridge Cottage



Gangbridge Cottage

We wanted to be within reach of London, the sea and with good access to our windsurfing events. We saw a nice house at Warsash but the hinterland there and road access is

poor. We also found a nice house east of Alresford but there was no local community. We came to St Mary Bourne and in the shop a cheerful lady told us about all the goings on. It has proved to be an ideal location. The previous owner had died and had even left her handbag on the kitchen sideboard. There was much to do to make it right for us.

There was a scruffy shed in the garden and we got planning permission to replace it with a garage. Two things made the garage ideal. We put in a mezzanine floor for storage with a bowed translucent roof which cannot be seen from the ground. We also installed a fibreglass pit which just had to be lowered into a hole cut in the ground and always stays dry.

Next we got expensive garden planners to suggest what to do with our little cottage garden. Worth every penny. We did think of a swimming pond but fortunately decided against it as it would have been expensive and we are away for so much of the summer any way. Our three ponds with a waterfall work really well.

We tried to get permission to put in a conservatory but lost, even on appeal. However we were able to convert the newer end of the house to cut out the tiny kitchen and the pokey dining room and to make one big living room kitchen. Our combined talents and experience have produced a result which we would not change in any way if we were going to do it again.

Nearly all of the house has been rethatched and should last us out.

Our attached cottage Little Thatch has now been lived in by the same tenant, Monica, for several years. We improved it by putting in central heating and she looks after it and her garden with great pride.

The field now has two ponies (not ours) which are much loved.

The garage houses our beloved VW van in the winter plus a great deal of Ruth's windsurfing gear.

The old garage near the house is now my workshop. In the old days, I used to be able to go down to the factory if I needed to use a metal lathe. So it has been necessary to equip my new workshop with all the tools I need.

On eBay we found that someone in the Midlands wanted to sell a complete workshop after her partner had died. After collecting a large wood lathe for Ruth from Preston, we went there with our trailer. We could hardly get it all into the trailer with bits sticking out at all angles. Then the van started to hiccup on the way home. It was a long day.

Thinking it was "The right thing to do", I offered my services and became a Trustee of the village hall. At the first meeting I suggested that it would be helpful if the accounts were available before the meeting so that we could all consider them in advance. "Its perfectly satisfactory as we do it now" They said.

The chairman was a very nice Judge and I suggested privately to him that he was acting more like a judge than a chairman. Not well received.

I suggested that a dishwasher might be good for the kitchen. "Far too expensive" They said. So I went away and found that commercial dishwashers were not expensive. Eventually they agreed that I could come up with proposals to improve the kitchen but that the £50,000 they had in reserve (In the Anglo Irish Bank of all places) was not to be used. So I raised £45,000 elsewhere and there is now a completely new well equipped kitchen. The ladies who provided the monthly lunch were delighted. The other Trustees noses were put out of joint and I was not given much credit. So I resigned.

In Suffolk I had built up a good reputation as a good employer and successful businessman. Unfortunately they did not know me in Hampshire. Perhaps I should have been more forthright in telling them who I was. St. May Bourne is a very nice village but also very conservative with a small c.

Some time after settling in St. Mary Bourne I developed an illness which took away all my energy. I felt as if the end of the world was nigh. Having private medical insurance, I was



seen by many specialists including a Dr. Besser, the top endocrinologist in Harley Street. None of them could find anything wrong with me. Eventually I went to an alternative health doctor in Winchester, Dr David Owen and he gave me pills to help my adrenal glands. With time I have put this illness completely behind me. I now believe that the illness was psychosomatic and related to several different problems at that time. Now that I have come to understand and believe in myself fully, there is no more problem and I am in good health.

### 35. Windsurfing

I enjoyed learning to windsurf and did get to the stage where I hooked in on the boom and with my feet in the toe straps I could plane away. However my shoulder did not like the strain and so now my main windsurfing duty is helping to run racing events.

Seavets, the windsurfing club for seniors which depends on Ruth for its survival, takes us to many inland reservoirs and to the south coast. We also had

several trips to Minorca Sailing, a very well organised windsurfing and dinghy sailing organisation on the north coast of Minorca.

### 36. The VW Van



Our VW van with home made sun shade

We decided to change the VW van which Ruth had owned for some time. We found a company near Edinburgh, Jerba who were official VW converters and would do exactly what we wanted. The result has been totally satisfactory and we have maximum mobility to go wherever we want with plenty of comfort and warmth when needed.

We have an inflatable pneumatic tent when we need extra space and two electric bikes which we hang on the stern. Each year we seem to make some small improvement and then ask ourselves why we had not done it before.

We have had many good holidays touring most of southern Europe for up to four weeks at a time..

### **37. The Ocean Youth Trust**

A great privilege for me today is to be able to help fund the Ocean Youth Trust and I will be leaving a legacy for them in my will.

The Ocean Youth Trust started as the Ocean Youth Club and was founded by Chris Ellis, who has influenced my life so much.

They take children with all sorts of problems on short voyages in their wonderful boat Prolific. I get wonderful detailed reports regarding these kids and the influence that a week on the water can give.

It is one charity where I know how the money is being spent and I am happy that my contribution will not be wasted

### **38. Religion**

One advantage of retirement after a long active life is that one has more time to think through one's fundamental beliefs. As with my political beliefs, my religious belief has changed from doubt and agnosticism to unbelief.

My Father was a very sincere Christian. Mother would go along with him when necessary but was agnostic.

At Radley I had been taught that the Church of England was the only true faith and that every other belief was wrong. I was a good attendant at chapel, sang in the choir and even became an altar boy. When the kids were small I used to take them to morning service in the Cathedral in Bury St. Edmunds. So my belief, acquired through my father and my education, was still strong.

However I always had problems with some aspects of dogma and particularly found St. Paul difficult. I could not understand how he knew so much about Christ when the gospels were not written until 60 years after Christ died.

In about 2000, whilst still in Bury, a group of us went to evening classes led by Charles Freeman and I read his book AD381. This explains that the Trinity was a convenient invention of the Roman Emperor with no basis on the life of Christ. After this I started to question much of the rest of the dogma of the church.

When we came to St. Mary Bourne we started to go to church again. However, with more time for reading, my doubts continued to develop as well. The book Why Christianity Must Change or Die by John Selby Spong set me thinking further. The Darkening Age by Catherine Nixey shows how Christianity was imposed on the known world in the fourth century AD. It is an amazing account regarding the tunnel vision of the early Christian church and how there were so many versions of the the christian story at that time. The great thinking of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were ignored. The Unauthorised Version of the Bible by Robin Lane Fox shows how you can believe almost anything by selecting the bits of the bible which you want to believe.

So today I am not prepared to go to church where I am asked to get up and say a creed which I do not believe in. I speak to other friends who do go to church and ask them if they really believe everything in the creed. They say possibly not but they do it anyway to go along with everybody else. This is dishonest and makes me question whether they really think deeply about anything.

I have read elsewhere that "As people get richer and better educated, they abandon the crutch of belief in dogma and rely more on reason". I agree.

The church today still tries to rely on their interpretation of the teachings of the bible. But the world today it is very different, better informed and we need to think differently about everything from same sex marriage to assisted dying.

I believe that we have done enormous harm in destroying the fine traditions and beliefs of other indigenous people around the world. Instead of listening and learning from them our forbears rejected them. Another book, Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist by Patrick Batchelor made me realise how the evolution of Buddhism and Christianity were not dissimilar and how pure Buddhism has much to offer. Both started with good men who had a fine philosophy. As soon as they died, their followers distorted, changed and added to the original belief, often just for their own advantage.

I do not fear death. If there is an afterlife, that is just fine. My record in this life and what I pass on to the next generation is what matters.

I have become a Humanist whose people are doing great work to explode old myths and to reduce the present excessive power of a church where only 4% of young people attend regularly.

Buckminster Fuller said “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change things build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” Perhaps this is the way forward for Climate Change.

### **39. Climate Change and Population Matters**

Climate change is happening fast and it could be that we are already beyond the tipping point where we can do anything about it. I fear greatly for the state of the world which my grandchildren will inhabit in 50 year’s time.

Never before in history has it been necessary for the whole of mankind to work together to solve these problems. Unfortunately those who rule much of the world today talk a lot but show little inclination to take the drastic action which is needed. This is in spite of the fact that so many new scientific reports say that measures such as CO2 levels are getting worse far more quickly than previously predicted.

If we go on as we are at present the world will need 70% more food in 50 years. The population of Nigeria is set to double in the next 50 years as is the case in other countries.

We are taking some action in the UK. But India with 15 times the population is building more coal fired power stations as is China and much of the rest of the world. OK, less developed countries consume much less than us but most are getting richer and becoming bigger consumers. All the large fast developing countries have a significant number of rich people who consume as much as rich Europeans.

I strongly believe that population reduction is the only long term solution. That is why I am a member of Population Matters and I intend to leave a legacy for them in my will.

A smaller population would provide more space for everybody. There would be more wildlife because less land would be used for farming. A shortage of young labour would result in higher wages at the bottom end of the scale, encouraging increased automation and productivity overall.

It does not mean a reduction in the standard of living for most of us. It does mean a substantial change in the structure of business and employment with less time needing to be spent on construction and infrastructure.

We have become stuck with the philosophy of continuous growth. The real problem is fear of change

I cannot believe that well intentioned people such as Christians in the developed world do not want everybody in the rest of the world to be able to enjoy good health, good food and opportunity through education. A smaller population is the only way of achieving this. So why do these people duck the issue.

I support the organisation Population Matters which is doing great work to promote the subject and to encourage birth control and the education of women.

## **40. Politics**

I started as a Little Conservative (it was a very active organisation in my teens) and was a member of the Conservative Party until about ten years ago. Now I am mildly left of centre. I disliked the right wing conservatives of the Johnson era. Instead of locking up young offenders we should be looking at the causes of the problem. We need to spend much more on those with less opportunity than us. We need to provide more for youth clubs, social services and real help for those at the bottom of the pile.

The tricky thing is that the top earners in society also pay the most tax. So it is necessary to have a system which bleeds them as much as possible without making them leave the country. I am in favour of a wealth tax for the very rich, say with assets over £10 million. I also believe that wealth should churn so that very large inherited wealth is taxed heavily.

However the creation of a better world is best achieved where innovation and new business is encouraged. This is what I have tried to do. This includes better ways of living, of employing people and of caring for others. Making money through endeavour and the willingness to take risk is good.

Big business has become far too strong when its sole objective is increasing profit. To see a company's share price go up just after they have shed a whole lot of workers shows how business loses sight of what is really important.

At the same time I have seen the innate inefficiency of state owned operations such as the NHS. This is not to criticise the wonderful committed people who work in it. It is said that the present crisis with the Covid-19 virus has resulted in more change in the NHS in one month than in the previous 20 years. The same thing happened at the start of both world wars.

A return to nationalising everything would never work. It would take away all incentive to strive for success. Government is poor at innovation and change. Look what happens when the army tries to take control of a country, as in Egypt, Myanmar and Thailand

## **41. Today**

It is 2023 and my greatest pleasure is having three children and three grandchildren who all look after each other and me.

Ruth and I have many interests in common and life is good.





