

David Barrett Remembers

Soon after the birth of his first grandchild in the United States, Old Cestrefeldian David Barrett received a book entitled "Grandfather Remembers: Memories for my Grandchild" which provided a structure for passing on information to the next generation. David decided to go a step further and produced a book of reminiscences specifically targeted at his grandson.

David attended Chesterfield School from 1947 to 1955 and it is hoped that OCs will find the following extracts of interest. The Society is very grateful to David for allowing the sharing of this very personal document.

It must be stressed however that any views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Society.

..... But in September 1947, I was at a major junction in my life. I was about to begin a career at Chesterfield Grammar School.

LIFE BETWEEN 1947 & 1952

Success in the 11 Plus brought one big change to my routine. No longer would I walk to school, I would go on the bus and then the train, and a steam train to boot. For a child confined by the constraints of war to a small village and the immediate neighbourhood this was a great adventure.

This period of my life, and indeed for the two years beyond 1952, was dominated by people and events associated with Chesterfield Grammar School. The focus of my life had moved for ever from Langwith, partly because most of my time was taken up in and around Chesterfield, but also because my friends and acquaintances now came from there. Consequently, much of what you will hear in this section centres around my life and experiences at Chesterfield Grammar School.

Day One Chesterfield Grammar School

The first part of the journey to school involved the 7.55am EBOR¹ bus from outside the colliery cricket ground. I recall it was a fine September morning with the hint of autumn which that month always brings. My immediate destination was Langwith Junction where I would catch a train to Chesterfield, hauled by a steam engine. I had money in my pocket to pay the bus fare (two or three old pennies) and a cheque to the school from Father to cover the cost of my lunches during the Christmas term.

At Langwith Junction station ² I collected my green coloured train pass for the term from the booking office, and along with Harvey Gilbert I waited for the train with a crowd of other children wearing Chesterfield Grammar School blazers and caps. ³

¹ This was a private bus company which with the advent of a Labour Government would be swallowed up by the Nationalised Mansfield and District Traction Company. I disliked this sort of change, I guess I have done so ever since, but somehow I have managed to go along with this and other changes which in life are inevitable. In due course I would abandon the bus and bicycle to Langwith Junction.

² Lawson Little published an article on this very busy rail junction in Steam World, January 1999 page 22.

³ Well at least some of the boys (certainly the new ones) were wearing hats because even in those days there was a rebellious element who said, "Why should we have to wear blazers and caps?" It was this generation that seeded the revolt against conformity and authority that gathered pace in the 1960s and 70s.

Now the train arrived from Chesterfield with a handful of passengers, and then had to turn around. To do this the engine was uncoupled and went off in the direction of Lincoln in order to find change-over points allowing it to come back along the line to Chesterfield. It came hooting through the station at speed and went up the line to find yet another cross-over back on to the other line so that it could hook up to the carriages. Having done this the entire train set out for Chesterfield, empty, crossed over yet again and then reversed into the station where we were impatiently waiting to board. Hardly had the train come to a standstill than there was a mad rush, which was odd because many of those gathered could not have cared less about going to school! Until this day it has never occurred to me; why were we never allowed to alight on the far platform and then depart direct to Chesterfield?

Why did the engine complete with carriages have to go up the line only to come back again? I can only think that the train should have arrived long before we appeared but it rarely did so and had it remained on the far platform it would have unnecessarily blocked the line to Lincoln⁴. At 8.20am or thereabouts we departed for Chesterfield.

The train pulled away through a cutting, under a bridge carrying the Langwith to Langwith Junction road and then up and on through rolling rural countryside to Scarcliffe where we paused at a small station and a few office girls joined us on their way to work in Chesterfield. I guess this station was there both for passengers and commercial trade. There was a yard for storing domestic coal for distribution to the surrounding community, and space for agricultural produce such as grain and sugar beet before they were shipped to the factories for processing. As usual, there were no houses in the immediate vicinity of this station, you had to walk a considerable distance to reach it.

Beyond Scarcliffe station was a large hill, and to overcome this the train had to enter the 18th (I believe) longest rail tunnel in Britain⁵. It was some 1870 yards long. This tunnel, or rather the activities it provoked on the train, would blight my first weeks at School, but more of that in a moment. Mining subsidence had caused one side of the tunnel to sink so much so that one track could not be used, and to avoid collisions the drivers and signal men had to operate a "key" system which locked the signals while a train was in the tunnel. There was only one key and this was contained in a leather pouch fastened to a large metal ring. As the engine driver passed the signal box, he slipped his arm through the ring which the signal man held out. The key having been removed from the signalling mechanism, it was impossible for further traffic to enter the tunnel. The key having been delivered to the signal man at the far end, he could then unlock his signals and allow traffic to move into that sector.

⁴ The London and North Eastern (LNER) Chesterfield-Lincoln route was a cross country line which intersected the Company's main North-South route at Retford. I guess it was designed as a feeder line from the East Midlands coal fields and the agricultural districts of Lincoln. Whether it ever paid for itself I don't know, but during the three years I travelled on the line you could usually count the number of fare paying passengers, besides we school children, on one hand. Sometimes following "after school activities", I travelled home on the 10.00pm train and was the only passenger. No wonder it closed for passenger use in 1950, and then completely when Dr Beeching came along, it must have been a financial nightmare. Dr Beeching was an ex-ICI Director known to your Great Grandpa Sykes. His name has gone down in British History as the villain who destroyed the wonder that was the eco-friendly British rail system. The fact that the Irish navvies tore rural Britain apart to build it, and for years its dirty, coal burning engines covered the environment and the population in fine soot is forgotten by the modern liberals.

⁵ Many of us became "train spotters", i.e. we collected the numbers of engines, indeed some chaps used to spend all their Saturdays on a railway station logging engine numbers in a little book as they were spotted. I wrote one or two down as I saw them on the way to school, but never took the hobby seriously.

Bolsover tunnel was always full of sulphurous smoke made either by the current train or previous ones. Invariably as you approached the tunnel smoke was issuing from the entrance. In the carriages, passengers had some protection from the smoke, providing they kept the windows closed which many silly small boys preferred not to do. The driver and fireman had no such protection. They had to breathe in the smoke, and look cheerful.

Emerging from the tunnel the train came to the village of Carr Vale in which lived miners from the nearby Bolsover Colliery. This village nestled in the valley ⁶ that runs roughly north south below Bolsover Castle standing high on a bluff. It was one of the castles that Cromwell knocked about a bit, though fortunately in not too big a way. The arrival of our train brought road traffic through Carr Vale village to a halt because the level crossing was only just beyond the end of the platform, and for safety reasons the gates had to close to people and vehicles before the train arrived.

Leaving the folk of Carr Vale patiently standing by the crossing gates waiting to go to work or to school, the train made its way, pulling hard against an adverse gradient, through rolling fields to Arkwright Junction.⁷ The first section of this part of the journey was set against a distant backdrop to the north of Markham Colliery and the Coalite chemical plant, which even in those days had its own distinctive smell associated with pyridine and associated derivatives.

After Arkwright Junction, the train careered (because it was now on a distinct downward gradient) through another tunnel,⁸ hurtled towards Chesterfield with its famous Crooked Spire⁹ crossing yet another valley¹⁰ and finally curved its way into Chesterfield Market Place Station.¹¹ This station had six covered platforms which suggests that the original investors in this rail project had high hopes of a thriving cross country business.

Alighting from the train we were met at the barrier by a scruffy old guy who insisted on inspecting our train passes. I think he was called Alf or some such name. Several of us speculated as to when, if ever, he had taken a bath. So, if we scruffy unwashed schoolboys noticed the state of his toilet, you can guess how incredibly grubby he must have appeared. Out of the station we trooped, and threaded our way up past the end of the Market Place and then through various back streets, alongside a saw mill, down through a church yard (in which I believe George Stephenson the steam engine inventor is buried) across the even then busy Sheffield to Chesterfield road, and into the Grammar School.

Travel by train would only last for three years. Before Dr Beeching had chance to take his axe to the rail network, the line from Langwith Junction to Chesterfield was closed. The poor level of passenger

⁶ The M1 Motorway now runs through this previously quiet valley.

⁷ The nearby Arkwright Colliery eventually closed, and the National Coal Board persuaded the miners to buy their terraced cottages which previously they had rented from the Board. Having completed the deal, and lived in the houses for some time the new owners found that not only did they have a subsidence problem, but also a major problem with methane gas. The gas problem proved to be so large and so intractable that in the 1990s the Board built a completely new village for the residents across the main Chesterfield/Bolsover road and knocked down the old village completely.

⁸ A short tunnel only 400 yards long and, compared with Bolsover, quite clean. Moreover, it possessed two working tracks.

⁹ Referred to by TOCR's Mother in her very young days, as the "curly spanner". This she did when we approached Chesterfield, one day in the car and she arose from sleep and peered out of the window.

¹⁰ In the very bottom of this valley on the outskirts of the town there were two more separate railway lines, a canal, and various roads. Our train majestically steamed over all of these on a magnificent multi-level (I believe 5 levels in all) viaduct built of blue-grey brick. It was a superb and elegant piece of engineering. All that remains today (1998) is part of one pier.

¹¹ To distinguish it from the London Midland station on the Sheffield to London (St Pancras) line,

and freight traffic, and the technical problems with Bolsover Tunnel were bleeding the owners to financial ruin. We took to the bus, first with a private company, Baker Brothers, who in due course were taken over by East Midland as part of the nationalisation programme of the then Labour Government. This move to bus travel had certain profound consequences. In particular, it prevented those laggards amongst us who had not completed their written homework the previous evening from making suitable amends on the journey to school. On the other hand, there were a number of good looking secretaries who preferred to travel by bus, and by this time the testosterone was making us aware of such attractive young things.

The School

Chesterfield Grammar School was built into the side of the valley that fell away from the Chesterfield/Sheffield road. Consequently, it had a rather unimposing facade from the road. Its more imposing two storey facade, complete with stone plaque saying the school was founded in 1594, was at the rear. Below this was a tarmac terrace and retaining wall, and then the upper grass field which was devoted to routine recreation at break times, weather permitting. In turn this led on to a steep grassed bank with a set of formal steps going down to a lower field which was devoted to cricket, and later to hockey.

Six hundred and fifty boys attended Chesterfield Grammar School, or rather Chesterfield School as it was re-named by the socialist reformers who were already at their destructive work. The number of pupils had already out-stripped the available space and facilities, even with the “New Wing” (a Cotswold stone extension built at right angles to the main building) and the various wooden huts which were scattered around the site.

It was an “unashamedly” boys school. How could you develop “men” with girls around the place? Times have changed, but as far as I can judge the exclusive male regime did me little or no harm. I had no problems subsequently relating to women, at least as far as I know. Other chaps may not have been so fortunate, I cannot tell. But Chesterfield Grammar School was not a boarding school. I had the attention of caring, attentive parents at home. I believe this factor is more important in determining the orientation and normality of boys in later life than single sex schools or co-education.

There was no Hall or Chapel large enough to hold the entire school for morning assembly. Consequently, if the weather was fine morning assembly was held in the open on the top field, but if the weather was wet then it was split into morning and afternoon sessions and held in two upper floor class rooms. In one corner of these class rooms there was a wind organ, so wet weather prompted the accompanied singing of hymns. Unaccompanied singing was not practiced outdoors, fortunately.

My first image of Chesterfield Grammar School was open air assembly on one fine, sunny September morning.

Assembly, held inside or outside, had a religious purpose (Anglican naturally) as well as an administrative one.¹² The gathering was led by the tall, imposing figure of the Headmaster (who was also a Methodist lay preacher). Prayers were followed by a short address, and then by notices dealing with the administration of the School, School Societies and Clubs.

¹² Boys from Roman Catholic families were sent to contemplate the cosmos or the Virgin Mary in some classroom set theologically apart from this heretical gathering.

Chesterfield School was run very much along the lines of an English Public (i.e. private) School, but within the State System. As no one boarded, we were all “day boys”, and announcements dealing with Club and Society business usually occupied much more time during Assembly than any other notices.

When it was fine we, “Shirebrook people”¹³, never arrived in time to join the start of School Assembly, the train time table simply didn’t permit it. So, when Assembly was held outdoors, we gathered on our arrival round the corner near the staff room where we were supposed to keep quiet until called to join the other pupils for school-notices. The other pupils were arranged in a large semicircle on the top-field in front of the steps leading down from the walled terrace on to the top field. Fairly frequently, as you might guess, we were told to be quiet by an irate master who detached himself from the proceedings to admonish us all.

Settling in

In my first year, I was assigned to Form IL.¹⁴

In the classroom, we were seated in alphabetic order by surname. Everybody was known by their surname. There was no use of Christian names, they were completely “out”. This was an immediate shock because up to that point in my life, I had been known as “David”, not Dave, I hasten to add because Mother frowned upon this form of sloppy, familiar, uncouth address. From then on until I reached the VI Form I would be known as plain “Barrett”, by staff and friends alike. It was I suppose a way of levelling people out, and avoiding confusion. It was of course a Public School tradition. I guess the practice explains why over the years I have had the tendency to address each of my male friends by his surname.

Anyway, as plain “Barrett”, I sat in the back corner of Form IL along with a guy named Peter Breeze. He came from a home that was less interested in education than mine, and after the first year we drifted apart. I think he left school as soon as he was able to do so. Various other administrative details were also addressed that morning, e.g. I was assigned to Clarke House, (there were 6 Houses, each named after an earlier “worthy” of the school or district) and in any internal sporting or other competitive events, I would compete for Clarke House. Indeed I would go on eventually to become Captain of the House.

I learned that I must wear a school cap and blazer on my way to and from school, a rule that would create friction and dissent for years. School prefects used to revel in setting lines if they observed you cap less.¹⁵ It was one way of demonstrating that you “belonged”, and I for my part wore it with more

¹³ Though we boarded our train at Langwith Junction, the station was called, “Shirebrook North”, hence the rather derogatory term “Shirebrook people”.

¹⁴ The first year intake was just over 100 boys. There were 3 classes for the year designated, IL (for those with a language bent), 1S (those preferring Science), 1C (for what I cannot remember, but everybody else in the year). I guess selection was fairly random that first year, though performance in the II Plus and reports from the previous school did possibly play a part. However, being placed in IL was ironical, because I have never had a bent for languages, ask your Mother, Thomas.

¹⁵ A favourite line was “Manners maketh Man” though there were much longer ones, and you were required to write this out 50 or 100 times. A quite useless exercise, but there it was. I did not have to write too many lines. The other punishment was “detention”, when for an hour you were detained in school on Friday evening when others had gone home. During this time you had to complete a task set by the Master giving the detention. Prefects could not hand out detentions. Too many detentions, and you were interviewed by the Head. I think I was detained once, and that was for not owning up immediately to a misdemeanour. I had to stay in for an hour after school one Friday evening, and write an essay on some lordly topic or other. This was bad enough, but the timing caused me to miss the 5.00pm bus home, the next one did not depart until 6.00pm, so that Friday was a

than a certain amount of pride.¹⁶ I had been assigned to Clarke House. Being in Clarke House, the rings on my hat were yellow, the other houses had different colours.

Our Form Master in IL was a formidable chap called H (Harold) H Hanson, or Froggy Hanson because he taught French. It was customary for the whole class to rise to its feet when the master arrived to give the lesson. The reason for this was never explained in so many words as far as I can recall. But in retrospect, it registered both respect for a person who at that time had more knowledge and skills than you yourself possessed, and just common courtesy in acknowledging that someone new had joined the group. Certainly, in later years I have always done this, and particularly so when a member of the opposite sex joined the group of people of which I was a part. I guess in these days of aggressive feminism this is now considered to be insulting, or at the least degrading to the female. Fortunately, I was brought up during a time when a female was also a lady, and males treated her with deference and care.

Froggy Hanson frequently bellowed at us often in French. A typical remark would be, “Un Cochon, man, un cochon, masculine, not feminine, man!”

We all feared Froggy Hanson, and so I reacted with abject horror when about a week later I took an apple to school and juice leaked on to the label of my French exercise book.¹⁷ Ironically I did not like apples very much and, as my shiny brown leather satchel held very little, the chance of the apple not leaking upon something was fairly small. But why did it have to be my French exercise book? Horror, upon horrors, what was I to do? I said to Father, “Dare I go back to school?” But good old Dad fixed the problem with the simple remedy of covering the offending book in clean brown paper, and then (with a stroke of near genius) he typed a label which mimicked the official one on the actual book. Would Froggy Hanson buy it? Well, he more than bought it, he drew the attention of the whole class to the care and attention I was giving to my exercise books. Father and I had such a good laugh.

The first few days were exciting and challenging, but they were marred by various antics on the train going to school. Playing tricks on new boys by older boys was not a practice confined to public schools. Most of this larking about was done in the dark in the Bolsover Tunnel when the electric light bulbs had been removed. It was difficult to keep away from the perpetrators particularly as the carriages had no corridors. I recall going home absolutely devastated and saying that I wanted to go back to Whaley Thorns. This was equally devastating to Mother and Father, all they had worked for was being put at risk.

Anyway, the problem did not go away, if anything it got worse. In the end, Mother and Father formally complained to the Head, which then turned out to be an embarrassment to me. The problem improved after this, but it only finally went away when two large saloon (single compartment) carriages were introduced; the older boys were then segregated from the younger ones, and were supervised by prefects.

long day. However, I recall the shame of being placed in detention was more of a punishment than the actual time or work required. long day. However, I recall the shame of being placed in detention was more of a punishment than the actual time or work required.

¹⁶ There is a photograph of a school cricket team somewhere in which I alone am wearing an ordinary school cap, and I look a right “berk”.

¹⁷ Ironically, I did not care for raw fruit, and never have, mainly because polio was rife in those days (the Salk vaccine was yet to be invented) and somehow I had heard that one source of polio infection was uncooked fruit.

However, this change of carriages almost had a tragic consequence when the back bogey of the first of these carriages (my carriage) jumped the points, followed the wrong line, and became derailed as the train pulled out of Chesterfield Station one summer evening. Fortunately, the train was going very slowly and because the entry to the station was via a long bend the alert driver had a clear view of the problem as it developed and stopped very quickly. Nobody was injured, though it was nerve racking experience as we bounced along the sleepers of the track. Dust came out of every nook and cranny of the old carriage creating quite a fog within the compartment. I remember one of our prefects sitting at the end of the compartment shouting at us, "Keep calm, keep calm." as he hung on like grim death to the arms of his seat, his white knuckles clearly showing. However, had the carriages toppled over, the accident could have been much more serious since each had large picture windows, and these were not made of safety glass. At the time, we thought it was all quite a lark, but over the years I have come to realise that some of us could have been scarred for life, or even killed.¹⁸

Homework was also part of the new experience. One had to remember what work had been set for that particular night, and then make sure that the appropriate books were in your brown leather satchel when you left school. Without knowing it, I was beginning to operate an elementary filing and registry system, poorly. I suppose I must have done the required homework at the kitchen table.

I do know there was always a conflict between homework and the radio. Certainly, the radio won between 6.45pm and 7.00pm because that was the time that Dick Barton, Special Agent and his assistant Snowy took on the powers of darkness and evil. They invariably won, but not before much strife, tribulation, heartache and excitement. It was a programme for "men" without any women in mind or in sight. It was marvellous. In due course it was considered too violent for we young things, even though we still had some of the Empire intact. It was replaced with "The Archers", a story of country folk (and women) and look where that has got us to, "organic fanning". Later in the evening, the competition on the radio came from "Paul Temple and the So and So Affair"¹⁹, a half hour serial which usually ran for six episodes. Now here women were involved, but in the most proper way possible. Temple, the suave private detective with independent means, had a (clearly very beautiful) wife with the exotic name of "Steve" who in turn had an equally sultry, sophisticated, sexy voice.²⁰ In the course of Temple solving the "Affair", Steve inevitably got herself into lots of bother with the powers of darkness, and this always occurred at the end of one of the episodes. You had to wait to the following episode for Temple to come to the rescue, and prevent her from experiencing a fate worse than death, whatever that might have been. It was stern, nail biting stuff, against which French, Maths, Latin etc. had little chance. That is, providing the radio was working. It was an AM set, so to begin with the reception was pretty diabolical, but this particular receiver was long past its sell-by date. What a red letter day when a new ECKO radio came into the house. But again this did little to promote the prompt completion of the wretched home work.

¹⁸ One of my companions on the train that day Lawson Little subsequently wrote an account of the Chesterfield/Lincoln railway, and mentioned this accident, see the references at the end of this article. Later, he told me that despite a diligent search, he was unable to find any reference in the official records to this accident. Why this should be he could not say.

¹⁹ The use of the word "affair" in the context of Paul Temple, a very happily married man, came to bother me since men and women apparently had "affairs" which for some reason they were not supposed to have or indulge in. It was all very confusing for a twelve year old who had at that point had received no sex education from his parents, and indeed never would receive any.

²⁰ The actress, Marjorie Westbury, who had of course a very sexy voice. But how was I to know it was sexy, after all, I was only 12. Marjorie Westbury in the flesh was actually quite plain, and not all that attractive.

One other cross I had to bear was my initials, DWAB. Why are young people so sensitive about this sort of thing. However, I have to say I was tormented fairly regularly about it and for many years I spent much effort avoiding the A, and indeed I sign myself to this day, D W Barrett. Why did nobody tell me three names were an asset, and I should use them accordingly. Indeed my own children have only two Christian names, sorry family names,²¹ and it has only occurred to me fairly recently that three Christian names makes your full name stand out in a crowd. Mother was far seeing in many things (mothers usually are) and I suspect that you are already learning this lesson!

Morning school was interrupted by a short break at around eleven o'clock. By this time I was ravenous. Now, twenty five yards or so down Sheffield Road from school was the "Tuck Shop", a small bakery with adjoining shop. At break, the School descended on this establishment and cleaned it out of cream buns and doughnuts. It was literally, "a bunfight", and it had every feature of a rugby scrum. I remember pressing Mum and Dad for the four old pence to join this melee in order to buy two cream buns each day. On occasions they complied, but this was done reluctantly because money was tight, and they were already paying for a good, hot school dinner. Moreover, I had access to a third of a pint of milk at morning break, and that was much better for me! Well it was OK if you got there smartly before the crate was cleaned out, and it was all right in winter when the bottles had not stood in the warm summer sun shine for several hours. Being a growing lad had its problems.

Growing problems were not helped out much by lunch. These meals were cooked on the premises by the Caretaker's wife, Mrs Fell. I cannot recall not liking the fare, just the lack of quantity. This was compounded by the fact that the new boys sat at the bottom of the dinner table. Each table had a prefect who was supposed to oversee fair play in the dishing out of equal quantities to all, together with any seconds which might emerge from the kitchen. My impression, which was confirmed by my stomach, was that this even handedness did not always manifest itself. Seconds usually materialised in the form of spare custard, and every so often some found its way down to the bottom of the table, but not that often. When it did it was a life saver. Hence my weakness for custard which to this day I have never lost.

Not too long after I began school, this routine of train travel was interrupted one afternoon when I was hauled out of class, and told not to go home, but to catch an East Midland bus to Creswell and stay with my Nan. My sister had developed measles or some other contagious disease. I had to be quarantined for a short while, and if no symptoms developed then I could return to school but only if I lived at Creswell. This was a great adventure, and I remember feeling very important, apart from the fact that I loved staying with Nan. I recall being more than a little disappointed when my poor sister recovered and I had to revert to my normal travel routine.

Exercise and Other Sports at School

Exercise was very much a part of a Grammar School education. Half an hours gymnasium work was a set period for every form at some point during the week's timetable. Mr Jephcote, the gym master, took these periods, or rather he told us what to do, he rarely executed the various exercises which we were obliged to do. He had a wonderful way of saying "Leeft" when he wished to encourage press-ups and the like.

However, it was not the gymnastics which I found surprising, it was undressing with a crowd of other young boys. Then, to add insult to injury, we had to have a fairly cool shower after each and every

²¹ Soon after I started work, I got myself into a tangle. I asked a Moslem, "What is your Christian name?" No wonder I received an odd look!

gym period, winter and summer. These showers were a series of five or six coarse nozzles fitted in a line at about five feet from the floor. They did not deliver a large volume of water. So for a year or two we dodged around the jets and emerged still sweaty, hot and unwashed at the other end. New efficient showers were then fitted and it became much more difficult to dodge the water jets. In any event we had come to like showers by then, and tended to stay under them much longer than necessary. Indeed, since leaving school I have preferred a shower, and taken great efforts to have them fitted in all my homes, a completely unimaginable situation in 1948. I have to admit that I have not been too good at adapting to change, but now and then I have got it right. Ask your mother, she is fairly keen on showers.

There were no playing fields at School apart from a cricket ground, the site was not large enough. The school's playing fields were located about four miles to the west side of the town at Storrs Road. Each "school year" was allocated one afternoon each week for games, and immediately after lunch we boarded two Chesterfield Corporation double deck buses and headed out of town. The site at Storrs Road was not a good one since many of the pitches were on hill sides. Somehow the money was found to level the site, which in those days was a big project, and at the same time install an all-weather athletics track. The land of course had to be re-seeded with grass after this operation and then all the stones brought to the surface had to be removed. School boys became a very cheap (though I am not sure how effective) way of stone picking. At the same time this task kept them occupied during their official games periods because for a while they had nowhere to play soccer and rugby.

Football during the winter was the usual order of the day, but as you progressed up the school, the option to play other sports such as rugby and hockey emerged. To Master Jephcote, you were pretty useless if you were not proficient at soccer, particularly as he coached the Chesterfield Boys' Team that took lads from all the secondary schools in Chesterfield. His great discovery was Bob Wilson who went on to be a top class goal keeper with Arsenal but really made his name subsequently as a national TV sports commentator.²²

However, if the ground was too wet to play soccer, which it often was in those pre-El Nino days, then we were sent on a cross country run. How I hated this, as I did Sports Day when everybody at some time or other had to run. I was short breathered and had yet to discover that if I tried I could run quite quickly over short distances. But longer distances and cross country running over ploughed fields, these were exercises for the birds!

My fame came in cross country when I was obliged to run for the House. I ran out of puff very early, dropped to the back of the field very quickly, lost sight of the remaining players in the game even more swiftly, and in the back blocks of High Storrs lost my way. I eventually got back to the Club House at the sports ground when everybody else had long gone home. On the board at school reporting the results, I was not given a time to finish. Instead, the word, "lost" was put in the place of my time, much to the amusement of the rest of the School.

Swimming was also part of the gymnastic curriculum, and every so often we trooped off to the Ashgate Road baths to immerse ourselves in tepid, chlorine saturated water. The whole bath complex reeked of chlorine when you entered the building, and when you departed alter immersion, then you also reeked of chlorine. There was little enjoyment in this exercise, little incentive to learn how to swim properly, and even less incentive to practice. The weather did not help either. At home, the nearest swimming bath was at Creswell, but there was little fun cycling over there on a cold Saturday morning, and even less fun cycling back a wet towel on the handle bars of the bike. Moreover, the skill of

²² His brother Hugh can be found on the back row of the 1955 School Cricket next to the Headmaster.

swimming did not fall into my lap, it required effort, and on my part, effort in those days was in short supply.

Consequently, I have only ever been able to do a pathetic breast stroke. Many years later when we lived in Australia and the temperature was about 35 degrees centigrade, there was a jolly good reason to get into the water, if only to cool off. Ice and snow in Britain never prompted such a reaction.

The Ritual of the School Photograph

The School Photograph was another ritual that I came to know fairly early in my school career. This would occur on a bright spring morning when the entire 650 boys and 50 or so staff would be lined up en masse, and a rotating camera would be used to take one large photograph. I doubt whether anybody ever took the trouble or effort to name and catalogue those people on the photograph, and indeed I do not think I have specifically recorded where I am to be found on the two copies in my possession. But as I have mentioned elsewhere, Chesterfield Grammar School was run on the lines of a Public School, and a group photograph every so many years was obligatory. I have never had my school photographs mounted and hung, but you will find such photographs in the homes of many chaps who have been to a Public School.

Many years after I left school, a comparable photograph from Farnham Grammar School, Surrey taken in the late 1940s was published in our local paper. The fascinating thing was that it was almost a double image of our school photograph of that period. The participants were dressed alike, the boys faces looked similar, their hair styles were identical, one chap was fooling around and looking entirely in the wrong direction when the shutter clicked, the composition of the staff was similar, there was one token woman, one male member of staff who looked like Himmler, and the Head who dominated the scene in the centre.

Academic Progress

I cannot comment much on my academic achievements during that first year, and I have no School Reports to guide me because they were produced (if they were produced) on single sheets which have since been mislaid. After that first year all School Reports were produced in a Book, and these have survived. They do not make very interesting reading!

Academically, very few things interested me at the time. Indeed that was the problem. Mental effort was hard work, and I could not relate much of what I was being taught to the practicality of my own everyday life. For example, when was I ever going to use French, my horizons ended at the Yorkshire coast. Thank goodness Shakespeare was not limited in this way, or the Merchant of Venice and Two Men of Verona, etc. would never have been written. Moreover, I had an easy comfortable life at home. Hardship was not a driver.

Latin was part of the curriculum which pleased Mother. Her ambitions for my future education involved not only a degree at a University but nothing less than Oxbridge, and in those days, regardless of what you intended to study, an ordinary pass in Latin was mandatory for entrance to either institution. So I recited, amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant, without really understanding what it was all about. I also similarly recited Latin verse on the terrace of Hurst House²³ one sunlit morning dressed in sandals and a toga (one of Mother's white sheets secured precariously with a safety pin) as

²³ Hurst House was a large house across the road from the main school in which the VIth Form Arts studied, since there was no room available in the main school building.

part of play produced for the education of fellow students and any Latin speaking parents who cared to attend.

As it turned out, I was not made of Oxbridge stuff, though I would have given my eye teeth to have gone to either place. The nearest I got was a viva for my Ph.D. in Oxford, presenting a lecture in St Johns at Cambridge, and finally examining candidates for a crop protection certificate in Woolfson College, Cambridge, simply because it was a cheap venue out of term.

In due course my Mother's ambitions were transferred to my own children. Your mother secured a place at St Johns, Cambridge, much to my delight. But promptly, she turned this down much to the disgust and displeasure of her teachers at Godalming VIth Form College. As usual, she had very sound arguments for taking such a decision. Apparently I did not disguise my disappointment very skilfully. Your Uncle Nigel had both the intellectual software and the A Level grades to have reached either place, but he visited Cambridge and decided that the town had an insufficient number of supermarkets for his liking, and followed his sister to Nottingham. Parental ambition was thus thwarted for a second generation. I trust this will not re-occur again!

Should you ever come across my academic record up to the Ordinary Level Certificate (which I took in the summer of 1952) you will discover that progress was uneven. Success was usually followed by concentrated relaxation, or severely reduced effort due to the distraction of out of school activities. Sloth and idleness were inevitably followed by failure, prompting then a determination to succeed, which brought about some slight improvement which only prompted further sloth and idleness. During the 1949/50 school year, the Head commented in my Report, "His keenness must apply to schoolwork as well as to Societies." But it didn't.

In my second year I was moved into Form IS (Science), though I continued to take History and Geography. In time these subjects would disappear from my curriculum. I certainly could not work out the value of subjects such as History, English Literature and Geography. What practical use could they ever be? Now chemistry, that was altogether a different matter. It was quite obvious how valuable Chesterfield Gas Works was to the community at large.

Over the years it has dawned on me, albeit slowly, that very successful careers could be made in administration and the manipulation and control of people, materials and finance. You didn't have to be a brilliant scientist, engineer or technician to succeed, indeed quite the reverse. The pen can be mightier than the sword or ploughshare but at 12 years old I had not appreciated the full significance of this phrase. Those exercising "real power and influence" are generally not technicians, they direct the work and efforts of technical people. Consider Churchill or Napoleon; they had vision, they knew how to deploy and direct the efforts and skills of their technicians. But they had very few of the practical skills of the many people they commanded and led.

Looking back, I tended to react positively to those members of staff I liked.²⁴ I was going to add, "and respected", but I do not think respect came into it all that often. Over the years I have come to respect H J Cooke, but I never liked him, quite the opposite. With hindsight, what he was trying to do in Zoology was correct He was trying to promote excellence in that subject, but I never responded positively to his disdain, sarcasm and red ink. J (Jerry) R Owen on the other hand was also pursuing excellence in

²⁴ I used to view these guys as "gods", but in reality they were a mix of young and older men, some with war experience who were battling to make a living. Some were more competent than others, some much more dedicated. Some were unmarried, and one Latin Master had a difficult time courting with 600 young lads monitoring progress on a daily basis.

chemistry, but he did so in a less aggressive and abrasive fashion. I willingly followed Owen, indeed it was he who inspired me with the desire to work for ICI. He once said of ICI, "The only thing they waste is calcium chloride, and before long they will have found a use for that by-product." The paper which was wasted on internal memos copied to be bodies who "just might want to know" would have horrified him. What would he think of ICI in 1998/99 with hardly one heavy chemical plant in sight!

During my time at school, I also tended to look on the staff as "gods", though in fact they were quite ordinary chaps. Indeed, my ambition when I left school was to become a schoolmaster, a profession that Mother saw as very desirable, and economically very secure. How times have changed. Fortunately, as things turned out I gave up this ambition, otherwise my life would have been much more restricted and much less interesting.

Part of the ethos at Chesterfield Grammar School specifically encouraged the development of leadership, promoting the achievements of those who succeeded as targets for those coming along behind. Certainly, as I recount elsewhere, the older guys of the 1st XI Cricket team were almost gods to my young eyes, and I tried in due course to match their achievements.

I suppose it was about 1950 or 1951 that Mother and Father realised that I was dropping behind in maths, and particularly in geometry. Again, I could not see the practical value of the subject. At the same time I would not put the mental effort into understanding the jargon which was part and parcel of the subject. This would become an increasing problem. If any subject was difficult, or had a language all of its own, calculus and genetics were two cases in point, then I would run for cover long before rolling up my sleeves and getting to grips with the language and basics of the issue. After I got a job, the marketing and sales functions were a mystery for a while, until I realised half of the terminology was flim flam designed to confuse, intimidate and mislead the uninitiated. But back to geometry.

My parents persuaded a Mr. Fred Kingsley to give me some private geometry tutoring in the evenings. He was a very tall chap with a fierce reputation as the woodwork and part time maths teacher at my old school, Whaley Thorns. So on dark winter nights I would go down the road to his bungalow and plough through proofs of the main Euclid theorems. It was a small bungalow, very well heated smelling strongly of tobacco because Fred Kingsley was a heavy pipe smoker. So both this atmosphere, and my in built lethargy and disinterest used to produce a soporific effect which made these evenings a real torment. Unfortunately, he failed to relate the stuff we were looking at on paper to what I call, "real life" so he failed to ignite any spark in his pupil. While all this tutoring was going on, his wife, a small kindly lady, patiently sat by the fire knitting.

You will note that woodwork disappeared from my studies fairly early in my school career. Likewise did art. Neither skills were inbred.

My woodwork experience at school can fairly and fully be described in terms of a single letter rack. This article began life as a block of wood measuring x c.c.s, which many months later had been reduced to a block of wood measuring x minus y c.c.s. However, as a functional letter rack it was far from complete, and indeed it was never completed. Any practice at cutting right angle joints in wood was difficult, because securing timber at that time was like seeking gold, and Father did not have tools such as tenon saw, or indeed a work bench. Consequently, when push came to shove, i.e. I got married and became a house owner, I had to re-learn (or was it learn) the basic skills of woodwork. Much, much later I had to apply myself to use of a jig saw associated with the woodwork requirements of Grayshott Flower Club competition projects. In fact it is absolutely amazing what one can achieve and will do when encouraged (or is it tempted?) by a good looking woman!

Art has never been my strong point, but later in life I discovered how useful small crude diagrams can be when trying to describe a problem. But to practice anything vaguely resembling art, I have had to resort to the camera. And even then, I took to that rather later in life than I should have done. Thomas, always give things a try, it's quite amazing what you can achieve, and what enjoyment you can encounter.

The bright sparks at school, took their Ordinary Level examinations at the age of 15, but with my record it was clear that I was not ready for this. So I did not take these exams until I was 16, and then only in 6 subjects. Ironically, I passed them all, even Latin and French. However, I did not pass oral French, I just could not understand what the guy was going on about, in fact much the same happens today when I visit France and a Frenchman speaks to me. I can cope with the written word to a certain degree, but spoken French is like (as my Mother used to say) "Double Dutch".

Distractions from Academic Work

The distractions from academic work mentioned earlier varied from amateur dramatics, choir work, cricket, the debating society, and reading competitions to sheer idleness.

My flirtation with the boards began in my first year at school. I suppose I was a "show off". I told my parents that the School was staging three one act plays, and asked whether I should try to take a part? "Have a go." they said. I did and secured the part of an urchin who had fleas and spent most of his time on stage scratching his head. I think I must have depicted a louse-ridden lad rather well because many in the audience were scratching by the end of the play. If you reflect just a little, you arrive at the conclusion that this part required little or no dramatic talent. But it gave me a taste for the stage,²⁵ the smell of grease paint, the thrill of applause, the thrill of curtain calls, the tension before the curtain rises, the excitement of being made up by Margaret Hall, (the very good looking wife of John Hall, one of the physics masters).

I became hooked on acting for the rest of my school career, though curiously I have never done any amateur dramatics since. Actually, that is not quite true. Making a technical presentation is nothing short of acting, and I did a great deal of that in the course of my job, appearing on the stage at Brighton in Crop Protection Conferences, on the stage of the Opera House at Buxton, and even on local radio and national television.

The following year I went on to take one of the leading roles, Jonathan, in *The Boy David* by J M Barrie.²⁶ This was followed by a series of "bit parts" in *Richard of Bordeaux* by Gordon Daviot, Shakespeare's Henry Vth and then finally the lead part in "Youth at the Helm" when at the climax I had to kiss my leading Lady. "She" of course was played by a boy, it was a boys' school!

I would not have missed my period on the boards for anything. This activity also introduced me to the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford. Leonard (Lenny) Lodge, a French teacher was the driving force behind dramatics at school.²⁷ He took a party to Stratford, and this involved staying overnight in

²⁵ Several rehearsals had to take place on a Saturday evening, which meant going to Chesterfield on the bus and returning quite late at night. I was growing up.

²⁶ The chap who took the part of King Saul was called Brian Unwin. He was outstanding, and went on to Oxbridge. He became Deputy Secretary to Thatcher's Cabinet and was later knighted. He became President of the European Bank.

²⁷ I recall him eulogising over various explicit parts (no pun intended) in D H Lawrence's book, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* long before the famous trial in which the Snooty Prosecuting Council (ex-Eaton) said to the Prof. of English (ex 11 Plus Grammar School), "Would you give this book to one of your servants?". Now, how Lenny Lodge came to possess a copy of this illegal book he never told us. He also took a party of us to Lawrence's home in Eastwood,

Chesterfield with a guy called Higginbottom and his family. This was an adventure in itself because staying away from home with strange people was not a task to be undertaken lightly, unadvisedly or wantonly!²⁸ In fact, the Higginbottoms made me very welcome, and what I had to fear I do not know to this day. I think we must have seen *King Lear* at Stratford²⁹ because I recollect an old man with a beard lying on a bed towards the close of the play. Certainly we were up in the gods along with all the other school children.

I cannot recall how I became interested in the Debating Society but I do know that my speeches were made largely on the hoof, in other words there was little thorough preparation or background reading.³⁰ Indeed my general awareness of the issues bearing upon the debates was very poor compared with many of the other participants. I read quite a lot, but mostly adventure books such as *Biggles Goes to War*.³¹ But I did not dip into any serious literature, and this was an error which I have appreciated since becoming more widely read in recent years. Neither did I follow events in the arts. I recall a chap named Sellors speaking very movingly at a debate about the recent tragic and early death of a singer, Kathleen Ferrier, but it was years before I heard her wonderful contralto voice and understood why he was so upset. Neither was I very good at stringing together a good argument, so when nailed to the wall in debate I tended to bluster rather than countering logic with logic. The memory bank was neither well supplied with information, nor was it very good at retaining what it did receive, and retrieving the appropriate information at the right time has always been much too slow a process.

By this time I had come to realise that the bright lads at school were those who had good memories, and absorbed facts quickly, and having done could also retrieve them. I did not have such a capacity, a handicap that has dogged me ever since. But at the same time I would not invest the time and effort to overcome this handicap. This was very silly.

Moreover, I failed to appreciate that simple answers were often required to what were apparently complex and difficult questions. I assumed that such questions, by definition needed complex answers.³² Many years later, my father-in-law, an extremely able and shrewd old bird, told me that he learned this “simplicity lesson” early in life. As a boy, he rammed a marble up one nostril where it became very firmly lodged. All efforts to prise it out by his mother and others using tweezers and other such complex instruments failed. So he was taken along to the doctor who said to him, “Take your

Nottinghamshire, and I guess all of this prompted my interest in Lawrence’s writings which in parts are wonderful, but in many other parts are distinctly turgid, e.g. he does go on about “losing himself in the womb of mother earth”. He was just on heat, I guess.

²⁸ Am not sure whether it was this trip or another time, but I did once attempt to cycle to Chesterfield from Langwith. Unfortunately, I chose a day when there was howling gale from the west, and the road to Chesterfield goes up and down dale. The journey took hours, much of it taken up with me cursing the wretched wind. It convinced me that cycling is a mug’s game. Never again did I try it.

²⁹ I did not keep the Theatre programme, but I suspect I may have seen a young Guilgud in the lead, he was certainly taking Stratford by storm in the late 40s and early 50s.

³⁰ Having said this, I discovered recently that I came runner up to a chap called Sellors (see reference to Kathleen Ferrier) in the Coxhall Debating Prize one year, so I cannot have been altogether useless.

³¹ An intrepid aviator, interested in nothing but protecting the weak and the Empire 2 Women rarely featured these gripping tales. They do not write about such heroes anymore. Chronicled by one W.E. Johns.

³² In arithmetic, I was thrown into apoplexy by problems, i.e. a few numbers surrounded by a paragraph or two of written text.

handkerchief out lad and have a good blow". And out popped the marble. But it took me years to learn the American salesman's adage, KISS, "Keep it simple, Stupid".

Entering public reading competitions was really an extension of my activities on the boards, but it provided School Prizes which enabled me to take part in prize giving on Speech Day, not simply attend that function. I certainly would not have participated had I relied exclusively on my academic record! Public reading also required me to memorise and practice wonderful poetry such as "Tiger, tiger burning bright in the forests of the night", and "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure dome decree, where Alf the sacred river ran, in caverns measureless to man". When first introduced to this latter poem in class, I recall we rolled around with mirth when it came to "Alf"³³, as we also did when Mr. (Jerry) Webster, a history master told us that "Mir Jaffa was old and had no heir." What tiny minds we had. What little imagination.

I cannot be certain what prompted this bold action, but about the age of fifteen, I joined the Combined Cadet Force (CCF). Some influence may have come from Tony Warrener, who I mention later, for certainly he was an important chap in the CCF. One other reason may have been my wish to join the Air Cadets. The Army held no attraction for me, but ever since Father treated to me to a ten minute flight in a De Havilland Rapids bi-plane³⁴ I had an urge to fly. Why, I do not know because I hate heights!

Now, the only way to gain entrance to the RAF Cadets was to first join the Army Cadets and that meant wearing those wretched khaki army shirts which were very rough on my delicate, gentle skin. Indeed, the only way I could survive Fridays (CCF day) was to wear an ordinary shirt under the wretched army issue. Then of course in summer I was terribly hot. I could not win. I longed for the day when I would graduate to the RAF cadets because they wore smooth shirts, smooth trousers and shoes. They were a civilised lot, and did not spend their time crawling around in the dirt on their stomachs.

The Cadets were yet another distraction from academic work because Thursday nights were spent applying blanko to belts and gaiters, and polish to boots. Homework on Thursday night received very short shrift. One of the Ruddick brothers next door very kindly gave me his ex-army hoots, so that I could claim that I was doing drill in hoots which had actually seen service in the Korean War, fortunately of course without my feet.

Somehow or other, I managed to pass my Part I Army Cadet examination, which involved reading maps, reading ground, etc. but I have to confess that most of it went largely over my head. It was not until much later when I had read about battles, visited American Civil War, and 1st World War Battlefields, that I began to understand the importance of reading ground, following a map, and judging direction and distance.

I learnt to shoot in the cadets, not that I have ever wanted to use a rifle in anger. I preferred the larger 0.303 calibre rifle. My efforts with a 0.22 calibre were diabolically bad, and evening visits to the indoor 0.22 range at Ashgate Road Drill Hall became a veritable nightmare. But I did enjoy practice on the outdoor 0.303 range at Totley, Sheffield, just across the valley from where your Great Gran and Grandpa (Nora and Charles Sykes) lived. The big 0.303 rifle kicked like a mule, and I always came away from a firing with a bruised shoulder. I was very chuffed to become a "marksman" with this calibre of

³³ Memory tells me that the grimy old porter at Chesterfield Station was called Alf.

³⁴ This occurred during a holiday at Hornsea and was a great thrill. The plane was based I recall at an airfield near Bridlington, and it was the one and only time that Father had a flight in an aeroplane.

rifle, and to wear the appropriate flash on my sleeve. Firing a Bren gun, i.e. a machine gun which had no kick was rather an anti-climax!

On these occasions, working in the butts was also very exciting. The butts housed the targets and was a deep passage behind a stout bank of earth. Each target could be raised above the bank on frame, and then lowered by a series of pulleys and ropes for examination and repair. It was exciting to cower behind the bank and hear the live rounds whistling over your heads. Once you observed a new hole in your target, then you had to mark this, i.e. signal to the marksman what he had scored, i.e. bull, inner or outer, and show where the shot had landed, i.e. to the right, left, down or up. To do this you waved a circle of ply wood on the end of a pole in various prescribed ways, and then finally placed the circle exactly over the hole in the target, i.e. you showed the rifleman exactly where his shot had landed. Only if there was a dispute did you communicate by field telephone with the Officer in charge of the range who was based at the firing point. Once any dispute or query was resolved, then you patched the target with paper and paste before the next round was fired.

Then the live bullets began to whistle again, and holes appeared like magic in the card board targets above you. You learned discipline on these days, and did things exactly as and when you were told. It was a dangerous game, we were firing live rounds, people could be killed, and if you fell out of line you received, quite rightly, a very strong dressing down. Once during this period we went on exercises on the moor above the Topley range, only to have live rounds buzzing above our heads. How this happened goodness only knows and we took to our heels and got away from the area as quickly as possible. I am not sure we would have made good "actual" soldiers.

Speech Day at School

Speech Day took place each October, not in School because we had no hall to accommodate everybody but in Bradbury Hall, a mile and a half away from School. We walked there, the whole school! Parents were invited, and very occasionally my own managed to attend.

Speech Day gave the Head the opportunity to give an account of the School's work in the previous year, placing appropriate emphasis on those pupils who had gained entrance to Oxbridge and/or who had secured cash grants for further study called County Exhibitions. It also gave some notable worthy the chance to give a speech, distribute the annual prizes (books which were suitably inscribed) and ask the Governors to grant a special half day holiday. Similarly, it allowed the staff to air their ermine on their otherwise dull, black academic gowns, and finally it allowed the Chairman of the assembled Governors to declare that they were happy to grant the special holiday. It was then the duty of the Head Boy to call for three cheers from school for the visiting dignitary, and to thank that gentleman for securing the extra half day holiday. I cannot ever remember this request for a cheer being declined.

All in all, I picked up just two prizes. The Oxford Dictionary which I wisely chose has served me well to this very day, but the Chemistry text book has become, not surprisingly, very badly dated. It debates the possibility of the development of useful nuclear reactors!

Cricket

Cricket started to play a prominent part in my life in about 1949. I discovered I could bowl a little, and managed to gain selection for the Under 14 School team. Batting at that point was not my scene, it was far too stressful. Ask your Uncle Nigel about this problem.

School cricket was a new experience because we had proper kit, such as pads and gloves. Previously on the recreation ground at home you had to keep delicate and unprotected parts of your anatomy out of harm's way when playing with a hard ball. This did not encourage good technique, particularly

when you pitched your wicket on any old piece of unprepared turf. Personal protectors, i.e. boxes, were not provided by the school and although pads and gloves were very reassuring, they were not as important as a box. One had to be obtained. So there was nothing for it but to go to Stephenson's Store one lunch time and buy a "box". But to my horror who was on the counter that day but a girl! But when needs must, you have to get on with the job. She fixed me up very satisfactorily, so to speak, and indeed I still have the very item which is still in good working order. I might add that (fortunately) I never had to put the efficiency of the device to the test!

The U14 Team had four or five matches per season against other schools, some played at home others away. Two games stand out in my memory from that period, one at Mansfield, and the other at Mount St. Mary's boarding school near Sheffield.

It was sensible for me to travel independently to Mansfield, which for some reason made me feel important, goodness knows why. Anyway the Mansfield Grammar team batted first and I was put to field at "point", which as you may know is located exactly at right angles to the batsman and to the pitch. From there, it is impossible to see the line of the ball when bowled, impossible to say whether it is in line with the wicket, and so impossible to make any sensible appeal. In due course, one ball hit the pad of the batsman, and cocky, uninformed me shouted, "Howzat"³⁵. Well, the Mansfield master who was umpiring, gave me one heck of a public dressing down for this howler, and I never made the same silly mistake again.

In the other game at Mount St Mary, we received a veritable drubbing. It was the first ever game in which I played where a batsmen scored a century. Unfortunately, it was one of the opposition's players who achieved this feat, not one of our team. My friend Mike Tarrant made 15 which was our top score! Indeed, we batted twice, and even then did not reach their score. In these games we were very lucky because a member of staff always accompanied us and umpired. If the team played away, then we usually caught a bus in the morning, and a service bus at that, not a specially chartered one. So an away game wrecked almost an entire Saturday. I wonder now what the wives of the staff had to say to about this. Moreover, I cannot ever remember saying thank you to the staff for their trouble and effort. Much later, as an adult, I was never very happy to go into work on a Saturday afternoon, or for that matter on a Saturday morning.

Cricket in those days seemed to be dogged by the weather. How many times I travelled all the way to Chesterfield, only to find that the grounds man felt it was too wet to play, and I came home empty handed. I do not think such cancellations were due to the grounds man being too pedantic. I firmly believe that since the late 1940s the weather during the summer has become drier. Certainly, after I left school and began playing Sheffield League and village cricket, a cancelled game from rain seemed to be more the exception than the rule.

Playing cricket increased both my interest in the game, and in "cricket week" which was held at School during the last week of the summer term. During that week, the School's 1st XI played a local school on the Monday, followed by a match against the staff on Tuesday, and the Old Boys' XI on the Wednesday. These games began at 11.30am in the morning, broke for lunch and for tea just like a County or Test match. After lunch, the school was allowed to watch until it was time to go home. The School's 1st Team players became my idols, and I longed for the day when I might represent the School and walk down those steps from the top field to the wicket. One of those idols was a guy called Ted Rodgers. When he went into bat I felt the School was likely to make a good score. Little did I know that

³⁵ A question to the Umpire, "How is that, is he out?"

in years to come in far-away Hindhead Ted Rodgers, as our local vet, would look after our dogs, particularly that hound McGee, and in doing so relieve me of a small fortune in vet fees.

By the time I took my Ordinary Level examinations I had risen to the dizzy heights of the 2nd XI cricket team, I was taking wickets and making the odd few runs. The winter was still bare as far as sport was concerned, but soon after I entered the VI Form this was going to change, and the winter months would become as busy, if not busier than the summer months.

Cricket came into direct conflict with the school VIth Form dance when I guess I was in my Ordinary School Certificate year, i.e. when I was fifteen going on sixteen. I recall that the Head was taking us for General Studies or Scripture, when he enquired who was attending the School Dance that was held in conjunction with the adjacent Girls' Grammar School. I had a cricket match lined up for that evening, and in any event I had come to detest dancing following Mother's efforts to get me to attend Olde Time Dance Evenings in the Church Hall at Langwith. I have mentioned that I have an incomplete sense of rhythm, and to make one foot follow the other in a synchronised manner has never been my forte. I hate making a fool of myself before other people. Dancing created a situation where you could become a fool "squared" in two small steps, and in front of a girl! So, I told the Head I was playing cricket. He was not too pleased, though there was little he could do about it. Nevertheless, he pointed out that dancing gave a young man one of the few (if not the only) legal opportunity to grasp a young woman in public, and he inferred that I was a fool not take the opportunity of holding several young ladies over the space of one whole evening. I still played cricket that evening, though privately I had to admit in due course that there is something pleasant about putting your arms around a young lady. However, at that point this was not worth the hassle of mastering the art of dancing. Actually, I have never mastered the art of the dance, though I have been known to career around the dance floor. Indeed as your Gran will tell you that I have certain strong ideas about the role of men in dancing, prompted I have to admit by the antics of those young men of uncertain gender who for their own good, not to mention ours, should have been put down at birth, if not earlier.

Music

Music played a significant part in the life of Chesterfield Grammar School. Mainly because of the practical efforts of the music Master, Charles (Charlie) Bryars, and the policy makers which allowed time to be devoted to music. These policy makers wished to create rounded pupils, boys who were not only technically trained but also had a taste for the fine arts.

Our music lesson consisted of Charlie Bryars extemporising on the piano, and then leading us in the singing of traditional English airs, such, "There was a lover and his lass", and "Linden Lea". I enjoyed this, but in the music room there was one of the latest slow playing record players and this was capable of playing whole symphonies. Every now and then, Bryars would play part of a classical record, and I would love to have heard more of this with some informed explanation. This was odd because at that time, (1948/51) I was a keen radio listener, and I was particularly miffed in an evening when there was no play scheduled, and in its place was a Symphony Concert! I thought Symphony Concerts were a real waste of space and time. But of course now and indeed for many, many years, I have been unable to secure my fill of classical music.

Charles Bryars and his School Choir were very influential in the development of my love for classical music. However, I would not come around to listening to concerts until after I went up to University in 1955. Bryars' music lessons, which nowadays would be regarded as "naf squared", gave me a taste for melody, while his choir, their concerts, and their involvement in the end of term services at

Chesterfield Parish Church³⁶ introduced me to a wide range of traditional choral music and accompaniment. I sang parts of the Messiah, Elijah, Acis & Galatea, and much church music. Singing Parry anthems at the end of each term in Chesterfield Parish Church was a wonderful experience.³⁷ Again, like my drama activities, I have done little if any choral work since leaving school. However, in 1997 I did sing in a worldwide performance of Handel's Messiah, after just one hour of rehearsal.

Through the School Choir I was also introduced to "eating out". My first public concert in the Choir was held in the evening. It was far too far to go home and be back in time for the start of the concert. So, I had to idle away two or three hours after school, and more importantly find something to eat. Above one of the cinemas in Chesterfield was a restaurant or cafe where house-wives doing their shopping had afternoon tea. Again, push had come to shove. I needed to eat so I had to venture into this restaurant whether I liked it or not, complete with one shilling and three pence. This sum of money would buy me baked beans on toast and a drink, but nothing more. I had a little extra money in my pocket, but this was a reserve and not for general use. Mother had spoken. Hardly had I started to tuck into the beans on toast when who should bowl in to the restaurant but Charlie Bryars. He promptly joined me, chattering in a most friendly manner (as was his wont) and ordered his meal. He finished his first course, and then said,

"What would you like for a sweet?"

"Nothing", I replied politely, "I have eaten enough, thank you." This was not exactly true, I could have eaten a horse at that point. But where was the money to come from?

"Nonsense," he said, "A young lad like you can't live (I suppose he really meant, sing) on a plate of baked beans, why don't you have some fruit salad and ice cream."

Panic then set. How could I afford fruit salad and ice cream? Well just, that is if I dug deep into reserves, and I am sure Mother would understand. So I was presumed upon. Of course, he intended from the very start to treat me, in fact for the whole meal!

Charles Bryars was a very kind and friendly guy. I remember him taking us for cricket one day and batting without a pair of gloves, blithely saying as he did, "This is not the occupation for a pianist." And how right he was, one crack on a finger, and his playing days might have been severely curtailed. But he could handle a cricket bat, I recall. Many of our masters had hidden talents. In fact, many people do!

One spin off from Charles Bryars' Choir was his "Choir Outings". These outings were to Lincoln and York Cathedrals, to see the architecture and to listen to organ or choral music if this could be arranged. Lincoln was the favourite, because Bryars knew Lincoln's Organist, Francis Jackson and until the Chesterfield / Lincoln railway closed it was very easily reached from Chesterfield. I think we went three times in all to Lincoln, because it took me three attempts to climb to the top of the tower. At the first visit I never left the ground, at the second I chickened out at the bell level, and at the third time I made it! I hate heights but curiously love flying. The visits to Lincoln Cathedral also introduced me to English church architecture, again an interest which I have to this day. I became familiar with Norman, Early

³⁶ The spire of Chesterfield Parish Church is literally bent and twisted, and is known as the "crooked spire". There are legions of stories as how this came about, the most scurrilous involving the devil, his tail, and his surprise at the marriage of a medieval girl who was a virgin, but that's another tale.

³⁷ As in any Public school worth its salt, we had an end of term service, but as we had no school chapel this was held in the Parish Church. The Archdeacon was rolled out for the occasion, two boys read the lessons (I had a go one year) and the Head gave the sermon. All the staff wore their academic gowns, and for this occasion their hoods. The Choir had to practice, so this relieved me of several periods of work!

English, Decorated styles and the like. I came to think as the years went by that English church architecture was the best in the world, well that's what the English text books told me. Then I visited France and Italy, and found that the continentals had usually done the job at least a hundred years before the English, and built to at least twice the size. This discovery was very depressing, and quite deflating to my sense of English superiority. The art of clerestory design and the ability to light churches was about the only technique at which English architects excelled over their continental brothers. But again, that is all baloney, because many of the masons who built English churches came from the Continent and had learned their trade there. They just adjusted these techniques to the more benign climate in England, and where the greenhouse effect produced by clerestory windows in summer was bearable.

My interest in music never extended successfully to playing a musical instrument, though Mother and Father did try hard to persuade me to play the piano. I had lesson with a dear old lady in Worksop who made a living teaching disinterested young things like me. It must have been such a pleasure for her to have a pupil with both talent and interest! I did not have the talent, I wish I had. It must be wonderful to sit down at a piano and entertain your friends. But I have an incomplete sense of rhythm, and find it difficult to make the left hand do something different from the right hand. Learning a piece on the piano was hard work, and by the time I was in any way competent I had knocked any enjoyment right out of the piece. Father tried to encourage me to play a brass instrument, and even secured both the loan of a B Flat French Horn for my use, and some lessons with the Colliery Band Master, Mr Grant. I could cope with this one line instrument, but again I did not have the vision to anticipate the thrill of playing in an orchestra or a band, or the determination to learn the basic competencies which would have led to this experience.

Classical music, particularly Rachmaninov and Chopin can move me almost to tears, but I have yet to understand why poetry does the same for other people. I still try, but so far I have not made a great deal of progress. Writers in particular, be they authors or journalists, seem to be particularly smitten by poetry. As I write, I have been reading the autobiography of John Mortimer, the barrister and author, Mortimer (1982). Wordsworth (viz. his poetry) he says brings him "close to tears" and he quotes,,

....I have leamed
To look on nature, not as in the hour
of thoughtless youth, but hearing often-times
The still, sad music of humanity,
Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue, And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply infused
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man...

Having now typed this text, I can see more in the lines than before, but I can never see them, or for that matter any other stanzas ever moving me to tears.

School Excursions

In 1951, I went on a School Trip to the Festival of Britain which was held in London, and which was intended to celebrate both the re-vitalisation of Britain after the Second World War, and the 100th Anniversary of the Great Exhibition of 1851. This was a great step forward, because I had already flunked a Camp Trip to Tenby a year or so before. Mother and Father said I could go to Tenby, they would find the money, but I just flunked it. It would mean living away from home with strange people. I therefore missed out on what was reported to be a super holiday by the sea in Wales. London of course was also a long way away, all of 160 miles. What an adventure.

We travelled by train from Chesterfield into St Pancras Station. I can recall little if anything about the journey down to London, but when we arrived we had to descend immediately into the tube and travel south along the Northern Line to Clapham Common where we were staying in the bowels of a Deep Shelter. This shelter was a relic of the recent War, and was still fitted out with long lines of bunk beds. There were no restaurant facilities, and we had our breakfast at a corner cafe across the Common from the Shelter. It was a very convenient location because the Exhibition was built on the site next to the Festival Hall and we were only seven tube stops away from Waterloo. The outing was run with military precision since it was led by Major Brian 'O'Kelly of the Cadet Corps, and supported by Major Jerry Owen. Each of us had a number which we had to shout out to order each time we assembled.

The Skydrome at the Exhibition housed the latest in British technology and invention, and I suppose was the fore runner of the Millennium Dome at Greenwich. Beside it was the Skylon, a pencil shaped object standing on its end without a great deal of obvious support, and the old Shot Tower which was still in place.³⁸ We toured the Exhibition, and to be honest I cannot recall one item that was there, together with the main sights of the City. Options were given to us for other visits, and I chose the Battersea Fun Fair rather than a visit to the (then) brand new Festival Hall. What a wasted opportunity. I did however go to the theatre, but to nothing serious. A bed room farce I recall with the then well established, but already balding actor, Robertson Hare. He played the generally confused British buffoon who became particularly fazed by the sight of scantily dressed, well-endowed young women, of which (to our delight) there were many in the play.

I do regret that I never joined the Scouts during my early teens. Basically I was timid about joining a group of young people who among other things tied knots and went away to camp, actually stayed away from home, this was frightening. How in later life I regretted this timidity because knots still cause me a great problem during sailing. I tried to compensate for the lack of scout training by taking the easy option of attending the Boys Brigade weekly meetings and actually going to camp with them. I say easy option because Mother and Father were involved in both exercises. During the week, we went to the drill hall and swung clubs and leapt over pommel horses, and Mother made the sandwiches for half time. Then when the Brigade went to camp at Skegness, Mother and Father went along to help with the catering, and I slept in their tent, not with the guys. What a wimp. However, at around the age of fifteen, through my cricket activities with the Welbeck Youth Club³⁹ I somehow got

³⁸ The site was originally used as a factory to make lead shot. Molten lead was poured from a great height into water where it formed balls, hence the high Tower. Subsequently, the site was redeveloped into the South Bank concrete arts complex around the Festival Hall, and the Shot Tower was pulled down. Now they are thinking of pulling down the arts complex which could be no bad thing.

³⁹ For a couple of season, I had the good fortune to play cricket in front of the House at Welbeck. This was brought to an end when the whole complex was handed over to the British Army who converted it into a pre-Sandhurst College.

involved in (pressed into) a summer camp at Matlock Bank, Derbyshire and at last I started to beat the jinx of not joining in such activities.

LIFE BETWEEN 1952 & 1955

Matters Academic

My start in the VIth Form was not a very propitious one, but within a week or so I had taken a decision which would influence the remainder of my life.

I wanted to be a chemist or an engineer, and each of these careers required essential skills in mathematics. So I opted to do physics, chemistry, plus pure and applied maths.

Now maths had never been my strong point. Unlike your Grandma Barrett and your Mum who both have a feeling for maths, I found issues such as unitary method (and the like) difficult to manage⁴⁰. So life was not going to be easy. Well, the applied maths was not too bad. I could relate to bullets flying through the air and the inclination of rail tracks for high speed trains. But pure maths was like Double Dutch. And to compound the problem, the master in charge (Dodger Hodgson) did not suffer fools gladly, and illustrated this with very large helpings of sarcasm. Moreover, he wished to match the pace of the class to five or six guys who would go on to win Oxbridge Scholarships. I was just useless baggage, and so I bolted into biology without really trying to come to terms with the calculus which as the years have passed has fascinated me more and more.

This flight into biology was also odd, because I did not have any real interest in nature or in animals other than dogs. Moreover, it took me away from one academic frying pan and landed me into another in the form of H. J. Cooke who taught zoology, a subject which was to become my bete noir until the end of my first year at University.

H. J. Cooke was a Selwyn College, Cambridge graduate. He must have boosted the profits of the 1950's red ink industry enormously because, laced liberally with sarcasm, he applied tonnes of the stuff to my written work. I hated him, but he brought along a measure of Oxbridge logic and excellence which I have since come to admire, and which I wish I had absorbed earlier in my life, if only in part. Again he set the pace of the class to meet the needs of three or four guys who would go on to Oxbridge. Unfortunately, he did not teach "method". Given a scholarship examination question such as, "Waste management in mammals involves more than defecation. Discuss", he did little to analyse how one should construct and lay out the answer. I desperately needed this advice. If only he had said (and to be fair, had I then listened, understood and implemented) "Barrett, do ask yourself the Kipling questions, "Where does excretion and faecal management occur, how does each process work, what are the chemical and physical characteristics of the two processes, what happens to the body if either process breaks down, when does each process occur? etc." ⁴¹ No, that was not the way forward, one was simply expected to sit down with a blank sheet of paper and write an essay! And without doubt the bright guys in my class did just that, but for many years I groped in the dark when it came to writing essays, reports and papers. For me, a blank piece of paper simply created a blank mind.

An early zoology lesson also illustrated that I would never make a doctor or a dentist. Cooke one day described in fairly graphic detail the removal of an infected appendix. Well, I had to be removed from

⁴⁰ While not having any real feeling for maths, I became fascinated during my time in the VIth with logic, and in due course this developed into an interest in philosophy. The sheer beauty of both maths and physics still fascinates me as does the role maths plays in some parts of philosophy, and I did try to enforce some measure of logic into my adult career as time went by.

⁴¹ He might have done so, but if he did I neither listened nor implemented this valuable instruction.

the class (or I removed myself, I cannot remember which) in order to find some fresh air, otherwise without a doubt I would have keeled over and passed out. For years, I fought this problem which is in the telling rather than the doing. Only much, much later did I begin to tell doctors and dentists to cut the chat and just get on with the job. So not surprisingly with this genetic background, I discovered that your Mum had to attend several medical operations before she observed one operation from start to finish, an exercise required for her Pharmacy Degree.

I struggled academically during the three years I had in the VIth Form at School. Ideally, I should have been therefore just two years, but at the end of that time I did not get the examination grades necessary to take me to Nottingham University to do chemistry where I had secured a place. This was probably a good job, because I would not have made a competent chemist, and I would probably have been chucked out long before the end of the course.

So I stayed on at School to re-take my exams, but even then I only succeeded in gaining grades which just allowed me entrance into Sheffield University to do a General Science Degree in Botany, Zoology and (so I thought) Chemistry, a degree adequate to take one into the teaching profession which as I have said earlier was the width of my ambition at that time. The inclusion of Zoology was ironic because at that time I had still not passed one serious examination in Zoology. It would take a supreme effort at University to rectify this matter which by that time had become critical. Without a pass in Zoology at the end of the first year I could not go on to the second year.⁴² By that time I had discovered a liking for the physiology side of Botany, and been told that I could secure a place in the Botany Honours School if I put my mind to the matter. I had also discovered the delights of playing University hockey. But more of that later.

My parents played a significant part in gaining this entrance to Sheffield for which I am eternally grateful. I did not show any gratitude at the time or indeed for the other support and sacrifices they made over the next six years, but without their tenacity in chasing the University authorities to secure this place at Sheffield, I think I would have drifted into some dead end job, and the rest by now would have been history. I did little positively to further my career at that time.

Life in the VIth Form was not all science. I recall we had one period a week when we studied social and related matters, we discussed democracy, its meaning and how it should work. We talked about the difference between the Church with a capital C, and the church with a small c. I guess we were on the verge of discussing political religious and other forms of philosophy but time did not allow us to explore these areas. The value of the Manchester Guardian as a clear thinking, accurate newspaper was preached to us, and I suppose this reflected the left wing political leanings of the teaching profession at the time and which still persist today. Until the mid 1980s I was an avid reader of the Manchester Guardian (or Guardian as it became known) but its often misplaced environmental cant finally exasperated me and I switched to the Thunderer. We also once discussed the art and science of logic, and logic has fascinated me ever since. However, for many years I mistakenly thought that cause and effect was the province of science, without realising that the legal system has applied cause and effect (sometimes more perceived then real) from time immemorial.

Leadership

⁴² Neither could I re-take the year because my Student Grant would have ceased, and Mother & Father did not have the money to finance a further year. The influence of money also focused my mind in a way which it had previously failed to do.

There is a saying somewhere that “Some seek Leadership, and others have Leadership thrust upon them”, or words to that effect. I firmly fitted into the second category because when I attended Morning Assembly the first morning of term in my second year in the VIth Form, I suddenly found the Headmaster calling me up to the terrace and appointing me as a School Prefect.

A School Prefect was one position I had always hankered over, but if I am honest this was simply because I would then be in a position of power (if only to give lines!) and adulation (to a few at least). Other than this, I had little conception of what was expected of me as a Prefect. As it happened, I also became Captain of House at the same time, and in this position I knew I had to lead by example, i.e. get off my backside and do things that previously I considered I could not do under any circumstance, see my later account of what I did on the athletics’ and cricket fields, accomplishments that previously I thought quite beyond me.

Looking back, no member of staff ever took me or anyone else aside and gave us instruction on the art of Leadership. Probably I am expecting too much of them. If you recall, I regarded the staff as “Gods”. But many were only ordinary graduates, simply making a living. What did they necessarily know about “leadership”. Admittedly, some had been commissioned officers during the 2nd World War, and should have known something about it. And all were of course “teachers”! However, in 1990s the great argument is still going on as to whether “Leadership” can “be taught”, or whether “Leaders are born”, so why should I be critical of the staff in the early 1950s.

Nevertheless, the opportunity to add School Prefect and then Captain of Clarke House were very useful accomplishments to add to my job and grant applications. Potential employers were looking for leaders, and to them these achievements were good pointers or clues.

School Friends

I made a number of acquaintances at school but few long lasting friends, i.e. those I have remained in contact with to this very day. I continue to exchange Christmas Cards with Tony Warrener and Mike Oakes⁴³ but no others from school. Mike Tarrant⁴⁴ and I were reasonably close during our time at school, but the year before I left he went up to Cambridge to read medicine, and we have never corresponded or met since. I did meet Peter Baddely⁴⁵ for a drink in Perth, Western Australia many years ago and he told me that Mike took up practice in Canada.

The Influence of Tony Warrener

Now, sometime around 1952/53 Tony Warrener came into my life and, one way and another, he was to have an indirect but very significant effect on the direction that my life would take thereon.

Tony Warrener was a year ahead of me at school, and he lived in one of the suburbs of Chesterfield with his mother. His father had been a farmer, the Warreners were a well-known farming family in north east Derbyshire and nearby Nottinghamshire. But Tony’s father died leaving his wife, Edith, to

⁴³ I played cricket with Mike Oakes at School. He later went on to Sheffield University, became a maths lecturer at a Welsh University after graduating and later a school master in Oxford. We played hockey together at University.

⁴⁴ Mike Tarrant lived in the next colliery village to Langwith, Shirebrook where his parents ran a fish and chip shop. We travelled to school on the bus together, and played quite a lot of cricket together.

⁴⁵ Pete Baddely was the son of the Pit Manager at Langwith. He read medicine at Sheffield University, so we saw each other around for most of the time I was there. He had a spell in Chesterfield General Hospital and may have been there when Father was ill. He emigrated to Perth, Western Australia and practised gynaecology there. After we left WA, I discovered he practised across the river, and the next and only time I met him I was visiting on business. I have not seen him since.

bring up their only child. She was still relatively young, and in due course married Harold Ibbotson⁴⁶ who was a tenant at Norwood Farm, one of the Welbeck Estate farms immediately to the north of Langwith Colliery village. Harold had lost his wife a few years earlier, and it was known that she had had a hard life, with few if any modern conveniences in the home. For example, though the electric street lights of Langwith village burned brightly no more than a 100 yards from one of the fields at Norwood, the farm did not have any form of electricity until a diesel generator was installed to run the milking machines after Harold remarried in the early 1950s. Mains electricity was not connected until about the turn of that decade. Until then they managed with paraffin lamps like those I have described in Father's home on the Welbeck Estate. I believe, though I am not absolutely sure, that there was one water closet in the farm house, but certainly there was a traditional earth closet not fifteen yards from the back door.

So Tony and his mother faced a changed life style when they moved to Norwood Farm, including for Tony an hour's bus ride to school preceded by long walk to catch the bus. It was on this bus journey that I first got to know him, and for the life of me I cannot recall coming across him previously at school.

He opened up three areas of interest which previously had been closed to me. Hockey, the Combined Cadet Force and farming.

Hockey

Tony Warrener was a member of the School's only hockey team. The team was short of players and he asked me to go along and try the game out. Now both my parents had been keen hockey players in their younger days. They were delighted to hear of this invitation and, particularly so, as I did not play any sport in the winter. I showed no aptitude for soccer, I did not like the bruising nature of rugby, and as I have noted elsewhere I tended to lose my way at cross country. Mother provided me with a traditional English hockey stick of uncertain vintage which had a long curved head probably five to six times the length of the Indian style sticks used today, and I had a go. However, I had one problem. At cricket, I batted left handed. Now you must play hockey right handed, so I had to change hands, though in the event this was not as difficult as I first anticipated.

There was a vacancy on the right wing in the team so that is where I started, and I found to my surprise that if I received the ball it was fairly easy to push it round the left full back and be off towards the goal. Indeed not long after I started playing, I cut into the circle and actually scored. What a revelation. It was also evident (surprise, surprise) that I could run as fast (in short bursts at least) as many other people. And from that time I never looked back. Not only did I displace poor Tony from the school team, but the game became for many years the love of my sporting life. I went on to be awarded my School Colours and become Captain of Hockey.

In a very short while, I would go anywhere to play hockey complete with Mother's old stick and my kit in Father's old canvas sports bag. Again we were lucky at school in that there was a fairly full programme of fixtures with other schools as far afield as Mansfield, Sheffield and Worksop. I spent

⁴⁶ Harold Ibbotson was a crusty old soul, but for the Whole of his life he ran a business without any of the formal business training which is considered mandatory these days, and he made a living. I suspect he would not have known a cash flow had he fallen into it, but he nevertheless managed this in flow of funds from the sale of his produce, and regularly paid the wages of the four or five men who worked for him. He was an independent, responsible business man, though at the time I did not recognise this or the courage it takes to become one. I suspect Harold Ibbotson didn't either, to him farming was just a way of life and the only way for him to make a living.

hours travelling on service buses to away fixtures. I learned the hard way following one match about the wisdom of taking a complete change of dry clothes with you. It was a wet match and I kept my every day socks on under my playing socks. Well, they were so wet, I had to travel home without wearing socks. Buses were not heated in those days, and after two and a half hours I was frozen stiff.

But again, I received little or no formal coaching at hockey, and I did not work out what made this guy more skilful than that guy. I was also reluctant to move away from the position of right wing, so I did not develop any defensive skills. It was not until many years later, when my active club hockey career was over that I discovered the satisfaction of playing in the heart of the defence. But more about that when I talk about my early days with ICI.

As a School, we played various other schools but also Chesterfield Men's 2nd XI, and though they had a number of chaps somewhat past their prime, they could and did teach us a thing or two about the game. It was always a great feather in our caps if we could hold them to a draw. Another of our fixtures was with Worksop College where the odd member of staff often reinforced their defence. In those dim and dark days, we played all our games on grass. Worksop College had a superb pitch on the out field of their cricket ground. It was like a billiard table top compared with the surfaces we generally played upon. But before and after the game we also got just a glimpse of other aspects of boarding school life, and what we saw did not impress. I recall we were horrified to learn that caning was routine should you be observed committing the heinous crime of dropping orange peel in the Main Hall. I was always delighted to go and play there, but equally glad to return home after the game⁴⁷.

Cricket

In the VIth Form my School cricket career seriously took off, partly through a piece of good fortune and partly because I grasped an opportunity and for once used this to good purpose.

In my first year in the VI Form I played for the School's 2nd XI, finishing top of the bowling averages. I also did reasonably well with the bat which was no mean feat bearing in mind that I usually had little confidence when I went out to bat and little idea about the theory and tactics of the business. So, I was bitterly disappointed when, at the end of the season, I did not receive my Half Colours. Roger Silcock, who had captained the 2nd XI did receive his Half Colours but he had performed little better than I on the field and I was very disappointed. I recall that somehow I made my disappointment known to the master in charge of cricket (Mr. Pilkington) because he told me not to be down hearted, "There is always next season." This was true but little comfort at the time. All this occurred during that year's Cricket Week.

On the Wednesday of Cricket Week, School played the Old Boys. Some chap had to drop out of the School 1st team for a very good reason, and suddenly I found myself asked to play. The Old Boys opened their innings in the morning and had made steady progress by lunch. By that stage my contribution had been entirely in the out field. When we resumed, Unwin, wearing his cravat and white school colours cap, and looking every part a Captain of Cricket,⁴⁸ threw the ball to me and said,

⁴⁷ Your Great Uncle Howard (Sykes), your Mum's brother went to Worksop College and from all accounts he did not enjoy his time there. I am not surprised. Unless you were the sporty or outward going type, life must have been pretty miserable. He was neither.

⁴⁸ Unwin went on to Oxbridge, joined the Foreign Office, became deputy secretary of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Cabinet and then Chairman of the European Bank, and eventually Knighted. He was a very accomplished actor, and I recall being literally "showered" by his diction during one of the plays we were both in.

“Please have a go from the Tuck Shop Street end”. By that time the entire School were sitting on the bank in the sunshine watching the match. What an opportunity, and for once I took it!

Now, why the bowlers in the morning had made no progress I will never know because the wicket was still very green, it had lots of grass on it, and it was just up my street. I bowled reasonably quickly and on this type of wicket could cut the ball back a treat. For once, I grasped the opportunity and cut the ball back to the tune of 5 wickets for 20 runs by the time we adjourned for tea. Whereupon, in the presence of the Old Boys’ Team I was awarded, not my Half Colours with which I would have been delighted⁴⁹, but my Full Colours and a coveted White Cap⁵⁰. I recall, I could not wait to get home to tell Father. But we had to finish the match. It was a draw after all my efforts, and I didn’t bat.

Now, looking back, this event must have disrupted Pilkington’s grand strategy which I suspect was to give the Cricket Captaincy to Roger (Silcock) come the next season, hence his Half Colours. Roger was quite a canny slow bowler, and at the same time he was fairly good with the bat⁵¹. Slow bowlers were a rare breed in school cricket, and he knew what he was about. But here was I with Full Colours and Roger with only Half Colours, and as “Pilk” had so rightly said, “There’s always next season.”

Well, come the following season, I became Captain and Roger became my Vice Captain, and this is how it remained for the next two seasons.

With this responsibility thrust upon my shoulders I had to do more than just bowl, and I found to my surprise that I could bat more than a little if I put my mind to it, and actually watched the ball on to the bat, Indeed, I went from strength to strength culminating in 63 against the staff in the year I left school, including one if not two sixes.

Roger Silcock and I were selected to play for Derbyshire Grammar Schools against Nottinghamshire Grammar Schools. Now fortunately, and what a stroke of luck, it was Nottingham’s turn that year to host the game. So, we played at Trent Bridge, yes the Trent Bridge where the likes of Hutton, Bradman, Hobbs, Larwood, Lindwall, Truman had played, what a thrill⁵².

We did not play on the main square but on a strip cut out in front of the low Victorian Stand⁵³ to the right of the Pavilion (as you look at it). It was a lovely summer’s day and we batted first. Because of my recent batting successes I was put in at number 5 and found myself at the wicket before lunch. Well, I was still there at lunch, so had the chance to pad up twice and walk out to the wicket on the hallowed turf. Well at this point all went wrong, and it was entirely my own silly fault. The chap at the other end was scoring quite freely, but I could not get the ball away so easily. At the time I had scored 11 runs. Roger Silcock was in next, fresh from his recent century, and like a fool I thought, “I ought to let him come to wicket, he will push the score along far better than I am doing.” So instead of waiting for the right ball to hit, I picked the wrong one and was out. Silcock scored 3! When you have an opportunity, use it. Do not hand it on free gratis to others, you may never get your chance again.

⁴⁹ I had not raised my aspirations at this time, in fact for many years I failed to do this. Don’t you make the same error!

⁵⁰ This was at least two sizes too small, and was completely unbearable. I guess it was the only one available at short notice.

⁵¹ He went on in the next season to make 100 in a school game, a feat not often accomplished. I batted before him that day, and should have made a 100 because I was seeing the ball so large that I followed it all the way between my bat and my pads and on to the wicket.

⁵² Previously, I had played one evening match against a Chesterfield Club side on Queens Park, the ground where Gladwin and Jackson had taken Yorkshire apart, and thought that was a great privilege.

⁵³ Certainly in 1998 that Stand was still being used, and the Pavilion, from the outside had changed little.

My final school cricket story concerns a limited overs House Match. Clarke had a good team, and we were favourites to win the House Championship. We should have walked it but for my (car) driving test. It was difficult to get a driving test, and as it happened it clashed with this House Match. So I found myself abandoning the game as we started our innings and taking the test. I failed,⁵⁴ and to add injury to insult, when I returned to the match we were eight down, with a lot to make and a very few overs left. Hardly had I started to put on my pads, than a wicket fell and it was up to me. Well, I picked the wrong ball, was caught behind, and it was all over. Whereupon, in frustration I broke the wicket with my bat. What a stupid thing for the Captain of Cricket to do. I received a thorough dressing down from "Pilk" next day, and quite rightly so. Thomas, never do such a silly thing as this, it achieves nothing, and it is not the behaviour of a Leader.

Not that I really understood what leadership was all about. I knew people of lesser ability looked up to leaders and they in turn were able to bask in glory at times. But I never analysed what one had to do to become a good leader. I suppose at school I did work out that it is important to be a good administrator. Woe betide you if the selected cricket team was not posted in time, or the bag for an away match was incompletely packed. But I was not aware of the techniques of managing and, above all, inspiring people to do more than they themselves believe they are capable of doing. In due course in my work, I would learn about delegation, coaching, encouraging, and target setting, but at school all this was a complete mystery.

I recall that I was always puzzled why Universities and future employers wished to know how many official positions you had held during your time at school. In other words, how many positions of leadership had you held, or in my case, how many had been thrust upon one. Looking back, I was too interested in the visible froth of leadership rather than the inspiration and hard work which makes a true leader.

Athletics

Now you would expect, having been told about my skills on the cross country circuit that I would take no part in athletics, and until I joined the VIth Form and became a hockey player that was exactly the case. But as I have said, playing hockey taught me that I had a turn of speed, if only over short distances. Moreover, when I became Captain of Clarke House, I had to make an effort, I simply could not leave to others to carry the House flag on Sports Day. Consequently, I found myself running in the House relay team, putting the shot, throwing the discus, racing over hurdles, and even coming home with the odd Championship point, not to mention the odd Certificate. The whole business was quite remarkable.

The Combined Cadet Force

Tony Warrener also encouraged me to take part in the School's thriving Combined Cadet Force, (CCF) an organisation led by an enigmatic Major Brian O'Kelly. He marched and walked stiffly upright and though always very pleasant to me I found him difficult to relate to as he peered from behind very thick glasses. I would love to know what he did in the Second World War, and for that matter the exploits of the other members of the School staff who had served in the Forces. When I was at school the Second World War was "very recent", and of course the shadow of National Service in the Forces

⁵⁴ Your Mum did slightly better, and has never let me forget this. She used her mirror so knew who was behind her at any one time. Mind you do not make the same mistake as I did. Do your homework before the test, not during the examination or indeed afterwards.

hung over all young men at that time. Tony had joined the CCF several years earlier and when I came to know him, he had reached the lofty rank of Staff Sergeant in the Army Section.

Soon after joining the Lower VIth, I passed my Part I Examination and graduated to the RAF section where I learned about the theory of flight, jet engines (which were relatively new in those days), navigation, recognising aircraft shapes,⁵⁵ and the like. Eventually before I left school, I would rise to the dizzy rank of Corporal and would sport two stripes on the arm of my uniform. This meant that I could drill a squad of troops, but otherwise it brought along little other responsibility.

The highlight of my time in the RAF cadets was my attendance at the three camps, one on HMS Gamecock, a navy land ship (i.e. Fleet Air Arm airfield) near Nuneaton, the second at RAF Cottesmore in Warwickshire, and the third at RAF Leuchars in Scotland. Each lasted about a week, and for a variety of reasons provided excellent experience.

First of all, it meant that I had to stay away from home, and this was no bad thing. Secondly, each camp involved travel away from Langwith and its environs, and thirdly, I began to see sides of life not readily visible from 40 The Woodlands.

HMS Gamecock was a gentle introduction to camp life. I believe it served a training function for naval ratings and for navy flyers. But it was run as though we were on a ship at sea. You went ashore when you departed through the main gate, and came on board on your return. Cigarettes were purchased duty free in the NAAFI,⁵⁶ and those amongst us who already smoked revelled in the opportunity to buy these during our time in camp. The regular Petty Officers who looked after us were quite civilised, and we learned a lot about deck operations on a traditional aircraft carrier. Well, they were not quite traditional because the angled deck was relatively new and we were taught about parking aircraft at the end of the ship's deck away from the flight deck. We pushed old Fairey Fireflies around aircraft hangers, pretending we were on a flight deck two or three hundred feet above the sea, and learning not to push on sensitive, vital surfaces such as ailerons. I remember one Petty Officer saying, "Young man, if two tons of aircraft is coming straight towards you across the deck at eighty miles an hour, then you will willingly jump two hundred feet into the sea." And he was right.

The opportunity to fly was always a theoretical feature of these camps. Previously, on a day out to an RAF airfield near Nottingham I had been flown in a Prentice trainer⁵⁷ for twenty minutes including a roll, but that was the extent of my RAF flying experience. A flight in an Avro Anson (the nearest British equivalent to the American Dakota) was promised at HMS Gamecock but, when it came to our turn, the plane went US which was a bitter disappointment. The next camp at Cottesmore, which was operational with the latest two engine Canberra jet bombers, did not produce any flying either but it did open my eyes to the brashness and confidence of the Public School boys who were sharing the camp with us.

The RAF staff sergeants were, on the surface more abrasive than the Petty Officers from the previous camp. They bawled us out for the entire week. "Am I hurting you airman" shouted one burly Staff Sergeant standing close and immediately behind one unfortunate young cadet. "No Staff Sergeant"

⁵⁵ This was still important because many aircraft still flew low enough and slow enough for visual spotting to be of some significance, well slightly because Radar was already becoming highly developed.

⁵⁶ This was the Organisation, (Navy, Army & Air Force Institute) that provided a wide variety of recreational facilities for off duty service men and women

⁵⁷ From a wing design standpoint, this was an aircraft in front of its time because in the 1950s it had turned-up wing tips, a feature which did not appear on Jumbos and Airbuses until the 1990s.

came the faint reply, "Well, I should be airman, because I am standing on your hair. Get it cut!" We shy, inexperienced Grammar School boys gently quaked in our boots at this onslaught, but not the lads from Stowe Public School. They, horror upon horror, answered back. We were appalled, not having cottoned on to the fact that we were not in the regular RAF, neither were we National Servicemen, and we would leave the base and go home at the end of the week. Providing the lads limited their remarks to sheer unadulterated cheek, and nothing more (which they did and enjoyed) there was absolutely nothing the regular NCOs could do about it, apart from shouting even louder. I recall one afternoon a squad of us had escaped the eye of our Staff Sergeant and were idling our time near a Canberra bomber with its open cockpit. The Stowe contingent had the unmitigated gall to start messing about amongst the controls of one of these aircraft. When discovered all hell was eventually let loose, after all these aircraft were the country's front line bombers at the time, but the Stowe lads were not phased by the experience.

I observed all these incidents at the time without entirely assimilating them or analysing them. I know I was impressed with, and rather envious of, the public confidence of these Stowe individuals, though I did not particularly like those I had dealings with at first hand. They were too cocky and pushy, and at that time I found this attitude difficult to handle. In due course, I adopted the policy of "metaphorically" kicking public school chaps first, and talking to them later. Then we often became the very best of friends.

The final cadet camp took me all the way to Dundee and to RAF Leuchars from where the country was literally and actively being defended by a squadron of Meteor NF IX night fighters. I guess the year was late 1954 or early 1955. The Meteor, was the RAF's first operational jet fighter. The Mark IX version could be distinguished by its long nose in which was housed the very latest radar to enable it to intercept incoming Ruskie bombers. Consequently, the base only came to life as darkness fell, when the air was completely filled with the noise and roar of jet engines.

I cannot remember what we actually learned at this camp, but by now as much by age as by rank, I had achieved some seniority in the group. So I was near the top of the list when it came to those chosen for a flight in one of Her Majesty's aircraft, and at Her Majesty's Government expense. And I hit the jack pot, none of your creaking, ageing pre-war Avro Ansons, but a Mark 4 Meteor trainer. I sat in the front seat, and in the space of half an hour we flew on a beautifully clear day from one side of Scotland to the other and back, observing, Glasgow, the Clyde river, Loch Lomond and all points in between on the way. All this was to encourage us to take up a career in the RAF, but this was lost on me because I was keen to avoid National Service⁵⁸ let alone make one of the services a career.

The Stage and Other School Societies

I remained interested in the stage when I reached the VIth Form, and in my second year in the VIth I reached my goal, taking the lead in the annual school play. The play was entitled "Youth at the Helm". I played the part of a young twit who believed that he could run the Company better than his more experienced and older colleagues in the Company (what's new), by taking over both the helm and the girl.⁵⁹ This I did, but overlooked the fact that all the cast were boys. Having "got the girl", who in proper

⁵⁸ By this time Tony Warrener had left school and joined the Royal Artillery at Oswestry as part of his National Service, and stories filtered back of the dreaded "10 Week Basic training" course when you were not let out of camp for any reason, spent all your waking hours either marching, painting coal white, making your bed, and polishing your buttons. Sleep was a luxury, and if you did not shape up you were likely to have to peel two or three tons of potatoes a day. But Tony Warrener survived as did so many others, and went on to have an often thoroughly boring time.

⁵⁹ Yes, sex had actually been invented even in those golden, olden days.

Shakespearean tradition was actually a boy, I had to kiss her, or rather him. This took quite an effort. Among other things, this experience convinced me that I was not cut out to be an actor,⁶⁰ and there ended my career on the boards because I never took to the stage again! In anger that is, for I found that as the years progressed I had to perform from the boards for ICI when promoting its agrochemical products, and audiences of several hundred became not uncommon at places such as the Buxton Opera House and the Brighton Conference Centre. I also had to speak in public at events such as birthdays and weddings. So, my experiences and training on the boards at Chesterfield Grammar School turned out to be very useful.

My stage activities prompted a taste that I have fortunately never lost, a taste for attending live theatre. This started with the Chesterfield Civic Theatre, a subsidised community theatre which in the 1950s attracted actors and actresses who went on to national note, e.g. Margaret Tyzack. I saw some wonderful, gripping, and amusing plays at the Civic Theatre, and combined this passion with the excuse to take a girl out for the evening, what a perfect blend! Try it sometimes, Thomas.

During this time, I also continued my oratory activities with the Debating Society, and I was even approached by Lenny Lodge, the Master in charge, to become the Secretary of the Society. I accepted the offer but then withdrew in a funk, though the proffered excuse was that it was vital I worked at my formal studies in my third and final year in the VIth form. The real excuse was that I dreaded the thought of stringing sound, witty, accurate English, or devoting the effort and time which would have been needed to do this. Basically, I suppose I doubted my ability to do this, but then I never tried. I have regretted this decision ever since, but bearing in mind my poor academic achievement at that time, this would probably have become the “outside activity straw” that finally broke the camel’s academic back.

I continued with my choral singing during this period, but by now my voice had broken. Father was a bass and I was fast becoming one.

However, for the practical reasons that tenors often have a more melodic line which is easier to follow, and the choir at Holbeck was short on tenors, he persuaded me to become a tenor. The advice was sound, but singing tenor was a strain in the upper registers, but it allowed me to continue my discovery of musical gems in the choral tradition.

⁶⁰ The uncertainty of employment, particularly if you were not all that good, had also been illustrated by school productions. Some years you got a good part, other years virtually nothing. All this depended on the play of the year, but also on the whim (so it seemed) of others, particularly the producer. I also discovered that acting consisted of fairly short periods of intense excitement followed by much, much longer periods of inactivity and anti-climax. As a job, I suspected, quite correctly, that these longer period would change quickly to boredom.