

## Chapter 3 - University Days

(1965 to 1968)

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(5<sup>th</sup> November 2012 – Singapore)

## Leaving Home

A few weeks before my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, I literally packed my trunk and set off from Darwen for Birmingham. I was never going to live in Lancashire again, although I didn't know that at the time. Jim was also going to Birmingham University to study Physics and together with fellow student, Jean Yates who was off to Aston University, we boarded the long-distance coach outside the Odeon Cinema on Bolton Road, all of us very excited. Saying good bye to Mum, who I am sure had totally conflicting emotions about the whole thing, not that I noticed I am ashamed to say, I boarded the coach which stopped to pick up passengers in Bolton and where Jenny joined our merry band of escapees. I should have realised by the rather cool treatment I got from Jenny that day that my days as her boyfriend were numbered, we were off to a bigger pond with bigger fish for her to catch.



Jim and I had, quite independently, opted to stay in the same university hall of residence, The Manor House along the Northfield Road to the south of the university campus. We decided to splurge on a taxi and share the cost to get us and our trunks from Digbeth Coach Station to the Manor House by the easiest possible means. Not at all sure what to expect of the Manor House, we were both overjoyed when we turned into a long, tree lined drive to be delivered to the front door of a real oldie world manor house. The

house and its extensive grounds which included a lake, had been bought by University from one of its major benefactors, the Cadbury Family, they of the chocolate bar. The Cadburys had allowed the University to build two, four storey annexes to serve as dormitories with single and double rooms for student accommodation, the old main house serving as a shared resource for the kitchen, dining room, bar etc.

I was allocated a shared room with Roger Birch who was also a fresher coming to Birmingham to study mechanical engineering. Like me, he had come with friends from Manchester Grammar School, Eric Mathieson, also here for the mechanical engineer course and Mark Saxon who was to study Physics. Roger, Eric and I hit it off straight away and we became good friends over the couple of years that we were all in the Manor House together, forming an early study group.

The first evening in our new home was a complete surprise to both Jim and me. Dinner was set for 7 o'clock, a formal three course affair delivered to our table by waitress service staff replete in black and white uniforms. There was a high table for the university lecturers who lived in the hall as wardens, we would later call them warders on occasion. Once we, the students, had all found our seats and just before the wardens entered to take up their places at the high table, there was a last-minute rush by a couple of students to occupy the student allocated seats there. Jim and I were both confused by this sudden burst of energy and the accompanying cheers from the rest of the diners. This ritual was played out every night for the next two years of my stay in the Manor House. Nobody wanted to sit at high table and make small talk with the wardens. I think I was only subjected to the ordeal twice during my stay in hall.

After dinner there was coffee served in the library next to the dining room. All so very formal with tiny cups of 'proper' espresso coffee, quite different to the instant Nescafe coffee in a mug I was used to back home. I was experiencing culture shock having travelled only 80 miles south in my own country, for goodness sake! Coming from Manchester Grammar School, a rather expensive private school, Eric, Roger and Mark didn't turn a hair but for me it was a little overwhelming, me with my thick Lancashire accent amongst these 'posh' bods. I was soon to learn that Grammar School boys like Jim and me were a small minority in the all-male hall. Sons of all sorts of professional men, farmers, university lecturers, doctors, lawyers made up the residents of the Manor, even an aristocrat's son who hadn't managed to gain a place at Oxbridge.

There were also a few students from overseas, particularly from the Commonwealth countries, Ghana, Nigeria, and Malaysia. In the 1960s, Darwen's population was totally English and white, I cannot remember ever seeing, let alone talking to a foreigner. This was a totally new and exciting experience and I embraced the newness of it all and resolved to make the most of what the future offered me. Back then I still had ambition.

*(26 December 2012 – Penang)*

Very early Boxing Day morning. Couldn't sleep. Polly left for the UK a couple of days ago. She came for a two-week holiday. Great to have her around for even a little while. We hired a car for the last week of her stay and motored up the Malaysian west coast to Perlis. Lovely place, all rice fields and beautiful sunsets into the sea.

## Settling into University Life

Fresher's fairs haven't changed much over the intervening years, with the Student Union organisations and clubs touting for new members. I joined the United Nations Society, with no real purpose in mind other than just to get involved with something that looked interesting and different. Sports clubs were out of course, although I did look at sailing, but

they were only interested in recruiting people with previous experience in the sport. Not a lot of sailing done in Darwen, so a 'no go' there.

The introduction to the Mechanical Engineering (Mech Eng) Department was a bit of a shock, I mean who would have expected the weekly timetable on a university degree course to be fuller than that for 3 'A' level subjects in the sixth form? And we were expected to attend Saturday morning lectures too! I was not impressed, great campus, great engineering facility but terrible timetable. Towards the end of the week, we fresh undergrads were gathered in the Great Hall to be addressed by the University Vice Chancellor. There was the expected welcome to the campus speech and stuff about working hard etc, but the part that stuck in my mind was the prescient remark that three of us would be dead before the end of our stay at the University. Little did I know then that two of those three would be new friends of mine, and the third a young lad in Manor House who tragically committed suicide.

Jenny was staying at the all-female Wydrington Hall, on the other side of the University from the Manor House. We did meet up a couple of times during fresher's week, but only briefly. The fresher's hop was our first social event together at the University and most probably we were the only fresher couple there. Birmingham being seen as a technical university did not attract many female students and as a result the dances organised by the student's union became known as cattle markets where the male students would try and get themselves a girl friend from the few women available. A fresher's hop was even worse as the second and third year students were there in force to clock the newly arrived talent. I think both Jenny and I were glad to be a couple and not subject to the madness of these strutting males, but I think I sensed that Jenny was on the lookout for a new boyfriend, with a majority male student population she could take her pick.

So began a three-year maturing process, starting with how to manage my own finances. The university fees and hall accommodation were paid for by the government and a means tested maintenance grant was available for day to day living expenses. Mum and Dad had to top up the grant since the year before Dad's income had just exceeded the full grant threshold. Effectively I had to manage on £1 a day during term time, so no heavy drinking or throwing wild parties could be entertained. Vacations would be a time to look for temporary employment to see me through to the next term. Well, I am proud to say that I never had to work during the term times and neither did I need to resort to asking Mum and Dad for more cash. It was a tight run thing though, sometimes.

Lectures were held every morning 9 to 12, including Saturday and lab work every afternoon 1 to 4, except Wednesday afternoon when we were instructed by the department to 'go and do a sport'. I don't think so. This was University, it should be free from all the petty school rules and regulations. After a couple of attempts to get me to toe the line, my personal tutor gave up and let the matter of Wednesday afternoon drop. And so, a learning routine

Granddad Stories.

was set up for the next three years, but the most interesting stuff happened outside of the lecture theatres.

*(30<sup>th</sup> December 2012 – Penang)*

As it turned out, the first year was a breeze for me, despite the crammed timetable. Having taken both mathematics, pure and applied, together with further mathematics under the Northern Joint Matriculation Board, the board with the most comprehensive curricula, and having excellent teachers to boot, meant I had covered most of the courses content for the Mech Eng first year. This course was an applied mathematics degree in essence with some extra stuff tagged on such as materials, business studies, electronics and other bits and pieces. No design. We were only introduced to drafting in the final year and then, not related to design. How could you do Mechanical Engineering without design? The answer was given to me after I graduated by the careers advisor chap on the campus. He told me that my degree was so constructed to fit the needs of the research the Mech. Eng. Department was undertaking at the time i.e., all analytical work. In short what he was saying was that to be considered a success on the course was to be accepted onto one of the many research projects undertaken by the Department. The rest of us were failures by that measure and worse, no use to industry. As a result, 40% of the Mech. Eng. graduates had careers on graduation other than in engineering including working for investment banks in the City of London. The rest of us had to have additional in-company training or take a more vocational related Masters Degree to make us useful and employable.

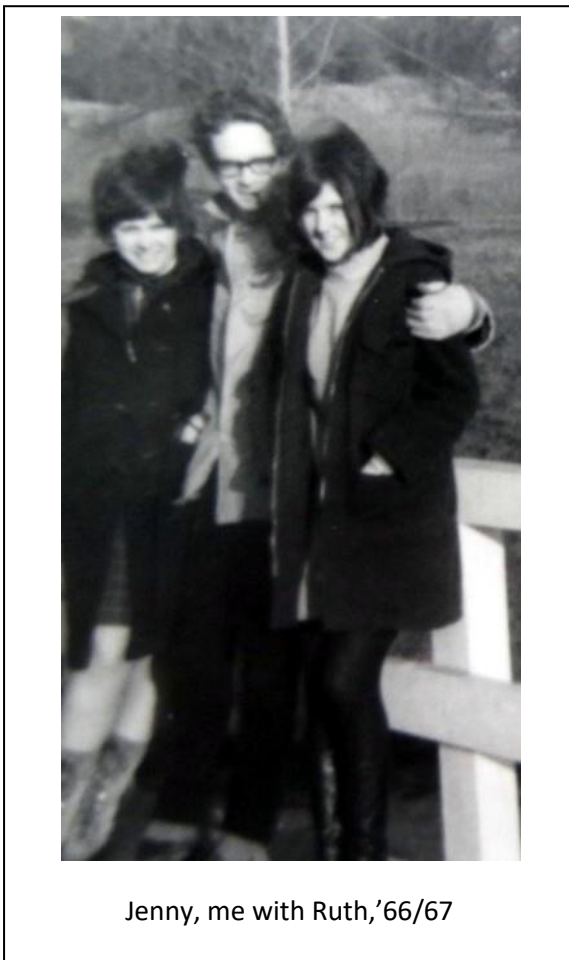
Thankfully this situation has changed somewhat today. The Institute of Mechanical Engineers and other engineering bodies forced change on the universities by insisting that design was a core subject in any engineering course which could be accredited to lead to Chartered Engineer status. And a good thing too. I wanted to be an engineer not a scientist, but that is all the course fitted me for. I remember Dad questioning me about the course content and he was a bit surprised by the omissions. He had studied for his High National Certificate at night school part time whilst holding down a management job. On comparing the two curricula, his was more advanced in some respects than mine. In the first job I had after graduation, stressing aircraft frames with the British Aircraft Corporation, I was using 'A' level mathematics to analyse aircraft space frames. Crazy. Anyway, little rant over. Going to university was more to do with stepping out into the wider world after all.

The start of term proper was about getting to know your fellow classmates and adjusting to the new lecture led method of teaching rather than the student-centred learning I was used to. With fifty students in the first year, all doing the same courses, you became a bit of a nonentity. I met Ruth for the first time. She was Jenny's roommate at Wydrington Hall. Jenny had been given her roommate's name before she arrived in Birmingham and with Ruth's surname being Nixon, we speculated that she may be American. Turned out she was a Manchurian studying French. Bit off the mark there! Unlike Manor House where like was roomed with like, at Wydrington the rule seemed to be 'different is best', rooming students

from differing courses. Jenny and Ruth became lifelong friends, sharing a room in Wydrington for the first two years of their courses. In the third year Ruth had a year in France, otherwise I am sure they would have been together for the third year as well. Amazing considering that other pairings in the hall ended within weeks after falling outs and personality clashes between roommates.

Then the bombshell. Jenny had found her bigger fish and I was dumped. Our relationship had been cooling since we arrived in Birmingham but there was no bust up. Just 'I am seeing someone else and you are history my boy' or something like that. I was gutted. I spent the next few weeks hoping that I might bump into Jenny on the campus one day, but it never happened, and the campus was such a small place too. Perhaps she saw me coming first and shot off in the opposite direction. Possibly. The night of the tragedy we were in her room at Wydrington Hall and, as was becoming my habit after the 10 pm kick out time from the hall, I walked the 4 miles back to Manor house, cursing all the way. By the time I got back to Manor House I was spent with frustration. But what to do? Nothing but go to bed, get up next day and get on with things.

As the Christmas vacation was approaching, I managed to get a job in Darwen as a temporary postman for the Christmas period. Most temporary postmen at Christmas were



Jenny, me with Ruth,'66/67

students but I am afraid I was not a dedicated deliverer. One street on my delivery round had a big dog that clearly hated all men carrying a postman's bag. To avoid getting my leg bitten off, I would drop all that street's letters and Christmas cards in the end house letter box and leg it around the corner. I never found out if the street's post ever arrived at the right addresses or if the addressees complained about the total lack of service they were getting from the post man at this festive time. But the money came in handy.

Since I left Darwen in late September, I had only written home to mum once. Snail mail was the only means of communication, but despite my lack of fidelity, Mum did not once upbraid me, a sarcastic comment yes, but no big drama. Christmas was without Jenny of course, just a normal family affair... but I couldn't wait to get back to Birmingham. Once the genie was out of the bottle, you

cannot get him back in again. I had left Darwen and it was going to stay left. One surprise was to find that my thick Lancashire accent was on the way out too. I paid a visit to the tuck shop opposite the Grammar School where Ray, Jim and I used to get a sandwich lunch in our sixth form days. The lady behind the counter made the comment that my way of speaking was becoming 'posh', another indication that I was morphing into another person.

When I got back to Birmingham and my new life, I resolved to put past romances behind me and get out more. For nine weeks I hadn't been to any social events at all but now I decided to get back in the saddle and search pastures new. Well, it didn't quite turn out that way at all. At the first student hop I went too in the Students Union on my return to Birmingham, I met a very nice young nurse. Nurses came from the local hospital to make up for the woeful lack of female students on the Birmingham University campus at such events as hops, an all-male hop would have been a very sorry affair. She had to leave relatively early to catch her bus home that evening but having seen her to the bus stop I decided to return to the hop, having made arrangements to meet my new friend at the Student Union the next day, Sunday, for our first proper date.

I hadn't been back in the dance hall for more than a couple minutes, when Jenny was at my elbow.

"Hi, I'm back!"

What!!!

"I saw you from the balcony with that girl and realised I had made a mistake."

So, what about lover boy?

"Oh, I just dumped him".

Poor chap!

"Not my type really, too much of a mummy's boy"

Did I think it over? Should I take Jenny back or not? Never crossed my tiny mind to question fate!!!! From that time on we were always together, meeting each other at lunch time in the Student Union, being together both Saturday and Sunday, back to the good old days during the sixth form in fact.

*(31<sup>st</sup> December 2012 – Penang)*

New Year's Eve. We will be leaving home for Ranu and Chris's place after lunch out at the local coffee shop and as tonight's traffic in Georgetown will be horrendous, we are to spend the night at their place.



## Extra Curricula Activities

During the second term at the university, I became involved with a chap called Roland. We met at one of the UN Soc. meetings and somehow got talking about his involvement in the local civic society scene. Roland was a postgraduate and was working as a researcher at the Edgbaston weather centre. Birmingham had several slums, places in the city which still had back to back housing built for the workers in Birmingham's heavy industry of the 1800s. These houses had not been very well built in the first place and had very poor environments, each row of houses sharing a common toilet at the end of the street, all still very Victorian and Dickensian. The local council was planning to clear these slums and re-house the occupants in multi storey tower blocks. The issue was that despite the awful conditions the people were living in, the community spirit in the streets of these areas would have been destroyed as the council intended to re-house the separate families in different tower blocks around the city and not street by street.

Being young and idealistic we decided to try and do something about it. The first step was to get support from the student body by forming a special interest society within the student union. I had recently read George Orwell's 1984, which had a big impression on me, the first novel I had ever read. I followed up by reading the rest of Orwell's works and found him to be against any regime that smacked of authoritarianism. To my mind Birmingham Council was behaving autocratically, not in the same league as Franco, Stalin or Hitler, granted, but autocratic, nevertheless. I suggested to Roland that we name our proposed society 'The 1984 Society'. We applied to the Student Council for the right to set up the society with me as the secretary which they promptly gave, and we were up and running with a small grant from the Union to help with the start-up of our venture.

What did we actually do? First, we gathered information on the slums and the people who lived in them. On our visits, I was always shocked by the conditions the families were living in, one room upstairs and one room downstairs was the norm with the house having no rear entrance as the back wall of one house was the back wall of another house. If there was a fire in the house between you and the front door there was no escape. Families all slept in the same single bedroom. No bathroom. I know, you are thinking moving to a brand-new council flat would have been much, much more preferable to living as they were now. But when we talked to the people who lived there, they didn't want to move to a concrete box in the sky and certainly not to be given any choice in the matter.

Our aim therefore became to get the council to move whole streets into the same tower blocks. We became, in effect, a sort of lobby group for the residents of one of the slum areas, Ladywood. To attract other students to the cause we held a couple of recruitment drives, putting up posters, handing out leaflets, etc. By summer at the end of the first year, we had gathered a handful of society members and held a series of meetings to decide on a



campaign strategy to persuade the Council of the error of its ways in re-housing the slum dwellers from Ladywood in different parts of the city. By now, exam time had arrived, and we had to postpone direct action until the following academic year, but at least we had got the ball rolling and done some basic groundwork by information gathering. The danger was that with inaction we would lose the students already recruited over the summer.

At the start of the second year, we had a stand for our new society at the Student Union fair held during fresher's week. The members we had lost over the summer vacation were replaced by new recruits from the fair. We then spent the term lobbying councillors, holding strategy meetings and paying visits to the council offices trying to represent the interests of the slum families. Even Dad got involved by transporting a load of leaflets for us from the printers on one of his visits to me in Birmingham. Of course, this had a heavy toll on my academic work as I was increasingly skipping lectures to do the society stuff. I guess I got a bit carried away with the rightness of our cause. Dad must have seen on his visit that I was neglecting my studies, but he didn't express his fears, he almost seemed pleased that I had a 'cause'.

Failing the Christmas exams that year was my wake-up call. I came to realise that I was putting at risk all the support that Mum and Dad had given me and were continuing to give me, to get an interesting life and become a free individual. I told Roland at the start of the

Our New Year's Eve night is off. Ranu and Chris have had a small fire in their apartment and so we are rescheduled to go visit them tomorrow, New Year's Day instead. Both of them are OK, thankfully.

second term that I would have to resign as the society secretary as my involvement was jeopardising my degree. He accepted my decision, of course, and he did carry on for a while with the society, but he was no organizer and the whole thing soon died a natural death. In the event, our concerns were proved justified when many years later, the re-housing of people into the new tower blocks was deemed a disaster, and today almost all the 1960s tower blocks have been demolished. The blocks had become vertical slums with the added complication of drugs and drug related crimes making a worse environment for the inhabitants than the slum areas they had replaced.

## United Nation International Camp, France

Being part of the UN Soc. gave me access to the Society's newsletter and pamphlets, it being not just a Birmingham Uni. based society but an international one. One advert attracted my attention, a three-week international summer camp in northern France during the summer vacation at the end of the first year. Sounded interesting. I applied to join the camp and was accepted. Game on.

But first I had to sit for the end of first year exams, which thankfully I passed thereby avoiding the need to do any dreaded re-sits. Also, I clinched the required vacation job working in an engineering company for six weeks. I say required because it was a condition of the engineering degree that all undergrads did at least six weeks in an industrial environment during each of the two summer vacations. I managed to get a job at Belliss and Morcom, an old engineering company that had originally made stationary steam engines and now manufactured large air compressors. Being totally green, I couldn't contribute much to the company's profits and so they put me in with the company's apprentices. The six weeks passed very quickly as I was moved from one department to another, not having time to get bored with the work given to me. The best was the fitting shop where most of the jobs were hands on, I really enjoyed my time there. Bellis had been well known for its triple expansion steam engines in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the refurbishment workshop when I was with the company, there was such an engine being worked on. It had been shipped over from India to be reconditioned and given a new lease of life.

The money came in handy too. Working in Birmingham meant that I didn't have to go back to Darwen, terrible I know, but once out of the place I didn't want to go back. I stayed on at Manor House, paying for the board and lodging from the weekly pay packet I was getting from Bellis, what remained I saved for the much-anticipated UN work camp in France. I did try to arrange to meet up with Jenny in France after the camp was over, but she had already set up a hitch-hiking holiday around France with her friend from Grammar school, Susan Hewell. Our hitch-hiking holiday together would have to wait for the second-year vacation.

I opted to fly to France from Stanstead on one of the very first budget airlines. They advertised in the Student Union cheap flights at a discounted rate for students. I left by coach from Birmingham Degbeth coach station in the early hours of one Saturday morning.



Douglas Dakota

Sat next to me on the coach was a very chatty girl, also on her way to the continent to take up an au pair job for the summer. The time flew by and I regretted not getting her contact info to follow up on our chance meeting, ships that pass in the night. Not having slept on the coach journey down to London, I was a little groggy by the time I got to the airport, but I soon sharpened up when I saw the

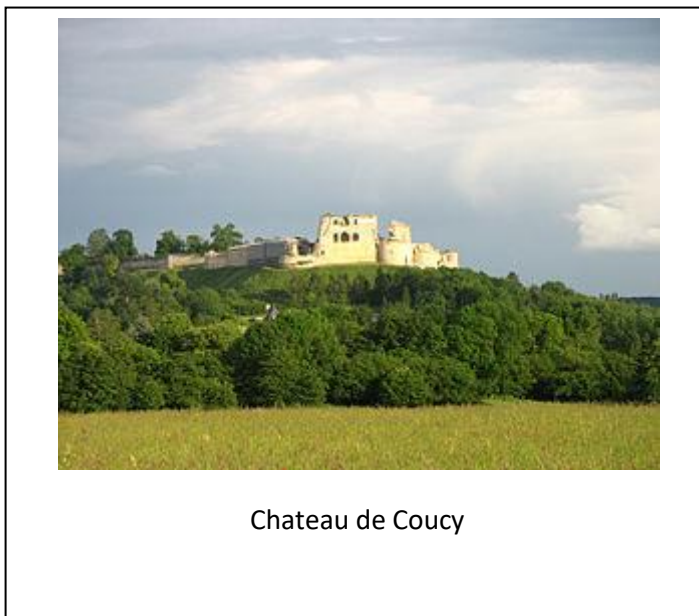
plane that was to take us, or perhaps not all the way, to Paris. A war time Dakota!!! No wonder the tickets were so cheap. This plane was ancient. It had a wheel at the back and not at the front, the walk up the isle to your seat was an uphill climb. To say I was I bit

apprehensive is a gross understatement, at take-off I was scared, at landing in France I was shitting myself. Pardon my French.

Having landed safely in France, I found my way to Gare du Nord railway station in Paris and bought a ticket to Anizy-le Chateau, the town nearest to where the UN camp was set up at Coucy. So far, so good, my schoolboy French seemed to be working, but then it let me down. I got on the train going in the right direction alright, but it didn't stop at the station I had booked to. It was the ticket inspector on the train that pointed out my error. He and the other passengers in the compartment considered my plight and suggested I got off this train at Soissons, a couple of stops before Anizy-le-Chateau and wait there for a local stopping train to finish the journey. OK, no problem, except that when I got off the train at Soissons it was already gone 10 pm and the next local train to Anizy-le-Chateau wasn't till the early hours the next morning. I spent the time sitting in the station waiting room with a tramp, swapping Gaulouse cigarettes for English No. 5's and practising my French. He was a very nice chap.

*(4<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang)*

Oops. I have let slip that I used to smoke. I took to smoking a pipe soon after I got to university, I have no idea why. I used to buy aromatic tobacco. Smoking was very common before the 1980s after which it turned into a very dangerous and antisocial habit. I



eventually regressed to smoking cigarettes during the second year at Birmingham and didn't stop smoking altogether until 1983 when we moved to Singapore.

Anizy-le-Chateau is only a couple of stops up the line from Soissons and when I got off the stopper train it was still dark. What to do? Seven miles from Coucy, no hotel in sight and only the police station open for business. I did contemplate going and asking the local gendarmerie if I could spend the night in one of

the police station cells but decided it might be a better idea if I set off walking to Coucy. I had a map, so what's the problem? The fact that it was a country road I was to walk, and it was a pitch-black night, that was the problem. But no matter, I set off. Then it started to rain. I must have walked for a good hour in the rain before taking shelter in the forest I was walking through. Note for the future, pine trees do not offer much, if any, shelter from persistent rain. I resumed the trudge completely drenched from top to toe by now, in spite of the plastic mac I was wearing, and with squelchy shoes to boot.

I arrived in Coucy before the inhabitants were up and about and finding shelter at last in a bus stop, I promptly fell asleep. I woke with a start to find a group of young children who were waiting for their school bus looking at me very suspiciously. I think I must have looked and smelt like a tramp. I had been awake for well over 48 hours by that time without even a face wash and my clothes were beginning to steam in the morning sunshine. Time for breakfast. I found an open cafe and sat down to croissants and coffee under the not so welcoming eyes of the men at the bar. With the tone of their voices and the dirty looks they were giving me I felt like an alien intruder. From the snatches of words, I could understand, it was something to do with the war and me being either obviously an Englishman or possibly German. I didn't linger over a second cup of coffee, as much as I was desperate too, I beat a hasty retreat.

The barman did, however, kindly help me by pointing out the road up to the castle where the UN camp had been set up. Chateau de Coucy's medieval castle, which dominates the town's skyline, had been deliberately blown up by the retreating German army during the 1914/18 war. This act of vandalism, as it was seen at the time by the rest of Europe, led to the castle being declared a "memorial to barbarity" and after being tidied up, left as a ruin as a testament to that "barbarity". This I didn't learn until much later and could have explained the animosity I met in the bar that morning. The camp was indeed a 'camp' with dormitory tents set up in the castle grounds but there wasn't much in the way of facilities in the castle, it being a ruin and all. My fellow campers were indeed multinational, French, Moroccan, Norwegian, Czechoslovakian, English, and German to name those I remember,



UN work mates, with me far right with my back to the camera.



about 15 of us in all. The location of the camp had been a mistake and any work we had come to do would have taken second place to looking after ourselves. On the third night the local priest arranged for us to take up our beds and move into the village's primary school. What a relief, toilets, showers and a proper kitchen. We set up our camp beds in the classrooms which were warm and best of all, dry.

So, why were we all here in this small out of the way village in the north of France, apart from promoting good international relations between the young people of the planet? Cut down trees was the answer. For the next three weeks we tramped up to the castle each day and slowly made our way around the outside of the castle walls, clearing the trees and undergrowth, beginning at the castle gate house. Good team building stuff. As you can see in the photograph, the work we started has survived as you can still see the castle walls from the road below. Towards the end of the third week our work was stopped. Someone had forgotten to mention that there was a possibility of unexploded bombs and shells from the Second World War being still embedded in the castle mound.

*(5<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang (Morning))*

The three weeks in the camp passed very quickly. It was a great joy for me to be with young guys and gals from different parts of Europe and North Africa. The banter during the working day, chats over meals and laughing conversations over bottles of cheapo French wine in the local bars, is to be highly recommended as a way to spend a European summer. I did stay in touch with a young woman from Norway for a while. She was training to be a doctor, but communications were not as now and with us all being students and somewhat prone to moving our home base on a regular basis, we lost contact with each other very quickly. Who knows, if the internet had been available back then, I would still have contact with loads more people from around our planet.

The two guys from Morocco invited me to go visit them but how to? No money to do. The best I could do was to set off hitch hiking with one of my new friends after the camp broke up. I had lent £10 to a visiting UN Soc. organizer from Oxford University after he run out of cash which left me with just enough money to spend a week or so travelling if I hitch-hiked and stayed in youth hostelling accommodation. I don't remember why he had run out of cash and in truth, I didn't expect to see my £10 again but, fair play, a month later he sent me the money with a very nice letter of thanks.

Soissons, Verdun, Reims and then home, that was the week I planned. Nothing was pre-booked, of course. Hitch hiking is rather a hit and miss way of travelling the highways and byways, you can never predict where exactly you will end up each evening. Verdun interested me because of the horrific things that the First World War had brought to the town, the area around Verdun having seen some of the bitterest fighting on the whole of the western front during that war. Walking over the shattered defences and mangled gun emplacements was, for me, very moving. In the hostel where I was staying, I met two

German lads. They asked if they could visit the war sites with me as they felt the animosity of the locals, to the extent that they communicated with each other in English the whole time they were in the area. Being with a real Englishman would add to their cover and, perhaps, send a reconciliatory message if their innocent rouse was discovered. After all, it was also our grandfathers who had been knocking seven bells out of one another during that same war and, not only that, our own fathers' generation had only stopped shooting at one another for a second time twenty years before. They too were interested in trying to understand what had happened here, the madness of it all. They also had a car. Bonus.

After Verdun, Reims. By now I was running very low on funds and was practically living on bread, cheese and water. After a day visiting the tourist sites in Reims, the Cathedral etc, I spent the evening walking the streets of the city. I felt the anguish of the tramp, walking past brightly lit, expensive restaurants and cafes, seeing the happy customers tucking into plates piled with delicious looking food. Money no enough. Walk on by. Stay hungry. A prostitute approached me to offer her services but moved off real quick when she realised I was so young and English. Down and out in France. One night was enough for me. Orwell must have had real staying power not to abandon his project after his first night on the street.

And so back to Blighty. I plotted a route to Calais that would take me through the battle fields of the northern France; Arras and the Somme. After a couple of short hitches, I was picked up by a refrigerated lorry heading to Calais. After chucking my rucksack into the freezer at the back of the truck, I climbed up into the cab for what became the most enjoyable hitch of the whole trip. The driver was a chap in his middle age and despite his non-English and my broken French we sort of hit it off. When we stopped for a lunch break, he shared his tucker with me as I had only limited supplies, being very broke by this stage of my trip. Inevitably we got to talking about the war years. He had joined the French Resistance towards the end of the last lot and on the way to Calais we took a little detour for him to show me the wood where he had hidden from the German soldiers with his compatriots. The English never having been 'occupied' by a foreign power since 1066, cannot know what it is to feel the presence of aliens running your land. My new friend gave me a sense of how the occupation must have aroused the passions of even the mildest of French men and women.

After being five weeks away, the neat little houses I saw from the train window between Dover and Waterloo looked really quaint, with their little neatly fenced gardens. Very Hobbit like. I saw England as different from Europe that day. Across London to Euston station and the train north to Manchester and home to Darwen. Having done the math at the train ticket counter, I calculated I would arrive at the door of 105 with 3 pence in my pocket if I took the train, as opposed to taking an overnight coach, as I did on the outward leg of my European adventure. It would be a close-run thing but tired, hungry and wanting

Granddad Stories.

my own bed, I opted for the train and did indeed arrive back home with just 3 old pennies in my pocket.

*(5<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang (Afternoon))*

What with six weeks working in Birmingham and four weeks on the continent, the summer vacation was all but over. Jenny, who had been travelling in France with her friend Susan from Grammar School days, hadn't had such an enjoyable time. She and Susan had somehow grown apart over the year they had been separated. There had been some sort of friction between the two of them on the trip which had developed into a further cooling of their relationship.

## University Year Two

As soon as I was back in Darwen, I wanted out. On the pretext of going back to Birmingham early to study for the coming year, I was soon southward bound again. Being in the Manor House early with only a few other inmates was brilliant. Very peaceful. The empty university campus was also sort of calming. Of course, I did no studying. Just bummed around, meeting up with Roland and getting things ready for our '1984 Soc.' recruitment stall at the up and coming Fresher's Union Fair, printing leaflets, that sort of thing. I loved these preterm days. Freedom.

Once the term was underway Jenny and I enjoyed the social side of university life together as before. Almost every day, I would join her and her friends in the Student Union common room for lunch. Jenny's friends, Lyn, Liz, Maggie et al, became my friends too as I spent more time with Jenny and her mates than I ever did with any other group of students, including my own Mech. Eng. colleagues.

The second year at university was going to be a bit tougher academically than the first and before I realized it, I was failing the Christmas exams. In a group, post-exam meeting with the Head of the Department, Prof Tobias, we miscreants were asked individually why we had performed so badly. Eric and Roger had also disgraced themselves as had around 10 others. By calling us to account individually and in front of our peers, this was clearly an attempt to get us to toe the line by causing us maximum embarrassment. Having the meeting on his turf, in his office, was also part of his intended intimidation.

Well, I wasn't going to be cowed. When it came to my turn to face the inquisitor, I fired back that I had come to university to do more than just attend lectures and get a degree. I wanted to take maximum benefit from this one-off opportunity to broaden my horizons. "OK" was the response, "...then go and join a Student Union Society". To which I responded by saying I didn't want to follow, I wanted to lead. By this time the other students present had their heads down, awaiting the explosion from the other side of the big desk. But before it came, I went on to then explain the '1984' Society I had help set up and its objectives. That trumped the game. By the time I had finished my little diatribe, we students



had gained ground in this battle of wills. The other tutors present were shuffling in their chairs. Encouraged by my fight back, the remaining students to face the “So what is your excuse then?” question, responded with a bit more gusto than those before I had spoken.

After the meeting was over and we had left the torture chamber, the other guys were patting me on the back and laughing out loud, a ruckus that must have been heard from inside Tobias’s office. I thought “Hung for a sheep as a lamb”. What the heck. To celebrate our ‘victory’, however hollow it might have been, the lads took me off ten pin bowling, two fingers up to the establishment that had tried to brow beat us. Bowling 1, textbooks 0.

*(6<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang)*

The Prof. was right of course, continue as I had been doing and I would be leaving the university in the summer with nothing to show for the previous two years ‘work’. But in some ways, that meeting had called me out: I don’t like to be led, must lead: I don’t like being told what to do, not good at taking orders. The rest of my time at university wasn’t going to be as interesting as the first half of my stay there, though.

The only memorable happening in the second uni. year before the summer vacation was the Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington concert in the Birmingham Odeon in New Street. I had forked out a fair bit of cash for two tickets, but Jenny said she was too busy studying to spare the time to go. But it’s Ella Fitzgerald! Still no. It was a great concert and I had the only empty seat in the house, next to me. I had hoped that Jenny would change her mind at the last minute, but no show. Pity really. I could have touted the ticket at the theatre door. She did appear after the show, catching me up in the street as I walked to the bus stop and apologised profusely. But all too late, sorry no cure.

Towards the end of the summer term, I was seriously contemplating leaving the shelter of the Manor House and getting myself a flat. Only half a thought really. Hall was a bit too comfortable and suffocating. I asked Jim to join me in looking for a flat to share but he demurred saying he would prefer to be in the Hall for the final year if he could manage to get a single room. Then one day in the after-dinner coffee get together in the Manor House library, Richard Grant approached me and suggested he and I rent a flat somewhere together for the final year. He thought we would make good roommates. Richard, I knew only vaguely, he was a second-year economics student and therefore not in my immediate circle of friends in the hall. Most of the students messed with others from the same course, forming study groups etc. Bit of a surprise then, but I said, OK, why not? He would be away home in Nottingham for the vacation and said he would leave it to me to find somewhere suitable. All very trusting, I thought.

Taking only one television night each week, Thursday night to watch the Top of the Pops and the Man from Uncle, paid off and I passed all the summer exams, much to my relief. But finding an engineering job for the required six weeks over the summer proved problematic. I did get offered a four-week job in a ship building yard in the Netherlands but

when I asked my tutor if that would be acceptable, he said no. Lord knows why. In the end I had to ask Dad if any of his contacts in Darwen or Blackburn could give me a job. In fact, I asked Dad to find my friend Patel a job too and good old Dad came up trumps. It did mean living in Darwen over some of the summer months, but that couldn't be helped, I needed that job.

## Continental Hitch Hiking with Jenny

For a summer holiday I asked Jenny if she would come hitch hiking with me on the continent. At first, she was reluctant, her father being a bit of a stickler for correct behaviour and she was a bit loathed to ask his permission. What would the neighbours think of his daughter swanning off around Europe with a boy, never mind the people in the church. Fred, Jenny's dad, was a church warden, member of the cricket club and 'known' in Bromley Cross if not all over Turton. With this rejection I asked Patel if he would like to join me on the trip I was planning. OK, love to. Mistake. Jenny eventually broached the subject with her Dad, and he said he didn't mind. I am sure he did but faced with Jenny in determined mood, my guess is he backed down. I had to tell Patel of Jenny's change of mind, but he took it in good part. Later in the summer when I was at Nottingham University attending a 'how to get a job on graduation' weekend, I took the opportunity to visit Patel and his family in Leicester.

Living at home and having a job locally meant I could at least keep more of the wages for the planned holiday. Did I offer to contribute to the 105 household expenses? Probably not, I am ashamed to say. Jenny and I planned to cross the channel from Dover to Ostend and then head south west through Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, heading towards Switzerland.

Before the end of the summer term and during a Rag Week charity fund raising event, two of my friends died in a tragic accident. Kevin, Jim's roommate from the first year in Manor House and another friend of ours, Patrick, were attempting the three peaks run. The record they set out to break was the ascent and decent of the three highest peaks in Wales, England and Scotland; Snowdon, Scafell Pike and Ben Nevis respectively one after the other. They made the top of Snowdon and back, but something went terribly wrong on Scafell Pike. This was June, the warmest time of the year and yet both died of exposure when a mist unexpectedly descended on the mountain. With no mobile communications back then, the alarm was only raised after the pair failed to appear at the appointed time on the downward side of the mountain. Their support team then drove back round to the starting point, thinking the runners had abandoned the attempt and returned to where they had been dropped off. But no, they were not there either. By now it was dark, and any rescue would have to wait until the next day, by which time both lads had died. Jim, Kevin, Patrick and I used to enjoy gas fire toasted bread of an evening in their room. A very tragic loss.

*(7<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang (Morning))*

Ruth had gotten herself an au pair job in Switzerland for the summer and the plan was for Jenny and me to hitchhike and youth hostel our way to Geneva to pay her a visit. We took the overnight ferry from Dover to Ostend, thinking we would be able to save the cost of one night's accommodation by sleeping on the boat. Wrong. The ferry was packed to overflowing and by the time we boarded all the inside seats were taken up. We spent a very cold night curled up on deckchairs on the outer deck watching the sea mist drift by. By the time we disembarked the ferry and boarded the Ostend – Brussels train, we were not a little tired. As nothing was open in Brussels when we arrived, it being very early in the morning, we found a park bench and made the best of it until the cafes opened and we could get some breakfast. Not an auspicious start to our continental adventure, but we were quite happy facing these things together. No trauma, no drama. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that on this sort of trip you had to carry all the cash you might need to spend with you as traveller's cheques. No VISA or ATM's back then. They wouldn't appear for another 20+ years. If you ran out of money, you were in big trouble, walking and begging becoming the only way to get back home. This makes you very careful with how much and on what you spend your limited resources, making every penny count.

After a one-night stay in Brussels, we hit the road and headed towards Luxemburg via Liege. Hitching in Europe wasn't uncommon then. The strategy was to walk or bus yourself to the outskirts of the town and stand on the main road going in the direction of your intended destination, hopefully on your own and not in a queue of other hitcher hikers. There was an unwritten rule of deferring to the hitchers who were there before you. When it is your turn,



you stood at the side of the road, away from junctions and in a convenient place for a driver to stop, with your arm extended and your thumb up turned, an internationally recognised signal that you wanted a lift. It is best to avoid long straight stretches of road as a driver is less inclined to stop from full throttle. Also never hitch on a curve where it is dangerous for the driver to stop. How long you waited before someone took pity on you depended very much on how you looked. Forget hitching in the rain, nobody

picks up bedraggled, scruffy looking young people no matter how pathetic and in need they might look.

Jenny and I must have appeared very English, what with me in a sports jacket and flannels and Jenny in a dress. But we looked smart and it worked. When first the car door was opened, the driver almost always knew our nationality. We also had a strategy for getting into and out of the car; I would always be first in and last out. You never know if some kind of nutter was picking us up for some nefarious delight he had in mind.

From Luxembourg we cut south into France. We had been waiting to hitch a lift on the city limits for nearly 2 hours and were beginning to think we would have to stay another night in Luxembourg. As we had left the hostel under a bit of a cloud, we didn't really fancy going back there. Youth hostels can ask you to perform some small task to help run the place thereby helping to keep the hostel running costs to a minimum. Jenny was asked to clean the toilets, which she point blank refused to do. After a short, sharp exchange she agreed to sweep the hostel yard after which we left.

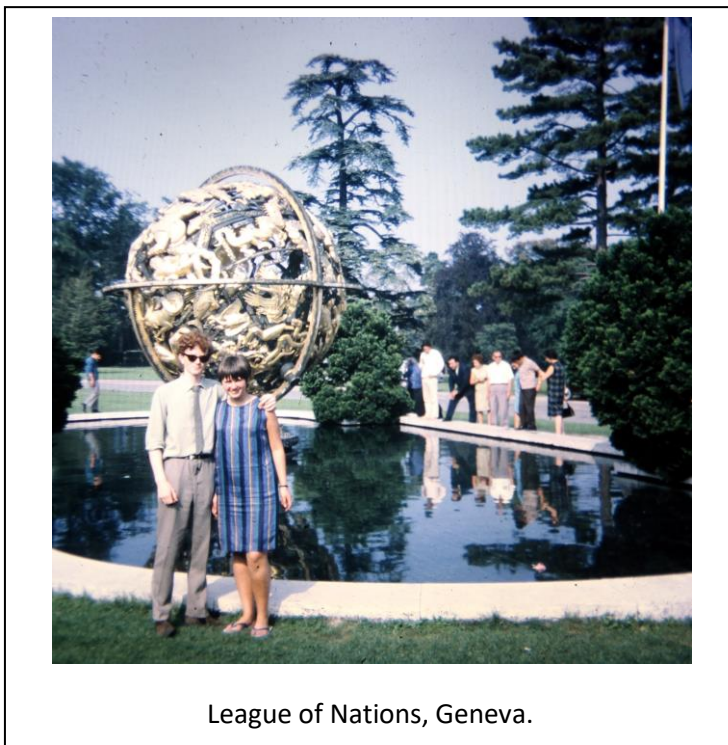
Then, miracles of miracles, a guy stopped and offered us a lift to Lucerne in Switzerland. 300 miles in one hitch. Result. We couldn't believe our luck. Our new friend also spoke perfect English which made the journey a treat and the time just whizzed by. Once in Lucerne, he dropped us at the youth hostel which was high above the town, surrounded by the greenest of green fields. The accommodation was housed in a chocolate box picturesque, all wooden Swiss chalet. And to cap it all there were only two other residents, a young French girl with her new German boyfriend. This had definitely been our day.

*(7<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang (Afternoon))*

Lucerne or Lausanne? Writing your own history from memory with no notes is not at all that straightforward. The further back in time you go, the more unreliable your memories can be, particularly since my partner in crime, Jenny your grandma, is no longer with me to collaborate on the venture. So, I am left to research the internet to try and corroborate memories with the facts on the ground, such as place names, geographic features etc. Between Lucerne and Lausanne, after several hours on the net, I am still unsure as to where we had the lift to on that day 45 years ago. I have tried to use a memory of the shoreline we saw from a rowboat in the lake to get a fix on the place, but to no avail. A precious memory that one. The shorelines in both towns have changed so much as to be unrecognizable to me now. But there you go, just to show I am really trying my best to get the tale right. Lots of memories are being left out if they slow the 'story' or my memories are too confused. OK, let's say it was Lucerne until I find out otherwise

Since we had arrived in Switzerland a little ahead of schedule, having had such a 'super hitch', we decided to enjoy the company of our new friends at the hostel and stay in this

wonderful place as long as we could. We took to walking around the town in bare feet, hippy like. Four young people whose fathers had been at war only twenty years ago must say something about the new vision of Europe, a vision made real by the European Union. In 1965 the Merger Treaty was signed in Brussels to come into force on 1 July 1967 which eventually led to the expanded European Union. This was 1967, not that we knew what was being acted out in Brussels that year, all without the UK, of course. But then we English did give Europe and the world our language. Our new friends could not speak to each other in their own languages and used English all the time they were together. This was the first time I can remember non-native English speakers using English as a common language to communicate.



All good things do eventually have come to an end but usually lead to another good time. We left Lucerne heading off to Geneva and our rendezvous with Ruth. The chap who gave us a lift to Geneva took us to lunch in a rather posh restaurant overlooking Lake Geneva. He said he would like to introduce us to something very Swiss. This was our first introduction to fondue. We were a bit apprehensive at first when we saw the prices on the menu, as our share of the bill would have blown more than a couple of

day's budget in one sitting. But he insisted on treating us, so we said, "OK then", sat back and enjoyed. Another brilliant hitch.

Ruth was staying with a family out in the Geneva suburbs and Jenny was able to stay at the house whilst I had to rough it in the Geneva Youth Hostel. Being in the city centre, the hostel was not half as pleasant a place to stay as the other hostels we had stayed in so far. Besides that, I was getting to like the world of two and was real glad to be on the road again after a couple of nights bunking on my own.

*(10<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang (Morning))*

We headed to Paris from Geneva but it took us a couple of lifts to get over the border into France. Hitching lifts is perhaps the most random way of getting from A to B imaginable, you can never be total sure where you will be spending the night. The youth hostelling book had all the hostels listed and if it was getting late in the day, 4pm or so, we would opt to



stay in a town if it had a hostel. Hiking in the evening and certainly after dark is not a good idea. And this had been bit of a trying day. The second lift we got was with a middle-aged chap who clearly had some sort of hang up with the English. He spent the whole journey berating the English for some unspecified wrong they had done him and his country, all the time speaking in rapid fire French. Lords knows what he was going on about. Jenny and I were both glad to get out of the car ASAP since the guy seemed to be getting himself worked up into a right tizzy and we escaped into the first town with a hostel, performing our car exit strategy, just in case he drove off with Jenny still in the car.



Citroen 2 CV

Another great night stopover, with a town festival thrown in for our entertainment. Early next morning saw us expectantly at the roadside again, thumbs upturned, heading for Paris. The first lift, Paris all the way. Another top notch hitch. The transport was a Citroen 2CV with a young English-speaking couple on their way home from a Swiss holiday. It was going to be a bit of a squeeze, four people and all our travel bags, but they insisted, and we had our second-long distance drive of our holiday in

lovely company. After the 250 mile lift, they dropped us in the early evening at the Porte D'Orleans on the periphery of Paris.

Since we were spending well within our budget for the trip, we decided to treat ourselves and stay in a real hotel for our three nights in Paris. Sometimes I wonder what we were thinking of at the time but having found a hotel in the inner-city area we could afford, we booked ourselves into two rooms. The owner must have thought, "These English, they are crazy, crazy!" Who was to know that we had spent the night together in a hotel, miles from home as we were, never mind in a different country? But that is what we didn't do. Jenny worried that the hotel owner might get the wrong idea. But he is French!!!! No matter, it is not right. So that was it. I literally only slept in my room. Great fresh croissants for breakfast.

Paris was Paris.... just literally, wonder full. Cafes on the south bank to sit outside, art galleries to visit, parks to sit in with our French bread stick and cheese lunches, the Seine to walk by in the evenings. Totally romantic, a brilliant way to end a brilliant two weeks together.

(10<sup>th</sup> January 2013 – Penang (Afternoon))

## University Final Year



22 Wheatsheaf Road, Smethwick.

Back to Darwen and back to reality. For what was left of the summer vacation, Dad came up trumps again and found me another job. He pulled a few strings and persuaded his uncle Charlie to give me a labouring job at the crane manufacturing works where he was foreman, down Printers Lane in Bromley Cross. Very convenient for visiting Jenny at her parents' place, 122 Queens Avenue, in the evening before catching the bus home back over the moor to Darwen.

And so, with a bit of extra cash in my Post Office savings book, I took off early back to Birmingham to look for a flat for Richard and myself to share. It didn't take me long before I found a ground floor flat in a converted Victorian house at 22 Wheatsheaf Road, Smethwick. Having squared it with Richard by telephone, and with the help of Mum and Dad and his newly acquired Land Rover, I moved in. In the event, it was an excellent choice of a location. Richard's girlfriend and future wife, Jackie, was moving into a flat just around the corner.

The new Land Rover was the bonus Dad received from Ritherdons on the previous year's company trading profits. After driving around in a 20-year-old Wolesley, this was a driving revelation. It went in the direction you wanted it to go precisely and not just in a general sense. With four wheeled drive, two gear boxes and a canvas top, this wasn't so much a car as a utility vehicle, a bit like the Hummer of



1967 Land Rover

the early 2000's, a road going version of a military vehicle although Land Rover didn't make as many concessions to comfort as the road going Hummer did. The first I knew of Dad's new wheels was around Easter time when he and Mum paid me a visit at the Manor House.



Pulled up in the Manor's drive was this gleaming green, brand new Landy and when Dad went to open its door, I was dumb struck. "Can I have a drive?" ..... first words to splutter.



Typical air con Room with mainframe computer.

Richard and I got on really, really well. We had to. The flat had a single room with two single beds plus a small separate kitchen and a tiny bathroom. A bonus was the garden at the back of the house which we had access to via French windows. The flat was a little bit grotty, but at what we could afford, it had to do. To the University campus was a walkable distance, being only two miles or so. I bought a bicycle which

Richard and I would share but it wasn't long before it was stolen, and we were back to shanks' pony. Of course, Richard being on an 'arts course' his final year was mostly guided self-study, whereas mine was the same timetable driven trudge.

The final year project I chose from the options available turned out to be rather too ambitious, not that either I or my tutor could have known that at the time. It involved creating a computer model of how a series of capacitors would discharge when used to fire a laser and verifying the model by running tests on a laser rig in the laboratory. The department was researching how lasers could be used to cut metal sheets, very new technology at the time and not commonly used in industry until 15 years later. Attempting this project today with current computer technology would be 10% on computer modelling and 90% on physically testing the model. But back in 1967, the man in the street was hardly aware of computers at all, all of which were mainframe machines and almost all living in universities and research establishments. Birmingham University had an IBM System/360's with hardware and operating systems which were designed for processing batch jobs using card or tape input devices.

The whole topic of lasers was new to me as was the computer programming to create the virtual model of the capacitors discharge profile. The only thing I knew anything about was the underlying math model using the Runga Kutta Method to solve the multiple simultaneous equations, mathematics being what the engineering course was mainly about, grumble, grumble. FORTRAN was the



Computer input punched card.

IBM created programming language for this sort of analytical work and I set about learning from scratch, from books, on my own, how to program a computer. My project tutor had no understanding of what was involved or the time it would take to learn FORTRAN and then try to type the program using the input technology available to me, the punched card.

I spent hundreds of hours over the next three terms developing the code, punching out the cards, one card per line of code. Once submitted to the air-conditioned room to have the programme run on the beast inside, the wait for the resulting reams of paper covered in numbers from which to graph the capacitors discharge profile to appear, could take as long as three days. Well, that is if the program hadn't crashed when I would have to go through the code line by line to debug the thing. Now I know I am dyslexic. Back then I didn't, dyslexia wasn't even recognised, but now I realise that was the reason it was such a struggle for me to get the code to work. Boy, had I chosen the wrong project.



By write up time, I had barely got the computer model to work leaving no time to test the results. But, years later, I did have the satisfaction of knowing that the code was used by a fellow student, Brian Bakewell. He was recruited on graduation to the laser research team and used the code in my project report (which I still have a copy of) to good effect to help design the banks of capacitors used to trigger the lasers. A result of sorts.

This final year of university was not all work, work, work. This was a year of coming of age parties and marriages. Me, being one of the eldest on the Mech. Eng. course and the 11th of October being on a Wednesday in 1967, the lads treated me to a couple of halves of bitter shandy in the Union bar at lunch time. What I didn't realize until I stood up was that they had laced my drink with vodka. I was quite tipsy and very merry with it. When I have a little too much to drink, I get very chatty and friendly. This I found out on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Jenny came to my rescue and plied me with coffee before we went back to her place for me to sleep it off in the afternoon. Come evening time, Jenny and I wandered back to Wheatsheaf Road and surprise, surprise all my mates were there with Richard and Jackie. A party ensued together with fireworks we let off in the garden. A brilliant end to a brilliant day.

*(11- January 2013 – Penang)*

## A Disappointment

With the end of university life looming, it was time to think of paid employment after graduation. I had visited many recruitment fairs, referred to as 'Milk Rounds', at the University's careers office and had set up a few second interviews at engineering companies for the Easter vacation. Dad was really very good to me, always ready to lend me the Land Rover whenever I asked him for it. That Easter vacation I toured Bath, Portland, and Southampton visiting two Royal Naval establishments and an electrical engineering company. Surprisingly I was offered a job at all three. But the Royal Corp of Naval Constructors was the position I wanted the most and with high expectations of getting the 2.1 class of degree required, I foolishly turned down the other two. Big mistake. Note to self for the future, always have a backup plan 'B'.

After the final exams were over and before the results day, Jenny and I found employment at the Rackhams Departmental store in Birmingham city centre. I was put in the men's department selling socks, mostly it seemed to little old ladies. I became, for a short while, an expert on socks. The day the exam results were posted must count as one of the most disappointing days of my life ever. My name was under the 2.2 class of degree. I wasn't going to design war ships after all.

## Memory Litter Bin.

1. **Maggie's Wedding** - On some weekends Liz's boyfriend, Geoff, would bunk up with us in Wheatsheaf Road on his visits to Birmingham to see Liz. He was a pilot officer in the RAF and had wheels, a Citroen Traction Avant, French for "front wheel drive", not common in those days. Maggie who was training to be a doctor at the Queen Elizabeth Teaching Hospital attached to the university was to marry John, a post grad on the production engineering masters. The wedding was to be in Devon, somewhere near Tiverton, at the end of the spring term. Maggie invited Jenny, Liz,





Citroen Traction Avant

Lyn and me to attend, Ruth being away on her year in France. Poor Geoff became our nominated driver for the trip. We set off in the Citroen on Saturday morning from Birmingham heading south on the 'A' roads (no motorways remember), a trip of around 150 miles, hoping to arrive at Maggie's place in time to get changed into our posh frocks and witness the church ceremony

scheduled for 2pm that afternoon. By 12 o'clock it was becoming pretty evident we were only just going to make it to the church on time. So as not to embarrass poor Maggie by arrived a dishevelled mess, we stopped the car a few miles from Tiverton and piled into a field to change into our best togs. Just as well. We arrived at the church doors at the same time as Maggie. A speedy drive by Geoff on the last leg of the journey saved the day.

Having partied to the early hours of the morning, we lads crashed out in the garden greenhouse on improvised beds, to be awoken real early by a dawn chorus of blackbirds and thrushes. They can seem very loud when you have a hangover. The plan was for Jenny and me to go with Liz and Geoff back to Croydon in the Citroen before returning to Birmingham on the Monday. Lyn was going north, back to her parent's place in Worcester. We didn't particularly leave early that Sunday or indeed rush to get to Croydon and so the onset of dusk saw us still on the road and quite a ways from London. That was the first we knew the car's dynamo had packed up.

After plodding on for a little while longer with the head lamps getting ever dimmer, it was clear that we were not going to make it. The car battery would be well flattened long before we got to Croydon. After a short discussion we decided to try and make it to Geoff's RAF base at Tangmere where we hoped the station commander would take pity on us and give us a bed for the night. Never try driving at night on side lights. It was slow going. By the time we arrived at the camp gates, the place was in total darkness, everyone being abed. No matter, we would ask permission to stay post event, in the morning.

I was awoken in the morning by a batman and offered cup of tea. Poor Geoff awoke to a carpeting from his commanding officer. But all's well that ends well and after a ticking off, we enjoyed Her Majesties hospitality with a slap-up breakfast. We hadn't eaten much the day before and we were all not a little hungry.

## Notes

## Notes