

Chapter 5

Away from home

Life away from home was going to be different; although the prospect of being thrown into the deep end didn't unnerve me. It was Sunday, November 5th, 1967, when I finally cut loose from the apron strings. The day was sunny and I was looking forward to the drive north along the M1 and M45 motorways to the city of Coventry. I had packed a couple of suitcases with clothes and said cheerio to Mum at the door. She was anxious, of course, but realised that this move was a step in the right direction. Dad carried one suitcase and followed me to my fire engine red Mini Minor parked in the street. We loaded the car and stood beside it, finally shaking hands and, with a wave to Mum, I drove away. Dad's parting words were, "Don't look back."

Adjusting to a new job and a new community

It had been prearranged that I would lodge at the "Holly Bank Guest House" located on Foleshill Road until I found more permanent accommodation. The small hotel wasn't hard to find, being on a main road on the north side of the city. It was also within walking distance of the Coventry Climax Engines service depot and offices in Kingfield Road. The following day I arrived at the reception area and met Mr. A.E. (Bert) Harman, who took me to the Technical Publications Department where I was introduced to my new co-workers.

I was the only 'Southerner' in the team; the others hailing from Coventry or the surrounding Midlands area. Bert Harman was the head of the department and lived in the town of Bedworth just north of Coventry. He shared a ride every day with his second-in-command, Ray Turncliffe, a resident of the village of Bulkington. The two spare parts compilers were Kevin Foxton, a local lad, and Roy Baker, who commuted from Rugby, south of Coventry. There were two 'Brummies' (folk originally from Birmingham), a technical illustrator, Nigel Pratt, and the department's typist, Kathy. Another technical illustrator, David (Dave) Payne, was also a Coventry kid.

A short orientation followed. I was first shown over the Kingfield Road service depot, which included a repair workshop, customer service headquarters, warehouse and extensive Parts Department. The building was part of the British Leyland Corporation that had taken over the assets of Jaguar-Daimler Cars, the previous owners of Coventry Climax Engines Ltd. There were other satellite buildings to become familiar with. The company's design and manufacturing activities were carried out at the Widdrington Road factory. Widd Road Works, as it was familiarly known, was located a few streets away and, further down the road was another administrative office building and assembly line at Sandy Lane. Most of my working activity would take place in the Technical Publications Department, but sorties to the drawing office and manufacturing areas were necessary from time to time.

As I eased myself into my new working environment, I learned the names of key personnel and their expertise with the company's products; the mainstay of which was a series of fork lift truck models. Over the years, Coventry Climax Engines Ltd. had diversified into various products and, apart from its early specialised racing car engines, the company had become well known as a manufacturer of quality high-capacity water pumps used on fire engines (trucks). However, a lucrative business had emerged with a niche industry – fork lift truck industrial handling. Manoeuvrable and robust machines were needed for modern day warehousing methods when moving inventory. A simple conveyancing device with provision to carry large and heavy loads emerged as the fork lift truck. Essentially the basic design was a self-propelled chassis with a telescopic mast and two steel extensions adapted for lifting and carrying loads. Many variations grew from the prototype and specialised versions were custom made to suit individual applications.

The Technical Publications Department was in demand to provide the company's many customers with accurate information for operating, servicing, maintaining and spare parts ordering. Bert Harman was a veteran with the company and co-ordinated the department's workload. As a supervisor he was fair-minded, but also could be difficult in a touchy situation. However, he possessed a good sense of humour that offset an unfortunate disability in that he had lost the use of his left hand. Another release was his chain-smoking habit. In the days when smoking was almost universal, the relatively small room where we worked soon became fumigated as chronic cigarette smokers, Bert, Kevin and Roy, later joined by pipe-loving George, lit up with abandon. To avoid working in a permanent fog, a VentAxia fan was installed in the window to assist smoke extraction.

Blending in with my colleagues and the community in general was a major adjustment. There were many regional differences and this included understanding the distinctive Coventry accent. Suddenly I had to develop an 'ear' for the local twang and listen hard to interpret the strange vowel sounds and other dialectal differences. Local slang and idiomatic phrases were other challenges, but they came in time. Likewise when conversing with Coventrians I had speak plainly and without 'flowery' language to dispel any notion of appearing as 'posh', which I was accused of one time. As the 'new boy' and a Southerner I was viewed with a certain amount of suspicion by some of the mechanics and assembly line ('the track') workers that I interviewed as part of my fact finding exercises. Only until my face became better known, did the suspicious qualms start to dissipate and, eventually, I was treated as an equal.

The workload was extensive and varied. Bert assigned the projects based on priority and I was first given some simple tasks to become familiar with the design of the machines. Service bulletins and installation instructions were relatively easy to produce and were stepping stones towards tackling more complicated writing jobs. In due course I was able to supplement my writing activity with a few simple illustrations (mainly tracings from engineering drawings).

On the occasions when Bert was absent from the office, the atmosphere became more relaxed and I was able to see a different side of my co-workers' character. Suddenly the working environment became more animated as conversation flowed freely; something that Bert would discourage. Ray Turncliffe was the most ebullient of the team and became easily excitable at times. He was also a 'worry wart' and had certain health issues, but could make good judgment calls and was a reliable colleague. In his spare time, Ray

headed a small musical combo and listed himself under the stage name, Ray Stanley. The band played on the working mens' club circuit in and around Coventry. His pride and joy was a Rover 3-Litre saloon (sedan) with an automatic transmission and power steering.

The department's clown, who was also the butt of the in-house jokes, was Roy Baker. Roy was a twenty-something bachelor and lived at home in the nearby town of Rugby. Always seen with a lit cigarette, his absent-mindedness tended to lead him astray, but he was a conscientious worker and an excellent chess player. During the lunch periods he and I would go head-to-head at friendly chess games.

Roy worked in concert with a young Coventry lad, Kevin Foxton, who was a bit of a roustabout and tended to bend the rules. His rather nervous disposition was calmed down by chain-smoking and I suspect his private life was a whirlwind of carousing with local girls and a copious amount of beer drinking.

The two technical illustrators were young men and had a great deal of talent; having been formally taught in technical college. Dave Payne was the senior chap and a prolific artist. He was also a bachelor, but harboured a relationship with a divorced woman, Doris Shufflebotham, who worked in the same office building. Doris was many years older than Dave, but they didn't hide their association and it was common knowledge throughout the company. Dave's colleague was Nigel Pratt. Hailing from Solihull, an affluent suburb of Birmingham, Nigel came from a privileged background – his father was a managing director – and was slightly cynical, but we put up with this idiosyncrasy as he produced some excellent illustrations. Nigel liked to show off in his Mini Cooper sports car and is the only person I know who could leave rubber marks on the road by spinning his front wheel drive.

Last, but not least, was Kathy the technical typist. Kathy was straight from the heart of Birmingham and readily identifiable by her singsong 'Brummie' accent. She had a keen sense of humour and even relished in telling a few 'blue' jokes. Her one fear, however, centred on a curious office legend. Over the years there had been a succession of typists, all of whom left on maternity leave. The common denominator was that they had all sat in the same typist's chair, which appeared to be cursed. Kathy's trepidation was falling into the same predicament. Some time later, we heard her plaintive remark to Bert; "Mr. Harman. I think the chair's worked." The legend's curse had struck once again.

The Kingfield Road building was a single storey industrial complex located across the road from the Courtauld's (British Celanese) factory with its two high and distinctive smokestacks. At one end, the service repair workshop was fully contained with bays, cranes and a small paint shop. Here, fork lift trucks of all models and vintages were overhauled. Mr. Sharman was the foreman, and I made an early point of talking to and acquainting myself with the men to stave off any suspicions. Of the mechanics there, Pete and Ray were easy to get along with, together with Jim Rankin, the electrician, and Cyril Marden, the painter, who was quite the character. There was a one-man Inspection Department; Arthur Johnson, a white-haired old stager who had apprenticed in the early days. His distinctive white laboratory coat set him off from the greasy overall-wearing mechanics, but he was a fount of technical information and, being an amateur philosopher, could engage in deep conversations. He was also an expert chess player and his level of play at the lunch time games established him as a formidable opponent.

The building's operation was managed by Mr. Ivor Cox, whose office was next door to the Technical Publications Department. Further down the corridor was an office for the two service representatives; both named Bob Woods, but who were distinguished by their stature, one being taller than the other. The end of the corridor opened up into the large Parts Department. Typical of its genre, the department was a mix of clerical and administrative personnel. One of the fixtures there was Alf Cooper, a veritable encyclopædia of spare parts information with a photographic memory for part numbers. He was very useful, but his bumbling personality tended to dominate and it was hard to get away from his fastidious *modus operandi*. Outside, at the south end of the building, was the main car park. Large and often obsolete parts were stored here and there; including two complete fibreglass body shells of the Daimler sports car known as the model SP250 "Dart". A total of 2,645 model SP250 cars were built in Coventry between 1959–1964, and thirty were used by the Metropolitan Police Force as 'pursuit' vehicles as they could travel up to 120 mph (193 km/h).

Lodging at the "Holly Bank Guest House" gave me the freedom to explore the city after dinner. A new inner ring road, which was being constructed in phases, surrounded the city centre. However, most of the commercial heart was a groundbreaking traffic-free precinct replacing one of the heavily bombed areas of the Second World War. The central point was a square called Broadgate and its bronze statue of the legendary Lady Godiva. This was overshadowed by the lofty spires of Trinity Church and St. Michael's Cathedral. The main shopping arteries of Trinity Street, High Street and Hertford Street radiated from Broadgate. The pedestrian-only zone of The Precinct. Lower Precinct, Smithford Way, Market Way, Shelton Square, Bull Yard and the City Arcade spread out in an expanse of pavement (sidewalk).

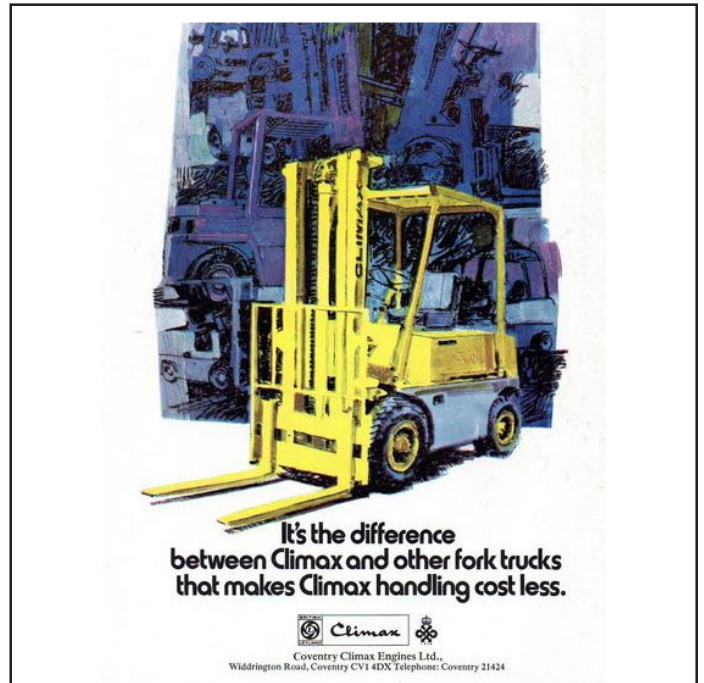
Although the guest house was convenient it was also costly to lodge there on a long-term basis. There were some concessions and the food was good. However, I decided to look for alternative accommodation. I had been given a list of private addresses and made the rounds to choose the best of the bunch. I decided that a room at Mrs. Armstrong's home in Dorset Road was the right fit as it was closer to the office and also cheaper. Mrs. Armstrong was an elderly Scottish widow who had lived in Coventry for many years. After six weeks at the guest house I moved into her Dorset Road semi-detached.

Every so often I returned home to Islington for the weekend to see my parents and old friends. Shortly after I left home, my parents decided it was time to upgrade their lifestyle and move to the suburbs. They did an exhaustive search for a small, low-maintenance house and eventually settled on a two bedroom terrace property in the dormitory town of Hatfield, north of London. They must have had professionals move the big and heavy items, but Dad had access to a vehicle that I helped to load up with boxes and smaller pieces. The drive from Coventry to Hatfield was easy with Motorway connections on the M45, M1 and M10. Since I didn't drink and drive, heading into central London for a few pints with Phil and Mike meant taking the suburban train from Hatfield to Kings Cross – a reliable service.

Back in Coventry, familiarisation of what the city could offer was taking place. Because of the revolutionary new pedestrian precinct, new soon-to-be-completed inner ring road, and an advancing post war regeneration of industry and its attendant offshoots, I perceived the city as being extremely progressive and the right place to be so early in my intended career. Even my recreational opportunities looked bright; especially after I discovered a ballroom dance studio where I would eventually make many friends.



Coventry Climax Engines Ltd., Fork Lift Truck Service and Parts Division, Kingfield Road, Coventry. 1967.



Typical Trade Press Advertisement of the 1970s Showing a Generic Fork Lift Truck Model and Marketing Claim. The Company's Branding Includes the British Leyland, Original 'Climax' and Queen's Award to Industry Logos.



Coventry Climax Engines Ltd., Service and Parts Department Christmas Party, 1968. Held at the Jaguar-Daimler Social Club. Among the Partygoers are Barry Page, Doris Shufflebotham and David Payne.

This was the Mercia School of Dancing, operated by the one-time professional dancer, Henrietta (Hetty) Armstrong. The studio was located on the top floor of an old four storey red brick building near the city centre. The dance floor, however, was a specially sprung wooden structure, ideal for its purpose. I had only attained my IDTA bronze medal status, so Hetty was more than anxious for me to progress through the medal standings. Together with the private lessons, there was ample opportunity to practice the new routines with other like minded young adults at the social evenings held in the studio. Hetty did her best to pair male and female partners according to skill, appearance and personality. Most times it worked, but there were also some incompatibilities. Not all the tuition was done by Hetty as some of the routines were taught by her helper, Peter Kiar. Peter, a salesman in a menswear shop, was extremely effeminate, but I had been used to this with Ron and Reg in Islington as they were of the same sexual orientation. The social evenings brought me into contact with a group of nice young ladies and friendships soon blossomed.

At work, a routine pattern emerged and I was gradually becoming accustomed to technical writing techniques and fact finding exercises. Researching information for the job was perhaps the most interesting part. It gave me an opportunity to leave my desk and visit various areas of the company, including the design/drawing office and 'the track'. The design/drawing office at Widd Road Works was in a small, but well lit room on the top floor. Draughtsmen were busy at their boards, and nearby was a blueprint printing machine characterised by its distinctive ammonia smell. Two of the personnel there were my principal contacts: John Dewsbury, a designer, and Arthur Strawbridge the veteran operator of the blueprint printing machine. Arthur knew every drawing by heart and was most accommodating when producing prints on demand. Product knowledge shared by the long-term employees was indispensable as there were many variations to the fork lift trucks. For example, there were models powered by petrol (gasoline), diesel, or natural gas engines, and also a full range of electric machines. Wheelbases and wheel configurations with either pneumatic or cushion (solid) tyres varied. Some had standard lift masts and others had triple-lift masts; and there was a complete array of optional extras and custom-designed models.

Theoretical design was put through a research and development (RND) stage before being released into production. It was on 'the track' that the end product materialised from a collection of parts to emerge as the finished machine. My presence on the factory floor was, at first, considered somewhat suspicious. But with familiarity I was able to blend into the workshop environment and derive answers to my questions. For the most part it depended on the attitude of the line foreman, "Bed'th Bill". "Bed'th" was a corruption of Bedworth, the name of a nearby town. Bill could be good, bad or downright ugly, and we did lock horns a few times. Naturally I asked Bill's permission before enquiring with the men about one thing or another. Sometimes Bill could answer the questions himself, but often I needed to make notes and arrange for a professional photographer to take pictures of a sequence of operations. This intrigued the men and they tended to shirk a little or engage in prolonged and general conversation, much to Bill's consternation and he didn't mince words when he wanted me to leave the line. One particular fellow was good at 'swinging the lead' and often drew me into lengthy gossip sessions. Others such as veteran assemblyman, Les Harris, were extremely helpful and were only too pleased to provide any information.

The information was carefully analysed and incorporated into a specific technical publication. A family of technical manuals for each standard fork lift truck model and the many variants needed to be constantly

updated, and one-off publications for special applications were common. I quickly learned techniques in using the technical illustrator's equipment such as the Rotring pen and Timely templates. This reduced my reliance on the illustrators and improved productivity.

As in most offices, certain personalities came to the fore to enliven the daily grind. One such character was Margaret – the food lady – a larger-than-life woman who trundled her refreshment cart down the corridor and visited every office room. Regular as clockwork when it was time for the morning and afternoon tea break, Margaret would open the door and, with a booming *basso voce* growl, announce, "Food!" This would get everyone's attention and there would be a scramble to buy cups of tea, sandwiches and filled bread rolls – known locally as 'batches' – from this formidable vendor. Although sullen in appearance, Margaret had a keen sense of humour that she let slip once in a while.

Clandestine relationships, too, were part and parcel of the office scene. The telephonist/receptionist was often seen in the company of one of the salesmen, and Harvey, another marketing type, was covertly courting one of the secretaries. More overtly, though, were Dave Payne and Doris Shufflebotham, whose romantic association was widely known and, whenever they had a disagreement, the gossip of 'a lover's tiff' run rampant through the office. On one occasion, Doris overspent time on a personal visit to Dave in the office. Ivor Cox, the manager, noticed this and called Dave into his office to give him a dressing down. We all thought this was 'it' for Dave as there had been previous reprimands for the same reason. Apparently Dave spoke his mind and consequently escaped with only a stern warning.

Things became even more interesting after Kathy left on maternity leave. Following the usual interviews, a replacement technical typist was hired. When Yvonne first arrived she turned all the male heads. She was a young, petite, dark haired girl with traces of Oriental features. Seeing that she appeared to be unattached, we all wondered who would make the first pitch to take her out. It was Kevin who started to see her on the side. However, as time went by, it became clear that Yvonne's typing ability was not up to scratch and, after a number of warnings, she was eventually let go. It then transpired that she was a single mother of four children fathered during different relationships!

Although boarding at Mrs. Armstrong's was convenient and comfortable, I was still of the opinion that I needed my own apartment. The local Coventry Evening Telegraph newspaper listed all kinds of property for sale or rent. There were some single rooms available and I made enquiries at one place. I was shown around by the landlord and eventually settled on a small fully-furnished room in a terrace house near Spencer Park on the south side of the city. Although further away from the office, it was still within walking distance through the back streets should the need arise. After a six week tenure at Mrs. Armstrong's I moved my meagre effects into Flat No. 5, 40 Spencer Avenue at £1/10/0d a week, including laundered sheets and a cleaning service for the communal bathroom. At the same time as this flat-hunting exercise I went to the town hall (known as The Council House) and had my name added to the municipal housing list. This move was to prove beneficial later.

Now I felt really independent and started to adapt to a true bachelor's existence, bearing in mind that I was now self-catering and responsible for chores such as grocery shopping, personal laundering and house

cleaning. Soon after I moved in, my parents visited with a number of practical household items to help get me started. The room was located on the upper storey and contained furniture such as a single bed; side table; wardrobe; armchair; two casual chairs; a tea trolley (acting as a table) and a built-in sink unit with storage cupboard. Cooking food was done on a miniature electric stove called a “Wee Baby Belling”. This was a versatile unit with a large, single hotplate and small oven. A fridge was not supplied and the only other appliance was a two-bar electric reflector heater. All electricity consumption was controlled through a pay-for-use meter located near the door.

With the new roof over my head, I had to explore a different neighbourhood and find the nearest supermarket and launderette. Fortunately there was a general store at the corner of Albany Road and Broadway, the street adjacent to Spencer Avenue, and a launderette in the shopping arcade further along the main road. The district was well provided with speciality stores, pubs and an off-licence/wine bar.

With self-catering in mind, I had to become conversant with the characteristics of the “Wee Baby Belling” electric stove. After some experimenting, I was able to prepare a small meal using basic ingredients and any heat-up-and-ready-to-serve product. TV dinners were unknown and the microwave oven had yet to be invented, plus I had no means of refrigeration so scratch meals were made on the fly to prevent waste. Fresh fruit augmented desserts and a pint of milk a day ensured some nutrition in that regard. During the week, my main meal of the day was eaten at the firm’s cafeteria, Every lunch time, Bert Harman and I would walk down Kingfield Road to the cafeteria building just beyond Cash’s Lane. I seem to remember that management had its own separate dining room away from the workers’ canteen.

Transportation woes

When I lived in London there was no need to own a car/motor cycle/scooter/moped as the public transportation system suited my purpose. Despite my father’s exhortations I made no attempt to take my driving test at an early age. It was only in 1967, when I was twenty-one, that I bothered to sign up for driving lessons with the British School of Motoring (BSM). After a short course I took the test and promptly failed – not an auspicious start. I continued with BSM’s refresher course, took the test and failed once again. The next time I went to another school and eventually passed the test on the third attempt.

It was on my twenty-first birthday that my 1958 road accident compensation of £332/1/6d was released from an investment trust account. In a strange twist of fate, the money was used to buy a car; the contrivance that caused the accident. Dad’s connections in the motor trade brought him in contact with car dealers and he was able to find a good second hand car that would be a suitable beginner’s vehicle. It was an exciting time to receive and own the 1964 model Morris Mini-Minor. The car was ideal for my needs and I gave it lots of tender loving care. Washing it was never a chore – carrying two buckets (shampoo suds in one and plain water for rinsing in the other) down five floors was the standard procedure – and a mandatory polish with “Turtle Wax” once in a while kept the fire engine red colour in pristine condition. Dad was able to find many extras and installed a fog lamp and a reversing lamp. Some optional luxury items, such as switch extensions, mud flaps and a leather-wrapped steering wheel mysteriously appeared. I had specified seat belts from the start – a nonstandard item for cars at the time – and appreciated this measure of safety.



*Interior of Flat 5, 40 Spencer Avenue, Earlsdon, Coventry. 1968.
The apartment window looked out onto the back garden and beyond that, the King Henry VIII Grammar School playing fields.*

The junction connecting the main railway lines serving Birmingham and Leicester was located in a cutting on the other side of the playing fields. The Coventry city skyline could also be seen at this point. An easy access to the city centre was by way of a pedestrian footbridge over the railway lines from Spencer Avenue to Grosvenor Road. This avoided a long route to either Warwick Road or Albany Road at either end of Spencer Avenue.



My First Car: a Used 1964 Model Morris Mini-Minor Photographed in Highbury Crescent with Highbury Fields in the Background, Islington, London. 1966.

Down to Two Wheels after the Disaster with the Three-wheeled Trojan Bubble Car. The Practical Moulton Special, 3-Speed Sturmey-Archer Bicycle. Spencer Avenue, Earlsdon, Coventry, 1968.



A Veritable Workhorse: the 1964 Model Pininfarina Styled Austin A40 Mk. II Photographed in the Back Yard of 109 Birchwood Avenue, Hatfield, Herts., 1969.

A Dream Sports Car: the 1966 Triumph Herald Convertible that Soldiered on despite many Problems and Photographed in the East Midlands, 1970s.

Despite a few mechanical problems the Mini served me well; it was economical and manoeuvrable. It had its share of misadventures: broken into once; a minor rear-end collision when I stalled and the lady driver behind failed to stop resulting in a dented bumper bar, and the occasion of my break up with Pat Duggan that precipitated the front-end collision. However, one incident caused me great despair and impelled me to sell the car.

One evening while still boarding with Mrs. Armstrong, I decided to go to the Jaguar-Daimler Social Club where there was fellowship and entertainment. A few days previously, I had had some starting difficulties with the Mini and was on the brink of the battery going flat. Fortunately, Dad was attending a training course at the Land Rover factory in the nearby town of Solihull, so he travelled over and sorted out the problem. In a bid to conserve electricity I drove around at night using sidelights only and not dipped headlights. When entering the Jaguar-Daimler Social Club car park in the dark, the sidelight illumination was insufficient for me to see a steel fence post that was bent at an angle (evidently hit at one time). The right-hand body sill (rocker panel) came into contact with the steel post and caved in along its entire length. The collision unnerved me and I was distraught about the extensive damage. It was somewhat the 'last straw' and following an emotional phone call to home, Dad elected to buy the car off me. "I can only give you £200 for it", he said and the deal was sealed. Dad kept the Mini for quite some time even though he had his fair share of mechanical problems. As time went by I realised that I should have persevered with the car, and future events pertaining to second hand car ownership confirmed that selling the Mini was probably the biggest mistake I have ever made.

I relinquished the Mini and resorted to 'shank's pony', which was not really a main concern. Even after moving to Spencer Avenue in 1968 the office was still within walking distance and, finding the quickest way through the back streets, I carried on regardless rain or shine. My periodical visits home, however, were restricted as I was obliged to use public transport – in this case, main line train from Coventry to Euston Station and then the Underground to Highbury & Islington (my parents hadn't yet moved to Hatfield). I also started to feel handicapped where exploration outside Coventry was concerned.

I was nervous inspecting second hand cars on the dealers' lots, and I didn't want to bother my father to look for me, so it was something of an opportunity when I found out that a woman in the Parts Department was selling her car privately. To make things more interesting, the vehicle involved, which I had seen on several occasions, was a three-wheel Trojan Model 200. The Trojan was a re-branded Heinkel Kabine Type 153 and was one of the 'bubble car' genre along with such names as Messerschmidt and Isetta. The vehicle was in rough shape, but it was cheap transportation and we settled on a price of £40. The vehicle needed a Ministry of Transportation (M.O.T.) safety check and the only Coventry outlet for service and spare parts for Trojan products was a dubious garage in the industrial back streets. It appeared that a new rear brake drum was necessary before an M.O.T. safety certificate could be issued. Several weeks later, at a cost of £60 (parts, labour and the M.O.T. test), the car was fixed and street legal.

Tender loving care made the car presentable and comfortable, and a parking spot in Mayfield Road just opposite the apartment house was convenient. The left-hand drive vehicle had its own peculiarities: a 198cc single cylinder, air cooled, 4-stroke engine and a transmission with three forward gears and reverse. The

gear shifter was a stubby lever on the left hand side that engaged with notches in a quadrant and operated a cable. The ignition key looked like a piece out of a Meccano set and, after inserting into the lock was pushed down to activate the electric start. Lack of sound suppression material and a gap at the bottom of the front opening door made any journey a noisy affair. However, there was the benefit of a fabric sun roof that could be opened on warm days.

It wasn't long before certain shortcomings, in particular starting problems, started to plague the vehicle. My limited mechanical knowledge and the meagre product support from the Trojan representative didn't help the cause either. It was best to cut my losses and, once again, Dad came to the rescue as he ferreted out somebody who would take the Trojan off my hands for £10. My last journey was to London and, driving down the A5 (I took the regular roads and not the Motorways), I ran out of fuel in the main tank. I switched over onto the reserve tank and limped along to the next town, Redbourn. At the top of the hill leading into the town, the reserve fuel tank dried up, the engine quit and I coasted down into the forecourt of a filling station. Quite opportune as it turned out! After I arrived home, Dad took the car out for a test drive and came back with the opinion that it was a "Death trap". And that was the end of my adventure with the bubble car.

It wasn't long before I hankered for a mode of transportation. There was a bicycle shop in nearby Albany Road and, included in the inventory was the revolutionary Moulton Special. This was a complete departure from conventional bicycle design. The lightweight frame was reconfigured to suit the sixteen inch diameter wheels, and the bicycle was equipped with front and rear suspension; a Sturmey-Archer three speed rear hub gearbox, and a front Dynohub with lights. Apart from its compactness, another practical feature was the oversize pannier installed behind the saddle post. So, from a four wheel Mini-Minor and a three wheel Trojan bubble car, I further downsized to a two wheel bicycle.

The Moulton Special was to serve me quite faithfully for some time. I found the oversize pannier good for carrying groceries and laundry, and the lightweight construction ideal when carrying the bicycle up the stairs to my room. It took a while to master the Sturmey-Archer gearchange, but it was manageable even on long runs out of the city – my first one about twenty miles (32 km) one-way to the town of Lutterworth. On that trip I also encountered one of the curses of cycling: heavy rain. After that experience of being drenched, I made my own waterproof cape. However, it was inadequate to protect the lower extremities and, following one particular miserable journey being doused by driving rain and water splashed by passing vehicles, I bought some waterproof leggings.

It was sometime in 1969 that Dad located a good used car and recommended that I should buy it. The 1964 Austin A40 Mk.II Pininfarina styled model showed promise as an all-round reliable car. I elected to purchase it and, at the same time, I had to find a buyer for the bicycle. My co-worker, Ray Turncliffe, bought it so I knew it went to a good home. Now there were two Austin A40 owners in the department as Roy Baker had a similar model, although his was a Mk.I with a clamshell boot (trunk) door opening. My car had the traditional single boot door.

I couldn't fault the A40 as a reliable and economical vehicle. The back seat cushion hinged forward to allow for increased cargo space or an extension to the boot. This feature came in handy when I bought a bed

mattress and was able to stow it through the boot door opening and onto the lowered back seat cushion. Some of the bodywork needed fresh paint and one of the trends at the time was to add 'matte black' highlights. Cyril Marden was the painter in the Kingfield Road service repair shop. Cyril and I got along very well and had many philosophical talks as well as doing each other a favour or two. For his part, Cyril would slip me a small tin of tyre black paint, which I would smuggle out to use on the Austin. One of Cyril's hobbies was recreational boating and he designed a special boat hull – which he christened "The Marden Hull" – so I helped him develop it by providing improved drawings taken from his improvised pencil sketches. The design was an enhanced catamaran, but had some promise. I don't think he ever patented it though. The tyre black paint was just right for the matte black highlights and made the A40 look sporty.

In time, of course, age started to take its toll. Bias-ply tyres had a limited life and the inevitable rust bug ate away at bodywork and exhaust systems. Batteries and electrics, such as ignition cables, points and plugs were high maintenance items, and the brakes needed constant adjustment. Fortunately there were plenty of automotive supply stores and service outlets. Two close together on Foleshill Road and Eagle Street were Abbey Tyres and Halford's. To keep costs to a minimum I bought retread tyres from Abbey, which also replaced silencers (mufflers), and Halford's had a complete range of body fillers and aerosol spray paints.

However, there came a point when home-mechanics became inadequate. One day, I decided to inspect underneath the Austin. The car's jack was designed to lift the complete side of the car so that front and rear wheels on that side could be changed. There was a reinforced hole in both door sills that accepted the jack's lifting bracket. The sills were 'box section' welded assemblies and notorious for trapping any moisture. Eventually, corrosion weakened the jacking point and, when I started lifting the car, the entire door sill collapsed in a shower of rust. Since the sills were an integral part of the unitary body construction they were subjected to M.O.T. test scrutiny and any defective parts had to be replaced. So, I went to a body shop to have both sills replaced and, to reduce costs, I didn't have them repainted. This is where I applied Cyril's tyre black paint – courtesy of Coventry Climax – to add additional sporty matte black highlights to the car.

In 1971, Dad located a true sports car for me. It was a Triumph Herald 1200 convertible that had seen better days but was still an eye catching car. The A40 was now ageing and a replacement was on the cards, so I decided to buy the Triumph. One of my new colleagues, Ted Jones, bought the Austin for £50 as a gift for his daughter. Driving with the convertible top down was a brand new experience and one I relished as long as I owned the vehicle. The Triumph, though, did have a succession of problems. The first one was a malfunctioning battery that had to be replaced. Then a more serious complaint arose as the brakes were deemed unsafe, resulting in some acrimonious correspondence between myself and the garage that sold the vehicle. This was resolved by the garage paying 50% of the repair as a gesture of goodwill.

The Triumph's chassis and drivetrain design also had its Achilles heel. The body was mounted on a separate welded frame assembly, and the side members, or outriggers, were prone to excessive corrosion. This meant that they had to be replaced periodically – no cheap repair – to pass the M.O.T. safety check. The two rear half shafts from the differential were supported on universal joints that were not built to withstand heavy duty wear. The universal joint bearings constantly failed resulting in a noisy rear end and loss of efficiency. The universal joints had to be replaced from time to time resulting in more repair bills.



The 1964 Model Pininfarina Styled Austin A40 Mk.II Photographed in the Peak District National Park. The Peak in the Background, Derbyshire, 1970.



Barry with the 1966 Triumph Herald Convertible Photographed on top of Wrynose Pass, Lake District National Park, Cumbrian Mountains, Cumbria, 1971.



Nial and Barry with the 1966 Triumph Herald 1200 Convertible Photographed in the Car Park near Fairfax Street, Coventry, Warwickshire, 1971.



The 1966 Triumph Herald Convertible with the Top Down Attracted Girlfriend Monica Papworth as Photographed here at Rhydspence, Hereford, 1973.

The biggest expense by far, however, was a partial engine replacement. This was the conclusion to a series of incidents that began after my good friend, David Cross, visited me at my new apartment in Henley Green. The car he was driving at the time was a rear engine Hillman Imp and he had parked it next to the Triumph. I wanted to look at the Imp and, upon inspecting the engine, we noticed a pool of coolant on the ground under the radiator. A stub pipe had cracked and there was the risk of losing all the coolant. I said to Dave that I would tow him back home so he could investigate further. We connected a tow rope between the two cars and proceeded to drive to Dave's home in Stoke on the other side of the city. Everything went well until we reached the service road behind the row of houses where Dave lived. Suddenly, I was unable to see anything ahead as a cloud of steam burst up through the joint between the bonnet (hood) and windscreen (windshield). I immediately stopped and shut down the engine. The Triumph's bonnet/front wing (fender) panel is hinged at the front and, after opening it, I was greeted with more steam belching out of a broken cylinder head expansion plug (frost plug). Now there were two immobile cars stuck in the service road.

We assessed the situation and came to the conclusion that we should at least try and fix my car by replacing the failed plug. The first thing was to store the Imp somewhere then shop around for a replacement plug. Dave, who was living at his parents' house, moved his father's Ford Anglia out of the garage to make room for the Imp. We then manually pushed both immobile cars along the service road and garaged the Imp. The plug that had failed was in the most inaccessible position on the engine. Also we were unsure of the plug's diameter, so we toured around in the Anglia to various service shops and bought a selection of plugs, together with a tube of "Araldite" all purpose adhesive. Back at the service road we checked the damage and started the repair. It was a question of removing what remained of the failed plug, then installing a new plug of the correct diameter. Prying out the remnants was a chore, but after cleaning around the hole in the cylinder head we installed the best fitting new plug. Since we couldn't secure the plug in the appropriate way (striking the centre to 'bell out' the plug in the hole), we smeared a copious amount of 'Araldite' around the plug's outer diameter and waited until the adhesive cured. As it turned out, the repair worked well. I refilled the cooling system believing that the ratio of antifreeze to water was correct.

Fast-forward to winter time. I was visiting my parents in Hatfield on one particularly frosty weekend. On the Sunday evening I left in subzero temperatures to drive back to Coventry. This didn't bode well as I knew that with a malfunctioning heater there was a high risk of the windscreen freezing over. I hadn't been travelling on the M1 Motorway for very long when I smelled hot oil and heard loud mechanical noises that stopped when the engine seized completely. I coasted to the hard shoulder and ground to a halt. The only way to resolve this situation was to have the car towed to the nearest service shop. As a member of the Royal Automobile Club (RAC) I could get a tow from an RAC appointed agency. There are emergency telephones installed at regular intervals along the Motorway and I walked to the first one in sight. After securing a tow I had a taxi ride back to Hatfield and roused my parents out of bed to tell them the tale of woe. I eventually returned to Coventry by train, but was docked a day's pay for absenteeism.

Being in the motor trade, Dad knew the garage where the Triumph was stored and was able to negotiate a deal by salvaging parts of the original engine and installing a half-block. Most of the expense was in labour as the engine had to be completely removed, stripped, repaired and replaced. The bill came to over £160, but I was back on the road in a relatively short time. Evidently, when I replaced the coolant, the ratio

of antifreeze to water was not correct and the radiator froze up. The engine was starved of coolant and relied on lubricating oil which eventually boiled away and that led to the catastrophic seizure.

In 1973, when I was about to emigrate to Canada, I had to find a buyer for the Triumph. I advertised it for £60 and a fellow and his girlfriend came to look at it. He was somewhat hesitant even after a test drive, as there were some issues with the car (the speedometer cable had failed and the heater still wasn't working, for example). But as I was including some small items as incentives, and the girlfriend said it was a fair asking price, we shook hands on the deal. It was sad to see the Triumph go, but my master plan was now in effect and the spectre of used car headaches was to follow me to Canada as described in a future chapter.

Further education

Before I moved to Coventry I had passed the examination in German (summer, 1967) to give me my fifth G.C.E. 'O' level certificate. Although I wouldn't continue studying mathematics, I was still ambitious enough to strive for the elusive qualification in physics. An evening school course in the subject was available at the Henley College for Further Education and I enrolled for a year's tuition.

The college was a new, modern campus with a high standard of teaching. As it turned out, perseverance paid off and, after taking the examination in the summer of 1968, I managed to squeak through with a passing grade; thus securing my sixth G.C.E. 'O' level certificate. I made a point of visiting my old teacher at the City College for Further Education in London, who had encouraged me to continue studying, and we shared a celebratory pint of beer.

Although I was getting older, and studying was becoming more of an effort, I considered it necessary to qualify in a technical communication subject as an additional string to my bow when aiming for loftier goals in my new chosen career. The recognised standards were Higher National Certificate (H.N.C.) or City and Guilds of London Institute (City & Guilds) diplomas. The H.N.C. required G.C.E. 'A' level passes in mathematics and a science subject, which negated my eligibility. However, the City & Guilds examination was not contingent on advanced academic achievements. There was a problem in that the City & Guilds course in technical writing was not taught as a subject in any of the Coventry colleges. In July, 1968, I was able to overcome this by enrolling for a course in distance learning with the International Correspondence Schools. This form of tuition was a new departure for me, but I gradually acclimatised myself and adapted my evenings and weekends to the nuances of self-study.

After studying for nearly a year and submitting assignments at regular intervals it was time to sit for the examination. The City of Coventry College of Art and Design was the only local examination centre that recognised the papers and I was the only candidate for that subject. The other students in the examination room were all taking tests related to the printing industry. With the correspondence course training and the practical experience at work fresh in my mind, I didn't find the examination too daunting. Nevertheless, it was with a great relief and sense of satisfaction when I received the results indicating that I had passed the examination augmented with a credit standing. I then decided that at 23 years of age, my days of formal studying were over.

Life continues to improve

The day-to-day routine was now well established. I hadn't as yet acquired a circle of friends, but my visits to the Mercia School of Dancing provided a measure of companionship. Together with scheduled dancing tuition, there were the evening open sessions where practice with a number of different partners as put to the test. It was also an opportunity for Hetty to evaluate individuals and match them to one another with the purpose of encouraging them to enter amateur dancing competitions.

As I was a tall person, Hetty was challenged in finding me a suitable partner; most of the girls there being of average height. One young lady, however, was singled out as a good prospect and her name was Mollie Bartlett. Mollie hailed from Birmingham and was married with children, but enjoyed a certain amount of freedom away from home when her husband was working various shifts at the Chrysler car factory at Ryton-on-Dunsmore. We made a stylish pair that Mollie found thrilling, and we certainly made heads turn on occasion. Mollie's husband, John, however, was somewhat suspicious and enrolled at the studio ostensibly to chaperone his wife but, in reality, more to keep his eyes on me. I tried to suppress any jealousy, but the partnership was doomed when John insisted that Mollie refrain from attending the studio.

Regardless of this hiccup I partnered several other girls including: Jean Long, Vernice Harris and Gayle Lydster. Another talented, but petite young lady was Susan Woodhead. We sometimes intentionally met on Saturday mornings for a coffee and conversation at the Wimpy Bar restaurant on Trinity Street. Susan was a good friend of Virginia Gilbert, who was a reference librarian at the Coventry and Warwickshire Collection. This was a repository of historical information based in the public library adjacent to the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Jordan Well (a road that extended from the High Street). I often visited Virginia at the collection and we had many meaningful discussions. There was a significant amount of information stored there that piqued my interest. The library, too, had a well-stocked lending and reference inventory, and it was a refuge at times when I needed to browse on a rainy day.

On sunny days there were opportunities to escape from the city and explore the surrounding countryside. Even during the time when I was without a car, I made long distance journeys by train as Coventry station was near to where I lived. One such trip was to Birmingham where the city centre was being transformed and new, modern buildings such as the Rotunda and the Bull Ring Shopping Centre had risen out of the bombed sites and rundown neighbourhoods. From Birmingham, another train connection took me to Bristol. One of England's foremost engineers, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, left his marks with the spectacular Clifton Suspension Bridge spanning the River Avon gorge, and two passenger ships – the Great Western and the Great Britain. Not far away was the Somerset village of Weston in Gordano where my Great-grandfather, John Carl (Charles) Johnson married Elizabeth Ann (née Williams) in 1882 and lived on the main street (see Appendix 1, *Family lineages*). Later I travelled to the village, but was unable to find any evidence of my Great-grandparents' presence; although the churchyard had some Williams family graves. A short suburban train ride from Bristol ended at the city of Bath and I explored the ruins of the *Aquae Sulis* Roman baths with its natural, thermal and curative water. 'Taking the waters' was still practiced and a public drinking fountain that dispensed the sulphurous liquid was a focal point for visitors. Throughout the city were examples of Georgian architectural masterpieces such as the Royal Crescent, The Circus and Queen Square.

In 1968, following in the footsteps of my Continental holidays, I was inspired to explore somewhere more exotic, and a North African destination was considered as a front runner. My nearest travel agent was Wards, a well established Coventry firm, and I browsed through a number of their glossy brochures to evaluate the various resorts. An affordable and what appeared to be an adventure-filled packaged holiday was to Hammamet, Tunisia, so I booked a two-week trip through the agency.

The chartered flight took us over France and south of the island of Sardinia before landing at Tunis City airport. The highway coaches were there to meet and take us to the hotel in Hammamet, which was a typical Mediterranean resort of low-rise hotels and guest chalets. The wide expanse of sandy beach and tall date palm trees echoed the photos printed in the glossy brochures, so there was little or no disappointment there. The promise of interesting sightseeing trips added to the mystique of the holiday and I booked myself on several excursions; including a visit to the ancient ruins of Carthage – the rival city to the Roman Empire in the 2nd and 3rd centuries B.C.

As I had witnessed on other Mediterranean beaches, the British tourist, devoid of endless sunshine back home, soon discovered the consequences of prolonged ultraviolet ray exposure and suffered terribly with sunburn and sunstroke. The fierceness of the North African sun was acute and I made sure during short, periodic sunbathing sessions that plenty of lotion was applied as well as head and neck protection.

In reality, a period of two weeks was far too long at the resort. A certain amount of boredom set in despite some interesting side trips. There was the obligatory camel ride through local wadis to a small village where vendors surrounded the visitors and plied them with all manner of items, and a ‘staged’ traditional caravan with musicians entertained the crowd. An opportunity to dress up in typical Bedouin clothes was a novelty. *En route*, my camel driver tried to part me with my camera on some pretext, but I saw through his ruse and hung on to my trusty Kodak Instamatic.

The excursion to the ancient ruins of Carthage was a worthwhile trip. The conquering Romans completely sacked the rival city to make sure that the Carthaginians would never again threaten their empire. So there were many opportunities to view the remains of toppled temples and other buildings.

There was transportation between the hotel and Tunis City and, together with several of the English guests who had formed a loose friendship, I went along for the ride. The city centre was clean and modern, but not far away visitors found the old neighbourhoods and the traditional street market, or *souk*, which was a ramshackled collection of vendors’ stalls in the *Casbah’s* labyrinth of alleyways, but interesting all the same. The entrance to the Tunisian Parliament Buildings was protected by sword wielding guards – a colourful sight. Of course, the call to prayer was ever present and the Imam’s voice was broadcasted from loudspeakers mounted on the tall, elaborate minarets that sprouted from the many mosques.

Several nearby towns provided further exposure to the Arabic culture, and places such as Kairouan displayed a never ending parade of ornate architecture. Even mundane items; for example, street name plaques made from ceramic tiles, were works of art. In contrast to modern Tunis City, it was commonplace to see the primitive method of drawing water from a well using a *shadoof* powered by beasts of burden.



Barry on a Dromedary Camel Ride through the Tunisian Wadis. Photographed along the Gulf of Hammamet Beaches, Tunisia, 1968.



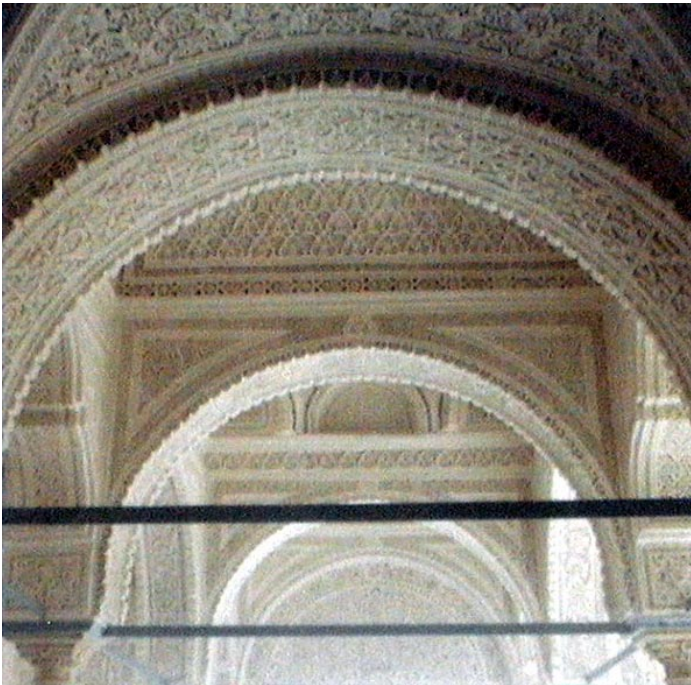
Archeological Ruins of Carthage, the Rival City to the Roman Empire. Destroyed by the Romans then Colonized and Sacked again by the Vandals and Arabs, Tunisia, 1968.



The Casbah Section of Tunis City Showing the 'Souk' or Street Market. A Labyrinth of Small Shops and Stallholders, Tunisia, 1968.



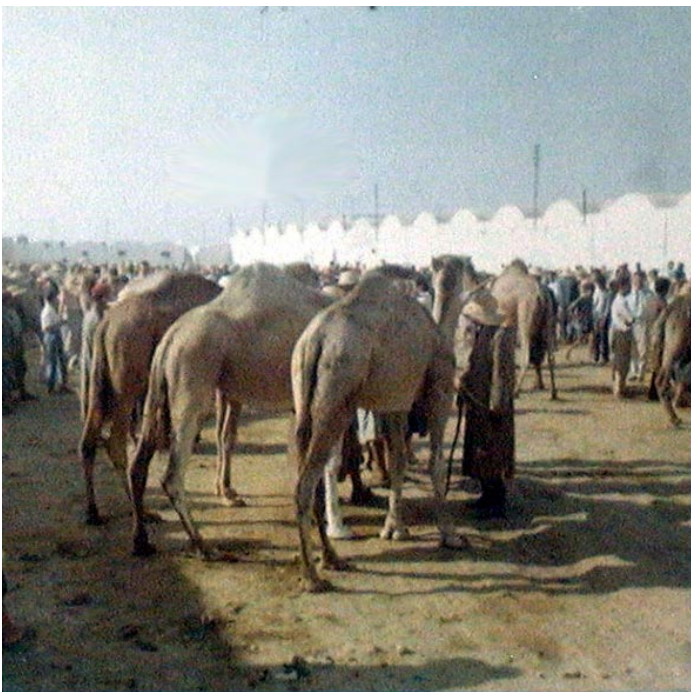
Ornate Gateway to the Tunisian Parliament Building Showing Guards Armed with Drawn Scimitar Swords, Tunis City, Tunisia, 1968.



Carved Stone Arches in Typical Moorish Style. Photographed in the Great Mosque at Kairouan, Tunisia, 1968.



Raising Water from a Well or Oasis Using the Traditional 'Shadoof'; a Leather Bucket Tied by a Long Rope to a Beast of Burden that Walked up and down the Earthen Slope, Tunisia, 1968.



The Camel Market at Nabeul where Traders Come from Long Distances. Photographed in the Main Area of Activity, Tunisia, 1968.



Away from the Centre of Nabeul, a Typical Back Alley in the Residential Section Showing People at the Communal Water Fountain, Tunisia, 1968.

For an experience of rural Arabic culture, I travelled to the town of Nabeul to visit the famed camel market. Trading was done in a large open area where camels of many descriptions were herded into groups for inspection and subsequent haggling between vendors and customers.

More interesting, however, was the maze of back streets and alleyways that spread away from the trading area. I decided to carefully explore some of the alleys, making sure not to get lost. This was a labyrinth of whitewashed adobe houses and dirt passageways. The basic electricity infrastructure consisted of cables strung across buildings any which way, and the public water supply amounted to a communal standpipe where people lined up and filled their buckets and other receptacles. Indoor plumbing and drainage must have been nonexistent and flies were ever-present. The same flies swarmed and settled on raw meat carcasses hung on hooks outside the butcher's shop and, nearby, the blacksmith was seen using work methods unchanged for centuries. I took a few quick snapshots, being mindful that I could fall prey to lurking thugs, and returned to the relative safety of the bustling camel marketplace.

Another excursion was planned to visit Tunisia's principal port of Sfax, and an opportunity to perhaps venture out to the fringes of the Sahara Desert. Unfortunately I had to cancel my booking because I was suddenly afflicted with acute diarrhoea as a result of food poisoning. Not being used to the vagaries of contamination caused by heat and microbes, I had ignored the basic rules to avoid certain foodstuffs. So for a few days I preferred not to be too far away from a toilet!

My 'Montezuma's revenge' situation wasn't helped by the fact that the hotel's indoor plumbing proved inadequate for its purpose. On occasions there were effluent backups in the shower compartments of the chalet rooms. The mess was left for the housecleaning staff to sort out, but I did tip them for their pains. Next door was another of my travelling companions, a young lady named Susan. One day she was in a panic because the hand basin brackets had detached themselves from the wall and the basin was being supported only by the U-bend drain pipe. I somehow rigged up a temporary prop to keep the basin functional and prevent it from crashing onto the floor. Susan was thankful to me which resulted in spending a very intimate afternoon together.

My eighteen months tenure at Spencer Avenue ended in June, 1969, when my name had reached the top of the municipal housing list and I was advised that a council flat was available for occupation. I went to the town hall to complete the paperwork and was asked on which floor of the newly built high rise block would I prefer. I said, "As high as possible", and was allocated a self-contained bedsitting room with adjoining bathroom and kitchenette on the fourteenth floor of the seventeen story building known as John Fox House in Caradoc Close.

This tower block was the latest to be built by the municipality and was the focal point of the Henley Green Estate on the northeast side of the city. The old hamlets of Bell Green, Henley Green, Potters Green and the village of Walsgrave on Sowe were connected by a rural lane, Henley Road, and were quickly being developed by both the council and private speculators. Curiously enough, when I was attending Henley College for Further Education, I watched the progress of the high rise construction through the classroom windows – not knowing at that time I would be living in the building a year or so later.

It was arranged that I should meet an official, visit the apartment and receive the key and rent book. The building had a security entrance and visitors announced themselves to the tenants using a telecom system. The tenant then unlocked the secured door remotely from the flat. In the building foyer (lobby) were two lifts (elevators) and an emergency stair access to all floors.

The flat – No. 145, John Fox House – was all that one person needed and included a gas-fired central heating and hot water unit (furnace) and a portable spin-drier to discourage tenants hanging washing out on the balcony. The view through large windows and a patio door faced east over the Warwickshire countryside. Gradually the building filled with tenants of all walks of life; although there was a good measure of young urban professionals – so much so that the building became known as the ‘intelligentsia block’.

I now had to look around for furnishings and, from the beginning, I was prepared to buy good-quality articles. Essentials were quickly acquired. For convenience and compactness I bought a fold-up “Zed-Bed”, which was easy to move from the store and transport to the flat. My parents were updating their dining area and donated the old kitchen table which had a red Formica top and white tubular steel legs. I supplemented this with three bar stools upholstered in red and also with white legs. The kitchenette was practical with built-in shelving and storage cupboards. Having had a great deal of experience cooking various meals on the “Wee Baby Belling” electric stove at Spencer Avenue, I decided to buy one myself and, again, it was a useful investment.

Before contemplating any additional furniture I decided to change the décor from the existing utility paint scheme. The 1970s ushered in vibrant colours and bold designs, so I changed the depressing mid-green painted wall of the bed-sit to a neutral colour, and papered the remaining walls with a block-type design in vivid orange. The pre-pasted vinyl paper used in the kitchen had a simulated woodgrain finish, and the bathroom wallpaper was meant to resemble marble stonework. The wooden trim was repainted in white gloss and the original kitchen cupboard doors received a coat of red gloss paint.

Custom made curtains gave me a little problem as I had decided to go for easy maintenance and chose a glass-fibre fabric with an abstract design. I specified everything at the shop – Greens in the Lower Precinct – but when I went to install the finished curtains, the instructions had been misinterpreted and the size was completely wrong. This meant a complaint and rectification. I was told later that Greens had a bad reputation, and I know I wasn’t the only person to complain that day. One customer before me was really irate and upset the salespeople. Some trendy open-weave curtains in white, yellow and orange supplemented the main ones.

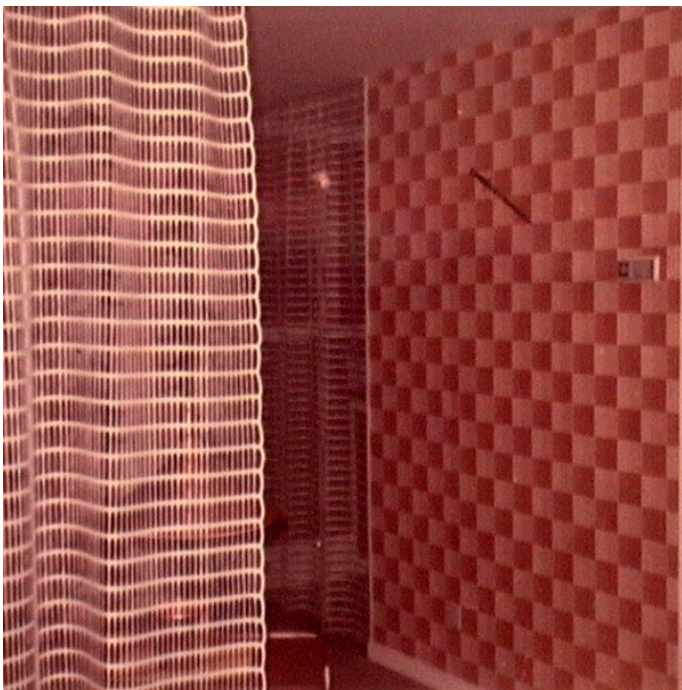
As time went by and funding was available, I continued to add a few creature comforts and functional furniture. The linoleum covered floor was covered with a length of grey wall-to-wall carpet that I was able to buy cheap through my friend’s employee discount scheme. A risky fiddle, but it worked. Next came a swivel-rocker easy chair; then a tray-cum-coffee table on casters – very versatile as it could be elevated and swivelled to many positions. Copper accessories were all the rage and I had a number of plant pots scattered around. The main pendant light was housed in a copper cone that could be raised or lowered from the ceiling. The most expensive item, however, was the sideboard unit bought from Wade’s, the high-end furnisher



145, John Fox House, Caradoc Close, Coventry. Photograph Showing the Interior of the Bedsitting Room Looking towards the Entrance Hall Door. 1969.



145, John Fox House, Caradoc Close, Coventry. Photograph Showing the Interior of the Bedsitting Room Looking at the Modular Sideboard Unit. 1969.



145, John Fox House, Caradoc Close, Coventry. Photograph Showing the Interior of the Bedsitting Room Looking towards the Kitchenette. 1969.



145, John Fox House, Caradoc Close, Coventry. Photograph Showing the Interior of the Bedsitting Room Looking towards the Picture Window. 1969.



*145, John Fox House, Caradoc Close, Coventry.
Photograph Showing the Interior of the Kitchenette.
1969.*



*145, John Fox House, Caradoc Close, Coventry.
Photograph Showing the Interior of the Bathroom.
1969.*



*John Fox House, Caradoc Close, Coventry.
Photograph Showing the Exterior of the Tower Block.
No. 145 is on the 14th Residential Floor. 1969.*



*145, John Fox House, Caradoc Close, Coventry.
Photograph Showing Gayle Lydster Enjoying some
Homemade Pancakes, Shrove Tuesday, 1972.*

in the Precinct. This was a modular construction and consisted of a three drawer cabinet; drop-leaf cabinet; glass-fronted display case, and two flat shelves all finished in teak veneer. The versatile unit had three matte black steel column brackets that supported the shelf and cabinet combination in a flexible arrangement. I quickly adapted the drop-leaf unit into a cocktail cabinet, and the glass-fronted display case contained paperback books and my growing collection of dancing medals and awards. A final touch was the infrared electric fire with flame effect that I used because the gas-fired central heating was noisy and only used first thing in the morning to heat the bathroom.

At its zenith, the apartment was viewed with envy when friends came to call; from the welcoming vestibule that boasted two reproduction Rembrandts on the walls, to the panoramic rural view through the picture windows. I lost count of the number of young lady visitors that came through the door, but it sure impressed them right up to the time when I left. There were many adventures associated with my tenure and they will be described in the next chapter.

Now that I was ensconced in John Fox House I had to formulate a different everyday routine. The work-day commute by car to Coventry Climax was straightforward, and could even be walked at a pinch. After work on Friday, the laundry, grocery shopping, housecleaning and evening meal blended into one seamless operation which occupied up to three hours. The nearby Riley Square shopping centre at Bell Green included a launderette and supermarket; also a Trustees Savings Bank, local library branch, and the regional council office that I visited from time to time. Life was definitely improving.

Work at Coventry Climax continued to be challenging with its ups and downs. At one point, I was recruited into a trade union – the Draughtsmen’s and Allied Technicians’ Association (DATA) – a membership that had future ramifications, and also netted me a handsome weekly rate of £26/10/4d. Another professional membership was taken up, this time with the Institution of Technical Authors and Illustrators (ITAI), an association that also had far-reaching effects.

It became apparent, however, that there were no opportunities for advancement, and I was becoming increasingly ambitious now that I was firmly entrenched in the world of technical writing and had acquired formal qualifications. I started to look around and even went to one interview at a machine tool manufacturer in Hall Green, a suburb of Birmingham. The big break came when I was attending a meeting organised by the ITAI Midlands Group. Among the Institution’s members was Mr. Desmond (Des) Harris, who managed the Technical Publications Department at a branch of Product Support (Graphics) Limited (PSG), an affiliated company of Rolls-Royce Limited. PSG’s head office was in Derby, but Des’ department was located at the Rolls-Royce Industrial and Marine Gas Turbine Division (IMD) on the old Ansty wartime aerodrome site just outside of Coventry. I spoke with Des and we agreed to meet again for more meaningful discussions on a possible job offer. The interview went well and I was introduced to Mr. Jim Mansfield, who managed the entire product support office. IMD was experiencing an expansion and, as PSG was also used as an outside agency, private companies under contract were expecting results, which meant that additional manpower at PSG was required. My application was accepted and I began working at PSG’s Ansty office on May 6th, 1970, at a weekly wage of £28/5/0d. Another chapter was about to unfold and life in general was looking full of promise.

