



TELLING TALES

Recollections of growing up
in post World War II London

Written & illustrated by Trevor Maldwyn Smith

TELLING TALES

Recollections of growing up
in post World War II London

Written and illustrated at my son Sam's suggestion for my family

Trevor Maldwyn Smith

tms@boxend.com

Background

I was born in 1944, two years too early to be classified as a 'Baby Boomer' but just in time to grow up in an era of dramatic and exciting social and political change.

The second World War had left much of London destroyed and the German navy had sunk most of our food imports. It wasn't until I was 10 years old that rationing was abandoned and fruit & veg, meat and dairy produce started to reappear in our shops. Petrol, soap, newspapers and clothing also became available again after 14 years of rationing.

In 1952 fogs known as pea-soupers killed 12,000 people in four days and were so thick that bus conductors were forced to walk in front of their buses with flaming torches.

The 1950s also gave us the NHS, the hydrogen bomb, the nationalisation of the coal industry and a new queen, Queen Elizabeth II. A British expedition was the first to conquer Mount Everest and The Clean Air Act was introduced ridding London of smog. It was a time of optimism.

The Swinging Sixties was a decade of irresponsible excess and flamboyance and the start of the decay of social order. Working families could now afford TVs, refrigerators and cars. Youth was finding its own identity and the contraceptive pill had become available allowing women sexual emancipation.

Music came via the transistor radio and rock'n'roll ruled. Little Richard, Fats Domino and Chuck Berry were late night listening on Radio Luxembourg and soon we had Elvis Presley, Beatlemania and The Rolling Stones. Monty Python and Doctor Who were on the telly, man walked on the moon and we had rebellion, psychedelia and recreational drugs.

By now I was at Wimbledon Art School and would go on to the Royal College of Art. This was terribly exciting with Peter Blake and David Hockney having recently left the college but still visiting. I recall Hockney's Ty-Phoo Tea painting (recently acquired by the Tate) being dumped in a corner with a load of other stuff. Ian Dury was a year above me and would roam the corridors with Clever Trevor and a man mountain called Big Bill. My art tutors were Paul Hogarth and Quentin Blake and Iris Murdoch baffled me as my philosophy tutor. Jock Kinnear taught graphics and had just designed all the signage for the newly built motorways.

A year after leaving the RCA David Juniper, Bob Murdoch and I started an illustration studio in Covent Garden. This was before it became a destination for tourists and the market buzzed with a bohemian mixture of marketeers, actors and artists and you could get a pint at 5am. Covent Garden was starting to be 'gentrified', the market was moving out to Nine Elms and we were able to rent the top floor of a warehouse.

Class barriers were crumbling, society was becoming homogenised and photographers and illustrators revelled in celebrity in the way that fine artists had long enjoyed.

The bubble was about to burst however and Margaret Thatcher's brutal answer to inflation was to raise taxes and slash government spending. Striker's benefits were cut by £12 a week and subjected to tax. By 1981 the country was in deep recession with industrial decline and urban riots as unemployment soared. Thatcher was 'not for turning'.

Computer stock libraries had begun to supply demand for imagery in advertising as clients curtailed their budgets. Illustration work was becoming less abundant and I joined the enemy and bought a computer.

I taught myself how to create websites although writing code always eluded me but I was able to indulge my love of photography as most clients didn't have pictures of their products. This opened up new possibilities and eventually the websites took a back seat and I was able to concentrate on more aspects of photography.

So it seems I've come full circle as I present my little book of stories - illustrated by me!

Contents

Coming Home.....	1
Aunt Doris.....	5
The Mackintosh Hotel.....	8
Mr Taylor's Triumph	9
The Whistleblower	11
More Bang for you Buck.....	13
Frankenstein Bikes.....	15
Mr Gwilt's Inspiration	16
The Life Class.....	18
The New Neighbour.....	20
A Salutary Tale.....	21
Destination Greece.....	23
Deya Dreaming.....	25
Making Whoopee!.....	29
Agent Provocateur.....	31
High Life	32
The Fetish Head	34
Tank Slapper.....	35
The Ghillie	37
Swedish Pickle	38
Merlin and the Flying Machine.....	40
Christmas at Barcaldine Castle	41
Merlin Maddock MBE	43
The Skiing Trip.....	45



Coming Home

By 1943 Nazi Germany's sustained aerial bombing had destroyed two million British homes and killed 70,000 civilians. London and urban areas in Kent and East Anglia were being evacuated with women and children, teachers and carers being sent to live in country villages to avoid the bombing. Villagers, known as "billetors", were required to accept evacuees despite many of their charges being ignorant of country ways. Some children had never seen farm animals or vegetables. One described a cow as being a creature with, "six sides, right, left, an upper and below. At the back it has a tail, on which hangs a brush. With this, it sends the flies away, so that they do not fall into the milk. The head is for the purpose of growing horns and so that the mouth can be somewhere. Under the cow hangs the milk. It is arranged for milking. When people milk, the milk comes and there is never an end to the supply. How the cow does it I have not yet realised, but it makes more and more. The cow has a fine sense of smell, one can smell it far away. This is the reason for fresh air in the country. The men-cow is called an ox."



My mother was billeted to the picture-postcard pretty village of Bradford-upon-Avon in Wiltshire and in July 1944 I was born there. By June 1945 returning to London was officially approved but for many there was no house to return to and by March 1946 when the billeting scheme ended 38,000 people were still homeless. The government set to building pre-fabs and high rise blocks to accommodate them. Pre-fabs were one storey pre-fabricated temporary housing intended to last ten years. They were built in rows like army camps and some survive to this day. The community bonds were strong on these estates and some residents were loath to leave when offered alternative accommodation.

Our house had survived although much of the street had not and by 1950 a lot of bomb-sites had become adventure playgrounds. Nature was reclaiming many while others were planted with flowers to "Stimulate a pride in London" or given over to vegetables to supplement the post-war shortages.

Few people had cars making the streets good playgrounds. Marbles was played in the gutters with no regard for disease, cigarette cards were swapped or flicked against the wall and hopscotch squares chalked on the pavements. Jumpers were goalposts

for football in the streets or wickets for cricket. Pram wheels and soap boxes collected from dumps made excellent carts and a visit to the lido in our knitted swimsuits was great for "bombing" or just for a splash about. Treasures to be found in the woods in Autumn were shiny brown horse chestnuts peeking out from prickly coats split by the fall from the tree. Once opened and threaded on string a game of knuckle-bashing conkers sorted the men from the boys. The aim was to smash the opponent's conker by hitting it with yours. A winning conker would then be known as a onesie, twosie and so on depending on its success.



November 5th is Bonfire Night when we'd commemorate Guy Fawke's failure to blow up the House of Lords in 1605. Weeks before the celebration the grown-ups scoured the neighbourhood for firewood, old furniture and anything flammable and built a bonfire on the nearest patch of open space. Small local shops would sell fireworks to anyone who offered hard-earned

pocket money and we made guys. These were effigies of Guy Fawkes often made out of old pillows or straw dressed up in any discarded clothes we could find. They would be burnt on the bonfire on the night. The faces were either painted on or covered with a mask. In the run-up to the big day we'd sit our guy in an old pram and wheel him down to the most populated local street with a sign on his chest begging for "A Penny for the Guy". A penny was quite acceptable as 12 pennies made a shilling which bought more fireworks! On the big night much excitement and mayhem ensued - the bonfire was lit, everyone brought out their boxes of fireworks, rockets were set from milk bottles, catherine wheels nailed to posts, boys chased girls with bangers, the burns unit was on alert and the sound of ambulance bells filled the smokey, sparky air.



Dad, home from his stint in the navy would love to make kites out of newspaper and garden sticks with string tails as long as you like festooned with newspaper bows. I loved the feeling of the wind's power tugging on the string as it took the kite higher and higher. Garden sticks were also good for bows and arrows and sword fights and despite parents' warnings nobody had their "eyes poked out". He also taught us a disgusting game called "Nelson's Eye" involving reaching into a brown paper bag containing a peeled grape.

Saturdays were for "Saturday Morning Pictures". I was lucky to have ABC, Granada and Odeon cinemas locally showing films for school children on Saturday mornings. The programmes were one or two cartoons followed by a serial which always ended on a nail-biting cliff-hanger ensuring a return visit next Saturday. Roy Rogers, Robin Hood The Lone Ranger, a rather chunky Batman and a less than athletic Superman were compulsive viewing. Admission was sixpence, unless you climbed through the lavatory window. Boys and girls with birthdays were invited on stage, given a badge, treated to the Wurlitzer organ rising out of the pit and loyalty cemented by singing the cinema's anthem following the bouncing ball on the screen indicating the lyrics.

Back home we'd eagerly await the Corona lorry with its cargo of fizzy drinks and go out to play. Sticking a feather in your hair made you Big Chief Sitting Bull with his whittled bow and pea-stick arrows ready to scalp the cap-gun toting sharp-shooter in the cowboy outfit donated by Santa. Most squaws didn't do fighting, they seemed to be

happy sitting in the wigwam tending their knitted papooses and occasionally rustling up a tasty mud pie.

Out all day and home for tea. Muddy, grubby, grazed and exhausted but ready for a ten minute small screen black and white episode of Whirligig with Mr Turnip and Humphrey Lestocq. Goody Goody Gumdrops!





Aunt Doris

I grew up in south London and when I was old enough I would be put on a train to South Wales to spend my holidays with my wonderful Aunt Doris and her husband Paddy in Troedriw. Doris and Paddy were dirt poor, due in no small part to Paddy's gambling and drinking but Doris had a heart of gold, loved children and doted on me.

They lived in the house that my father and Doris had grown up in, a two up two down terraced miner's cottage with a tin bath on the back wall and an outside loo. There was a scullery but no kitchen and cooking was done on an open fire in the living room. The front room was always kept spotless and locked, opened up only for special occasions.

The house was situated at the foot of Mountain Ash making the garden rather steep. Half way up the garden was the loo, a wooden shack with a plank to sit on over a deep hole in the ground. Sanitary necessities were provided by The South Wales Echo. Visits in the dark illuminated by a candle were a hazardous undertaking, especially on windy nights!

I loved the holidays there, sometimes my father would come and he'd take me up the mountain. We'd wade through chest high ferns past the lido full of frogs to the open ground where we'd pick wimberries and hazelnuts, slurp up ice cold water from the sparkling streams and sit and look over the valley when he'd tell me

stories about his days as a miner.

Other times I'd go with the local boys to paddle in the River Taff and catch flies to feed the spiders whose webs, larded with silken sarcophagi, lined the river banks.

Aunt Doris was reputed to be psychic and made some necessary extra cash by reading palms and tealeaves. This had little meaning to me at the time but her powers would become strangely manifest at a later date.

About ten years on and my parents and I received the tragic news that Doris had terminal cancer and had not

long to live. We had planned to visit her but before it could be arranged she had died.

On the day of the funeral I arrived nervously at the house and was shown in to the hallowed front room where she was laid out in an open casket. The mortuary beautician had done a wonderful job and, despite the ravages of the disease, my aunt looked radiant.

I kissed her goodbye and waited in embarrassed small talk for the hearse and accompanying cars.

Aunt Doris had requested that I and her seven other nephews would carry the coffin and sing the hymn "I Hear Thy Welcome Voice".

Aunt Doris had liked walking in the rain. As we bore the coffin into the street the heavens opened. The rain came down in stair rods all the way up Yew Street and through Troedriw, past the Junior School and the Aberfan Vale Centre, through Aberfan and up the mountain to Bryntaf Cemetery where it suddenly stopped.

The ceremony proceeded and Aunt Doris was lowered into the ground whereupon we were invited to sing the requested hymn, "I Hear Thy Welcome Voice". I had no knowledge of this hymn and bowed my head to avoid my ignorance being noticed but I needn't have worried. "**I hear thy welcome voice That calls me, Lord, to Thee ...**" came rolling out of my mouth as if I'd sung it all my life.





The Mackintosh Hotel

My father, despite the limitations of space in the two up two down he grew up in, had many siblings. One of them, Joyce, married a publican who owned the Mackintosh Hotel in Aberfan. As I often spent my holidays with Aunt Doris, who worked at the hotel, she would take me with her to see Uncle Roy and Aunt Joyce. The hotel was a huge late Victorian monstrosity located in the grey coal mining community of Aberfan.

As a child I found it exciting to be allowed inside a pub, especially as my uncle and aunt owned it and I had the run of the place. It smelled of coal, beer, cigarettes and carpets, although I know my Aunt Doris worked hard enough to keep it clean.

I had my first experience of shandy and darts and there were billiard rooms upstairs, although I had to stand on tiptoe to play. Roy and Joyce had two sons, Howard and Graham - petrolheads who were usually found up to their elbows in grease preparing an old banger for a rally. Roy and Joyce were always busy tending the bar or doing something mysterious in the cellar.

The evening bar was scantily occupied by locals, mainly mine workers but with the occasional box factory employee.

This was about to change.

At 9:15 on the morning of Friday, 21st October 1966 after several days of heavy rain five million cubic feet of mining debris in the form of slurry broke away and flowed downhill at speed to engulf Aberfan's Pantglas Junior School killing 116 children and 28 adults. Children and teachers died from impact or suffocation. After the landslide there was total silence. George Williams, who was trapped in the wreckage, remembered: "In that silence you couldn't hear a bird or a child".

The village had lost a generation and shock and grief enveloped Aberfan. Many people suffered breakdowns and post traumatic stress disorder. Health and alcohol-related problems increased manifold.

The world was in shock too and sent its photographers and journalists to report on the tragedy.

As Chuck Rapoport, an American photo journalist working for Life Magazine reported, "The Mackintosh Pub became my friend. My only friend. As a journalist, I was an outcast and in some cases a despised one. Thanks to the hundreds of newspaper and TV reporters who came through Aberfan before me, a very bad taste was left in the mouths of the village residents. The hotel bar was full every night so I was able to speak to those affected," he added.

"The landlord said the bar was not usually full, but after the tragedy the men just couldn't go home - they just couldn't face it."

And so it was that Uncle Roy and Aunt Joyce prospered and were able to indulge their sons in a brand new Ford Lotus Cortina GT in which to rally.

Howard and Graham were successful for a while but before long their car hit a tree and Graham was killed outright.





Mr Taylor's Triumph

Do you ever feel that the first chapter of your book has been removed or that you've come in half way through a film? Or is it just me who finds myself engaged in conversations not knowing who in hell Margo Finkelbucket is, or worse, a news story that's all over the media the premise of which eludes you? How did the Cuban Missile Crisis start? Whose idea was Brexit? Who is Noel Fielding?

This was for me the case with the first decade of my life. My parent's income was uncertain and sporadic and we found ourselves living a nomadic life in the suburbs of south London moving from one dwelling to another frequently. The formative aspect of all this relocating was that I was forever changing schools and as I was born in July on the cusp of qualifying as a year older was never sure if I would be upgraded to the next class up and miss a year's education or downgraded and have to learn the same old stuff again.

I was grateful therefore that when I landed at Franciscan Road Primary School in Tooting it was to be for long enough for me to feel that here was somewhere I belonged. My stability was further shored up by a teacher who had no small part in planting in me the love of art that has been my career. I had been downgraded but the art teacher, Mr Taylor, introduced the class to new and exciting aspects of creativity beyond daubing powder paint on coarse grey paper.

He told us that he had made the realistic looking life-size sailor for the film *Albert RN* which was a true story about smuggling prisoners out of a concentration camp with the aid of the dummy. We were in awe. His project was to create a puppet theatre. We would make the puppets out of papier-mâché, sew the costumes, build a small theatre and paint the scenery and put on a play. The project was brilliant and would involve the whole class of nineteen boys in making twenty-eight puppets including a burglar, cat, snake, devil, dragon, bull, bear, king and the population of a small village. I don't recall the play we were to put on but it had one hell of a cast!

First we modelled the puppet heads out of plasticene. They had to be big enough to fit two small fingers into the neck. They were then Vaseline'd and layered with paste-soaked strips of newspaper until it was thick enough. When dry, the papier-mâché heads were split from side to side, emptied of plasticene and stuck back together with overlapping newspaper to cover the join. Some, like the snake, were made in two parts and then hinged with fabric to make a snapping mouth. They were then painted and, where necessary, woollen hair applied. Twenty-eight small heads on wooden supports was quite a sight and worthy of Madame Tussauds.

Our fashion sense was then applied to make the costumes, mostly out of felt with treasure plundered from mum's button box.

Our stage would be built along Punch and Judy lines and scenery was to be painted for a jungle and a village scene. Under the guiding hand of Mr Taylor all of these were achieved. I was lucky to be chosen as one of the five or six boys to each manipulate several characters. Spoken lines were minimal and typed onto paper sheets stuck inside the booth.

We were to perform our entertainment at Parents' Evening when proud families were able to admire the work of their children. To have created such a complete project gave us all a huge sense of pride and achievement and me the realisation that I'd come in at the beginning of something and seen it through. Thank you Mr Taylor.





The Whistleblower

Despite my lack of interest in sport I was always fond of swimming. That and diving which I'd seen Tarzan do rather well. I was lucky enough to have a swimming baths on my way to school and could pop in and do a few lengths before the bell went. I don't know why I was so at home in the water, maybe it was my crabby star sign or maybe it was the one of all the sporty activities that I was forced to endure at school that I could enjoy.

Having your cold wet muddy ears jammed between two grinding beefy haunches in the second row of a rugby scrum on a freezing January afternoon was never my idea of a good time and neither was performing gladiatorial feats of Olympian inanity in the field. But swimming was a contemplative, solitary experience and I harboured the idea of swimming the Channel for a while - a short while.

South London was well served with swimming pools and two of the most splendid art deco examples were within easy reach of my home. I didn't realise they were art deco at the time, of course, but have come to appreciate the decorative aspect of their construction since.

Tooting Bec lido was a massive 100 yard outdoor pool on Tooting Bec Common and had a great cafe with a large lawn by the side of the pool. Perfect in the build-up to GCEs for revising while getting a tan!

The other great lido was Purley Way, further afield but it had great diving boards. There were three: 3 metres, 5 metres and 10 metres high. Oxygen might be required at that height!

I mentioned that I was fond of diving. Our local baths had diving boards but the highest was 3 metres, this was true of Tooting Bec too so when, on a crowded sunny day, I first saw the boards at Purley Way I was in awe! Wow! TEN METRES! Three metres is ten feet, more or less, and that was pretty scary but TEN METRES! I had to have a look. I climbed the ladders up, past the 3 metre, up past the 5 metre and finally to the 10 metre board! The view, and the height, were breathtaking with the Surrey hills to the south and Crystal Palace Transmitter Tower and London to the north. The idea was to have a look round and climb down again but as I approached the end of the board the attendant spotted me. The first blast on his whistle turned the crowd's gaze upwards. Silence befell the lido as the second whistle blast summoned the swimmers to vacate the pool. The entire crowd's eyes were now firmly fixed at a point 10 metres above the water, the point I occupied.

There was nothing for it but to see this thing through. I confidently walked to the end of the board, raised my arms and dived. Nothing fancy, no swallow half pike scissor tuck flying squirrel flips for me, it was all I could do to stop myself rolling over and landing flat on my back. Luckily I made a clean entry to the water and kicked off from the pool bottom. As I surfaced the smiling eyes of the bathers were on me, I was a hero, I could see everyone clapping, lips were moving but all in silence. A soundproof bubble encased me! The pressure of the water at the deepest part of the pool had deafened me and it lasted a week. I never went higher than 3m again.

It's a great shame that the the Purley Way Lido has now become a garden centre but the boards have been preserved and listed as art deco architecture.

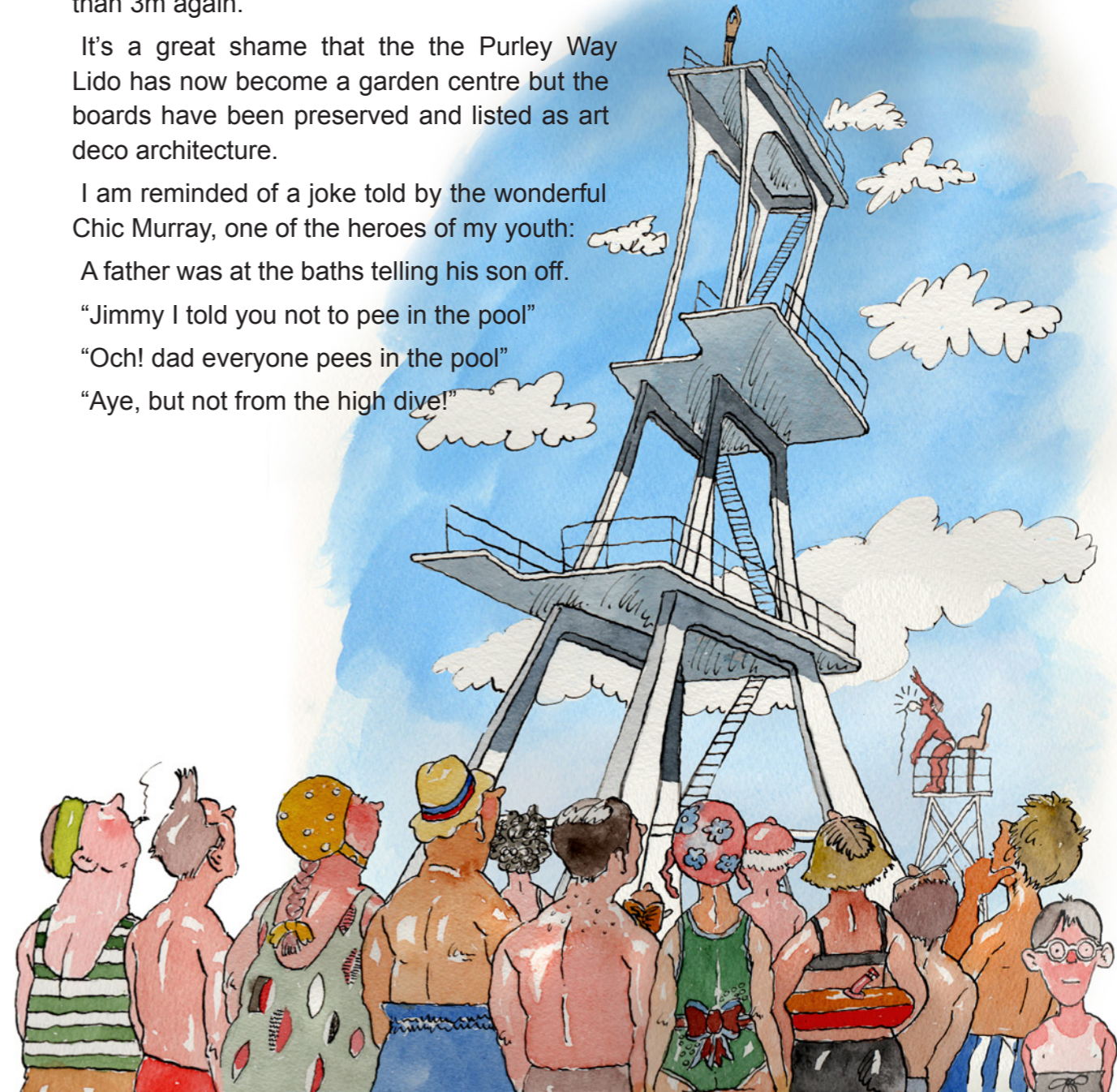
I am reminded of a joke told by the wonderful Chic Murray, one of the heroes of my youth:

A father was at the baths telling his son off.

"Jimmy I told you not to pee in the pool"

"Och! dad everyone pees in the pool"

"Aye, but not from the high dive!"





More Bang for your Buck

The only time corporal punishment was ever administered to me at grammar school was for the heinous crime of skating on the frozen pond on the common opposite. "Skating" is probably an exaggeration, "sliding" is better. About thirty of us had to line up outside the headmaster's room to await punishment. A fate made more dreadful by the sight of those having received the caning leaving the head's room bravely holding back the tears and painfully making their way back to the classroom.

Friend 'Brew' was among those of us punished but we considered ourselves fortunate that our more anarchic activities had not been discovered. Being keen on the more dangerous aspects of chemistry Brew and I had stumbled upon a formula for making gunpowder and decided to experiment with our discovery. We thought it best to source each constituent from a different chemist to avoid suspicion and we had no problem amassing a decent stock of the chemicals. It didn't cross our innocent minds that what we were doing was almost certainly illegal and undoubtedly highly dangerous.

We found that by varying the proportions of each ingredient it was possible to make the mixture more or less volatile and by packing it into lengths of metal pipe and sealing the ends we were able to construct devices capable of making what today would be described as primitive bombs. Jetex was an ignitable propellant for model speedboats and had a ready-made fuse sold separately which was perfect for our purpose.

In a misplaced act of revenge for our caning we would cycle back to the school at weekends and plant our bombs in the mounds of landfill that were being used to landscape the more remote parts of the common opposite. Bikes at the ready for a quick getaway the fuses were lit and we ducked behind the hills to watch the fun. What joy to see the rubbish fly everywhere! Our secret was concealed at school by the rumour that foxes and seagulls had caused the damage.

Schoolboy revenge sated we turned our attention to rockets! If we could retard the combustion process sufficiently we could build our own rocket capable of blowing the socks off the likes of Brock's or Standard fireworks for the approaching Guy Fawkes celebrations!

To test the new mixture we retired to the laboratory (my dad's shed) and prepared the hardware. The barrel of an old bicycle pedal was about the right size for the test and it had a ready-made oil-hole which was perfect for the exhaust thrust and fuse. The barrel was packed with propellant and sealed at either end with a G-clamp.

We placed the experimental rocket on the path by the shed, lit the fuse and stood

well back expecting a powerful thrust from the propulsion outlet and, with luck, a little forward movement.

5-4-3-2-1. An almighty explosion followed sending the shed door flying into the next door garden and removing most of the windows. To say that Dad was not amused is slightly understated but Michael Caine would have been proud of us.





Frankenstein Bikes

I was cycling mad in my early teens. Bikes were expensive but my friend Brew and I hit on a scheme to meet our needs and make a bit of cash on the side. I'd met Brew at grammar school. He wasn't really my type being extremely clever and a bit of a swot but he lived locally and during the long Summer holidays was good company. In those days bicycles were all constructed, more or less, of interchangeable components. It was possible to coddle together a roadworthy bike from a few donor bikes that could be found on dumps. It was amazing what people threw away and we could make our Frankenstein bikes in a couple of days.

Cycle speedway was taking off and tracks were being built in the bomb wreckage of post-war London. This was great for us as a new track had been built nearby on Wandsworth Common. The bikes didn't need to be roadworthy as they were stripped down needing no brakes, mudguards or gears and the only special requirements were knobblies (knobbly tyres) and bull horn handlebars. In order to gain a low centre of gravity and maximum thrust on the pedals the saddle would be lowered and tilted back. A leather strap wound round the front of the saddle and crossbar prevented the saddle tilting back further. The problem was riding the bikes to the track without being caught by the police but this was easily overcome by going the back way!

We competed on the 90 metre (100 yards in old money) oval dirt track, sliding our bikes into the corners in a cloud of dust just like motor speedway, then standing on the pedals thrusting the bike from side to side along the short straights. The sport gained in popularity and Brew and I were able to sell quite a few of our homemade bikes to the crowds of hopefuls from the burgeoning audience.

Races were held on Saturdays and during the holiday weekdays we'd venture onto Tooting Bec Common where the woods had switchback mud paths not unlike today's BMX tracks. It was fantastic fun to belt round the path yumping over the hills and sliding round the bends.

It was the yumping that did for me and put an end to my cycle speedway passion. Brew and I were racing round a Common path and both hit a particularly steep hill at speed. I flew into the air and came down heavily on my saddle. Unfortunately my leather strap snapped and the saddle tilted violently back tipping me backwards onto the back knobbly, taking the crutch out of my trousers and dragging my testicles under the rear fork brake bar. The swelling lasted three days and made it painful to walk but I resisted Brew's suggestion to use a wheelbarrow.



Mr Gwilt's Inspiration

I was lucky enough to pass my 11 Plus exams which entitled me to enter Mitcham Grammar School for Boys. The masters were the usual bunch of fusty grey coves with one exception - Mr Gwilt the art teacher. He stood out immediately at the opening assembly as someone I could get on with. He had a mass of curly hair, film star good looks and dressed like I imagined artists dressed: a ginger corduroy suit with suede shoes, a dark green shirt and a knitted tie - wow!

English Lit and Language was taken by Pubs with his chalky sweat-stained suit and comber. French by Grenouille, a jumpy little man who somehow instilled in me a love of France. Latin was with Lex, a six foot sadist and woodwork was taken by Louse who, at the end of the lesson, would line up all those pupils that he hadn't beaten and beat them anyway. Maths was the naive Mr Madden who could be persuaded to go outside to rescue a stranded cat whenever someone in the class made stranded cat noises. History was Petters who was always on the brink of a breakdown and Religious Instruction by Barabbus the most godless man I've ever met.

Thursday morning was ART! I was already looking forward to it and I wasn't disappointed. Gwilt's technique was to set a subject for a painting and inspire the class with a story. This morning's subject was 'A Shipwreck'. He told a story of a galleon that had run aground in a swirling storm hurling most of the crew into the briny. To hammer home the point he produced a soda syphon from under his desk and showered the class enthusing "I wanna feel the spray" We were suitably inspired!

My abiding memory, however, is the story he told about a satanic ritual: Gwilt and a friend were staying at a country hotel and, after a fine meal and a good deal of wine, decided to go for a walk in the woods. There was full moon and having gone deep into the wood they heard chanting. They could see a distance glimmer of light so quietly approach it. What met their eyes was beyond belief and they wondered if that last bottle of wine was a good idea.

In a clearing there were ten or so hooded figures moving rhythmically around a central altar on which stood a statuesque woman dressed in a brown shroud. At each climactic cycle of the chant she would go into a violent fit, shrink down onto the altar and transform into a baying wolf. This horrific act was repeated in reverse at the next cycle. Gwilt and his friend watched aghast for several minutes as the witch morphed back and forth and having seen enough and trembling with cold and fear they quietly stole away back to the hotel.



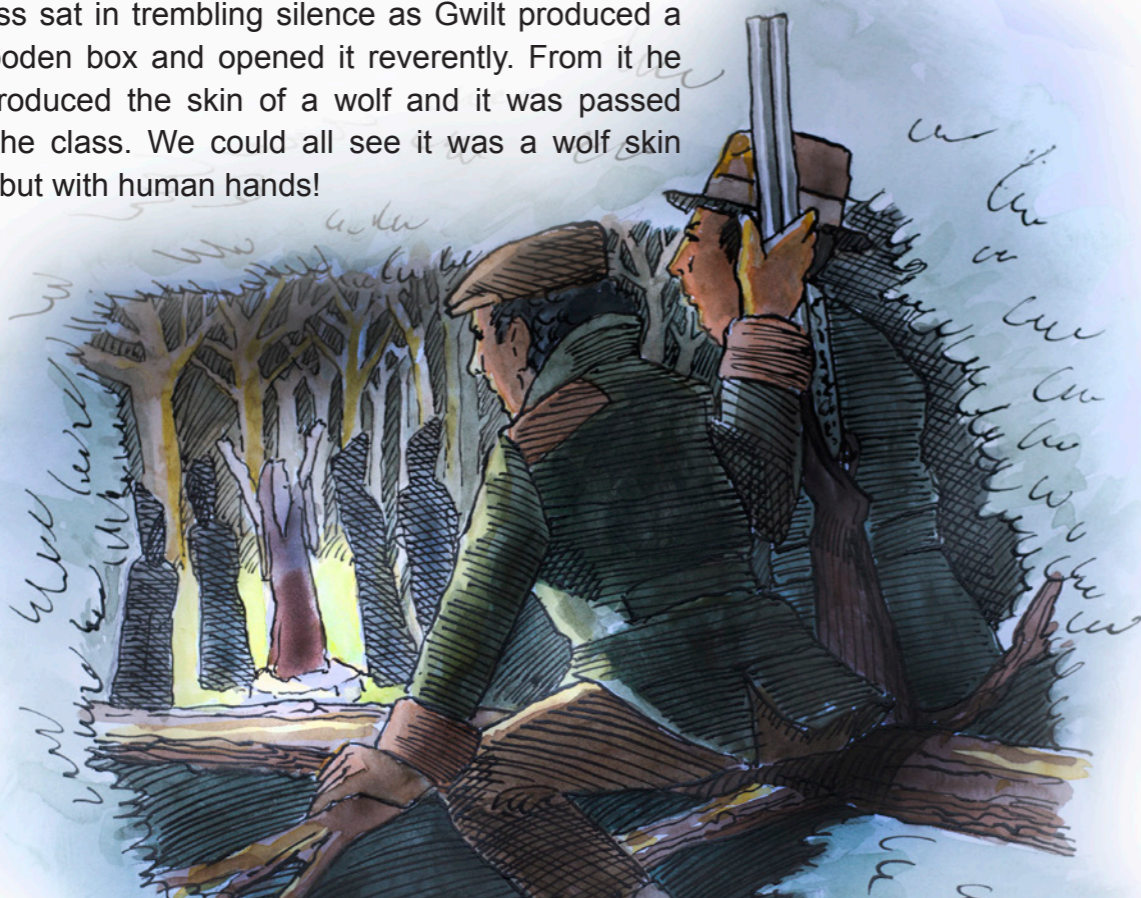
The Life Class

As they talked the previous night's experiences over at breakfast they began to doubt what they had seen and put it down to a tad too much hooch but each corroborated the other's story and that there must be something in it. They decided to take a second look but this time they'd got prepared.

At the next full moon they met at the hotel. This time Gwilt had brought a shotgun. After an early evening meal unaccompanied by alcohol they prepared to confront the coven. They arrived at the clearing and climbed into an oak tree. Here they had a good view of the altar but were covered from sight by the foliage. Soon the hooded members started arriving and gathered silently awaiting the High Priestess. Eventually she appeared and after a preparatory service the chanting began. Sure enough, what they had remembered was happening again and as the High Priestess was transforming for the third time Gwilt took aim and shot her. She fell in a crumpled heap as the other members of the coven scattered into the darkness.

Gwilt and his friend cautiously approached the altar and the crumpled heap covered by the shroud. They bundled it up and made their way back to the hotel. In his room the quarry, still warm, was thrown on the bed and gradually the shroud was peeled back to reveal something quite horrifying and extraordinary. The High Priestess had been killed as she was transforming into the wolf and had not quite completed the process.

The class sat in trembling silence as Gwilt produced a large wooden box and opened it reverently. From it he slowly produced the skin of a wolf and it was passed around the class. We could all see it was a wolf skin alright... but with human hands!



Having been offered some pretty miserable jobs by my careers master on leaving grammar school I decided instead that I'd like to further my education and become an art student. Wimbledon Art School was my nearest option and I duly applied. I coddled together a portfolio of work which I thought reflected the enthusiasm my art teacher Mr Gwilt had instilled in me and went along to the interview.

First impressions of the interview panel were not good. None of them was under sixty and whereas Mr Gwilt had dressed appropriately for an artist this lot resembled the occupants of a care home. However, they liked my work, thought I showed promise and offered me a place.

As much as the vision of the staff disappointed the students made up for in spades. This was the 1960s, psychedelia was about to hit the high street and, as usual, the art schools were leading the way. Mini skirts were de rigueur for the girls and boys wore collarless shirts, velvet jackets and Cuban heeled shoes. A lot of the clothes were sourced from second hand shops but Carnaby Street was about to happen with His Clothes by John Stephen about to set the pace. This was still post-war Britain and long hair for men had become fashionable as a rebellion against the short back and sides of our fathers. It was still a while, however, before it was possible to emerge from a barber's shop looking not unlike a squaddy. "AM I 'URTIN' YOO? I SHOULD BE I'M STANDIN' ON YOUR 'AIR!"

The urban myth was that many of the female students were sent to art school to "finish" their education and would otherwise be pursuing genteel activities in the shires. This was certainly true of Sonia Wyndham-West who was extremely beautiful and went on to marry a Saudi prince, the wedding being featured in Hello Magazine. Another exotic student was StJohn Gaillard-Bundy who had shoulder-length hair and a beard. He sported a corduroy suit, a paisley waistcoat and drove a 1929 4 litre Bentley Tourer. Art schools were the breeding ground for musicians then and among our number was Jeff Beck who would entertain us with virtuoso guitar sitting on the back of his convertible Ford Consul. Another accomplished guitarist and good friend of Jeff was David whose father Frank Bellamy drew Dan Dare for the Eagle comic and Garth for The Daily Mirror.

Lionel Ellis, a highly regarded figurative painter taught fine art. He had curly white hair and a pointed white beard. While examining one's endeavours he would point his beard at the work and peer down his nose through the monocle he used on his good eye.

He often smelled distinctly lavatorial due to the pet fox that he carried on his shoulder shitting down his back. He later contested the building of a new road near his home in Headley by confronting the road gang with a shotgun. The story made the papers.

I was anticipating my first life drawing class with some trepidation. I'd never been confronted by a strange, naked woman (or man for that matter) and was anxious that I might embarrass myself. Was this to be an erotic experience? Would I be aroused? Would I behave appropriately? We set up our easels and waited.

Miss Horne threw back the dressing room curtain and strode purposefully to the podium where she discarded her flowered dressing gown and arranged herself under the directorial eye of Mr Edwards. She was a woman of Rubenesque proportions and had a large vertical scar in the middle of her stomach causing an overhang either side not unlike a small bottom. During the course of the lesson Mr Edwards sidled up to me, pointed to my rendering of her stomach and confided "I don't like you young boys to have this model for your first life drawing class in case you think that this is it".



The New Neighbour

For the past 45 years I have shared a Marylebone 'Village' mews with three other dwellings the occupants of which I never meet. They come and go mysteriously and, as far as I'm concerned, that's perfect. The mews is weirdly quiet considering its proximity to Oxford Circus and it's this peace that gave rise to a rare confrontation with a new neighbour some years ago.

Returning one Saturday from a pheasant shoot I tooted my horn to announce my arrival when a red faced man came rushing out of the flat next door and screamed in my face "Do you mind not making that noise, I live here you know!" I'd never seen him before so I assumed he'd moved in that day. I said nothing but strolled to the back of the car, opened the boot and took out the shotgun. The red faced man vanished behind his front door and I didn't see him again for many weeks.

In those days parking was not a problem and I could park both my cars outside my front door with impunity. The fact that I had two cars (albeit both second-hand) was a source of jealous aggravation for my new neighbour and I would often find one or more tyres deflated or messages scrawled in the dirt on the garage doors. This was annoying but I overlooked it with a sense of pity for this man who obviously wasn't the brightest banana in the bunch but who was clearly very proud to live where he did. I thought of extending the hand of neighbourliness to him and invite him in for a drink but then I thought 'nah! Sod 'im'.

The next time I encountered him was not so much a sighting as a hearing: "**I'm gonna throw myself on your car and paraplegically kill myself**" he hollered. I rushed outside and there he was clearly bewildered with alcohol standing on the parapet of his flat in pyjamas. He repeated his mantra several times swaying precariously and holding up a chimney pot.

I rushed back indoors and 'phoned the police. They arrived quickly in a blaze of blue with sirens wailing. Three policemen and a police woman got out of the squad car and looked up. I had seen similar scenes in many films and was expecting kind words of solace cleverly constructed to make the potential suicide realise the error of his ways and come quietly sobbing. The sergeant took the megaphone - "**Are you gonna come down or am I gonna come up there and kick you down**"

The man came down and I never saw him again.



A Salutory Tale

Mike had come over to my place bringing a bottle of single malt. I didn't think we were celebrating anything but what the hell! We sat up 'til midnight talking and drinking until the bottle was empty. I lived then in a rented house at the foot of Wimbledon Hill and was in the habit of taking my dog Caspar, a mad Irish setter, for an evening walk on Wimbledon Common, at the top of the hill.

My car was being fixed so I asked Mike if I could borrow his mini to take Caspar up to the common. He readily agreed and gave me the keys. Minis then had a manual choke which enriched the petrol/air mixture in the carburettor making for easier cold weather starts with the side-effect of making the engine race.

Caspar jumped in the back seat, I pulled out the choke turned the key and set off. Two hundred yards up the road a car was double parked and a group of people were unloading crates of beer. In my not entirely sober state I tried to get through the gap between their car and a parked one and scraped their car. I stopped the mini and got out to apologise but was confronted by a very angry driver bemoaning the damage to his car. I remarked that it was hardly a Rolls Royce and that I would pay for the damage but this only seemed to antagonise the mob who had now surrounded me. Both our cars were completely blocking the road so I explained that I would park and we could sort this matter out.

I jumped back in the mini, started it up and put it into first gear. My intentions must have been misinterpreted as one of the two women threw herself across the bonnet while the antagonist opened my door and dragged me out. As the choke was still out the car raced up the road completely out of control with the woman still on the

front. I lay in the road watching the mob run after a runaway car with a pair of legs waving violently from the bonnet. The mini went careering onto the kerb throwing the woman off and running over her. It then ran straight into a parked car which ricocheted into the car in front of it.

I panicked and fearing reprisals from the enraged mob ran to the mini and drove off. Plan A! - I drove up to the common and let Caspar have his run. The walk was sobering and gave me chance to think, I decided to go back and face the music. Half way home the police pulled me over and breathalysed me. At the station I was not pleased to see the mob who were making statements and on noticing me being escorted into an interview room turned into a baying rabble. The bonnet woman had had her leg broken and was in hospital. The police were now putting two and two together and realising that this was more than a simple case of drunken driving. A night in a cell is a salutory experience and one I don't want to repeat. I was released in the morning, collected the car and was pleased to find that Caspar had been looked after and was overjoyed to see me again, as I was him.

In court before a magistrate I elected to to be tried before a jury, mainly because it postponed the experience for another couple of months but when the day arrived I was as nervous as a fish in a sock drawer. I had met my defense brief minutes before the trial and he only had a fraction of the facts. His evidence was not convincing. The prosecution made me sound like a hardened criminal. The mob were called one by one and each swore that I'd driven away with the woman on the bonnet. All denied dragging me out of the car. My turn to give evidence and I related the story told here.

My innocent good looks must have appealed to the judge who appeared to believe my story and directed the jury to be sympathetic. I was found guilty of drunken driving, my licence endorsed and given a fine of £25. Not very much, even in 1968.





Destination Greece

It was 1965 and I'd recently bought an old Willys Jeep which my mother loved, saying it made her feel like a G.I. bride. My 21st birthday present to myself was to be a 'Grand Tour' of Europe, hopefully ending up in Greece. There was political and religious upheaval in Croatia and Albania, countries which we'd have to pass through but with blind enthusiasm I knew we could cross those bridges on the way.

I'd paid only £40 for the Jeep so a spot of preparation was required. I bought a hood which would afford some protection against the weather but, with no sides, not a great deal. I built lockable storage boxes in the back running front to back and these would double as seating for passengers. They can't have been at all comfortable as we discovered! Art school friends Andy and Carole were invited and of course my girlfriend.

Early on my birthday morning we headed for the Dover ferry. The crossing was uneventful and on arrival in Calais set off in a vaguely south-easterly direction. We had no set itinerary and preferred Ernest Hemingway's dictum that it was good to have an end to a journey but it was the journey that mattered in the end. This is a philosophy I have adopted which has resulted in my discovering amazing and unspoiled locations throughout my touring holidays since.

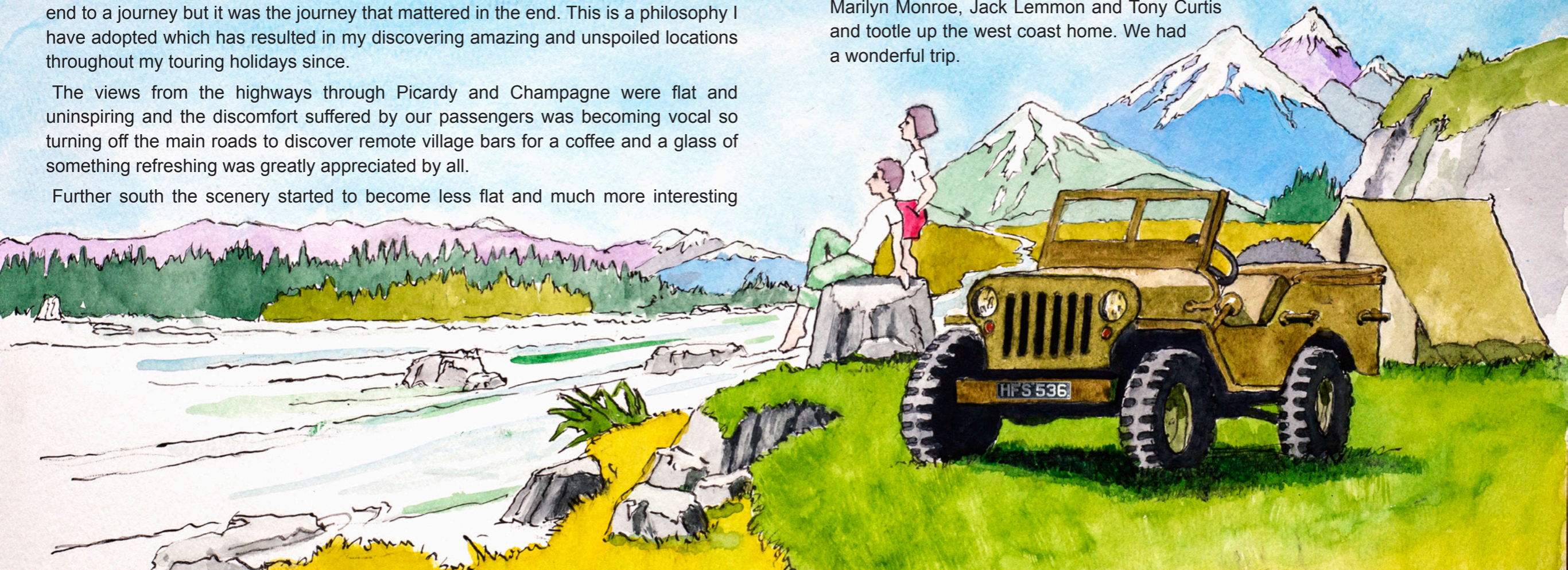
The views from the highways through Picardy and Champagne were flat and uninspiring and the discomfort suffered by our passengers was becoming vocal so turning off the main roads to discover remote village bars for a coffee and a glass of something refreshing was greatly appreciated by all.

Further south the scenery started to become less flat and much more interesting

and by the time we'd reached Bourgogne and Franche Comte our discomforts were forgotten. Camping that night would be in the mountains near Bresancon on the banks of a rushing stream where we built a fire and cooked some tins of cassoulet eaten with fresh French bread bought on the way.

Switzerland was now on our doorstep where the Jeep's four wheel drive would come into its own taking us off-road to remote camping spots in the mountain forests. We passed between Zurich and Bern navigating twisty mountain roads with spectacular views and headed for Milan as the girls wanted to see the capital of Italian fashion. Our route took us to Lake Como, a renowned beauty spot, hoping for a swim, unfortunately the midge population of Italy had beaten us to it. We headed for Milan.

Andy and Carole had had enough discomfort by now and, as we were less than half way to Greece, decided to cut their losses and get the train home from Milan. We said our goodbyes and headed off to see some sights. Marvelling at Milan Cathedral in the Piazza del Duomo the girlfriend had her bottom and her handbag pinched. Luckily there was nothing of value in the handbag but we decided to leave Milan straight away and instead of our original destination we'd go back to France, drive the length of the south coast through the haunts of Van Gogh, Picasso and Monet, not to mention Marilyn Monroe, Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis and tootle up the west coast home. We had a wonderful trip.





Deya Dreaming

Nearing the end of my stint at Wimbledon Art School I decided that I'd like to prolong my education and apply for the Royal College. I worked bloody hard for six months and produced a portfolio of graphic work I was proud of and a thesis on my illustration hero Paul Hogarth. This included a series of drawings in the master's style. The hard work paid off and I was admitted to the College.

Year one was spent determining whether one was a graphic artist or an illustrator. I was deemed an illustrator and started year two under different tutelage. It came as a revelation to find Paul Hogarth among my tutors. Paul had travelled extensively and had worked with many eminent authors including Robert Graves, Graham Greene, Brendan Behan, Lawrence Durrell and William Golding. During the course of this year it came as a nice surprise that he had picked a series of illustrations I'd done of stock car racing and asked another of his literary contacts, Jeffrey Barnard (who was well at the time), to write the editorial for it. The package was sold to Ford Times and I later received my first D&AD award for it.



The summer break was imminent and Paul suggested that some of the class spend it in Deya in Majorca. He had a house there and Robert Graves had lived there for many years. Sounded like a great idea so off I went accompanied by Ian, a technical assistant in the printmaking department. We flew to Barcelona, had a quick peek at Gaudi's masterpiece the Sagrada Familia and caught a rusty old ferry to Palma, hitching from there on.

Deya was a beautiful little village located on a coast road on the north side of the island. It had a small hotel, a bar named Haime's and a church. It had a rough, steep path called el clot down to a cove with a beach surrounded by high rocks upon one of which was a bar with palm fronds for shade. Another bar in a cave on the beach had a table and three chairs outside. You could dine regally there on fresh bread and olives included in the price of a glass of local wine. This would become my modus vivendi later in my stay.

Paul's house was halfway down 'the clot' and acoustically perfect for Paul's six year old son Toby to bellow 'Cahones to Jan Linton' at a neighbour in the valley. After saying hello to Paul, his wife Pat and Toby we booked rooms in the hotel. It had a balcony over the road through the village and was right next door to Haime's. Handy for a drink but not so conducive to a good night's sleep. The village had recently been colonised by young Americans and since draft evasion was prevalent in the States it seemed they'd found the perfect place to hide. They had brought cannabis and heroin with them and were not popular in the village as some of the locals had been introduced to hard drugs with devastating results.

After a couple of weeks of lazing around Ian and I had acquired a good tan and blended in well with the natives. Friends were drifting down from London and it was good to welcome Philip Castle and the others. This was Philip's first trip abroad and he lost no time in coming to the beach and stripping off down to his swimsuit. I was glad of my sunglasses as the glare from his skin was dazzling. Not one to hang around he clambered up the rocks and made his way to a high point overlooking the sea where he promptly dived into it! This was a feat only attempted by the most fearless local lads. I'll never forget that luminous pale greenish white figure splashing headlong into an azure sea.

Social life was good on the beach and Paul introduced me to a nose called Max Maxwell. I say 'nose' because, despite getting



to know him well, his nose was all I ever saw of him. His full thick beard covered the lower half of his face and sunglasses covered the rest. A white cloche-type hat was permanently on his head and a white Arab thobe completed his ensemble. He drove a white mini-moke and lived in a large ancient white farmhouse in the hills. Despite his mysterious appearance he was good company and he told me that he was the art director for Queen, a society fashion magazine that folded a few years later. He was also a photographer and was awaiting a bunch of models for a Blue C Nylon swimsuit shoot. The shots would appear in Queen of course. His methods were extremely economical, shooting on slide film with only a large reflector for lighting and sending the processed slides directly to the magazine with no retouching or editing.

I had also fallen in with a couple of sisters, the god-daughters of Robert Graves, who shared a fisherman's hillside hut outside the village and overlooking the sea. Paul was also a friend of Robert and his long suffering wife and muse Beryl. Robert's mistress was due to pay her annual summer visit from south America and the whole village knew how excited he was. I was to meet Robert Graves and had been invited to a dinner party in his garden. The dining table was a huge circular stone affair which seated about twenty guests and I, as the new boy, was seated opposite the host. His after-dinner party piece, in deference to the American incomers, was to roll a huge joint, light up and pass it to the adjacent guest. This guest then took a hit and passed it to his neighbour. This process was repeated until it came to me and as I reached for it the joint was passed back until it had gone full circle of the table and came to me from my neighbour on the other side by which time it had all been smoked. I never got to try it! Of course everyone was in on Robert's little jape and it turned out the fragrant smell wafting temptingly over the table was the herb rosemary, not dope.

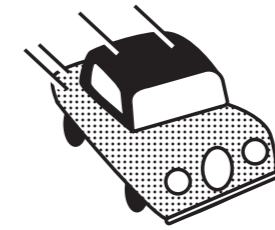
I had run out of money by now and was living on olive oil and bread from the beach bar and the occasional party fare from Haime's so was delighted to be offered the paid job of limewashing the interior of Max's farmhouse in the hills. I could stay there until the job was done and as the model girls were due any day now I jumped at the offer. The end of summer holiday was approaching and I had spent my only means of returning to London.

I reckoned the farmhouse to be 12th Century and had had so much limewash applied to the walls that the only right angles in the house were between walls and floor. Everything else was rounded off. But first I had to make the wash. Outside the house were large Ali Baba-type pots containing white rocks. Max told me that this was lime and had to be mixed with water to make the wash. What he didn't tell me was that by doing so the reaction would produce extremely high temperatures and corrosive fumes. Health and Safety would not have approved. It was lime that was used in London during the Great Plague to dissolve the bodies in the mass graves. Limehouse, Shoreditch and Gravesend still bear witness.

Decorating the house was hard work as each application had to be repeated three or four times but made bearable by Max's generosity, the friendship of the visiting models and the trips to the beach to cool off in the sea while Max took his photographs. Lunch in the clifftop bar followed and everyone was able to relax with a few bottles of good wine and wonderfully fresh fish. I don't think there's a better dish than sardines straight out of the sea and grilled on charcoal.

The decorating was finished, the girls had gone and so had Ian and the rest of my colleagues but I'd made enough money to survive. The sisters had volunteered to share one bedroom of their hut and generously let me have the other one. For a couple of very short weeks I lived the hippy dream not knowing how the hell I was going to get home and finish my course at college. The thought didn't prevent me enjoying myself and it was one night in Haime's when Pat had gone berserk and was chucking bottles everywhere that Paul suggested it was time to leave Deya and offered me a job as chauffeur to drive them home to England.





Making Whoopee!

Fiona and I had booked a self-catering cottage in Skibbereen in SW Ireland for a well-earned break. We decided to drive through south Wales to Fishguard and take the ferry over to Rosslare - a small port on the south eastern tip of Ireland. Our recently bought Daimler Double Six Coupe purred gracefully through the grey villages of south Wales stopping only every two miles to refill the tank. I didn't mind stopping so often as it gave me a chance to appreciate the shiny chrome and sleek looks of my new (to me) car and answer questions from the hoards of admirers that gathered.

The crossing was pleasant and we arrived at Rosslare in the soft early evening light. As we glided down the ramp the Van Morrison tape in the player opened with the haunting first bars of Celtic Swing filling the senses with Irishness as if Seamus Heaney was serving Guinness in a nun's habit from the back seat. As we bumped onto Ireland's soil Van's breathy sax quickened the pace, past the potato market and we're gathering speed through the town with the open road and lush green pastures ahead. In full swing now and we're in open country feeling thoroughly mellow and heading for Waterford and a fine meal in the hotel.

Flannan's Hotel is situated in the harbour overlooking the river, it is an imposing building in the traditional style of lots of brown wood and shiny chesterfield chairs. We checked in at reception and took our luggage straight to the bar for a cold drink before dinner. Halfway through my pint of Murphy's something I'd eaten earlier in the day picked a fight with my stomach. Throwing down my drink I gathered the luggage and made a run for the door. Fiona followed as we navigated a labyrinthine system of corridors and stairs and finally found our room number. By this time my guts were bursting and the thunder from my arse could be heard in Dublin. "Where's the key"...got it, put it in the lock...thraarp, fart, thraarp, prrrrrarp! "Oh god it doesn't fit"...thrrrrrrrrp! fart! fart! "Oh! shit it won't work!!" fart, thraarp fart! Mid-fart the door flew open and a not altogether well disposed gent in pyjamas asked what the hell was going on. "We want to come in" I bellowed. thraarp, fart! "Well you can't, this is my room" says the gent. "But this is room number 26 isn't it?"

It turned out Flannan's Hotel had recently bought and knocked through to the adjoining hotel. They had identical room numbers which had not yet been changed. Our room number 26 was an agonising two flights and a further myriad of corridors away. A change of underwear was necessary.





Agent Provocateur

During the 70s Bob Murdoch, David Juniper and I established an illustration studio which was to become very successful. We were based in Covent Garden on the top floor of a massive warehouse. Life was good, London was in full swing, Brahms and Liszt wine bar had just opened and the work was enjoyable and plentiful.

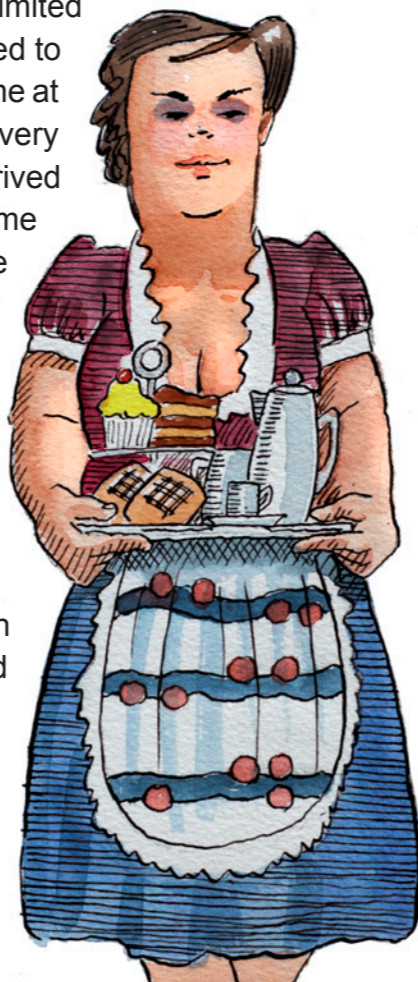
One morning I took a 'phone call from a certain Bill Evans who worked as an illustrators' agent in Brussels. He was interested in representing us in Europe and could I go and see him with a portfolio. Never one to miss an opportunity I booked a flight for the following morning. Bill was to meet me at the airport. As I was to find out on many subsequent occasions Bill is terminally unreliable and despite waiting for nearly an hour he did not show up.

Mobile 'phones did not yet exist and being a trusting sort of chap I had omitted to take his telephone number but I found a payphone and was relieved to see Bill Evans listed in the directory. A Flemish woman answered and although neither of us spoke the other's language we established a faltering dialogue in the limited French we had in common. Bill wasn't there but I was invited to come to their house and wait for him. A taxi soon delivered me at a suburban terraced house on the edge of town. She was very charming and invited me in to wait. Very good coffee arrived accompanied by some wonderful Belgian cakes. Over time more coffee and cakes were offered. Soon it was lunchtime and we shared some superb moules marinière with tiny shrimps washed down with a glass or two of good chablis.

We were getting on quite well now, the wine was working wonders with my schoolboy French and I managed to ask her where Bill was. Oh! said she "he's down at the British embassy putting in a new bathroom".

Clearly there was more than one Bill Evans in Brussels so I thanked her profusely, left and 'phoned the studio in London. Bill had called to say he had been delayed but had left his address.

This would prove to be the start of a relationship liberally punctuated by Bill's unreliability but, as with a loose tooth, you can't ignore its aggravating presence.



High Life

Vince is a friend who used to be First Officer for British Airways. He often flew with a Senior Captain with a sense of humour who, occasionally, would back out of his cockpit holding two pieces of string and hand them to aisle seat passengers with instructions to fly the plane for him while he went to the loo. On other occasions he would board the plane he was about to fly wearing an overcoat to cover his uniform and take a seat with the passengers. As take-off time approached he would start to complain loudly that he could wait no longer and if the pilot didn't arrive soon he would fly the plane himself. Take-off time arrived and he'd get up and proceed to the cockpit much to the consternation of the passengers.

Vince was no longer employed by British Airways but had been engaged to deliver new private aircraft to clients all over Britain.

Early one December morning he arrived at my front door and persuaded me to accompany him delivering a small aircraft to an airport in the Midlands. Temperatures were around the zero mark and snow was forecast but we set off in his car to Northolt Airport. I knew that Vince drove like a scorched cat but on this occasion, early morning, light traffic, he drove like Mad Max. Red lights were ignored and crossroads crossed without hesitation. What's he going to be like flying an aeroplane I wondered.

As we sat in the aircraft cockpit Vince Hyde became Vince Jekyll. Now the sensible, responsible pilot having to conduct the Standard Operating Procedures - a mandatory operation which ensures flight safety and which certainly inspired confidence in me after a white knuckle car journey. Checks completed he fired up the twin engines and we taxied onto the runway. Permission was given for take off and, with what felt like a kick in back, we were hurtling down the runway and into the air. This was wonderful, west London and the verdant pastures of the home counties spread out beneath us.

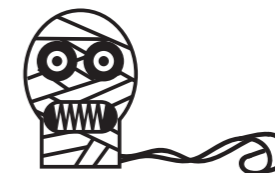
In my excitement I hadn't noticed the sky blackening and soon it began to snow. "No problem" said Vince switching on the windscreen wipers. Soon it was impossible to see anything but horizontal snow.

Somehow Vince managed to navigate to our destination airport in the East Midlands and began descent. I could vaguely see two rows of lights through the gloom and that's what we headed for. I was greatly relieved when the landing gear deployed and we touched down with a gentle thump. Immediately the plane went into a violent spin and pirouetted down the runway at alarming speed, eventually coming to an bumpy

halt on the surrounding grass. The whole landscape was white and the runway was covered in ice!

“Jesus, that was close” says I. “Closer than you think” replied Vince. “The de-icing boots had failed, there was a dangerous build up of ice on the leading edge of the wings and if we’d been in the air much longer the ice would have made the plane an uncontrollable death-trap”

I took the train home.



The Fetish Head

Murdoch and I had been illustrators for many years but the work had started to dry up due to a recession and the introduction of computers. We abandoned the studio in Covent Garden and started working from my home studio in the west end of London. We had installed computers and I had taken the opportunity to embrace my old love of photography. Broadening our horizons had meant that we now worked on more graphic projects and had already received large commissions from France and Germany.

We'd decided to create a self promotional brochure to encourage more work from the home market and we needed an idea for a cover. Murdoch had long been an admirer of the photography of Horst P Horst and Robert Mapplethorpe and we decided on something similar to the weirder kind of work they produced. It was decided it would be a 'fetish' head, a powerful image to grab the attention of the art directors and buyers who would receive the brochure.

Murdoch went home and set to work. A few days later I answered the door and was confronted by him looking like he'd crept out of the crypt carrying a bandaged relic. He'd taken a polystyrene mannequin head blackened its eye sockets and stuck glass eyes in them. The mouth had been gouged out and two inch nails inserted for teeth. He'd bandaged the rest roughly and covered it all in dust from the Hoover bag. It looked terrifying but perfect for what we wanted. I photographed it in some moody lighting and we had our cover image!

Murdoch put the head in the boot of his car and set off for home. Half way down Regent Street a howl of police sirens startled him, even more so when the four police cars responsible for the din screeched to halt surrounding his car and demanded he step out. He did as he was told. The head was found in the boot of his car and the police were convinced they'd caught their fetish murderer but on closer inspection and to everyone's relief the truth was discovered.

It seems he'd been caught on CCTV outside my place putting a human head into his car and reported.





Tank Slapper

Friends were departing to southern Spain for summer and I was invited to join them at their villa. I have an innate hatred of being herded around airports so decided to drive or rather ride my new Norton Commando through France and across the central mountainous wilderness of Spain to La Herradura on the coast. Off they went and I packed my panniers, left my flatmate Michelle in charge of hearth and home and set off. It is said that the best path through life is the open road and on that glorious July day with the wind in my face and an exciting ride ahead it couldn't be more pertinent.

I had had the Norton only a couple of months so was thrilled to be able to open her up on the empty roads en route to Dover. It felt great to have no-one but myself to answer to and my destiny lay in the balmy Mediterranean resort that lay ahead.

I headed for Paris and would skirt the city on the périphérique, exit at the Orleans turnoff and head for Poitiers, Bilbao and beyond. Nearing Paris the traffic was increasing and I caught up with a group of fellow motorcyclists. Catching them up seemed to act as a friendly challenge to establish whose bike was fastest and heading into the périphérique we were all well into triple figure speeds way beyond the legal limit. Nearing my bike's top speed I felt a vibration of the handlebars which was a bit worrying so I slowed down allowing the rest of the guys to carry on. Slowing down didn't seem to have any effect and the vibrations were getting worse so I opened the throttle to see if that would help. At about 110mph the handlebars were shaking so much that I slammed on the brakes. This caused them to twist violently and crash against the tank, the front wheel collapsed under me and I was thrown off the bike backwards into the path of following traffic. Luckily the lane directly behind me must have been quite empty as I remember skidding along the motorway on my back watching my bike sliding away from me.

Dazed and battered I managed to make my way to the central reservation and collapsed. Before too long (I guessed) I was being attended by the police. I was helped into the back of a corrugated tin shed police van and driven off. Was I being arrested? Where were we going?

"Etes vous blessé?" enquired a policeman. Oh shit, they think I'm dying and want to know if I've been blessed. I replied that I was not and expected the next call to be for a Catholic priest. I was still in shock when they returned to the scene of the accident, rang for a repair shop and a taxi for me. I went straight to the airport and took the next plane home.

It wasn't until I arrived home and found one of Michelle's slap up dinner parties in

full swing was I aware of the sartorial consequences of my adventure. The arse had been ripped out of my leather trousers, the back of my Lewis Leathers jacket had been scraped off and my helmet had the back removed like the top of a boiled egg. I was grateful for leathers that day and almost as grateful for a stiff drink.

I had had my fill of motorbikes and left the Norton in France for months until a friend offered to pick it up for me as long as he could take it on a tour while he was there. The repair shop had done a great job and on the bike's return I was able to sell it at a very good price. After all it had only covered 1600 miles!





The Ghillie

Fiona and I were on our way to Scotland. It was December 1983 and we were heading for Fraserburgh, a busy fishing town on the most northerly tip of Aberdeenshire and a stopover for thousands of geese coming from the Arctic tundra heading south for Winter. The geese roost on the lochs dotted around Fraserburgh rising at dawn to feed on the surrounding fields of winter cereals. I was hoping to bag one or two for Christmas.

We booked into our hotel and went to the bar to meet our ghillie for the following morning's outing. From what I understood of his broad Scots accent he would pick us up at 5:30am in order to be at the loch before dawn. An early night was called for, we said goodnight, had dinner and went to bed.

Crawling out of bed on a cold morning was made bearable by the anticipation of the morning's events. We put on all our warmest clothing and went downstairs to wait. Outside the air was laden with the scent of the sea and the distant hubbub of fishermen off-loading their catch in the harbour. The ghillie arrived in his battered old Land Rover and we put our gear in the back with the dog and clambered in.

Spidery wind-bent trees silhouetted against an inky sky hooded the lanes as we headed for the loch, the headlights rudely picking out the fox and badger's secret missions. As we arrived all was quiet apart from the subtle whistling of the icy wind and the soft crunching of the frost underfoot. With his index finger to his pursed lips the ghillie guided us mutely through the fields, along the drystone wall to our positions. Fiona unfolded her shooting stick, sat down and waited with the ghillie while I was directed to move on a further 100 metres.

The light through the first crack in the clouds was the signal for ten thousand geese to rise from the loch like a barking airborne army. Ten thousand geese honking their way directly towards us.

As they flew over us Fiona, in awe of the spectacle and with her gaze following the flight of the birds above, toppled gently backwards on the shooting stick ending up flat on her back in the frost still mesmerised by the geese.

"Ah thunk yer wuhmun's fawlen overrr!" cried the ghillie.



Swedish Pickle

A popular style for advertising illustration at this time was photorealism - drawings often using airbrush that mimicked photography but were more narrative, adding detail to emphasise the emotive aspects of the product. It stemmed from pop-art and shared much of the subjective sources. ie coke bottles, toys, and other familiar objects.

I had become an exponent and received a 'phone call from an art director in Malmö asking me if I could draw bread. It was common when commissioning advertising illustration for the client to need proof of one's ability to draw what was needed. If you had portfolio full of fruit but no apples and the client wanted apples he'd look somewhere else. Luckily I had bread.

Pere (no pun intended) was the art director and sent over the brief. The job was for a Swedish bakery who made delicious looking bread in a variety of different bakes, shapes and sizes. The client was called Höghet meaning 'highness' and Pere's idea was of a crown made up of all the different breads they made, like gold and jewels. I quoted two grand to do the drawing which was agreed.

The finished work would have to be four feet square as there would be a lot of detail in the textures of the different breads. After 10 days the work was finally complete. It was airbrushed using gouache and water soluble inks with some hand painted detail to finish. The surface would be very delicate so, despite covering it carefully with thick acetate and stiff paper I decided the only way to get it to Malmö safely was to take it myself. Murdoch said he'd like to come with me and thought that the best way would be to go by train.

We set off from St Pancras with the work and a small amount of luggage as we foresaw staying only a day or two in Sweden. The journey was enjoyable but uneventful and we were met at the station by Pere. He invited us both to stay in his apartment and on our arrival there we were surprised to find a welcoming party in full swing! We were not expecting such conviviality and had a great evening. The following morning we unwrapped the drawing which met with Pere's delighted approval. While we had breakfast Pere vanished and on his reappearance handed me an envelope containing the fee for the drawing - in cash!

My first son James was about to be born and I took the opportunity to look around Malmö and spend the day shopping for baby clothes. I found some beautiful things and bought enough to fill two large holdalls. Pere was a wonderful host and our couple of days turned into a week but finally it was time to go home.



The first part of the journey was fine, we'd crossed into Denmark and enjoyed a bottle of wine at our table while soaking up the passing countryside. Arriving at the coast it was time to cross the Baltic Sea to Germany. This entailed loading the train onto a ferry and for this we had to disembark the train onto the ship. As it was now lunchtime we made our way to the restaurant and found a table. The menu was remarkably civilised and we availed ourselves of the à la carte three courses with wine and digestifs. The food was excellent, if a little heavy going, and we were feeling very buoyant when the tannoy announced that we were about to arrive in Germany and would we make our way back to the train.

We joined the queue and waited to be ushered onto the train. Unfortunately we had joined the queue for car passengers and by the time we found the queue for foot passengers it had gone! Train passengers had already boarded and as we raced to the stern of the ship we could see our train, expensive baby clothes and all, trundling off towards Belgium. Luckily the ramp was still down and like James Bond and Indiana Jones we launched off and gave chase. It hadn't quite got up speed and we were able to catch up, open a carriage door and drag ourselves on board.

We staggered our way back to our seats and were surprised to find our luggage in place in our empty carriage. Feeling very adrenalised and completely relieved I opened a bottle of duty free whisky and took a gulp. We quickly finished the bottle and were about to sleep it off when we pulled into a station and our carriage invaded by noisy British soldiers on their way home to enjoy leave. All of them were in extremely high spirits and had huge suitcases packed not with dirty underwear for Mum to wash or souvenirs but BEER! It was tipped onto the floor and we were told to help ourselves. Not wanting to offend we tried to explain why we couldn't possibly drink any more but our reasoning fell on deaf ears as opened beer bottles were thrust up to our mouths. "CHEERS!!"

"It's a good job you drank" said the sergeant "If you'd refused they'd have thrown you out the window!"

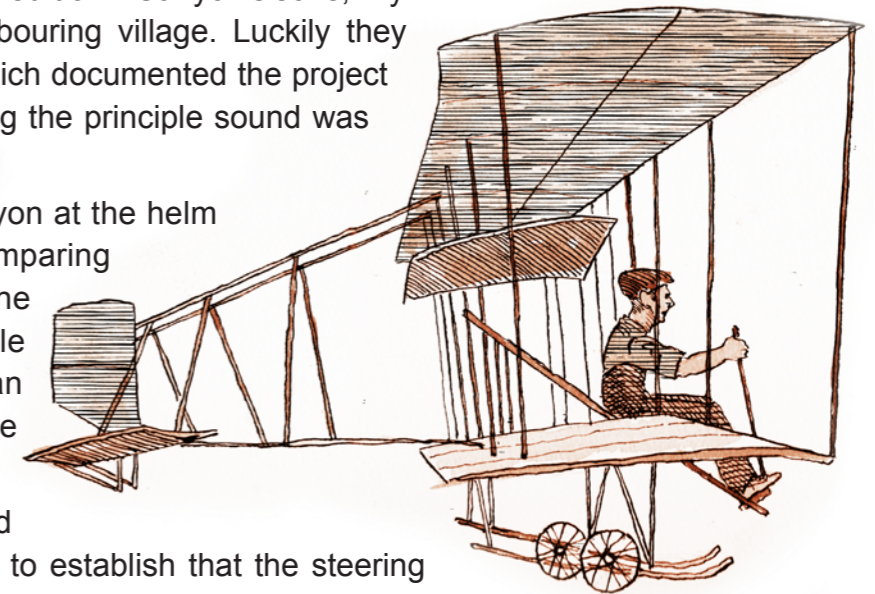


Merlin and the Flying Machine

In 1905 in Pontycymer, South Wales, one year after the Wright Brother's first flight, Christopher Carlyon, a colliery carpenter, decided he was going to fly. He started dragging timber to a spot 400 feet up a mountain in order to build a hangar to house his proposed glider. Everything had to be manually carried up the mountain as his budget was severely limited. The hangar alone took a year to build only to be pulled down later as it was found to be too small for the aircraft. Carlyon worked on his glider in his spare time for five years but in 1910 the great storm had catastrophic consequences. He had planned to launch his glider from the mountain and glide across the valley to the mountain opposite but the storm had caused irreparable damage. The dream was ended and the project would not be resurrected.

Merlin first heard of Christopher Carlyon as a child when his father pointed up a mountain and told him about this pioneering man who'd built an aircraft up there. Many decades later Merlin tracked down Carlyon's sons, Bryn and Raydon in a neighbouring village. Luckily they had kept glass slides which documented the project and Merlin's work proving the principle sound was about to begin.

One slide showed Carlyon at the helm of his glider and by comparing him for size with the craft Merlin was able to approximate a plan detailed enough to enable him to start building.



Merlin first constructed a one sixth scale model to establish that the steering mechanism and aerodynamics would work. Next would come the one third scale model and finally the actual size reproduction which Merlin planned to fly a few feet off the ground from Carlyon's vantage point on the mountain. As a test run he would tow it behind the electric scooter he'd built. By law these were limited to 20 mph but Merlin's did 70.

Carlyon's glider must be fated as Merlin never got to finish his project but what came to light was that Christopher Carlyon lived at 12 Meadow Street, Pontycymer - The address at which Merlin had lived for many years.



Christmas at Barcaldine Castle

Christmas 1987 and Fiona, myself and eight friends had hired Barcaldine Castle near Oban on the west coast of Scotland for the holiday. It was a stunning venue on the banks of Loch Creran and reputed to be the most haunted castle in Scotland, hence its alternative name - The Black Castle.

Each couple was travelling separately by car, my job being to pick up some booze on the way. As some old friends had recently bought a pub near Stirling it seemed a good idea to drop in and pick up some wines and spirits at trade price. It was good to see our genial landlord chums who invited us to stay the night but we were expected at the castle and would have to postpone the stay until we passed this way again on the way back.

Five boxes of assorted wines and spirits and, by special request, one box of brandy were packed into cardboard boxes. The car was pretty full already, our two year old son James having to share the rear seat with Tommy Turtle Beatty, Penny the Penguin and Oopsup Seazy Bear so the boxes would have to go on the roof rack. We only had less than 100 miles to go so that was fine.

At least it would have been fine if we hadn't taken a wrong turn and ended up in the mountains around Glencoe 50 miles out of our way.

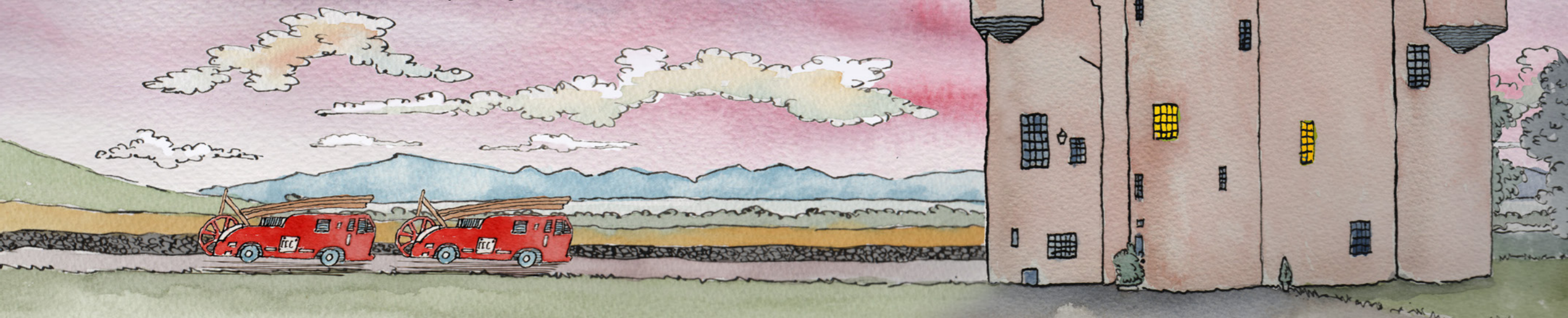
Actually that wasn't too bad but the weather had darkened and it had started to snow! We're in the middle of nowhere, there's no shelter and we've got three hundred quid's worth of booze in cardboard boxes on top of our car! There was nothing for it but to plough on and risk the boxes bursting. With one eye on the road and the other on the rear view mirror expecting any minute to see a trail of brandy bottles strewn across the road I drove cautiously through the snow.

Amazingly we arrived at Barcaldine that night with no bottle casualties in the road but the rubber straps had flattened the sodden boxes leaving the bottles standing proud, wet and ready to drop at any time. I rang the pull-down doorbell. Murdoch answered the massive creaking door in the style of a grumpy Scots laird confronted by a collecting tin - **"YES?"**

The castle was a little shabby-chic but magnificent and having unpacked we set about lighting a fire in the great hall. The fireplace was a massive inglenook affair but we loaded it up with kindling and logs and soon had a roaring blaze going. Half an hour later a blare of sirens sped up the drive and two fire engines screeched to a halt outside. Twelve firemen rushed in bearing two firehoses and proceeded to drench our beautiful fire! Is this how Scottish people welcome visitors?

It seemed the chimney had not been swept recently and had caught fire, the resulting smoke and sparks flying out of the chimney alerting the housekeeper in the gatehouse.

The firemen were a friendly lot and were keen to accept our thanks for saving the castle from living up to its 'Black Castle' epithet by helping us out with a glass of brandy... or two! The next day found me searching the town for an off licence with a good stock of brandy.





Merlin Maddock M.B.E

I've never been particularly patriotic or drawn to my compatriots. I'm only half Welsh anyway so it came as a bit of a surprise to find I had an immediate affinity with a thoroughly Welsh man named Merlin Maddock. He was a bit of a celebrity in his beloved village of Pontycymer in the Garw Valley, known for his humour, practical jokes and charity. He was also an inventor, a highly qualified engineer and a carpenter who made harps and had built himself a penny-farthing bicycle which he rode around the village. For charity he rode it across the old Severn Bridge pedestrian pathway blindfolded and guided only by the Welsh Rugby Fifteen running alongside and shouting directions. The pathway had only a pedestrian handrail (roughly the same height as the pedals) between him and a 50 metre drop to the Severn below.

In March 1989 The Exxon Valdez was wrecked and spilled 11 million gallons of crude oil into The Prince William Sound, Alaska. Previously in 1978 the Amoco Cadiz spilled 219,797 tons of crude oil and 4000 tons of fuel oil into the sea off the coast of Brittany and only eleven years before that The SS Torrey Canyon had deposited 120,000 tons of crude oil off the coast of Cornwall. Attempts at bombing the oil slicks in order to burn them off had failed and, in all three cases, the resulting damage to the environment and wildlife was an unmitigated disaster.

Merlin got to work on an idea to clear up oil spills at sea, a feat that had eluded all previous experts.

After not too long he came up with an ingenious solution to the problem. He would build a collapsible craft capable of fitting into a helicopter to speed access to the stricken area but with powerful motors to scoop up surface oil to a depth of several feet. The oil would then be pumped into enormous rubber containers and floated on the sea ready for collection. Everyone agreed it was a brilliant idea and Merlin set about making a working scale model to demonstrate his theory.

In order for it to fit into a small space it had to be made in sections and this he achieved by constructing the hull of the craft as an inflatable with the superstructure in four parts. The motor to drive the craft, the suction motor, waste oil pump and the arms

for directing the oil into the suction chamber. When completed the construction looked magnificent with its polished steel cogs and rods and coloured wiring looms all visible through the clear perspex construction.

Merlin loved telling jokes. He had a way of telling them which made you believe the story had been a personal experience until he delivered the punchline. So you interpreted anything he related as being a bit of a tall tale.

He was bringing his craft to London to demonstrate it on the Round Pond next to Kensington Palace and he said that Lord Lichfield, who was an old friend, was coming to photograph the event. Lord Lichfield? Of course, Merlin.

I waited at the Pond for Merlin who arrived shortly dragging four huge wheeled suitcases and with a holdall slung over his shoulder and a fat black bin bag under his arm. The bin bag was full of small polystyrene balls which would stand in as oil for the demonstration. Merlin unveiled the craft, assembled it and inflated the hull. Imagine a hovercraft with perspex superstructure and a pair of claws on the front. The whole thing was controlled by two remote controls.

The balls were in the water and we were about to launch the craft when the photographer arrived - Lord Lichfield was a charming man who warmly greeted his old friend Merlin! Didn't I tell you?

Everything went well, the machine salvaged the polystyrene balls and pumped them into a floating receptacle being towed behind the boat. We were assured the photographs would be perfect.

Merlin had a train to catch so we packed everything up and bundled him into a taxi for Paddington Station.

It was 1990 and Britain was in the throes of a bombing campaign by the IRA. Some bombs were activated by remote control. Next morning I had a 'phone call from Merlin thanking me for my help and had I heard the news? In his hurry to get home when he got off at Bridgend he had left one of the suitcases on the train. A vigilant passenger had spotted it and the train was stopped, the carriage evacuated, separated from the rest of the train and shunted into a siding. The bomb squad was called and on seeing the mass of coloured wiring and remote controls concluded that it was a bomb. A controlled explosion was ordered. The carriage was a write-off. Merlin laid low.





The Skiing Trip

Sport has always been something I've tried to avoid. I put this down to my gym teacher at grammar school forcing me to run the five mile marathon round Mitcham Common despite suffering from severe asthma. Gym generally was anathema to me and I never saw the point of vaulting over horses, throwing medicine balls or hanging around on wall bars. In my opinion any sport that involves jumping, hurling things or kicking a ball is best left to children who seem to enjoy it.

It was to my chagrin then that I agreed to accompany some friends on a skiing holiday in Switzerland, a land of straight faces, hot cheese and gnomes. I had never skied, but I dutifully took myself to Moss Bros and was kitted out for the duration.

The drive to Saas-Fee was a delight. Vince, our long time friend and genial chauffeur entertained us with a fascinating and scenic journey through champagne country, on to Dijon and Lausanne overlooking the magnificent Lac Lemman, then Montreux and finally our destination, a cuckoo clock chalet at the foot of the baby slopes. The journey had been pleasantly without incident apart from the last 100 yards which were achieved at considerable speed with no means of control due to the ice on the road. We were gently halted eventually by a snowdrift. The chalet windows glowed yellow against the blue of the evening as the rest of the party were already ensconced with a roaring log fire and a gallon of gluhwein warming on the hob. We all slept well that night.

Christmas morning was crisp and bright and it was with some trepidation that I donned my vintage Moss Bros. gear and hired skis and joined the others in the snow. Vince was the only experienced skier and gave us a few tips before catching the bum-scoop ski lift up the slope. On the way up I noticed the children hurtling down - if they can do it! I was feeling a lot more confident now as I was the only one of our team who made it to the top without falling off. Once everyone else had arrived Vince lined us all up again but with a braggadocio "any fool can do this" I was off down the slope. Despite being only a baby slope I was gathering quite a speed and, realising that the knowledge Vince was about to impart to us was how to stop, began to panic.

I could see a hillock looming up and was heading straight for it. I must have been doing a helluva lick and as I hit the upward incline my legs buckled and I became airborne, flying like a demented windmill in slow motion and landing in a heap with a sharp cracking sound accompanied by the worst pain I'd ever experienced shooting up my left leg. What I'd not been told was that my ancient ski boots, unlike modern boots, were not designed to part company with the skis on impact and mine remained defiantly in place. My left ski had rotated 360 degrees taking my foot with it.

With a whoosh of snow a passing Samaritan stopped, took a look at my parallel skis and asked if I could move ze toes. He didn't specify which foot so I said I thought I could and off he whooshed.

By the time my friends arrived I had turned a sickly shade of green. My skis were removed I and was bundled onto a sled and dragged into the chalet. The boot removing process required a handful of painkillers and the best part of a bottle of brandy. An appointment with a doctor was made for early evening and I spent Christmas day in a state of anaesthetised insobriety bemoaning the fact that my foot was hanging over the end of the sofa.

The doctor's appointment found me sedated sufficiently not to warrant an anaesthetic. He tugged and twisted my foot back to approximately where it should be and, without too much ceremony, slapped a plaster cast on it. He gave me some crutches and more painkillers with a warning not to take any until the morning.

The next day was spent resting while the others, chastened by my experience, went for further skiing lessons.

The new painkillers were effective and I was able to hobble to the drinks cabinet and pour my own brandy with no help whatsoever from the others.

Plaster cast day 3 and I had decided that I wasn't going to waste my holiday holed up in a chalet. I managed to get dressed with the aid of a pair of scissors, took my medication and got ready to go out. The others elected, in deference to my condition, that we would all go for lunch in a mountain restaurant. My appetite was returning so this sounded good to me.



I had become quite adroit with my crutches and managed to avoid the ice on the steps up to the restaurant door and navigate my way to a table. We ate heartily on bratwurst, smoked fish and veal accompanied by spratzli, cabbage, sour cream, gruyere and some bottles of Neuchâtel followed by a soothing Jägermeister or two. Suitably sated we paid the bill and made for the exit. The waiter was kind enough to open the door for me and I launched myself onto the concrete steps completely forgetting the ice. My left crutch slipped from under me and my plastered leg took my full weight as I pogoed down the steps landing in the snow at the bottom like an Easter Island statue.

The following three days were spent feeling very sorry for myself but cheered greatly by the medication supplied by my friends. The next day things weren't getting any better and I decided to knock it on the head and come home. Vince kindly drove me to Sion airport and I flew into Heathrow that morning. On arrival in London I went directly to the Middlesex hospital. I was admitted immediately and, upon examination, was told that I would be operated on that day.

Apparently the steps incident had compacted the broken bones which during the days preceding my departure had started to knit together and the longer it was left the stronger they became. The surgery would involve first breaking the bones again!

I awoke from the general anaesthetic New Year's Eve feeling groggy and sore and was somewhat surprised to be rewarded with a bottle of whisky by a Scotsman in the next bed wishing me Happy Hogmanay! The party atmosphere continued for several days. Patients in this ward had all broken something or other so nobody was actually 'ill' and the wonderfully obliging nurses sent out for bottles of booze and cigarettes for those that smoked. Cigarettes and booze? In hospital? It was 1975.





A
BOXEND
Publication

Copyright © 2021 Trevor Maldwyn Smith, tms@boxend.com. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, in any form, or by any other means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission of the publisher.