

My Journal (& CV Pages 1 to9)

1 My Journal

Having been triggered by my eldest Grandson to put some bits on paper : it seems sensible to put ideas into this format initially ; in order to arrange disparate ideas into some sort of order at a later date.

It's awfully difficult to work out where to start , but 'earliest memories' seems half reasonable . So, here goes. I have no recollection of Bath Rd. Kettering my birthplace. They must centre on Stotfold near Letchworth . While 'our' house at 19 Coppice Mead was , I think, being built by a Mr. 'Turby' Gentle we resided with Mrs Auburn (I understand I called her Mrs. Ornborn) on Church Green. Her cottage was two or three doors from Mr & Mrs Bonnet's rather grand house. She was the headmistress of St.Mary's infant school ,which I started at a little later on.

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I have very little recollection of the time we spent at Church Green , but during that time my father was in the RAF stationed at RAF Henlow essentially, as a rigger. I say essentially because , as I understood it ,he was actually employed as a batman to a Flt Lt. who's name escapes me at the moment. Could have been Etheridge.

I suppose we moved up to Coppice Mead when I was perhaps 3 / 4 . That seems about right 'cos my brother Trevor was born when I was 4 1/2 . A very significant memory was when I went with Mum to Letchworth Cottage Hospital for Trevor to be circumcised. It didn't hurt a bit but it was traumatic enough for me to remain a poignant memory.

I know he cried a lot & Mum had quite an uncomfortable period washing him & dressing the damaged area.

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That must have been the year I started school at St.Mary's . The infants went till they were 7, when the boys moved up the road to the Boys Council School. I walked to school , initially with Pat Trafford who lived at number 7 I think. The spinster Miss White's lived at 15 , the Wogans from Merthar Tydfyl at 17 & the Goughs at 9 . Pat & I were quite good friends & she used to call for me sometimes . "Can the little boy come out to play?" My dad mocked me quite unkindly about that , both then & years after. I think unfortunately ,Pat moved to Shortstown (a suburb of Bedford) when her dad was posted to Cardington as a civilian fitter. I never her of her again. That year, my memory suggests, was also a poor one from a health viewpoint .I was off school for several months with Mumps , Measles, & Whooping cough.

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I don't recall feeling poorly but I know my mum & dad & Gran Evans were very worried. For several years after I was fed virol , cod liver oil & malt ,calves foot jelly etc. to try to build up my puny frame.

I seem to recall Miss Vause was my first teacher & I'm sure she wasn't much more than a teenager herself. I clearly remember ,as I sat at the back of the class, being called to the front to explain what I was eating. It was my cherished lunch of cheese & tomato sauce sandwiches . Miss Vause was not impressed & spanked my hand. I was ... & laughed... shouldn't have done that I learned !

We did art one day I had a piece of black cartridge paper & proceeded to draw a perfect copy of a beautiful massive white chrysanthemum. It was perfect in every petal !! Whatever happened to that masterpiece ?

When I returned to school I was at the boys school & my bit of the class were on 'money'.

I recall a traumatic period of not understanding what was going on; a situation which followed me through much of my educational years. It was an awful long time before I got into study at all. Much later on learning about some things actually became fun.

About this time, sort of 1937/8 The Wogans moved in to 17. & around that time our house numbers were changed. Mr. Wogan had walked from Merthyr 7 had secured a labouring job at the arms factory of Cryn & Lay. Originally Turby had had designed & built twenty four houses in Copic Mead (with our tamped gravel road & wooden bordered pathways), but there was clearly room for further development which the renumbering was to cater for, & our house became 43. The smell of horse wee on the sun scorched gravel mixed with the distinctive odour of hot paraffin remains fresh in my nostrils; as does that cacophony of odours of an old fashioned school room. Glynn Wogan was just a touch older than me while Trevor could give me 2 or more years.

Here I would be fascinated to lean over the window sill watching the stage hands & actors walk out of the Coliseum Stage door & into the Grapes virtually under my vantage point. From here I could also see the busy traffic up the narrow 'Bury' to Covent Garden. I can't recall how far it was to Bow Street court but Dad took me there one morning & we listened while some of the ladies of the night were cautioned or sent down for some misdemeanour or other (Dad didn't actually enlarge on the 'offences'.) He also took me through an ordinary front door in the Strand & we walked straight down to a Roman Bath. I've no real idea where that might be, but I suppose it was walking distance from the Temple of Mithras which was excavated later. I did go up to London with my Dad, it must have been 1942 or 3 because the fire weed was in prolific bloom on the bombed sites we looked at.

I know he became very friendly with Helen Gough, who lived at 9, which became 33. They subsequently married but after we had moved to Witney in the summer of 1940., Dad had been moved from Cardington to 32 MU at Brize Norton & we had waited for number 3 of the 50 houses in Springfield Oval to be built. That was around the outbreak of war when he laid up the Austin 7 (ALD789) as he wasn't entitled to petrol coupons. We had had some memorable trips in that motor, Stalling in Oxford Street in front of a London bus, & the driver jeering 'get that matchbox off the road', while dad got out & re-crunked the engine! I think I was a bit embarrassed but not as red faced as dad was!

Then we drove down into an underground car park, to walk to Grandma's flat. I have a feeling the car park was near Marble Arch. Grandma Smith lived with Aunt Edith at 7a Peabody Buildings; in Bedford bury, where, I think, Dad was born.

I remember he told me that after the Great fire in 1666 that the devastated sites were supposedly covered in fire weed within weeks (maybe months) of the fire stopping at Pie Corner. It started, as I'm sure you will know, at a bakers in Pudding Lane. But I don't think I ever knew his name. I recall being fascinated to see the wall paper on the derelict walls, some with fire places precariously hanging almost in space. A year or to later I discovered that the Windmill Theatre never closed. That could have been when, after joining the RAF, we all went up to London to Route line for the Victory parade. My station was, I recall at the corner of St. Martin's Lane. The previous ~~The previous~~ night we had spent in Clapham 'deep' Shelter. Roused in the morning by the booming voice of RMS Britain (the loudest voice in the army)

After my winter of discontent (multiple sicknesses); when I got back to school it was the 'big boys' (Stotfold Boys County School) & I was completely at sea. Dad had tried to keep me up to the mark with times tables, but I don't think it had been very effective. They were doing 'money', going out to the front & buying & selling empty packets & tins of things. I don't think I had a clue what it was all about. & kinda lost interest anyway. That academic year away from school had a bit of an impact on attitude to learning, I am quite sure. The year following I moved up into Mr. Thomas's class. My class reader was Silas Marner but I don't think I finished it. I was always a slow reader as well. I could count (I think) on two hands the books I had read up to being quite adult.

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Still, in 2013 I squirrel away the odd pictorial. Most of my collected coins have been passed on for sorting & suitable disposal. I have just located & copied a synopsis of my service career from 1945 until 1975, & a copy of a CV which I wrote sometime later. I had written it into a computer but, fortunately taken a 'hard copy', which is just as well as I am more than displeased with the voracious appetite of cyberspace. I haven't been here for a long time. It's now Summer 2014. I have just finished & posted Issue 54 of the Connector. It went to 84 people a quarter of them 'My Widows'. Issue one went to 110 blokes late in 1996! Earlier in the year I was privileged to attend the presentation of a new Queen's Colour to 1 S of TT at RAF Cosford..

And they took forever!! Titles that come to mind were White Fang & Coral Island & Black Beauty, quite early on. My Gran Evans gave me a copy of Greek Myths which I had a bit of a go at before I left home in '45. She also gave me Franks (Grandad Evans) silver watch & chain for which I made a stand in woodwork at Batt Central School. Thinking on it I suppose I left a lot of what would now be 'my heirlooms' at home. Most were never retrieved. There was my collection of birds eggs (all carefully blown & mounted with gloy (glue) in a couple of shoe boxes. I suppose there were 30 or so. From duck down to very fragile finch, tit & wren, swallow & house martin, etc I did retrieve stamps & cigarette cards, which I have continued to add to, although not ever so enthusiastically.

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While several were treated as Very VIP: rather more of us were just treated as VIP's, so, over canapé's & vol au vents with wine we were introduced to Princess Anne, who shook hands & talked to everyone, some she even returned to! Betty & I had quite an enjoyable day out & even the brief encounter was most enjoyable.

Perhaps I should explain?

Mrs Betty Turner is a friend of over 40 years whom I met as a member of the RAF A: when as Chairman of the Branch I was able to recruit her to collect for the Wings Appeal.

I'm sure a lot has happened between then & now! As I record under 'Wine & Beer' (over) NOW is 4th December 2015.

Issue 59 of the Connector is under construction & Dot Peto (one of my widows) has already sent me a Christmas card : she has been 'first' for several years now! At the start of February 2016 issue 59 of Connector is being printed the envelopes have been addressed & I note that 25 of the 80 are going to "my" widows ! On Sunday last I did 20 lbs of 3 fruit marmalade. That was hard work & less well done than previous efforts. Sort of inexplicably I managed to burn the first batch , & although I retrieved it the jars do contain some unpleasant looking 'black' bits. I shall have to offer a discount on the price & consider not making any more & disappointing folk.

Wine & Beer.

It occurred to me today (4/12/15) as I checked on my latest two attempts at interpreting guidance from C.J.J.Berry " First Steps in Wine-making". My first attempts were with guidance from a certain Warrant Officer White when he gave a brief lecture to my course at the RAF School of Education in Uxbridge . 'Chalky' explained how easy it was to persuade yeast to convert plain potatoes into an extremely potable beverage. I was sold & have continued to experiment with recipes from the W.I. & other experts to this very day. Whilst Pat would not be outdone , she started later making 'my' beer & I have carried on that worthwhile tradition since she was called to higher service. But , back to wine : I have had a demijohn of red currant & a one of black currant on the go for several months .The black...

....The black currant tastes fine ,but at 15% is a bit heavy so I added some more water for it to 'mature' at a rather lower gravity (Relative or even Specific Density for the modern purist) I'll look at it again in a week or two. The red currant on the other hand tastes superb but is far too sweet & at 27% way beyond what one might expect an ordinary Allison's yeast to be able of coping with. That, you will all know, is nearly up to commercial spirit level. *No pun intended.*

So that has had to have a diluting approach , as I was only after a pleasant dessert tittle.

A little added yeast to rejuvenate the tiring incumbent & a few more weeks for it to recover & that should be another very acceptable sup.

At this point it is January 2017 & I have been doing a little tidying up of this diatribe which I have neglected for some time.