

A BASINGSTOKE CHILDHOOD

1946 to 1965



David Martin Young

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*Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer
you in the days of your youth.*

The Bible, Ecclesiastes 11

*We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our
exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the
place for the first time.*

- T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

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ISBN 978-1-80068-586-4

cover photo: The Loddon, Old Basing

Printed at the University of Chester

2022

BIRTH

It was impossible that I should be born.

In August 1940 my mother and her friend Lena (later Mrs Smallbone) wanted to go into St Michael's Church in Basingstoke, but they felt they ought not to as they were not wearing hats. During the time they would have been inside, German bombs fell and damaged the church. Their lack of headgear quite possibly saved their lives.

But my mother had an infantile womb and was unable to bear children. However, she persisted in prayer, and in trailing from doctor to doctor, till she found one who was willing and able to help. And so on the evening of Wednesday, Christmas Day 1946, at our home at 295 Worting Road, Basingstoke, I came into the world, attended by two doctors in dinner dress to a background of the Salvation Army outside in the road playing *Silent Night* - the only child of Dinsdale Thomas Young and Isobel Kate Young.



In offering the story of my first eighteen years, I believe I am giving an evocation of a middle-class childhood and youth that was subject to influences from family, school and church which were fairly typical of the period. It is in many ways a way of life that has passed away, but I hope that its record will resonate with some who might read it. You may even know some of the people whom you will meet in its pages!



295, Worting (now Old Worting) Road

You may wonder why a photograph of Basing is on the front of a book about a Basingstoke childhood. That is easily answered. My mother moved from London to Basingstoke when she was 2, in 1913, and used to speak fondly of her strolls with friends along Swing Swang Lane in her youth; my grandparents, Philip and Maud Young, moved to Upper Mill Farm, London Road, Old Basing, in 1930, before moving to Basingstoke, and the mortal part of them lies buried in the cemetery opposite St Mary's Church, Basing, where I occasionally go to tend their grave; as a boy I used to ride my bike to the path by the Loddon, with a friend, and catch minnows in jam jars; in my teens I walked there with Martine, who might well be called my 'first love'; and in my 70s I have walked by the Loddon with my wife and enjoyed a visit to Bartons Mill.

I like to give due acknowledgement for the source of photographs I use in anything I write. Most of the ones in this booklet are mine; some have been posted on Facebook, and I understand that anything posted on Facebook thereby enters the public domain. I would still like to acknowledge the rightful owner if I know the name, and if you find one of your photographs here without due acknowledgement, please let me know and I'll do my best to rectify the omission.

There are people named in these pages with whom I would be pleased to renew contact, and there is a note at the end of how you may contact me if you wish to. If you know, or are, one of the named people and would like to renew contact, please get in touch. I have tried – as far as possible without distorting the story – only to name people of whom I have nice things to say.

And a word on locations. Some that I mention may have disappeared or been renamed. Thus, the identification of some may be uncertain from what I have written, but a little further searching should make them clearer if needed.

THE YEARS OF CHILDHOOD

During the winter in which I was born, 1946-7, Britain was paralysed by the coldest weather since 1881, *the longest and coldest winter that most of them could remember, the kind of winter depicted on Christmas cards*¹. Such was the backdrop to my earliest days.

We pass our lives on septennial cycles (or so it has been said), and the narrative of first two septennia of my life consists of little more than a hotch-potch of disconnected memories. The memories of those fourteen years may not fall into the correct chronological order: such, I believe, is the nature of our recollections of childhood.

My Parents

My father Dinsdale Thomas Young moved to the Basingstoke area from the coal-mining region of South Wales in 1929. My mother Isobel Kate ('Kit') Williamson moved, aged 2, from London – so that must have been in 1913. I believe they met at a dance held in Moose Hall, Basingstoke's former Strict Baptist chapel, when my father laid aside his saxophone, came down to the dance floor, and asked her for a dance.

I had a white furry one-piece outer garment for cold weather when I was very little. After one walk with my mother, I came back and was taken in my father's arms - "my little snowball". That was possibly during the only time I remember him being ill till he was about 93 years old!

He often used to dance with me in his arms when I was little, to the music of their 78 rpm gramophone records. Favourite songs included

¹ R. F. Delderfield, *The Avenue goes to War*

Ha ha ha, hee, hee, hee, Little brown jug don't I love thee! and, much more poignantly, *Smilin' through*, a song whose words have haunted me through the years, and came to express my desire to find a warm and strong love on which I could rely all my life:

*There's a grey lock or two in the brown of the hair,
There's some silver in mine too, I see;
But in all the long years, when the clouds dropped their tears,
Those two eyes of blue kept smiling through
At me.*

*And if ever I'm left in this world all alone,
I shall wait for my call patiently;
For if Heaven be kind I shall wake there to find
Those two eyes of blue still smiling through
At me.*

Such words still send a shiver over me.

On the morning of my sixth birthday I stood on the rug in the sitting room and as my mother dressed me she asked, "What's it like to be a sixer?" In the summer term of 1953, now aged 6, I was 3rd in a class of six, my progress was "satisfactory" and my conduct "good on the whole". A year later I was 2nd in a form of seven, and my conduct had been "good".

At about that age, I was knocked down by a bus. I was with my mother, her friend, and Ronnie, an older boy - Ron Norsworthy - and we had been gathering old man's beard. Ronnie stepped out from beside a parked vehicle to cross the road, and I followed him, but I was knocked down. "He's dead! He's dead!" my mother's friend was calling out.

Also at about that age I succumbed to a mysterious disease, which it was thought might be polio. No-one ever found out what it was, but it was a very serious matter at the time.

Whenever I was ill, my mother used to read *Robin Hood* to me. Once when she started to read it to me when I wasn't ill, I quickly became ill! In fact, she spent many hours reading to me, and sometimes enhanced her reading by singing, if the text prompted it; my favourites included Noddy (before the days when political correctness deprived us of the golliwogs), Rupert the Bear and later Malcolm Saville's *Lone Pine* mysteries set predominantly in Shropshire and Rye (East Sussex).

My mother had worked as a seamstress at Burberry's after leaving school, and when I was little she used to take in sewing to make a little extra money. Later, she worked as a dinner lady at Worthing primary school, and enjoyed the access it gave her to children, for she had a life-long love of children, and it seemed tragic that she was able to bear only one.

My father worked as an insurance agent for the Co-operative Insurance Society, and his work involved collecting payments from his clients in the evenings, so that he often came home around 9:30 pm. I used to stay awake in bed till he came home and said "Good night" to me.

As long after as 2010, when I was speaking at a Brethren assembly in Sherborne St John near Basingstoke, one of his former clients recalled what a friendly and cheerful man he had been on his visits to their home in the course of his work.

We were not Roman Catholics, but somehow my parents had developed the habit of having fish for dinner on Fridays.

Each year they hired the village hall in Worthing and invited a good number of children for my birthday party - always earlier in the month than my real birthday, which of course was Christmas Day. They were kind enough not to want me to miss out on having a good birthday celebration. (What we called *the village hall* is labelled on the 1930 Ordnance Survey map as 'Reading Room'.)



birthday party (DMY bottom right)

Sometimes my parents invited their friends for the evening at our home, or received a similar invitation to their friends' homes - though I only remember going to the home of Lena and Alb Smallbone, whose son Mike is mentioned elsewhere in this story.

My father was almost a teetotaler, from his Methodist background, for his father had been a drunkard and – according to his own brief account of his early life – worse, before he turned to Christ in about 1900 and became a Wesleyan local preacher. But there would be wine when people came to dinner – usually Blue Nun, I seem to recall, for, as wikipedia tells us, “After World War II, the brand became widely popular in the United Kingdom.” It makes me think that my parents possibly had little or no idea about what wine to select to drink with what food.

My mother was a good cook, though tastes have changed since those days, and a good meal was always provided.

Afterwards, as well as relaxation and conversation in the sitting room, there would be parlour games, such as Nodding Donkey and Consequences, described below in case these games are unfamiliar to any readers.

In Nodding Donkey, you began by moving one part of your body, say, your head; then, while keeping that going, you moved another part, maybe a hand; you kept that going too, and began moving the other hand, but in a different direction; the process would then be continued with a foot, then the other foot. It was of course well nigh impossible to achieve, but there was hilarity in seeing half a dozen people of varying ages all attempting to sustain these uncoordinated bodily movements.

In Consequences, each person had a piece of paper and a pen or pencil, and would invent a brief narrative and write down the first sentence, then fold the paper over to make the sentence invisible, and pass the paper to the next person. Each would then continue his or her own story with the second sentence; and so on till every person was writing the final sentence of the story: so if there were six people, the story would comprise six sentences. The final sentence always began with, "And the consequence was..." The 'stories' were then read aloud one by one, and the humour and amusement derived from the fact that none of them made any sense.

Or we might sing round the piano which stood against the wall in the sitting room, maybe singing from the *News Chronicle Song Book*, published in the 1930s, which offered community songs, plantation songs, sea shanties, negro spirituals, children's songs, hymns and carols.



my parents, 'Din and Kit', 1965

Each year my father took me for a day in London, which was spent according to my choices. We went there by train.

My parents had a life-long love for each other, but of course they had rows from time to time. There was a time when my mother said my father was having an affair with one of his golf partners - which he denied.

After one row between them, my mother threatened to run away, and left the house. I looked out of the sitting-room window and saw her go, assuming I might never see her again. It had a profound and lasting effect upon me: I suspected that women were people upon

whom you could not help being dependent, but who could threaten to leave you: you could not really be secure in your trust of them.

Another impression I formed as a young child concerning women was that they were feeble creatures with a tendency to subside into “headaches” which block activities and fun one had hoped for; and who always fall down when they are being chased in films.

One day my parents took me, with their friends Lena and Alb Smallbone, to London where we ate at Vera Swami’s Indian restaurant, served by waiters in their national costume including sash and head-dress.

My mother had a special voice for certain ‘pronouncements’, as I call them. She had disdain for people whose bodies and clothes were dirty: “Soap and water don’t cost much!” And, concerning people who have hard faces, use bad language, and are rather loud and crass, it was: “Common!”

One deep impression that abides from my childhood is that I was loved. No-one reading these pages will form the impression that my parents were perfect, but that they loved me is beyond question. Years later, in his eighties, my father became very fond of the song in *Sacred Songs and Solos* that runs:

*Fading away like the stars of the morning,
Losing their light in the glorious sun -
Thus would we pass from the earth and its toiling,
Only remembered by what we have done.*

The chorus drives the message home repetitiously:

*Only remembered, only remembered,
Only remembered by what we have done;
Thus would we pass from the earth and its toiling,
Only remembered by what we have done.*

I suppose now that I am the only person who remembers many of the things he did, or the ones my mother did, many of which were warm, good, generous and kind. I hope these lines help them to be remembered.

When they died within less than a year of each other, I chose for my mother's funeral the words from the Song of Solomon: "...love is strong as death... a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it."

School

I started school when I was 4, at Victoria Preparatory School, a private day school in Richmond Road, Basingstoke, run by Miss Pink, who died in December 2009 aged 97. At first I went mornings only. It was where I first came across "school hymns", and I think that school assemblies there and at later schools successfully put me off certain hymns for many decades, if not for life.

The school was not far from my grandparents' house, and when I was older I went there for lunch - though I was sometimes waylaid and bullied by bigger boys from another school. Doubtless they were envious because I was well-dressed, loved, and went to a private school. I kept it secret, and my parents only found out when one day my father or mother (I forget which) was with me and I showed reluctance to make the short walk to my grandparents'.

My father contacted the father of one of the bullies, who came to our home full of bravado, but soon melted away when my father suggested they go out on to our front lawn and "settle the matter there and then" with their own fists: a practice no doubt brought from his youth in the coal-mining Eastern Valley of South Wales. Was this a case of a coward fathering a bully? I suspect so.



Victoria Preparatory School (courtesy of Basingstoke History, Facebook)

Play and Leisure activities

When I was about 4, my parents bought me a splendid metal car to enjoy riding in, shown in the photograph taken on our back lawn.



I spent a lot of time playing with Dinky toy cars, and was always interested in cars, as a child. Notice the school caps of two of the boys playing with me in the garden of 295, Worting Road; and that the other (who, I think, is Ron Norsworthy) is wearing a tie.



Later, I was able to identify most makes of car when we were out and about. I disliked swimming, or trying to, and my parents used to try to bribe me to learn by offering to buy me a new Dinky toy - maybe a grand lorry costing as much as 12/6 (62½p).

I was bought a tricycle, and later graduated to a bicycle. My father patiently helped me to learn to ride.

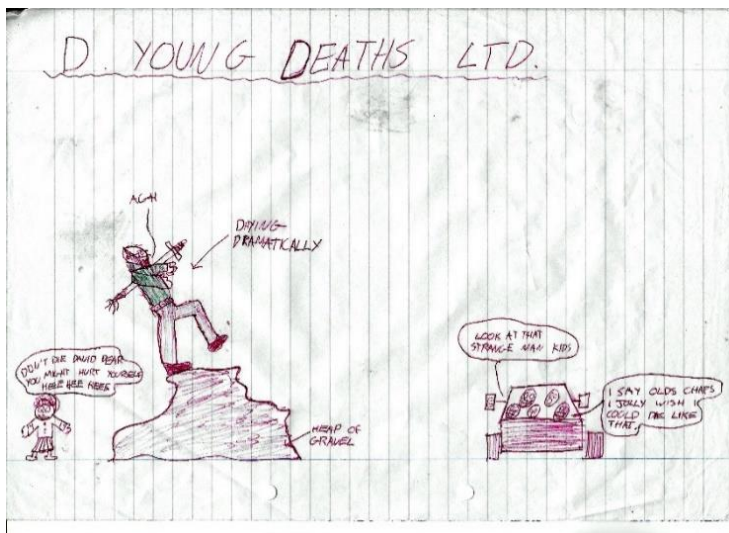
There were glow-worms at night when, a little older, I walked towards home from the bus-stop on Worting Road. Those have long since disappeared, as has “the dump”, an area of woodland near our home at the end of Buckskin Lane, where I played with my friends - cowboys and Indians, or pirates. In 1952, when I was 5, I felt very grand in my Tex Ritter cowboy outfit, and I once had a rather splendid silvery toy revolver.



Tex Ritter

I also enjoyed playing with various forms of construction: Baco bricks to build model houses; Meccano metal pieces for vehicles; and later plastic models of aeroplanes and other forms of transport.

I also enjoyed imitating dramatic and heroic deaths on the heaps of gravel that stood on a rough patch of ground at the junction of Worting Road and Buckskin Lane, in Worting Bottom.



(picture by Matthew Dinsdale Young)

There were regular fairs in the large town Memorial Park, with toffee apples and all manner of stalls and rides. And fancy dress competitions were popular in those days: I and two friends entered as the Three Musketeers on one occasion, and I believe we won a prize. My mother lovingly made my costume.



the three musketeers

We had a large back garden. About half-way up it was a sand-pit for me to play in when I was little, though it was later given over to flowers. Beyond the sand-pit was a small orchard of fruit trees. My bedroom was the back bedroom, and a vista of field after field extended to the horizon, green at times, golden at harvest-time. I used to look out over the fields and wonder what lay beyond them in the wide and distant expanse of the world.

In time, the limits of my childhood world came to be defined by the railway bridge towards the end of the village of Worting, by the junctions with Roman Road and Kempshott Lane, leading to the village of Kempshott; in the other direction the limit was the village of Basing. Within that space, I was “in my own patch”, but whenever I went beyond it, I was a stranger and a visitor.

Saturday afternoons would often find us going by car to Southampton or Reading for shopping. It was a trial to me when we had to interrupt the afternoon for “a nice cup of tea”. When we got home, I would

settle down on the settee to watch a Western or other television programme (such as *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot*) and my mother or father would bring me crusty white bread sandwiches with ham and tomato ketchup.

Later on, I was frequently left at the ice-rink in Southampton with a friend, and enjoyed an afternoon's skating whilst my parents shopped. I also developed an interest in second-hand books, and spent many happy hours on such Saturdays at one in Southampton, where I sat in some nook and read - often books on the occult, in my early teens: perhaps I was already hearing 'the horns of Elfland faintly blowing', as Tennyson has it.



our back garden, winter 1962-3 and the encroaching 'London overspill'

Our next-door neighbours had flowers in their drive. I used to go there and catch butterflies. Alas, I was a cruel child, perhaps as a result of being bullied, and would sometimes pull the legs or wings off of

insects. Sometimes, we were allowed to play in their back garden, at the top of which was an area of trees, which added hiddenness and mystery to our play. In my early or mid teens I had speakers from the record player which could extend to the garden, and I remember the lady next door's no doubt justified complaint when I played classical music loudly in the back garden.

My parents bought me a puppy, called Kim, who grew into a beautiful black and brown, silky dog. I took him for walks, and we often went for outings to the woods near Swallowfield, and played with the dog; or we took a friend or two of mine with whom I played in the trees, or climbed them.



But alas, I was cruel again, and beat him mercilessly with my stick when we were out of sight, perhaps more than once. If you find this distressing and it makes you cringe, it does me too. I was developing some unpleasant personality traits at that age. I guess that the cruelty was an inappropriate and inexcusable compensation for my own experiences of being bullied, and was an aspect of character from which I needed healing or release in the coming years.

My friends and I had things we called *trolleys*: old wheels were found, perhaps from discarded pushchairs, and were fixed on to wooden boards so that we could career downhill on them on the nearby tracks and dirt lanes in the area known as Winklebury.

At the bottom of the hill in Winklebury was a pond, where one could find newts and tadpoles. My main playmates were boys living close

to us, especially Nick Clark, the policeman's son on the other side of Worting Road.

It was probably in my early teens that I acquired one or more pen-friends abroad. There were agencies that would put youngsters in touch with young people in other countries, so that they could correspond with each other. There was a photograph of me with a tall, young Sudanese called Hassan who visited us once in Basingstoke, with whom I had been corresponding in this way. Perhaps this shows, along with my developing interest in languages, my awakening interest in things foreign.

Mobility was greatly increased when I was old enough to go on bike rides with a friend or two. Sometimes we went fifty or more miles, even reaching Buckinghamshire on one occasion. There were wild flowers at the woods on the back lane to Oakley, and they could be picked for our mothers. Or we could cycle to Basing, take a picnic and catch minnows in jam jars from the River Loddon.

I took up the hobby of collecting foreign coins, and was much helped with identifying the Middle Eastern ones by a Maths teacher at Queen Mary's who had a knowledge of Arabic. On a holiday in North Wales, we took a day trip by ferry to Dublin, and I happened to want an Irish farthing at the time. My father spent part of the brief visit there tracking one down for me.

I also took up collecting train numbers, and was able to advance this hobby from my parents' bedroom window, by using my father's binoculars, which had been rescued from a German submarine in the war. My parents left me once at the railway station in Doncaster - a very good place for getting numbers unlikely to be seen in Basingstoke - while they went about their lawful occasions in the town. (What on earth were we doing in Doncaster?)

One day my father said to me, "It's time you took a comic." I suppose most boys were thought (perhaps correctly) to take a comic. He

subscribed to one for me, and I gave it a try for a while, but I was not gripped, and the practice was discontinued.

It was probably not long after that that I took an interest in hypnosis, and attempted to hypnotise the daughter of one of our near neighbours, Linda Williams (later Ansell), a girl of about the same age as me. We were alone in my home, making the attempt in the bedroom, and my mother had a sudden rush of apprehension when she and Linda's mother returned and discovered *where* we were.

Bonfire Night, Christmas

Each November saw bonfire night celebrations on the patch of grass opposite our house with neighbours from the cul-de-sac: hot potatoes were cooked in the embers. One year someone (not I!) accidentally set off all the fireworks in one box at the same time.

Christmas was a time of excitement. It seems to have begun on more than one occasion with my father struggling to get the Christmas tree lights to work on Christmas Eve.

Then came a time of silent expectation, as I wondered whether Father Christmas would come, and what he might bring me. I believed in him till I was about six. My presents were placed in a pillow-case, and I would wake up excitedly early in the morning, maybe as soon as 4 o'clock, when I was allowed to have one or two presents to allay my impatience. Then some more sleep would follow, and then we would get up and really open the gifts.

Before Christmas came, I used to write my thank-you letters in advance, for I knew from whom to expect gifts. I would leave gaps to fill in as appropriate ("Thank you for the you gave me for Christmas," or some such), or simply write "present". This cleared time after Christmas for the much more pleasing activity of playing with the things I received.

Christmas dinner would be a chicken. Then, in the afternoon, my mother's family came, including perhaps the parents (visiting from Llanhilleth) of Aunt Mar (Marie Williamson), the wife of my mother's brother Jack. A fire was lit, and the Queen's speech was listened to.

The adults played games with me as the day wore on, and later in the evening, cold meat and pickles were consumed. At some point my mother secretly put the clock forward, so that I would feel I was being allowed a special treat of staying up late.

The 'magic' of Christmas remains with me to this day (2022), centred now on the incarnation of Christ, but also on its trappings of holly, ivy, special food, presents, the fireside, and family.

I developed a practice of standing outside the kitchen window making contorted faces and stances, perhaps jerking at the same time. Some people on a beach once leant over and expressed their sympathy to my parents for having a spastic son. It must have been part of being "a nervous child".

Performing

In 1955 I gained the second award in Vocal Class 16 for singing at the Aldershot Festival. The following year, again at the Aldershot Festival of the British Federation of Music Festivals I gained a Vocal Award Certificate for my singing of Britten's *A Tragic Story*: "It was nicely and sensibly sung, but I needed a bit more excitement and liveliness in the story-telling," wrote the adjudicator. I also performed A. Gibbs' *The Starlighters*: "Very carefully sung. But try not to look so solemn. Tell me the story and enjoy it more yourself..."

At the 1957 Festival my performance of Warlock's *Little Trotty Wagtail* attracted the comment: "A good voice and he sings nicely, but a very solemn performance of a cheerful song."

I took elocution lessons, but I was very nervous at the time of the examinations held in Haslemere or wherever. Nonetheless, despite the nervousness, in April and November 1957 I gained the Preliminary and Grade 1 Certificates for Elocution awarded by the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

My mother had wanted a girl (I would have been called Julie), and this may have influenced me when I went through a fairly long phase of having ballet and tap-dancing lessons, at a dancing school in the town run by Miss Peggy Rainbird. Doubtless my father would have preferred it to be football. My certificates are:

December, 1953	Ballet in Education, primary
December, 1954	Modern Stage Dance, Grade 1
March, 1955	Ballet in Education, Grade 1
June, 1955	Modern Stage Dance, Bronze Grade
May, 1956	Ballet in Education, Grade 2
June, 1957	Ballet in Education, Grade 3
	Modern Stage Dance, Grade 2
June, 1958	Modern Stage Dance, Grade Silver.

In July 1959 I danced with Judith Tinker in the National Awards Contest, and we gained an Honours Standard.

When I was eight I took part as the midship-mite in the Thorneycroft and Basingstoke Amateur Operatic Society's performance of *HMS Pinafore*, put on at Basingstoke's Haymarket Theatre. The *Hants & Berks Gazette* reported:

Dinsdale Young was a snarling and wonderfully contorted Dick Deadeye, the nigger in the woodpile, and David Young won the hearts of the audience as the midship-mite.

Holidays

We went on holiday somewhere every year, usually to the seaside. I recall a rainy week in the Lake District, probably our 1953 holiday there. Those were the days before motorways, and journeys were long. Before we set out, my father would take my mother and me into the sitting room, kneel down, and commit the journey in prayer to God, asking for God's protection on the roads.

Often, the journey would be broken somewhere for the night, when we would find bed and breakfast. My mother insisted on inspecting the room and the bed, and would refuse to stay if she did not deem it clean enough, for she was always committed to cleanliness.

Each Easter, together with Aunt Mar and presumably Uncle Jack, we visited this aunt's parents in Llanhilleth - Mr and Mrs Charlie Connor - and stayed in their mining cottage, 6 Troy Road. The Cyffin stream came down from the hills outside their house, and in the hills were lambs: I was told that if I could catch one, I could keep it, but of course I never managed to. On the way there, we would stop somewhere and get hot cross buns.

It was on these visits that my love of Wales was born, and when I was about 8 my father and I made a brief attempt to begin learning Welsh.

My father used to disappear on those visits to the Eastern Valley, to Blaenavon, where he grew up, no doubt to meet up with old friends and maybe family, and also simply to walk down Memory Lane. He always went alone: my mother never accompanied him, and I stayed with the others.

In 1959 we had a holiday in North Wales, and I was taken to the summit of Snowdon. I think my father and I walked up; my mother certainly went at least one way by the train. It was a clear day, and the view from the tops of the North Wales mountains has never ceased to astonish me.

Brook Street primary school

When I was eight, at the end of the spring term of 1955, I left Miss Pink's school and moved to Brook Street Primary School (known on paper as Brookvale School). Miss Pink was "very sorry to lose such a loyal and willing pupil".

I sometimes walked part of the way to my new school with other boys, and I disliked the dirty stories they used to tell each other. Also, I was small, and I was bullied by other boys on the way to and from school.

At the end of the summer term of 1956, I was 2nd in a class of forty-seven, and would have been 1st, but "It was the slap dash way in which he did his art exam that lost him his class position." Also: "His books are beautifully kept and his written work is done most conscientiously." Thus wrote Miss R. M. Dudman, my teacher.



Brook Street primary school (courtesy of Basingstoke History, Facebook)

“They’re going to send me away!” This was the anguished cry with which I came home from school one day. It was thought that I had a pleasant singing voice, and was intelligent, and the idea was mooted of sending me to Winchester School as a boarder with a choral scholarship. I was utterly distraught. If some fool of a teacher had not blurted it out, but left space for my parents to broach the possibility with me gently, maybe - just maybe - I could have been persuaded to go along with the idea. However, the opportunity was destroyed before it really came, and I remained at Brook Street.

I am not sorry: an English prep and public school would not have been the environment for me – which is not to say that others are not well suited to it.

By April 1958, when no assessment for Drawing appears on my report, I was 1st out of forty-five. I was “a lively and intelligent worker” and my conduct was “very good”. Thus wrote Mr W. S. Nicol. At the end of my time at Brook Street, I was still 1st out of forty-five, and the Headmaster, Mr W. W. Pill, BSc, wrote that I had “worked well throughout the school”.

In my last year at primary school, I began to notice girls: one whose name was, I think, Pat, had fascinating arms from her short-sleeved cotton school uniform dress, but I never established a friendship with her. I was too shy.

I also have what has been called “the Young nose” - fairly large and of a distinctive shape, shared by more than one generation. To make it smaller, in my self-conscious disposition around the age of puberty, I used to fix a peg to it when I was alone, such as at night-time. (It made it hard to get to sleep!) Of course, it never worked, and in the end you grow up and think, What does it matter?

Queen Mary's

I took the 11-plus examination at Fairfield's School, erected in 1887, not at Brook Street. Before the exam started we were asked whether we wanted to visit "the offices": the teacher was using code for "toilet", but I don't know how many of us knew what he meant: certainly I didn't. I was successful in the 11-plus, and moved at the age of eleven to Queen Mary's Grammar School.



Queen Mary's Grammar School

I was in Form 1A. At the end of my first term I was 2nd out of twenty-six, top in Latin and second in French. The next two terms I was 4th out of twenty-eight.

The teachers addressed us only by our surnames, so that was how we knew and spoke about and to each other, including our friends.

At Queen Mary's School, it was a common practice for bigger boys to reach out and hit smaller ones on their heads as classes were making their crowded way along the corridors. More bullying.

One teacher we had in my first year or two was a Geography master who lacked the ability to control a class of boys. His nickname was Mekong. There was much misbehaviour in his lessons. He eventually committed suicide.

In the first term of my second year at Queen Mary's, when I was in Form 2A, an inexplicable slide began, and I went through a period when my marks and position in the class slipped alarmingly. I could not account for it - though it is true that I was not given to cheating in tests, as some other boys were. (I did cheat once - perhaps only once - and got caught!) I was afraid to go home and tell my parents what my results were at such times. For example:

Age 12.11 Final Place 13th. Christmas Term 1959
Must not let himself slip too far. - CCK (Headmaster)

Age 13.3 Final Place 23rd. Lent Term 1960
Still slipping! - CCK

Age 14 Final Place 17th. Winter Term 1960.
This won't do!... - CCK

I formed a strong friendship with another boy at Queen Mary's, probably during my first and certainly second year there, but when a new boy came and won his friendship, we drifted apart. It was my first acute experience of a sense rejection and loss, and gave birth to a painful foreboding: that those I loved, needed, or aspired to would sooner or later desert me. (You may remember my anxiety some years earlier when my mother threatened to leave.)

Some Customs and Sights

The cemetery in Basingstoke was further along our road on the way into town. I was taught to stop and to raise my cap in respect whenever a funeral cortège passed, if I was walking along the pavement.

Photographs from my teen years show me and my friends smartly dressed and wearing a tie, even at times of leisure such as Christmas Day or a New Year's Eve party. My parents always dressed well – mother with coat, hat and gloves - for Saturday afternoon shopping in Reading or Southampton.

It was usual for men to walk along the streets whistling various tunes. Sometimes one would see a tramp (they seem to have disappeared), or the rag-and-bone man would pass collecting 'any old iron'.

Another custom of the time was that the national anthem was played at the end of the performance at the cinema - though people stood up quickly at the end of the film and tried to dash out before feeling obliged to stand for the anthem. Years later, when my wife and I took our first grandson to the cinema, it felt quite odd when there was no national anthem: something was missing.

At a fair my mother took me to see a palmist to have my 'fortune' read. Fortune-telling of any kind is strictly forbidden in scripture, and when the moment came for the palmist to read my future, she drew back and said she could not or would not do it. This is, I believe, because my future was in God's hands (though I did not know it at the time) and is not open for palmists to peer into.

Family

Outings in the car often included my mother's brother Jack and his wife 'Aunt Mar'. The latter invented stories about a girl called Leatherneck, to help me pass the journeys. And wartime songs were

often sung on journeys, such as *Run, rabbit, run*; *Knees up, Mother Brown*; *It's a long way to Tipperary*; *Bless 'em all*; and *My old man said, 'Follow the van'*.

My grandfather Frank Williamson was very fond of me, and spent many hours with me, including making a sort of trolley for me decorated with lots of used bottle tops. In the field behind his house at 12 Kingsclere Road, I once put an ear of grass in his ear, and he thought it was a bee or other insect, rushing into his house in great alarm. They had a dug-out in their garden, from the war years, which was always a place of dark mystery and allure for me.

They also had a cat, which I was cruel to, terrifying it by hurling it down their lino-covered hall. I wished we could live in a Council house, for I was sure they had more lino than private houses, which was better for playing with toy cars and for sliding along on trays.

We spent a good deal of time with my maternal grandparents, visiting them every Sunday. The household consisted of my grandmother and grandfather, and Jack and Mar. They and my parents would spend hours playing with me, for example Monopoly, draughts or dominoes.

After dinner, the men would retire to the sitting-room for a nap (called “forty winks”). My father groaned under this régime, and did not relish the weekly visit. Apart from anything else, he was an outdoor, active type, not given to postprandial snoozing.

Sometimes I would turn up at Kingsclere Road unexpected, with a friend, towards the end of a bike ride, and ask for food: my grandmother would provide tomato sandwiches.

When I was 11, my grandfather Frank died after a time of much suffering with cerebral thrombosis and Parkinson's disease. Towards the end, he was no longer able to feed himself, or to eat normally, and was fed ice-cream from a spoon, which he took with difficulty. One member of my grandmother's household called him a silly old fool:

that, I thought, was cruel. He was the first person to die, who was in any way close to me: my father's mother died when I was only a few weeks old, and my other grandfather long before I was born. Yet after all those years of love, his death left me unmoved.

After church on a Sunday evening, we sometimes took my mother's mother out for a ride in the car. The ride would include a visit to a country pub, something which my father disliked after church.



my grandparents, Frank and Bella (Isabella) Williamson

We never visited, or received visits from, my father's family, even though a good number of them lived in Basingstoke. I never discovered why contact with them, as with Blaenavon on Easter holidays in Llanhilleth, was not pursued or encouraged. Nonetheless, my father himself kept in touch with them, and some still remember him as Uncle Din.



The Young siblings, 1970

Religion

My father was brought up in Methodism; my mother was fond of the Church of England and regarded herself, I believe, as an Anglican, but she attended the Methodist Church in Church Street, Basingstoke, with my father. I was christened at St Michael's Church, Basingstoke, and my mother told me later that the christening was done there in case I wanted to be confirmed later in life in the Church of England.

But religion did not play a large part in our daily home life as far as I recall.



christening, with my parents

My father used to preach in local Methodist chapels, certainly in the former Basingstoke and Silchester Circuits, sometimes of a Sunday afternoon; also at other places including the Congregational chapel in Worting and the Countess of Huntingdon's chapel in Mortimer. But my mother did not attend. She came on one or many occasions to the village in the car, but took me for a walk during the service. It must have been a lasting sadness to my father, and (like his lone trips to Blaenavon) it seemed to me later that there were aspects of his life which my mother entered into hardly or not at all.

I was easily bullied, as you know. I attended Sunday School at George Street Mission, which had become part of the Methodist Circuit, just

round the corner from Brookvale School, and other children used to bully me before the teachers arrived on a Sunday afternoon.



George Street (courtesy of Basingstoke History group, Facebook)

I disliked my parents' occasional practice of joining the hymn-singing on the promenade when we were away on summer holiday. Religion was not for me!

When I was about 13 years old, we had a scripture teacher at Queen Mary's who was an earnest Christian, Mr Riley, who told us ardently that he knew by personal experience the truth of the Gospel. I scorned his faith: I knew better!

One piece of religious 'education' I had from my grandmother: "It doesn't matter what church you go to, so long as you are not a *Catholic*" - the last word uttered with a sort of spitting through the teeth. (She herself never went to any church, her excuse being that there was no Church of Scotland in Basingstoke.)

I negotiated with my father that I could stop attending Sunday School, on condition I went to church with him - which didn't happen all that

often by that stage. Church Street Methodist Church was enormous, built to hold maybe 850 people, and we always sat in the very back row. The minister in his black robe and MA bands was a distant figure swathed in holy mystery.



George Street mission hall after it closed as a place of worship

This postcard photograph on the next page, showing Church Street Methodist Church, was published by Valentine & Sons Ltd, Dundee & London, whose operations ceased in 1994.

The last service in the church was held in October 1965. The second photograph on the next page was posted on the Basingstoke History Facebook group by David Brighton. It shows the demolition of the church in 1967, as part of the development of the town.



EMERGENCE FROM CHILDHOOD

I began my third septennium (now aged 14) at Christmas 1960 in Form 3A at Queen Mary's, and in the spring term of 1961 I was studying English, History, Geography, Latin, French, Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Art, Music, Gymnastics and Games. I finished the term in sixth place in a class of thirty-three, which marked a return to better positions and marks after what had seemed an inexplicable slide in previous terms. I was top in French, second in Latin and 27th in Physics. My grade for Art was C3; all the music teacher could muster was his initials, no comment. Gymnastics and Games were *could do better* and *poor* respectively. The following term I was top in both French and Latin, 22nd in Art and *I'm sure he could do better* in Biology. The Headmaster's comment was, "A very good recovery - well done."

When attending church with my parents, aged about 12, I began to notice that I could no longer read the hymn numbers on the board at the front of the church beside the pulpit. When the optician prescribed spectacles for me, I wore them only at certain times, and when I first put them on in a lesson at school, I felt the whole room was looking, and I was acutely embarrassed.

At this age my French teacher was writing these comments about me:

He is developing linguistic talent - Spring Term, 1961

He has the makings of a competent linguist. - Summer, 1961

After the summer of 1961, I began life in the 4th form in a class of twenty-two, taking a reduced number of subjects: English, Maths, History, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Latin, French, Gymnastics, Games. In the last two there was still *more effort needed*

to succeed, but the Headmaster (C. C. Kuyper) described me as *a good sound fellow*, and my Form Master said *I can be relied on for an original point of view*.

Masters wore academic gowns, and we learnt languages by corporate chanting of declensions and conjugations - by far the best way to memorise the required forms of adjectives, nouns and verbs. There is nothing I know of that quite has the same atmosphere as a class of thirty or more boys chanting in unison:

vis
vis
vim
no genitive
no dative
vi.

There was a good atmosphere in the school, underlain by the tacit assumption that masters and boys were both “on the same side”: they had our educational progress in their hearts, and at bottom so did we.

I was still bullied at school, on one occasion being shut in a cupboard by other boys. Although I was usually well behaved, it may have been my experience of bullying that prompted me to join in the ragging of a teacher who was able to exercise virtually no control over children, not even the 2nd formers: a man we nicknamed Square Root, a derivation from his surname. I also joined in the misbehaviour which dogged the lessons of a Physics teacher we called Ross, even during the time of the death of his son. Years later, I wrote and apologised.

And to my shame, I joined in the merciless bullying of a new boy called Harris C P A, whose parents, I believe, soon had to remove him from the school. Poor wretch! What mental cruelty we inflicted upon him! I often wonder what became of him, and wish I could ask his forgiveness.

I also had a rather nasty habit of stamping on other boys' shins with the heel of my shoes, or chopping the back of their necks with the edge of my palm, both of which inflicted pain on them. Did I do it because people bullied me, or did they bully me because I was nasty? Probably a bit of both.

In general – perhaps not surprisingly - I was disliked by other boys at school, and was argumentative: they felt I would be good at arguing with boys from another school on the trip to Lake Thun in Switzerland, probably in 1961. I seem to remember a bus driver, and a train journey. Anyway, he who lingers in my memory as the bus driver joined in the filthy jokes of the other boys, and it was my first eye-opening that adults too indulged in such conversation. I was not religious, but I found it very distasteful, no doubt partly from absorbing my mother's dislike of such smut, though my father also never indulged in such conversation.

The visit included a day trip to Domodossola in Italy. My parents wanted me to enjoy and benefit from the trip, but I didn't really enjoy it, as I had so little in common with the other boys. The trip must have made a deep impression on me, because as long after as the early twenty-first century the sight of high, snowy mountains would still evoke that school trip.

It may well have been about this time that I felt I wanted a more satisfying hobby than collecting train numbers or coins, and I decided to teach myself Spanish. Other than Arabic, it seemed to be the most widely spoken language, and most likely therefore to be useful as well as interesting and enjoyable (as in fact it has been).

I also took an interest in the interpretation of dreams - not the weird or silly explanations offered in some amateurish manuals, but the serious psychological study of the processes whereby our minds build up our dreams whilst we sleep.

Also about this time I got a Saturday morning job, helping a bread delivery man with his round. One woman to whose house it took me asked what I hoped to do when I left school; I replied that I hoped to go to Oxford University. She laughed at me! Repeatedly over the following decades I have found people who find it difficult to take me seriously. But that sort of response would only have served to strengthen my determination. (In fact, I did initially hope to go to Oxford, but following the death of our headmaster, the acting head spoke to me of a closed exhibition for boys from Queen Mary's to Trinity College, Cambridge, and I opted to try for that instead.)

For a while I also took up beating as a Saturday or holiday job, frightening game birds which would be shot as they flew away.

At one point I got a paper round, but it only lasted one morning. I was already a victim of my almost life-long affliction of nosebleeds, and had one that morning. My father completed the paper round for me in his car. (I say "almost life-long" because in 2019 I paid for a consultation at a private hospital which (till now at least) so reduced the affliction as to make it negligible.)

A momentous event (perhaps for many other boys too) took place in 1961: the film *Whistle down the Wind* was released. I fell in love with Hayley Mills! Her naïvety, goodness, long fair hair, fringe, simple skirt, black stockings or tights - what a picture of desirable girlhood she was to me! Of course, I kept it secret, for I was embarrassed. Other films followed, *The Parent Trap* being one of them, also released in 1961. When my mother and a friend of mine gave voice to their suspicion of my hopeless yearning for her, I denied it most strenuously. What a silly idea for them to have! An article appeared about her in the magazine *Titbits*, and how I longed to acquire a copy! I lingered as I passed the newsagent's on my way home by bicycle from school. But if I went in and asked for the magazine, the newsagent might guess which article I really wanted, and my passion would be known. I never did pluck up courage to buy the magazine,

but I grew more aware of another aspect of the painful foreboding mentioned earlier: those I loved or aspired to would be beyond my reach.



Hayley Mills (flickr.com: public domain)

By the beginning of 1962 I was in the middle term of the 4th form at school, having just turned 15. It was the year in which I took seven Ordinary Level GCE examinations. I worked very hard for these, often spending five hours a night (say, between 5 and 10.30 pm) at prep or revision. The work paid off, and I was successful.

Chemistry was my weakest subject, and I am persuaded that the teacher (who had the nickname Sludge) disliked me. In his subject I finished the winter 1961 term 12th out of 22, and the next term 20th. When recommendations were made concerning who should be entered for GCE, he said he would not put my name forward.

This would have been a major setback for me, as the O Level was General Science, which would have meant I could not take the Physics or Biology parts either, and therefore presumably not go on to the 6th form (or go on, but with work for Science O Level still round my neck).

I was reduced to tears by this possibility, but my parents approached the Headmaster; the teacher's refusal to enter me was cancelled; I was entered; and I passed General Science with grade 3 (the highest pass being 1, the lowest 6). I felt sure that the teacher's wish to hold me back was due partly if not entirely to personal animosity.

Joining the school's combined cadet force was compulsory (except perhaps for boys with parents of pacifist conviction), and in July 1962 I passed the examination for the Army Proficiency Certificate (Basic Test), followed by the Proficiency Test the following May. I was eventually promoted to corporal, but it was not a part of school life which some of us took very seriously.



Queen Mary's school CCF, 1964

By the end of the 4th year, I had almost no friends, though two or three boys at school were on pleasant enough terms with me. By consistent and prolonged nastiness, unfriendliness and acidity, I had managed to turn my own class against me and to earn a reputation in the school way beyond my own form. Neither was the situation made any better by the fact that I despised the impurity of the other boys, and let it be known; and that I was possibly the most able boy in my chosen subjects in my year.

In the summer of 1962 I went to Hardelot Plage in the Pas de Calais for the first half of an exchange holiday with a French boy called Gérard. This introduced me to a new environment, where again I felt alien and ill at ease: not because it was in France, but because I had little in common with Gérard, and was awkward with boys of my own age, and shy with girls. I felt foreign in the world of modern music, dancing and girl-boy liaisons. But it was there that I first heard the singing of Ray Charles, and have liked the Blues style of singing ever since.

I recall a strikingly beautiful blonde called Pascale, whose unreachableness emphasised my own gaucheness and tendency to hug the sidelines, longing without much hope for the right social skills and success.

There was also a dark-haired girl from Roubaix whom I saw at the tennis courts and admired from afar; eventually I summoned up the pluck to talk to her, and we entered for a short while into correspondence after the time in Hardelot-Plage.

So the person who was emerging from childhood was intelligent, studious, sensitive, shy, small, disliked, alienated and bullied. Ah well – there's always room for improvement.

SIXTH FORM YEARS: 1962-4

In the autumn of 1962 I started in the 6th form, having missed out the 5th, and took Latin, German and French for Advanced Level. Only one other boy took all three, Maurice Chandler (now living in Devizes), and we naturally spent quite a lot of time together. I also continued my hobby of learning Spanish.



*Teachers M. D. MacIntyre (left), and D. H. Barden
(from 1968 school photograph, courtesy of Basingstoke History group, Facebook)*

I owe a debt of lifelong gratitude to teachers MacIntyre and Barden, who taught German and Latin respectively, for they instilled in me a love for both languages, and my knowledge of each proved incalculably useful for decades to follow.

We had to do a subsidiary subject, and our success at O Level engendered an examination thirst in us, and a kind of friendly rivalry as to who could gain the most O Levels. So we wanted to take exam subjects. I was not allowed to join the Russian class, it being felt that three languages at A Level plus Spanish was enough; so I took Geology, and took part in fossil-hunting cycle rides near Basingstoke with Mr Stokes the teacher and my fellow pupils. We also made a trip

to Snowdonia and climbed Moel Hebog where, it seemed, we got quite lost in the mist - though the teachers never said so!

I was taking piano lessons from a woman who lived along the road from my home called Mrs Joan Boyd. In April 1963, I took the Grade I (primary) piano examination, and passed with distinction. Thereafter I took no further exams, and perhaps no further lessons, but I did continue to play the piano for pleasure, though I never passed beyond being able to play the fairly simple music found in hymnbooks.

Games or Athletics lessons would find me on occasions secreted behind the huts with a Latin or other book, though when we were trusted (perhaps in the Upper 6th) to go to the tennis courts at the other side of town and play tennis as Games, I did that gladly.

Sunday afternoons sometimes found me by the stove in the kitchen doing my prep (now called 'homework', I believe) on the kitchen table. I passed Geology, German and Spanish at O Level in the summer. I had to go to a girls' school in Reading for the Spanish oral parts, as Spanish was not offered at Queen Mary's. There was another boy present as a candidate, also visiting for the purpose. I seem to recall that the girls wore dark blue pleated skirts - most appealing.

Reports for French, German and Latin contain these comments:

- *always working well & making good progress*
- *an extremely able boy, who has made quite remarkable progress*
- *work... of a commendably high standard*
- *excellent progress*
- *Made admirable progress... Works extremely hard & enjoys it!*
- *A keen & hard worker*
- *a lively and enquiring mind, with a passion for work*

In the Lower 6th I was made a subprefect, but I never attained the rank of prefect. I still (2022) wear my sub-prefect's tie sometimes!

Social

Entry into the 6th form marked the beginning of being able to relate better to my peers, make friends more readily and be more accepted. This changing character may also be reflected my form master's comments at the end of the winter term 1963: "He is developing very well as a person"; and the summer term 1964, "Another very good term, academically and socially"; and also in Mr Crossman's summer 1964 comment, under Scripture: "A pleasant and likeable boy who is determined to succeed."

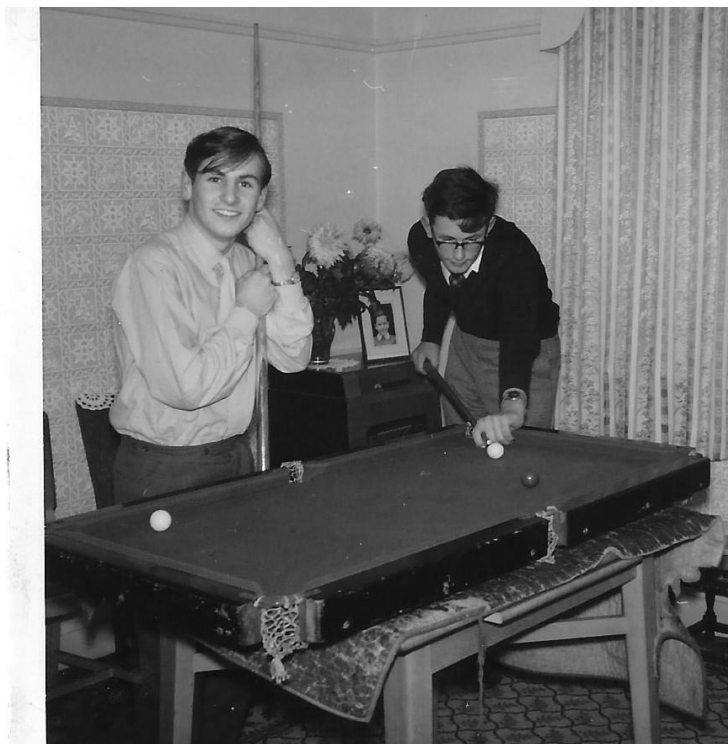
And at last I was no longer bullied.

On Saturday evenings (I do not recall how often, perhaps monthly) a 6th form dance was held at Queen Mary's, to which girls from the High School came. Boys wore suits, girls wore skirts or dresses, and we danced the waltz, fox-trot, quickstep, Scottish. And you got to hold the girls in your arms, not jerk and twitch in front of them at a distance.

Certain things tickled our developing humour, for example the stage direction noticed by students of A Level English: *Enter Ralph, with a forked Arrow through his Head*, from Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

And it was in the Lower 6th that I began to have girlfriends. I made some of my first girlfriends from among family acquaintances or contacts, though I recall brief liaisons also with girls from the 6th form dances. I think one would 'go out with' a girl for maybe six weeks or so, then one or other would terminate that liaison, and soon another would begin.

Also, about that time, my parents gave me a small billiard table, and many happy hours were spent on it with my friends playing billiards and snooker in the dining room.



*David Wheeler (left) and Charles Marshall
(David Wheeler now lives in Bromley)*

At Easter 1963 I had an exchange holiday in Châtenay Malabry, in the suburbs of Paris, with a French boy called Daniel Troublé; he was to visit us the following year. I did not know in advance that he had a

14-year old redheaded sister called Martine. I was emotionally quite overwhelmed by her, and she was, I think, the first girl with whom I fell in love.

In the summer of 1963 I had an exchange holiday with a German boy, Jürgen Mende, of Sohlerweg 18, Neuwied am Rhein. One of the first things his father showed me was his copy of *Mein Kampf*.

At first I could hardly understand anything they said, for I had only had one year of German at school and had never before been to a German-speaking country, other than the brief school trip to Lake Thun; but by then I was not even studying German at school. But understanding and, I suppose, fluency improved as the brief visit progressed.

I remember Herr Mende moaning at me for paying too little attention to the beautiful views once when out in the car: perhaps I seemed uninterested or rude; perhaps he disliked me; perhaps I was weary with the unfamiliar sound of German: in any case, appreciation of scenery probably comes later in life than 16. Herr Mende was certainly friendly when I spent a while at a German pub with him in March 1985.

Then in the school summer holidays, 1964, both Daniel Troublé and his sister Martine came to us in Basingstoke. My parents took a house in Cornwall for part of the time, and with the French visitors we visited places including Boscastle, Tintagel, Crantock, Watergate Bay, Looe, Land's End, Pentire Head and Mevagissey. There was glorious weather. We also walked by the River Loddon at Basing on one occasion.

Daniel and Martine still remembered that holiday fondly when my wife and I visited them in 2010 in Kerhinet where they own a renovated cottage; and Martine and her husband visited us in Wales during a touring holiday they took of parts of Britain in

2012, when we took them also on outings to Chester and Much Wenlock.



Basing: by the Loddon, 1964

There were also girls who were friends but not girlfriends: I played tennis with Rosemary, and occasionally spent time with Alyson Ransome. The latter lived along the same road as ours (Worting Road) and waited at the bus stop on her way to school, and I often wished I had the pluck to speak to her; obviously eventually contact was made, but I forget how or where.



with Rosemary



with Alyson Ransome in Reading

In 1963 my friend David Wheeler and I sang in the chorus of “HMS Pinafore”, put on by the Basingstoke Amateur Operatic Society. My father played Dick Dead-Eye. It was David, not I, who managed to go out with the prompt, a girl whose name I forget. I was too shy to venture an approach.

During the autumn and winter of 1964 I continued my friendship with Alyson, but we never really had any strong emotions for one another. I went somewhere with her, together with my parents, the evening

before my Cambridge entrance exams, that is on Sunday 29th November, and I believe she did hold my hand in the back seat of the car: kindness, I think, not romance, to calm and reassure me before the next day's important exams which were likely to determine the direction of my life for a long time to come.

And at Christmas we visited the lights in London, maybe again with my parents. She attended the Baptist church on Sarum Hill.

Other comments from school reports show various aspects of my developing character:

English: *never at a loss for words... Loquacious, but interesting... Always willing to take an active part*

German: *His essays ... could be more succinct and less pretentious.*

French: *he must stop valuing everything by the consideration of whether or not it is 'in the syllabus'.*

Scripture: *He is so very good that I am surprised he is worrying about success.*

Form Master: *keen & pleasant & interested in most things ... He is developing very well as a person.*

Games: *The occasional game of tennis, but little hard work.*

In 1963, aged 16, I was learning to drive my father's Velocette motorbike, RBP 563. I passed the driving test for a motorbike, and in 1964 my parents – ever generous – bought me my own white Velocette motorbike, 913 KCG.



on my father's motorbike

A party cum dance held in a Worthing village hall around New Year's Eve 1963, may have been given partly to mark my Christmas Day birthday a few days earlier, for they include school friends of mine as well as friends of my parents and their children.

It reveals the closeness of family life in the circles I grew up in. I cannot now name everyone in the photograph, but I believe they include Linda Williams; a boy from Queen Mary's surnamed Foster; Sybilla and Ruth Forbister; a married couple called Cyril and Ena; Roger Sturrock, also from Queen Mary's; my mother; Charles Marshall, from Queen Mary's; Mike Smallbone and his girlfriend (later wife), Frances; and Linda Williams's mother.



on or about New Year's Eve, 1963, Worting village hall: one of the dances recently introduced – perhaps The Twist:

Dances of the period also bring to mind another striking contrast with today's society. After a New Year's dance, probably ending about 2 a.m. on 1st January 1965, I walked the two miles or so home alone,

passing along what must have been largely a quiet, unlit lane (Roman Road) with a field to one side. Who, these says, walks home alone in the dark in the small hours of the night?

School

Having finished the Geology O Level course, I and a few others persuaded Mr Crossman to give up free periods and teach us O Level Bible Knowledge. I recall, when he got engaged to a 6th former at the Girls' High School, asking him whether he was going to attend some event, or whether he was "otherwise engaged". We found it a little odd and amusing for a teacher to marry a pupil – not that I didn't do the same nine years later in 1973, though I did not actually teach her when I taught part-time at her school: if all is well, this year will bring our 49th anniversary.

The first few months of 1964 were mainly taken up with studying for my A Levels, and I usually did about three hours' work a night. Here are a few comments from my reports:

Still working like a Trojan...

...a remarkable grasp of the language

I admire his enthusiasm

He is working very hard and creating a very good impression

Studying for A Levels was hard work, and I spent about three hours a night studying at home, as well as some time studying at weekends. In the warm summer weather, I used to wish I was out with a girl instead of sitting at my books.

I had a preference for language over literature in all three languages, though some German literature was enjoyable (*Götz von Berlichingen*, *Woyzeck*, *Tonio Kröger*) and Terence's *Phormio*. My liking for Latin continued to develop, and it probably became my favourite subject, though I also greatly enjoyed German.

I kept vocabulary and literature quotations on cards on key rings which I could carry with me and revise at odd idle moments, such as in the barber's queue or a bus.

I also took the Use of English paper (gaining grade 3); and at O Level Bible Knowledge (grade 1) and the General Paper (grade 3).

As mentioned earlier, my parents bought me a motorbike, a white water-cooled Velocette. I used to go to school on it, and for rides for pleasure.

On one such pleasure ride, the day before my A Levels began, I was coming home along a dual carriageway. I was overtaking a car, when suddenly, and without warning that I observed, the car turned to the right, crossing both lanes, and I was unable to do other than drive into it; to stop or avoid it was impossible. I was unhurt: I found myself several yards from the bike, on the ground, as if I was lifted off and put in a place of safety before the impact. The motorbike was damaged, but not so badly that it could not limp home.



6th former, Queen Mary's

Religion: coming to faith

When I was 11 or 12, I still had a vague belief that God existed, but he played no part in my life or thought. I “prayed” nightly, because this had been ingrained in me from earliest childhood, but my prayers were no more than empty repetition of the same formulas, and I got through them as quickly as I could.

At the age of 13 or 14 I began to think more seriously. I became convinced there is no God, and that those who believed in him were quite below my own level of insight! (I was not the humblest of characters!)

But through books acquired from a jumble sale I became convinced that there is an afterlife; with this came also a head belief in the existence of God. It went no further than the idea that he existed - he played no part in my life.

I went to Church Street Methodist Church only when I could not avoid it - that is, when my parents insisted, maybe once every six weeks or so. One evening, in 1962 or 1963, I went for this reason, and after the service I was invited to the youth fellowship. I went for the sake of a good discussion, and in the hope of finding a girlfriend, but when my ideas were discussed, neither side succeeded in persuading the other – and I never acquired a girlfriend through going there.

I do not think I was yet a Christian in 1962. I am fairly sure that in Hardelet Plage I attended a Roman Catholic service with the family I was staying with, so I assume I believed in God and was getting interested in religious matters.

Indeed, when I was in Châtenay Malabry the following Easter (1963) and attended the Mennonite church with the mother and children of the Troublé family, that is Martine and Daniel, I do not recall being already a believer, though again I seem to recall that developing interest. This may be only a lack of clear memory years later as I

write, but certainly I went through a period in which I believed in God and felt drawn to him, without being a Christian.

In my time of searching I visited, in Basingstoke, the Salvation Army, the Pentecostals, the Baptists and the High Anglicans. When I visited the Pentecostal church, meeting at the time in Cross Lane I seem to recall, my father disapproved, saying they were fanatics.



Bill and Joy Murphy in 1966

Having been unsuccessful in my search for serious discussions and a girlfriend via Church Street, I began attending the Methodist Church at South Ham, a large and fairly new housing development, which was nearer to home and easily walkable. The minister was Bill Murphy, with a wife called Joy and a dog called Spud. His services

were much livelier than those at Church Street, and I attended regularly, if only to qualify for the youth group that met after the evening service at the home of Bill and Marion Taylor in Elisabeth Road, where there was a warm, welcoming atmosphere with good discussions, prayer, seriousness and fun.



South Ham Methodist

Two other lively young ministers also spent a while in the circuit - Arnold McIndoe and Malcolm White. At one such evening meeting Malcolm White put the question to each of us one by one: “Do you have a sense of sin?” I was perhaps the last to be asked; the others all said yes. I replied that I supposed I sometimes did something I ought not to, but would not go so far as to say I ever sinned. I continued to enjoy the warm, friendly atmosphere and the lively discussions, and maybe unawares I was also attracted to their Christianity.



*youth meeting at Bill and Marion Taylor's: Linda Digweed, centre,
Myrtle Boghurst right (photo courtesy of Jeff Butcher)*



Bill and Marion Taylor

At any rate, at church and at the youth meetings I learned more of what Christianity is. It was almost certainly in the spring or summer of 1963 that I came to faith in Christ. I was now aged 16, with that regrettable tendency to look at some of my peers with disdain, feeling a cut above them, and that cruel streak in my character, mentioned a number of times in this narrative and perhaps caused (but not excused) by my experience of being bullied in so many contexts over so many years. These characteristics needed to be dealt with and healed: I *hope* they have been.

The clinching moment in coming to faith happened when I was alone at home. From my piano lessons, I was able to play several of the tunes from *The Methodist Hymn-book*, as hymn tunes were normally set out in a manner easy to play in the hymnbooks of the period. One day, practising the piano, I was playing hymn 452, and at the same time reading these words of Charles Wesley, which form verse 2 in the hymn:

*I long to know and to make known
The heights and depths of love divine,
The kindness Thou to me hast shown,
Whose every sin was counted Thine.
My God for me resigned His breath:
He died to save my soul from death.*

It was as I was reading line four - "Whose every sin was counted Thine" - that I saw and understood that they are true words. It was for me, and my sins – that is, all the things I had done wrong - that Jesus died on the Cross. And so I became a Christian - humanly, perhaps Charles Wesley's last convert.

As with so many conversions, I wanted to tell others of my faith. I typed out my testimony on a gestetner skin, duplicated copies, and handed them out at the school's main vestibule, and along with one or two other boys, started a group in the school for religious

discussion, with the assistance of Mr MacIntyre and another teacher, perhaps Mr Crossman or Scripture teacher Mr Riley. The speakers we invited were not all Christian: I think we may have had a Spiritualist and a Jehovah's Witness. Occasional joint meetings with the Christian Union at the Girls' High School were also arranged.

Questions which I chose in June 1964 in the GCE O Level General Paper show the heavy influence the Christian faith was playing in my thoughts. There were eighteen questions, from which the candidate had to select three. I opted for:

"History is strewn with the shipwreck of faiths." Discuss.

"Science is neither moral nor immoral." What are your views?

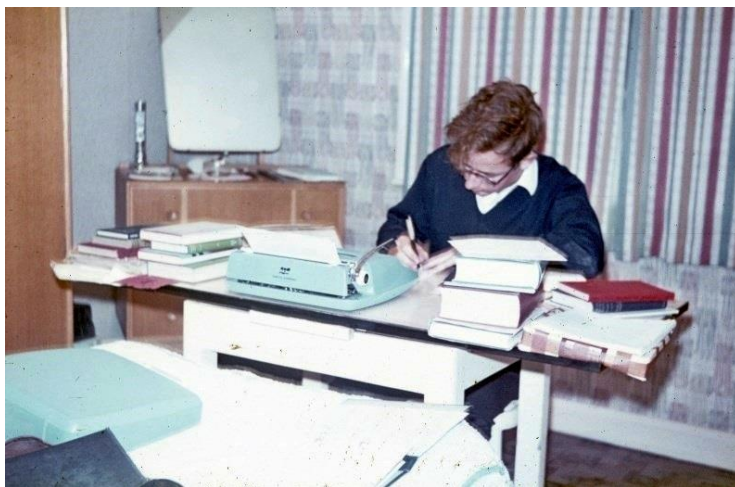
*"A moment's insight is sometimes worth a life's experience."
Discuss this from the point of view of a writer.*

There are ten Bible chapter-and-verse references in my handwriting beneath this last question on the exam question paper, from Isaiah and Ezekiel in the Old Testament, and Romans, Luke, 1 John, Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Peter in the New Testament.

In the Cambridge entrance exams in November a French essay I chose was on:

L'homme veut donner un sens à sa vie. N'est-ce pas le comble de l'absurdité? [Man wants to give a meaning to his life. Is not this the height of absurdity?]

Similarly, in the translation and general paper I chose the topic *New situations and new knowledge demand a new morality*. These chosen essays show again how my mind ran along religious lines.



studying for Cambridge entrance

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

At one of the 6th form dances I met Pam Sced, who spotted the small silver Methodist shell badge in my lapel, and was interested by it as she too was a Christian. We began going out together, and I attended youth meetings with her at the church she attended, St Mary's Church in Eastrop Lane - a "Low" church with a warm Evangelical ethos in the young people's meetings. I was deeply challenged once when she sang as a solo the song:

*I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold,
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands,
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hands*

*Than to be the king of a vast domain
And be held in sin's dread sway;
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.*

*I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause,
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause...*

By about mid 1964 I felt God was calling me to the ministry, and it was an intense inner struggle whether I would say yes to the call or disobey it. I wished to obey it, though I struggled with the opposition I knew would come from my parents - or was already coming if the subject came up.

I recall my mother's horror when a local paper mistakenly reported that I was going up to Cambridge to read Theology. She urged me to consider what my father's clients might think if they heard he

had a son who was going into the ministry: it might adversely affect his business as an insurance agent, she said. Perhaps my father's undated note to her, found after his death, was written in this period, in which he writes, "May all your worries about David be gone." Paradoxically, there came a time when my father said to me quietly that I should continue to preach, and had his approval.

I spent time with an elderly Methodist local preacher, Leonard Wardell, who lived in Worting Road a few hundred yards from us. I originally met him on the Saturday morning bread round. I would go to his home, probably quite unannounced, and he took me to his sitting room, and opened the scriptures to me, exhorted me, prayed with me. In time, I began accompanying him on his preaching engagements, and taking part in the services.



Leonard Wardell

Thus, the autumn of 1964 was spent in the third year sixth form at Queen Mary's, studying for Cambridge entrance and for two exhibitions to Trinity College - an open one and the closed one restricted to pupils of Queen Mary's.

I wanted to apply to Trinity, not only because of the closed exhibition, but also because it was the largest college, and I guessed therefore that I might find more fellow Christians there – that is, like-minded companions and friends - than at smaller colleges. I did in fact find such friends, and six of us still get arrange an annual reunion for lunch and a short walk.

It was hard work, and I well remember the poignancy of a film I saw some time in my teens about a boy studying for exams and the mental stress and worry it caused him. The day before the examinations started, my father recommended me to read John 14, which I did, and I was especially struck by verses 1 and 27:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me... Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

These words suffused my heart with an unexpected and strong peace. And, though I didn't know it till later, during his invigilation of me at that time, my German teacher Mr M. D. MacIntyre was praying for me, for he was a devout Christian.

My final school report contains the comment from my house master, "I could wish that his interests were wider," and from my form master, "...his chosen field. I hope he will not work at this, to the exclusion of all other interests..." These imply that then (as in subsequent years) I identified my goals and went for them with a single mind.

I do not remember when I went to Cambridge for my interview to gain a place at the College, but I do remember falling in love with the place, and wishing to try again a year later if I was unsuccessful.

Particularly I remember the mist. Indeed, Cambridge is so often misty, that I associate the two together to this day, and that not without emotion.



Trinity Lane, Cambridge

I was interviewed by Dr Robson, who later became my tutor. We spoke of politics and of religion, and I came away somewhat downcast, for he tied me up in knots and I did not feel I had done well.

I didn't know how to act appropriately in some situations without being prompted, unless I had learned by being told, by earlier experience or by observation, and I made a *faux pas* when I left school after the Cambridge entrance examinations, for I did not say good-bye and thank-you to any of my teachers. However, I still had some school books, and (when it reached my ears that there was disappointment) I made some (mendacious) excuse that I intended to see them for such valedictory greetings when I returned the books after getting the results of the exams.. And, of course, I did in fact return the books.

In December I got a seasonal job at the postal sorting office at the end of Penrith Road, Basingstoke. It horrified me to see the way parcels were flung on to a pile in the corner, and then how staff clambered up the pile to sort them, regardless of what damage might be done to the contents.

When I was working there one day, my father came to tell me that we had received a telegram from Trinity College, saying I had gained an open exhibition. I was also awarded the closed Philpott Exhibition.

My mother was so proud! Everyone had to know that "David is going to Cambridge."

Early in 1965 I got work at Eli Lilley's factory in Basingstoke, whilst waiting for papers to go and work in Germany to improve my German. My task was packing parcels, and I also spent one morning on the paper-tearing machine. Fellow workers enjoyed teasing me with comments that had sexual undertones - not a line of conversation I wished to join in.

I preached my first sermon on 10th January at Oakley Methodist Church, on Isaiah 53:6: *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* Leonard Wardell was engaged to preach there, but invited me to do so in his place, and came with me: the arrangement was that he would lead the service and I would give the sermon.



Oakley Methodist chapel

When I preached in February at Bramley Methodist, he took the trouble to gather extra hearers for my encouragement - a claque, one might say.

I spent some of my spare time with J. Terry Hardy, a lad about my own age who was an organist and a keen Methodist. We would visit country chapels, and, if we gained entry, would “try the organ”. One we visited was at Wootton St Lawrence, where I was stirred by the conversation of an elderly man (probably about the age I am now)

who told me about the services in the chapel in his youth, probably before the First World War.

Sunday 21st February was my last Sunday at South Ham Methodist Church before I set off by train for Backnang, in southern Germany, to take up work as a postman, prior to going up to Cambridge. My mother stood on the platform crying as the train pulled out: I couldn't understand why, but years later in adult life I did.



postman (Postzusteller), Backnang

When I arrived in Backnang, it was under snow; at the end of my time, it was warm springtime. I thought of going to France for three months from Germany, and working there, but unemployment made it impossible. I was offered the opportunity to stay a further three

months in Germany, including a job with the post office in Lübeck, to which town I was drawn after studying *Tonio Kröger* at school; but I decided to return home - a decision I have since in some ways regretted. But I was already homesick, for the first and last time in my life, and I used to see trains going past and long to be on them returning to Basingstoke.

My father met me on the way home, maybe in Dover, and my English had become slightly muddled from speaking German so long. I desperately wanted to tell him I was going into the ministry, but could not bring myself to do so - and anyway, the moment of deciding had passed and it was too late. "The hour is come, but not the man." (Eight years later I became a Baptist minister in Kent.)

At about that time I had a tendency to dress sometimes in black: blazer; roll-neck shirt; shoes; black or dark grey trousers; and I carried a black umbrella after my time in Germany in the spring of 1965.

On 25th July, I went with Rev. Bill Murphy to Newnham Methodist Church, now a garden shed used for raising and (I think) displaying flowers. As he was unwell, he kindly let me preach.



Newnham Methodist chapel

He said to me on the way that I was welcome to talk with him any time there might be something I wanted to talk about. I dare say he had sensed my exercise about the ministry, but what was there to say? I had made my decision whilst in Germany.

On 1st August I preached at Newfound Methodist Church, then went up to London to meet Jürgen Mende, who was coming to stay for a while. My father urged me to skip the preaching engagement and just go to London, but I didn't feel that would be right: undertakings should be honoured.



Newfound Methodist chapel

Also in the summer I acquired a harmonium, but my mother would not let me have it in the house, and it had to be kept in the shed. I felt so sad about this that I almost cried. A neighbour complained when I played it.

On 15th August I preached at the 3:15 service at Rotherwick Methodist. It being a warm summer afternoon, the door was open,

and I made some attempt to make myself heard by the man mowing his lawn on the other side of the road!



preaching at Rotherwick, 1965

Also in the summer of 1965 I went to France for a visit to the Troublé family. They were going on holiday to Noja, in northern Spain, and took me with them. On that holiday I felt that Martine had become somewhat distant, a feeling reinforced my fear mentioned earlier in this account: that those I loved or aspired to would be out of reach from the start, or would sooner or later desert me.

One evening in Noja I went into the Roman Catholic church to pray, that being the only place I could find for solitude, but the priest came and turned me out, as it was time to lock up.

I was much taken with the dry countryside of Spain, and enjoyed visiting Burgos, Laredo and the River Ebro. In Santillana del Mar there was a colourful Roman Catholic festival in which the Virgin Mary was very prominent.

It is a pity I was not yet interested in food, for the French really know how to eat. I recall their relish for cockles – though sea food is not one that delights me to this day.

On the drive back from Spain to Paris we stopped for a while at Kerhinet in Brittany, where the Troublé family owns a cottage. It needed a lot of renovation, and we spent time working on it. It was at that cottage, beautifully restored, that my wife and I visited Martine and Daniel in September 2010.



Kerhinet, August, 1965

THE END: 1965-1968

A significant event took place at some point during 1965 when I testified to my faith at the Independent Evangelical Mission, Green Lane, Thatcham (where Mr. Wardell was preaching). Someone in the congregation noted down my name and passed it on to the students' Christian society (Christian Union) at Cambridge, with the result that when I arrived at Trinity in October I was visited by another undergraduate in the college, Philip Clements-Jewry, who introduced to a group of Christians in the college.

As I was preparing to leave behind my days of childhood and school, and go up to Cambridge, Basingstoke Borough Council and Hampshire County Council were preparing to destroy and remove the environment in which I grew up.

In October 1961 they signed an agreement with London County Council to increase the Basingstoke's population from 26,000 to 100,000 by 1980. A large number of the newcomers were to be "overspill" – that was the word frequently used - from the London area.

What was a market town was to be changed into a sprawling commercial centre, by building housing estates and accompanying facilities and replacing the town centre. They finished early - the scheme was complete by 1976.

The vast view of field after field from the bedroom window of my boyhood, stretching out beyond sight to a world waiting to be explored, was replaced with housing. In the mid and late 1960s large parts of the town were demolished and replaced with new developments, and by the time I graduated from Cambridge in 1968 the world in which I had grown up no longer existed.

In the summer of 1966 I spent time in Vienna; the summer of 1967 found me in Freistadt (Austria) and in Spain; and after leaving Cambridge in the summer of 1968 I moved to Kent, then in 1977 to Wrexham in North Wales. In 1978 my parents followed me, and settled in Ruabon, some seven miles from Wrexham. Various friends were scattered to different parts of the country for study or work. Thus most of my links with Basingstoke were severed, and it is only seldom now that I return.



*“in the summer of 1968 I moved to Kent”
summer, 1968, with David Wheeler (stationed at RAF Lossiemouth)*

The world of my childhood and adolescence had been a good world - a peaceful, secure and wholesome one, where you knew people, places and customs. By 1968 when I moved to Kent, it had, in the title of the film, *Gone with the Wind* - a society and its way of life pushed aside and obliterated under the chilling euphemism of “development”.

Now, when I do return to the area, what evokes a sense of nostalgia in me when I do come back? Or maybe I should say, seeing I am in Wales, what provokes *hiraeth*?

The local architecture: I love to see the houses and churches built with flint: they always speak to me of home; and there are more thatched cottages and houses than in my present area.

I have spoken (during my working years) at churches in the New Forest and Wiltshire, and have loved hearing again the speech that used to be heard in Basingstoke. It seems that Hampshire is now classed as in the south-east of England; it was formerly in Wessex, and the modern descendant of the rich West Saxon dialect of Old English heard so often in and around Basingstoke when I grew up there, has been replaced with a London-sounding dialect. Now don't misunderstand me: my ears find the speech of London and the contiguous areas of Kent and Essex beautiful as well – but they do not speak to me of home. They evoke no nostalgia.

It also seems to me, though I cannot give names and facts, that people I met in chapels in places like Wootton St Lawrence, Oakley, Newnham, Burghclere, Charter Alley, Rotherwick, Newfound, Cliddesden were local people, living (in many cases born and bred) in or near those chapels and villages. Nowadays, albeit in a different area, I find village chapels are largely maintained by people travelling in from elsewhere, doubtless because they have past connections with the location. The chapel as part of village life seems very widely to

have passed away, and I feel it was a rich privilege for me to taste the final years of that dying aspect of English life. It has disappeared widely, but it enriched me, and contributed much to the foundation on which the rest of my life came to be built.



atop Cadair Bronwen, 2021

CONTACT

If you have enjoyed my reminiscences, and would like get in touch for any reason, you can send an email via the contact form on my website: www.primitivemethodism.com.

I also have a YouTube channel, which you will find if you type *David Young Wrexham and Basingstoke* in the YouTube search bar.