

## Chapter 9 – Aston by Stone

(1986 to 1995)

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(20<sup>th</sup> February 2014 – Penang)

## Setting up home in Aston-by-Stone



St. Dominic's Priory School, Stone.

Before setting off back to the UK at the end of November, we had found a place to rent not too far from Stafford, an apartment in a barn conversion on a working farm located near to where Jenny was to take up her new job in the New Year. Without the benefit of the internet, I am not sure how we did this, but I guess there were ways and means of getting by without the web back then. Difficult to imagine now though, I agree, now that our whole life seems to be organised using the

web. It could have been from a newspaper advertisement that Mum had brought out to Singapore on that last summer visit to stay with us, that we found our new temporary home. The week after we arrived, it snowed. Polly could not remember snow and she was quite excited at the sight of the white landscape that greeted her on that first snowy morning. Polly wasn't too enamoured of the cold weather though, jumping off the toilet seat with a shriek one frosty morning, complaining that the cold hurt her bottom.

The first order of the day was to decide where the girls were to go to school, as from this decision would flow everything else, such as where we would be buying a house. We did visit a couple of schools in the Stafford area. But in the end, we came very quickly to the decision to send the girls to St. Dominic's, a private school in Stone about 7 miles to the north of Stafford. Jenny was adamant that Polly and Anna's futures were best served by them going to a single sex school, and for this St Dominic's fitted the bill very well. Mind you, it was not that straight forward to get the girls enrolled at there. Before that could happen, the head teacher, who was also the lead nun at the associated St Dominic's Convent, interviewed us parents. However, we did pass muster and the girls started at St. Dom's in the New Year 1986.

To help with looking for the right house to buy, Jenny and I came up with a checklist of what the house should have, and perhaps more importantly, have not. Of



School of Computing, Staffordshire University,  
Jenny's new place of Employment.

course, the list was torn to shreds the first time Jenny clapped eyes on the garden at The Maltings in Aston-by-Stone. Amongst other no-no's on our list, this house was a dormer-bungalow which had coal fired central heating, a septic tank for toilet waste and black water. Worst of all, it had no garage. Where was I going to keep my beloved Morgan? But the garden was big and that was that. Decision made. The current owner was the librarian at the Polytechnic on the Stafford campus who was about to retire to a place he owned down south somewhere. He was interested in a quick sale and therefore was ready to accept any reasonable offer on his Aston property. Added to this we had cash in the bank, newly arrived from the offshore account in the Channel Islands where Jenny had been saving it to avoid paying UK tax on it. This meant that the deal could be completed in double quick time. To be fair, the house did have location, location, location, it being almost halfway between Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford, the sites of the two Polytechnic campuses, and it was in a rural setting. You had to drive through a farmyard to get to the house back then. About six weeks after we arrived back in the UK, we moved into The Maltings, which was to be our home for the next fifteen years, our longest stay anywhere.

Our initial domestic arrangement was a repeat of the first few months after we arrived in Singapore. I stayed home to setup and run the home, see the girls off to school and pick them up afterwards, all the usual comings and goings in a family's day. This, however, couldn't be a permanent arrangement, much as I would have liked it to have been. Having decided to opt out of the state education system for Polly and Anna by sending them for



The Holly Bush Inn, Salt: the second oldest licensed pub in the UK. Est. 1190.

private schooling, I would have to find paid employment to fund this decision. My preferred job was to be taken on as a lecturer in the Polytechnic's Mechanical Engineering Department, which also happened to be on the Poly's Stafford campus. As luck would have it, an advertisement for such a post appeared in the Sunday Times one weekend as if by magic and, joy of joys, it did have my name on it. At the interview I displayed the work I had done in Singapore in arranging

learning materials for the students and the new software I had developed, a start in computer aided learning. I was the last one to be interviewed on the day, 'W' being towards the end of the alphabet. After my session with the recruiting panel was over, I was asked to wait outside whilst they deliberated on the job candidates they had seen that day. Ten minutes later, I was called back in and asked when I could start. This was to be the first step into a job that was never going to be 'work' for me, I enjoyed it far too much for it ever to feel like I was working.

*(3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014 – Penang)*

The time up to the 1986 summer holidays we spent transforming our new house into a home and, of course, building a garage for the Morgan, which was still at Mandy's place in Cheltenham. For every-day running about we had bought a second hand Volvo estate, Jenny having a 'thing' about Volvos ever since Peter and Mandy had bought one during our last year together in Wales. She had also been taken by the Volvo's safety record when it came to car crashes. Basically, if you hit a Volvo with any other make of car you would come off worst, much worse. Volvo was certainly a very stable car to drive as I discovered when our front tyre completely blew whilst we were doing 70mph in the outside lane on the M6 one evening. A scary moment but the estate handled the loss of a tyre extremely well. I was able to pull over on to the hard shoulder without at all feeling I had lost control of the car. Very impressive.

Once the garage was finished, I trailed FUA up to The Maltings from Cheltenham towed behind the Volvo. We must have made quite a sight bowling up the M5 and M6, all thirty feet of car and trailer with Morgan aboard. FUA were the letters in the car registration number, letters which a friend of mine back in my days at Valenite thought most appropriate for me to have on my car as in FUA, 'Fuck 'U' All'. Don't know why he thought that, I really don't! On our trip to the UK in the previous spring I had arranged for FUA's radiator to be repaired at a workshop in Cheltenham and once it was collected, I set about

fitting it to the car. Now the Morgan looked the bee's knees, no more the truck radiator stuck on the front looking like I don't know what. After the work was completed, I started using FUA for my daily commute to the Poly, that is if I wasn't taking the girls to school that day.



Janet with her beloved +8

I was disappointed to find that there was no Morgan Club centre in Staffordshire, the nearest regular meeting of Morgan enthusiasts being some 40 miles away in Buxton which was a little too far to contemplate joining. So, I decided to try and set up a new local centre myself. To this end, I sent a letter to be published in the club magazine,

Miscellany, inviting any like-minded people to meet at the Crown Inn at the top of our road in Aston. The pub meeting took place in May with seven Morgans turning up in the car park that evening, much to the surprise of the pub's locals. From the first May pub meeting until the MSCC national committee formally recognized our new centre on the 28<sup>th</sup> September that year, we would meet regularly at the Holly Bush Inn in Salt. Salt, a small village off the A51 just a couple of miles from Aston, was very convenient for me. The Holly Bush subsequently became the Staffs Centre HQ.

I first met Janet at the May meeting and I was much impressed by her enthusiasm for the centre project. She had recently bought a Morgan and was enamoured of the marque to put it mildly. From this initial 'date', Janet and I would be meeting a couple of times a month for the next fifteen years and be involved together in organising loads of club and centre activities. Janet sadly died in October last year. She was a lovely person and will be genuinely missed by her many friends. The fact that 150 people, including 30 club members, attended her funeral, testifies to Janet's popularity. Eleven Morgans formed part of her funeral cortege. Rest in peace, Janet.

## Our first Continental Holiday

When Jenny and I joined the Polytechnic at Stafford, the academic calendar still included a five-week summer break when the Poly staff could take holidays. When you worked it out, we effectively had nearly 3 months official holiday a year. Most staff took full advantage of this, as did Jenny and I for the first couple of years at least. Of course, this all changed when the Poly became a University in 1992 and our contracts were renegotiated giving us a nice increase in pay set against a reduced annual holiday entitlement. I would personally have preferred the status quo and keep the holidays but we weren't given the choice, unfortunately. For this first summer on our return to the UK we planned a three-week



Amboise Castle.  
Our hotel is on the bottom left of the picture.

touring holiday on the continent in the trusty Volvo. We crossed the channel by ferry and headed south to the French Riviera, down France's Atlantic coast before cutting across on the north side of the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean.

This was to be a camping holiday for which we bought a large tent and all the gear, airbeds, camping stove with gas bottles, etc. The Volvo estate was a great buy for this sort of

holiday having loads of room to carry the four of us and the camping gear without us feeling overloaded with stuff in the car. We had arranged to meet up with Ruth and her boys, Jacob, and Toby at a campsite just outside Sainte Jean-de-Luz, close to the Spanish/French border. Ruth had booked a fully kitted out tent there for the summer months. We decided to get to Jean-de-Luz with only a one-night stopover in Amboise on the way south. Amboise was a little off the main drag south, but it was a lovely quiet place for a night's amble around the town and a comfortable hotel night's sleep. Our rooms were in an ancient building, atop a winding staircase, all very atmospheric and feeling very French to us. We spent a lovely evening having dinner at a cafe by the river following which we took an evening stroll along the riverbank. Our holiday had really begun.

Next morning, we set off again, heading south towards Bordeaux and Jean-de-Lux. At Bordeaux we stopped to fill up with petrol and I thought I had better do a visual check around the car to make sure that nothing was amiss. To my horror, I found that the nearside rear wheel nuts were loose and in fact one was already missing. In preparation for the trip I had had replaced a couple of tyres at a local tyre fitter and clearly, they hadn't



St. Jean de Luz

checked if the wheel nuts were fully tightened up before letting me drive off in the car. Talk about being lucky. We had just driven at speed over 500 miles with a loose rear wheel! Note to self – never rely on others to do things right on a safety critical job, always check and double-check their work.

We drove on to St. Jean de Luz a little shaken by our close encounter with a potential disaster, swearing to give the tyre fitters back home a piece of my mind when we got back to the UK. Never did of course. No point, the heat had gone out of my anger and I would have appeared as another moaning customer not an irate father who had nearly lost his and his family's lives by their shoddy workmanship. I didn't use that company's services again thereafter.

Having found the camp site, Jenny and I set up our tent close to Ruth's. We all enjoyed a week together, going to the beach, taking drives up into the hills to the south of the town and, best of all, enjoying the cheap local red wine at 90p a bottle.

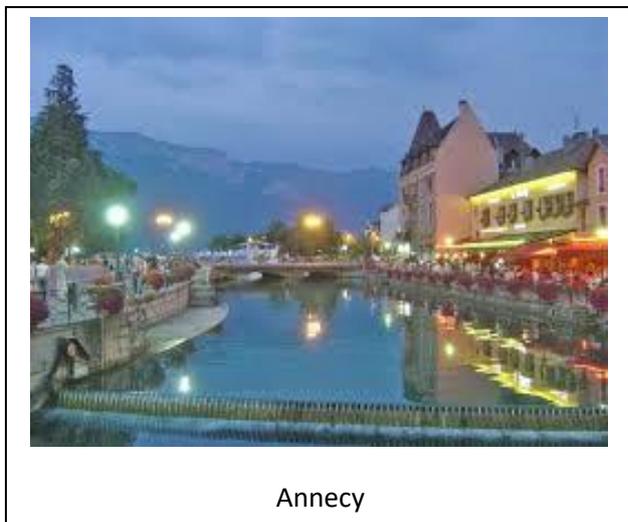
*(6<sup>th</sup> March 2014 – Penang)*

After a week with Ruth in St. Jean de Luz, we four set off again to resume our tour de France. We headed off east, skirting along the northern edge of the Pyrenees Mountains that form the border between France and Spain. I was struck by how run down all the villages we passed through were, unloved houses and dirty, quiet streets. We had an overnight stop in one of these towns at a hotel with a terrible restaurant, terrible because within twenty-four hours all four of us were down with food poisoning.

The first hint of the tummy trouble ahead was having to stop the car for Polly to be sick by the side of the road the morning we left the hotel. We were on the road going up into Andorra at the time, where we had intended to stay a couple of nights. But on meeting a traffic jam halfway up the mountain road into the country, we decided to abandon the visit and drive on instead to Perpignan. By the time we reached the town, we were all feeling a little queasy which prompted us to book into an hotel instead of pitching camp which had been our original plan. Camping and having a jippy tummy do not go together at all well. And a good job we did too. We didn't leave the hotel room for the next three days and had

to call on the services of the hotel doctor to help combat our vomiting and diarrhoea. On the one trip out from the hotel I did take to get supplies from the local supermarket, I ended up dashing from the checkout till to throw up by the side of the car in an open car park. I got many funny looks but not one offer of help. Poor little Anna, who was with me at the time, didn't know what to do, bless her.

After three days of self-imposed isolation in the hotel room, we felt comfortable enough to load up the estate again and set off for our intended destination, the French Riviera. But when we got to the sea, Jenny and I looked at one another and, in an instant, agreed this place wasn't for us. We took a sharp turn left, heading north back into the French heartland. I guess the scorched looking landscape and the sight of tourist 'development' everywhere put us off wanting to stay there. But where to go now?



A quick look at the map and we decided to head up to Annecy in the French Alps. Annecy is built at the out flow of a lake with the same name and it turned out to be a great choice for a family camping holiday. We all had a great week by the lake on the outskirts of the town, savouring the delights of the Annecy's bakeries, of which there are many, swimming in the lake and just generally relaxing after our unsavoury experiences down south. For a day's distraction from

beach and cakes, we took a day trip drive into Switzerland to visit Geneva. Jenny and I had last been in Geneva twenty years earlier when we were backpacking around Europe. This time we came with a little more cash in our pockets to spend than during our student days, but it was still a shock to have to pay £5 for a cup of coffee. Finding a place to park the estate was difficult and we ended up some distance from the city centre before we managed to find an empty parking space. Unfortunately, neither Jenny nor I had thought to remember where we had left the car. Not even making a note of the name of the street we were in, each thinking the other would remember where it was. After our amble around the city and a stroll by the lake to see the famous fountain and it was time to return to the car, only then did we realise our predicament. Where exactly was it? All the streets looked the same and to try backtracking our amble around the city centre was really a nonstarter. Then Anna chirped up that she knew where the car was. I have to say with not a little scepticism, but with nothing to lose, we let Anna guide us back to the missing Volvo. And, bingo, there it was. I still do not know how Anna could have remembered where we had parked, given that she had no reason to take a special note of where the car was. But, great relief all round.

Granddad Stories.

All good things must come to an end and after a week by Lake Annecy, we loaded up the estate again and set off northwards, heading to Paris. We hadn't booked anything ahead of time before we left the UK, relying on a free and easy approach to finding a place to lay our heads each night. This included accommodation in Paris and by the time we had found a hotel in the city where we could afford to stay, it was getting a bit late in the evening. Now where to park the Volvo? Paris was an even worse than Geneva to find a place for your car. I did eventually find a place some way from the hotel after driving round the block a couple of times. This time I took note of where I had left it. And as the Parisian restaurants were beyond our means too, we took to dining each evening in a local Chinese eatery. After a couple of days 'doing' the sights of Paris, we motored back to Calais and ferried across the Channel to the UK without any further dramas.

*(9<sup>th</sup> March 2014 – Penang)*

## **Staffordshire University and All That**

The start of my first full academic year at the North Staffordshire Polytechnic, as it was known then, saw me lecturing materials technology and design to the National Diploma and the first-year degree students. Over the next fifteen years at the institution, I progressed from senior lecturer (SL) with no portfolio to principle lecturer (PL) and Head of the Design and Materials section in the School of Engineering, being responsible for ten members of lecturing/laboratory staff and three workshops. Towards the end of my career in academia, I was awarded a Fellowship for my contribution to teaching and learning in the then renamed and rebranded Staffordshire University. (See below for a rundown and explanation as to the meaning of the letters I garnered to my name over the years I spent lecturing.)

The one very attractive thing about lecturing at a University is that you have almost total autonomy over what you 'do' to earn your crust, within certain limits that is, of course. This suited me down to the ground and I found the people management part of the job when I became a Principle Lecturer was not at all onerous. The staff under me were self-motivated and in the main, they went along with my leadership. It also helped that mechanical engineering was not a popular. In addition, attracting students to the school was very difficult, given the competition from engineering courses at more established universities like Birmingham and Manchester to name but a couple. This was a very real problem, as the school's funding relied entirely on the number of students we managed to recruit each year. I.e. no students no jobs. This gave me an opportunity to initiate a new set of undergraduate courses based on technology. These new courses did not rely on the applicants having 'A' level mathematics as an entry qualification, a real sticking point in recruiting potential engineering students.

And very popular they proved to be, keeping the school's first year admissions at a level that could pay the school's way, i.e. keep us lecturers in the jobs to which we had become

accustomed to enjoying. The idea behind these new design courses, was to use already engineered products for which the 'hard' math had already been done and using these to meet a customer's design specifications. An example might be the laying out of a plant to manufacture toys. The machines in the layout, the material handling robots and conveyer belts could be standard off the shelf products from a third-party supplier. The design of the layout and selection of the machines to use in it, would be the work of our new design technology students. Sad to say, none of the courses I initiated has survived. Nothing stays the same forever. However, later other lecturers on the staff had courses validated in music, and film and television production technology amongst others using this approach to new course curricula.

*(17<sup>th</sup> March 2014 – Penang)*

Apart from the new technology degrees I put together for the undergraduate portfolio in the School of Engineering, I also had validated in 1993 a four-year to master's degree in engineering design which did require 'A' level maths for entry. Paul Boardman, a colleague, and friend from the School of Design, and I had previously collaborated on a joint first-degree course. This one combined my school's technology and his product design expertise, with the students taking advantage of the facilities of both schools. Paul and I had first worked together on a new BSc. in Technology Management that involved input from engineering, computing, design, and business, making this the first truly cross faculty degree in the University.

From these initial experiences in new course design with a cross discipline curriculum, I proposed to my Head of Department to create a MEng in Engineering Design which would have a grounding in Mech. Eng. with input from the School of Design. To my joy he said, "Yes, get on with it." One of the criticisms from the employers of engineering graduates, not just ours but nationally, was that the courses they studied for three years were not fit for purpose. They did not provide their new recruits with the right technical knowledge to hit the deck running once they had joined their companies. They almost always needed additional training before they could contribute anything to the company's bottom line. I was very conscious of this criticism, and so for the MEng I enlist the help of the Head of the Engineering Design Department at the local Cannon domestic appliance factory in Blythe Bridge. He gave our course design team the benefit of his industrial experience when deciding on the module content. Having him a practising engineer as a member of our team grilled on the day of the validation event, the first held in the newly created Staffordshire University, cannot be underestimated.

Validation events are adversarial in nature and can be a terrifying ordeal for the course development team. The day long events have the team sitting opposite the validators whose mission is to pick holes in your new course's documentation with a no-holds-bar approach to the game. David Legge, the University's Deputy Vice Principle responsible for academic standards, was in the chair that day. He had a reputation as a very hard hitter,

pouncing on any perceived weakness in our documentation and our defence of it. Also present on the validating team are representatives from other schools in the University as well as external experts in the courses subject area from other universities. The external for our validation event was a lecturer from, of all places, the University of Birmingham. He was very supportive of our new course, even though he was on the 'opposing' team, commenting at the end of the day that he wished they had such an undergraduate to master's degree course at Birmingham. We did pass the validation process and the MEng became a part of the School's course portfolio.

Not long after joining the Polytechnic I became the admissions tutor for the School, a role I held for the next ten years. The job fell to me to do because nobody else on the school's staff wanted to do it, but again that suited me down to the ground. I was free to take whatever approach I wanted with this new job, i.e. I would be my own boss. Mind you, if I failed to recruit enough students each year then not only I would be out of a job, but all the other school staff would be in the dole queue too. As part of the deal for me to take on this new role, I had the exclusive use of a secretary. I recruited Liz from a day of interviewing young hopefuls who had answered an advertisement for the post in the local press. She stood out from the rest. At the interview, she was extremely chirpy and quick-witted making her a no brainer of a choice for the job. She joined the University a couple of weeks later and became my right-hand woman in all matters to do with student recruitment until she left to marry a marine five years later. She was a brilliant organiser and took a load of the day-to-day administration associated with student recruitment off my hands. Once we had set up how the fortnightly School open days would be run, Liz took over, using her charm and bubbly personality to get the other members of staff to play their part on the day. Not an easy task with some, I have to say. We did, of course, innovate, introducing individual interviews for students with members of staff and having a parallel programme of events for the parents who came with them on the day. More and more parents began to accompany their teenage kids to university open days. Particularly after tuition fees were introduced for all undergraduate courses by the government of the day. Liz and I were a good team, no, a great team. She became a friend. Jenny and I went to her leaving party. She got married and her new husband took her away from Staffordshire to live on a marine base on the south coast somewhere. I was very, very sad to see her go.

To attract new students to the School was a real annual challenge. Apart from devising new and attractive courses for them to apply for, I decided we needed to create something new in the School that would differentiate our facilities from those of other universities. I proposed to the then Head of School, Swadim Ghosh, to buy a kit car to be assembled over the next academic year in the workshops. The idea was that successive teams of students would work assembling the car every Wednesday afternoon as an additional part of their practical education. I was given the green light to buy a Westfield and granted a small budget to be spent on its assembly. Of course, the other members of staff, particularly the

technicians, took no persuading to get involved with this new project. Visiting students would be shown our kit car project as an inducement to join us at Staffordshire.



Westfield – The School car was white and was completed as a pure racer, with no lights or front wings. The engine was blue printed Ford 1600cc Kent engine.

To cut a long story short, at the end of the year we took the finished Westfield to the Curbrough Sprint Circuit near Litchfield for a mornings sprinting. In preparation for the day, I had the first-year students design and make a suitable trailer for the car as part of their end of year workshop practice. Before the sprint, I also took a small group of the more enthusiastic students, to a race marshals training day at the Oulton Park racing circuit in Cheshire. It was quite an exciting experience. This was the place they trained race marshals for Formula One. Conscious of the risks I was running letting a group of young men and women drive highly tuned motor on a speed circuit, I took a couple of measures to offset the risks as I saw them. First, a few weeks before our own

‘event’, I had the completed Westfield scrutineered at a Morgan Club Sprint meeting by a professional scrutineer. Second, on the day of the sprint, I had everybody involved sign an indemnity form absolving the University and myself of any blame if the participants got injured. To make the day more interesting, I invited members of our Morgan Club centre to join us with their Morgans. Which they did, apart from Maurice who turned up in his big BMW. A brilliant day was had by all. To begin with the students were very cautious driving round the circuit. But after they saw me spin my Morgan on to the grass, there was a definite change of gear, with not a few Westfield drives also taking to the grass after that.

And stranger than strange. As we were leaving in our University minibus, towing our bright white Westfield emblazoned with the Staffordshire University logo, on our own in-house designed and built trailer, who was waiting at the entrance gate to take up the afternoon session on the circuit? None other than the University of Birmingham’s Car Club in their beat-up old Minis and estate cars! I had to smile, well, ok then, grin widely.

*(19<sup>th</sup> March 2014 – Penang)*

Another administrative duty that fell into my lap, was that of coordinating the franchised courses the School had set up in the local further education colleges (FE colleges) and beyond. I suppose this new responsibility did fit in well with my role as admissions tutor, given that the main aim of the franchises was to recruit more students onto our three-year degree courses. The coordinator’s responsibilities not only included liaising with the colleges on a day to day basis over management issues. It also covered arranging for new colleges to join our merry band with all that entailed. Including, organizing validation events at the colleges, poacher turned gamekeeper. In the end, I had a clutch of ten FE colleges

under my wing, including a private college a little further away in Athens, Greece. It was delivering our engineering foundation year. This year was an alternative route to the 'A' level entry for students to embark on the engineering courses without the need for 'A' level mathematics and physics. From a recruitment point of view, this was a gift because I could not only offer places to the 18-year-old applicants but also to so called mature students, those over 21 years old. Each year between twenty to twenty-five enrolled on this foundation year, making it a vital component in our School's survival strategy.

Whereas my involvement with the cross-faculty course developments had given me the opportunity to work with colleagues from different parts of the University, the roles of admissions and franchise coordinator got me off campus too. I was fortunate enough to visit the local colleges in Staffordshire and Shropshire as well as to take part in the University's recruitment fairs overseas. This included trips to the Far East, which, of course, suited me fine. The trips could last up to a week depending on the location and the type of fair the University had been invited to participate in. For example, in 1993 I came to Kuala Lumpur and Penang in Malaysia with a small team of six, made up of colleagues from Business and Computing with myself representing the Mech Eng. For the Penang fair, which was held in the KOMTAR, we stayed in the then Shangri-La Hotel. On our one free day on the island, I hired a car, having brought my driving license just in case the opportunity arose to do so. I took my five colleagues on a tour of the Island. It was, to say the least, a bit of a crush in the car with six of us, but nobody seemed to mind, enjoying the views from the road down the west coast. Other places I was privileged to represent the University were Paris, Athens, Crete, Thessaloniki, Bilbao, Odense (Denmark) and Singapore.

You might be wondering why the University would spend money sending six of us on a staff jolly all the way to South East Asia on the off chance we might recruit some students there. The answer lies in the changes the British government made to the University's funding mechanism. From 1992, funding directly related to the number of students recruited and subsequently retained, i.e., no students, no funding. This turned the University managers' attention towards the institution's cash flow and as a result the University became seen more as a business than it was before. Recruits from overseas, particularly from outside of the European Union, were a rich source of income, as they paid full fees directly to the University. To put this into context, if I had managed to recruit just one student on my 1993 trip to Malaysia and he/she had stayed on the course for three years, the £1500 spent on my seven days in Malaysia would have netted the University a total income of £15,000. Not a bad investment, I would have said.

As part of the Polytechnic being restructured, rebranded, and renamed as Staffordshire University, the powers that be in their infinite wisdom decided to take the opportunity to move the humanities courses from the Stafford to the Stoke on Trent campus. Nothing contentious in that, you might think. Until you realise that 90% of the female students on the Stafford campus were there to attend the Humanities courses. This meant that there

would be only engineering and computing students based there, with less than 10% of their combined student numbers comprised of women. Not surprisingly, both the male and female Stafford based students got not a little upset at the prospect of their campus becoming 'monastic' as they put it. I wasn't very happy about it either. It was difficult enough to recruit engineering student as it was, without this additional difficulty of promoting a male dominated environment.

Not long after the announcement was made, Karen Lord appeared in my office asking me my take on the Humanities students' impending move to Stoke. I recruited Karen on to the foundation year three years earlier as a mature student and she proved to be a very capable engineer in the making. She was also a very determined young woman. After a brief discussion over the issues, she set off to set up a meeting with the Vice Chancellor (VC) with the intent to at least let him know the feeling of the Stafford based student body over the matter. After the meeting was set up, she came back to seek my advice on how to approach the issues. We drew up an agreed list of points to present to him, which she would then use during the meeting to keep on track and not be distracted by his filibustering. I also recommended that she should take along a fellow student to witness the meetings proceedings. A couple of days later Karen was back in my office quite animated, straight from her meeting with the VC. She had apparently caught him off guard, as he seemed to think he could handle Karen on his own without the presence of any his management to support him. Bad move Mr. VC. He really was on his own, all the other senior managers being off site at the time. The upshot was that the he agreed to meet with the Stafford student body to have an open discussion as to the rightness of the University's position on the impending move. In other words, "I hear where you are coming from but..... "

Again, the VC completely miscalculated his move in the game. On the day of the meeting, the room was overflowing with almost as many lecturers as students attending, including myself sitting right behind Karen. The VC was clearly surprised to see so many staff supporting the student initiative. This time he did arrive with back up, all the senior managers having been mandated to be there. But all to no avail. He was no match for Karen and to be perfectly frank his performance on the day was embarrassing. If this had been a game, it ended Students 10 points, University Managers 0 points. The VC's team deserted him with only Christine King, the next VC of the University, providing any kind of defence of the Humanities move to Stoke. This did make me think that privately the rest of VC's team had their own reservations about the intended move. The meeting ended with an agreement to look at the issue again and come up with a plan to mitigate the gender imbalance on the Stafford campus. A few weeks after this exceptional meeting at which common sense had, surprisingly, prevailed, the University announced that there would be a new section of the Business School setup at Stafford. It was to deliver a whole set of new business related, but cross discipline courses focusing on Enterprise and Innovation.

*(20<sup>th</sup> March 2014 – Penang)*

These new courses were to take in their first students at the beginning of the next academic year, giving us only three months to create nine new, three-year degree courses and have them validated. Since it had taken me two years to bring one three-year degree course to validation, this seemed an almost impossible task. But we did it. And despite having only the UCAS clearing system to get recruits from in that first year, the courses started with healthy student numbers.

The Engineering School's contribution to the new degree programme was limited to one core module on the second year, Management of Design Solutions (MDS). This project-based module I devised so that the Engineering School would at least gain some monetary return from the expected influx of new students. Always thinking of how to contribute to our bottom line was I. What possible problems could there be resourcing one module out of thirty-six? The number of students on that one module is the answer. I do not think any one of us involved could have foreseen their popularity with applicants. By the second time I had to deliver the module, the student numbers on it had mushroomed to over four hundred. The biggest lecture theatre on the Stafford campus in the newly completed Octagon Computing Centre, accommodated only 200, meaning two timetable slots for every core module in the new degree programme. What to do?

The answer was to use the University's computer network. I had already been experimenting with computer networking as a means of organising and delivering student learning material. This after I attended a Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) workshop run by the head of computer services. This workshop was a 'eureka' moment for me. I could see in an instant a completely new way of doing things. And with my previous experience in computer programming, I could also see how to create web content myself using HTML and not have to rely on the help of a computer expert to do it. Following the HTML workshop, I approached the head of the computer services section and after listening to my networking idea, he allocated me space on the University's server for my exclusive use to test my new ideas. There were a couple of teething problems using the University's computer network this way. On the first occasion I used my newly devised web delivery system for the MDS students, their response after the first lecture on the module overloaded the University's computers. They all logged on to download the project data, almost causing the University server to collapse. Ooops.

From this beginning in the early 1990s when the internet was still really in its infancy, to the time I retired in 2001, I had created an 8 Gigabit internet-based student learning environment on the University's server. This might not seem a lot of data by today's standards but in 2001, this amount of computer memory was many times that available on a standard personal computer of the day. I even recorded my lectures and uploaded edited highlights to complement the course notes. To my obvious delight, my contribution to the University's adoption of computer-based student-centred learning was recognized in 1999 by an award of a University Fellowship.

*(5<sup>th</sup> April 2014 – Penang)*

## Christmas in Florida

Over the 1988 Christmas/New Year period the Whitworth family and the Cooper family took a three-week holiday together to Disneyland in Florida. Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> December 1988 was the date that Lockerbie in Scotland hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons. PAM 103 transatlantic flight was brought down over the town by a terrorist bomb. Jenny had initially thought of booking us on to this very flight but subsequently moved our departure date to the weekend before. The plan was originally to fly out only a couple of days before the Cooper family. But we decided instead to leave the UK the week before they did, so that we could have a tour down the west coast of Florida on our own with the girls. News of the plane crash came in over the TV news whilst we were in a Florida motel, a bit of shock to say the least to think it could have been all over for us if Jenny had not rearranged our holiday schedule.

We first flew to New York to make a transit flight to Fort Lauderdale. Our transatlantic flight had been delayed and to catch the Fort Lauderdale flight we had to hotfoot it across the Kennedy Airport terminal to have any chance of making the connection. Jenny took off like a rocket with Polly and Anna leaving me to keep up as best I could with a trolley load of luggage. However, I could not keep up and lost sight of the three of them in the crowd as I tried to get the bags off the trolley and on to an escalator all by myself. Not having a clue as to where I was supposed to be headed, I had visions of being stranded in the airport sans passport or ticket, only a very loud holler caused Jenny to turn around. Of course, when we did get to the right gate, that flight was also delayed because of a technical fault. Even when we did eventually board there was a further delay as two burly men in donkey jackets came down the aisle of the plane with multi-meter in hand. Not very reassuring for any nervous flyers there might have been on the plane.

It was very late at night when we eventually landed at Fort Lauderdale. We picked up a hire car at the airport and drove off into the night to look for our pre-booked hotel. Driving an unfamiliar car, on the 'wrong' side of the road in the middle of the night looking for a hotel in a strange town after not having slept for the last 36 hours is not the best way to start a holiday. Having driven around for an hour, we decided to abandon the search for our hotel. We pulled into the next motel we came across, which unfortunately was not for tourist but more for the local 'ladies of the night' to take their clients to for a quick how's your father. Picture if you would, an English family of four including two little girls standing in the hotels reception surrounded by numerous 'painted ladies' and big American men. A quick exit stage left, and we decided to keep looking for our pre-booked accommodation, which we did eventually find with much relief all round.

We four had a great time driving down the west coast of Florida, visiting places named after European towns and cities such as Petersburg, Naples, and Venice. The day before we

arrived in Petersburg it had snowed. Snow in Florida, unheard of. Was this an early sign of the global warming we are all so concerned about these days? After the west coast drive, we crossed over to the Atlantic coast and to Miami. The road across the top of the Everglades is an interesting driving experience as it stretches for over one hundred miles without a bend or a hill to break the monotony and without any towns where you can take a break. If you are unfortunate enough to have your car breakdown you are urged by road signs to 'Raise your Hood' and await assistance. Being used to Morgan hoods, it took a while before I understood the signs were referring to the car's bonnet.

We spent a couple of days in Miami during which time we took a drive down the Keys road and I managed to get myself pulled over by a speed cop for doing fifty miles an hour on the freeway. With the blue flashing light in my rear-view mirror, I pulled over on to the hard shoulder and as I got out of the car this cop approached me looking a little apprehensive, with his hand on his pistol's holster. The upshot was that he let me off with a warning, having been convinced by my driving licence and my passport that I was indeed an Englishman holidaying Florida. Still, all a bit intimidating in the dark.

The Coopers joined us in Fort Lauderdale. All five children, Sarah, Emma, Dylan, Anna, and Polly loved Disneyland, although queuing for an hour and more to access each and every ride or attraction was a bit wearing on the adults. After Disney, our gang of nine drove to visit Cape Canaveral Space Centre to see the launching pad for the space shuttle, all fascinating for me but not so for the youngsters, I think. Christmas was a bit of a let-down as nobody in America seems to celebrate it, choosing to have their 'do' at Thanksgiving a month earlier. Still all in all, it was a brilliant holiday.

## Of Morgans, Gek and Dollhouses

A couple of years after we had moved into The Maltings, it became clear that the house was not big enough for the four of us, despite the attraction of the big garden. Jenny and I did look around at other bigger houses in the Stone area, but it always came back to the garden at The Maltings and the houses rural setting. Location, location, location always location. If we were not to move, then we would have to expand the accommodation in the house we already had. Using some of the money we had left over from the cash we had brought back from Singapore, we added two bedrooms, a bathroom, a new kitchen, and utility room, making The Maltings a five-bedroom house. I guess we must have increased our living space by at least 50%.

Not long after the building work on The Maltings was completed and I could use the garage again, I decided to replace FUA with a more practical Morgan, if ever a Morgan could be called a practical car. Driving around in a 1937 automobile can be a little restrictive, particularly if Polly and Anna were to come out with me on weekend jollies with the Morgan Club. My plan was to buy or exchange FUA for a basket case of a car with the idea of

rebuilding it and thereby have a 'new' car for a lot less money than buying a newer model in good condition.

Without too much looking, I found my basket case car in Pembrokeshire with the current owner interested in doing a swop with a small addition of cash on my part. Well, it took me three months to completely strip the 'new' car down to the last nut and bolt and rebuilt her again. This included a new chassis, and some replaced wooden parts that had rotted away with the 1600cc Ford Kent engine being reconditioned too. As an inducement to get the job done, we booked a ferry from Poole in Dorset to Cherbourg in July for Jenny and I to take a week's touring holiday around Normandy and Brittany. Mandy and Peter were now back in the UK and had bought a business in Poole, a resource centre for school children to come to stay whilst taking part in local educational activities such as beach combing for fossils or nature trekking. During the summer months Mandy's new centre ran summer schools for children and as me and Jenny hadn't had a holiday on our own since Anna was born, we 'dumped' the two girls at Mandy's whilst we took off to the continent. Well, not really dumped just parked.

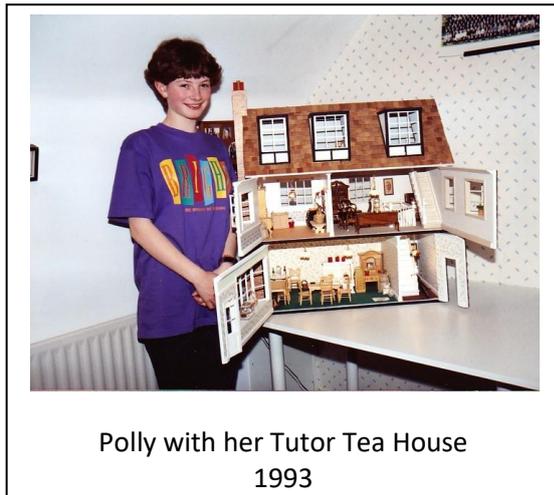


Picnic in Normandy. The Morgan was originally red but I fancied a two tone gray and black livery. Very smart.

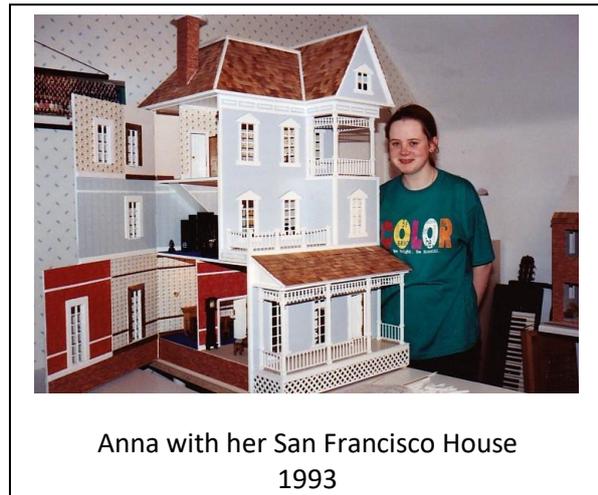
Jenny and I had a great week, not having booked anything ahead of time apart from the ferry, we felt so very free. I had only just managed to finish the car rebuild in time for the trip, still putting the final touches to her the weekend before we left for Poole. The only hiccup with the

car during the week away was a snapped clutch cable which I had over tightened on assembly. This caused the cable to flex every time I changed gear with it failing through fatigue. But, guess what, I had brought a spare which a local garage fitted for me, so no problem.

*(6<sup>th</sup> April 2014 – Penang, (morning)*



Polly with her Tutor Tea House  
1993



Anna with her San Francisco House  
1993

In 1992 Jenny was awarded her Doctorate, something she had craved since graduating in 1968. Soon after we had returned from the Florida trip, Jenny had registered with a supervisor at UMIST in Manchester to do research on a part-time basis into some aspect of computer architecture. Completely beyond me, of course, whatever Jenny's final thesis was about I haven't really a clue. All I know was that she was looking into a new way of modelling computer architectures using a different mathematical approach. To finish a PhD part-time in just three years was unheard of at the University. It was not long after she became Dr. Jennifer Whitworth that she became the Head of Research in the School of Computing and later secretary to the University's research committee. Words cannot describe how much satisfaction Jenny got from these achievements. For her it was a dream come true. Very proud of her and happy for her, was I

1993 was the year that I first met Gek. Jenny and Gek had been colleagues in CCS during our time in Singapore and Gek was now on a study trip to various UK universities and polytechnics, Staffordshire being one of them. I do vaguely remember Jenny bringing someone home to The Maltings around this time after work for a cup of tea. And running that someone to the train station in Stafford town for the next leg of her journey around the



Gek with her Black and White Singapore House.  
2013

UK. However, this visitor could have been anybody. Probably because I had never met Gek in Singapore, her visit that day did not latch in my memory as this was the first time we were meeting. That is my excuse anyway and I am sticking to it. There is proof positive that Gek did indeed visit The Malting in the two photographs that Gek took of Anna and Polly standing by their respective Dollhouses. In one of life's strange twists and turns Gek and I are now

Granddad Stories.

married, as you know, but back 1993 if you had foretold me my future, I would have thought you nuts.

OK, it is confession time. I design and build model houses in twelfth scale, commonly referred to as Dollhouses. To date I have built 12 such houses. It is a bit of a passion of mine, sorry about that. It all started when I tried to get Polly and Anna to be creative with raw materials, both having loved to make Lego models. Polly was also well into playing computer games at this time. Neither of them had shown any interest in helping me rebuild the Morgan and modelling planes, trains or cars did not light their fire either. So, I thought I would try dollhouse modelling to get them using their creative talents to work with raw materials. Of course, the attempt failed in the sense that they did not make a single contribution to the model houses. It did succeed in the sense that Polly pursued her interest in art, particularly photography, at University level and Anna is now making a career out of designing and making original fabric products as well as teaching sewing. Not that I am claiming any credit for that but at least, perhaps being exposed to my own 'doing things', they could see ways to express themselves beyond just their schoolwork. Who knows?

I was hooked on miniatures after completing the first house. I have always loved to make models, be it a car, a train layout or an airplane but never had any of these models rang my bell the way that the dollhouse did. At one stage, there were six twelfth scale houses in The Maltings, completely taking up one of our five bedrooms. I am still making dollhouses, with my current project being the biggest I have ever attempted at five feet square. You can get some idea of the size from the photograph showing Gek standing between the two halves of the house. This model is of a, so called, Black and White (B & W) house and is based on a set of drawings submitted in 1922 to the Singapore authorities, a reproduction of which I came across in a book on the subject of B & W Houses written by Julian Davison. The B & W's are peculiar to Singapore and are well designed to accommodate the tropical climate in this part of the world, with high ceilings, deep verandas to shade the windows and air vents high up in the walls to facilitate cooling airflow. The house design is a true mix, bringing together elements of the mock Tudor houses of England and the bungalows found in India, together with the stilts of the traditional Malay house. They were, and those that are still left standing in Singapore remain, the homes of the wealthy and well to do, with each house having the servants and kitchen facilities accommodated in a separate single storey structure built in the house's grounds. For more on my dollhouse efforts, visit

<http://www.davidwhitworth.me/DOLLHOUSE/Dollhouse.html>

where the fruits of my labours are stored.

The year 1993 saw our MSCC Centre organise the annual international club weekend at Weston Park in Shropshire. Each year, a different Centre of the MSCC volunteers to organize and host this event for the club members. It was Janet, who had been at the first ever

meeting of the Staffordshire Centre at the Crown Inn, back in 1986, who proposed our newly formed centre should volunteer to do the 1993 event. Janet, Maurice Williams, and I formed a coordinating gang of three to oversee and coordinate the three-day event at Weston Park. We were very conscious of the damage that organizing such an event with centre members contributing their time and money on a purely voluntary bases, could have on the centre's dynamics. Coming to a pub meeting twice a month to meet up with other Morgan enthusiasts for a couple of hours for a pint and a chat, is completely different to working with others towards a common goal on a tight deadline. History had proven that inter-personal conflicts arising from disagreements between the people involved, could destroy even the most mature of centres. To avoid this happening to our new centre, we gang of three divided the centre's members into teams made up of people who already knew each other socially outside of the Morgan centre circle. We tasked each team such that there were no over lapping responsibilities between them. In this way, if any friction arose between members of one team, it did not spill over into the others and cause a domino effect leading to the failure of the whole project. And it worked. After two years of putting the event together with at least one meeting every month, to the running of the event on the day, there was not one disagreement among us. Result.

The first half of the 1990 decade was a very creative time for us as a family. Both Jenny's and my careers at the University were interesting and absorbing. Polly and Anna were doing well at school and they both looked set to have secure and productive futures. The second half of the 1990 decade was not so good. In November 1996, Jenny was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of breast cancer, which she subsequently beat only to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease at the end of the decade, changing all our lives yet again.

## Academic and Professional Qualification.

I think I had better end this part of my story by explaining the qualifications that have suddenly appeared at the beginning of this chapter. I started 'collecting' professional qualifications at Valenite-Modco (UK) Ltd during the 70s, being encouraged to do so by my then boss, Brian. He thought it a good idea that I join the Institution of Production Engineers, the IProdE., of which he was a member. The IProdE was later taken over by the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, the IEEE, after the IProdE filed for insolvency. The Institute of Mechanical Engineers, a more natural home for the IProdE, were very sniffy about us IProdE'ers and refused to help us out. God knows why as most IMechE'er's are employed in production/manufacturing, but such is the inner world of politics where sometimes things just don't make any sense to the outsider.

My academic & professional qualification collection really started to grow when I took a lecturing job at North Staffordshire Polytechnic, as it was called in 1986 but for completeness, I have listed them all below:

1. **BSc (2.2) Mechanical Engineering**, University of Birmingham, 1968.
2. **MSc, Engineering Production and Management**, University of Birmingham, 1971.
3. **MIProdE**, Member of the Institution of Production Engineers. circa 1977. (Later MIEEE.)  
After returning to the UK from Singapore, I did for a year become the secretary to the Stoke on Trent Branch of the IProdE. Work commitments at the University made the post untenable, though, and after a year, I had to step down.
4. **CEng**, Chartered Engineer, circa 1978.  
A Charter comes after several years practicing as an Engineer and accumulating appropriate work experiences in the engineering field.
5. **MIED**, Member of the Institution of Engineering Designer. circa 1989.  
This was the Institution in which I was most active, attending conferences and being a member of the SEED (Shared Experience in Engineering Design) editing committee, which met in the Mech. Eng. department at the University of Birmingham. Going home really.
6. **Eur. Ing.**, European Engineer, circa 1994.  
Once you have a CEng, which is UK based professional title, you are eligible to apply for a wider European title which is 'worn' as a title in front of your name.
7. **MILT**, Member of the Institution of Learning and Teaching, circa 1998.  
Staffordshire University encouraged staff to join the ILT as part of a learning and teaching quality improvement drive.

8. **Fellow of Staffordshire University**, Learning and Teaching, 1999.

The Fellowship was an award given to me by the University for my contribution to the students' engineering design learning experiences in the School of Engineering.

**Citation:**

“No-one can doubt the contribution that Dave has made to advancing the practice of learning and teaching and it is with great pride that the University honours him with a Learning and Teaching Fellowship. Dave has been developing distributed learning activities for students since before the term was invented. As a pioneer of using the web to provide learning materials and activities for students many of ‘the-taken-for-granted’ elements of good practice were first identified by him. Many colleagues may recall the first time he set an assignment for students that led to a near melt-down of the server as they all tried to print it at the same time. The lesson being, do not simply put content on the web and transfer the ‘print moment’ from the tutor to the student. Dave has not rested on his laurels and a visit to the School of Engineering and Advanced Technology web-site, and in particular, a visit to Dave’s Home Page demonstrates the passion that Dave has for advancing learning and teaching - a passion and enthusiasm that greatly impressed the (Awards) Review Panel.”

The Fellowship came with an increase in salary, which is always comes in handy!

## Memory Litter Bin.

1. **Music** – In 1992 we bought a Bose sound system. My collection of Queen related albums had grown to 35 and with Dire Straits, Sting, Annie Lenox, U2 (you get my taste in music?) amongst other rockers work I collected I needed a decent system on which to get maximum enjoyment from them. Jenny was into classical music and her collection of the masters was almost as big as my own rock collection. I still have the Bose which is sounding out as strong after 20 years as on the first day we plugged it in, a testament to the build quality of a Bose system. It has moved with me from the UK to Italy, Singapore and now Malaysia.
2. **Holidays** – Apart from the trip to Florida with the Cooper family, we also took a driving holiday with them to the Harts Mountains in Germany. Whilst there, Jenny and I visited the Eagles Nest, Hitler’s retreat before and during World War 2 up in the forest. A very strange place where some Germans were still visiting on a sort of pilgrimage, which made me feel very uncomfortable. A very, very strange place.
3. **Anna to University** – Anna gained entry to Leicester University in 1995 to study for a master’s degree in Astrophysics, the second top university for the subject after Cambridge. During the two years leading up to Anna sitting her ‘A’ levels, the two of us used to reserve Friday nights for a drinking session together at the Crown Inn at the top of Aston Lane, Anna drinking Malabo and Coke and me having a couple or

three of Caffery's Irish Ale, all in the interests of father – daughter bonding you understand.

4. **Polly's Duke of Edinburgh Award trip** – Both Polly and Anna took part in the DEW scheme to different levels. Polly went away on a camping expedition as part of the scheme whilst I was out of the country on a student recruitment trip to Greece. One evening as I was getting ready to turn in at the hotel, I got a call from a very upset Jenny. Polly had been caught drinking whiskey with some boys in her tent. Don't know what Jenny expected me to do about it, me being over a thousand miles away. The upshot was poor Polly was grounded for a few weeks and bumped off the DEW scheme. The school wasn't too enamoured of her behaviour either. I guess we were fortunate that she wasn't told to depart and never darken their door again, given that St. Dom's was a Roman Catholic school run by a nun as head mistress.
5. **Accused of Racism.** – Yes, me. The accusation came from a Middle Eastern business student whom I had failed in my MDS module. The University had to take his accusation seriously and convened a special court-type session to hear the student's case against me. I was invited to bring along a couple of my colleagues as character witnesses and with my good friend Tarik besides me, the student's case fell apart, much to my relief, I have to say.