THE ROAD UPHILL

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Preface

This memoir of my working life is for my children and grandchildren.
It represents only a part of my life. It says little about my wife and family, who are the most important people in it: Brigitte especially, because without her constant love, help and understanding I could have done very little: would not even have survived a heat-stroke on a holiday in Spain. Whatever I may have achieved was done, not just to satisfy ambition, but to provide a shelter under which you could all thrive and flourish. Brigitte and I have always felt that to help small children grow and develop their own skills and interests is a great and enjoyable privilege; and no-one could have done it better than she.

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Chapter One: Home and childhood 1920 - 1937

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.

It is odd that a poem I've always hated should stick in my mind. It was by Christina Rossetti, and I first heard it at my primary school at Western Road, Sheffield, when I was about nine. I disliked it partly because it seemed like all the other finger-wagging instructions that adults inflict on children, such as: 'eat up your greens'. I also felt that, coming from a young woman teacher, it was 'sissy', as compared with the robust lines from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* which the headmaster made us learn a month or so later: Cassius is speaking about Julius Caesar and his powers of leadership:

For once upon a raw and gusty day,
The troubled Tiber chafing at her shores,
Caesar said to me, 'Darest thou, Cassius, now
Leap in with me into this angry flood,
And swim to yonder point?' Upon the word,
Accoutred as I was, I plunged in,
And bade him follow: so indeed he did.
The torrent roar'd; and we did buffet it
With lusty sinews.

This was my first introduction to Shakespeare, and I have enjoyed his muscular use of words ever since. But why did the Rossetti also survive in my memory? Was it because I always felt that a hill - there were many in Sheffield - was a familiar challenge? In looking back over eighty-four years it does seem that my life has involved a lot of climbing: both mental and physical, and hills more often than mountains. So the Rossetti quotation seems to provide as good a title for this memoir as any.

My parents, Ernest Kay and May Friskney, were married in January 1918 at the Baptist Church in Hillsborough, Sheffield. He was almost 23, she was 19. He came from a large family. His father, George Kay, was a working cutler, proud of his skill. He came from Stannington, a bleak hilltop village to the north of Sheffield. Despite a long lifetime spent grinding knives and scissors he still had the looks and bearing of a countryman, used to a rough hill climate. He and his wife Annie Elizabeth had six sons and one daughter, all married; and all the marriages lasted. All but my father and mother seemed to accept without question the conditions of working-class life in which they grew up. But my parents were more ambitious. My father was always bright at his elementary school and wanted to take the exam for entrance to secondary school when he was eleven. But his father would not let him: a waste of time, he said. 'Tha mun learn summat practical'. My father borrowed a copy of the exam papers and wrote down his own answers: he was told that if he had taken the examination he would have passed. But he had to stay on at the elementary school until he was old enough at thirteen to take a job.

We should not be too hard on my grandfather: with seven children to support, he needed every penny to make ends meet. And in those days, people of his sort did not believe in borrowing money: what they couldn't afford they went without.

My father's job was at one of the better cutlery factories in Sheffield, George Wostenholme's: a dismal 18th-century building in which ancient work routines still flourished. My father was a modest, unassuming man, muscular but short, like most workpeople living in the sooty atmosphere of Sheffield at the time. He was shy and reserved, but with a friendly and straightforward manner and much energy and ambition. Following steady application to his work as a despatch clerk (he took evening lessons in Spanish at Sheffield University in order to boost the firm's exports to South America) he learned how pocket-knives were made, and attracted the interest of his managing director, Frank Colver, who eventually made him manager of the pocket-knife department. He never earned more than a modest salary, probably not more than £300 a year until after the Second World War; but at least he had a regular income. With prudent management he managed to buy an Austin 10 car and a small house in Forres Rd., on high ground between Crookes and Crosspool. The house cost £500. A similar house to day would be worth about £100,000, reflecting change in the value of money over the years. (Of course, with continuing inflation, every pound buys less). Anxious to give his children a better future he gave steady encouragement to me and my younger sister Shirley to work hard at school: we both won scholarships to the best local schools and on to Sheffield University. He never wasted a penny, never drank beer, and a present of a bottle of sherry would last him a year. But he did smoke, a habit formed during the First World War when soldiers were given free cigarettes during off-duty breaks. He eventually died of lung cancer, after 78 years of otherwise frugal and healthy living.

I can remember little of my cousins, either on my mother's or my father's side. We were not a close-knit family; the telephone was a middle-class luxury; few people in our circle had a car; few of our relatives found letter writing easy. I suspect that among Ernest's brothers there was some resentment of his ambition; and my mother, despite a rough upbringing following the death of her father when she was twelve, was regarded as having ideas above her station. She was born a Friskney. As this Danish name indicates - meaning 'fresh-water stream' - her family originally came from a village of this name near the Wash, in Lincolnshire. From later research it has been possible to trace the name through a line of ordinary people living in small Lincolnshire villages, people such as blacksmiths, farmers, a cordwainer (shoemaker, probably home-based). The earliest recorded ancestor in a direct line was Edward Freshney, born at East Barkwith in Lincolnshire in 1590. It is probable that his family changed its name from Friskney during the Middle Ages; it reverted to Friskney later. It is still a rare name. My mother knew nothing of this later research, but her brother Leslie Ronald Friskney, who worked as a clerk in a Sheffield steelworks, often spoke vaguely of a family tradition: ' there must be a family seat somewhere; the name appears in Burke's Peerage' etc. He was an entertaining chap, a great wag, but I don't think he knew what he was talking about. I have since seen evidence that a certain Ranulph-de-Friskeneye held an appointment under King Edward I to survey and repair the sea coast of Lindsey, and in 1303 he received a licence to build a substantial mansion of stone and lime. But no-one can be sure that Ranulph and his heirs were direct ancestors of the Edward Freshney, born in 1590, to whom my mother could

have traced her own origins had she known how... Medieval records are untrustworthy unless a legal transfer of property is involved.

My mother, May Friskney, was born on 7 March 1898 in Leicester. Her father was Thomas Leonard Friskney, son of a blacksmith. Her mother, who had married young, was a member of the Enderby clan, mostly professional or business people based on Boston. Thomas Leonard Friskney died in 1910. My mother, at the age of 12, had to look after her two older brothers Albert and Leslie Ronald and her younger sisters Edyth and Nora while her mother, my grandmother, went out to work, mostly as a cleaner. I think my grandmother had little help from her Enderby relatives, who disapproved of her marriage to the shiftless Thomas Leonard. At some stage before the First World War my mother and her two brothers moved to Sheffield, while her mother moved to Leicester with her second husband, named Fletcher.

My mother remembered little of her father, who was often away working as a commercial traveller (we would now call him a sales representative). But she did remember that he loved to sit at the piano playing hymn tunes. It may have been from him that she and I inherited musical interests. But her Enderby grandmother was also musical. I met her once on a visit to Boston as a sixth-former. I had cycled in one day from Sheffield to Boston, using main roads then carrying far less traffic than now, and enjoying the vast flat landscape with its dramatic cloud formations, and the distant view of Lincoln cathedral. I stayed with my mother's Aunt Ada and met several of the Enderby relatives, including my great - grandmother who still, at a high age, managed a music shop in which she exercised autocratic powers. She sold sheet music but refused to stock jazz or pop songs, however popular. Every day she would climb up a steep winding staircase to an upper room and descend whenever the doorbell announced a customer.

There was a wide interest in music throughout the country at the time. Many quite ordinary people owned a piano, at a time when radio was in its infancy, television had not yet been invented, and people made their own music. Singing was popular, and ballads such as *'Home sweet home'* or *'Just a song at twilight'* were often sung. On a more serious level, there was much hymn singing, and many choral societies. Handel's *Messiah* was a great favourite, and even opera - now believed to be 'elitist' by young people brought up on pop songs - was frequently performed by visiting groups such as the Carl Rosa Company, which happily still exists. The most popular 'grand' operas were, as now, Bizet's *Carmen*, Gounod's *Faust*, Puccini's *La Bohème* and Verdi's *Rigoletto*. My parents had enjoyed them all sung in English in local productions.

It was quite normal for boys to sing in their local church choir, as I did from the age of nine until my voice broke. And there were also countless amateur groups performing the popular Gilbert and Sullivan operettas with their lively tunes and witty dialogue. My mother often sang in concerts and performances in our local church hall. She was a good dressmaker and often designed the costumes, while my father would handle the ticket sales.

One of my earliest memories was of playing on the floor at home and listening to my mother playing pieces by Grieg, Chopin waltzes, or a *Humoresque* by Dvorak. She had had some private tuition, mostly from an obscure teacher of the piano with a brass plate on the front door of his modest rented house, who later became famous as

Reginald Dixon, a popular star of the cinema organ: his live performances from a rising organ loft spotlighted between early films were sought after by millions. With her modest earnings from giving piano lessons to local children my mother in the early 1920's was able to buy the Hopkinson piano, which is still in our music room. We have kept it regularly tuned, and it is now worth over £2,000.

I did not realise how good my primary school at Western Road was until I left it. It still has a good reputation in the city. I owe much to some fine teachers; but I also remember a young woman who had only recently arrived from London and obviously felt uncertain of her bearings in a northern city. Once she asked me for a direction to a local address. With all the pride of a small boy anxious to show off his local knowledge I gave her precise instructions. Her response was devastating. 'Woe betide you if you are wrong' she said. It was a new expression to me, and I couldn't understand the need for a threat to a child. Bad psychology on her part. It was the same teacher who gave me an exercise which I finished with success. This was a list of spellings, which I enjoyed because I was a great reader and had for some time been devouring adventure stories from the free city library: I found the list so easy that I finished it early and then occupied myself by drawing a vertical squigly line joining up the ends of the words. Result: I was blamed for arrogance, and got no marks, leaving me with a sense of injustice: the affair could have been better handled by a more experienced teacher. By contrast, everyone in my class adored Miss Denny, who with the headmaster's help and support helped and encouraged me to win a rare scholarship to the best local grammar school.

I had a salutary lesson once when playing near the school. It was snowing, and I joined a group of boys in a snowball fight. One of my opponents raised the stakes by hiding a stone in his snowball. This hit me and was painful. I lost my temper completely and lashed the other boy unmercifully with a leather strap which I found near by. Immediately, I was so ashamed of losing control so completely that I resolved never to lose my temper again. Brigitte knows this story and thinks that the episode may have had a profound effect on my personality throughout life.

Sheffield was then a grimy city, but it had compensations. One was the beautiful moorland scenery that framed it, especially towards the west, where we lived. From my home in the hill suburb of Crookes there was easy access to the Rivelin valley, only a mile from my house, now shown in the Ordnance Survey map as a Nature Trail. Here I caught my first tiddlers, spent hours messing about in the river, and enjoyed my first picnics as a Scout cub. Wyming Brook, a magnificent area with wooded hills and reservoirs on the edge of the Hallam Moors, was about seven miles away, accessible by bus, or by the bicycle which I was given as a reward for passing exams. From the age of eleven I sometimes walked with school friends further into Derbyshire, along the Roman track from Stanedge as far as Hathersage, with its rolling moorland scenery and magnificent views of the Peak District. I remember the sense of infinite space and the calls of the curlew, the lark and the grouse. When somewhat older I was asked by my parents to show my favourite haunts to a young man about ten years older than me. I looked at his flimsy, pointed city shoes and wondered. But with a short haul on the bus we reached Hathersage, having walked about ten miles. Here we had a drink and a sandwich at the George Inn, this being my first entry ever to a pub (which among my Wesleyan Methodist relatives was still regarded as a sink of iniquity). My companion had a beer, I a shandy.

'Right' I said briskly after the drink. 'Now we walk back'. 'Oh no we don't' said my companion, not unreasonably. I had simply taken it for granted that money was too scarce to be spent on buses. He paid for the return journey: each ticket cost half a crown (two shillings and sixpence, or one-eighth of a pound sterling).

Sheffield had other compensations. At Millhouses there was an open-air swimming pool and ponds where you could sail model yachts. There were excellent parks and playing areas, good libraries and art galleries, the grounds of Sheffield Wednesday Football club at Hillsborough and Sheffield United at Bramall Lane; and also at Bramall Lane one could watch the heroes of Yorkshire cricket: the batsmen Sutcliffe and Holmes, the fast bowler Bill Bowes, and Hedley Verity whose slow spin bowling on a sticky wicket caused havoc among visiting teams. Among the victims was a visiting batsman called Fender. After Verity had bowled him out for a duck there was a joyful shout from the stands: 'That's scuttled thi' fire irons, Fender!'

I had good reasons for remembering my birthday on 4 March 1930, when I was just ten. I arrived home at teatime and noticed signs of festivity. My mother welcomed me with a rare hug. 'There's a letter for you!' It was from the local education authority offering me a scholarship at King Edward VII School - the most sought-after of the local grammar and secondary schools, then independent, which admitted a quarter of its entry free by examination. This was to transform my whole life. On my first day I began learning Latin grammar. The first example was the word *aquila,* an eagle. I could not then understand the point of knowing it. Many years later, in retirement, I heard it used on a mountain top in Spain: the Spanish word is virtually the same as Latin. School Latin and French, history and English continued throughout seven years, with maths, sciences, German, art and music for shorter periods. It was a school entirely for boys. The masters all wore a black academic gown, indicating their university degrees, mostly from Oxford or Cambridge. In those days graduates did not have such a wide choice of occupations as they have now, so more of the brightest people went into teaching as a career. The school, I found later, had a high national reputation for its large output of boys who went on to Oxford or Cambridge from the sixth form. It also had a good sporting record in soccer, cricket, swimming, and athletics. Most of the masters gave up free time to coach in one sport or another. Our popular headmaster, a Quaker called R. B. Graham, had once taken part in an early attempt to climb Everest and was a good classical scholar, a fine batsman and an inspiring teacher.

Sport was compulsory unless you had a serious medical problem: it involved two afternoons a week, usually Wednesday and Saturday. Saturday mornings were not free as nowadays but were given to class work. There was a flourishing Scout group that I enjoyed, also a school orchestra in which I played the violin. Discipline varied from class to class. Some masters seemed to have a natural authority that was rarely questioned; others had problems with the more mischievous boys, and if they could not maintain order by persuasion they were allowed to use the cane. Beatings - up to six strokes on the bottom - followed a ritual: you had to go to the school office to fetch a cane; the master had to call in a colleague to witness the punishment, which was recorded in the office when the cane was returned. It became a matter of pride if you were seen to bear your punishment like a man: particularly if - as happened once to me - you were caned by the headmaster, or caned by a master in the presence of sixth formers. Customs have since changed, but none of us found such punishment

unacceptable. And as compared with discipline in the armed services, which was later to be the fate of most people of my age, there was little to worry about.

I could not claim to have been more than average in my schoolwork. Since the scholarship stream consisted entirely of boys like myself who had fought off intense competition for a place I had to struggle, and it was not until I was fifteen that I began to find an area where I could keep my end up. This was mostly in English and history, my favourite subjects. I must admit that, as compared with my own children later, I had the disadvantage that my parents had no experience of secondary education; I was ploughing a lonely furrow, and could not discuss my school experiences and problems at home. As I moved towards the Sixth Form I became more ambitious, and dreamed of one day continuing my studies at Oxford or Cambridge, as many of our boys did. This ambition was stimulated by my first glimpse of the sheer grace and beauty of the Cambridge colleges, which my aunt Edyth in Bedford took me to visit once. Here I met one of the Enderby cousins, Hale, who was now an undergraduate at St.Johns College. I liked his relaxed manner and his pleasant room in college. We ate tinned grapefruit on toast and listened to a recording of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, in my case for the first time. What an introduction to the world of grown-ups – such a contrast to Sheffield!

My sister Shirley was born when I was eight, in circumstances that will sound unbelievable to day. In my parents' circle, sex was a taboo subject: this even included the basic facts of pregnancy and birth. I was never told that a baby was expected; my mother had an illness - pleurisy - during her pregnancy, and while still attending my primary school I was sent to stay every night for a fortnight with a kindly down-to-earth woman unknown to me who later turned out to be a midwife. One day I arrived home for lunch and was introduced to our new baby. 'Where does she come from? I asked. 'From the hospital'. Not a good introduction to the facts of life. Once, having seen the word 'sex' in a newspaper, I asked my father what it meant. Acutely embarrassed, my father said I would find out when I grew up. So I asked my friends (all boys) what they knew. Their answers were on a primitive, lavatory level. Curiously, the ancient four-letter words used, then never seen in print, were spoken in hushed tones, as if they were newly discovered secrets, which must not be revealed to adults. I did not then realise just how ancient and widely known those words were.

Girls were something of a mystery. Although I had met a few at primary school they seemed to be very scarce when I began to be interested in them as a teenager. No one of interest seemed to live near my home. There was a good girls' school just opposite my school, but their times of starting and finishing classes were different from ours. Only once did a party of their girls visit our school for a special lecture, but they were carefully escorted in and out as if they were Arabian princesses. Once, when I was fifteen, the headmaster's secretary came into our form-room to exchange a few words with our master. She was eighteen and very shapely. I shall never forget the fraught atmosphere of tension and suppressed longing that we felt during her visit.

My mother clearly did not make any effort to encourage more contacts, largely I think because she wanted me to study hard and did not want me to lose my chances of a good career by an association that could lead to an early marriage. It was generally understood in our circle that meetings led to 'courting'; courting led to engagement; engagement led to marriage. Anything else was philandering, and frowned upon. So

although by the time I reached the sixth form I had met and talked to a few girls I never achieved any sort of commitment to regular friendship. There were occasional dances at the local church or tennis-club but I did not have a girl friend until I became a student. And we were very innocent: even then it seemed natural to join a group of friends rather than to cultivate one only.

From about fifteen onwards I was fully occupied with schoolwork and outside interests. Having passed the School Certificate (now O-levels or GCSE) with reasonably good grades in about eight subjects I prepared for the Higher School Certificate (now A-levels) with English, history and French at 'major' level and German and Latin at 'subsidiary level. By this time I had had to drop science and mathematics, largely because in my ignorance I found the science teaching boring, while in mathematics, which I had always enjoyed, I got stuck at a particular stage (the binomial theorem) in which I had missed a class and didn't have the sense to ask for an explanation. From then on I was lost. From later reading I know that with the right advice and guidance I would have been able to continue. I still think the early specialisation forced on us all was a mistake.

I had many things to do. I played violin in the school orchestra from my first year at school, acted in school plays, played football and cricket, and enjoyed Scout training. I walked for miles over the moors, sometimes in pouring rain. In the Sixth Form I once or twice attended concerts at the City Hall given by the famous Hallé Orchestra: tickets cost half a crown. I had already enjoyed listening to Mozart and Haydn on the radio and was beginning to discover Bach. I swam every day in the new school swimming bath set up in the school grounds. Being fairly lightweight with good stamina I was becoming a successful cross-country runner. I seemed, with the rest of the Sixth Form, to be engaged in continuous political arguments: none of us was happy with a not very impressive government that seemed to have no idea how to cope with the growing threat from Hitler's Germany.

My first trip abroad was a visit to Germany with a school party in 1937. I had already studied German for two years and was involved in correspondence with a young German boy, Ulrich Jacobi, who was the son of a magistrate (Richter) in Berlin. I went abroad with an open mind. The Hitler regime was in the first flush of its success and self-confidence after the occupation of the Rhineland in the previous summer. But Germany seemed enchanting, with its litter-free streets, its efficient motorways, its vast forests, picturesque towns and splendid cathedrals. We travelled by boat and train through Belgium to Aachen, where we spent the night in a youth hostel. I had my first encounter with young German girls when a detachment of the Bund Deutscher Mädchen arrived in the hostel: nice healthy-looking girls with fresh complexions, all the better without make-up. Yes, they were part of the Hitler Youth, but those I talked to were as politically innocent as English girl guides.

Aachen itself was full of historic buildings, including the famous Cathedral (Dom) with its immense chandeliers, full of memories of the great Charlemagne (Karl Der Grosse or Charles the Great to the Germans: he spoke a Germanic dialect and it was probably the French who conned us all into giving him a French name). The streets were full of soldiers in uniform, a rare sight in England in those days. Since most people we met spoke some English we had interesting conversations, from which it was obvious that there was immense popular support for the achievements of the Nazi

regime in restoring prosperity and self-respect to the German people. But there were also discreet and guarded comments, especially from the teachers we met, which revealed some alarm about the suppression of free speech and the subordination of all activity to the needs of the state.

We spent a few days in one of the university buildings in Göttingen, where we were joined by German schoolboys of our own age. The pleasant town seemed full of fragrant lime trees, but our building was stuffy and ill - ventilated, with busts of forgotten German professors everywhere. We had a shock when we saw the timetable for each day, beginning with Frühsport – early morning gymnastics – at 6 a.m. Very good for us, no doubt, and I am now slightly ashamed of our reaction: but we English thought this an unacceptable holiday routine and protested. We did make a political point, however, by asserting that in England this sort of thing would be put to the vote. The German teachers gave in and held a vote, in which the German boys took our side. Triumph of idleness over Spartan discipline. Privately, I have a sneaking suspicion that a lot of things in modern English life would be better run if we could all start the day earlier.
I went on to stay with Ulrich and his family in Berlin. We spoke a lot about politics. I had already read Hitler's Mein Kampf (My Struggle) and in the Sixth Form at school we had talked about the Nazis. It seemed not unlikely that with so many soldiers about Hitler would soon want to put his ideas into practice. Ulrich's father assured me that, having survived the First World War he and others like him did not want a repetition. But Germany, he said, had been savagely treated in the post-war peace settlement at Versailles, and without colonies was desperately short of living space - Lebensraum. Germany had no quarrel with Britain. Why could not both countries, with a shared Saxon inheritance, join their military and naval strengths in a European alliance, which would stop the spread of Communism?

I had many similar conversations with other German people. Powerful influences in England were pressing the same argument. But Hitler's persecution of the Jews, his repeated breaking of treaties, his gradually increasing pressure on neighbouring countries, culminating in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, his annexation of Austria and his invasion of Poland, made war inevitable.

Our school group had our lighter moments. Occasionally, out of courtesy to our hosts, we were expected to use the customary greeting of the Nazi raised-arm salute. But we sometimes used it as a pinprick. German soldiers were often seen riding a bicycle with a rifle slung over the shoulder. If you saluted them they had to return the salute, which made them wobble. This had no perceptible impact on Anglo-German relations but made us feel less embarrassed about saluting when we had to.

I never saw Ulrich again after my visit, but I did meet his father eight years later in the freezing winter of 1945 when I was quartered in Berlin as an officer of the British Control Commission for Germany. He was a broken man. His wife had died, his son was still alive as a prisoner-of-war in Germany, but with an artificial leg, and the judge himself was living half - starved in an unheated flat through the bitter north German winter. I gave him what help I could: I had plenty of cigarettes that I did not smoke, and these at the time were the only useful currency.

Chapter Two: University

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven

The decision to go to university was not something my family took for granted. But with strong encouragement from my parents I won an Edgar Allen scholarship of £100 a year, which provided maintenance and free tuition at my local university, Sheffield. This was in 1937, and I was just 17, old enough to realise that for my father, with a modest salary, this meant losing the help I could have given him from my earnings if I had taken a job. So I took the bus or walked from my home in Forres Road near Crosspool to the university buildings at Western Bank every day and suppressed my envy of school friends who had made it to Oxford.

As I look back on those pre-war years, I realise that I had had a wonderfully varied and privileged life. I took a good degree in English, stiffened with a strong historical and linguistic backing. I edited the university magazine '*Arrows*' and made heaps of friends. I ran seven miles cross-country with the university Harriers twice a week over a course at Norton, which nearly killed visiting teams who could not foresee the cruel uphill climb through the mud which lay in wait after the first downhill rush. I played violin in the university orchestra under dear old Professor Shera, and remember a particular crisis when we were playing the Grieg Pianoforte Concerto and the gas lamps in the Firth Hall virtually faded out. For a performance of Congreve's Restoration play '*Love for Love'* I not only acted a minor part and played the violin in a small orchestra which provided interval music by Peter Warlock; but I also wrote a prologue in rhyming couplets which, after gently chiding the characters for their irregular goings-on, concluded:

Mankind, 'tis sure, still cuts this kind of caper:
You ask for proof? Read next week's Sunday paper.

Among many conversations about life, love and the Universe I remember a succinct explanation given to me by a student from Jordan who talked of homeless people in Palestine and said that the long-lasting territorial dispute between Israel and Palestine started when the British occupying authority made two sets of conflicting promises, one to each of the two countries. Little has changed in this respect in over 60 years.

Sheffield University then had only about eight hundred students, and for an Arts student it was easy to meet people in most Faculties. An older friend, William Armstrong, later became Professor of English at King's College, London University. Many others, alas, were killed in war service: most in the R.A.F. or Fleet Air Arm. But I did keep in touch with Arthur Collins, a fellow runner with whom I raced often. The Union provided a good social club, and my athletic friends included some who took first-class honours in glass technology, zoology or engineering. The success of the annual Rag Day rested greatly on the efforts of Crewe Hall students who became adept at building rafts from oil drums borrowed from a sympathetic garage. I remember shooting the rapids in the cold, sooty waters of the River Don, along with Alf Clewley who later became a District Commissioner in the British Colonial

Service. Many years later I met him and his wife in Leeds. They told me much about his service in Nigeria as a District Officer during the last years of British rule. He found it hard to adjust to life in England afterwards.

Back to student days. I remember 'flannel dances' in informal dress at the Union. These were great fun, but ended with the problem of deciding which girl one had the last dance with. It was usual to walk that girl to her home, because transport was irregular at night. A girl I particularly liked lived over three miles away, which meant five miles there and back home, after I had already run seven miles that afternoon and danced all the evening. All I got – and expected – in return was a kiss. Anything more promising in those days had to wait until one got engaged.

What did I get out of my degree in English? The course was not light reading: it was strongly biased towards the older English classics – Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, as well as Elizabethan and Restoration prose and drama, some study of philosophical and theological writers from those periods, with a look at the historical background. We read most of the more important novels ranging from Fielding and Richardson in the 18th century to Graham Greene, Henry James, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce in the modern period, with the poetry of T.S.Eliot as more satisfying fare. It all seemed to meet my needs at the time. I came away with a strong feeling for the continuity of English cultural traditions, a nodding acquaintance with some modern French and German authors, some intellectual curiosity, and I suppose an ability to make intellectual distinctions and later to hold my own in conversation with people who had had a more expensive education at public school and the older universities. The degree, backed by some proficiency in French and German and a thorough grounding in Latin, was intended to prepare me for work as a teacher but in the event gave an entry to work later at a senior level in the Home Civil Service and in the British Council abroad. What I lacked was any real training in science or technology. I have always regretted this, as well as the curious English tradition, which assumes that you are either an Arts man or a scientist, and can't be both. I would especially have enjoyed the opportunity to go further in mathematics; whether I would have been good enough is a different question.

Like most students at that time I had to be prepared for active military service after finishing my studies. So I did some training with the University cadet corps; it was based on an out-of-date War Office manual, *Infantry Section Leading*, written in 1927. This told you how to plan a march so that infantry at a measured pace could link up with cavalry when needed: it certainly did not contemplate the *Blitzkrieg* (lightning attack) of 1940 in which massed German tanks overran our allies and drove the British into the sea at Dunkirk. Typically, first instructions about the cadet corps stipulated that the course was intended for the sons of gentlemen. Both my father and I doubted whether, in the traditional interpretation of the word, either of us qualified. My father was not a landowner, had no gambling debts, and did not ride a horse. I was however quite certain that my father was a gentleman in the real sense of that word. I passed my certificate A which took me part of the way towards officer training, and helped me in my service with the Home Guard; but it became quickly clear when I took my Army medical that my eyesight was too bad to allow me to be entrusted with a rifle, and I was put on the list of people to be given a reserved occupation, which usually involved desk work. I finished up in Whitehall in a quite interesting war job.

But meanwhile I had to finish my degree course and take my finals in May-June 1940. With most of Europe collapsing under German invasion and enemy attacks on

England already probable it was not a time conducive to academic work. After I had finished my last oral exam I got out my bike and headed with my friend Arthur Collins for the Lake District, both of us wearing only a shirt and shorts and carrying a packet of lentils in our saddle-bags (food was already scarce in the Youth Hostels}. We slept in the open air by a quiet railway embankment near Huddersfield. It was cold, and we woke early. We needed route directions, because all the usual road signs had been removed to make life difficult for any invading German parachutists whose arrival was expected any moment. Eventually we met a small boy at about 6 a.m. 'Which way to Skipton?' The boy looked at our anonymous gear and seemed very doubtful. 'Ah'm not rightly supposed to tell yer' he said. And he didn't – bless him. Next day we cycled through the magnificent landscape of North Yorkshire and eventually arrived at Ambleside. On arrival at the Youth Hostel there the Warden came outside to meet us and said: 'Have you heard the news? Dunkirk has fallen'.

Chapter Three: The Second World War

'The time has come' the Walrus said 'to talk of many things
Of shoes - and ships - and sealing - wax
Of cabbages and kings'

What strange mental rubbish sticks in the mind! All these random objects played some part in my memories of the Second World War, as will be explained later. I volunteered for active service as soon as war was declared. I was two-thirds of the way through my university course, but I had already done some infantry training in the university cadet force, and suddenly an arts degree seemed irrelevant. But the Army didn't like my eyesight. So I finished my degree course in the summer of 1940 and was put on a central register of graduate manpower. While waiting for a decision about my future I took a clerical job in the Government's Assistance Board office in Sheffield, in which I had to visit and interview elderly people who were suffering hardship because the State pension was too small. It was a moving insight into degrees of misery and squalor which I had not known to exist, and as a young, fit newcomer I took great pride at first in being able to clock up over twenty visits a day. But one day the chief clerk took me aside and said 'Your quota's twelve'. The trade union argument: don't spoil the job for other people by showing how fast it can be done. Naturally I lost all interest in the work, took every afternoon off, and faked my record of calls.

In April 1941 I reported for duty in London as a trainee desk-warrior (temporary Assistant Principal they called me) in the Ministry of Shipping in Berkeley Square. Interesting, but not heroic - although as it turned out even a civilian job under regular threat of bombing in wartime London was neither cushy nor safe.

'Shoes, ships and sealing-wax' wrote Lewis Carroll. *Shoes* were of course rationed. I was to hear a lot about *ships*. *Sealing wax* was used for legal documents. The *cabbages* - disgustingly overcooked - threatened health and morale in the basement canteen of the Ministry. And *Kings* - we had them too. As the monarchies of Europe collapsed before advancing German troops in the summer of 1940 their governments moved skeleton forces to London and brought with them useful shipping fleets as well as their Kings. Meetings were held in the Ministry to allocate these ships to Allied purposes, and the refugee monarchs took a personal interest. During a busy week, months before my arrival, our Head Porter on the ground floor became confused over one introduction to an imposing dignitary. 'Which King did you sy it was, sir?'

I knew little about shipping. Fortunately we had people who knew a great deal. Our Director-General, later Lord Hurcomb, had as a civil servant in the First World War played a leading part in the control of the requisitioned merchant shipping fleet. In the Second World War most of the big ship owners joined our operating groups. By the time I arrived in the Ministry in April 1941 the bulk of the British and a large part of the Allied merchant fleets were still manned by their owners but working under the Ministry's control. They were paid fair rates of hire for the requisitioned ships.
The need for requisitioning derived from the all-embracing nature of modern warfare. Even during the First World War, after increased German submarine activity from February 1917 onwards threatened our lifelines, the British Government had to take control of shipping movements and priorities. Thanks to those civil servants who dug

out the old plans in the mid-1930s when reluctant preparations had to be made for another war, the lessons learned in 1917 were revived.
Ministries of food, shipping and economic warfare were set up. What the Ministry of Shipping had to do was to make sure that every ship was put to a good use. It was not the Ministry's job to settle priorities as between food, munitions, and troop carrying. These could only be settled by Cabinet import committees advised by experts in the supply of different commodities. Gradually the Ministry of Shipping acquired more and more skill in budgeting, and was increasingly able to make reliable predictions about supplies as well as shipping capacity.

To estimate shipping capacity you have to do more than simply count cargo space: you must also know the length of each journey, and the time needed in port for loading, unloading and repairs. Liners, which operate like trains on fixed routes, usually have shorter journeys than tramps, which like taxis are able to trade anywhere and may make several journeys worldwide before returning to port. Delays caused by enemy bombing of the Mersey, the Clyde and other port areas threatened havoc to our shipping programmes; although in the long run, because of superb organisation, the delays proved to be not so significant as they otherwise would have been. Shortly after I arrived the Ministry of Shipping was expanded to form the Ministry of War Transport, extending its control over ports and railways: a logical step because the movement, handling and storage of cargoes was a continuous process involving both sea and inland transport.

In 1939 the British Empire and its potential allies owned more than half the world tonnage of merchant shipping, which was 68 million tons. (The Germans had only four million tons.) In fighting ships the Royal Navy, despite increasing German competition, was still predominant, with more battleships than France, Italy and Germany combined. It had a virtual monopoly of aircraft carriers and superiority in numbers of cruisers and destroyers. Only in submarine strength were we surpassed, by both Italy and France. The Germans were level with us, with 57 submarines. They steadily increased this number to 1200, of which by 1945 the combined efforts of the Royal Navy and R.A.F had destroyed 700.

A powerful weapon on our side was the blockade. This ancient tactic, still in this war used against Germany and Italy, was intended to strangle the enemy's sea routes, to prevent him receiving vital imports, and if possible to prevent his battleships and submarines leaving his home ports. Under international treaties, once a blockade had been formally announced, a belligerent was legally entitled to search neutral or enemy ships and to seize cargoes clearly intended for enemy use. This could include depriving the enemy of essential food, a threat that the Germans reasonably used as an argument justifying their use of submarine warfare. (The man in the street in England always regarded this as an underhand weapon). It was our Ministry of Shipping, working closely with the Admiralty, which controlled the search for suspect cargoes.

As a mere junior I had no vital role in the office, in which I was given no formal training, and most of this chapter is a report of work done by other people. In my own limited sphere I was expected to keep my eyes open and work out from the files what was needed, taking, on my chief's advice, as much responsibility as I felt able to. I drafted answers to parliamentary questions, collecting advice from all over the Ministry. I summarised files about complex negotiations with the shipping industry.

More interesting was the occasional paper I was asked to research and write about topical questions, such as 'What does the American constitution say about the powers of the President of the United States? Has he the authority to declare a state of war?' I was surprised by the apparent freedom allowed to the President to make his own decisions, subject of course to getting political support from Congress.

During 1941 our thoughts were dominated by our losses of merchant ships by enemy action. Churchill's Memoirs record 224 ships lost in 1939, 1058 in 1940 and 1141 in 1941, the last figure representing over four million gross tons. Churchill records his concern over this, and his approaches to President Roosevelt for American help which, as soon as the Americans were assured of our will to survive, brought increasingly helpful responses.

The first good news came in the winter of 1941. After the entry of the United States into the war following the devastating Japanese attack on its fleet at Pearl Harbour in December 1941 we received full American co-operation, and although heavy losses of shipping continued they were increasingly offset by new American shipbuilding. In four years the Americans, using unconventional methods, mass-produced 2,770 pre-fabricated ships amounting to over 29 million tons. Meanwhile the Royal Navy was increasingly destroying German submarines and their crews, bys such methods as improved anti-submarine devices, skilful use of convoys, more powerful and experienced convoy escorts, skilful intelligence work flowing from our decoding of enemy signals and the increasing use of air power to launch bombs, depth charges or torpedoes. From the middle of 1942 we and the Americans together - mostly the Americans - were building more new shipping tonnage than the Germans could sink.

Most of the people I worked with in the Ministry were older than me. They were an interesting mix of career civil servants, lawyers, statisticians, ship owners and other shipping experts - some of them with the household names of old shipping families -and a motley collection of academics and others there for the duration of the war. My immediate boss was a Professor of Economics from my old university, who worked out the rates of hire paid for requisitioned shipping on the basis of actual costs. Above him was Walter Carter, a formidable Scot with years of experience in the Board of Trade. His sedentary life had given him ulcers, but he could be very kind and patient. Once during my part-time service with the Home Guard I asked for a week's training leave. Carter gave me permission, in the formal language of the 18th century: 'I presume ye'll be residing in some military establishment'. I was tempted to reply in modern English: 'No, I'll be living in barracks' but I refrained. A young man did not speak to a senior civil servant like that.

An early contact was a man in his forties, dark and slight with a decisive mouth, a twinkle in his eye and black, curly hair. Although working now on South American shipping he told me that 'in real life' he was a composer. Later on I shared an office with him. His name was Gerald Finzi, now widely known as one of the dozen most interesting English 20th-century composers of classical music. I then knew nothing of his work, but shortly after first meeting him I heard a public performance of his '*Dies Natalis*': that work, and his *Clarinet Concerto* and his *Cello Concerto* and numerous church anthems are on CD's and quite often performed. He was meticulously accurate in his work, pleasant and informal, and made many friends in the office. I did not realise at the time that his father had been a shipbroker in London. With his advice I

was able to enjoy some of the feast of music available at Promenade and other concerts in London during the war.

Another contact was a formally dressed lawyer with a sharp mind. Most of his shipping knowledge came from before the war: he had drafted most of the legal contracts or 'charter parties' then in use to govern shipping charters, and now used his knowledge to benefit the taxpayer. He was a stickler for the Geneva Convention, the international rules that governed conflicts between nations at war. Once the Royal Navy had seized an enemy ship which later turned out to be entitled to protection as a hospital ship. The lawyer insisted on the ship being sent back to its German owners. We had a legal duty to do this, and as a shipping power we had much to lose if we broke the Convention. It happened to be my job to arrange a safe-conduct for the ship back to Hamburg through the minefields in the North Sea. When I next heard of the lawyer some years after the war he was rapidly moving towards his eventual position as the Lord Chief Justice of England. His name was Eustace, later Lord Roskill.

The most interesting phase of my work was after my transfer to Foreign Shipping Relations. This group negotiated with foreign governments whose merchant ships had been requisitioned or chartered by the Ministry. By the summer of 1941 we already controlled nearly four million tons of foreign shipping, mainly Belgian, Dutch, Greek, Norwegian, Swedish and Yugoslav ships on time-charter. Roosevelt later allowed us to buy substantial numbers of American ships, and as time went on we put captured ships from France, Denmark, Germany and Italy to good use.

Correspondence with the Foreign Office brought its own delights. About six months after the Japanese destruction of the American fleet at Pearl Harbour had brought the United States into the war, I received a note, elegantly printed on blue paper, which read: 'His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs presents his compliments to (here someone had typed in 'The Minister of War Transport') and begs to inform him that a state of war now exists between this country and (typed) 'Japan'. The mills of God grind slowly. There may have been a time when such a note would have triggered off an avalanche of work, but all I could do was file it. All the necessary things had already been done. Years later, I read Churchill's account of a letter which he had sent on 8 December, 1941 to the Japanese Ambassador in London, informing him of Britain's declaration of war on Japan. His letter was written in the old-fashioned style of diplomacy, ending with 'I have the honour to be, with high consideration, Sir, Your obedient servant, Winston S Churchill'. Commenting on this in his Memoirs, Churchill remarked. ' Some people did not like this ceremonial style. But after all when you have to kill a man it costs nothing to be polite'.

There was a curious, old-world episode in which I was sent to the Foreign Office Library, with its tranquil view over the lake and trees of St James' Park, to search the records of the Peace Treaty signed at Versailles after the First World War. My instructions were to find and copy the shipping clauses that our predecessors had proposed for inclusion in the Treaty. These instructions were based on the prevalent belief that with both Russia and the United States now in the war, Britain would again be on the winning side. This followed the old, economical wartime practice of the Civil Service: find out what we did last time and repeat if desirable. The Librarian in a traditional wing collar and morning suit kept me supplied with China tea and files in an elegant room still boasting a coal fire. I duly wrote and submitted my paper, but I

never discovered what became of it because a Peace Treaty was indefinitely deferred during the post-war occupation of Germany.

There was another sniff of diplomacy after the Italian surrender when I had to draft a telegram to be sent to the Foreign Office, intended for our Ambassador in Madrid. This was to advise him what His Majesty's Government wanted him to do about all the captured Italian ships now cluttering up the harbour in Gibraltar. I collected ideas from all over the Ministry and after my draft had been hurriedly approved by my chief sent it to my elderly contact at the Foreign Office. This man, not far off his pension, usually sounded half asleep but for once he exploded. 'My dear chap' he said ' you can't possibly send the telegram in that form. It is tantamount to a declaration of war!'

Another interesting moment was when I attended, along with a more senior colleague, a meeting at the Foreign Office to settle arrangements for a large-scale exchange of British and German wounded or disabled prisoners of war under the terms of the Geneva Convention. We planned to use a large Swedish passenger liner, the *Drottningholm,* which I had previously, under instructions, arranged to be repaired in the Baltic. The Swedes were of course still neutral. The Chairman of the meeting, Frank Roberts, head of the European division of the Foreign Office, was on the telephone to Geneva. His Swiss opposite number had a telephone in each hand, one linked to London and the other to Berlin. This was a welcome reminder of sanity in a world gone mad. We had to settle the date for the movement of British prisoners from Germany to join the *Drottningholm* in Gothenburg, Sweden. We proposed a date. Back came the reply from the Germans through Geneva: 'Yes, we can despatch the prisoners on such-and-such a date provided the British Royal Air Force will guarantee to stop the bombing on that night'. A quizzical look from Roberts to the senior R.A.F officer present. 'Agreed'. Back I went to Berkeley Square and got from an old contact in the Military Department of the Admiralty the map references of the safe-conduct route, avoiding the mines, through the Baltic and the North Sea for the voyage of the Swedish ship. It took one telephone call.

The exchange took place in October 1943. It began with the movement of 800 German prisoners from Leith in Scotland, where they had been assembled from camps in Britain, Canada and the United States. They sailed to Gothenburg in two British ships. Meanwhile over 4000 British and Allied prisoners of war had been escorted from Germany, France and Holland to Gothenburg on the Trelleborg Ferry. They embarked during cover of night on the *Drottningholm* or on one of the two British ships, and all returned to freedom in Britain. They were welcomed at Leith on 26 October with a tremendous celebration: pipers, massed bands, a message from the King, 28 days' leave, a completely new kit and an advance of pay (officers £2, other ranks 10 shillings). The Press told us, as always on such occasions, that they arrived in good heart and with their boots polished. (For modern readers it has to be said that the idea of asking for monetary compensation for their sufferings would never have occurred to anyone in those days).

My life in wartime was not all shipping. I explored a great deal of London, mostly on foot, later by bicycle. I first stayed in lodgings in Chelsea that had been recommended by a Sheffield friend who had studied at the Royal College of Art. Later on I moved to the Hampstead area, and then on to Bayswater. Such moves happened fairly often because it was difficult to find satisfactory lodgings. My salary of £350 a year,

equivalent in wartime to that of a skilled labourer, was barely enough to live on in London and did not leave room for luxuries. My social life was limited because most men of my age were in the Forces. I did however find a group of people in Bayswater with whom I could share cheap restaurant meals and talk. One was a Jewish refugee from Poland called Lazarus - not his real name, but the name given to him by the policeman who had found him shortly after his arrival in the Lake District as a refugee. (His original Polish name was judged by the local Bobby to be unpronounceable). There was also a pretty girl a few years older than me who worked on a newspaper and gave me helpful advice about how to chat up the opposite sex: we once swam together naked in the Serpentine at midnight, but our relationship was platonic. There was a friendship with a girl I met at the International Arts Centre in Sloane Square, a brilliant pianist who accompanied me occasionally (I had been taking singing lessons). She had a brother who played the trumpet and ran a jazz band: he later turned out to be the famous Johnny Dankworth. I also made close friendships with a group of people who met in each other's flats to sing Elizabethan madrigals. They were, like me, all members of the London University choir conducted by Dr. Thornton Lofthouse. One of them, Larry, remained a friend for life.

When in Sheffield I had joined the local Home Guard, and I continued membership in London. But I soon tired of the hypothetical patrolling of golf courses in a London suburb and switched to an active unit at the Ministry of War Transport headquarters in Berkeley Square. Here I heard of an initiative by a friend of mine. Having obtained private information he gained access to the Air Ministry headquarters during the night, by showing a fake pass. He climbed the stairs to the office of the Secretary of State on the third floor and left on his desk a typed message. 'You have been blown up' (Signed XYZ unit, the Home Guard). Childish, but good for morale.

Later on I took up an invitation to join a new, experimental Home Guard anti-aircraft unit in Hyde Park, run during the daytime by the regular artillery but manned at night by Home Guards. We used the new, primitive Z projectors working in conjunction with radar spotting of enemy aircraft: the system was set up as a particular hobby of Winston Churchill's. It was certainly experimental: during the week before I did my training course on them one of our rockets exploded during firing and killed a Home Guard.

With these rockets one could fire shots in anger. Unfortunately no one told us whether or not we had hit any enemy aircraft during the now sporadic raids. I suspected that we killed more innocent civilians than aircraft when the rockets returned to ground. But it seemed to be accepted that the mere sound of the rockets - a journalist wrote that they sounded like a giant tearing calico up to the sky - was good for the morale of the hard-pressed people of London.

We did night duty in Hyde Park, each unit on a weekly rota. 'We' in this case were a mixed lot of part-time amateurs from all walks of life. I had reached the humble rank of bombardier, with two stripes, largely I think because in our initial training in a resonant drill hall I could shout louder than anyone else: an unexpected result of singing training, which strengthens the diaphragm muscles and increases head resonance. My command included a retired English colonel, a foul-mouthed Cockney factory hand, a German-Jewish refugee who was once a magistrate in East Prussia and was now running a restaurant as well as a profitable transatlantic fur business from a

flat in Park Lane, and a suave young English diplomat whose occasional apologies for absence were signed personally by the Foreign Secretary, Sir Anthony Eden. (Such notes were necessary because what had started as a voluntary service was now subject to conscription). Unfortunately I missed the opportunity to meet the famous cartoonist Giles, who was on a different shift. The anti-aircraft unit was disbanded soon after the German V1 rockets ('doodlebugs') and the even more effective V 2's started to arrive in June 1944. They were too fast for us and caused grievous loss of life and damage to property in Greater London.

It was during a Home Guard concert that I met Pauline, my first love. She was training as a singer and shared my love of German lieder: Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, Brahms and so on. She was for a time a member of the chorus in performances of 'Lilac Time', a revival of a Schubert operetta, but we had to part company when she joined ENSA, a Government - sponsored company formed to provide entertainment for our troops abroad; and she later married a businessman.

During the later stages of the war my working life was enlivened by Major-General R.C. Money. He joined our Ministry in his fifties, having recently retired as Governor of Baluchistan. He was given the unrewarding task of licking me into shape, while I was able to brief him on some of the more peculiar habits of civil servants. An expert on mountain warfare, he was a magnificent figure of a man: even when wearing a plain brown suit; he sat at his desk as if still on horseback, and treated everybody including the porters with exquisite but commanding courtesy and a dazzling smile. He was pleasantly old-fashioned: he did not approve of the remits given to two maiden ladies to research into the subject of 'procurement' in the Far East, innocent as this proved to be. In his directness of approach he was so different from the dons and civil servants I knew that he made a great impact on me. I remember his first meeting with Finzi, introduced as a composer. The General said 'I expect you're planning to write a sea symphony'. Finzi, with a quiet smile, replied 'I don't think a composer's mind quite works that way'. When I finally left the Ministry at the end of the war to join the Control Commission for Germany the General's last words were: 'Good- bye, my boy, good luck, and don't marry one of those German girls'. This, I am delighted to say, was the only military instruction I ever disobeyed.

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Chapter Four: Service in Germany, 1945 - 1946

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish?

After six years of continuous, stressful wartime life in England an opportunity to work abroad seemed welcome. I applied for work in the Allied Control Commission, set up to run affairs in Germany after the war, and was appointed to a civilian post with the equivalent rank of Major in the Control Commission for Germany. One month after the end of hostilities, in June 1945, I flew out with my unit to Westphalia. We represented the British share of an Allied take-over of the German Ministry of Internal Affairs in Berlin: that is what was supposed to have been decided at four-power conferences in London and Potsdam. But the Russians and French remembered differently and vetoed a central administration. So I was shifted to short-term work in the British zone of occupation. Four of us young men stood in front of a large map of the Zone. A red-tabbed Colonel gave us a choice: 'One of you to Düsseldorf, one to Kiel, one to Hamburg, and one to Hanover. Sort it out among yourselves.' I had seen the Harz Mountains on my pre-war visit to Germany and voted for Hanover, little knowing that my choice would shape the rest of my life . (At Brigitte's eightieth birthday dinner I reminded the whole extended family in a short speech that if I had been sent to Kiel instead of Hanover none of those present would have been at that dinner, and some might not even have existed).

That evening I arrived by jeep in a bomb - flattened city with one suburb, Kleefeld, still remaining more or less habitable, and was shown to my billet in a house, Kaulbachstrasse 34, which has since become very familiar to my children and some of my grandchildren. But in those days Brigitte was keeping a wary eye on her parents' house while it was being occupied by British officers. We later fell in love and both of us decided that we wanted to share our life together, but did not marry until 1949.

I can't pretend that my efforts at military government ever amounted to much. I remember anxious nights on duty trying to use my languages in dealing with hordes of refugees streaming westwards from Eastern Germany and Berlin during that summer of 1945. Everyone seemed to be on the move. Seven million German troops had surrendered to the British and Americans and were being rounded up, disarmed and either held for trial or sent home. About half the six million foreign workers had to be repatriated. Up to ten million Germans who had been living in areas that were now Polish or Czech or occupied by the Russians were expelled, or fled to the Western zone, and many of these came through Hanover.

I remember the simple satisfaction of escorting a convoy of German lorry-drivers among coal-mines in the Ruhr, now guarded by British troops, and bringing them back to Hanover with full loads of coal for the civilian population for the winter. Discussions with German officials in the Rathaus - the Town Hall - were frustrating because they were mainly about industrial machinery which the Germans were supposed to hand over as reparations. Often the Germans insisted that essential parts

had been sent for repair to the Eastern Zone, now under Russian control, and were inaccessible. Reparations from the Western Zones amounted eventually to no more than 5% of Germany's pre-war industrial capacity. They fell chiefly on industries which were over-equipped and cleared the ground for the later, subsidised installation of fresh and modern equipment which did a great deal to restore German economic prosperity.

Later I was moved to Kempen, a pleasant little walled town near Krefeld that had been the birthplace of the medieval saint and theologian, Thomas à Kempis. Here I could observe the workings of the old German bureaucracy. Most English people would assume, in a state of general chaos, that anything useful could be done if not specifically forbidden. But those Germans I met seemed to assume that nothing could be done unless it were specifically permitted. The permission always seemed to require a document stamped by the responsible officer - me. I wore out my patience in issuing permissions and my wrist by rubber-stamping them. The most delightful was a piece of paper brought by a pretty girl who described herself as a flute-player with a local musical group, and asked permission to practise, in her own words, an 'ambulatory occupation'. She got a double stamp.

Rather less satisfactory were my relations with my unit commander, a Colonel who had served with the South African police and behaved towards the local people with an arrogance that scarcely matched the policy he was supposed to follow of 're-educating' the Germans towards democracy. He threw most of the directives from London into the bin and sometimes, in his cups, announced his intention of setting up an independent republic south of the Rhine. Meanwhile, at a time when resources were scarce, he bullied a local builder into constructing a large, gleaming new bathroom for his own private use. I was glad to be moved on to Berlin, where I arrived in December 1945 and stayed until I left the Control Commission to take up work with the British Council in the summer of 1946.

One of my first impressions in Berlin was the view from the house where I was billeted in the Grunewald, a forest suburb that was gradually losing its trees, chopped down for firewood by the local people in that bleak winter. Looking out of the window at six in the morning - everyone wakes early in that invigorating Berlin air - I saw a row of middle-aged women building a wall with their bare hands. On my return from work twelve hours later they were still there, still building.

In Berlin I worked as Secretary to the British Delegation of a four-Power Council, representing all the four Allied countries, U.S.A, Britain, France and Russia, which was supposed to regulate all civil transport throughout Germany. These four - Power groups each had a 'rotating chairman', Russian one month, British the next, and so on. It was amusing to watch the slow progress of a paper drafted in British English, referred to a sub-committee, translated into French, modified after discussion into Russian, until it finally re-appeared in American English virtually unrecognisable. For every paper discussed, over a thousand copies had to be distributed to American units and agencies throughout their Zone of occupied Germany. I still remember the look of amazement on Field-Marshal Montgomery's face during a visit of inspection when we had to confess this. Not surprisingly, little was achieved in this tortuous exercise of international diplomacy, particularly because neither the Russians nor the French wanted it to work. The Russians in particular were mainly interested in extracting as

much loot from their own zone of occupied Germany as they could. One could not blame them, considering what they had suffered at the hands of Hitler.

We did arrive at one conclusion during our long-winded discussions on the Transport Directorate. This was about the design of the uniforms to be worn by the German railwaymen when normal services were resumed. The French railway experts, all civilians, saw no reason why the Germans needed a uniform at all. The Russian experts, all wearing huge epaulettes and medals over their battle-worn uniforms, disagreed strongly. Papers were written about this footling topic, which seemed to have symbolic overtones. The Russians found a practical way of comparing the proposals from each of the Four Powers: each of the four Secretaries was to appear at the next meeting in a mock-up uniform based on his own delegation's designs. I can't even remember what I wore: probably a tatty compromise. But the whole exercise proved abortive because, rather late in the day, it was discovered that there was no material in any of the occupied zones to make any of the uniforms. I am afraid we spent public money too lavishly in those days.

Our own personal lives during this winter and following spring were reasonably comfortable. Food was skimpy: I was once reprimanded by my boss for eating two successive dinners in the Mess the same evening, wrongly believing that a colleague would be eating out. I was on good terms with my French colleague: my French was better than his English, so I enjoyed translating some of the results of our meetings into French for his benefit. There were occasional dances and parties enlivened by our cosmopolitan contacts. My opposite number on the Russian side, Colonel Grammatikaty - an engineer whose eighteenth-century ancestor had been a schoolteacher - was occasionally seen drinking and performing athletic Russian dances in the French Mess. But although his English was good he avoided more than the minimum social contact with his English colleagues. It was rumoured that the Russians were all terrified of fraternising with the British and Americans because they feared being sent to a punishment camp in Siberia after their tour of duty in Berlin. At the time I couldn't believe this. Years later, when I read Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, I knew the rumours to be true. (Since you may not have heard of this powerful Russian writer - he seems to have been forgotten by the British Press who once admired him - I should say that he wrote a vivid and obviously first-hand account of life in the Russian concentration camps from the point of view of a young, patriotic Russian officer, a graduate in mathematics, who was condemned to years of imprisonment under harsh conditions simply because in a private letter, opened by the censor, he had criticised Stalin. He also wrote one or two very fine novels, such as *Cancer Ward* and *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch* which are so vivid and thought-provoking that they make most modern English and American fiction seem trivial.

Did the British achieve anything in Germany in those early years after the war? To be honest, not much; perhaps as much as was possible, certainly not all we had hoped. The sharp divisions between the Russians and the Western allies made it impossible to carry out any long-term policy. At least we, along with the Americans and the French, provided a temporary shield under which a shattered country could pause to recover its morale and begin to plan its own future. We kept reasonable order and helped to prevent mass epidemics of disease or starvation, although our own food supplies were so short that we could not prevent Germans dying of hunger in the bitter winters of 1945 and 1946.

Brigitte assures me that the British were respected because our administration was generally seen to be fair. British colonial experience led to the early establishment of curfews, which quickly cut down disorder and looting. The Americans, in their hunt for Nazi war criminals, often acted with incredible naiveté. They herded into concentration camps many German people, including some for whom membership of the Nazi party had been compulsory: headmasters for example, or public-spirited women volunteers who had led the first-aid effort: some of them stayed in prison for years. The Russians were straightforwardly vindictive: who could blame them? The French were considered never to have been in full control of their own Zone of occupation: this was the area to make for if you were a criminal on the run.

Whatever the failings in the British and American zones, we did at least introduce an ordered climate of free discussion and comment which helped the Germans to take their first steps towards a peaceful democracy, and towards the beginnings of an assessment into what had gone wrong in their society. . We encouraged the production of *Die Zeit* in Hamburg: it is still one of the best German newspapers. We even helped the Germans with our advice to avoid the worst features of our own Trade Unions: we suggested one union for each industry, with union representation at Board level: some of us regretted that we did not follow this advice in Britain. But most of what the Germans achieved after the war they achieved by their own efforts, supported by generous financial assistance, especially from America.

It was with great sadness that I returned to England on leave in the spring of 1946 to find my mother seriously ill. She died of a suspected cancer, which had been diagnosed too late, at the early age of 49.

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Chapter Five
British Council, 1946 - 1951

What should they know of England,
Who only England know?

My next assignment was in a completely different field. I had been in touch in London with my former tutor at Sheffield, Harold Orton, who in wartime became an official of the British Council. (I was to meet him again later when he was a Professor at the University of Leeds). Orton had asked me whether I would be interested after the war in the teaching of English at a university abroad. I reminded him of this when it became clear that my post-war work in Germany offered no future. During summer leave at home in August 1946 I received a telegram offering me a post as Lektor in English at the University of Copenhagen, a post supported and subsidised by the British Council. (The Council, which still flourishes, was set up to promote cultural contacts in foreign countries and to spread a knowledge of English life and language abroad. It was intended to be non-political).

Having heard something of the delights of Copenhagen, which the war had left relatively undamaged, I eagerly accepted. I was looking forward to an academic career, combined with opportunities for travel.

I lived in Denmark for four years and enjoyed every minute. At first I knew no Danish, but soon found that much of the written language, which seemed to combine elements of German as well as English, was easy to follow. Spoken Danish was difficult: since many of the consonants were represented by a glottal stop, speech was hard to understand. (The language of English TV soaps seems to be going the same way). On my first evening with the family where I was to stay as a paying guest, in a charming eighteenth-century chateau on the outskirts of Copenhagen, my hard-working hostess, who knew no English, asked me what I would like for breakfast. Not knowing the Danish for 'egg' I drew one. 'Ah, aeg ' she said, pronouncing it exactly as we do.

University life in Denmark followed the German pattern. There was little personal supervision of students, courses went on indefinitely, and the length of a degree course was for the student to decide: the final exam was held at the end of the academic year in which the student felt ready to sit. There seemed to be no fees or scholarships; most students financed their living expenses by casual earnings; many dropped out during their studies. I was expected to teach and lecture in English, but was left completely free by the Professor to organise my lectures and tutorials as I thought best. I covered mainly outline courses in English literature, plus some translation exercises in which, using copies of a good Danish newspaper, I asked students in turn to put whole paragraphs into modern idiomatic English.

I also joined the students informally in discussion groups and amateur play-acting, which included plays by J.B.Priestley and Noel Coward. I enjoyed all of this, and believe that the students did: they were free to attend or ignore my courses as they pleased, but I had a consistently good attendance. One colleague, a Danish medieval

historian, commented ruefully that all the pretty girls seemed to prefer English studies. There was a natural reaction among the Danes, after German occupation, to prefer English as their main foreign language. English had always been popular in academic circles, and Danish scholars including Jesperson had made important contributions to the study of English language and linguistic history. But the general public too in Denmark were becoming increasingly aware of the importance of English as a world language, and before long it was made a compulsory school subject.

I enjoyed my stay at Oerholm Hovedgaard (Head Manor), a country house in a tiny village about half an hour's train journey from Copenhagen. My host, Paul Fenneberg, had before the war combined work as a university lecturer with commercial jobs in publishing. He was also a useful farmer and public speaker. He published books for visiting tourists about Denmark, written in German or English, and was naturally glad of my help in brushing up his English. I always knew when a request was in the offing, after his wife had provided her usual excellent meal. After dinner he would lean over, offer me a cigar and a liqueur, and invite me to check his proofs: which I gladly did, in return for such excellent hospitality. (The British Council office in Copenhagen paid me an agreed monthly sum to cover food, board, and salary as a Council officer; in return I gave my lectures and classes at the university and adult education classes sponsored by the Council). I faced one dilemma when reading Fenneberg's English book about Denmark It included colourful phrases about the Danish coastline and said 'At the beach of Bellevue a vivid strand- life unfolds itself' . I was tempted to alter this, but decided it was such a charming example of a slightly foreign idiom that I would leave it untouched.

The house was surrounded by pleasantly wooded hills where I walked my host's Dalmatian dogs, and in the winter snow, practised my first attempts at skiing. I was on my own, using borrowed ski sticks on which I made the beginner’s mistake of leaning too heavily. One stick caught a hidden stone under the snow surface and I fell awkwardly, with what turned out to be a compound fracture of the left arm. A small boy found me and immediately assumed that it was my leg that was broken. Helpfully, he yanked my injured arm. Ouch! For the next six weeks I was in hospital, improving my Danish in conversation with the nurses and preparing my next lectures.

Later on I was joined as a paying guest at Oerholm by a group of younger people. Fenneberg and his wife had no children, and enjoyed young society. My fellow lodgers included a young Englishman, son of a Danish father, with the Danish name of Ladefoged, meaning farm bailiff. (The name appears in English in the form of ‘fogey’.) Later, he became a lecturer in Phonetics at Edinburgh University: at present he seemed to occupy himself mainly in writing sob stories for English women's magazines. Another guest was a young Swiss studying Danish methods of making reinforced concrete: his nickname ‘Amadeus’ reflected his love of Mozart’s music. Of course, he could ski well. A third companion was a young Dutchman studying Danish business methods who was mad about sailing small boats. Later, we were joined by Paul Christophersen, a young Professor of English who had taken his Doctorate at Cambridge and later held Chairs of English at universities in Oslo, Nigeria, and Northern Ireland.. He eventually retired with his wife to Cambridge, where years later I met him again.

One evening we all took the little 'Pig' train into Copenhagen for an evening dance at the Students Union. Ladefoged had in his arms an imaginary dog, which we all petted to general mystification.

Denmark is a small country, and I was soon meeting interesting groups of people: diplomatic contacts through the British Embassy, business people known to the British Council, and academics at the University. Visitors to Denmark sponsored by one or other of these groups included the poets Stephen Spender and T.S.Eliot, the Cornish academic A.L.Rouse, the playwright J.B.Priestley, the composer Benjamin Britten along with the tenor Peter Pears, and Kathleen Ferrier, whose glorious mezzo-soprano voice is still cherished on CD's. All these were merely fleeting contacts. I came to know more closely a distinguished Haydn scholar at the University, Professor Jens Peter Larsen, who was a major contributor to Grove's great encyclopaedia of music. At annual summer schools I met large numbers of Danish teachers of English. At one point I worked out that during my stay in Denmark, I had met one Danish inspector of education and on separate social occasions, three of his successive wives.

One of the summer schools took place at Herlufsholm, one of the few Danish equivalents of our public schools. It is in a lovely sixteenth-century country house and was run by a Danish schoolmaster and his wife, both of whom, like so many Danes, spoke fluent English. Having already spent a few days with groups of young English and Scottish academics brought over by the British Council to talk about their special subjects, I thought we should join forces to put on a scratch entertainment on the last evening. We chose well-known English folksongs, which we wove into a silly plot, the songs being accompanied at the piano by my boss, the Council representative in Denmark: a former teacher and Lieutenant-Colonel in the British Army Education Unit. He could play the piano well by ear and knew his Gilbert and Sullivan backwards. I cast myself as the 'Wandering Minstrel' from The Mikado and descended by rope from a trap-door about eighty feet up in the roof of the ancient hall, the rope being firmly held in the roof space by a lecturer in phonetics who had served in the Parachute Regiment and knew his stuff. So much was happening on the stage that my arrival at floor-level was a complete surprise to the audience. None of the Danish teachers who watched this believed our assurance that we had dreamt up the plot only the day before.

Other memories of Denmark included riding one of Fenneberg's horses on the downs outside Copenhagen with a wonderful view of the beech woods that fringed the sea. One midsummer's night I helped to sail a small boat to the neighbouring island of Fyn, navigating by map and light-buoys, and watching the dawn come up as the light flooded the estuary. We grounded on a sandbank and had to ask a fisherman for help. He kept sufficiently far off to strengthen his bargaining position. ‘Va vil Di gi’mi’? he said (What will you give me). At only twenty kroner – about two pounds – this was a bargain. I also flew once to Sweden in January over the frozen sea to keep a lecture assignment at Lund, a beautiful old university town. And there was a skiing trip with students to a little place in Norway. We went by ferry and train, arriving at a station to be told that only one bus a week went from there to our destination, and it had left half an hour ago. So we hired a taxi, which drove us through deep snowdrifts, magical in the sunshine. When we reached our Norwegian village I was soon an object of pity

and contempt to the local children. They had never yet seen a grown-up who was not an expert skier.

For someone who had lived through the hungry years of the war it was a delight to discover Scandinavian food. The Danes in particular were great connoisseurs. One of Brigitte's first experiences, after she had joined me in Copenhagen for the first year of our marriage, was to find how often food formed the topic of conversation. 'What are they talking about ?' she asked once in a train compartment. 'Food' I said, 'especially what they had for dinner last night at Fru Hansen's. She asked again, half an hour later. 'Still food' I said, 'They've now got down to the sauces.' It was not surprising, given this culinary culture, to discover that work in a restaurant, whether as chef, manager or waiter, was a highly sought occupation; many young men of good education and family start their working life in the hotel trade as waiters. But service in a good restaurant was often slow. Local legend recorded a complaint by a dissatisfied customer. 'Has the waiter who took my order an hour ago left any successors? (Efterfolgere, literally 'after-followers' in Danish).

While in Denmark I still clung to the hope that one day I might become a professional concert singer. I continued lessons in singing and listened to as much music as I could, although recordings were not so accessible as they are now. I enjoyed inviting a group of my friends from London who formed a mixed-voice choir to give concerts throughout Denmark. The choir paid for their own travel and food but were given free accommodation by members of the various provincial Anglo-Danish clubs throughout Denmark, which I co-ordinated in circulars from the Council office in Copenhagen. It worked very well, and the Danes enjoyed this opportunity to hear English choral music from the Elizabethans onwards: Morley, Weelkes, Byrd, Orlando Gibbons, Purcell and so on..

By 1948 I was beginning to feel that Denmark was only a small country and the world offered more. I was also becoming dissatisfied with a bachelor existence. I appreciated its freedom, and enjoyed occasional unattached encounters with young women; but I felt that life offered something deeper. My mother's early death while I was still working in Germany - she was only 49 - left me feeling rootless. I remembered Brigitte in Hanover, and the memory was refreshed by annual home-made Christmas cards which, on her side, showed a degree of imagination, warmth and sensitivity which I had not seen anywhere else. I wrote to her and asked if I could visit her. We met in Hamburg and, among other pleasures, enjoyed listening to an unknown soprano - Erna Berger - singing in a church concert. We both thought her voice was something special. A few years later we discovered that the Vienna State Opera agreed with us. A shared love of music was only one of the things that brought us together. From her own closely-knit family she had developed qualities of warmth and loving human sympathy which had been lacking in my own upbringing, and I sensed the difference. In short, I soon knew that she was the woman - the only woman - with whom I wanted to share my life. Luckily, she felt the same way. We married in Germany on 5 August 1949 and spent a thrifty honeymoon in England in the Lake District, after which I introduced her to my father and sister Shirley and my father's second wife Claire . We then went on to live in a newly found flat near Copenhagen.

It was a modern flat in a tree-lined suburb near a lake and extensive birch woods. Brigitte and I had an idyllic existence in what was virtually nine months of extended

honeymoon. My lecturing obligations were not heavy, I kept up my singing, and she enjoyed her first real years of peacetime freedom with occasional trips into Copenhagen and Sweden. Barbara arrived punctually nine months after the wedding. Shortly after I had to leave Denmark to look for my next job, because the British Council was reviewing its manpower policy and warned all overseas staff that no one not already on permanent contracts could regard their jobs as safe. So I went back home to Sheffield to look for work, leaving Brigitte with Barbara in the charge of her mother in Germany.

I was eventually offered a new post in the Education branch of the British Council in Vienna. This required me to teach at the University and to visit all the various Austro - English clubs throughout Austria and give them support. My first lecture to 500 students in the Auditorium Maximum of the University of Vienna was a nightmare because most of my books and lecture notes had not yet arrived from Copenhagen, and I had to borrow a few books from the library and improvise. I saved my bacon by reading out a long extract from Oscar Wilde's *Importance of being Ernest*, including what I thought was a fairly accurate imitation of the voice of the distinguished actress Edith Evans. I particularly relished her projection of Lady Bracknell's scorn on discovering Ernest's doubtful parentage: ' In a handbag?'

During our first weeks in Vienna Brigitte and I, accompanied by little Barbara in a cot, were housed at the Council's expense in a palatial run-down flat owned by the Baroness Merey, the widow of a former diplomat who had once been Austrian ambassador to the Vatican. The building, with an imposing marble staircase, reminded me a little of our National Gallery with all the best pictures removed. It was still called the '*Schottenhof*' (Scottish court), recalling a settlement on this site by the original Scottish or Irish monks who brought Christianity to these parts centuries ago. We had a wispy sort of meal with the Baroness every evening in a sumptuous room with hanging tapestries and a once-impressive chandelier of which the only part now functioning was a single electric light bulb. Meals were served by two downtrodden girls who had been trained to stand with their faces to the wall in between courses so as not to disturb the 'gentry'. We learned later that neither of them had been paid for three months, and one of them was pregnant but had not dared to tell the Baroness. Later we moved to a flat in the centre of Vienna, where Brigitte had the help of a devoted Yugoslavian maid who became closely attached to Barbara.

Among the delights of this assignment was the duty of maintaining contact with Austrian teachers of English and English study groups throughout Austria, in lovely places such as Graz, Klagenfurt, Innsbruck and Salzburg. Later in the year Brigitte was able to accompany me on one or two of these trips, leaving little Barbara behind in the care of our maid. The summer of 1951 was very hot, but it was relieved for us by a stay at a summer school for Austrian teachers near Graschnitz near Steiermark, where we had the pleasure of entertaining the British Ambassador, Sir Harold Caccia. In briefing him for his visit I asked him to give a talk. 'What about?' he said. 'Oh, the usual platitudes' I replied - far too flippantly. In the event his speech was brilliantly perceptive, and made me feel very small. But I did enjoy training a small, scratch Austrian choir to sing some English folk songs and perform them. The effects of the long Austrian musical tradition were striking: they made *Sweet lass of Richmond Hill* sound like Mozart.

Knowing that I was due to be recalled to the London office of the British Council, Brigitte and I fitted in a wonderful trip to Florence and Venice. We knew that this would be our last trip abroad for a long time, and we took full advantage of it. Of Florence we are often reminded in our sitting room by a young Italian student's beautiful reconstruction of part of a triptych by *Simone Martini* (1333). Another memory is of friendships with two outstanding colleagues: James McDonaugh, my immediate chief, and his wife, who probably, by sheer example, influenced our later decision to become Catholics; and John Mitchell, who like McDonaugh remained with the Council for the rest of his working life: both reaching senior positions.

Chapter Six: University Administration 1951 - 1960

Of the making of many books there is no end,
And much study is a weariness of the flesh.

I decided to leave the British Council, not because I had lost interest in it, but because of the problems of living overseas with young children. It seemed unfair to Brigitte and the children to continue in a job that would involve spells in very hot climates. My sister Shirley had married an old school friend of mine, Ken Coldwell, and moved with him to Australia; and my father had re-married, and was living in a small house in Sheffield. We therefore lacked a suitable base in the U.K. for small children. The option of boarding schools did not appeal.

Nor was I convinced that work with the Council, however interesting and useful, was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. So after a year in the London office I succeeded, against quite a lot of competition - over a hundred applicants - in being appointed Assistant Registrar in the administration of the University of Leeds. At my interview I met two men who later taught me a lot and proved to have an enormous influence on my life. One was the Vice-Chancellor, Charles Morris - later Lord Morris. After teaching politics as a don at Oxford he had served as an under-secretary in the Ministry of Supply during the war and later became headmaster of King Edward VI School, Birmingham, one of the best schools in the country. I took to him immediately. Looking at my paper qualifications (CV) he said: 'You seem to be indifferent whether you want to do teaching or administration.' I said I was not indifferent but enjoyed both, which was true. There was of course no question of teaching in an English university without a Master's degree or Doctorate. But most of my work in university administration was going to involve contact with staff and students in all Faculties, and some feeling for their values was essential.

The other person who made a strong impression on me was Dr Loach, the Registrar. In any other large organisation he would have been called a chief executive, but universities always dislike titles that might suggest that anyone other than the academics should have any power, so they tend to use this ancient and meaningless title. Loach was a model Registrar. Having taken his doctorate in Biochemistry he had a good understanding of scientific ways of thought, with an excellent memory for facts; as a practising Christian he had a deep concern for people; he had sound judgement, a good command of English and could write tersely and accurately on almost any university issue. In a self-governing community in which most issues were settled by consensus he was at the centre of all the discussions, with a strong moral force that made him widely influential. In those days the university had about 3000 students, some 50 Professors and about 250 lecturers and teachers. Loach knew the strengths and weaknesses of most of the academic staff and even some of the students, especially those in charge of student union affairs. His response to any difficulty was always positive, and he never wasted time on regrets.

The government of a university is a difficult exercise. Power is diffused throughout a complex structure which seems to combine all the types of government known to

Plato and Aristotle: including oligarchy in the senate, the (rarely used) power of royalty in the shape of a 'visitor', democracy in the faculties, autocracy in a few departments, and sometimes anarchy in the students' union. Loyalties are divided: academics may owe as much allegiance to colleagues in their own field of teaching or research among different universities as to their own institution. A vice-chancellor must use all his political arts to get his own way in Senate: he will encounter courtesy but not unvarying deference. Once a professor has been appointed - sometimes against worldwide competition - it is hard to remove him. The nearest equivalent to banishing him to Siberia is to make him chairman of a committee appointed to redraft the matriculation rules, and an ingenious man may make a success even of that. (I have said 'he' throughout; there were few women professors and no female vice-chancellors in those days. This was not a result of sex discrimination: very few women ever applied for a professorship. Some very able women were still having to put marriage and family before their careers).

In theory a university is a chartered corporation responsible only to the Crown, independent of political control. In practice, all British universities except Buckingham are heavily dependent on public funds, mostly from the taxpayer. It is not surprising that assertions of autonomy sometimes ring hollow. Despite the increased funding provided by the Robbins Report expansion of the 1960's the universities have had funding problems ever since.

The difficulties are not eased by a general inability to settle priorities. Academic theory tends to rate all subjects of study as of equal importance: who can judge whether the future lies with physics, astronomy, medicine or genetic engineering? Politicians and businessmen talk about 'relevance' and the need for 'vocational emphasis'. In reply, the principal of a theological college could show that 100% of his graduates were sure of employment as clerics or missionaries, while trained chemical engineers were at that time still looking for jobs. Critics sometimes ask why universities do not respond to popular demand for more engineers. In those days of Soviet Communism, a visiting principal from the University of Ulan Bator once asked me once how his country could achieve an annual output of 12,000 chemical engineers, and wondered how we tackled that problem in Britain. I had to tell him that we had no means of persuading young people to study engineering if they had no interest in it.

There are limits to what can be done by rationalisation. Obviously not every university needs to teach Portuguese, Sanskrit or agricultural botany, and some progress has been made to eliminate redundant courses. But in the clash of arguments reason sometimes gives way to strength of individual personality.

I found university administration an absorbing and satisfying experience. For nearly ten years I followed highly stimulating debates on Senate topics involving the progress of study in a vast range of departments from agricultural botany through medicine, science, technology, economics, languages and fine arts to psychology. The issues were sometimes of national importance.

As one of two Assistant Registrars I was closely involved in most of the work of a self-governing body which has the normal problems of owning and maintaining property and providing complex technical services as well as supporting the work of

staff and students. I was kept on my toes because I had to work close to the scene of my crimes: not for me the distant and lofty buck-passing of Whitehall. Your university registrar is at the heart of an articulate community which takes it for granted that power corrupts, and assumes that the administration has too much power. The administrator can protest that he is there to provide a service, that his job is merely to define the options and put them before Senate: he will not be believed except by those who have worked closely with him and have come to recognise his perverse satisfaction in working within his professional limits. Tensions are often eased by friendship and mutual respect, and Leeds was a friendly place. My work combined the trivial with the important. It might involve the taut definition of campus parking privileges or marshalling honorary graduates in the proper order for their degree ceremony. But it could also involve reforming the method of awarding scholarships or briefing a well-known architect who needed to know how students were distributed among departments on the campus before he could start to plan a new building. If the work involved working through the night we did so without question.

I was involved in the reception of refugee students from Hungary who fled persecution by Soviet Communism in Budapest in 1956. This meant travelling to London to pick up 36 students 'allocated' to Leeds University by the London reception committee. I travelled with an amiable Hungarian professor who held a chair of linguistics at Leeds: with his help as an interpreter we interviewed the students on the train and had them placed in their preferred courses before the train reached Leeds. The next day we learned how generous Leeds business people could be. Many of them were Jewish immigrants who well understood the plight of the Hungarians. Before the day was out we had received enough money or promises from Leeds shopkeepers to provide each student with a free outfit of clothes.

Sometimes I drafted the university Chancellor's speeches, planned with student help some large-scale exhibitions of laboratory work for an Open Day, or drafted in budgetary terms the effect of a proposed new cut of 10% in expenditure across the board. I was asked to devise new constitutions for our halls of residence, where the powers of the warden had never been properly defined. Mainly I was involved in the business of student admissions throughout the whole university, which was to assume increasing importance in my later career. I will say more about this later.

It all sounds very serious, but it was continuously refreshed by staff and student contacts, and Brigitte and I soon made heaps of friends within the university. There were balls, concerts, public lectures, informal suppers and occasional festive dinners. Occasionally I would be asked to look after a visiting dignitary and show him round the university: one of these was the singer Victoria de Los Angeles; another was the composer Benjamin Britten. Even during meetings there were moments of light relief. Members of Senate once suspected that the Professor of Greek had put the requirements for entry to his tiny department so high as to produce the minimum flow of new students into his care, leaving him with the maximum amount of leisure for research and fishing. A Senate committee enquiring into these allegations asked some awkward questions and received apoplectic answers: 'I will not be sacrificed on the altar of the administration' he declared. I pictured the Registrar, a tall elegant figure in a white robe, standing with his ceremonial axe raised above the short, plump and

prostrate form of the Professor of Greek, while a distant flute played the *March of the Blessed Spirits* from Gluck's *Orpheus.*

Academic debates sometimes had a streak of dottiness. Filibustering was not unknown; comma hunting was an occupational hazard. I once worked happily under the chairmanship of the distinguished historian Asa Briggs in thirteen long meetings in which we all tried to propose a reform of the old General degree structure. Its main weakness was that departmental rivalries virtually required each student to spend half his time working on each of three different subjects. Finally I wrote a report, approved by Briggs, in an effort to improve matters. A cabal of three language Professors was afraid that this would threaten departmental interests, but they seemed unable to find rational objections. Instead they took the syntax of the report apart, page-by-page, in a crowded meeting which eventually approved my report. All this did not stop Professor Briggs going on in a distinguished career, which led him, through the Mastership of an Oxford College to a seat in the House of Lords. It was only years later that I learned of his service as a code-breaker at Bletchley Park during the Second World War, which he had successfully kept secret from all his University colleagues and students.

Different faculty Boards varied in their way of handling university business. Board of Science meetings were crisp, factual, with decisions grounded on statistical evidence circulated well before each meeting and a chairman whose aim was to conclude the business in the shortest possible time, often half an hour. The Board of Arts was entirely different. Its members seemed far less interested in the eventual decision than in the process of getting there, with displays of rhetoric, humour, or personal temperament on the way. Once at a Senate meeting Clapton, the Professor of French, asserted that the Professor of English, Bonamy Dobrée, a distinguished literary critic, was a Philistine. Dobrée exploded. The vice-chancellor, as chairman, intervened. 'Professor Clapton can say what he likes, but he must address his remarks through the Chair.' Clapton swiftly retorted ' An insult's an insult, whether it's in the second person or the third'.

An acute observer of the art of academic politics was Francis Cornford, a Cambridge don, whose light-hearted little treatise *Microcosmographia Academica* first appeared in 1908. Reprinted since, it has entertained more than one generation of academics. It is based on the closed world of Oxbridge college life, but its conclusions are of wider interest, and would certainly have been relevant to some of our discussions at Leeds. Cornford had seen many committees at work, and heard many forms of argument. Two sorts of objection still often raised in debate concern the dangers of introducing either the Thin End of the Wedge or a Dangerous Precedent. To quote Cornford:

‘The principle of the Wedge is that you should not act justly now for fear of raising expectations that you may act still more justly in the future - expectations that you are afraid you will not have the courage to satisfy.
The principle of the Dangerous Precedent is that you should not now do an admittedly right action for fear that you, or your equally timid successors, should not have the courage to do right in some future issue. Every public action which is not customary, either is wrong, or if it is right, is a dangerous precedent. It follows that nothing ever should be done for the first time.’

I enjoyed my contacts with the Department of Music. For many months I was given permission to practise singing in a spare room with a piano, where I arrived at eight o'clock every morning. I was preparing for the difficult solo part of the Evangelist in a forthcoming university performance of the Bach *St. Luke Passion*. On another occasion I rehearsed with a music student, Alan Farnill, who provided a beautiful piano accompaniment to my rendering of the Schumann *Dichterliebe* at a well-attended lunch-hour concert. But by then I had decided to abandon my idea of becoming a professional singer. From then on music would be enjoyed as a hobby.

It was refreshing to meet Farnill later in Cheltenham, where as a member of the teaching staff of Bristol University he was lecturing to an adult audience on Bach. Although he had not seen me for nearly fifty years, he greeted my arrival in the audience by playing the introduction to the first Schumann song on the piano.

Once at Leeds an academic department was in crisis. A group of disgruntled students in the department of Psychology came to seek my advice. They were worried about the syllabus; they could not understand the professor's lectures; they thought their course was not being properly planned, and so on. A senior lecturer in the department said that the problem lay with the professor, who, he said, was a paranoid psychopath. Having looked up the words in an encyclopaedia I realised we had a problem: the lecturer thought the professor was mad. Enquiries were made, medical opinion sought in confidence. The accusation seemed improbable, because university appointments to a Chair are made only after thorough scrutiny. In the end I was advised to tell the lecturer that, although the professor was considered to be breaking difficult new ground in his teaching and research, there appeared to be nothing physically or mentally wrong with him. 'In that case' said the lecturer 'I must be the one who is mad.' And so the poor chap proved to be. We were able to find him a quiet haven in a research institute where, after treatment, he could continue without harm to students.

Most of my work at Leeds was concerned with student admissions. I soon found that Leeds, one of the larger UK universities, was virtually unique in having a centralised system in which the main paper work was handled in a branch of the Registrar's office, leaving the actual selection to be dealt with by the academic departments. This centralisation had two advantages. One was that it enabled my office to ensure that no applicant fell between stools: if one department turned him down we could ensure that another could consider him if he wished. The other advantage was that I was able to provide the whole university for the first time with statistics showing numbers of applicants for each of the main university courses with their A-level grades. These showed that even in those days the medical Faculty was receiving the largest number of highly qualified applications for any course within the university. Unfortunately, like most other medical schools, they were accepting too few of them. Who decided to limit numbers I could not find out: I suspected a desire within the profession to keep numbers low . Whether or not this was so, we were clearly not meeting the potential demand within the NHS for trained GP’s and specialists. The situation has not changed materially even now.

My experience at Leeds greatly influenced the proposals I later made for a centralised admissions scheme involving all universities. I shall deal with this in my next chapter.

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Chapter Seven: Starting from Scratch: 1961-1985

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp
Or what were Heaven worth?

In the mid-1950's Leeds University annually received over 15,000 applications for entry to 1200 places in its undergraduate courses. This did not represent the real competition, because many young people applied also to other universities: some to as many as twelve. All universities were offering places without knowing how many other offers the student was accepting from rival institutions. Ghost armies of young hopefuls were flooding university offices with paper, but each application had to be taken seriously by academic selectors for whom this work had to be done in spare moments. It seemed to me that there was an urgent need for a national scheme in which all universities could work together.

Conversations with my opposite numbers in universities such as Sheffield, Bristol and Birmingham showed that all were having similar problems. It so happened that the vice-chancellor of Bristol University, Philip Morris, was the brother of Charles, my own vice-chancellor, and Dr Chapman, the Registrar at Sheffield University, was an old friend from my student days there. They listened sympathetically to my ideas, while underlining the difficulties of getting rival universities to co-operate.

One day Brigitte and I met a new neighbour, Sandy Douglas, a former Bursar of Trinity College, Cambridge. He was now in charge of Leeds University's new computing laboratory: a visionary project, I thought at first. We talked over the garden fence. Before long I was helping him to find useful work in the university offices for his Pegasus Mark II computer. This was a vast machine which filled the greater part of a converted 19th- century Gothic church: the machine had to be cosseted with air-conditioning at the right temperature; it had about the same power but less flexibility than the personal computer which now sits on my desk upstairs. I told Sandy that if he could publish the university's official list of students, course-by-course, within a fortnight after the start of the autumn term instead of the two months now required by manual effort, he would have the whole of Senate eating out of his hands. The project was difficult because most first-year students took a range of courses in different departments: about half the university intake did some course or other in mathematics, for example. After a lot of effort we succeeded. This taught me something of what a computer could do for routine business, at a time when it was still generally regarded as a scientific rather than a business tool. It all seemed to suggest ways of reforming the national arrangements for university admissions.

But we could do nothing in one university alone. All I could do was plague my own vice-chancellor with suggestions as to how a national computer system might work Charles Morris discussed these with me and passed my notes on to his brother Philip at Bristol. Both were influential university figures; each served for a period in the 1950's as Chairman of the national committee of vice-chancellors; each was keen on reforming university admissions. Both realised that the present unsatisfactory arrangements were attracting political attention, in Parliament, the Press and elsewhere; the problem had reached Cabinet level. Heads of schools in particular were very critical of the universities for their failure to remedy a situation which was causing great distress to young people and unnecessary work for schools.

A chaotic system

The chaos, which affected all universities in different ways, was compounded by the growth in the number of eighteen-year-olds following the baby boom after the end of the Second World War. This was officially forecast to produce a bulge in the number of applications expected to reach all universities by 1963. Increasingly, schools were demanding reform. Their own problems were accentuated by the variety of methods of selection used by universities and their faculties. Each group of selectors designed its own application form and requirements. Some selectors required a photograph of the applicant; others did not. Some universities set special entrance tests as a supplement to A levels, and so on. A headmistress despairingly broke into verse at a conference:

There was a young lady of Kew
Who tried every college she knew,
I have passed the examiner,
God grant me the stamina
To run in the marathon too.

When the national committee of vice-chancellors set up a working group to consider reform, I was one of the people asked to put up ideas. The group proposed several reforms, which were quickly accepted. Mainly they involved uniform definitions: for example every university agreed to define a 'conditional offer' in the same way, and to adopt a common timetable for making decisions. I was asked to draw up a common application form to be identical for all universities, and I managed to produce a design, which included what most universities thought important. But there was increasing pressure, especially from the schools, for a central office to be set up to oversee the whole admissions process. There was also an informal hint from a senior civil servant that the universities had better put their admissions procedure in order, or else.

New Central office proposed

By the summer of 1960 I was heavily involved. Several vice-chancellors were convinced that a new central office was needed to run a new, co-ordinated system. I was privately warned to expect an offer of a new post as head of that office. Meanwhile I was authorized to negotiate with the two main computing firms in the U.K., the American IBM and the British ICL. The main problem was that we did not yet have an operational plan, and until then it was impossible for any firm to write computer programs. It was thought that the programs would take at least a year to design. But if the new scheme were to be effective the new organisation would have to be fully staffed and effective by the spring of 1962 to meet the flood of applications expected by 1963.

My own position was difficult. Aged forty, I was by now virtually Deputy Registrar at Leeds, where my future would have been secure. Brigitte and I already had four children - Barbara, Michael, Robert and Richard - and Brigitte was again pregnant. She was under the personal care of the University's Professor of Obstetrics. He was a distinguished man, but diagnosis was not his strong point. One day he put his file of

medical notes on Brigitte's bare stomach - bad professional etiquette, we thought - and lectured his attendant students about the coming 'baby'. He had obviously not been told by his Registrar that it was not one baby, but twins, and the students knew it. Eleanor and Jenny have, like all their siblings, been a source of delight to us, but at the time their arrival was not a promising background for venturing into the uncertain future of a combined university scheme. Few academics believed that so many different and competing universities could ever unite in a common project. But neither Brigitte nor I doubted for one moment that this was an opportunity to be seized. At forty I still had an irrational faith in my power to achieve the impossible that I would have lacked at sixty.

The offer came in September 1960, and I was appointed head of the new office and asked to draft the outlines of a scheme for the universities to approve. The office was to start in London in a large house at 29 Tavistock Square, Bloomsbury, which belonged to London University. The house had to be modified to take heavy machines, a lift, and punched card equipment. I took cheap lodgings in London, and for relaxation, played the guitar - a quiet instrument, which the landlady found unobjectionable in her small flat. During the next year I discovered that I could, without strain, put in eighty hours work every week yet still spend most weekends in Leeds with my family. Without wonderful support from Brigitte and the help of our handpicked au pair girl I could not have done it.

I had a supportive chairman, John Fulton, recently appointed vice-chancellor of the new University of Sussex, who later, as Lord Fulton, became at different times Chairman of the BBC and of the British Council. After receiving agreement in broad principle from a newly-elected Council representing all universities he got together an Executive Committee of experienced university professors and other members representing different types of university in regional groups throughout the U.K. One of the delights of this period was a meeting in which I joined two vice-chancellors and two other university people over breakfast in the Athenaeum Club in Pall Mall, London (normally the haunt of retired bishops and diplomats). We adjourned to a small room after a delicious kedgeree breakfast. We were to issue a Press release announcing the new system. To a young man accustomed to regard vice-chancellors as very near to God it was amazing to see one of them apply thick blue pencil to another's draft and reduce it to a third of its length. The new scheme was announced in broad outline in The Times on 20 July 1961.

It soon became obvious that we had no time to wait for a computer: we should have to begin with punched cards. ICL, which had just taken over the Hollerith punched card business, could supply large machines, which could sort, copy and tabulate at speed. I was authorised to give a provisional order for these in the autumn of 1960 for delivery a year later. What was required was central machinery which would record every application and every decision, and transmit these to both universities and applicants in such a way that every university knew quickly how they stood. Since we were dealing with young people making their first real choices in life the scheme must be flexible. We allowed six choices of university and course to begin with, narrowing these down so that by the time applicants got their A-level results they could be holding not more than two university offers. For those still without a university place after this stage we planned a September Clearing operation.

The outlines of these main aspects of the UCCA scheme still exist in the rules of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the organisation that includes polytechnics as well as universities in the much larger system that replaced UCCA after I had retired in 1985. The emphasis was, and is, on an orderly placing of applicants based on decisions made by the selectors and the applicants themselves, with the rules kept as simple as possible, and with everybody free to change their minds up to the last possible minute.

After universities had approved the main outlines of the UCCA scheme in the spring of 1962 my appointment was confirmed as Secretary of the Council of UCCA and head of its office. I was able to move my family to Fleet in Hampshire, commuting daily to Bloomsbury.

Why was UCCA given such a cumbersome title? 'The Universities Central Council on Admissions' was quite a mouthful for the girls answering telephone enquiries in the office. The real reason was that academics preferred a name that suggested a talking shop rather than a powerful executive. The name had to be settled before the functions of the office could be worked out. But from the beginning, all of us in the office realised that the universities must remain firmly in control.

In setting up the punched card system we were helped by a young man in his twenties, Michael Hiscock, who straight after leaving grammar school had run a punched card system in London. He had a sharp Cockney wit and a sense of logic, which enabled him to argue effectively with Professors. Another early appointment was that of Anne Draper (later, Anne Warne) who had worked as an assistant in the BBC Third Programme office and soon became an indispensable member of our secretariat. Like most of our key staff these two stayed with us throughout their working life, both eventually filling leading positions.

The punched card system did not produce all that was hoped for, and by 1963 we moved to a computer system, hiring time on a Univac machine until we were ready to run our own machine. The extraordinary thing about our computer system was that, unlike so many large systems later set up by Government, this one worked. We did not need to hire consultants. We were lucky to find a newly retired Lt. Colonel, Jim Wise, who had developed large computer-based systems during his army service in Africa. As soon as his tall, solid figure with a twinkle in his eye had entered the room at his first interview and removed his regulation ex-service bowler hat I knew instinctively that we had the right man. We appointed him as head of our operational staff, and he served us loyally and creatively up to his retirement in 1982, making an immense contribution to the UCCA service. What Jim knew better than anybody was that the success of any computer project depends on meticulous preparation of input and output. With his help and that of a young Scot, Ken Horsburgh, who had learned his craft at evening school we developed a computer service which proved to be free of technical flaws: a remarkable success in those days. Unlike insurance companies or banks, who developed their computer systems later, we had to form and replace a new set of records for a completely new intake of applicants each year, all with complete accuracy. Nor did we have branch offices. In our dealings with schools and universities we had to work entirely by persuasion: although after discussion they had accepted the agreed procedures and rules they were free to use whatever type of machinery and method of selection they wished.

I was soon impressed by the way the office worked as a team. Only two or three of the staff had ever been inside a university, but the message had gone round that we were helping young people to fulfil their dreams at a critical period in their lives. This sense of purpose, and the excitement of doing something new in a friendly atmosphere made for high morale, with a lot of ideas coming from the shop floor. In the early days we had to ask people to work night shifts, sometimes after a busy working day. Their response was magnificent. For a time at a critical period I had a camp bed in my office.

Once the system got under way, we had full support from schools and universities. We kept all of them fully informed of our plans. Any university could have refused to join the system. For the first year or two Oxford and Cambridge and three of the Scottish universities held back, while co-operating to a limited extent. But at Cambridge we had strong support in the legendary classical scholar J.S.Morrison. He became famous later as the man who designed, built and floated a replica of an ancient Greek trireme and persuaded a crew of young men to row it successfully in the Aegean. Like some other tutors at Oxford, Morrison believed that once the UCCA system got properly under way, with its annual issue of a handbook giving accurate lists of universities and their courses, the other universities would risk losing some good students if they remained outside the system. I enjoyed some stimulating walks, talks and college dinners during those months of discussion. Within five years of our starting, all the English universities, Wales and all but three of the Scottish universities were fully involved in the UCCA system. Virtually all the new universities heralded by the Robbins report of 1963 decided to join. I found myself prefacing circulars with a Shakespearian flourish: 'To the vice-chancellors of Essex, Kent, Lancaster and Warwick: we bid you welcome.'

The move to Cheltenham in 1968

By 1968 we had found our London office too cramped, and we were glad to find better and cheaper accommodation in Cheltenham. The move was not easy to plan, because we knew that to keep the system running we needed to take the key staff with us of their own free will - about thirty out of a total of eighty. By taking plenty of time to plan the move and to sell the delights of Cheltenham, with the help of the Mayor and his staff, we managed to bring all but one of the key people with us, and operations continued without a hitch. Most of those who came spent the rest of their working lives with us.

As a habitual writer of family limericks I felt I ought to celebrate the move, but couldn't find a rhyme for Cheltenham. But Gloucester had possibilities: some of our new staff commuted from there to Rodney House, our first premises in Rodney Road in the centre of Cheltenham. It was a time when we were trying to recruit part-time women staff who could combine office shifts with household duties. It happened also to be the time when mini-skirts were at their shortest. So:

A stalwart young fellow from Gloucester
Did his best, housewives' labour to foster,
But his plans came to nought
For their shifts were too short -

He eloped with the first on the roster.

One of our earliest needs was to convince applicants that it was not our job to select them for university entry. Some of them did not quite know what to make of us. One addressed the computer 'Dear He, She or It'. Overseas applicants often addressed us like gods, sometimes with gifts of chocolate or figs. I once had to refuse the offer of a free sailing trip in the Mediterranean. I liked the prayer sent in by an English Sixth Form:

Our computer,
Which art in Cheltenham,
UCCA be thy name
Thy acknowledgments come,
Thy procedure be done
In school as it is in Cheltenham.
Give us this day an unconditional offer
And forgive us our results
As we forgive those who write confidentials
And lead us not to Redbrick
But verily to Oxbridge;
For Cheltenham is the Kingdom
And ours is the glory,
For UCCA and UCCA
Omen.

Once we had an ugly letter from a Nigerian so-called Prince in London who threatened to come to Cheltenham with his friends and kill Joan Morris, a devoted and hard-working lady who handled most of our correspondence with applicants. We took the letter seriously, sent Joan home, and handed the letter to the local police. Their London contacts, who had had trouble with this student before, quickly packed him off home to his own village in Nigeria. We had some anxious moments before he left.

Alan Coren's cat

I soon learned to be wary of Press and media attention. Obviously we had a duty to answer reasonable questions, but sometimes during our busy period in August, when the newspapers are traditionally short of news, journalists tended to misunderstand complex problems and print short-cut headlines. We had one narrow escape, which featured Jim Fleming, our chief Copyflo operator, who lovingly tended an elephant-sized copying machine. This, during its working life, produced millions of perfect copies of the applicants' personal details on their main application form for university entry. Normally they bore the applicant's signature. But Jim once showed me a form without a signature, which looked rather odd. The surname seemed contrived. Details of past education looked eccentric. But what caught my eye was the name of the academic referee: not as usual the applicant's headmaster but a certain Alan Coren, whose name I already knew as a contributor to 'Punch' - the gently humorous magazine of which he later became editor. I sent Coren a po-faced letter, saying that the application was unsigned and had some unusual features: could he assure me that this candidate really existed? Coren replied with a graphic account of the applicant’s legendary qualities, but finally admitted that there was no such person. I acknowledged his letter and thanked our lucky stars that Jim Fleming's observant

good sense had saved us from an embarrassing public account of how Alan Coren's cat had found a university place through UCCA.

University selection

Although it was not our job to select students, we could see from the sidelines what sort of criteria selectors tended to look for: these were in no way affected by the introduction of a central office. Most selectors agreed that exam results, however important, did not tell you the whole story. They might even tell you more about the quality of the teachers. So an interview often helped a selector to find out whether a bright youngster really wanted to study and had a genuinely deep interest in his subject. Had he merely covered the set books or read outside them? Did he really want to study medicine or was this his parents' idea? Had she taken the trouble to find work in a hospital? Would she be better off studying pure science? There was never enough time to interview all applicants, but the application form itself could be revealing, and often the school's confidential report would give a strong lead. What still, even now, distinguishes British methods of university selection from those abroad is this element of personal consideration which is needed because we do not, like other countries, think that passing the school- leaving examination should automatically confer a right to university entrance.

An example of the worldwide interest in our system arrived from Brazil, with an invitation at a few weeks' notice to go to Rio de Janeiro and lecture at an international conference, with all expenses paid. Lavish funding on this scale made me suspect local politics. In fact the Brazilian government was at that time under heavy criticism for its handling of university entry procedures. With a half of the country's huge population under the age of sixteen, and public examinations conducted in football stadiums in the open air, their concern was not surprising. Whether anyone profited from my description of our system I never discovered. But I enjoyed the holiday, a rare spin-off. We later had enquiries from Nigeria, Israel, Germany and the Soviet Union about our unique system, and gave what explanations we could.

You may think that, however much fun it was to set up a new organisation from scratch, the annual repetition of its procedures must have been tedious. In fact the work remained absorbing. New challenges appeared every week. MP's and journalists constantly probed and had to be given sensible and accurate answers; there were constant discussions of human or financial or technical aspects of the systems, we were in daily contact with university staff and one or two of us visited schools whenever we were invited. With such a small office we could make substantial changes in our operational methods after a morning's discussion among five people. Every five years or so we installed a newer and more powerful computer, with rarely more than a day or two's interruption to our operations. Once, when there was a postal strike, we had to re-invent the whole system at short notice and run it smoothly until the strike was over. It kept us on our toes.

Agreement with examining boards

An important landmark was an agreement we made with the G.C.E.examining boards in 1972. Before then they used to publish all their A-level results in fat, expensive

volumes of broadsheets, school by school. Even a large university such as Leeds received only two copies. It was a fearsome job distributing this information accurately to the individual selectors who scrambled for copies on the official date of publication in mid-August. Surely, I thought, there must be a better way. By 1972 both our own computer systems and those of the boards were pretty accurate, and I managed to persuade the boards to send all their results to us on computer tape: good evidence of their trust. With our own programs we were able to sort the information to each university in the form in which their staff had told us they could best handle it. Our computer 'talked' to each university computer throughout the night, with little human involvement needed at either end. The result was an enormous speeding-up of the mass decision-making process during August, leaving more time for the many individual problems that cropped up in September before the start of the university year.

University Statistics

One of the arguments used in setting up UCCA had been the advantages of a central system in enabling accurate national statistics to be collected for the first time: about such things as the numbers of university applicants, their age, their qualifications, their gender, where they came from, and which universities were accepting them. All this proved to be an important part of our work. We were soon finding that government agencies as well as the Press were taking great interest in the increasing volume of statistics we published each year. Eventually, at Government request, we set up a database called the Universities Statistical Record. In doing this we used our own computer system to save public money, but a separate group among our staff under my overall control handled the necessary policy work, which included settling difficult questions about confidentiality of data and so on. As a result of this work UCCA staff were much more closely involved with civil servants in the University Grants Committee and the Department of Education and Science than we had been before. One delightful spin-off occurred on the day when I announced to my committees the appointment of a new officer appointed as Head of the unit responsible for all Government statistics. His name, believe it or not, was : Mr K.G.Forecast, known to us all forever afterwards as ‘Cagey Forecast’. Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.

UCCA and PCAS merge to form UCAS

Towards the end of my working life - I retired in 1985 - I found that the Ministry of Education was taking a greater interest in our affairs. Hitherto the polytechnics and colleges of further education had each handled applications for admission in the same uncoordinated way as the universities had done before UCCA; but they were beginning to feel the same pressures that led to our foundation. I was asked by the President of the Southampton Polytechnic to advise on the possibility of all the polytechnics joining our system. After wide consultations we agreed to work with the polytechnics and other colleges using our computer and software under annual contracts in which they virtually replicated our programs and procedures in a system running alongside ours. Tony Higgins, the new head of the Polytechnics and Colleges Admission System (PCAS), moved his office to Cheltenham before I retired. For a time Philip Oakley succeeded me as head of UCCA, and worked hard to ensure a

smooth transition to a new combined organisation. In 1993 Higgins was appointed as chief executive of a new organisation, the Universities and Colleges Admissions System (UCAS) which was formed in Cheltenham to handle entry to the whole of higher education in the U.K.: thus fulfilling the long-term hopes which both Sir Philip Morris and Lord Fulton had expressed in the 1950's. Higgins built on our foundations by making the best possible use of the increasing power and speed of computers and by making our systems even more user-friendly. Like all his former colleagues I was sad to hear of his untimely death in April 2004.

My retirement in September 1985

For several months before I retired I worked on a short history which my Executive Committee agreed to publish in June 1985, entitled: *UCCA: its origins and development 1950-1985*. In its preface my chairman, later Sir David Harrison, included a tribute from Lord Fulton, which gave me great pleasure. Lord Fulton wrote:

'I join in what must be the general tribute to this concise, lucid and beautifully written document, a fitting epilogue to Ronald Kay's central part in the story of UCCA. I should like to remind the reader of an aspect in which the account is perhaps over modest. In that critically important decade of the 1950's there was ample evidence of the frustration and injustice suffered by the young as a result of the existing methods of selection for entry. The right to choose their students was generally accepted as one of the three chief pillars of university autonomy. Would the individual universities continue to go it alone or would they find ways of collaborating to ease the burdens on the young without sacrifice of fundamental principle? We know the answer now: but it was not so clear at the beginning. There were interests that felt threatened; doubts and anxieties to be met and assuaged. The account pays a generous and richly deserved tribute to the wide range of university talent that came forward to assist in the task. The universities of to-day should take heart from this story.'

I was also delighted by the award of an O.B.E. in 1985 and by scores of letters I received from universities and schools throughout the U.K. and from government departments expressing appreciation for my work with UCCA. It was a wrench to give all this up, but the kindness of colleagues and friends was a wonderful cushion to retirement.

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Chapter Eight: Retirement from 1985

What is this life, if, full of care
We have no time to stand and stare?

Retirement should offer a pause for reflection. In my last week of full-time employment in August 1985 I had moments in which I wondered what on earth I should find to do with myself in retirement.. In the event, there was never a problem. I was at once asked to design and write an introduction to a new official guide to university entrance in the U.K., which was badly needed. The decision to publish it was clinched at a meeting in my house when four vice-chancellors came, among other things, to say good-bye. (It was a happy reflection on the changing times that three of them, in the course of conversation, proudly declared that they were sons of working men). They paid me a fee as editor and arranged the publication. This kept me busy for six months.

But other interests crowded in. For some years I had been a Governor of the twins' convent school for girls at Charlton Park: a connection which began when Eleanor was Head Girl and introduced me to the charming young Dutch headmistress, Sister Adriana. Fairly soon an important issue arose: a joint proposal by Sister Adriana and Father Copsey, the Headmaster of the neighbouring Catholic school for boys, Whitefriars, that the two schools should merge. I threw my full support behind this after talking to the priests at Whitefriars, who hinted that if the merger failed they would have to recruit girls, as many boys' schools were now doing. It would provide awkward competition for Charlton Park if that school remained open to girls only. Discussions continued during the year in which I became Chairman of the Charlton Park Governors. I knew that the staff of Charlton Park were unhappy about the merger proposal: apart from fear of the unknown there was the strong objection that single-sex girls' schools seemed to be more successful academically than mixed schools. But I was warned against taking this argument too seriously by the Equal Opportunities Commission, who advised that the available statistics did not compare like with like. Whereas the girls' schools in the comparison were well-established private foundations with strong parental support, the mixed schools were mostly newer state comprehensives with fewer educated parents. The people whose advice I most valued, including an experienced Inspector of Education, the retired Principal of the St. Paul's teacher training college in Cheltenham and the Principal of the Catholic teacher training college La Sainte Union (herself a nun) – all thought that co-education at Charlton Park was the best way forward.

Meanwhile the owners of Charlton Park School, the Sainte Union Order of nuns, delivered a bombshell. Their Provincial was an attractive lady in her forties, a charismatic leader who could have made many businessmen look like bumbling amateurs. She and her Council had decided that Charlton Park school must close, because it absorbed too much of the Order's time, energy and womanpower at a time when the African missions needed higher priority. I, along with my fellow Governors, took the view that to close a good and successful school at short notice was unacceptable. But what could we do instead?

A small group of us, including particularly Michael Abbott, a qualified surveyor and estate agent, decided that the school could not be allowed to close; that we, the Governors, would have to buy it; that the purchase price would have to be found by selling some of the school grounds; and that this could only be done by arranging for the sale of the land and the purchase of the school to fall on the same day. This type of deal was, for me, new and unknown territory, but I had every confidence in Abbott and also in John Todman, a well respected local solicitor who was associated with us. The deal was successful, and we bought the school for half a million pounds: very cheap at the price, but the nuns had little or no choice of buyer and they would not have been able to get planning permission for a commercial venture.

Buying the school brought to a head the question of a merger with Whitefriars. I knew that both the heads of the two schools had strongly supported it. In several meetings I persuaded the Governors to look carefully at either option, remaining single-sex or merging: but despite opposition from the staff I found the arguments for co-education the more convincing. At the last Governors' meeting of Charlton Park School the vote on a formal motion to merge was split fifty-fifty. I was reluctant to settle a matter so important by using my casting vote. So I simply said the whole matter would have to be referred to our Trustees, the new owners of Charlton Park School, for a decision. I knew that they would favour a merger, and so they did. So a new independent Christian school was born, St. Edwards, with a strong but by no means exclusive Catholic identity. A year or so later, in 1987, Brigitte and I realised that our big early Victorian house in Albert Rd was too big for us now that the children had moved on, and we looked for another house. It was a very happy coincidence that we found exactly what we wanted in one of the new houses, built by Bovis on the land at Charlton Park which our Governors had sold to finance the purchase of the school. (Only Michael Abbot had known which firm had bought the land, and he had been scrupulously discreet).

Other activities

I could write much more about things I did in retirement, but this memoir is already long enough. Brigitte and I continued our membership of local societies, including the Anglo-German Society of which I became Treasurer for many years; each of us joined a separate Probus Club, an extension of Rotary which still gives us constant mental stimulation and social contacts; I continued to sing with the Cheltenham Bach Choir until 2001, after thirty year's membership. I also very much enjoyed, also for thirty years, the meetings of the Friends in Council: a Cheltenham group founded in 1861, which met monthly in members' own homes to discuss papers on every subject under the sun. These were written by each member in turn and read out at each meeting. Since the group comprised headmasters, lawyers, doctors, writers, senior civil servants, clergymen and occasionally the odd General or Air Vice Marshall the papers were usually interesting and based on experience. What also gave me particular enjoyment was my work as a classical music reviewer for the local newspaper for ten years, reviewing about forty concerts a year; the fees were low, but Brigitte and I were given free tickets for a wide range of concerts, including the Cheltenham Festival of Music. Throughout all this we both continued to watch with delight the progress of our six children's careers and the fascinating growth and development of our twelve grandchildren.

A view from the summit

The summit implied in the title of this memoir is of course symbolic. Certainly I have felt throughout my retirement a happiness that derives from sharing with Brigitte the fruits of our continuous hard work in bringing up a family and following a challenging career. We have also enjoyed climbing real mountains, in the Lake District, Spain, Germany and Austria, and the view from the summit has always been a special delight.

Looking back on my career I can only feel that in return for a great deal of regular and sustained work I have led a blessed and charmed life. I hardly ever went to work without a feeling of eager enjoyment, and that must be rare. I have nearly always had colleagues I liked and bosses I respected. I have always sensed that the work I was doing was worth while. I did belong to a generation which placed value on working for the public interest. I am certain that the organisation I set up filled a real public need and gave good value for the money which it drew from public funds. (After I retired an increasing proportion of our income came from selling our services to the general public). What strikes me forcibly is the lack of any serious public criticism of the work of either UCCA or of its successor, UCAS, despite the enormous expansion in the Government's plans for higher education. We must have got something right!

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Sources of quotations

Page 1: *Does the road wind up-hill ?* …poem by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Page 9: *Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive..* from Wordsworth's Prelude (1805)

Page 12: *'The time has come' the Walrus said..* Lewis Carroll: Alice in Wonderland

Page 19: *What are the roots that clutch:* T.S.Eliot: The Waste Land (1923)
Eliot's poem reflected the devastation caused by the First World War, but it seemed equally relevant after the Second.

Page 23: *What should they know of England,?..*: Rudyard Kipling's ballad 'The English Flag'

Page 28: *Of the making of many books there is no end*.. Ecclesiastes, Chap. 12. This comes near to the end of the magnificent passage from the King James Bible beginning 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth' which was read to us at school at the end of the summer term each year by a senior prefect. The reminder that 'much study is a weariness of the flesh' was, I'm sure, intended by my understanding headmaster as an encouragement to forget books for a bit and go and climb mountains.

Page 33: *Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp.* .Robert Browning's poem, Andrea del Sarto (Men and Women, 1855)

Page 34: *The young lady of Kew* : In an important conference in 1957 Miss Joyce Bishop, Headmistress of Godolphin and Latimer School, Hammersmith, alerted the whole educational establishment to this young lady's plight with this oft-quoted limerick.

Page 42: *What is this life, if, full of care…*William Henry Davies, from 'Songs of Joy' 1916

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