

Chapter 3

Secondary school and early teenage

Turning eleven years of age was considered one of life's milestones. The transition from Junior to Secondary school seemed to be a giant step towards adulthood despite the fact we hadn't yet achieved teenage status. I was becoming more worldly and this was encouraged by my parents through such outlets as reading classical literature and attending cultural events and visiting museums. Social interaction with groups of grown-ups, which often happened at grandmother's (father's mother) flat in Cambridge Mansions, Cambridge Road, Battersea, became a requirement for learning how to listen and converse with mature people. A change in attire was a true indicator of moving forward out of boyhood. Instead of the trademark short pants and woollen socks, now I was wearing long trousers – a sure sign of growing up and being addressed as a 'young man'.

Nurturing cultural pursuits

The Islington Central Library, opened in 1907 and located at the corner of Fieldway Crescent and Holloway Road, was for me a huge storehouse of knowledge. The building's solid stone façade and imposing entrance gave it an awe-inspiring personality. Inside, the inlaid marble hallway led to a central staircase. On the left hand side of the hallway, two doors provided an entrance and exit to the adult lending library room. Near the staircase at the right hand end of the hallway was the door leading to the children's lending library room. In the adult section, an archway led to the reading room at the front of the building where newspapers, magazines and periodicals lay on wooden shelves or on the large wooden tables under the tall, segmented windows that provided natural light. Upstairs was the reference library, committee room, chief librarian's office and the large lecture room.

Until I was eligible to borrow books from the adult section, I took full advantage of the lending services of the children's section. The shelves were well stocked with all kinds of books – from rag books for the very young to hardcover adventure stories and works of general knowledge. One wall of the room was reserved for the non-lending section that contained volumes of encyclopædia and large reference books. This was a room that I could be frequently found in. Apart from the classics, which I was introduced to at an early age, my choice of reading material also drew heavily on futuristic and science-fiction subjects. I recall among the series of children's space fantasy books, there were the adventures of Kemlo, an average pre-teen boy born on Space Station 'K'; one of several such man-made satellites that orbited the Earth.

When not in the children's section, I patronised other parts of the library. The reading room of the adult section stocked issues of interesting magazines: my favourites being "Flight International"; "The Aeroplane"; "Autocar" and "Practical Mechanics". I was particularly intrigued with the cutaway illustrations and other pictorial content. This appreciation must have whetted my appetite for a possible future career in



Islington Central Library, Corner of Fieldway Crescent and Holloway Road



Natural History Museum



Victoria & Albert Museum



Science Museum

technical illustrating and, indeed, my artistic bent (so scathingly observed by my last Junior school form teacher, Mr. Pulman) was starting to point me in that direction.

The reference library on the second floor was a kind of Aladdin's cave of archival reading matter. The shelves were full of ancient tomes encased in intricate leather bookbinding. Most valuable were the huge bound volumes of back issue originals of the "Islington Gazette" newspaper. The room was always in a deathly hush with only the sound of pages being turned. The staff never seemed to change: two or three studious men and women who seemed to be human catalogues and always found the most elusive article.

On a less academic note, but nevertheless educational all the same, were the many presentations and personality appearances made in the lecture room on the second floor. These were specifically geared towards schoolchildren and proved extremely popular. Before the presentation, a queue would form at the Fieldway Crescent, or side, entrance to the building. After the door was opened there would be a rush up the stairs to the lecture room and a scramble to sit in the front seats. Everyone was keenly looking forward to the lecture or film show, as part of some of the presentations included a short movie using the old rickety and noisy 16 mm reel-to-reel projector.

One TV personality, who was a regular visitor, was Desmond Morris, the eminent zoologist. At each visit, he would bring a number of live wild animals for the children to admire – even touch – including a chimpanzee, a python, and other small creatures. His presentations were always a packed house as he had a natural ability to communicate with a young audience and his relaxed manner made the lectures more appealing. I remember Desmond asking for a volunteer to carry a python around the audience. I stuck my hand up and was given the job. Although I knew that the snake's skin wasn't slimy, it was the weight of the python that surprised me. When walking around the crowd, it was interesting to note the various reactions; from curious hands reaching out to feel the snake, to little girls shrinking back in disgust or fear.

Another renowned speaker was the explorer/adventurer, Ross Salmon. One illustrated lecture he made was of his travels in South America and, in particular, along the Orinoco River in Venezuela. The talk had all the elements of a "Boys Own" adventure story with tales of bushwhacking through the Amazonian-like jungle; encounters with primitive tribes; close-calls with wild beasts and, a spellbinding description of the cattle drives across the piranha-infested river. The accompanying film brought a true-to-life dimension to the travelogue. For the lecture, Ross appeared in his explorer's clothes of bush shirt, jodhpurs, riding boots and wide brimmed slouch hat – a true 'white hunter'.

An extension to my search for general knowledge, and one readily encouraged by my father, were the regular visits to London's museums and art galleries. There were three principal museums clustered in South Kensington, the Natural History Museum; the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Science Museum; and two others of note, the Geological Museum and Aeronautical Museum. Art collections were found in the National Gallery and Tate Gallery.

For the cost of a fare either on the bus or the Underground, a whole Sunday could be whiled away becoming absorbed in the large exhibition halls and display galleries of these repositories of knowledge and

culture. I had acquired a keen interest in prehistory; learning as much as possible about the geology and life forms from earliest times. Of course, the huge collection of prehistoric animal skeletons were a great influence, and a fascination with dinosaurs soon developed. Children, who were visiting the Natural History Museum, could pick up large sheets of drawing paper and borrow coloured pencils from the activities desk and tour around the museum sketching any artifact that took their fancy. Dinosaurs were popular, of course, and flowers and birds as seen in the numerous dioramas were also favourite subjects.

The Science Museum had one particular interesting feature. Many of the scale models were animated and, for example, a visitor could activate the workings of a cutaway steam engine model by pushing a button under the display case. A timed animation revealed the action of pistons and rods, flywheels and linkages, pulleys and belts all in miniature. It seemed that each succeeding motive display was more impressive than the previous one. Of course, the real, full-scale artifacts were also there: including James Watt's famous beam engine and George Stephenson's "Rocket" locomotive. Everything held a fascination, such as the technology of "TIM" the talking clock, and the theory of the Earth's rotation around an axis based on the swinging pendulum experiments of the French physicist, Jean Foucault.

A stone's throw from the Science Museum were the Geological Museum and Aeronautical Museum. The former housed everything there is to know about geology and related disciplines. Eye-catching displays of rare minerals (some that glowed under ultraviolet light); cutaways of the formation of oilfields and the methods used to extract and refine crude, and how different rocks formed depending on external influences and chemical make-up. The science of flight was explained in the small but interesting Aeronautical Museum. Many examples of pioneering individuals, such as Blériot's monoplane, were displayed, and a chronology of man's efforts to soar above the earth – from mythical Icarus's wings to the rocket technology of the time – guided visitors through the various exhibition halls.

The nearby Victoria & Albert Museum, located in Brompton Road, contained a wealth of artifacts devoted to the idiosyncrasies of the Victorian Era. Examples of 'Victoriana' in the form of fine china, elaborate tapestries and ornate architecture showcased the ideals of the time and, of course, the ascendancy of the British Empire.

Outside of South Kensington, other museums were equally patronised with enthusiasm. The Imperial War Museum in Lambeth had an impressive collection of military memorabilia, which included examples of German V1 and V2 *vergeltungswaffen* that wreaked destruction in my neighbourhood during the Second World War. The solid British Museum in Bloomsbury could be reached by a No. 35 tram before it descended into the Kingsway tunnel. Always fascinating was the gallery of Egyptology with its sarcophagi and mummified remains, and many examples of intricate lapis lazuli jewellery on display. Other ancient civilisations and cultures were represented with artifacts from Ancient China, the Aztecs and Babylonians, the "Elgin Marbles" from Ancient Greece, and a huge collection of Roman relics.

Art, too, wasn't neglected, and there were subsequent school visits to the National Gallery near Trafalgar Square, as well as the Tate Gallery with its leaning towards modern art. Being introduced to the masters made studying art at Secondary school a satisfying experiences and will be described more fully later in this

chapter. The original works of Titian, Canaletto, Boticelli and Braque became quite familiar, as were those of Cézanne, Renoir, Van Gogh and Turner.

Secondary schooldays

In September, 1957, I was enrolled into Barnsbury Secondary School for Boys in Eden Grove, Islington. Moving into the senior school meant a huge adjustment as the new pupils quickly discovered that the older boys were more worldly and enjoyed pushing their weight around on the newcomers. A new crop of teachers, too, who turned out to be greater disciplinarians; and a Headmaster, Mr. T.J.H. Davies, to match.

A new school also meant a new school uniform. The standard black blazer and grey trousers (whether long or short), grey socks, striped tie sporting the school colours of red, black and green, and the optional schoolboy-type cap. Soon after enrollment, the new pupils were assigned to one of four school ‘houses’. Each house was identified by its own colour. Datson house was red; Court house was yellow; Gerred house was green, and Wardman house was blue. I was assigned to Gerred house. The early assignment was important as the house colours were incorporated into the separate crest to be sewn onto the breast pocket of the blazer. The crest design had two elements taken from the coat-of-arms of Sir Hugh Myddleton – an Elizabethan benefactor. These elements were the bow and arrow and the water bouchet (yoke). Between the two elements was a broad wavy line that represented the New River, which was the entrepreneurial undertaking engineered by Myddleton. Crossing the broad wavy line were six bars that probably represented bridges over the river, and the colour of these bars was that of the pupil’s assigned house. In general, we kept to faithfully wearing the uniform but, as the years passed, personal tastes in fashion gradually took over and the senior boys were seen more often than not wearing anything but the school uniform.

The school property, bounded by Eden Grove, Geary Street and Georges Road, was originally opened in 1931 as Barnsbury Boys Central School, then renamed in 1947 to Barnsbury Secondary School for Boys; although always colloquially referred to as “Barnsbury Central”. Its popularity was also its curse and the school buildings – originally designed to cater for 400 senior boys only – became insufficient as enrollment increased year by year. The School Board’s answer to this problem were wooden huts hastily erected in the playground to act as temporary classrooms. These huts were minimal at best; inadequate heating in winter being a significant shortcoming. Later, it was decided that the school should be divided into a Lower School and an Upper School. Eden Grove would continue to accommodate the Lower School (forms 1 and 2), and the Upper School (forms 3 to the upper-sixth) found its quarters in a brand new building at the junction of Camden Road and Caledonian Road. The building was on lease from the North London College for Further Education and lasted until 1967 when Barnsbury Secondary School for Boys was amalgamated with Laycock Secondary Boys School and Highbury County Grammar School to become Highbury Grove Comprehensive School in the new Highbury Grove buildings under Headmaster Dr. Rhodes Boyson.

I entered the 1st form and was assigned to class 1S. According to an old schoolmate, the class numbering system was as follows: 1A, 1Alpha, 1S, 1X, 1M & 1R. In terms of foreign language tuition, classes 1A & 1S studied French, 1Alpha & 1X studied Spanish, and probably 1M & 1R did not have any language lessons. I certainly remember the French lessons being taught by the 1S form master, Mr. T.P. Stanwyck.



Barnsbury Secondary School for Boys (Lower School), Eden Grove, Islington, c1931



Barnsbury Secondary School for Boys (Lower School), Geary Street at Georges Road, Islington, c1931



2nd Form Boys at Eden Grove Lower School, 1962



Barnsbury Boys Tie and Blazer Crest (Gerred House)

Following the first half-year, the school report issued in February, 1958, listed my position as No. 2 out of 36 (a quantum leap since Laycock days), I was assigned to the top form 1A under Mr. J.E. Richards. At the end of year, the school report issued in July, 1958, I still retained my No. 2 position, this time out of 34.

Events at Senior school (1957 to 1959)

Despite hazy recollections of my days in the Lower School at Eden Grove, perhaps the greatest impact was the influence of the teachers, who expected a high standard and no nonsense from disinclined pupils. The Headmaster, Mr. T.J.H. Davies, (affectionately known by all the boys as “The Bonk” or “Bonky”), certainly demanded a lofty benchmark – largely to maintain the school’s criteria of excellence and also to prove the establishment’s worth to the London County Council.

Hand in glove with the elevated standards of study came harsher corporal punishment. Boys were maturing quickly and teenage influences started to distract them from normal learning practices. Pupils prone to truancy or dereliction of duty were meted out and dealt with – sometimes in front of the class, but more often than not in the Headmaster’s study. We soon discovered which teacher was the biggest disciplinarian and who was the weakest to hand out punishment. For example, top of the list had to be Mr. George Rice and Mr. A. Cohen (affectionately known as “Killer” Cohen). George Rice was singularly nasty; indeed, even sadistic. A short man with a permanent stoop, he would prowl along the corridors in a distinct lope and scowl at all and sundry through bespectacled froglike eyes. As our mathematics teacher, he took to task any boy who was inattentive and produced poor results. A case in point was his victimization of one lad in particular, whose name was Leslie Webb. During one lesson, this inoffensive boy was summoned to the front of the class and grilled by Mr. Rice over a trivial matter. Webb blubbered some comment, to which Mr. Rice accused him in a loud voice, “You’re a LIAR!” At which point he requested Webb to remove his eye-glasses and the boy complied. Next came a complete surprise to everyone as Mr. Rice swiped the back of his hand across Webb’s cheek, raising a red welt. “Killer” Cohen, the history teacher, was equally uncompromising, but in a different way as his favourite weapon of punishment was the split ruler brought down heavily on the palm of any miscreant’s hand. This action was always preceded by the verbal order. “Hold out your paw, boy!!”

On the other side of the coin, our teachers indicated credit where credit was due. Evidence of this appeared in the school reports that were issued twice a year. For the 1957/1958 school year, I received high marks and favourable comments in English (language), French, history, geography, art and general science. Subjects such as mathematics and English (literature) received lower grades and comments to the effect, “...his exam results are very disappointing”.

Schoolboy bonding occurred naturally as like-minded lads formed their own cliques, and friendships blossomed as time went by. My mate, Kenny Pratley, was a year ahead of me but we chummed around as usual. Another old Laycock friend was Philip (Phil) Davies and we were to be joined later by Michael (Mike) Stewart and Royston (Roy) Score. Later in our teenage, Phil, Mike and myself became virtually inseparable and, as soon as we were legally allowed to drink alcohol, the occasional pub crawl became a tradition and continued well into adulthood.

The latter half of 1958 was not very kind to me. In fact, the life-altering experience that happened set my academic career back considerably. Following the summer break, I moved into the second senior year and graduated to form 2A with the amiable class master, Mr. A.L. Martyn, a pipe smoking teacher of the 'old school'. He was also the senior geography master and was well known for his free and easy approach to the subject. We got on well together and shared a number of philosophical moments.

It wasn't long into the autumn half-term that I was involved in a serious road accident. A little while before, my father had presented me with my first full-size bicycle. It was either a Raleigh or a Hercules, not sure which, but I guarded it jealously and doted on its appearance and roadworthiness. Dad had made sure the three-speed Sturmey-Archer running gear worked and that the tyres, brake blocks and control rods were in tiptop condition. It was black in colour with a chromium plated headlamp and cycle bell. The rear light was powered by a small friction drive generator, and I was able to 'garage' the bike in the storage shed at the bottom of the block of flat's flight of stairs.

One Sunday I decided to go off on a ride around the neighbourhood. Cycling in those days wasn't as precarious as it is today. In general, the roads weren't busy and current safety equipment that's now virtually mandatory was unheard of; helmets, in particular. I hadn't gone very far – roughly at the corner of Liverpool Road and Ellington Street – when I was stuck from behind by a car. The force of the collision sent me over the handlebar and I landed in the gutter, apparently striking my head on the granite kerbstone. People passing nearby (or perhaps patrons of the Duchess of Kent pub) rendered assistance and called for an ambulance. Some witnesses said I was unconscious, but writhing in convulsions and vomiting. I was quickly taken to the Royal Northern Hospital in Holloway Road for stabilisation.

The prognosis wasn't good. As soon as my parents were told of the accident they visited me in hospital. The surgeon in charge wasn't optimistic considering the extent of injury that revolved primarily around a fractured skull and inner ear damage. In fact, the trauma was so great that I was given only four hours to live. My parents must have agonized as they watched over me in the equivalent of Intensive Care. I remained unconscious for several hours, but then regained consciousness and was left to rest and recuperate.

Much of my hospital stay remains a blur, but I remember being sent to a convalescent hospital at London Colney (near Colney Hatch, the mental asylum) and rehabilitating there; sleeping much of the time as my body healed from the experience. Soon I was allowed home and phased into school work, but I had lost a great deal of ground and had to try and catch up with my studies. Also, because of the danger of physical harm, I was excused any sports or P.T. (PE) exercises. My February, 1959, half-year report reflected a downturn in marks and subsequent position in class: No. 24 out of 34, but this was justified after an absence of 84 days and the teachers' remarks showed sympathy in this regard.

The rest of the academic year in the Lower School centred around basic education and some handcraft work particularly in woodwork. We spent time in the woodwork shop at Alfred Prichard School located in Westbourne Road under the guidance of Mr. Milsom. This was my introduction into the practical crafts that were expanded on at the Upper School at Camden Road, which had a complete technical block of workshops for metalwork, woodwork, plumbing and bricklaying, plus a room equipped for engineering drawing.

Before leaving the Lower School there was a steady regaining of confidence and an improved standing in the class: No. 17 out of 34. Strengths and weaknesses were becoming more apparent, with French, history, geography and art at the top of the list of achievements, and the ability to master mathematics being a particular stumbling block (a lifelong impediment regardless of trying; although geometry did pass muster).

This regaining of confidence was also noted by Hewitt, Woollacott & Chown, the firm of solicitors that was representing my compensation case in the courts. The solicitors relied on the judgement of a Harley Street specialist, Mr. Radley Smith, as to the extent of my injuries and the future effects they may have; particularly the inner ear damage. Ultimately, an out of court settlement was agreed upon by all parties and in December, 1959, the compensated sum of £250/0/0d was put into an investment trust until my twenty-first birthday. My parents also received £27/10/0d for out of pocket expenses. When matured in 1966, the investment totalled £332/1/6d.

The first two years at Eden Grove were somewhat unremarkable as far as general school life was concerned. Some of the senior boys pushed their weight around, but there were no outstanding cases of bullying. That was to come in the Upper School at Camden Road.

It was more practical for me to eat school dinners at lunch time regardless that home was within walking distance. Of course, school dinners were, themselves, totally unappetising. “Good food cooked badly”, my mother always used to say. There were times when the vegetables were inedible and, because of the patrolling teacher dinner monitors keeping their wary eyes open for any boy ‘toying’ with his food, it was difficult to secrete the offending pieces away. On one occasion I was almost force-fed on some disgusting turnips that I had refused to eat. More appealing, however, were the sweets and snacks available from the tuck shop located just off the assembly hall. The tuck shop was the domain of one of the most revered teachers, Mr. W.C. Matthews (“Bill” or “Pop” Matthews as we called him). Outside the school gates on Geary Street, we could count on the ice cream and lollipop vendor. One of the most popular items was the innovative “Jubbly”, a tetrahedron-shaped block of ice impregnated with orange juice and wrapped in a stiff, grease-proof package. The “Luvly Jubbly” was guaranteed to quench one’s thirst for quite a while.

I didn’t escape corporal punishment, either; being given serious reprimands on at least three occasions. Homework was considered an essential component of learning and, once when I forgot to submit a project on time to the teacher (who happened to be the Headmaster), ‘four of the best’ on the open hand was administered. An innocent game of ‘tag’, where touching a player with a plimsoll automatically made that person ‘he’, turned ugly when I threw the shoe to contact another boy, but instead it connected with and broke a window pane. This cost me another caning, this time by Mr. C. Madley, the Deputy Head. Finally, an accidental but audible yawn in class incited the drama teacher, Mr. Colin Lea, to deliver a blow to the open hand in front of the class. There was a choice – cane or slipper. As it turned out, choosing the slipper was the worst of two evils as the pain lingered far longer.

1959 was the year when the new school magazine, “The Barnsburian”, was first published. It was a well printed and compact publication sponsored in part by local merchants such as Kevans, the school uniform outfitters and Hirons, a local butchers. In time the magazine became published twice a year – summer and

Christmas – and was popular with the boys and staff alike. The editorial contained administration news and the rest of the magazine consisted of a sports section and a literary section. Also, some editions contained pen and ink sketches of which I submitted two renderings.

Recreation outside of school

Boys will be boys, as the saying goes, and I was no exception to getting into trouble or taking unnecessary risks. Sure, you could buy simple and harmless chemistry sets from the toy shop, but my mate, Kenny Pratley, was fascinated with the effects of chemicals and, in particular, explosives and jet propulsion. With the proceeds from his pocket money he started building a chemistry laboratory, including test tubes; retorts; measuring cylinders, a Bunsen burner and pestle & mortar. Kenny's father was a carpenter and built shelves, a bench and storage cupboards in the brick air raid shelter that was located in the small back yard of No. 1 Crane Grove. Every so often Kenny and I would go to the local oil shop to buy basic chemicals for experimentation. We made rudimentary 'ammunition' for mock battles using plastic soldiers and Dinky Toy army models. Gunpowder was obtained from penny 'banger' fireworks and, eventually we graduated to "Jetex" solid fuel capsules for propellents. 'Shells' or 'mines' were made with pieces of brass tubing, and aluminium cigar tubes made great rockets that could be launched from home-made ramps. We found a piece of magnesium that was filed into small fragments and, when set alight, made impressive pyrotechnics. Considering the extreme danger to permanently damaging eyesight or receiving serious burns (protective wear of any kind never entered our heads) we escaped relatively unscathed – probably more by luck than judgement.

The military theme was also played out with another favourite medium – Hubbard's Plasticine. This was a compound that could be moulded into whatever shape you wanted. It also came in different colours; green and grey being popular. Kenny was quite adept working with his hands and was able to mould the Plasticine into anything his fertile imagination conjured up. He made a large warship, complete with gun turrets and superstructure, that could be floated in a tin bath full of water. We then played out a battle scene with the help of a replica model and fully functioning anti-aircraft gun. The model could be traversed and elevated like the real piece of artillery. It had a separate breech that, when charged with explosives (in our case several caps from a 'penny roll' used for cowboy cap-guns) and armed with a suitable iron nail, became a powerful cannon. With the Plasticine warship floating in the tin bath, we positioned our 'cannon' and systematically fired nails into the boat, inflicting all kinds of damage and eventually sinking the craft.

Warfare and aggression seemed to be part and parcel of the world of young boys before the onset of teenage with its fads, fashions and girl-watching activities. Despite the realism of death and destruction, we considered violent games merely as an escapism for our imaginations. 'Cowboys and Indians' reflected what we saw at the Saturday morning picture shows – the same with 'cops and robbers' or similar 'gangster' scenarios. Cap guns, water pistols and rifles with corks made the games more believable in our minds. However, as young senior students these pursuits gradually gave way to more mature and constructive recreation. More emphasis was being put on school homework, for example, and other influences – as will be described later – filled our leisure time. It was also quite obvious that the 'fairer sex' and *la différence* were becoming more influential with the advent of puberty and its attendant hormonal activity.

There now seemed to be a shift in friendships. With a greater latitude of freedom, I was allowed to roam further and stay out later (homework notwithstanding). This didn't diminish any recklessness, and explorations onto construction sites, such as the new Islington Council estate at Highbury Quadrant, meant climbing up scaffolding and searching the property for anything valuable. Some empty houses in Crane Grove came under scrutiny and made for an interesting hide-and-seek game. Our little following also had a couple of 'tomboys', girls who were adventurous and easily led. One was Pamela, and I had a bit of a 'crush' on her. I remember on the bomb site behind the Cossor factory in Kelvin Road near Highbury Barn we spent an interesting intimate time.

Luck did run out, however, and through misadventure both Kenny and I were injured in a small chemical explosion. Kenny was inside the air raid shelter at the bench and mixing a compound using the pestle & mortar. I was standing at the entrance when all of a sudden there was a flash and explosion that sent both of us reeling. Kenny's mother came rushing out from the small scullery in time to catch both boys in a disoriented state. I sustained severe hearing loss and Kenny's face was pockmarked with wounds inflicted by small pieces of the ceramic mortar. He was also temporarily blinded. Despite some quick first-aid, it was determined that we had to visit a doctor as soon as possible. The nearest was Dr. McCormick in Holloway Road near Etterbeke's dry cleaners and the monument carver. I guided Kenny along the pavement to the doctor's practice and was able to obtain treatment almost immediately. Kenny was certainly lucky that he didn't sustain any permanent eyesight damage, but his face was to show the pockmarked wounds. My hearing, already impaired by the bicycle accident, was to suffer and I have permanent tinnitus to this day.

The chemical experiments; often incorporating toxic fumes and loud reports, didn't go down too well with the neighbours. We had a number of run-ins with the elderly widow on the top floor of No. 1 Crane Grove, and specifically with the workers in the garment sweat shop that had a window overlooking the Pratley's back yard. When the window was open sometimes our smoke and noise activity would greatly irritate the girls in the factory. They would complain to us and to their foreman. He would give us heck and threatened all kinds of retribution. The Desmond family in No. 2 Crane Grove were even more vociferous and the father, Cornelius (Connie), berated us more than once. This came to a head and my father had to apologise for my boorish behaviour; and my parents eventually banned me from playing at No. 1.

Events at Senior school (1959 to 1962)

Graduating to the Upper School at Camden Road was almost a rite of passage. Now I could be considered one of the 'big boys' and definitely a 'young man'. However, one significant event that reshaped my studying was the requirement of wearing eyeglasses. Until I was fourteen it never occurred to me that I had defective eyesight. However, my mother became increasingly concerned at my television viewing habits. It seemed unnatural to her that I should be constantly screwing up my eyes and sitting so close to the TV screen.

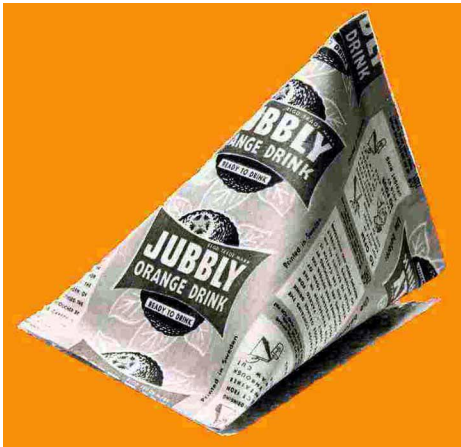
The closest optician (optometrist) was a Dolland and Aichison practice in Holloway Road near the Charrington's coal office. So Mum made an appointment for me to have an eyesight test. Both of us went and I was subjected to the standard examination. The optician then came to the conclusion that I was short

sighted and that corrective lenses should be prescribed. I wasn't too enamoured with eyeglasses in the first place (perhaps seen as a form of weakness), and my mother was certainly against me wearing the standard National Health 'wire' frames. So I chose some frames that were affordable and stylish but, as it turned out, not very robust for the school environment. The first time I wore them to class started the gossip mill as necks craned and fingers pointed – "Look, Page is wearing glasses." When the lesson began, it became clear to me that I must have missed a great deal of my previous teachers' blackboard messages even sitting in the front row. Now, I was able to comprehend all the chalk scribbles no matter where I sat in the room. A definite quantum leap and realisation how much knowledge had slipped by in all of my formative schooling years and also part of the secondary education.

The Upper School at Camden Road was a modern glass and concrete box with a neutral smell. Far removed from the traditional L.C.C. solid brick halls of learning with a characteristic odour of varnished wood and stale school dinners. It took a while to orient oneself around the campus. The four storeys of the main building were light and airy, and some classrooms were purpose equipped such as the science room (somehow never called the science lab.) and spacious library. Adjoining the main building was the modern gymnasium and along the hallway was the technical block. Outside, the large playground was marked out for various sports and a car park extended along the entire Camden Road front of the school property.

Commuting to school, however, was roughly twice the distance from home. Depending on time, weather and inclination, I made the journeys either by public transport or on foot. Rainy days almost guaranteed a trip by bus – usually Nos. 609 or 611 trolleybus from Highbury Corner to the Camden Road/Holloway Road junction. The return ride meant congregating at the bus stop outside Jones Brothers department store. It was here that we sometimes met girls from the nearby Shelburne School and friendships were often struck up whilst waiting for the trolleys. Otherwise it was shank's pony from home along Liverpool Road to Holloway Road near the Northern Polytechnic college (the "Poly") and continuing past the bottom of Eden Grove, under the railway bridge and taking a short cut through the courtyards of the L.C.C. Lorain Estate council flats to emerge at the corner of Camden Road and Caledonian Road, a mere stone's throw from the school.

Being the third formers, we were at the bottom of the totem pole and subjected to all the bullyings of the older boys. It was obvious that the senior one became the more lax was the requirement of wearing the school uniform. Older boys, who were more fashion conscious, flaunted the rules of decorum and attended school in 'trendy' clothes and footwear. Italian styling was a prominent vogue, so two-piece suits with 'bum-freezer' jackets and tapered trouser bottoms vied with denims and 'sloppy Joe' pullovers. Shoe fashion seemed to change weekly – from short or long 'winkle-pickers' to chisel toes, even diamond toes; Cuban heels; side laces or elasticated slip-ons, and crêpe soled "brothel creepers". Fashion didn't stop at clothes. With more disposable income, fourth and fifth formers could display the latest in hair styles with blow waves and immaculate trims that were influenced by current film stars such as Tony Curtis and James Dean. I still dressed the part for school: at least with a school tie and crested blazer, but later these were abandoned in favour of other apparel; although I wasn't affluent enough to sport the latest mode. Teachers, especially the up and coming, straight out of college types, also seemed to eschew the traditional dark three-piece suit. Casual jackets, cardigans and corduroy trousers were commonplace. Long hair and beards weren't frowned upon and a casual, almost Bohemian, atmosphere seemed to pervade in the teachers' common room.



'Luvly Jubbly' Orange Drink



Barnsbury Boys Prefect's Badge

Two Typical Views of Holloway Road en-route to Camden Road, 1958



Barnsbury Secondary School for Boys (Upper School), Camden Road, Islington, 1965



Holloway Road and Camden Road, Islington, 1960s



Caledonian Road and L.C.C. Loraine Estate, Islington, 1960s



Caledonian Road and Camden Road, Islington, 1960s

I was assigned to form 3A under Mr. D. Leff. Similar to several of the teachers, he was christened with a nickname; two in his case – either “Jeff” Leff, or “The Nose”. The reason for the second being obvious as he sported a sizable schnozzle. Mr. Leff was short, fairly dapper and not inclined to become overexcited. He taught mathematics and was very methodical. His school report notations were favourable to me with such remarks as “... a good average boy who is obviously working hard.”

My new classmates were the typical amalgam of fourteen-year olds, ranging from the brainy to the dregs. There were extrovert, comic, athletic, effeminate and dozy types. Also leaders and followers. I made and fostered some strong friendships; particularly with Ronald “Walt” Disney, who sat next to me. Others were: Leslie Chatfield; Mike Stewart; Roy Score and, of course, my old mate of years standing, Phil Davies. As time went by, it was interesting to see the development of strengths and weaknesses; the teachers reacting accordingly by promoting individuals’ skills particularly in the areas of art, sport and science.

The neophytes were mindful, too, of the bullies and their cliques. There were several rotten apples in the barrel, the most notorious being a ringleader called Johnny Williams, who cared for no one and held sway over a number of craven followers. Williams, his henchmen John Deighton and Martin Sturgeon, strutted around and summarily picked on likely targets – usually boys who could be easily intimidated because they stood out in the crowd. Fear and reputation were the main weapons and any resistance was met with a ‘swarming’ by Williams’ gang that often ended up with a minor injury to the innocent party. Williams was also known to carry a flick-knife (switchblade) that was used to some effect. His bravado was displayed against teachers and authority in general, but any punishment was shrugged off and used as bragging rights.

Before I was fully aware of Williams’s notoriety, I had my own brush with him and his gang. The incident began first thing on a Wednesday morning just before assembly. Boys were lining up waiting for the main doors to open and Williams was just ahead of me. As usual he was pushing his weight around and decided to intimidate a smaller lad in the queue by physically shoving him to one side. This irksome action caused me to accuse Williams by stating, “Pick on someone your own size”. Williams, flabbergasted that somebody had the affrontage to challenge him, glared at me and snarled, “What d’ya say?” I said, “You heard!” The next thing, I saw stars as the lout swung a right hook that connected with my jaw. After the initial shock, my instinctive reaction was to retaliate in a similar fashion. However, my answer wasn’t quite as powerful as I was carrying my briefcase in my right hand and, with the restricted room caused by the queue, my left jab into his face didn’t produce the desired effect. This really put the cat among the pigeons and Williams, infuriated like an enraged bull, brought up his knee and aimed it directly at my crotch. Fortunately the briefcase I was carrying warded off the blow. He then employed one of the favourite moves of the time – the head butt, or ‘nutting’ – but which never connected. By this time, the rest of the boys separated and watched the disturbance unfold with a mixture of surprise and excitement. Before any further punches were exchanged a teacher on duty barged through the knot of lads to separate Williams and myself.

News of the incident spread like wildfire throughout the school. At assembly it seemed as if all eyes were turned on me, together with furtive whisperings and, finger pointing. Kenny Pratley asked me, “Do you know who he is?” To which I responded, “No”. “He’d the biggest bully in the school and he has a gang”, said Kenny. Snide remarks from others such as, “Johnny’s gang’ll do you in after school” then

started to unnerve me. There was no other way except to brass it out and, although I wasn't scared of Williams one-on-one, the thought of encountering his spineless gang was extremely daunting.

The difficulty was keeping a low profile and away from Williams's prying eyes and his gang members' overt threats. Rumours of a 'punch up' or 'rumble' after school hours became rife. It so happened that Wednesday morning was reserved for sports activity. Here at least was an opportunity to stay away from the school property during the morning and perhaps things would simmer down. However, I was continually dogged with bad luck. The weather in the morning deteriorated and it became extremely cold. I was ill-prepared for this where clothing was concerned and the cross-country run through Scratchwood at Sterling Corner near Barnet was wet and miserable. At the end of the course I looked as if I had been dragged through a mud bath. We returned to school in time for me to eat lunch in the cafeteria – all the while being on my guard for Williams and his henchmen.

With lunch over I decided to take refuge in the library room on the second floor. After leaving the cafeteria, I became aware that I was being followed, so I elected to dart up the back stairs to try and elude my followers. They had different plans and split into two groups; one following me and the other taking the main stairs. I reached the second floor, but the group that took the main stairs beat me to the library room door and herded me back into the clutches of the group that followed me. There was no escape. The mob was howling for blood: "Let's get 'im in the bog (toilet)", suggested one lout; then Williams appeared and the crowd parted to let him confront me. Without warning, he cuffed me again – harder this time – and, pointing his finger at my chest, said, "That's just a taste of what you'll be getting tonight", and sauntered down the corridor. Martin Sturgeon decided to repeat his leader's action with a similar blow, and then the whole group slunk away – sneering as it went.

Things weren't looking good. To make matters worse, I was constantly being reminded of Williams's previous 'out of school' encounters. One particularly shocking story was when Williams challenged another boy to a fight using either a knife or a hammer. The boy refused and walked away. Williams then jumped on the boy's back and hit him hard on the head with the hammer.

Then my luck changed for the better. One of my classmates was a strapping Cypriot named Takis Polydorou. Even at fourteen, Takis was obliged to shave his face and often arrived at school with a 'seven o'clock shadow'. He had a considerable physique for his age and evidently decided that I needed a body-guard when it was time to leave school for the day. "There won't be no rumble", he told me. This obviously was a godsend and when it was time to leave we both walked down to the main doors that opened out onto the wide steps and Camden Road where it appeared that the entire school was congregating. True to form, Williams was strutting around in the foyer just in front of the doors, hands in pockets and being his usual blustery self. As we drew closer and he saw Takis he faltered a little, but then puffed out his chest in a show of bravado. We continued without interruption and, as we brushed past Williams, Takis said tersely, "Leave 'im alone!" Williams glanced at us, shrugged his shoulders and nonchalantly said, "I'm just waitin' fer me mates". We continued unchallenged and through the doors, down the steps and along to Holloway Road. When the audience realised that there wasn't going to be any action, it disbursed and I returned home on foot and unscathed, but with an impressive story to tell my family.

Why Williams didn't pursue his revenge more fully is a mystery. Perhaps he decided that he had made his point in the corridor (actually more an ego trip in front of his gang), or that he found other, more easy prey. Suffice it to say that Takis saved my bacon that day. In 1960, Williams was eventually expelled after challenging a teacher, Mr. Trainer, to a fight outside the school. Peace reigned once again.

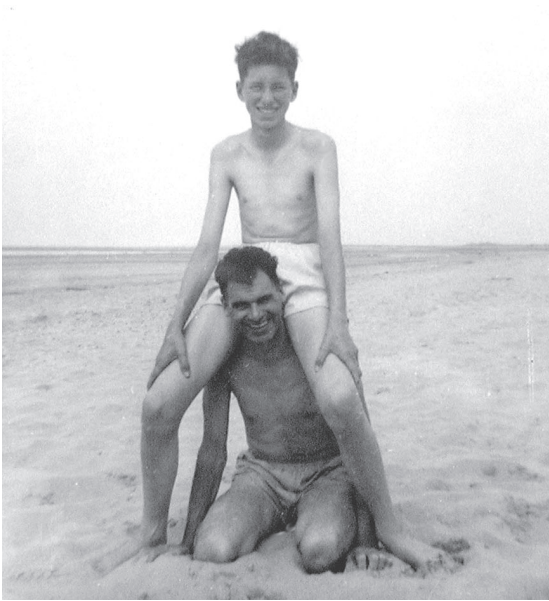
Curriculum subjects were expanded in the third form to include practical skills beyond woodwork. The school's technical block also catered for the building and metalworking trades. Time was set aside for boys to learn the basics of brickbuilding, all types of metalwork and woodwork, and technical drawing. Training emphasised both theory and practical, and I eagerly looked forward to classes in these subjects. There was a likeable rotation of masters; Mr. Parker for building, Mr. George Bean for metalwork, Mr. Derek Cooper for woodwork, and the head of the department and technical drawing teacher, Mr. Harry Godsall.

The introduction to brickbuilding included understanding the various 'bonds', knowing how to mix mortar accurately and constructing walls using the bricklayers' tools. Metalwork was more diversified as we learned the skills of plumbing, tinsmithing, forging and using machine tools such as lathes. The most popular item to make in woodwork classes was the Spanish guitar, but Mr. Cooper encouraged us to design and make anything that we wanted; including the use of power tools and traditional methods such as gluing. Design work was the domain of Mr. Godsall and his technical drawing studio. Since my father was gently prodding me to excel in draughting, I concentrated in this area of study. Harry Godsall was a blustering, jovial chap with beetroot red cheeks and who often shared a risqué joke with the boys. We got on extremely well and he gave me a first class testimonial before I left school.

As the third form drew to a close, out of 13 subjects listed on my school report only two were marked less than C grade. I seemed to be holding my own in terms of competency; although the obvious weakness in mathematics continued to trouble me.

Following the summer holiday break, two weeks of which were spent on the Norfolk coast, school studies resumed and I entered the fourth year in one of the 'streamed' forms, 4AB, with class master Mr. Arthur Graham. As I had elected to take the technical rather than the commercial stream, certain course subjects were removed and others promoted. Specifically, I was no longer taught any of the foreign languages, English literature, commerce, and music. Emphasis was now put on the technical trades and pure physics instead of general science. The fourth form was also the preliminary run-up to the G.C.E. (General Certificate of Education) examinations; the first set or 'O' Level (Ordinary Level) of which were taken in the fifth form.

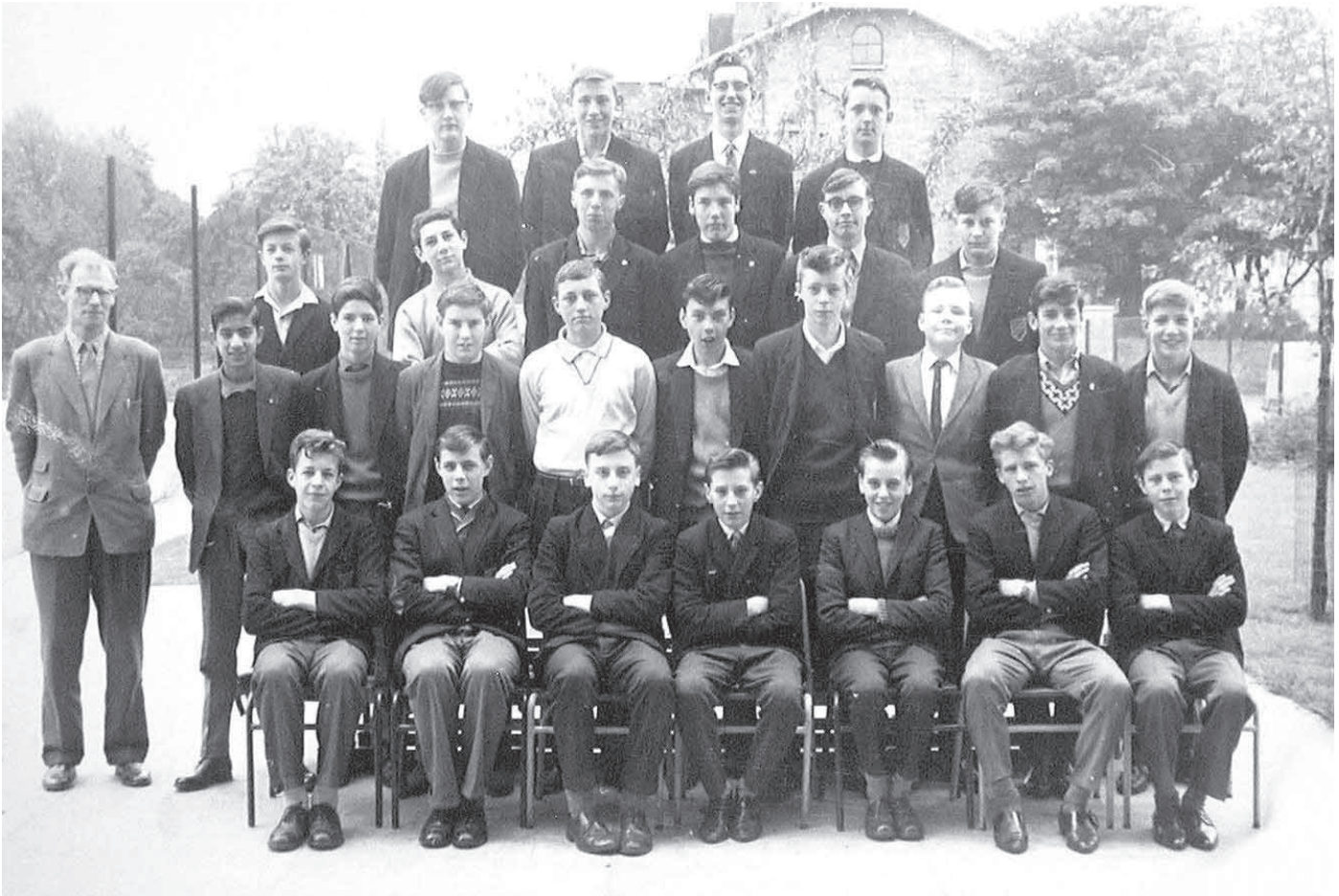
As the fourth form progressed, I seemed to be spurred on and enjoyed a high standard in some of my favourite subjects. Mr. Graham was virtually a mentor and I seem to remember we had several philosophical discussions. Mr. Frank Walton, who was the head of the art department, was also very supportive. An eccentric, pipe smoking individual, he initiated the school's Art Club and encouraged me to join the Islington Art Circle. This was an ideal opportunity to branch out from the school's formal studies into an environment that provided a means of self-expression in a congenial atmosphere. Much of the Art Club's activities was recorded in "The Barnsburian" school magazine.



Barry and Dad, Brancaster Beach, Norfolk, 1960



Mum and Dad, Brancaster Beach, Norfolk, 1960



form 4AB 1961
 Top Row: Leslie Barnett, Ronald Disney, Barry Page, Peter Kemble.
 2nd Row: William Parsons, Paraig O'Shea, Brian Offer, Anthony Shoulders, Malcolm Morecroft, Harold Crooke.
 3rd Row: Cecil Ali-Bakhsh, John Stroud, ? John Hayward, Keith Warner, John Andrews, Brian Bathie, ? ?
 Bottom Row: ? James Grange, Michael Stewart, William Waller, ? John Cole, Leslie Chatfield.
 Teacher: Arthur Graham (Maths and Science)

Form 4AB – Barnsbury Secondary School for Boys (Upper School), Camden Road, Islington, June 1961

Following is an extract from the Summer, 1961, edition of “The Barnsburian” by M. Christostomou:

Not that members of the Art Club were restricted in any way and, indeed, Mr. Walton expected a diverse output of work ranging from conventional painting techniques to clay modelling and experimental media such as papier maché. The Art Club was started by about five boys, who were very keen on art, so they asked Mr. Walton to initiate an art club and he agreed. The club was an immediate success and 20 boys signed up as members, with the promise of additional recruits. Our activities in the art room began at four o'clock on Wednesdays and Fridays and it was plain to see that the keenness was quite contagious as the boys painted, drew or made anything they wanted. Their interesting work was displayed in the art room and was a source of pride to both pupils and master alike.

Not only did the boys execute their own works, but sometimes unique opportunities came their way such as when the school's Drama Club required scenery painted for “Treasure Island”, one of the plays performed at the school. Much imagination and ingenuity was used when painting the props and backdrop, which took just over a week to complete.

Mr. Walton decided that it would be advantageous for members of the club to meet and mix with other artists in the community. He then introduced us to the Islington Art Circle and a whole new world of experience opened up to the boys who decided to integrate themselves. The first exposure was submitting an entry into the Circle's Spring Exhibition that was held in the Islington Central Library, Holloway Road, in May, 1961. I was honoured to represent the school when one of my paintings was exhibited at the show.

The Islington Art Circle was more than a group of individuals who wanted to express and practice their interest in art. It was also a fellowship club; the organization of which was presided over by husband and wife, George and Deb Bunting. George, an engineer by profession, was an easy-going, pipe smoking and puckish *mein host*. His auburn close-cropped hair and goatee beard made him instantly recognizable, and his infectious chuckle and twinkling eyes endeared him to everyone. Deb was equally as gregarious and hovered around as the proverbial hostess welcoming all into their period Canonbury villa where the Circle met for its art and club business sessions.

Although I cannot recall exactly where in Canonbury the Bunting's house was located, I know that it was within a relatively short walking distance from home through Canonbury Square. However, Grange Grove comes to mind. Typical of the large houses, a Greek columned portico and short flight of steps beckoned visitors to the substantial front door. Once inside the vestibule and central hallway, the expansive interior suggested a bygone age of Regency tailored gentlemen and stately ladies in crinolines.

One of the other members, Dr. Liebson, opened his house for the regular Monday evening life drawing sittings. At these sessions, models were invited to pose in the nude for the club members to capture on canvas, board and paper. Each model chose their own posture and remained in this position for a substantial length of time. Usually there was a break in the sitting then another session followed. At the end of the sitting a general discussion ensued as members circulated and critiqued each other's work; then we were invited for refreshments that consisted mainly of cheese, wine and other beverages.

The models varied: male and female, young and middle-aged, but all were of a good calibre and presented themselves with decorum. This was important as the essence was purely artistic and something I learned to respect. For a teenager confronted with the naked, curvaceous body of a mature woman, such respect was expected. There were, however, lighthearted moments such as one particular female model, whose entrance into the studio room was bizarre. The door would suddenly fly open and she would flamboyantly soar across the room in two or three bounds, launch onto the waiting sofa and drape herself over the upholstery like a dying swan. Whatever position she reclined in was the subject pose of the evening.

The Islington Art Circle's venue for artists was also a social nucleus for Canonbury's literati, and the Buntings were well known providers of convivial wine and cheese parties. Despite being an underage drinker, my membership in the society was an open-sesame to the social functions. Additional to this, I had another passport of sorts whenever a party was in the offing. The Bunting's son, Chris, and I attended the same school and he was able to forewarn me of any upcoming festivities at home.

The wine and cheese parties, themselves, were relatively lavish given the setting and coterie of guests. Certainly the wine flowed and Deb, the good-natured hostess, flitted around ensuring that everyone was having a good time. George meandered through the rooms, puffing on his favourite brier, and welcomed all arrivals with a hearty handshake and a beaming smile. Despite appearing out of place in an adult's surroundings, the three teenagers of Chris Bunting, Mike Stewart and myself blended in well and helped consume both the mountains of sandwiches and carafes of vino. We also happened to meet agreeable members of the opposite sex that helped to make memorable occasions of these soirées.

A major foundation of the Islington Art Circle was its honorary president, the noted architect, Sir Basil Spence. In 1965, a coach outing was organised for members to visit one of Sir Basil's architectural masterpieces, the new Coventry Cathedral. I distinctly remember travelling on the M1 motorway, which at that time was virtually devoid of any traffic, and arriving outside the new, modern edifice, which was in complete juxtaposition to the ruins of the 12th century St. Michael's cathedral shell and spire. The melding between the old and new was remarkable. This experience taught me a great deal about the complexities of architecture which, as another art form, blended well with the philosophies of the Islington Art Circle.

The additional exposure to art put me in good stead when it was time to sit for a 'mock' G.C.E. 'O' Level examination in the subject. At least I was under the impression it was a 'mock' exam. This took place in the autumn of 1961 shortly before I was to enter my fifth form. To my complete astonishment, I received notification of my success in passing the examination and was presented with the appropriate certificate. Somehow if I had realised that it was the real test I would've added an extra effort, but the results were encouraging and I didn't have to sit for art studies in the next round of G.C.E. 'O' Level examinations and could concentrate on the other subjects covered by the syllabus.

One of the extracurricular activities available was the school journey; often two weeks taken during the summer recess. The destinations varied from the Isle of Wight to European resorts such as Zell-am-See in Austria, Champéry in Switzerland, Lloret de Mar in Spain, and the Rhineland in Germany. There were also one-day excursions and one in 1961 that was affordable to my parents was a trip

to Boulogne-sur-Mer in Northern France. It was a popular journey involving many boys, teacher chaperones and even the Headmaster. Transportation was by train to Folkestone, Kent, then by cross-Channel ferry to Boulogne and return. At Boulogne, Phil Davies, Mike Stewart and myself kept together and eagerly explored the seaside town, amazed at the cultural differences and, at one point, practising our schoolboy French when buying ice cream cones. As we congregated for the England-bound ferry, many of the lads were accosted by quayside vendors, or ‘sharks’ as we called them, selling all kinds of cheap trinkets. I recall one boy buying a flick-knife, but later decided it was too ‘dodgy’ to take through the Customs so he threw it overboard mid-Channel. The trip for me, however, sowed the seed for further interest in international travel (it was my first venture abroad – I believe we had one-day passports) and the following years were to see an escalation in this ambition.

1961/1962 was to be my last academic year at Barnsbury as I felt the urge to enter the workforce and not continue to study for the G.C.E. ‘A’ Level (Advanced Level) examinations. I knew, too, that my outstanding weakness in mathematics was not going to improve, and this could still hold me back irrespective of acquiring other higher qualifications. With the cost of living continuously rising, it also behooved me to earn my keep and inject some money into the family coffers.

5AB was my fifth form and the class master was Mr. F.H. Puddefoot. As pupils, we were now entering a critical stage in our academic career. Most of us would attain the age of sixteen years and, after taking the requisite G.C.E. ‘O’ Level examinations in the following summer, a large proportion of graduates would leave school to look for work. Studying was to become more intense and competitive. Our teachers were expecting a high standard and coached us accordingly. Also, there was a certain amount of prestige attached as the school was continuously under the microscope of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and the Headmaster needed to capitalise on any outstanding achievements made by the boys. Usually, a few talented students aspiring to post-secondary education stayed on into the sixth and even upper-sixth forms.

Despite the fifth form being more gruelling it was also an exciting time, largely fired by increased competition between classmates. My primary rivals were Ronald “Walt” Disney and Leslie Chatfield. “Walt” sat next to me at the front of the class and we always shared a cheerful banter between ourselves. Actually we were very good friends; “Walt” living not far away in Salisbury House – then, as now, an exclusive block of flats facing Holloway Road not far from Highbury Corner. “Walt” had an extremely vivid imagination and outgoing personality, ideal for his roles in the school Drama Club’s popular plays. His main ambition was to be employed by the exclusive emporium, Fortnum & Mason, although I never knew whether he was successful in reaching this goal. Leslie Chatfield was one of the nicest fellows you could ever meet. He lived in Sutton Dwellings, Upper Street, just opposite the Islington Town Hall, and although not a bosom pal, we chummed around a bit and I often visited his flat if only to eat some of his mother’s bread pudding, which was probably the best I have ever tasted. Leslie was often ‘top of the form’ in certain subjects and was a serious contender.

One amusing episode where “Walt” and I were concerned was the time when we were assigned to deliver a message or something to somebody at the Barnsbury School for Girls in Offord Road. This was a break from studies and, as it was a pleasant day for a stroll, we elected to walk there. We entered the build-

ing and climbed the stairs to the room and finished the task. However, when it was time to leave, it coincided with the class change and that meant the school was alive with girls moving from one room to another. As we descended the stairs we were accosted from all side by a horde of girls, who regaled us with comments such as. “Allo, darlin’.” “Lookin’ fer a nice gel, then, sweet’ear?” “Gi’us a kiss, luv!” We managed to escape their clutches and both of us gave a sigh of relief as we left the school grounds. I said, “Christ, Ron, I thought they were going to de-bag us (remove our trousers).” It certainly was a close shave.

One prestigious promotion for me in the fifth form was to be appointed a school prefect. The rank was denoted by wearing the coveted prefect’s badge – a green shield with the word PREFECT embedded at an angle between two parallel lines – on the blazer lapel. The position of Head Prefect or Head Boy was the ‘crème de la crème’ in terms of prestige. Although ostensibly a position of trust and authority, not too many pupils took any notice of the prefect’s limited power. We were supposed to help the teachers in crowd control and report any unruly behaviour. Regardless of the ineffectual control, the distinction attached to the prefect rank put the student in good stead and usually produced a glowing testimonial from the Headmaster. I was fortunate in that my school leaving written reference from “The Bonk” contained the phrases: “... *He is a school prefect and has carried out his duties and responsibilities very well.*” “... *He is a hard-working pupil, honest and reliable in every way, and I can recommend him with confidence.*”

The ‘mock’ G.C.E. ‘O’ Level examinations were held in February, 1962, and were a precursor to the real thing that would be taken in the summer. Actually, the questions were from the previous year’s papers so their severity was real, together with that of the prevailing examination conditions. We were coached in the regulations and decorum of the examination routine; such as waiting for the exact time to start (by a signal to turn over the question paper), holding up a hand to request additional answering sheets or attracting a invigilator for any other reason – since absolute silence was rule No. 1. To accommodate the examinations, the gymnasium was furnished with rows of individual desks set far apart to dissuade cheating. Each pupil was assigned a desk and assembled in readiness for the tests. Timing was critical and accurate and, after the signal to begin, a pall of silence enveloped the room. There was the occasional squeak from the shoes of patrolling invigilators, otherwise it was heads down and thinking caps on. The golden rule was: read through the questions and tackle the simple ones first; leaving additional time for the more complicated problems. I think we all adhered to this philosophy.

Following the results of the ‘mock’ G.C.E.s, students were allocated places in three different school leaving examination categories according to their abilities. These different examining boards were the University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations (G.C.E.); Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (R.S.A.), and the Associated Examining Board (A.E.B.). My allocations were: English Language, Geography, Physics, Metalwork and Engineering Drawing (G.C.E.), English Language, and Mathematics (R.S.A.), and no subjects for the A.E.B.

It wasn’t long before preparations for the real examinations loomed on the horizon. “Swatting up” (“cramming”) now became routine. Before the examination period began, we were given last minute pep talks and encouragement from our masters. “We can only expect you to do your best.” After each test, groups of boys stood around outside the gymnasium building discussing the questions. Then, following the

last session, an overall sense of relief fell on the school. The die was cast and the final days in class were bittersweet.

Since most of the boys, including myself, anticipated entering the workforce, plans were made for each pupil to be interviewed by the ‘career officer’, a job councillor appointed by the ILEA. The interview with the councillor was held in the Headmaster’s study and tended to be a bit farcical – more like just ‘going through the motions’ – and proved to be ineffective. My efforts in finding employment rested solely on the tried and true method of letter writing to prospective employers and, since my main thrust was offering my services in the realm of commercial art, the number of potential companies was not very extensive. However, job hunting in all its forms was a necessary evil and, when it appeared I had exhausted most of my options, one particular outlet was my salvation as will be seen later.

Thus the days of formal education seem to be over. But minimal success in the school leaving examinations emphasised that things weren’t good enough: so the challenge to better myself academically continued.

