

## Life on the Edge

**Bill Greenalsh sat with his arm out of the window of his Polaroid Sales Area Manager's**, car puffing on one of his interminable cheroots. His 1977 Cortina Estate was stuffed full to the roof with MP4 & CU5



camera systems, ID3 identification systems and various cumbersome VDU hoods, the new SX70, and a mountain of Polaroid technical films. All fifty-one types - used across most industry sectors for capturing the picture that told the story behind the



research experiment, the baby ultrasound scan that told the radiologist the likely time from conception, the estate agent picture that found its way through your letter box, the final outcome of your fine dental work and many other data capturing pics that were an exceptional technology in the age of the typewriter. There was even a 3000 ASA film for use with fast video screen capture.

Bill told me that he had given up fags as they were bad for you. He was retiring – literally – and I had just joined the Polaroid Professional sales team as the 8x10 film expert due to my print background and a BSc Hons from Watford Tech 18 months earlier.

The next thing, my mentor for the week told me, was that I should not work my ass off but take the job 'easy'. What he meant of course is that if I did a modicum of work on his 'old patch' of central London, then his figures would look forever bad. As we cruised down the Finchley road into central London, his eye caught site of a likely looking lass.



I was soon to learn that Bill although meeting his retirement age still thought that 'the girls' were worth a go. With a broad smile he exclaimed - "Look at that xxxx slut, wouldn't you like to give that a goodun" Not unknown for his straight forward opinions, our Bill was in a good mood, looking forward to his very last week of 'work' before taking his pension. This amounted to doing the rounds of London Town, meeting his 'mates' who worked for his client businesses within high end photographic retailers, most professional photographers, all hospital radiographers & scanning departments, engineering companies, all research entities including the AWRE, dentists, estate agents and many government departments.

**The first stop** was within one of the world's most expensive retail arcades. Piccadilly Arcade housed the Professional photographic retailer Fox Cameras. In six years I don't think I ever saw a customer in this shop. I did however swap many packs of 8x10 demo film for some useful 'demo' cameras and equipment, these were happy to find a home in my new photographic and print business at number one Langley road near our first



house, (but that is another story for later on).

Bill introduced me and we had of course that cup of tea, how Bill ever managed to consume all those coffees and teas I never worked out. And he usually forgot the relevant sales questions, pausing only to pass the time of day with whoever he met.

His boss, David Bleazzard and now by boss, was completely the opposite. A consummate sales person and the best manager I ever had, although not unappreciated by me at that time. He also compiled the most gruesome fantastical Polaroid picture album from his tours around the UK's major hospitals. These were real life clinical photographs of various 'implements' and 'acts' that the professional

clinical photographers had taken during their working week. He used to introduce it to unsuspecting guests with the comment "it's just amazing what the human sphincter can accommodate".

At my interview, I entered the newish Polaroid building in Ashley Road St. Albans, in awe of the fine entrance hall and wide wooden steps up to the offices. I was met by a lady who looked like she had just done a shoot for Cosmopolitan. I jumped up the steps and was interviewed by the personnel director, (I didn't even know they existed), who asked me some fairly obscure questions, (I later found out he was an unusual card). What I had thought was a degree in Printing Technology and that's what they wanted. And as we were very few and far between they gave me the job. So, my late endeavours at education, spending three years to get two A levels and five years to gain an Honours Science Degree, finally paid off.



I joined the Polaroid Professional Division with a £5000 salary and a company car from a £1500 salary in print. I don't believe Jane and I were ever better off in our lives as we were then.



Jane was also working as a medical secretary for a Mount Vernon Orthopaedic surgeon, who was another Phillips. After a short spell in the west Hendon flat above the Welsh Harp boat shop, we bought our first house in Watford's Langley Road for £17,000 just after getting married. We managed to survive interest rates of 17% over the coming few years. These were carefree and great days, friends from college all around, into one of the many pubs every night, and I mean every night, then back to Colin and Ala's for cheese & biccies, Jane spoilt it by getting pregnant two years later.



**As the 8x10 'expert'** my task was to visit the professional photographers across London and try to get them to consider using the Polaroid film as their final output for printing or publication. Everyone except the US Polaroid people knew that this was an impossible task. But along the way I did meet and learn from the very best photographers in the world about still-life photography. Mostly based in and around Soho, amongst the sleaze, restaurants and boudoirs were the hidden studios of these talented people (all men of course in those days).



My first visit to Soho area for Polaroid reminded me immediately of an escapade many years earlier from the Cardiff based print factory with a brood of willing and unwashed comrades. A fleeting visit to the smoke, into the bars and out into the Soho bright lights. As a youngster of sixteen, I was wet behind the ears, and soon we were caught in the inevitable honey traps of the 'Soho Bars' with enticing young, (or not so young), ladies flaunting their wares. These bars had gaudy entrances in the back alleys off Wardour Street, dripping nectar and excitement that lured us down into their nests like lambs to the slaughter.



The exits were always round the corner with an unmarked black door from which the fleeced 'clientele' regularly got pushed. I was not excited by the idea of paying £90 for the privilege of meeting the basement ladies for just 5 minutes who purchased themselves a drink without 'a by your leave'. We soon realised we 'had been had' and went to leave, the exit being at the top of a steep flight of stairs in a darkened alcove bared by a counter, whereby stood two large and awkward gentlemen issuing us tickets for our money

they required to be handed over 'or else'. Having played more than a bit of rugby dodging the big guys, I was soon away under the counter with a quick roll or two, leaving my older mates behind to make their own judgement of the situation. They paid up like lambs and being quite a bit poorer we found our way back to Paddington for the trip home.

These Soho photographers were happy to use the 8x10 and 5x4 Polaroids as 'work in progress' for their final shots that were always completed on Kodak E6 transparencies. Loitering in these high end photo studios were the senior creative directors from the great and the good advertising agencies. The photo studio daily rate, even then, was in the many hundreds of pounds or even a £1000 for the very best. They created the car shots, the latest fashion shots, the magnificent food shots and the artistic cut-class from Harrods shots for the next edition of Cosmopolitan. Some of these photographers used multiple exposures along with carefully crafted masks fitted in the back of the 8x10 film carrier. Such technical photography needed the Polaroids to provide the material for the masks and the final proof of the shot. But the best reason for using the Polaroid film was to give the 'final' artistic view to these 'oh so clever art directors' and rid the photographers of their presence to enable the real work to begin. As I had an endless supply of 8x10 Polaroid demo film (@£4 a shot) I was treated to a view of the real photographic work and learnt a great deal in the process.



I had of course learnt much about the science of photography during my degree course. It was attempting to arrive for this degree course based in Watford in 1972 that I almost wrote-off my red MG Midget MK1 948cc (the model with the sliding windows). Driving down towards Oxford on the A40, having decided to overtake the line of cars before the roundabout to get past the queue quickly, I rear ended a car that had most inappropriately decided to stop and turn into the garage. It seemed to me at the time, that in no way was I at fault, how did I know the stupid sod was going to do that. But the fact was my lovely MG sports car had a holed its radiator and was not going any further. Now, perhaps I was



a little stunned, or just completely insane, but I decided the best course of action was to pick up my two very large cases and walk all the way to Harrow where my digs were awaiting. Interestingly, this garage was the very same one that I purchased my BMW GS motorbike from some thirty years later. And the digs were in



Hindes Road, the very same road that my brother-in-law Nick lived with his new bride Kasia many years later. The Harrow & north London area keeps popping up in my life and others close to me. Jane's parents lived there, and her grandmother, so did Neil's, just a stones throw away and of course Jane and I were both born in the area. It seems to me that half of the UK's population must have lived in north London during the 1950's.

But that night near Oxford it was dark, and I was lost and tired carrying my cases, then this small nice little gay man stopped in his car and gave me a lift – but only to his flat and a bed for the night somewhere near Headington. So far so good, although I spent most of the night constantly fending off this ridiculous and fortunately ineffectual man from trying to get into my bed. In the morning reason resumed and I took a train. I hope he had more luck in the future, I was ever grateful for the lift though. After much hassle and with a new radiator and fibreglass front fitted to the MG and I was ready for my degree course.



## Many Lives

The first little instance was completely self-inflicted. I think that this was my first life was lost, at least I cannot remember any other 'adventure' before-hand that concerned me particularly, apart from being left swinging in the wind from the 'safety' bar at the very top of Barry Island's *Big Wheel* aged about six. This time we were in my fathers very nice Rover V8,



adorned in metallic blue with a de-dion rear axle, that may well have helped myself and the other occupants survive. The cliff near Nash point lighthouse has short grass perfect for practicing handbrake turns and for generally messing about on. This particular afternoon, the grass was wet and very slippery, I was having great fun with three others (Keith Barlow being one of them). **Swooping about sliding the Rover** well away from the cliff edge that proffered a 300 foot sheer drop on to the rocks below. But life, when you are young (just 18), had a habit of turning a nasty unsuspecting corner. The cliff edge presumed to do just this as we came over a small brow doing around 30 mph. The cliff edge filled my vision directly in front, just a handful of yards away. My survival instinct kicked in and neither did I brake nor panic but steered very, very gently in an arc avoiding the cliff edge by no more than a foot or two. I stopped the car well away from the edge and we all decide to get out for some fresh air. Interestingly, no one uttered a single word. After getting our breath back we decided, as one, the correct course of action was to head directly to the nearest pub and celebrate our good fortune.



In those days there were no drink driving laws, at least non that we were aware of, and often we would get legless and drive wherever we wished. In my first car – a Ford Popular with vacuum operated windscreen wipers that stopped when you went up hill, I was a little worse for wear with alongside me, (to become a *Copper*), Clive Thomas would asked if I was ok driving, I replied in the affirmative and then seconds later drove directly over a small roundabout filled with shrubs and flowers in the middle.. Those were the days. John and perfected hand-brake turns. A great place to show off our skills was in the middle of town.

St Mary's street, Cardiff's high street, had a central strip of flowers between a road either side. Charge up the road past Morgan's department store, handbrake around the top of the flower bed and back down the other lane. We got quite good at that.



John arrived at Keith's house one day while we were all outside the front awaiting. Keith's road was on a hill and John miscalculated his speed. He went around three times, fortunately in the middle of the road, before parking up and pretending he meant it. How we laughed. Keith's dad's car was a VW estate. This was designed as a left hand drive and the ones that came over to the UK were modified for left hand drive. What we worked out quite quickly was that the passenger in the front could accelerate the car. The accelerator cable was routed behind the passenger front panel. We would wait for Keith to arrive at a corner and push forward hard on this panel. The car would accelerate just as Keith was trying to slow for the bend. "Bastards" he would yell, while trying to take avoiding

action to miss the hedge. Great fun. His mum and dad were wonderfully open and we made Keith's house our second homes. Keith and his dad planned an extension at the back, every once in while they re-dug the foundations, but never built the walls, it became a living example of the families ability to plan great things but rarely manage any of them, they were always far too nice and welcoming to concentrate on practical things. We all loved it there.



My second certain life was lost in France, in my MG Midget with my then girl friend Christine Slight from my Grammar school days. France as you may well know has many long straight provincial roads. It was on such and stuck behind a long, long queue of very slow moving vehicles that I decided this was holding up my need for speed and as I could see for miles down the road, I floored it. This went spectacularly well and I was doing 80 or so miles per hour by the time I



reached the head of the queue, the MG was working very well as I had done a complete engine re-build. When I reached the head of this queue I realised the very slow moving vehicle that had been holding everyone up was this old tractor - no doubt with a stout French farmer smoking his Gailoises and idling the day away. Unfortunately, just as I arrived, the old farmer decide to turn into his field direct across my path. Our lives either ended spectacularly then and there, or no. Quite how we missed that tractor I know not, but the farmers fag paper would not have fitted in the gap between our vehicles. There was one excellent outcome however. My girlfriend had not seen the tractor turning and of course I was not going to enlighten her. So we careered on serenely as if nothing had occurred at all. We went all the way to Portugal in this tiny MG filled to the brim with my diving gear and all our camping equipment. Spain was interesting, this was soon after Franco's demise and the country looked like a third world nation where the roadside cafes and shops were mud huts with corrugated roofs.



The third life was again lost in the MG, this time writing it off on the M4 motorway near the Heston flyover. Travelling back late at night with the same girlfriend, Christine, to our respective colleges, I was in the middle lane passing a stream of lorries - something I know never do – doing about 80mph, when a lorry pulled out of the slow lane directly into my path. It was wet, the midget was skittish and immediately went sideways as I attempted to avoid the lorry, to no avail we hit it just behind the cab. The lorry never stopped. But we were propelled directly into the barrier at almost right angles and came to rest in the central reservation. This was

puzzling as we were now sitting comfortably between the two barriers with the one behind holding down the boot lid, the windscreen was no more as it had been chopped off at its base and disappeared.

Christine had a nasty cut on her head and I had got away with skinned knuckles as my hands bent the steering wheel and hit the dash. I studied the scene for quite a while trying to work out exactly how we still had our heads on as the barrier had been no more than a eight inches off the ground when we hit it and was now holding down the boot lid. The most annoying part of this whole event was the guy who 'rescued' the car and took it to his compound in Hounslow. He was in cahoots with the met police, notoriously bent especially in those days. When I went to get any bits left from the wreckage, I found he had nicked my precious stereo radio & tape unit. He was a great lump of a man and when I complained that my stereo was missing, he promptly got up and fetched two enormous Alsatians and told me to f'off, which I duly did. I hope he died peacefully.



The fourth life lost was another near miss. It was the sea again. I was about thirteen or fourteen, walking on Southerndown beach (Dunraven Bay) in a mid-winter in a gale. Here there are some layered rocks that form flat ledges you can run and jump down to the next ledge. My parents had gone off somewhere and I was merrily attempting to see how far down to the breaking waves I could get as they came thundering in. Jumping down several of these long steps I got closer and closer, eventually almost right to the waves themselves, with spray everywhere. After about 20 minutes, I had just decided that was about as near as I could get and ran back up to the top ledge, probably some 10 metres above where I had got down to. I heard a louder roar and looked



around to see the sea had charged in with a massive wave that drove up to the lever just below where I now was. I couldn't believe it. I was stunned, it seemed impossible that a wave could be so much bigger than all the rest. All the layers of rock below me had simply disappeared into the sea. I knew I had been dead lucky. The undertow took the water back out. And if I had been doing just one more run - me with it, never to be seen again. An odd moment, as I was alone, with no one to share the 'adventure' with, of course I never told my parents, they would have just stopped me doing other stuff.

The fifth life 'lost' in a car was fairly recent. I was with Bry on the M4 in my BMW 330D. Great car, full sports package, I doing my usual 90 plus. I think we were coming back from her Uni in Bath. Just as I was going to pass a large 4x4 in the central lane, a foreign plated lorry pulled out from



the inside lane directly into the path of this 4x4. The driver instinctively swerved into my lane. Fortunately, I had learnt to left-foot brake for rallying and have used this technique ever since. On a motorway going fast, I always cover the brake with my left foot. This enables instantaneous braking. Boy did I need it then. I stood on the brake peddle and even at 90 mph the ABS kicked in. Without that the 4x4 would have hit us with an enormous sideways impact into and probably over the barrier. As it happened I don't even think the driver noticed us missing his rear by a few inches. I did tell Bryl that I had just saved her life. She just complained that I shouldn't drive so fast. They are never satisfied kids, are they! All my many other lost lives were on my motorbikes, but that is another story for later.

## Watford & Print

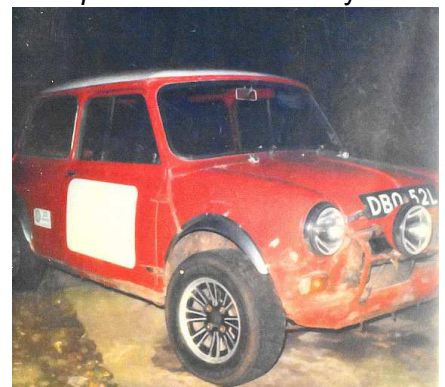
Then there was Watford college. At that time one of just two Printing Technology degree course in Europe. None now of course, printing is almost dead. These were good years. After writing off my MG



Midget as I was 'sponsored' in the four year sandwich course, (five in my case as I repeated a year – I blame it on my dyslexia!). I had 'company car' provided by Graphic Print. This degree course was a proper degree – we had lectures every day from 9 to 5, doing all the sciences including maths engineering and specialist topics appertaining to the print industry like photography, metallurgy, ink & paper technology. Then, whilst other students went off on holiday we were sent packing to various print companies around the UK to work our passage. We did of course manage to spend lots of time in the bar and in the Horns Pub next door.

Although hard work, I did achieve an excellent education in the applied sciences with good depth and breadth. Few courses offered this wide range of science and technology subject matter at degree level in those days or since. I was always interested in how things worked and this provided an excellent base for my lifelong interest in science and technology. We had one lecturer, Jim, who was a magician. He taught us maths and applied physics. His was one of the few lecturers that we, only a small group of eight doing the degree course, looked forward to. He had low drawl and would paint pictures in our heads of impossibly complex theories and mathematical convolutions, but in a way that made sense. Off we would go for a break in awe of his explanations. But by the time we had finished a coffee the images in our minds seemed to evaporate and we seemed none the wiser. A very strange thing this, we all found the same, and I have never experienced anything like it before or since.

College was time-consuming, but I did find time however *to rally a Mini Cooper S* with John Thayer. We kept the rally car in my parents garage in Cyncoed Road. Working on it late into the night when I was home between terms. Back in work by 8 am as I was also working in my parents print company during the day (Graphic Print). During my last degree year, Graphic Print moved form Woodville Road in Cardiff to Taffs Well. This tiny town held the record for the most pubs in any UK high street at the time. It was a new build and I project managed the whole building and moving in process. I learnt many things doing



this and made many key decisions for the factory. I even welded the massive frame together for the front door overhang (having done an evening welding course for the mini while at college).

In the early stages I had made a model of the new factory and spent hours moving machines around to see where they worked best. What I found was that the planned factory was not going to work, it was too narrow and the whole factory had to increase in size. During the build, I learnt much from the trades people, especially the plumber who enjoyed showing me how to do stuff properly. He was very good and made complex fitments look easy. At one time he needed

to cut a hole in the ceiling and roof to fit the boiler 12 inch diameter vent pipe. There was no way of measuring the correct position for the holes so that they matched up as the two were six foot apart with no external access for measuring. The pipe slid through both holes perfectly first time, I never did work out how he did that. One Irish tradesman laying the stones for the office entrance was not so hot. I found him laying the slabs upside down with the base layer that had lumps on it for keying into the cement facing upwards. He wouldn't have it though, he was not going to be told by a young oik he didn't know what he was doing and walked off never to return.

Come the day of the move, a specialist print removal company (Vanguard) transported the large print machines into the front of the factory. They left the machines Friday night on the craned lorries and came back on the Saturday. The main Foreman however had not returned as it was a weekend. I was watching with interest at how they intended to get the machines safely off the lorries, when to my horror they started slinging the lifting chains around the inking and damper rollers. These looked like to good place as they were high up with room to wrap the chains around to balance the machine when lifting. I knew that this would wreck every machine, the roller bearings while substantial would not take the load of ten tons that each machine weighed. Print machines are



incredibly heavy by design. I called a stop. "What the fuck you stupid kid" I was shouted at and threatened by these heavy lifters. I said "you cannot lift them by the rollers". "We will fuck off then" and they all down tools and walked off site. I saved the whole business and thirty jobs that day, although my legs were shaking. Next day the foreman returned looking very apologetic. So much for a specialist removal company, Vanguard are still going I believe. **After college I spent**



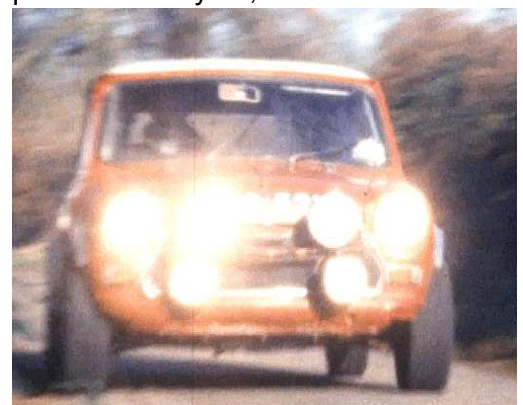
about two years in Graphic Print, doing everything from mending machines to becoming Production Manager. Print was unionised with several different unions representing different trades such as compositors, machine minders and finishers. I learnt a lot but I was too young to manage all these people and their respective union traditions. Then I met Jane doing van runs up to London and staying over with Jon Barber in his bedsit in Watford. Jane was also a resident and that was it as they say. Within a year I was married, moved to the flat in Hendon, got the Polaroid job, and a month later bought the house at 35 Langley Road. Job done.

While in college and the print business, John Thayer and I took turns in navigating and driving the rally Cooper S. Motoring News events mostly - these were effectively a legalised road race, now banned of course. Starting at 11 pm and running till about 6 am the competitors in full spec rally cars, Escorts. Minis, Triumphs, Fiat's and other spiced up vehicles. We went off in one minute intervals into the country lanes of Wales and the West country. They soon caught up to each other and raced around the lanes as if was a race track. Blazing a full frontal of lights, we lit up the lanes like daylight, with the very occasional late



night driver having taken to the hedge and hiding somewhere until these mad people all went roaring by. These rally cars all had roll cages, fireproofed bulkheads, full harnesses and seriously souped up engines.. The quick boys, were indeed very quick. Mick Bryant, an established

name in those days, won the MN series several years running. They were renown for their speed even in the fog. The navigator would have his head buried in his lap using his 'potty' – an upturned plastic pot with a light and large magnifier in the end – the good navies called all the corners and straights from marked maps – 'flat for half a mile, then 60 left'. Bryant's navi could call these so accurately they went as fast in the fog as in the clear. And were are talking about a full blown Twin-Cam Escort with 350 Brake horsepower doing 80 plus mph even in these tight lanes. The marked maps could be purchased specifically for rallying – they had the mistakes marked up - so you knew every corner was mapped



accurately, or at least you hoped so.

The mini went through several iterations, ending up with a full blown 1340cc 'S' engine. This had all the top race parts; 649 cam, tuft-ridged crank, lightened flywheel, two half inch SU carbs... The first time we put it together we couldn't believe the power, but we had got the compression ratio wrong, it only went a few miles before blowing the head gasket going up the hill near Newport. We added 12 inch front wheels and a limited slip diff. Now this proved interesting as each wheel would take turns in driving the car forward, it would hop from one side of the road to the other. We wondered why all the other mini's had huge steering wheels, it was the only way to keep it on the road. Worked well on the gravel though. It would pull the car around the corners, all you had to do was hold on and floor the accelerator and around you went. At least, that was what you hoped for, and it was all good fairly safe fun as all cars needed a full rally 'cage', fire protection, race harnesses. For off road events, you also needed to wear a helmet.

John and I had fun but never really got the Mini to be reliable enough to compete properly, especially against the Twin-Cam Escorts that were the same spec as the International rally cars. These dug huge ruts in the off-road events and the mini, even with the larger 12 inch wheels wobbled along on its sump guard, in the tracks left by the Escorts.. Mostly we retired with some problem or other and towed it back from the depths of mid Wales behind John's Mini-Van. We went just as quick towing, often overtaking cars while – the look on drivers faces as we went passed was always amusing.

**And that reminds me** of a little trick myself, John and Keith Barlow used to use. Often going somewhere in convey – perhaps west Wales, maybe camping and diving in Cornwall, the car in front would find a safe place to overtake, then at the next corner either indicate left or right – the right indication telling the following car that nothing was coming, and we would then overtake in the middle of the bend, giving overtaken car's driver a pretty big scare I expect. Great manoeuvre though, always worked perfectly. Some of our antics were less well versed. When a bit bored, one of us drivers, would simply shout 'swap' and start climbing out of the driving seat. Whoever was behind the driver had to get in quick! No seat belts or head rest to get in the way those days. We had a few prangs but nothing serious considering the chances we took,

including the stupid prank of myself driving on the wrong side of the road through a blind bend under a bridge – god knows what I was thinking.



Then there was Thayer, god bless him, taking a run at a hump back bridge in the middle of nowhere somewhere near Marshfield east of Cardiff I think. We had found this bridge the day earlier and went back to do it justice. Dick, Keith and Myself went either side of the bridge a little way up the road to make sure the coast was clear. Then we waved to John in his Mini-Van to "go go go". And how he did. Perhaps with the delay of waiting for us to line him up he had lost the idea of how steep this humpback bridge really was. He never came down again. He flew off the humpback and landed in the top of the hedge about ten yards down the road. While John was wailing and thrashing about, swearing and cursing us for our stupidity, we were prone, lying on the road, laughing so hard we could not get up. The more John cursed us the more we laughed, he really could not see the funny side of it. It took us a long time to extricate his Mini-Van from the hedge, but only a little bit battered.



One of the nicest little get out of trouble John and I had was when I was following his Mini-Van down a tight lane, going our usual silly speed. I was in my first ever car, a Ford Popular which was so old the windscreen wipers stopped working when going up a hill as they were inlet vacuum powered, the vacuum stopped when on full throttle. Anyway, around the corner came a lorry, John's new Mini-Van had excellent brakes and stopped letting the lorry whizz past, my Popular had little or no brakes. So I had no-where to go except into the back of John's Mini Van. I took the other option and simple drove off the road and up the bank to the left, while up there John saw my clever manoeuvre and shot forward so that I could arrive back down on the road. I still think that was the best crash avoidance I ever did.



More recently, a local Harrow biking guy Steve Fez and I went



on a day rally event in mid Wales. This was run by an ex-rally guy called Phil Price, now sadly deceased (2021). The full Rally stage was at the top of a hill with drops of probably a hundred feet all around. This stage is used by world class teams for practice and Phil was the rally coach for many top drivers. There is now a memorial rally held in his name. At the bottom is a section that you learn the techniques on using old Ford Escorts. We both had BMW GS's at the time and had a nice blast down there. This turned out to be probably the best days fun I have ever had. At the end of the day, Phil accompanied you in a rally Subaru. Now this was a very special rally car as it had two complete sets of controls, including two steering wheels. I was strapped into the drivers seat and Phil said "Off you go then I'll call the corners". Ok, I said "how fast?". "Fast as you like" says Phil, "I'll sort you out if I need to". Now, I think if Phil had known me better, he maybe would have been a bit more circumspect. So I floored the Subaru up the first slope. By the time we had reached a near 90 degree right hander at the top I was doing 80 mph. Using what I knew of rally technique, just before the corner, I threw the car completely sideways, then back on the power, in the vague hope that Phil would do his magic and save us from hurtling over the looming edge fast approaching to our left. Phil didn't even blink, he just said "well done", gave a slight adjustment to my line and we sailed around the bend. The next few minutes were pure magic for me. I cannot remember ever having been let of the lead like that, but in a controlled environment.



The last part of the day, Phil took each of us in turn for a lap around his mountain course. He had a replica Colin McCrae full international rally Subaru, in beautiful condition. What he did with that car around the mountain was simply impossible. It was one of those, "Ah I see"

moments when you realise what you think you know is replaced by a total re-assessment of speed and ability. At each and every corner, I has the certain knowledge that Phil had got it completely wrong and we must surely hurtle over the side of the mountain to our deaths. The rally school is still being by John Caine his second in command, and apparently they still have the dual control car, it's well worth the money.

We used to go and spectate at the old 1970's rallies in mid Wales, in the forest around Machynleth and similar. These were the old RAC and Welsh rallies, with drivers like Roger Clarke, Hannu Mikkola and Jimmy McRae (Colin's dad). At night, this spectating was great fun. There would be hundreds of people in the pitch black forest, walking up the centre of the stage roads, listening for the *Marshals* whistle to tell everyone to get clear as a car was coming through. All you could see was the bob of torches all around as people rushed for the safety of the bank, often just to fall into the inevitable ditch, then scramble up the bank just in time to get clear. The old BDA Twin Cam Escorts made a wonderful low, powerful howl as the drivers threw these cars around each bend, always sideways. Even in those days these International Rally cars were very quick, they came with an amazing blaze of lights and rocketed past leaving a cloud of dust. The cheers and claps reminded you the forest was full op people, all unseen.

I saw Roger Clarke go round Llandow race track, a former aerodrome near Llantwit Major west of Cardiff. This circuit often held race days. There is only one interesting corner at the bottom, very few ever got this right, it had a very late apex after a big sweeping right hand bend that seemed to on forever. I had studied this corner and Roger (who was a naturally talented driver), two-wheeled his Rally Escort flat out in a beautiful arc and hit the apex perfectly on the exit. This was on the Welsh Rally that he won in 1975. *I found this pic left, it is the actual pic of Roger taking this corner in 1975, I must be in the crowd behind!*



Some time later, I 'borrowed' my fathers V8 Rover, (of the cliff fame), and did a lap of this circuit on an open day. Oh, yes, I knew exactly how to get round this bend perfectly. Take a wide,



wide sweep, keep slightly on the gas until you can see the apex just before the exit, then floor it There is a very large bank some fifty yards from the tarmac protecting spectators from wayward vehicles. I was supremely confident when I turned into this corner. But, half way around someone must have changed the profile, and I was heading really quite fast for the grassy bank, fortunately at a bit of an angle. Woops, once on

the grass I had very little control or breaking, and we hurtled at the bank just managing to prevent a serious accident by bumping along up the side. That would have been expensive. I still don't understand how so much effort can go into learning one corner with so little success.

## Technology & Change

As a watcher of current technology I am always amazed at how much this has changed since my early years in Polaroid to now (2024). The highest tech then was the electric typewriter, and for larger businesses a Teleprinter plus a £10,000 black & white Xerox copier. The Teleprinter sent messages via the standard phone lines to distant parts. Smaller businesses or individuals were limited to long-distant, hugely expensive calls or to sending Post Office's telegrams. A few years later, by 1980, the first real micro computers such as Apple and the BBC micro had emerged and everything started to change. (The BBC micro has been praised for providing a generation of computer literate kids that enabled the UK's excellence in IT and helping develop leading UK industry sectors such as gaming.) Print technology was then 'cutting' edge'. Litho had come of age, and the pre-press processes were all hi-tech photographic processes.



In these early days, to communicate you had to turn up at the door. This was the age of large corporate sales teams who travelled the UK to visit and sell to their prospects. Polaroid had several – my professional division, the sunglasses division and the lowly consumer division. But we all went on fabulous

away weekends and had sales meetings in places such as Tenerife or Portugal. From my joining in 1978, Polaroid Professional were the main profit centres world-wide. The consumer division added scale, but made little profit. Consumer cameras were sold at a loss, and each camera needed the consumer to buy 1.8 packs of film to break even.



**Polaroid had more patents** than any company in the world when I joined. But within a few years, the technology has changed the landscape. Polaroid in 1977 launched Polavision. I still have the tapes (standard 8mm film) with pictures from those early days (I must get them out from the loft and digitise them, no idea what they contain now!) Very soon after a world wide launch, Polaroid issues us all with an ultimatum – turn in all your demo equipment for destruction, from now on Polavision never existed! The Betamax had arrived. As we progressed during the early 1980's computers began to take on some data and visual tasks. Polaroid was feeling the technological pinch and launched into devices that helped capture pictorial outputs from these new micro-computers. One such device was the Polarprinter. This took the coloured VDU screen image and created an accurate film output either onto a standard peel apart picture or a new instant 35mm transparency. The US told the UK we had to sell 100,000 of these devices in the first launch year. I told the management during a difficult sales meeting that we would only sell one tenth of this number as we didn't have more than a few thousand potential customers within our professional sector that could make use of it. No brownie points, but I was exactly correct. However the **Polarprinter gave me a new business idea** especially as not keeping pace with my outgoings. Turning the loft in 35 Langley road into an office joining forces with my old college friend Jon Barber, we got a loan from Lloyds Bank and purchased an Apple 2e computer worth £1700... bearing in mind our house only cost £17,000 a few years before this was mega money for a slow, floppy disk based 64Kb memory computer with an 8 bit chip. The business we called Computer Graphics and my old mate Chris Tidy (again from

Polaroid salaries were

college and a graphic designer) created a brilliant logo. Chris is a lovely bloke, but he was often on the end of some trauma through no fault of his own. I hurt his ankle in a three side football match and while sitting on a bench in the park one day a bloke came up and hit him for no reason, his excuse being "sorry I just had to hit someone". I was having a pint with him around the corner from where we both lived, and as we sat down on a bench table outside, the whole table tipped as he sat on the bench and he poured the whole pint over himself.



Computer Image Ltd  
Computer imaging systems &  
computer slide generation

*Computer Image* attempted to sell next day slides for presentations. Our system used new graphics design software called Robo-Graphics software and you could draw with it. This plan worked to a point and we paid off the loan but the business never really took off. We spent a lot of money in doing a very extensive mail campaign, but I found out later that the mailing list was complete rubbish and we did not get anywhere near the usual 2% result, (as it was in those days, ha!). The best thing about this business was the logo (right) that my good friend Chris Tidy created. Eventually many, many years later, I threw away the Apple 2e when I cleared out our loft in Hughenden Valley (Tosser!).

| MAIN EXPENDITURE BREAKDOWN (Including V.A.T.)          |             |
|--|-------------|
|  | £           |
| Apple II E Computer                                    | 1300        |
| Monitor  | 300         |
| Printer  | 500         |
| Plotter  | 800         |
| Palette  | 1300        |
| Software   | 770         |
|  | <hr/>       |
|  | 4970        |
|  | <hr/>       |
| Stationery   | 250         |
| Mailing (5000)   | 2800        |
| Advertising  | 1400        |
|  | <hr/>       |
| <b>Total outlay over half cost of 35 Langley Road!</b> | <b>4450</b> |

**The next business venture** was hard on the heels of Jon and my Computer Graphics business. *Protran* was a specialist pre-print business initially aimed at creating a wizzy new way of making colour separations for the print industry. *I made all the equipment.* I shall repeat that – I made all the equipment, it almost cost me my marriage and my sanity and took over a year. This included a complete nitrogen

burst E6 film developing system including a set of four large tanks made from sheet PVC and welded together. (I still have some of this and still use it to make stuff, it is particularly good for odd shapes). The whole system needed temperature control to within 0.05 deg C. I made the electronics for these and the nitrogen burst timers. I made an 8x10 enlarger from a Polaroid MP4 camera stand and ripped off the design of a De-Vere light box (that De-Vere sold for £10,000). De-Vere was one of my Polaroid customers, I spent half an hour sketching out their design on one visit when I was left alone in their darkroom. This enlarger was powered with a very expensive lens from one of my photographic retail customers in London (swapped for 8x10 demo film of course). This equipment was all installed within our back bedroom, *my mind now boggles at this endeavour.*



**This system only ever produced one job** – for my college mate Colin Rothwell who then worked as second in command in the production department of the UK's largest magazine business. Why were there no other businesses offering such a system? It was a cheaper production method, but the technical information I had learnt at college did not match the reality in production – surprise, surprise. The final output was poor quality and not useful for general commercial use. *Another hard lesson learnt.*

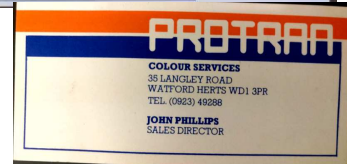


**This company then morphed** into a photographic, design and print business. This worked quite well for a year or so, photographing pictures of books for a local book company for their advertising and film positives for a local screen printers. Unfortunately one of these

closed down and the other moved away. The next revision was to move into number one Langley road and employed Piers a mate of Nick my brother-in-law as a direct sales agent. I put a massive back lit sign in the large window of number one



Langley road that did attract good business. But, eventually, the owner of the premises went bust and we needed to move. This was too much for Piers and he left after we had found a place just up the road, his heart was not really in it. Now Piers went on to work in sales within a paper distributor called 'Paper Run' – in the Slough Trading Estate – *the very company that created the idea for 'The Office' with Rickie Gervase as David Brent.* I closed Protran then. However, within the premises I had installed a 40/80 Rotaprint printing machine, and it was in the basement. This Rotaprint probably weighed about two tons and we slide it down the steps into the basement as it was the only way to get it down the stairs. I expect it is still there! Interestingly Rotaprint were based in Honeypot Lane Edgware, the same road as Jane and I were both born - in the Honeypot Lane maternity hospital, alas, closed many years ago.



Around the corner from Langley road was St Albans Road there were two of our favourite places. One of these was a 'Wimpy' burger bar that never sold actual franchised Wimpy's, but were *much* nicer, and Jane in particular loved them. The second was Midnight Motors, a car parts shop that had everything, and I mean everything, I lived in that shop and it never seemed to close either. *What's crazy is that it is still there!*



Technology and change have been at the forefront of my life. Having used technical progress for my own businesses and personal development, I probably take a slightly different view to other people. This period of change was massive, going from typewriters to PC's then the first mobile phones, and then the internet in 1990. There was lull after this until we had the iPhone in 2007. This spurred things on again and now we live not many years later with a changed world. All communication has been renewed throughout our societies, not always to our benefit. Big business always seizes the chance to turn a profit, although some of the current major companies such as Twitter, Uba, AirBnB, WhatsApp have never made a penny. They seem to be data machines that pose questions for our democratic processes and our wellbeing. Now as we move along the AI path, this data is already being used for training. Twitter, (that may soon go bust), is still apparently worth a lot of billions as a data source and data repository for training AI.

**The print industries, for which** I had an intermit understanding, offered a fascinating tale of invention and decline in equal measure. The print is a perfect microcosm of the changes over just thirty five years. The pace of change was sometimes impossible to keep apace with. Companies purchased new (very) expensive equipment such as photo-scanners that turn photographs into films for four colour process printing, just to find next week there was a new machine at half the cost that went 10 times faster. People who have never worked in a capital intensive business, do not realise the management and running is quite different from people based businesses. Back in 1989 my sister purchased a new Heidelberg five colour press, I did tell her not to do it as we were entering a recession, but she did it anyway. This machine cost £1.2m Graphic Print was then effectively bust as there is no way to compete with other companies when you have falling prices and a new machine – as you cannot cut your cost base.

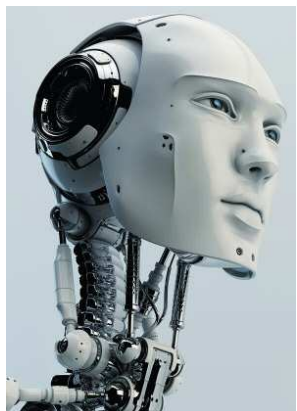
When I look back and look forward, I see continual technological change. If AI is not the next level up, then something else will be soon. This is as clear to me as the sun coming up every morning. Yet our societies never plan for these changes, they plan for technology standing still, as sometimes over short periods, it may seem to.

Of course there will be new tech, we just cannot say what changes will be impactful. I sat next to the guy (in QinetiQ) who project managed the very first proper military drone (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, UAV) in conjunction the US military. When the US entered Afghanistan in 2001, they took the first prototype from QinetiQ. It was still being checked out by my colleague. This drone enabled ground communication to the large Air



recognition planes (AWACS). I was amazed at the time to find out that in the early 2000's the forces could not talk directly to each other, the airforce, navy or army all used different comms systems. This drone enabled translation between these systems and allowed a ground trooper to provide exact co-ordinates for either an air strike or a naval guided missile. Now we see wars being fought with drones being centre stage.

Many people complain about the latest tech. They see no point for it, and then get into a hugely technological car and drive to the away using sat-nav and Google maps. The media and politicians today talk about future wages and economics in the long term, (30-50 years), as if there will be no change that will impact these issues. Perhaps they have little imagination? Or maybe like many others are happy to repeat the same mantra over and over again? I discuss later, imagination and training for kids to enable them to question stuff throughout their lives, this of course is clearly contrary to what the 'ruling class' wants. And we see a whole continent (China) forcing exactly the opposite to 'an imaginative & thinking culture', in their belief that it is the only way a world of eight Billion people can remain in harmony as a society. If it is, and they may well be right, then please leave me out.



My personal guess is that the next major technological change will be AI coupled to Robotics. AI is currently at the stage that the very first 8 bit micro's were in the early 80's. AI technology has so far to go in the next 30 years that we cannot know what it's impact shall be. It is likely however to create not just a step-change for the human race, but new era for humans that will surpass the industrial revolution. The issues around the safety of AI will be by-passed by big business in the usual way. The iPhone, (we can consider as a step change), has just done this for communication. The Apps enabled by the iPhone have created new ways for doing 'data based stuff' in every single aspect of our lives and for all businesses. Yet, we do not directly perceive this as a technological revolution, yet it is. What this particular technical revolution has not done a great deal of, is to improve human's output, it has increased efficiency a little, but mainly it has moved our workload to different processes. When improved AI gets together with robotics, then we should see this start to significantly improve our efficiency and replace much of our input and not just data communication.

## Critical Thinking & Politics



Growing up, from a very young age, I always interested in how things worked. At the age of eight, I took down and took apart the kitchen clock, I just wanted to know how it worked. As a positive child, I had no reason to believe that it would not go back together. I hung it back on the wall, looking none the worse, but all of its mechanism was in the bin, not our bin, the neighbours. That reminds me of Ala & Colin's daughter aged about four, when their budgie died, Jane said "Ah, that's a shame Anna, has it gone to the heaven for little birds?" "No", said Anna, "It's in the Bin"

At all my schools the only lessons that I took an interest in were practical demonstration of science. I can remember the experiment in the basement of one school where the candle went out under a closed glass jar, I think I was only six years old at the time. This along with my practised day-dreaming has provided for a practical and logical mind. I remember how things work and I can apply this knowledge. My success in sales, consultancy, my businesses and computing is based on this ability.

**As I got older, I found it increasingly difficult to understand** why people generally, and the society as a whole did not find useful solutions to their many problems. I can usually derive many solutions that I believe would work, and, I understand implicitly how these could be implemented. Over my extended years, I have seen failure after failure after failure with political governance. It is only recently that I believe I now understand why our systems have no chance of delivering effective solutions to help govern our society. This is a world-wide failure across all democracies. The countries that have fared better are indeed the autocracies. China has developed much quicker over the last twenty five years than it should have been able to, as their decision making did not have to follow societal norms.

The core issue that has perplexed me for quite some time, is why with increasing efficiency from technological change – over my lifetime, very significant efficiency gains – imagine going back to typewriters, postal service, manual production methods? This was the situation in the 1970's when I got married, bought a house, had holidays, ran two cars – all on one average salary. I have been trying to



work out how the western societies managed to turn this massive efficiency gain into an effective loss for most families. Over one billion people allowed this to happen, with little dissent. It is ridiculous.

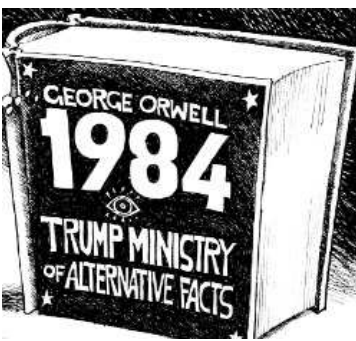


**Similarly, we currently see Russia** seemingly undertaking a war that is against the broad instincts of it's population. But it now looks like Putin and North Korea perhaps Iran and China, will significantly benefit from this action. Keith Barlow recently told me that Putin has gone for a land grab, very sensible if you consider the threats from global warming, he's probably right. Putin has re-engaged his industries providing jobs and wealth and is selling his oil and gas successfully to autocratic regimes. Russia is now in a much stronger



position within a 'new axis of evil' and ever growing military strength. The West hid behind its hands under the ridiculous threat of a nuclear Armageddon. How Putin must be laughing, the bully waves his big stick and the weaklings hide away. The west should have swotted Putin immediately to avail Ukraine of their victory. The west is now faced with an immense future problem of how it survives in the face of combined threats from autocratic nations with both nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities that at least match the Western democracies.

**The reasoning behind my new understanding** I shall attempt to outline as follows; (stay with me...), The process of working together as a group or tribe has been created unthinkingly by nature. Along with some other social species we are a *social animal first and foremost*. We have never evolved away from this basic social nature that glues people together *and makes the group a very efficient machine for survival*. Nature decides all the main stages in our lives; From the first years of development, the hormone changes at puberty and the menopause, and the essential 'requirement' to fall in love and procreate. We do not choose these staged life processes, we survive them. Life is thus fraught with disappointments and almost certain failure in our expectations. Perhaps there is a few years where there is a 'sweet spot' old enough to really understand the world, young enough to take life as it comes and enjoy it. But, for my particular argument here, these natural life stages also specifically control what and how we think. We now understand, that at around the age of twenty one, the brain goes through another stage that shuts down our earlier appetite for risk, adventure and learning. Thus our societal behaviour is also dictated by these natural yet powerful processes.



The difference between humans and other social animals that makes us so much more successful, is our advanced ability to communicate. Ask most people about what makes us different and often they will say our thinking ability. This is not correct, thinking is just a manifestation of communication.

Words and sentences allow us to 'think', (try thinking without them), as we think by 'talking' to ourselves, and, with others to plan ahead in our group effort. Our communication improved our rate of survival and in turn, our brains grew much larger as we developed and improved our food sources. Larger brains enabled our improving toolmaking ability. Many animals make and use of tools, yet humans have taken toolmaking to another level with our advanced brain. We now know that other species such as the Denisovan and Neanderthals had significant communication and toolmaking abilities, so humans are not unique, we just did it better.



**Nearly everything in our society** rests on our basic social instincts and interactions. What you look like, the way you sound, the way you interact with others, what you choose to do.



Together, these provide for your place in the social hierarchy. Societal norms drive just about everything and these are immutable over the shorter-term. As social animals, we are adept at creating



brilliantly complex social structures around ourselves. We work very hard, instinctively, at this process from an early age. The result is that the society as whole creates a culture of its own. This cultural norm is almost impossible to change without significant external challenges. When I left Tetra I was about thirty seven years old. A few years later I attempted to get back involved with selling high-end computer systems. Not a chance, I was over forty and the door was smacked in my face. Ridiculous, I had not even reached the peak of my abilities in sales, let alone anything else.

Yet that was the cultural norm then, over forty and you could not work in the computer industry. Few ever discuss this powerful and almost unmovable '*social basis*' for our actions. Unless discussion is linked to 'current concerns' such as attitudes to females at work, or some other issue that has caught our social 'minds-eye'. People, politics and institutions do not peer around the corners, we all live insulated from reality by these powerful current social norms. It takes a war or an existential threat to change these

cultural values. We see that the NHS was born from such a change after the second world war.

**I do not have an answer to this cultural conundrum**, it is who we are and what drives us individually and naturally. *Effective* change is not about specific current issues, it is about planning for the unknowable future. Our social ties and norms prevent us from thinking clearly or planning our society to match these future needs. Travel ahead some several thousand years into the future, and try to convince people that it is a good idea to build societal structures based upon religious beliefs. It clearly is not a sensible idea, it is illogical and quite frankly, (as a scientist and thinker), fundamentally ridiculous. Yet religion has been a main driver for most societies for over three thousand years and still is for more than half of humanity. You see my point I hope. We are very happy to exist within this social glue, even though it means we cannot plan ahead for changing technology and its effects. **I have just read a marvellous book**, it reads like a Black Comedy. It is called the *Power of Geography (Tim Marshal)*. This one book explains some of the history of the world, its conflicts and why. It should be mandatory reading for all kids from 14 years until they leave school. Unfortunately, it is a very dark book, it shows how the world has been 'run' by humans over the last three thousands years, and this boils down to *geography, religion, and utter bastards*.

**So, our society, which** is reflected in our politics, has this illogical and stubborn social foundation from which to create change. We hide this *spectacularly* well by sheltering our failed attempts under the blanket of something we call 'democracy'. It has taken me seventy years to work this out. As a positive person who likes change, I have followed politics all my life. I asked myself, why don't the systems work to create effective plans for the future? I always presumed, when younger, that with improved education for the 'masses', reasoning and understanding would improve and thus proscribe better outcomes for society and political thinking.

**I was wrong.** The Internet, for which I had tremendous hopes (and one of the first to get properly involved), has proved even more subjective and subversive than the printing presses of Henry VIII's reign and thereafter. It comes back, yet again, to all of us being a part of a continuous wave of social processes that define our societies. And some of these are dictated by physiological processes during our development.

**We do create change**, but nearly always this is prompted by a significant predilection for an already socially accepted move. Our laws follow our social processes. These social urges are not what we logically require to move us forward or to solve the underlying issues we face. During my lifetime, I can



remember just one or two political changes that have been 'planned'. Margaret Thatcher's attempt to change union power and Blair's attempt to change educational standards. Neither worked particularly well, both created change but yet again this change was not thought through properly. Thatcher's changes led to the creation of a *new underclass* and Blair's led to some improvement in education but failed to permanently lift educational standards in the poorest regions.

**Another recent book that shines a light** on the *real* workings of the UK's Parliament ('Politics on the Edge' by Rory Stewart) has changed my view, yet again, of how

improbably poor our democratic processes actually are. Here is one paragraph from the book:

*"MPs who had served the long apprenticeships of doorstep campaigns, who used Prime Minister's Questions to land little stories in their local papers, and exploited their media appearances to repeat party slogans – too often treated friends with the same half-truths and evasive geniality with which they approached their electors. I felt the very skills which helped them get elected and promoted undermined their ability to think clearly about what the country needed. I hated how politicians used the pompous grandeur of the Palace of Westminster to pretend to a power they did not have, and take credit for things that they had not done. I felt that this was at the heart of our failure of responsibility.."*



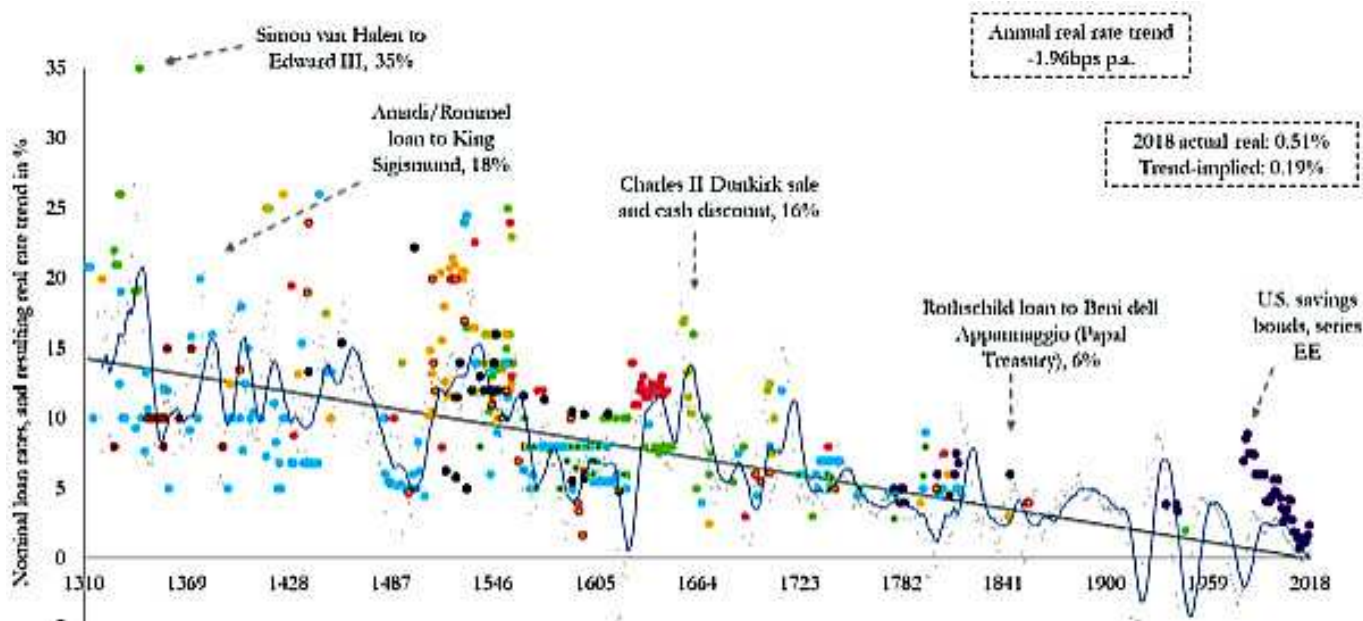
**The above reinforces my own personal view** that the world looks through a *fundamental social lens*, explains this failure of governance, tragedies of repression, slavery, of most wars, of all radicalisms, of all

racial inequalities and ongoing female subjugation across many societies. The Chinese currently have a profoundly different cultural view of society to the west. They believe, (maybe quite correctly), that for humanity to survive longer term; society needs to be wrapped up within a *proscribed* social environment. And, of course, Orwell's 1984 predicted this. The world, during the coming generation, will decide which social system survives. I don't think this will be about 'freedom' or 'humanity,' it will be about which social system works best for a post-climate changed world.

### Where Next?

The old philosophers worked out many different potential solutions for society. But, in the end, society has provided it's own solutions. Solutions that have *evolved* due to the prevalent economic possibilities of the day. All larger societies, while they may seem politically different, all follow very similar economic structures. *The basis for all these economies is work output, efficiency, trade and resources.*

In modern times, almost as soon as we created the tool we call **money** (yes it is a man-made tool), we created a *power class*. Money has been the lever that has enabled this to happen. This has not changed for some three thousand years or more now. The general population has been enslaved by the elite class throughout our history, and often with our blessing, "God Save The King". But **money** is based on 'human work output'. **If this trends to zero, then money value will also trend to zero.** (It is likely to be replaced by a new share-out tool based on 'resources', and, I cannot convince anyone of this, yet I do not see any other possible outcome). **However there exists a very interesting graph** – by the Bank of England – that shown *money value* has fallen for 700 years. **And, it has trended to zero!** To me this looks like a fundamental statement about economics, yet no one ever discusses this graph and it's importance for the future.



**What I am sure of now, is that our natural need to adhere to social norms plays directly into the hands of the people who wield the real wealth and thus the real power.** This works because these people exist **outside our social processes.** In this way, they alone control their own destiny. Perhaps, just perhaps, history will show that it is these people who inherit what is left from all human endeavour and climate disruption. Future historians may *not* notice that the success of this elite was based upon the demise of most of the rest of humanity for over three thousand years.

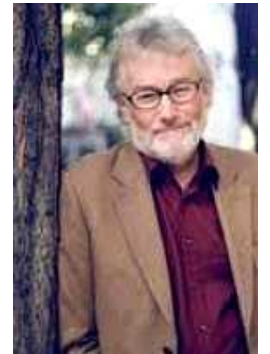
I often say, to my close friends, "**come the revolution**". As a person who has baulked at following most societal norms, I like to think that at some time in the future, technological change will eventually free humans from work and subjugation by the elite. But, I do see a time when our economics will be so changed by technology, that humans will have to step back and reconsider how society is constructed and who is really driving it, simply *because the current economic structures shall not work.*



**Maybe, just maybe** the future will change with what I think of as the 'smart robot'. This 'soon' may remove an essential part of current economics, (and economies), as the need for paid work will diminish. True change will only happen if the society "understands" what the underlying changes being played out really offer for humanity. The 'smart robot' will not just *move the goal posts* they will do away with the playing field. The 'Powerbrokers' will do everything in their power to prevent this understanding changing our cultural norms. They will leverage societies adherence to current economic processes to prevent major cultural and economic change - just like the past leaders controlled society by leveraging our religious beliefs.



But come the 'smart robot' people will have to re-consider their lives, because there will be less and less work. They may stand back and start asking fundamental questions, because the veil will have been stripped away to reveal the underlying reality. Plato has done this thinking already with his allegory of the 'cave'.



Some of my favourite books are Ian M. Bank's Sci-Fi 'Culture' Novels. These describe and question the legitimacy of a future human like race based nominally on a *Galaxy-Wide culture*. These societies behave similarly to today with social norms still providing the basis for people's behaviour. Bank's culture though, is managed and defined by the 'Minds' that have developed over the millennia's from early AI systems. These effectively 'free' humans to behave in anyway they like. Their behaviour does not, and cannot influence the physical wellbeing of individuals or the culture as a whole, as the Minds control all the life support systems and make all the strategic decisions. These books, IMO, offer an interesting philosophical analysis of a potential future. Bank's takes on, full frontal, the core issues of humanity - the best and worst that can, and will happen, when humanity *is freed from personal responsibility*. Perhaps we shall get there eventually.

If not the revolution, then likely the Power-brokers and Autocrats shall win. Then who is to say that this is not the best course for humanity. An elite that has conjured survival from a throw of the dice. Perhaps we could argue that this is nature's way of creating progression. *The ultimate selfish-gene in action* to create the ultimate goal – a *final solution for human progression*, and then, to the stars to spread *these selected genes* across the galaxy.



## Polaroid Again...

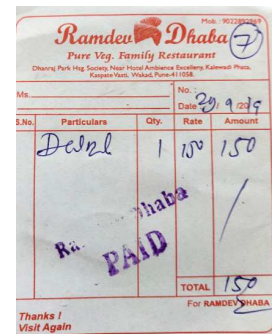
**To finalise the Polaroid story line**, there were some perks along the way. One of the more interesting bits, especially with hindsight, were the maternity units and ultrasound scanning. These were used to establish the head size for the foetus to establish the likely date of conception. Remember, that way back in the early 1970's the only way to get an instant picture of anything was using Polaroid film, one of fifty different films we sold for professional use. The scanner output was on screen, the radiographer held the scan head steady and pressed the button to freeze the screen, then using the VDU hood and attached camera, took a picture on to a black and white high contrast 3000 ASA Polaroid film (type 87). The film started developing as soon it was pulled out from the camera back. One or two minutes later (after holding the developing film (against your nice clean white shirt to get some heat into it), the covering was peeled off to present a very good picture of the scan. This was then measure by hand, the dimensions of the head were indicative of the age and date of conception, and the mother to be went off with the Polaroid picture.



We, the Professional area sales managers, needed to adjust camera focus and lens settings to allow the best and clearest pictures. So we were often present in these early days when the ladies were scanned. What still amazes me is that at that time, the lassies were stripped bare, and I mean bare, to allow ample access for the scanning process. We sales professionals, stood with draped in our

allocate white coats next to the camera and screen unit, paying no attention whatsoever to the completely nude young lady lying prone on the bench. Such was life then, imagine that now if you will.

One of the many other perks were the expenses. Travelling around, we would need lunch, dinner and tea, of course. Staying away, we would need all of those plus a bed and other sustenance. I soon cottoned on to the fact that the smaller hotels and B&B's catered for this trade very accommodatingly. Receipts were all hand written by these smaller establishments. If you booked into a large swanky hotel, (and we could), the your bill was printed out in uncompromising detail by some new printing gadget. In the smaller establishment you would book-in, have a nice shower, go to the bar, meet a few other sales guys (the female sales-agents often stayed in there rooms, for gods sake we weren't that bad), have a beer or three. Then into the restaurant for an 'a la carte' meal with, ah yes that nice bottle of Chablis, no, not that one, yes that correct, the other bottle please, yes that's fine, I can see the price. In the morning after a full breakfast, the bill was paid at reception. "Just the bill total will be fine, I don't require the details". The receptionist would gladly hand-write the total, and we would be on our way. To be fair, the smaller places were still cheaper, even with everything thrown in. Expenses were totalled each week, they came to a very significant amount. In the later years, when I was doing many other jobs simultaneously, expenses were tricky. I had to show where I had been and have relevant expense details. So, expenses became a sort of necessary curse, good job I had a good imagination, and they still added up to a significant amount of additional income.



**Polaroid gave us some memorable times** in regular 'sales meetings'. These we did around he UK in expensive hotels and retreats. My good friend John Watson and others were often propping up the bar with me late into the night at these sessions, I was always rushing next morning to get the meeting on time, although once there, we did little, often to

break-up early and head out for a meal and another bar. One meeting in Devon, we were sent out to take some pictures, there was a prize at the end for the best one. We all thought we had done quite well until Watson arrived back.



**He had gone into a pub,** and in this

pub were some good old boys. He started chatting to them, (as he would), and they said, with a Devon drawl no doubt, "why don't you take our picture then?" And he did because they turned out to be gurners, and they could also take their teeth out. The pictures were unbelievable, the rest of us just threw in the towel. I wonder if he still has those photographs? Peter, another of the sales guys, used to work at Odd Bins, the wine reseller. Their training was renown and Peter knew everything about wine, it's growing and making process and where all the best wines came from. In those days in the mid to late 70's, wine was only drunk by the hoity-toity and at the occasional special dinner. But most imported wines for retail were horrible and undrinkable. Being the professional Polaroid sales group, we would always go to out to dine at classy restaurants and Peter would call the wine waiter over. After some lengthy discussion he would find an obscure bottle that came from Spain, or Italy. We didn't even know that they produced wine, it was all French or sometimes white German that we ever drank. But Peter knew his wine and found us some unbelievably good bottles such as Barolo, Bardolino or Chianti Classico that had been left in the cellar as neither the wine waiter or the restaurant's clientele knew what it was. These Italian & Spanish wines were simply not appreciated in the UK at that time and we drank vintage bottles of wine that would now be worth a fortune.



**After being educated in wine selection by Peter,** I found a wine merchant during my travels around London. Somewhere off Theobalds Road, I think I bought, for three pounds, a bottle of vintage Barolo. I went back often and Jane and I would drink a bottle in the evening in our little two up two down in Langley road accompanied by a meal or some



cheese. This wine was deep, smooth and delicious. It had a brown meniscus at the top when you tilted the glass, Peter told me that this was a sign of a well aged wine. Many years later I was discussing this with a guy who ran the Pink & Lilly pub, in Hughenden, he was a Vintner by trade. I asked him why I could never find such a good deep Burgundy red like that Barolo any more. He laughed, and told me that such wines now never reach the retailers but go direct to the best restaurants and the top end merchants, and they cost hundreds of pounds a bottle. Where was that crystal ball?

As the 8x10 expert, I worked on the introduction of new products. The main one that I had helped design was a simple camera back for the graphics arts industry. I had a batch made locally by an engineering company, it was just a sheet metal former that replaced the glass top of these large cameras. We launched this at Wembley Arena.. The Arena was fairly full of press people and graphics businesses invited to the launch. I was on stage and had to undertake a complete demonstration. Everything



Polaroid did was inevitably live. I was miked-up and had to explain the process while doing the exposure and development on a large Agfa graphics arts camera. We did of course have one pre-prepared just in case the development went wrong as it often would. But it all went ok. I can still remember trying not to shake and keep my voice level in front of probably several hundred people.

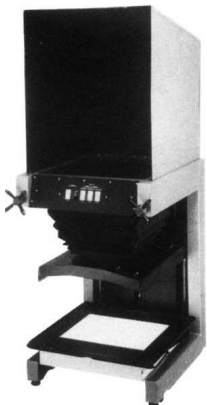
John Watson married Jill when they were both young, they met when they were teenagers. We knew her well, they seemed to get along ok. What we didn't know was that they had for some years effectively split although co-habiting. Mary was at this time Polaroid Professional's admin secretary. She would organise us, the many exhibitions and the general efficient running of the office. John and Mary got together in the back of my Ford Cortina estate car on one trip back from some sales meeting or other. The office tongues wagged. Only I knew the full story. John Barber then got together with Jill. I felt like a marriage guidance councillor. John Barber went from girl friend to girl friend over the years and we eventually knew lost of them better than he did. He was excellent at choosing his girl friends, just not very good at keeping them.



**John and Mary play golf now**, I still meet up with them occasionally, Mary wins. We always had a knock about relationship, never taking anything too seriously. We both liked our cars too. Last time we met I had recently bought my S Class with £20k of factory extras. I knew John had one of the new big Jags. We met at their golf club near Beeston Nottingham, I parked up and spotted them near the club entrance. Where did you park say's



John, I pointed to the gleaming silver S Class, oh, the S Class say's John, yep I said, it's brilliant. I know he says, I've got a new one. Now I thought this has to be a wind up, firstly new they cost 80K and secondly he only bought his Jag a couple of years ago. Don't believe you I said. No really I swapped the Jag out got a fantastic deal on the Merc as they are trying to shift the last ones before the new version. And he had bought one, I couldn't believe it!. So we spent the next eighteen holes with me saying, bet you haven't got the 360 camera? Yep he says, well bet you haven't got the soft close doors, yep he says. Pan roof? Yep. Right, what about memory seats, and the Burmester stereo, yes and yes. Finally I had him, what about the self driving system? I think I have it, he says, never tried it. No you bloody don't nobody has that fitted, took me a year to find one with it. We laughed and laughed all the way around the golf course, Mary won of course.



The group of sales people and managers in the Polaroid Professional Division were exceptional. I was young and inexperienced at the time, looking back this group was very special. I saw quite a few come and go, they moved on into management jobs and I expect they did very well for themselves. I was of course spurning these opportunities as I thought I had a better plan. I didn't. The only sales person who was still there by the time I left was Ian Anderson the Scottish area sales manager. A little older than myself, a very conscientious salesman who had a lovely crinkly smile and demeanour, he covered the whole of Scotland and the Islands. He travelled all the time, staying away from home nearly all week. At that time Polaroid had a major manufacturing site above Glasgow in Dumbarton, Scotland, I visited that on one sales meeting we held in Scotland

**There was yet another business opportunity** during my Polaroid 8x10 work that came about from my

dealings with a company called Halco Sunbury. This old established company made graphic-arts viewers and cameras. These viewers were used by every advertising agency in the UK and elsewhere to create new design ideas by drawing around the image a print or object placed on the copyboard. I worked with Halco to produce a variation of the fitment that allowed Polaroid 8x10 films to create a coloured image from these viewers and cameras. This was quite successful as agencies could now quickly create a mock-up of a new design to provide to a client.

Halco lost their engineer who repaired these machines on site within the ad-agencies. I offered to help them out and soon realized this was very easy money. The machines used metal wires to move the lens, these broke often as the monkeys in ad-agencies would heave on the handles the wrong way until they snapped. I charged £40 an hour to fix these – a fortune in those days – but the ad agencies were all crooks anyway and making a fortune, especially in London. It took a few minutes to re-attach the wires, and I then cleaned the lens and the lights, which were always filthy and ruined the machines output. This cleaning restored the machine to its original quality and the ad-agencies thought I was a genius. I could easily fit this work alongside my Polaroid calls which were mostly in London at that time. Piers helped me at one point and we had a fine time travelling around together making lots of money.

**This was all in the earlier Polaroid days**, and later on, Halco gave yet another business opportunity with yet another of my old college mates – Martin Smith. Martin was an electronics expert. This company we

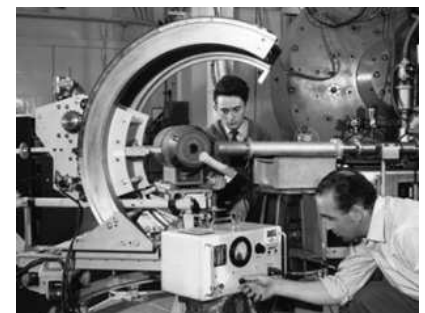
called *Ash Electronics* – I have no idea why. But together we made several prototypes of a new electronic automatic camera for Halco. This was based on their original frame with Martin designing the electronics based on a brand new chip from Rockwell that included ‘tiny basic’ – a program interpreter built into the chip itself. I designed and built the hardware side modifying the movement systems and adding opto-electronic detectors and counters to input position information to the electronics. Unbelievably it all worked and the focusing and exposure system created excellent results. Halco showed one of our prototypes at a London design exhibition – it was a great success and they took orders. There were other versions of automatic cameras, mainly from Agfa-Gaevert, (for whom John Barber then worked), but these were far more expensive, Halco’s new camera was under half the cost of Agfa’s (Pic is of the original sales leaflet with Ash Electronics on it at the bottom!)



**As they were strapped for cash**, - and quite unbelievably – *the MD of Halco sold our prototype during the exhibition to a guy from – wait for it – South Africa!* He took the whole machine away with him and shipped it back. The first Martin and I heard about it was days later when we asked where our prototype was. The prototype’s electronics were made from separate board pushed together, the mechanics were rough and ready and the chance of it ever working in

South Africa was zero. Halco then went bust and we only got about half of what we were owed for the development. We sold off the other prototype machine to help pay our costs. Martin and I, especially myself missed huge opportunity at this point. We had proven that we could create complex control systems using this new chip technology. We were well ahead of anyone else in the UK. If I had done some sensible strategic thinking, I would have realised we could have become a major technical business helping other businesses to computerise and automate their equipment. A real missed opportunity.

**Did I ever do any work for Polaroid?** Well yes, I was the ‘top’ sales person in the division – or at least my patch created mores sales than anyone’s. But then again I had some significant customers such as the Atomic Weapons Research in Aldermaston (AWRE) who went through roll



film like it was going out of fashion. Actually it was out of fashion and Polaroid only continued to produce it for a few such customers, hiking the price regularly, it was very profitable. AWRE had the largest laser in Europe and when it was fired at targets for researching materials, they needed a picture of each of the 20



or so large capacitor discharge screens to tell them the total power delivered. The laser was in constant use, lots of film burnt and my best account. I did go there occasionally, just to check they were keeping our atomic weapons nice and safe. It was the only place I ever went where the security guy with the automatic weapon looked like he meant it. I attempted some futile comment on one occasion, he just gave me a look as if he was trying to turn me to stone.

**My Polaroid selling activities** eventually became a game of completing the weekly call sheets and making lots of phone calls to cover my tracks. I *still* have, quite often, a recurring dream – I am back working yet again for Polaroid, but I cannot, for the life of me, understand how and why I am still working for Polaroid. And then I remember that I have not been into the office for so very long. Still to this day, I have this dream, I wake feeling distinctly unsettled. Within Polaroid itself, I was considered one of the better sales guys, I did sell lots of equipment and I once sold six ID3 Identifications Systems at around £2k each as they were very expensive bits of kit and the leading identification system in the world. Kodak would never purchased anything from Polaroid.



Their head office was in Hemel Hempstead, just up the road from Polaroid HQ, but Kodak and Polaroid were sworn enemies, especially after Kodak got sued by Polaroid for imitating Polaroid's SX70 film (Polaroid won). So when I landed ID3 sale to Kodak, I was king-pin for quite a while. I sold an ID3 system to the Nigerian Embassy in Kensington London. It all seemed a bit dodgy, no interest in what it did or any obvious use for it. They tried to pay me in cash, clearly this was one of their money making schemes, I said I cannot take cash. I made a quick phone call to Polaroid's account office, I was told 'take the cash' In those days this amount of cash was about a third of my annual pay. Towards the end, Polaroid tried to get me to take a management job rather than lose me. I didn't have time of course, running all my business ventures, but I always wonder where that would have taken me.



The VAT lady was a funny episode. While running my businesses at Langley Road while also running around for Polaroid, I had forgotten the VAT appointment. The VAT lady dully arrived and banged hard on the door as they do. Jane saw her coming and there was no way she was going to get involved, so she took Corinne who was about two to three years old at the time, upstairs and told her they were playing a game of hide and seek from the VAT lady. Jane rang my office at the end of Langley road and I hoofed it back, the VAT had lady returned a bit later, and while I was ushering the VAT lady inside, Corinne piped up "me and Mum were hiding upstairs from you". What could you do but LOL. She passed my VAT returns which was amazing. A second VAT lady called at JPH many years later, to exclaim delightedly when she found a pair of curtains hidden in the purchases. I just smiled broadly and pointed to the windows

with the curtains draped behind her, she looked crest fallen. She passed my accounts too. One thing not widely known is that a motorbike is 'classified' for VAT as 'a vehicle without a rear window'. This somewhat wayward description and classifications means that motorbikes can be purchased by a business VAT free. I bought many brand new motorbikes on my VAT business account over the years, all completely legally apparently.

### Music, music tech and acting

I was about seventeen when I got seriously interested in music. I did always have some interest iin music. My sister and myself got bought a Dansette record player and two single disks at first, that was when I was about nine I think. Later on, my parents had a quality hifi in the front room at Cyncoed Road. This included a Quad 405, a Grundig turntable system, a Quad stereo tuner and some very hefty speakers. They had a wide range of music, from classical to Joan Baez and Paul Robson but no real up to date stuff. This system produced excellent quality sound and I listened to it more than anyone else in the house. At

Frensham Heights, we always taped 'top of the pops' every week on to early tape recorders. I had one friend there Steve White who was an excellent drummer. He did a number of shows at the school and was brilliant. He still drums and runs a training studio somewhere. Then came the Beatles with Sergeant Pepper and good music bands followed for the next thirty years.

**At seventeen, things changed** as one of my friends who had moved down from the Manchester area was really into his music. This was Jon Kelly who went on to become a well know studio sound engineer working with the some of the best bands in the 80's and 90's including Chris Rea and Kate Bush.

(Strangely Jane's brother Nick was a sound engineer and also worked with Kate Bush for a short period in a London studio). This was the time of Led Zep. Their music was banned in most of our parents homes as it was considered devils music and completely



unlistenable to. I suppose that was why we liked it so much. From then on, I always had the best quality systems that I could afford. When Jane and I got our first house we spent a lot on music systems culminating in a system with Roger LS7's powered

by an Audiolab 8000A. As we both liked music, for our next house Ailort in Hughenden saw us buying a really expensive system with Quad ESL electrostatics powered by a Naim 250

amp and a Linn Sondek turntable. The cartridge alone cost £600 quid and that was in 1988. This was a very special system and I liked to listen late into the night when Jane was away. The Quad's for me are still the best, most open



sound available, they worked well with the concrete floor and heavy brick walls. I could do an odd mental trick with this system. After about twenty minutes, my brain would tune into the stereo image and seemingly re-create a perfect sound stage where I could see in my minds eye the exact positions of the instruments being played. I could do this for most decent recordings, and it only worked with my eyes shut. After a bit of practice I could repeat this process at will.



We had one recording of coral music recorded in cathedrals and the like. This sounded awful. It was just a mishmash of sound bouncing around the large hard surfaces in these halls. You could not hear the singing at all clearly, just lots of dooming noise. I played just once before stacking it at the back on the record collection.

Late one evening, when I was nicely tuned in, I fetched this coral recoding and tried it again.

Transformational, the choir and singing had changed to a glorious clean reverberating sound stage that blew my mind.

Somehow the Quad's were producing such a good stereo image of such good quality, my mind could do the rest and clean up the mixed up sound on the recording. The mind is a wonderful thing. Lucid dreaming has 'proved' to me that our brains are far more competent than we think. I have listened to music when lucid, aware that my brain is making up a full orchestral piece, (or one that I have remembered perhaps), on the fly. How my brain could do this I have no idea.



**For anyone interested in expanding** their conceptual experiences, lucid dreaming is an avenue, that for me, is the nearest thing to an 'off world' experience that is currently possible. And, if you do awake in a dream at any time, even if it is only for a second or two, quickly have a look around and marvel at what your brain is making up, you will be amazed at the clarity and reality of your own production. I have been in a few dreams

where I thought I might just be dreaming, but on looking around and feeling the wind in my face and the floor beneath my feet, I have almost dismissed the idea of it being a dream. However I use a simple technique to ensure I am dreaming, I just float up. Bingo, this is a dream, quite astounding..

**This reminds me of the Ouija board** that Keith Barlow dug out when we were eighteen. Keith, me John and Dick sat around this board and Keith explained the process of all of us putting our hands on to the glass in the middle in a darkened room. Just as we were getting a bit bored, the glass started moving. "Who's pushing it" someone said, not me, nor me, me neither. Now these guys were not the sort to lie

outright, at least not without a chuckle. There was no chuckling, the glass spelt out something about one of Keith's ancestors that we could never had known about. Keith still swears to this day he wasn't pushing the glass. And it all had a very creepy atmosphere, with the glass moving as if it was not being directed by any of us. I think it was this movement that freaked us out. We stopped immediately and that Quija Board never, ever came out again. Discuss.

**At Frensham, I had a French teacher**, Grant-Ferguson. His young wife taught me English. They were a lovely young handsome couple, no kids though. Both Oxford graduates, they had the pick of the jobs no doubt and Frensham would have been a good job I expect given the costs of the school that were I think £600 a term in those days, a small fortune. Grant-Ferguson was a keen rugby player. Unfortunately he had just started putting a team together for the older lads when he tackled one of them breaking the lads femur. That was the start and end of the rugby at Frensham. We used to play hockey, never really liked it a lot, it was a very difficult game. As you can imagine I was useless at French, but Grant-Ferguson gave me the lead role in a play about Noah and his ark. I was done up as an old man with grey hair and old clothes. I thought I was doing ok, until, at the end when I clapped my hands to my head everyone started laughing. Worse still, as I pulled the curtain cord to closed the curtains and end the show, but the cord just came away in my hand. I was left there bemused with everyone laughing madly at me. Later I found that when I had clapped my head it caused a huge cloud of talcum-powder, (used to make my hair grey). I did like acting and I auditioned to do the lead of 'Alibaba' when I was about six at Marlborough Road school. I remember throwing myself about acting wildly thinking I was bound to get the part, I didn't. I often wonder if I could have become a decent actor. I still daydream about it sometimes.



### Sailing, Windsurfing, Diving & Kitesurfing, Fitness

Jon Barber worked for Agfa, when I worked for Polaroid, similar sales jobs with easy options for sneaking off when the wind blew during the summer months. He kept his brothers 505 sixteen foot dinghy at Queen



Mothers reservoir where I also had my Mirror 14 dinghy for a while then a Laser and a Fireball (in which I tried to drown my son). The Mirror and 'Five O' were both trapeze boats, but the 'Five O' was the Porsche of the dinghy world. An International class dinghy then used as an Olympic boat, it was stable and incredibly fast. Jon was bigger and heavier, so he got the trapeze while I helmed. The Queen Mother is built up in the air, lying adjacent to the M4 and



overlooking Windsor castle to the west. It was often windy on the reservoir and Jon and I had many exciting sails with the Five O' at full blast on a broad reach, the bow-wave used to come right over the boat into the stern. One nice summers day, Jane and his girlfriend little Carol were with us on a weekend. We played an almost disastrous trick on them. Urging them out for a gentle sail with us, we helped them into the dinghy, but then pushed them off on their own. As soon as we had done this we started regretting the prank for they were no sailors and went around and around with us shouting "Duck" as loud as we could. This did not help a great deal and they began drifting further and further out. Eventually not finding any suitable craft to rescue them, we swam out. They were not best pleased to say the least and I don't think Jane has ever sailed since.

**Later on, when I was in Eastman Stuart**, Jon was working in a high-speed graphics & industrial photographic business in Bovingdon, (John Hadland, where Neil also used to work sometime after). During that period he taught me to windsurf. If you can ever find someone attempting their first



windsurfing experience, then please do go and watch. It is hilarious, not of course for the windsurfer, but for everyone else. You climb aboard, lean back to hoist the mast and attached sail, carefully balance the rig with your feet apart, the sail nicely positioned, then fall serenely backwards still holding the sail to start all over. After about twenty attempts, you are now running out swear words to berate this stupid rig and are tiring fast. Of course, you do not give in, but are soon so knackered you can hardly haul yourself onto the board let alone



hoist the sail and mast out of the water. Eventually you give up and go for a well earned rest, passing by the spectators who are trying desperately not to laugh out-loud, you do however notice them all smirking, and you wish you still had enough energy to chase a few of them into the water.

The first decent pay cheque I had in Tetra (nearly all commission, the basic salary being only £12k), I drove to a specialist shop near Evesham and bought the best 'fun' board then available – a Fanatic Bat. This was a great little board and I spent many afternoons with Jon and on my own sailing it in Brogborough lake, an old brick quarry near Bedford. This board was exactly a 'fun board' and in higher winds it used to take off and fly like a bird over a wavelet, I would bail out when it got more than a few feet up to swim after the board and rig. As I got better, I bought a second hand BIC, (yes the plastic biro company), a smaller board called an Electric Rock. This was more stable and quicker in force 4 plus winds and it didn't attempt to fly so much, at least not until the top end of a force 6. I used a tiny 4.3m sail that was easy to handle. With this board you needed to waterstart as it sank if you just got on it, and anyway in high winds you could never up-haul the sail without getting blown straight off.



**I had some magical times** on these boards. One late afternoon, in autumn, I sailed along with my feet completely hidden by mist while the upper air was clear, a most memorable experience and there was not another sole about to appreciate it. I did break my ribs once hitting the board when catapulted off by the harness, normally you just got thrown clear and it was all part of the fun, but this time it hurtled me directly on to front end of the board. Otherwise did not have too many bad experiences. The guy who ran the place had two son's who helped him out, both very good windsurfers. One really blustery day his older son was moving a large board, the wind caught the board and swung it violently, now, maybe he should just have let it go, but a flying board is very dangerous and he hung on. Unfortunately, this

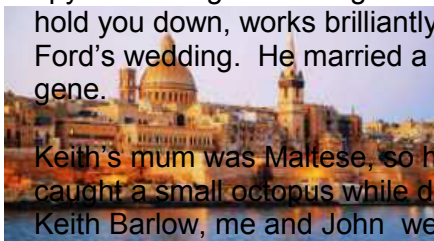


broke both his knees and he never windsurfed again as far as I am aware, poor lad. A few years ago I tried Kitesurfing, Poole Harbour, only to break my ribs yet again, very near from where I went diving when I was in my late 50's and got bent. On that occasion I drove all the way home, then got Jane to drive me all the way back to Poole. It ended with Jane and Bry sitting all night upstairs in the Poole Hyperbaric unit while I slept peacefully in 100% oxygen in the pressurised chamber. They both looked like death warmed up in the morning. I was in a joyful mood having had one of the best sleeps I can ever remember and was feeling top dog, I really couldn't see why they were so morose, it was a lovely new day with so much to do in Poole.

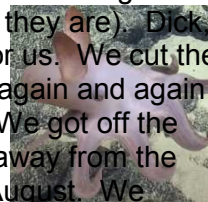


I kept getting bent and have decided that I have a hole in the heart, not uncommon, but it allows nitrogen bubbles to pass from one chamber to another, not good for diving. I got slightly bent on the plane coming back from Sharm El Sheikh after diving the wrecks with Neil and Nick Furtek in the Red sea. This was a great diving trip as we stayed in the best diving hotel for a pittance, drank loads of beer and eat out every

evening attempting to avoid the many local scammers who had some interesting stories up their sleeves. "Oh, Welsh are you boyo" one piped up when I said where I was from, they were hard work to get away from. Due to 'my hole' I gave up proper diving and some years later I created a new 'snorkel-dive' sport using a small one litre air bottle coupled to a standard demand valve for snorkelling. Fin along as normal, spy something interesting on the bottom, then just dive down grabbing the demand valve and a rock to hold you down, works brilliantly. The first time I went abroad diving was when I was best man for Keith Ford's wedding. He married a Maltese girl, Miriam, it seems that all the girls in Malta had a special beauty gene.



Keith's mum was Maltese, so he often went there for holidays, inevitably falling for one of the local girls. I caught a small octopus while diving out there (sort of wish I hadn't now I know how clever they are). Dick Keith Barlow, me and John were all staying in a flat Keith Ford had rented for the week for us. We cut the octopus up fried it gently, tried it, no still not done, fried it some more, still rubbery, fried it again and again until our teeth bounced of the pieces. It was like chewing hard rubber. It went in the bin. We got off the plane after landing, and I thought that the plane's engines must still be really hot and ran away from the plane trying to get into some air that was breathable. It wasn't the plane, it was Malta in August. We





spent most of our time in air-conditioned bars. I can still remember coming out into the street much later, having forgotten what the heat was like outside, to be almost thrown to the floor by a wave of impossibly hot air hitting you. For the wedding Keith had decided, in his wisdom, we would all be dressed up in classical Top Hats and Tails, I don't think I shall ever forgive him for making me stand in the sun in 120 degrees heat in all that getup. Keith Ford worked incredibly hard holding down a full-time accountancy job in Cardiff while working his articles in evening classes. This went on for years and years. He made it eventually, then moved to the London area and later set up a partnership, I helped him out much later while I was doing consultancy as his practice fell apart due to the inevitable partnership failure that besets so many. Keith and Miriam ended up having three girls, he always used to complain about having to live in a house full of women. Last time I saw him and Miriam, he still smoked heavily, god knows how he has survived this long.



**Sailing, it seems was always in my blood.** In the 90's I did an evening Yacht Masters course in Misbourne school. Here I met a small group of would-be sailors and after the course we set about getting some yachting experience. One of the first of which was to hire a racing guy with a 33 foot yacht in Southampton to take us across to France for the weekend. A short flip across the channel to Cherbourg was planned I think. However we never made it. It started calmly enough, the wind rising steadily until we were going fast on a broad reach, me on the helm in a Force 7. Not a problem. The others had little actual sailing experience, for one guy, Tim, an accountant, it was his very first trip.



No problem. At least not until the wind kept rising and rising to eventually blow a completely unforecasted Force 9 gale with winds in excess of 45 knots. Who had to get on deck and put up the storm jib? And who had to helm the boat right through the night as no one else but me and the skipper could do it by feel alone – it was pitch dark, with someone throwing bathfulls of water over you every few seconds, from somewhere unseen. Myself and the owner-racer took turns on the helm after the others had tried and promptly attempted to kill us all by immediately gibing the boat.



Now, getting tired, wet and cold, we quickly determined that this 'boy-racer' had never even considered safety or victualing his boat, no, not even a Mars Bar. So around and around we sailed, across and back across the shipping channels in middle of the English channel with one small storm jib up all night long. I was hooked on, but in the morning I discovered to my dismay that I had only been hooked onto to a thin line, one that would not have stopped me going overboard. Good job I held on tight when the yacht's gunnels disappeared feet under water and the spray attempted to knock me off my perch. I realised that night, however good a crew you had, in a small yacht, there is zero chance of survival if you get swept overboard. By the time you managed to even slow the boat and put her around, it was so very dark, the wind howling so very noisily and the waves so huge that it would be impossible to find anyone. Poor old



Tim the accountant had taken to his bunk and remained there, probably hanging on for dear life. He never sailed with us again.

As a group though we did a lot of sailing, to the Channel Isles several times, to Cherbourg and Saint-Malo, to the Isles of Scilly – certainly the very best way to holiday on Isles. Nothing, however, happened to match that first trip across the channel with boy-racer. Eventually, in 2021 I bought Charlotte Rose, a 35ft Yacht. It is a lot of work.



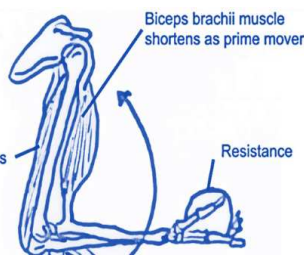
**Kitesurfing came to light, but probably too late for me.** I thought that it looked fun, so I took myself off on a course in Poole. Unfortunately the guy was a bit of a chancer and the training he had set up was poor. He gave me advice on a kite – but I should have known better, it was a poor choice. I then went on another course in Spain, Gulf de Roses, a lovely quiet bay just over the border from France in the Pyrenees. This was better, but not a lot of practice due to no wind. The young French guy who was teaching me was brilliant. After finishing the training he picked up his Kite, launched it above his head, then picked up his board with his

right hand and trotted off down the beach towards the surf. When he got about 5 to 10 meters away from the water, he powered-up the Kite flying above his head while jumping into the air and while in the air slipped his feet into the board's toe-straps, landing amongst the waves he sailed away. Smug git. If I was younger, I would not be happy until I had perfected that trick. The girls on the beach were also clearly impressed.

**I have never managed to Kitesurf properly.** I did some with Stephen, who picked it up really quickly, but all I managed to achieve was to break my ribs having caught the wind wrongly when launching, taken to the air, then smashed back into the water. Ouch. I couldn't breath, yet Steve made me carry my Kite back out of the water, I don't think he knew I was about to expire. He then wanted to take me to A&E. "So, Steve, what are they going to do in A&E" "They will assess you, maybe take an Xray". "Ok, but what will they actually do?" "Well, nothing really as you cannot strap you chest or anything, but you may have punctured a lung, and have a pulmonary embolism, they'll check for that." "Ah, ok, what will they do about that then?" "Well, not a lot unless you are really ill." "OK, so lets just go down the pub."

**That was not the first time** I broke my ribs. In fact I have broken many bones over the years. The first one was when I was two, broke my collar bone in a car accident, almost certainly due to my fathers awful driving. The only worse driver I ever knew was Jane's dad, he drove down a one way street and gave the finger to a copper coming the other way, that takes the biscuit doesn't it? Next break was falling off the back of a chair at three years old and the other arm falling off a bike at about none years, my right arm and a chipped elbow joint at thirteen, but that was really not my fault. I was in the gym at Ty-Celyn, and we were being urged to jump on a trampette and launch ourselves over a tall box. The gym master was catching us. I was small, I said to the master "how hard do I hit the trampette sir" - "As hard as you can" came the reply. So I did exactly that and sailed gracefully about 3 feet over the gym masters outstretched arms to land metres away behind him, my right arm outstretched taking all the force of a hard landing from at least ten feet up. Broke both bones, arm wobbling about like a piece of rubber, horrible. Next up was a cracked shin bone I got playing rugby at Watford college, then cracked ribs playing rugby against 'Guinness' at Park Royal s scrum half for Chesham- these guys were ringers, all bloody Aussies and New Zealanders working their time as 'tourists' Bastard opposition scrum half lined me up, long after the ball had gone to my Fly Half, ouch. Then the last break before my ankle was another set of cracked ribs windsurfing. The classic mistake of not releasing the hook quick enough and getting catapulted, but this time directly down onto the board and another three weeks sleeping in a chair. My right ankle playing full back at Chesham was by far the worst break. I was fifty by then and when you break an ankle, what you really do is break the end of the joint and also the smaller lower leg bone the fibular. This allows the joint to come apart. The main issue is damage to the joint and even when it is pinned back in place, it is not the same anymore. I live with it now.

**Fitness has been part** and parcel of my life. There was a period of about a year after getting married when I did not do any sport. Then one day I played tennis with Jon Barber. I was breathless trying to run around the court and started seeing stars. This was a warning for me. I then started running several times a week around Cassiobery Park in Watford, often after dark as I was always busy working. I found that my energy and brain worked better, I needed regular exercise. And I have only recently stopped running, my knees won't take it any more.



However, these days I use antagonistic exercises to keep muscles strong along with stretching coupled with short sprints to provide some heart lung aerobics. A few minutes each day antagonistic muscle training seems to work better for me and it does not induce muscle ache. I started this when I heard of an experiment showing that people going up in a lift and coming *down* the stairs gained more muscle fitness and more general fitness than those going up the stairs (and down in the lift). This exercise also induced less muscle ache after.

## Managers & Computing

After closing the *Protran* business, I gave Polaroid an ultimatum, either pay me a sensible wage or I'm off.



I intended to leave anyway, it was clear Polaroid's upswing was turning into a downswing, it was now in an 'old industry'. Computing was the better up and coming option. I Joined Tallgrass, a new and awful, jumped-up American business run by three American idiots, (Vice-Presidents, the Americans do like their titles), and based in Basingstoke. This company made PC add-on drives with backup tape units. In 1981 PC's cost thousands

and had tiny (10mb) hard disk drives. The largest Tallgrass unit had 100mb hard drive along with a tape backup. An industry reviewer stated categorically that it was 'impossible' to fill this mammoth 100mb hard drive unit. Then, of course, it was just very simple programs and with spreadsheets and text documents running on these PC's. Today we have this amount of storage embedded in many devices we wouldn't even think of as a computer such as a memory switch.

**These idiot Tallgrass 'Vice-Presidents'** even managed to crash three of their new BMW cars into one another down a dark lane one evening. How I did laugh at the time and left soon after as one of the worst managers I had ever had, (Leanne), was secretly listening into my sales calls. In the morning of the day I left I had secured a new job with Eastman Stuart in Watford where we lived. In the afternoon I drove to Basingstoke station and asked a taxi to follow me to the Tallgrass HQ. This was an open plan office, and I went directly up to Leanne's desk, dropped my car keys ostentatiously on her desk, then went around the whole room shaking the hands of the admin and other sales people, telling them all in a loud voice that I was off due to Leanne secretly listening in to my calls. This was most cathartic and I strode out straight into the waiting taxi. The company didn't last too long, but it had been my stepping-stone into the computing industry proper.

**Eastman Stuart (ES)** was a 'programming house' as they were then know. Mainly developing systems to run on NCR small mainframe and mini-computers. ES had recently branched out into developing Unix based software systems. These were mainly software for specific industries like airfreight and printing plus the normal range of general financial ledgers. Unix was the latest thing back then and there were few good software systems available.

(Unix is still here, it runs most smart phones and tablets and we now call it



'Android'). It was the only system where the software was independent of the hardware vendor and as such offered a much better and cheaper future path for growing companies.

Mainframes were mainly used then in medium and large businesses. To put this into perspective each of the 'core' memory within a mainframe system was made up of a small ring of metal wrapped by several coils of wire, each one hand made and costing £1 each. So the memory in a mainframe with one megabit storage cost one million pounds. Your phone today probably has more memory than all of the world's computers back then.



Bill Morgan was my boss and sales director. He was, (you would think if you had met him), one of the nicest and cleverest individuals in the UK. I was first aware that something was awry after planning a special Unix software exhibition in London where we were exhibiting.

During this exhibition, I had a long line of print company directors queuing up to talk to me about our new Unix based printing software. I had developed a sales brochure that outlined a completely new system **ES Print**, but this was work in progress as ES at that time only had a few print customers using a costing system. But the Print system made a lot of sense. I understood the print industry and described exactly what they needed in my Brochure.



#### E-Sprint

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Having established that a genuine market exists in this sector, we should pursue it with vigour. I firmly believe that we can become within a short period of time (say 2 years) the market leader. I also feel from my background and my work undertaken in this sector in the past year, I will have a major impact on both the software development, and on the marketing of the resultant system.
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I do feel however, we must move forward quickly; to enable us to enter this market before anyone else consolidates their position, and also to provide me with a major sector to work.
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Bill effectively ran the whole business. He organised all the software development work while his best friend and MD – who owned the business – sat fairly ineffectually in his office doing a bit of programming. Bill kept promising me he would get the developers to create this new package for which we now had a long order book. But this print package never got developed – because Bill had other plans. This nice man helmed the business into failure, and it went into receivership. Bill then proceeded to buy the

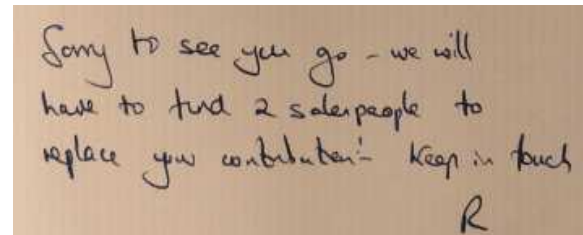
business from the receivers for not a lot, his best friend did not get a look in. He was not best pleased by all accounts. Before this had happened, I had been pushed out by Bill as he realised I knew something was up with his 'management' as he continued to fail to develop the business opportunity I had created for the printing sector.

**This was actually a bit of luck**, as I moved to Tetra Business Systems in High Wycombe and after a tricky start - where I had to 'force' a company to purchase a systems before the Xmas break otherwise lose my job – I became the top salesman earning more than the MD, Sean Dowling who was a clever Australian. Not clever enough though to prevent a then tiny start-up business called 'Sage' to eventually overtake and buy Tetra. I had an interesting



conversation with Sean one day in our new open office in Maidenhead. "Sean, why don't we re-package one of our software systems, cut it down and take on this new low end entrant Sage Computing, who are being very effective at the bottom end of the market". "Oh, no, no", we're not interested in that end of the market", he said in his Aussie drawl. Well he should have been. Sage purchased Tetra after I had left and they still sell Sean's software to large businesses very successfully.

I was successful at Tetra because the sales of larger computer installations suited my approach. This was because companies purchasing such systems knew that they were crucial to their own business success. How I approached these potential clients was all important. My sales process was a simple. I developed the business argument for creating added-value within their business. Tetra was the leading software package, I just needed to convince these client businesses that the whole system was going to work for them. I backed this up by overseeing all my initial implementations and overseeing the staff training. This gave me a growing list of companies who sang my praises, (and that of the software which was excellent), even when things had not quite gone to plan. It is the old adage; it's not what goes wrong that matters, it is the way you put it right. The other sales people were less hands-on and they did not have such a successful customer platform to leverage their future sales. I ended up earning more than the MD.



One area within every major installation was always tricky. This

| EMPLOYEE NAME        |          |
|----------------------|----------|
| JOHN EDWARD PHILLIPS |          |
| PAY                  | AMOUNT   |
| Basic Pay            | 1250.00  |
| COMMISSION           | 25092.10 |

was how to prove the new software, (that always included all the financial ledgers), accurately reflected the old system. The new software had to make all the important numbers all added up and produce critical outputs such as invoices, stock reports, purchase notes and financial reports accurately. At that time the usual way to prove a new system was to run both the old and the new software in 'parallel' for several weeks. This was a major administration task and most companies failed to do it for long enough to

get the wrinkles out of the new system. But the whole software industry kept attempting to push this process as it was 'standard practice'.

**I developed a new process** – I called it the 'big bang' approach, (that name was nicked by the stock exchange later on). This new approach was simply to test the new system with, critically, a complete set of the live data. Specific tests were run to prove that each output reflected the old system accurately. This could be done in the background well before 'going live' and with a lot less manpower and hassle. It also allowed for extensive training and re-training so that when the switch-on day came, everyone was fully conversant with the new system. It worked spectacularly well for my clients and my implementations were far smoother than most others. I was offered a sales managers job due to my success. Of course, I didn't want a normal career, it all seemed too easy. *What a tosser.*

**I then made the worst call of my career.** I went to work for my sister in the old print business that she was now running to sell 'Focoltone' a new colour system that enabled printers to create really nice colours more cost effectively and without



moiré patterns. Focoltone could have worked, but I could never get my ather and sister to agree the right marketing plan. I left after about a year and went into consultancy with Morton Hodson - a franchise operation. If, of course, I had stayed with Tetra, I could have made millions in this growing industry as I was probably the top IT sales guy in the UK at the time. Why does one bang one's head against a brick wall? My current interests in 'mentoring' comes from the many poor decisions I have made throughout my life that perhaps, if I had had someone independent to review these with, a sensible open discussion might have changed my career moves. *But no, impatience and risk-taking were my stock-in-trade.*



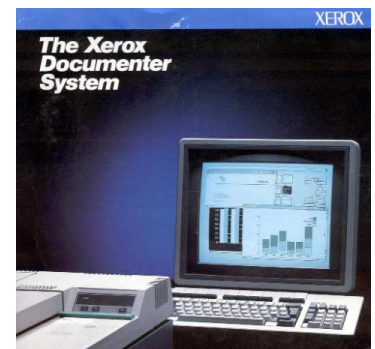
## Millionaires Row



Four real chances, three spurned, one lost. The first was undoubtedly Ash Electronics, we really should have taken that business forward, we had all the skills by then, it was just inertia. The second and third were investment opportunities that I should not have missed. At Morton Hodson I was the IT trainer for internal training. Morton Hodson regularly ran IT training sessions to help new and established consultant keep up with IT progress. It was at the time of 'green screens'. But I knew we were moving quickly to Windows based systems that I myself was already testing Windows 286, of course being Microsoft the earliest versions it did not work at all. However, I knew that this was the future and soon. When I ran this by the trainees, being of one mind and not liking change, they actually threw stuff at me and said this move away from what they knew was complete nonsense. Within

a year Windows 3.0 was becoming the go to system for the ubiquitous PC. Had I invested in Microsoft then, I would have become a multi-millionaire within a year or two.

Interestingly, during a consultancy assignment for a charity fund raising consultancy (*Craigmyle*), I came across a Xerox based 'windows like' system that had been sold long before Microsoft ever 'invented' Windows. This Xerox system was called Documenter and I remembered that Martin Smith's first job after college was selling this system. I was quite taken aback and found out that there were two serious commercial law suits going on about this very thing. Xerox was suing Apple and Apple was suing Microsoft over this 'windows' looking interface. I can tell you that when I saw this old relic of a Xerox system – was exactly the same as the first Windows systems. Microsoft had never invented it at all, it was smoke and mirrors.



**I bumped into a guy at an exhibition** that used to work for MS in the earliest days. He told me that Gates who had been given the chance to create MSDOS / PCDOS by IBM had to come back to IBM and ask for help, he could not do it. Gates only got to create MSDOS due to the US putting the brakes on IBM (with an anti-trust law), who back then ran the whole worlds computing and was seen to be too big even in the US. The IBM PC was about to revolutionise the world's computing and they forced IBM to make the operating system (PCDOS) compatible with any other manufactured PC. They gave this opportunity to gates who had a tiny operation, hoping he was too much of an idiot to do anything sensible with it, which was true for a time until Gates met a marketing guy who re-marketed Windows as Windows 95. The rest as they say is history. This sort of explains why MS has never been a good technical company. It was always market driven and Gates was never a very good techie. Nice guy though, as he has given away many of our billions to charities, thanks Bill.



**The next similar episode was when I was with TicketingSolutions, TS.com,** (We purchased that two letter domain for tens of thousands, I notice it sold in 2012 for around £150k).

At a trade show for the industry, I came across a group of young people pushing a new search engine, They were taking £1000 tranches for their *initial* funding. The sales guy was more than useless and I still blame him, of course. "So what so special about your new search engine" I asked... His answers did not impress, there were already companies with simple search engines like Yahoo.



This was 1999, the company was Google. I did not invest although at that time I had some spare cash and was looking for possibilities. Oh dear oh dear, *sorry kids you could all have been billionaires.* **More recently**, I was watching the price of oil plummet (April 2020) due to the fact that there was zero storage space left for the oil that was pumped, all the ships were full and others had been purchased just to store the oil. The price effectively went down to zero. Now with my spread-betting system I could have easily purchased thousands of pounds worth of oil at say 1 pip, I really cannot remember why I did not do this, perhaps I too was taken in by the situation. Now, of course, oil was always going to go back up wasn't it, the world had not stopped using oil had it? Soon it was back at 7000 times the price I could have bet on – so if I had wagered £10k, then I would have made £7m and there was really zero risk.

**TicketingSolutions could have been my deal winner.** I had company share options as one of the main directors. I got the job while doing a consultancy review of the sales and marketing. The MD, Mathew Hare a clever business man and excellent at fundraising. His background was a senior director at Vodafone in the early years. His company based in Kiddlington just north of Oxford was a general Internet service company (ISP) offering services and website development around the Oxford area. His new idea during the Dot Com boom was a generic online ticketing system that could be used by anyone to setup and sell tickets – music & theatre venues, stadiums, sports events, one off events or activities. Mathew raised a second tranche of £7m just before he asked me to join as sales and marketing director, deposing the sales director that I had just finished interviewing to complete my consultancy project. The result of which was a pretty damning report on the clueless advertising spend coupled to ineffective sales processes. Mathew read the report quickly, looked up and said simply “why don't you come and do it then”. At first I did not understand that he was offering me a job. I caught on quickly and bartered for a salary of £60k plus a car and endless expenses. This was quite a lot more than I was earning as a consultant. The sales director now worked for me. This however worked very well. He swallowed the pill and I found that Alan Postlethwaite was a consummate salesman. I was the strategic thinker and together we put in place a new sales force trained in ‘solution selling’ which was my background. I cut all the unfocused general advertising and aimed it at the important sectors. Alan and I had a lovely time choosing new sales people. At the interview we would simply conduct a role-play exercise. The recruits had to sell us a Coffee Mug. We had a pre-designed set of criteria as the buyers. It was eye opening, hardly any of the so called sales people knew how to conduct a sales meeting. They asked no questions, launching into long spiels about how good their *Mug* was. Even when prompted with “well, not sure that meets our criteria” they still asked zero questions and were sadly shown the door in quick fashion. We not only enjoyed these role-plays but together we did find a few capable sales people who we then trained up properly. In just 18 months I had spent most of the £7m. Part of it went on developing a new solution specifically for one client who we



knew would put us on the map and lead us towards the IPO we were desperately seeking. At one time we were targeting the professional football stadiums. We tried getting them to engage, but this was difficult. So I set up a track day at Silverstone (costing a fortune) and invited the heads of the premiership and first teams for a free day's fun. What we hadn't considered is that they would wimp out and send a lower profile person in their place. Lots of money for not a lot of sales. I did, however, very much enjoy the day and although I was not supposed to win anything, I did beat everyone on the timed skid-pan circuit, oh dear.

**One day, in our open plan office**, my senses were pricked in overhearing one of the sales people saying “sorry we don't have a solution for you that fits”. He put down the phone and I said “who was that” oh just London Underground, but we can't meet their needs. I said what's the number and within 30 seconds had the LUL guy back on the line. I just said “I think there is a bit of a misunderstanding, lets meet and discuss your needs”. I worked with two lovely youngish guys for several weeks developing the solution they needed. All done simply using PowerPoint slides, together we

nurtured the exact solution that worked for all their tickets and was simple in execution right through to the payment. There were very few good online purchasing sites at that time and this one

**London Underground Limited**  
**Marketing & Planning**

**Subject:** Ticketline Internet sales service Contract Renewal  
**From:** Jon Davies  
**To:** John Phillips, TS.com  
**Cc:** Alex Boulting, Richard Parry  
**Date:** 27 April 2001

*(Sabira admin/h)*

**Contract Renewal**

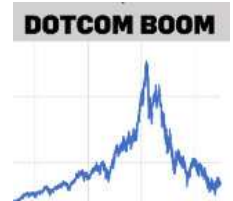
had to work well first time. They never knew that we needed to create a completely new software system for their application which I had to oversee as the development director was lovely guy but hopeless at getting stuff done. When we went live Ray, the technical director decided that as it was a bank holiday weekend to leave the servers all unattended, his excuse was that he would be pinged if something went awry. I lent on Mathew Hare to get Ray to get some permanent cover, if the LUL launch failed that would have been the end our business. It was, in fact a resounding success and the company won an ISPA trade award for the best online solution for that year. Mathew went up and collected the award –

### Background

Since the introduction of Ticket-on-line in August 2000 overall Ticketline sales (Telesales and Internet) have increased significantly and the levels of customer satisfaction have been high compared with alternative sales channels, notably LU ticket offices. Customer feedback has demonstrated that the web-site, in its current guise, is both simple and easy to use.

should have been me – I sold it, designed it, developed it and made it work!

**We were ready for the IPO** – except that the Dot Com boom crashed out shortly before we could get the business to the market. Millions spent, my future fortune gone yet again. I went back to consulting when the £7m ran out.



### Down and Down

The Mid 90's was a difficult time for me personally. I was running out of ideas and the consultancy was getting more and more difficult and time consuming to sell & JPH Marketing was gone. We were running out of money and I was very stressed, although at the time I did not know this. My thoughts turned very dark. As a problem solver, I imagined many ways out and one was not a good option. Eventually, I went to the quack and he told me that my lack of energy and light-headedness was probably caused by a hormone deficiency, ordered some blood tests and sent me to a specialist. The specialist told me the quack was indeed a quack and there was nothing whatsoever wrong with me



physically. I said "what is causing my symptoms then?" He said you are probably just stressed out. Up to this point in my life, I had lived through constant anxiety. I believe it probably started at St John's boarding school and stayed with me thereafter. I didn't think it was anything unusual. I assumed everyone had similar anxiety issues. Eventually of course the stress built into these physical issues.



Fortunately I had already come across a book on self-hypnosis. I was practiced at meditation, (upon which self-hypnosis is founded), from the early 70's, but never applied it rigorously. I went home from the specialist, read the book, lied down on the sofa, meditated and then applied the new technique. Quite honestly I was astonished at the results. Of course, maybe all placebo, but then stress is all in the mind. I was cured, my energy bounced straight back and my other symptoms went away. I have never looked back. I started doing new stuff like playing rugby again with Chesham Rugby Club, (and years later broke my ankle still playing at aged 50). A great bunch of lads here and we had some good times training, playing and of course, after matches together. One of the younger guy on a night out (I was not there), decided to scale a four story building, I think to impress the ladies. He fell off from the top and never played again having broken most of his bones and gave himself brain damage.

**Whenever I need to pick myself up I use self-hypnosis.** I know it can also be a dangerous technique for some people, but for me it was transformational. At times it was still rough but I managed through these without getting stressed again. A family with three kids with a sole bread winner was tough, probably impossible now, but even then the constant strain of earning enough to pay the mortgage and the household bills was bound to take its toll. I don't think it is too far fetched to say that self-hypnosis saved my life, I don't think I would be here now if it was not for that book. I manage any anxiety now with meditation and self-hypnosis. I have tried to tell many people including the family what an exceptional

technique it is, but this nearly always falls on deaf ears, with most saying they cannot meditate. Well if it saves your life then it is worth getting good at in my opinion.

Sometime after I decide to add a new 'job' to my portfolio, selling Mortgage Upgrades as a freelance sales person, facilitated by a company specialising in up-grading mortgages. The idea was simple; re-mortgage with a new provider that offered the ability to pay a bit extra when money was available. The graphs showed spectacular savings over an extended period, because most of all fixed term mortgages pay mainly the interest only for the first 5 years or so. The training was £4k, and included with this was my own local sales patch. The company sales and profits were very good, I researched the sales people and got great feedback. It was a workable scheme and made sense. I sent my cheque. A week before the course start date I rang to get final details. The phone was answered punctually; "This is the Official Receiver" My last £4k disappeared down a dark tunnel. At this juncture I applied my new hypnosis technique in anger and said to my self "this simply did not happen and I will move on". I have never suffered from losing this £4k, I knew it would have been too much to bear, this result, for my mind, proved the incredible effectiveness of self-hypnosis.



**The mortgage company had been shut down by the government** after being 'lent on' by the big banks who did not want this upstart with a really good idea trashing their profits, ("Bastards"). I did, much later on, get into mortgages again. A client asked me to help him out, he only told me later I had to pass a high level financial exam. I did this with reasonable ease as I knew quite a lot by then about finance. But the work was not only like watching paint dry, it was immoral. The main money was made in selling (unnecessary) insurances to cover defaults. I did one job then quit. I am still a registered CEMAP mortgage adviser. I still remember a meeting we had with Northern Rock, this was 2007, not long before the financial crash of 2008. We were urged to sell 110% mortgages. Northern Rock's business model was simply making money on each deal, (not on the underlying investment). They just bought and sold money, and charged a fee for doing so. They had zero interest in the outcome or the morality of heaping massive mortgages onto young couples with little chance of paying it back, if or when, interest rate conditions changed. They were the first UK bank to go bust come the crash.



**My World-Wide claim to fame** is that I caused the 2008 financial crash entirely on my own. Having found internet based trading while doing the mortgage work, I followed this up using online trading in shares. I had some money put away to pay for our upcoming mortgage repayment (interest only – never go there). I remember my first trades, I bought some shares when the graph went down, hopped into the shower, hopped out and the shares had swung back up, I sold them, making a decent profit and got dressed. Ten minutes later they had swung back down again, so I repeated the exercise. Easy I thought, no wonder the chimps in the city make lots of money. How naive. A few days later I caused the crash. I wasn't a complete idiot and so I decided to buy some of the safest stock I could find – Barclays Bank. No sooner had I invested, (a lot), God decide to teach me another lesson. God didn't seem to mind crashing the whole of the world's finances just to teach me this lesson. I would have been ok, as the sensible option would have been to hold the shares until they came back up. Unfortunately both myself and God knew I needed the money to pay of my looming mortgage repayment. Another hard lesson learnt. I now (touch wood) have better trading strategy, but it has taken many years to figure the markets out. Simply stated if you bet against the market – however seemingly illogical the market movements are – you will lose.



Things eventually picked up – the self-hypnosis worked wonders on my ability to get on with life and find some solutions. I have used this ever since. All my life I had suffered from mild anxiousness, mixed with my impatience and need for adrenaline. From this time onwards, I have managed these issues with much greater effect and now rarely get anxious, and if I do, then I can calm my brain quickly and efficiently.

## Consultancy

**My happiest working years** were in consulting. I have, over the years, reviewed nearly a hundred different organisations - including businesses, charities and public sector agencies. I saved several from going bust and significantly improved many others, the rest didn't listen.





I was only thirty eight when I started with Morton Hodson, as a freelance consultant – no more ‘proper jobs’ and rubbish managers for me. The training was excellent, it gave me a base from which to re-align my business skills, although I still had to sell every single project.



**The first client I landed in 1989** was ‘Boxer Removal’ based in Wembley, (my patch), the company was a professional removal and storage company for office moves in London. Alistair Brown was the owner manager. When I met him he had his feet up on his desk puffing away at a large cigar. He was clearly very pleased with himself and his business. I ended up working with Alistair for some years. His accountant was always telling him how well he was doing, and

unfortunately Alistair believed him. In the final fallout some years later this accountant (crook) went to do time at Her Majesty’s pleasure, yes he was that bad. Although Alistair said he didn’t need any help, he did employ me so I could tell him just how well he was doing. A nice guy, he was outgoing and a people person, we got on well. In those days few smaller companies had computers, accounts were done by hand and Alistair used a home grown set of box cards for sales and purchases. His only true picture of the business came from his accountant. It took me about a day to total up his sales and outgoings, I found that he was making a loss. It took me a short while to convince Alistair of the true situation and he was visibly shaken. Now the real work started. The more I uncovered the worse it got. He was ‘employing’ about forty cash-in-hand heavy lifters each weekend when all the office moves were undertaken. His turnover was around £1.5m and the UK was just entering the recession of 1989. I got a first quick win just by looking at what his competitors did on their paperwork. A simple trick often employed in the initial consulting stages, was to use my own limited company to get the competitors of my clients discussing their operations and viewing their literature, no websites then of course. In this instance I found that all of these competitors were leaving out the standard 12% insurance charge for removals damage from their bottom line removal price. This made Boxer Removals 12% more expensive. We simply removed this from the final quote with a line below stating the 12% insurance. This immediately made Alistair 12% more margin. This took the company into profitable work, but the sales were falling quickly as the recession began to bite.



I also explained to Alistair that he could not continue to pay the weekend guys cash as the Inland Revenue would go back years and collect the tax owed, so he put them on a PAYE system. Just in time, as a year later the Inland Revenue did a spot check, they didn’t look back at the earlier years, it would have taken the company under if they had. The sales plan was to set up a direct marketing team. His wife was employed as the manager and with guidance they started producing quality opportunities, while all his competitors were sitting on their hands. The company sales improved and ran well for some time.



Unfortunately the wife was having an affair with Alistair’s right hand man, the operational manager, that put paid to the sales effort and the marriage. Then, a while later, his accountant had his problems and Alistair found he owed a hundred thousand in back taxes that his accountant had nicked, he was on his back foot again.

He then had the chance to Tender for the huge move of the British Library. He didn’t think he had a chance. But I had a different view. I knew the ‘tender process’ and I knew what they would be looking for. I said to him, the big firms will all use consultants to do the tender, they will miss the key issues by being too arrogant, we won’t and you will do the presentation, we shall play the small but very capable card. This is exactly what we did, and Alistair got the job split into several phases. Unfortunately, this was such a big future earner for Alastair, he took his eye of the current situation and however much I tried getting him to cut back as the recession continued to bite hard, he would not lay off any of his staff. I did convince him to do so a few weeks just before Xmas, a very low earnings period for this profession. He promised me he would lay off all his weekend workers over the holiday period and into new year Good job I said to him in the new year, after reviewing the sales figures, you would not have been able to afford them, you would have gone bust. “Ah, he said, but I couldn’t do it, I didn’t lay them off. I said, “well that’s it Alistair”, and walked out. Boxer Removal went bust and Alistair ‘disappeared’, I never knew what happened to him after that.

**I had many odd experiences** during my consultancy projects. I realised initially that the learning curve was immense. I likened each early job as equivalent to doing an MBA in business, as a consultant thrown

in the deep end, and I had to learn about the industry sector, the competitors and the business itself, - all in great detail. By the end of each project I knew more about each of these than the MD of the business. In one Electroplating business my ISO 9000 quality project hit the buffers when the second in command was found dissolved in the acid tank on Monday morning, he had been there since Saturday, either fell or jumped, no one knew. Which the HS&E were not happy and closed the place down for months. Another company was Mayway in Hemel, a construction company (laying foundations and drainage for large building sites) run of course by a large Irishman. I was finding and installing his first accounting computer system. This fine Irishman liked things to work,. This was fine until the stupid sales guy from the chosen supplier decide to tell him about the possibility 'bugs' in the software. "No, no" say's the our large Irish MD, " I don't want ANY bugs". Then he turns to me, his trusted advisor, "What the fuck are you doing finding me a system with bugs". "Get out both of you before I throw you down the stairs". And I am sure he meant it. We left in a hurry. It took me weeks to get him to understand about 'bugs' and that all systems had them, but my *trusted relationship* never quite recovered.

**One of the oddest and a little bit scary clients** was an auto-engineering business in Wembley. This was run by an older couple and specialized in auto-gearbox refurbishments. This was an old family business that was not making any money and I undertook a marketing study for them in the hope to return the business to profitability. I was quite good by then at delving into the depths' of a business to find exactly how it worked. I started as usual with the people at the lowest tier and worked back up to the owners. This business interested me as it was about automotive engineering and auto-boxes were very tricky bits of kit. I found out a great deal about how they pulled them apart, refurbished them. There were only a few basic types of these gearboxes used across many makes of vehicles. I found quite a slick refurb process that was really a bit of a cheat as most of the parts such as the gears and mechanisms were only cleaned up and the whole lot put back together. The tricky bit was the fluid flywheel, this gave all sorts of issues and unless the whole assembly was clinically clean, or the end result would end in failure. So it was a bit of a shock to find this in this greasy, roll-up your sleeves environment being run by youngish lads aged about 25 to 30 who seemed quite out of character to the job, they were all far too slick. The Forman was a born salesman and laid-on the sales pitch he used on the clients, he couldn't help himself, he was your main-man - more like your average Wembley drug dealer than a engineering Forman. I used my interest in the engineering to hide my astonishment.



**Part of my rigorous process** was to review the accounts. I had covered this before I took the job on as I had found many businesses do not like external people to crawl all over their accounts – but they always tell such an interesting story. The owners stated prevaricating when I asked for these accounts. Eventually after reiterating the necessity, they gave in. Nothing made any sense. I knew enough about the refurbishment process to estimate the costs and time and I had seen many, many finished units sitting on the shelves awaiting customers. The business was turning over loads of these auto-units from older cars, refurbishing them and stacking them on the shelves, there were hundreds. The punters rolled in and soon rolled out again with an expensive 'new' auto-box installed, all looked after by our genial and smiling main-man. It didn't take a genius to realise that these guys were using this business almost solely for their own ends with just a few percent of the sales going through the accounts. It should have been making a fortune as a specialist auto-gearbox company. The lads and our main-man were running a complete internal scam.

So, in my inimitable, (and rather stupid), way I organised a meeting between the owners and your *main-man* at the owners house on the pretext of presenting my findings. I then confronted the *main-man* with what exactly he was about and sat back. He owned up immediately. But this didn't go quite to plan because the owners who must have already suspected what was going on, just shrugged and told me they weren't bothered. I still have no idea whether they were scared of these guys or if they were truly not bothered, but unless I went to the police I could do nothing more. So deciding that I was best quickly out of this situation, I left collecting my cheque on the way out.



**One client ran a Cigar Business in Wembley**, selling most by mail order, (they are still going). I reviewed the competitors who were all in London in the St James area. It is amazing what people will tell you if you ask them, especially as a "researcher, in confidence". I found two shocking things

about these old time traditional cigar traders. All the London businesses were selling mail order to the US, making most of their profit here as the VAT at 20% went directly into their margins (zero VAT on exports). The US prohibited Cuban items after JFK announced the Cuban prohibition order in the 60's, (after he had filled a humidor cupboard with Havana cigars apparently). It was not illegal for UK businesses to sell Cuban products into the US under UK law. The US however took a different view as we shall see.



The second thing I learnt was that these old established Cigar Businesses had basements that were full of very old Havana cigars (and they get better as they age). After a little probing, I uncovered that these stacks of old cigars were in fact owned by



very deceased owners. Sold once many years ago, these shops waited for some tens of years and then resold them at a greater profit. They are probably still doing this.

**I went back to debrief 'The Cigar Shop'**. The owner, a personable young guy Tim, who had taken over from his dad some years before, listened to my accounts of his competitors and announced that he was not going to start selling to the US. So, I said, "well do you mind if I do then?" seeing an easy opportunity to make some profitable sales. He didn't mind, and so *St James Cigars* was born operating from Ailort's lofts with Jane removing the tell-tale cigar bands and packing them neatly into the nice unbranded wooden boxes that I purchased from a guy in Stokenchurch for a quid each – never did work out how he did those for a quid, still have a few left.

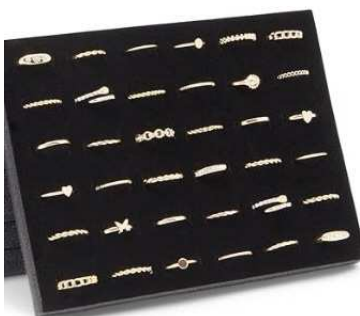
**As I was into the new World Wide Web**, (1990 all dial up connections then), In 1991 I put up a simple St James Cigars website listing the larger Havana Cigars with standard prices and 'world wide' shipping at £25 via FedEx (a great company then and incredibly reliable, with an office in High Wycombe). **Within the hour**, I had my first email order paid by credit card (I had Amex and Cardnet services). Over about 18 months we shipped hundreds of boxes each of 25 cigars with some boxes priced at over £500 each. Most of these went to California, we stopped selling to the East Coast area and New York as their nice customs people kept trashing the cigars in the boxes. *A nice little earner, Dell Boy would have been proud.* St James's Cigars was probably one of the first ever business to sell *anything* via the internet – why am I not a multi-billionaire?



**Then I had a visit from Customs & Excise.** A senior guy turned up with very little notice at my Princes Risborough offices (JPH Marketing). We had a very pleasant chat that went like this; "Our friends over the pond have asked me to visit. Either you stop selling the Cuban Cigars to the US or we shall go through your business records and we shall, believe it, find something awry, and you do not want to go down that alley." As it had happened the sales has just fallen off a cliff as the Spanish, who only paid a fraction of the Tobacco Tax that was levied by the UK, stated competing to the US market. Our prices were far higher.

I said to the pleasant customs man that I would be happy to comply and we had a nice chat about what he normally did. He was the senior manager for multi-million or billion pound frauds, mainly involving the shipping of illegally imported booze by large criminal organisations into, and out of, the UK without paying the duty. He assured me he did not want to be in this meeting either, but our friends over the pond were very insistent. I felt quite pleased that my little cigar business had attracted so much nice attention. I shall never bother attempting to get a travel visa for the US.

I only ever had one client who exactly followed the brief from a consultancy project. This was DH Hill, a company run by a Jewish couple in the Mill Hill area overlooking the A1. This business made Jewellery for the mid-end retail market and they also had an import company for consummate, high end wooden Jewellery and Cigar boxes sold to Harrods and the like. The Hill's were a lovely couple, and we soon agreed that the Jewellery business was never going to make good profits. It was very well established, did not seem to do a lot wrong with an excellent sales force and competition from Asia that undercut their prices with ease. The cost of manufacturing by hand in small quantities was necessarily high. One significant issue did arise from my brief overview of the manufacturing facility. When you make jewellery, the process requires gold to be cleaned in a potassium cyanide tank. DH Hill had a tank, and it was a large, open tank, situated in



the corner of the workshop. This tank gave off cyanide fumes when used for 'bombing' the gold (produces a clean thin layer of pure gold on the finished jewellery). As a ISO 9000 qualified consultant who did risk assessments, I had to observe that this was breaking just about every health and safety law. They soon closed down the manufacturing and started buying in jewellery to sell on. The consultancy outcome was to grow the small but well established wooden box business. This had good margins (unlike the jewellery business), and an established set of high end retailers that sold on quality not price. The plan was to import a range of new high end wooden products and expand the wholesale sales to more high retailers using companies like Harrods as leverage. It was a staged plan and dear old Mr Hill followed it exactly. Over the next few years I bumped into him several times unexpectedly and each time he told me the business was going from strength to strength and they were still following my plan to the letter. Had he not been such a nice guy, I would have thought he was pulling my plonker, but no, Mr Hill was a convert.

**Blackson & Kenridge was a tool stockist.** Again run by a lovely guy John Eldridge. Over the years I did just about everything for this business, starting with ISO 9000 and ending up looking after their stock system and automating the stock updating (they had 100,000 stock items). I worked with them for 15

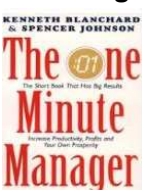


years or more. But they were in a dying industry sector and their turnover steadily decreased and the management was too old and inactive to allow the business to re-develop. I did think about buying the business and running it as an online outlet but there was too much debt. They were kept afloat by 3M for whom they were major distributors (mainly abrasives). They owed 3M a

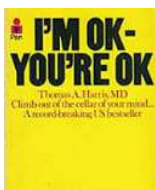
great deal of money by the end. They also owed the bank a large sum. I knew the business was going to fail. Unfortunately John Eldridge was getting old and not making good decisions. He and his family had their house and the building on the line underpinning the bank loan. This was an accident going to happen, they would lose everything. This was the only time during my consultancy when I effectively took over and made the decisions. I set up invoice discounting with Lloyds (where Lloyds pay 80% of the customer debt and the invoices are assigned to them). As the company had a large sales ledger debt this raised enough to pay the bank loan off. The 3m debt was still outstanding but not secured. Shortly after the company went into liquidation. I don't think John Eldridge ever understood that I had saved his skin.

**I learnt that hard way** that most business people just want you to *'borrow their watch and tell them what they already know'* – which is how well their business is already being run. After many years of consulting I found that the only way I could influence the business was to lead them along a process of discovery so that the directors came up with the answers themselves. While effective and requiring significant skill and planning, as a consultant you never got the acclaim for finding the best path forward.

**Learning Points.** During various stages of my life, I have had life changing learning points. The first of

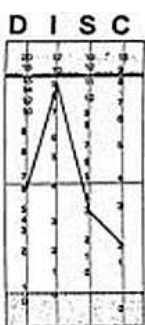


these was The Leadership Trust at Symonds Yat. This was a training business run by the ex-head of SAS training, David Gilbert. I was just twenty three. He used physical problems to replace business problems and evolved a leadership course over one week that took everyone through an intense set of learning situations, eventually ending in the 'Klondike'. During this process I learnt that none of the trainees, including senior managers from large businesses, had a clue about



leadership or planning. Neither did I. But, by the end of that week, each group felt we could have done anything together and succeed. The deep learning points have stayed with me to this day and I believe they have changed my approach to most situations. Another key learning point came from a book called 'You're Ok, I'm Ok'. And I have also used this understanding to help manage my relationships ever since. Yet another was 'The one minute manager'. I read this in the library, standing in the same spot for the

whole reading, it is only a slim book and not to be mixed up with the many versions following it success. If you have not read these books then I urge you to do so. During my consultancy years, **I had to apply personality profiling** for a client request. From this I learnt much about myself also and began to understand how very different each of us are. My profile is dominance and people orientation in roughly equal measure, coupled to high risk. When I am pushed this moves to dominance. When I saw my own profile, it made a lot of sense for my past actions. One thing I have learnt is that most people are surprisingly good at hiding their own personality. This is all part of why humans are so successful as social beings. What you



see is not what you get. Only when you get to truly know people, often through sharing adverse situations, does their true nature come to the fore. This has caught me out many times, and now I am much more careful in my expectations.

**As a child I was always impetuous.** I also seemed to have boundless energy. As I got older, in my teens, I became aware that some days I had exceptional energy and a lust for action. This was difficult to manage and often got me into trouble. I noticed also that I had times when I was less energetic. I am not convinced, but these cycles may be linked to either the moon or perhaps some hormonal cycle. What I do know is that when on a *high*, I felt invincible and so full of ideas and energy. When young, I assumed that everyone had these events, but now I know they don't. Where does your personality come from, the eternal question of nature or nurture. Up until I was about 45 years, my life was all about achievement. This was pretty well all consuming in nature and caused many issues with Jane, the family and indeed other people. In my earliest years, when I didn't get what I wanted, there would be a tantrum. Later on, this turned to anger and shouting. Certainly when I feel put down or do not achieve what I expect, my base reaction is anger. Perhaps this came from or was exacerbated by my upbringing; my parent constant and violent arguments, or St John's at 7 years old. I don't know, and I cannot blame all my bad behaviour on to these past issues. The truth is, that I have always been selfish, and still am. Jane is a remarkable lady, she has put up with me and has the innate ability to be both energetic yet calm. If I had my life over, I would attempt to find a solution to these earlier drivers of my life. It does seem *unfair* to me that some sharks live to 400 years, while we are almost spent just as we gain enough experience and learning to make sense of ourselves. Perhaps in the future, humans will consider the first 70 years as 'growing up'.

### Early years from Hell; "St John's On The Hill"

My parents were moving around setting up a new business. I was put out to grass. At least to St John's on the hill in Chepstow. A classic preparatory school of the old sort. God knows why there, it suited me like an armoured suit would a cross-channel swimmer. I sunk into this hell-hole *aged 7 years*. It was all surnames, you were strictly forbidden to use any forenames and no running in corridors and strict behaviour at all times. This was no doubt formative. We were occasionally allowed home over a weekend to arrive back at the time the bell rang on a Sunday evening, even today when on a Sunday I hear bells ringing, my stomach sinks. **We carried a little note book around** with us, if you were caught running in a corridor or some other small demeanour, a mark went in the book. Three marks and your name was called out in Saturday morning assembly. The headmaster (and his wife) were old gits who smoked 60 plus cigarettes a day, (and sent the older boys out to buy them). He got one of his whippy canes down from the rack in his study, you bent over a stool and he wacked you so hard you could not sit down for a week.



**'Verbum Dei Lucerna' – 'God's word, a guiding light'**  
**- More like - 'Devils Place of Worship'**

We had no time to ourselves, even Sundays were filled with forced walks or boring activities. Each morning at 7 am even in the depths of winter we were ushered out of our beds to be lined up outside in just our pants doing 'physical jerks'. The gardener caught some large rats one day and placed them in a metal cage. He then proceeded to round up

some of us young boys to watch him drown the rats in the school pond, nice man. The only time we ever got out to 'town' was to watch a film – amazing, fancy that, but at the interval it was past our bed time so they marched us back up the hill missing the end of the film. You get the picture.



**One of the worst thing that happened** there was seeing a boy, one year

older than me, taken off through the dinning hall during lunch. Some time later he was brought back, being helped along, held under the armpits to stop him falling - his face was unrecognisable. He had been caught bullying another boy. The punishment was several rounds with the older school boxing champion. I shall never forget that moment. And I think it was then I knew I will would never return. Once my mind was made up, I



can remember the relief, I was going to escape this trauma.

**The last day of term** we were playing chase in the corridors, (the masters could do nothing as we were about to leave for home), when I got slammed in the face by a door, this chipped my front tooth, a life long reminder of that place. But I was leaving for the last time and so didn't feel a thing at the time. My parents would not countenance my leaving, (they had probably already paid for the next year). I simply stated, "fine send me back and I shall run away". I meant it, and would have done, I was never going back to that hell-hole. I think probably my life-time resentment and distrust of all rules and being told what to do comes from St John's. Who knows, but it seems to me that I do take an alternative view quite naturally, for good and bad no doubt.

**After St John's I hated school.** All of it. I learnt nothing until just before my GCSE's (O'Levels then) when I worked out I needed to get some results to progress. My mother taught me to read at eight years old. But I still couldn't keep up with the lessons or the writing on the chalk board, everyone seemingly being able to understand and move on before I had cottoned-on. So I didn't bother, I spent my time in my own head Daydreaming. I was brilliant at daydreaming, I won wars, ran countries, had lots of girl friends who I saved from impending disasters. Endless, long, complex daydreams, and, yes I still daydream.



This however had an upside. My imagination was clearly exercised and still is. I have always had an advantage here, and I believe that all kids should be taught these imaginative exercises, without imagination you cannot have innovation, which is how the human race moves forward.

## Cardiff, Sport & Friends

**In Brandreth road Cardiff we lived on a hill.** It was a new house and they were still building the one next door further up the hill. I think I was about nine or ten when we moved in. I played in the part-built house jumping up and down up and over the unfinished walls, it was great, like my own little exciting playground. Then a wall crashed down, missed me just, and I disappeared pretty quick.



The builders seemed to know it was me, I have no idea how, but playing the Just William line, shrugging and saying "it wasn't me, and I didn't see anything". Never worked, and the new half built walls were now strictly off limits. Tim moved in next door. He was a teenager and his bedroom window was above mine directly opposite.

We had a line with cans on the end strung between our windows, he was a very friendly lad and I looked upon him as my older mentor for a while. Then he grew up and didn't pay me much attention, off with his friends and girl friends in cars. Unfortunately, he had a very bad car crash and smashed his leg. From then on he walked with a limp and become a changed person. My sister had loads of 'boy friends' some of these had motorbikes – proper bikes – 500 and 750 Royal Enfield's that made a great roar as they came and went. How I hankered after one of those, I made up all sorts of impossible daydreams that allowed me to ride one at that young age.



I made do with my bike and my skates. The garage behind and to the side, had a very steep short slope coming down towards the house. I used to whizz down on my skates and just make the first corner around the back of the house. I never did hit the pebble-dashed very hard looking wall, but it was always a near thing. The easier run was around the front corner, none of my friends ever tried the rear corner. I was always incredibly independent from that age on. We used to roam far and wide on our bikes, there was the lake nearby and the railway line that we used to lie next to as the steam trains thundered past. Everything in life seemed to fall around exciting trips and dare devil acts. We set a whole hedge alight near the railway line one day and when we heard the sirens coming we cycled all the way to Barry Island, some ten miles away, to escape any consequences. I hated school, but the rest was fun.



**Years before we lived in Green Lawns** a cul-de-sac just a few miles away from Brandreth Road. I was three then I think, my father was a sales manager for Proctor and Gamble and initially sold Daz soap to retailers. I had a tricycle that I used to ride up and down the close. One day I decide to escape and rode for miles down the main Cyncoed road, even at that age I was always getting into trouble. We were not there long and moved away when my father changed jobs, I think to Sawbridgeworth Hertfordshire.

Another school – I went to about ten different schools in my early years – had to stay away with some old couple who put me to bed at 6 pm and my sister taught me to steal from the other kid's coat pockets when we both at a school together. It was a girls school, I was the only boy and all I can remember is being told off for not saying my prayers at assembly, well I didn't believe in prayers and was certainly not going to say them. I think I was quite lost in those days, no friends, no structure.



**Eventually we came back to Brandreth road** and I went to Marlborough Road junior school. We used to play a great touch rugby game using a rolled up cap as the 'ball' and passed it about

while others were chasing you to get it. The girls normally stayed out of the way but we were often in trouble for knocking them over – the punishment was being lined-up and wacked very hard across our fingers with the masters cane. Didn't stop us playing, so clearly it was a stupid authoritarian mechanism that was ineffective. I had a welsh teacher at that school that was tall and had huge hands. As usual I never paid attention, I could hardly read or write English let alone learn a seemingly pointless welsh language. Whack! He would hit me hard around the head with those big hands, it hurt. "Now go and stand in the corner Phillips" I eventually I told my parents (I could usually sort stuff out myself being independently minded), but I was getting battered all the time. My father said next time just come and tell me. So I did, I took him to mean tell him when he did it. Whack! "stand in the corner". But I simply smiled and strode directly out of the classroom door hopped off quickly down the corridor and was away home. They tried pinning the blame on me. Oh, how they went on, I just shrugged and said I did what my father told me to do and faced them all down. The welsh master didn't last long after that, he was gone by next term and the rest of that term I did what I liked in his class, result! My first win against authoritarianism.



When I failed my eleven plus, (unsurprisingly), I went to Ty Celyn secondary. This was a fairly hard school, one master was expelled for dangling boys by their ankles from the second floor windows, always fights in the playground, you get the picture.

**Then I found rugby.** I initially thought it was a joke, they were going to let me, without being told off, to jump on other boys. I was never taught any rugby, I think they assumed that since I was so adept at jumping on people that I must have been taught already. I got into the under 15 school team and this first year we won the championship. Not due to my tackling, but I was pretty good at it although only half the size of the other boys who were all in the next year or two up. No, we won because one of our lads, the full back could kick the ball almost the whole length of the pitch. In those days you could kick from anywhere into touch no need to bounce the ball on the ground first. I can remember the disbelief in the opposition players eyes as they saw their hard earned territory disappear with one mighty hoof, right down to their end of the field. I enjoyed that year at Ty Celyn, but my parents sent me away yet again to a boarding school – Frensham Heights.

**Frensham was a good school** and eventually I did learn a few subjects. I played football, and cricket - which I hated as I was far too impatient to stand still for longer than five seconds. At Frensham I learnt to sail – again the hard way. "Who has sailed before" the master asked as we stood next to the launching slipway at Frensham Ponds lake. I stuck my hand up with several others. Ok you and you and you "Taffy". I was know only by my nick-name as a young welsh lad from Cardiff. It was true I had sailed before at six years old sitting in



between my mother and father in their GP 14 Dinghy. I had no idea 'how' to sail, but he didn't ask that. Off I went in a Cadet two man dinghy and had been given a younger girl to look after and instruct. At first, there were only very light airs and we floated gracefully down Frensham Ponds. Myself doing an



impression of being in total control, *Just William* would have been proud. Then, in the afternoon, the wind began to pick up, the boat heeled and I instructed 'the crew' to learn out. We lent out further and further, the boat went over further and further. I tried everything, pushing and pulling the tiller from side to side,



aiming the boat in different directions, nothing worked, and so over we went. Never mind I said to my crew, "we'll just get it back up", which we did, many times, until at last I said to the crew, "why don't we just stay in the water and swim the boat back in". I've no idea if the young girl ever recovered from that afternoon's 'instruction'. I wasn't deterred, and I quickly found out that I should have let the sail out when the wind gusted. By the end of my time at Frensham I won the sailing competition, one of the few competitions that I have ever won.

**Frensham suited me**, as it was a very free school and nurtured independence, it was also a co-ed school. The senior girls dormitory in the main old building burnt down in my first year. I remember one of my friends Steven Williams, coming back to Hamilton House, (which was a dormitory building for the younger boys), and jumping up and down insanely saying "you won't believe this" over and over. "For gods sake Steve in can't be that good". It was, we were being sent home for two whole weeks so they could house the girls in our dorms. When we came back to Hamilton House, a few of the older girls were still housed there in there own large flat. We did however manage to engineer a small spy hole into the communal shower block. But the best bit was these older girls came around each evening to tuck us in and give us a goodnight kiss, wonderful.

The best sport at Frensham was playing in the woods, building tree houses and dens in the vast grounds. At the side of the main mansion house there was a famous Scots Pine the top of which was the spot height in the area. To climb this tree, there is a small branch overhang (see pic). I had to reach up and then pull myself up and onto this stubby branch. This was scary to say the

least, especially as I was short, but once up and on this overhang, balancing and hugging the tree, it was plain sailing right to the top. Once there, the view was incredible, you could see for twenty miles. The grass tennis courts can be seen behind the tree.

Near the main entrance to the school, there was a steep grassy hill. This was perfect for careering down on a sledge when it snowed. One such snowy afternoon we had built a ramp to jump the sledges off from three quarters of the way down. It started to get dark and the snow which had compacted and melted a little froze solid again. This run got quicker and quicker as it iced over. Now dark, we put a torch beside the jump and aimed just

the right of the light, so very fast, then bang, whoosh, we were in the air for many seconds, and then crash you landed. If your ribs survived you went again. Best fun I ever had on a toboggan. Long past our lights-out, they eventually came and dragged us back. At the top of the same hill one day we found humungous wooden wheel that had held new underground electrical cable. It was at least ten feet high. We looked at each other, said almost nothing and set about turning it around to face the drop. By the time it had got to the bottom, at least 150 yards, nothing could have stopped it and it felled several small trees. We scarpered pretty quick.

**I had two good friends who played tennis.** One of them was a day-boy, Tim Flood the son of the actor Gerald Flood and John Harrison a Jewish lad, who I had tennis coaching with. We played on the grass-courts in front of the big Scots Pine. Tim always beat me at tennis, just. Tim was a natural sportsman, and his eventual son Toby went on to play for Newcastle Falcons rugby club at fly half and I think for England on a few occasions. There were many son's and daughters of the good and the great at





Frensham. Michael Sellers son rolled up one day in a Roller, he was a bit younger than me and a completely spoilt brat as were some of the others. My parents spent an arm and a leg keeping me at that school, I lasted three years, but was in the group (inevitably) that were considered too 'difficult' and I was not allowed to stay for the six form. Just as well as I went back to Cardiff and joined Howardian Grammar, not sure how on earth I got in there with only five average O'Levels.

In Howardian, I found some of my old mates from Marlborough Road. I also met my best friends Keith Barlow, Keith Ford, John Thayer, Dick Geen and my first girlfriend Christine Slight and her friends, one of whom married Dick, another Christine. She has sadly past away now. So that move changed my life quite a bit. I played rugby at Howardian, the level was high being Cardiff's best grammar school. I managed to get into the second team, but didn't really enjoy it that much, I was playing with boys who had played for many more years than me by then. I was more interested in cars and girls, pubs and having a good time with Keith Barlow, Keith Ford, John, Dick and others. They were mostly not particularly sporty.



**I did play tennis once with Dick.** It was very windy and I said its better weather for sailing or something like that. Dick said "I sail". "Oh, right, why don't we go sailing then in my GP14, the very same dinghy as my parents sailed many years ago. I had done the GP14 up a bit and regularly sailed it. Off we went to Penarth (now Cardiff Bay) and although it was blowing a gale, we were strapping and fit seventeen year olds, so we launched the boat, almost never to be seen again. The sailing club had cancelled a race, as it was too

windy. We hurtled across the water towards Cardiff, got about half way then the boat disappeared in a ball of spray, capsizing and throwing us out. Now, in my wisdom I had lent Dick an old RAF life jacket, (my fathers from the war). I had my new one on.

**Unfortunately for Dick,** his lifejacket was past its best. In fact, not only was it not buoyant at all, but it had seemingly hundreds of pockets that filled up with water and did any excellent job of trying to drown Dick. The boat had turned upside down, we clambered onto the hull and somehow managed to right the boat then get the sail down the mast, as we thought this was the best idea. It wasn't, as the sail halyard got stuck in the mast and the sail with the boom attached ended up flying from the top of the mast just like a kite. We now had a spectacular ride. The force on the sail flying above mast was so great the boat became a washing machine and went over and over with me and Dick attempting to haul ourselves onto the hull each time it surfaced. By this time the tide, renown in this stretch of water (26ft tide height), was racing away seaward with us as passengers.



At last a small motor boat came out and threw us a tow. Now we had two boats neatly linked and moving fast out to sea. The small motorboat was not powerful enough to rescue us in these conditions. Just as myself and Dick, now both cold and exhausted, were thinking the worst, the clubs rescue boat appeared from nowhere and the disgruntled old guy on the helm brought us alongside and tied us firmly up. At least someone knew what they were doing. It turned out that this rescue guy was just about to leave for home after the race cancellation, when we caught his eye. Close one that. Dick took a while to recover, I think he thought he was a goner. After a nice warm shower, probably one of the best I can remember, I was fine. The GP14 never sailed again though, it rotted away in Penarth's Yacht club.



**There was another sailing club in Penarth,** just off the beach where the pier was. When I was very young, 2 or 3 , we lived in a flat next to Penarth. This overlooked the sea water public baths and swimming pools. Run by Mr Brown, an old hairy individual with huge eyebrows, he would give us one of the large hot water bathrooms to change in. All the

water was sea water, even in the hot baths. I used to jump straight in from the side waiting to be rescued as at first I could not swim. I was swimming by 3 years old though as we went to the pools several times a week. Many years later, strolling down the beach from the pier, we noticed a bit of commotion near the slipway for the sailing club.



The Members (who were a bit too toffee-nosed for me) strode around complaining someone had blocked the slipway with his vehicle. When we got there, it was not any old vehicle but a brand new Rolls Royce. And the tosser had parked it right in the middle of the slipway. What the owner did not know, as presumably not a local, was that the tide in Penarth is the same tide that rises by 26ft. Not long after, the commotion turned to bemused interest. The tide had turned and the sea was coming in fast.

The crowd got bigger the excitement increased with anxious looks around for the Roller's owner, no, not to find him, but to make sure he was not returning in time. He didn't. The Rolls Royce was soon up to its steering wheel in sea water. Job done, owner still nowhere to be seen, the good folk of Penarth went merrily on their way, and up to the pubs to commemorate a great day for the working people.

**This happened when I was around seventeen,** I was staying at home, at 'Chandos' Cyncoed Road, doing my 'A' Levels at Howardian. This house, a magnificent corner plot next to Dan-Y-Coed Road, later sold by my sister to developers and developed into three large houses (each worth a million plus now), cost £8k when my parents purchased it in about 1967. We also had a new metallic blue Jaguar 3.4 Mk11. This saloon car seemed huge then, but when you see them now they are quite small. I remember driving up the valleys with my



parents in this new car. The people all came out to look at it as we past, I was agog, they lived in a different world to me.

Years later, this same car, was lent to me by my father, for a trip to London for a weekend away on my 18th birthday. Me, Keith Ford and Dick Williams (who emigrated to Australia), all had our 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays that weekend. We had an 'exciting' trip. We ended up sleeping in the car, but not before racing a Lancia Fulvia most of the way there. No M4 then of course. I almost lost the Jag on a quite few occasions, I was not an experienced driver, but that was no excuse not to drive this vey fast car flat out. Unfortunately it was hopeless going around corners and rear would step out easily and it was a handful to say the least. But we survived and beat the Lancia, my Father must have been bonkers letting me take the Jag.



**In slightly earlier days, in our teens between 16 and 17 we got around on scooters,** well they did, I wasn't allowed one, I had to get a moped. But it was

a good moped and with my feet out on the passenger foot-pegs, lying flat, I could get 45 mph on a downhill run. I Took that engine apart and mended it several times. The others all had mostly Lambrettas but Dick Williams had a Vespa, there was a constant discussion point of which handled better, I never did find out who was right. All. Of course, had lots of mirrors. These scooters were not



particularly fast. The 225cc Lambretta was the ultimate. It was the back of one of these, escaping from Howardian one Friday lunchtime to congregate at a local country pub (The Unicorn) a few miles away in Llanedeyrn that the scooter fell over. Well, I got the blame, apparently, I was leaning too much, (or not enough), as we entered a bend far too fast in the wet. Fortunately, the guy who's scooter it was had a huge Greycoat on flying in the wind, upon which I landed, totally comfortably as we both slid in unison along the tarmac. We still made the pub. It was the same pub where my sister got married, I still quite like the idea of being married in a pub.



Ann actually got married in Llanedeyrn Church, but we all stated off in the Unicorn Pub before the church and went directly back there after a short ceremony.

**My father was, as usual,** after a drink and getting home late for his supper, becoming abusive, arguing with my mother, who seemed to 'like' winding him up. I had lived with them arguing and shouting all my life and when I was very young I can remember praying to God 'please make it stop', strangely enough that seemed to work. This particular day, I decided enough was enough. I was a strong young lad then, and simply picked him up by his collars and put him out of the kitchen door. It was a sort of a 'coming of age' for me. From that time onwards, at least when I was home, he behaved himself a lot better. I do still dream of my father, and it is always some sort of traumatic dream. I also still dream of Jon Barber, who I still dearly miss. One interesting aside here, is sometimes, during such a dream, you figure out that this person is actually dead. This is a great way to enter into a 'Lucid Dream', but that is a completely another story.

About the time of Dick's & my sailing catastrophe, Keith Barlow got into diving with Newport BSAC club. His mum helped with the club also, diving then was very new. About two years later Keith got me involved and I did my BSAC training. Keith and I dived in many parts of west Wales and Cornwall together. In those time we always took a keep bag with us, the sea was so full of life, the bottom covered with large crabs, lobsters, scallops depending on where you were diving, along always with multiple types of fish. We camped, went diving and cooked our catch on Keith's petrol powered burner. Wow, that was a thing, I bet he has still got it. Camping very near Penzance, we were all there, Keith, John, Dick and me. We decided that as none of us had ever got really seriously drunk, we should take advantage of the bar in the campsite that evening. The good idea that some idiot had was to go through every single drink that the barman had on his shelves. I blame the barman, he should have known better than serving all those drinks to youngsters of no more than eighteen years. We ended up finishing all the whisky and so it was time to go to find our tents.

**One element of the return journey** across the camp site had been forgotten, we were doing very well, singing, hanging on to each other, as we stumbled happily across the turf towards our nice cosy tents. Then we came across the stile. Nothing out of the ordinary. Although now it seemed extraordinarily difficult to mount successfully. With more singing and good heart we got John Thayer on to the top, balanced nicely. He seemed fine until he fell like a stone (or drunk) face first into the ground. But at least he was over. The rest of us seeing John's ungainly descent, managed to crawl over without breaking anything or anyone. Perhaps we thought it a deed of kindness, but we realised after attempting to jump over all the circle of bins in the site and spectacularly failing, that John looked a little worse for wear. So we ever so gently laid him prostrate behind his tent, just in case he was sick in the night. Next morning, very late morning, we did happen to notice John was still lying behind his tent. I never did understand why he was so grumpy the next day.



It took us three morose days to get over that night. I couldn't stand whisky for many years after. It did teach us all a lesson though, and ever since I have never set out just to get drunk, I 'may' have got drunk from time to time but that is slightly different.



**The same group** were at my house in Cyncoed Road some years later. We had our girlfriends with us. Dick with his Christine, my Christine and Alison who would marry Keith. John didn't yet have a girlfriend but that is another story. And as usual, come five pm we were getting a little thirsty. A few quick nods and winks, we announced we needed some fags or something. Just a quick one down our usual haunt we drove to the Discovery Pub near where Dick lived just a mile away. Not a particularly classy place, it was a typical large estate pub serving Courage beers, but we spent most evenings there. We arrived, got the fags, had a quick pint, maybe sneaked in another and were just about to leave (honestly),

when some old school mates arrived. "Ah, fancy that, how you doing, great to see you, what you having". But still, we were set on making it back to the girls in good time, just a little bit late. Unfortunately as the sands of time catch you out, another group of old mates arrived. Now we had a small party. Getting out was looking more difficult with the pull of the ale and the bonhomie that grew and grew. The final straw was yet another set of old friends arriving to complete set. No one even suggested leaving after that. No, we were now truly done-for, and we knew it. Horses and slaves could not have pulled us away from such a marvellous impromptu gathering. We eventually did go, of course, well we had to, when the miserable publican kicked us out, it being well after time. The greeting from within once we arrived home shall never, ever, be discussed. Was it worth it? Well yes.

Here is a funny interlude about me and Keith in someone's small car. I was sitting in the front Keith and Alison were in the back. I was drifting off with my hand dangling behind my seat (small seats in those days). I was picking at the hairs in the carpet behind me. I came too a bit and for some reason turned and caught Keith's eye, we both then had a moment of realisation, I had been picking at the hairs on his leg, he thought it had been Alison and was enjoying it until the truth was exposed. How we laughed.



**My girl friend, Christine Slight**, lived in Splott. It was mostly not quite as bad as it sounds. Very near to Cardiff Bay, known then as Tiger Bay, a home to many distant travellers from all walks of life. Both Dick and I seemed suitors for Chris in the beginning. We had a chat about this I remember, Dick was always the 'gentleman' and basically said, "please you first". I think he already had his eye on the other Christine anyway, who of course became his wife.

During the school holidays, I used to go down to Splott in my MG Midget every morning. I would strategically wait a few roads away until her parents left for work. Christine's mum was a 'comp', this was an operator of some sort of mechanical calculator system in an office, nothing to do with a printing compositor type setting, it confused me at the time. When the coast was clear, I would arrive and Christine, always still in bed, would sleepily open the door and let me in, well we were only 17, and I would hop back into bed to keep her warm. At some point in time my father decided that 'our relationship' was getting in the way of my not very productive school work, and attempted to ban me from seeing Chris and told me that I could not use the car. Ha, that worked well of course.

**The Slight's only toilet was an outside lavatory** to the rear of the house, cold and uninviting. The house was a two up two down terrace and the Slights were a welcoming family. Well at least her mum was. Every evening she would cook Mr Slight his supper, (yes it was in those days Mr & Mrs Slight), two thick pork chops, done in the oven, with kidneys attached, "would you like a chop John" she would ask about 9 pm, "Oh yes please Mrs Slight, if it is no bother". It wasn't, except for the dark and dangerous looks from Mr Slight. He didn't seem to mind what I got up to with his daughter, but his pork chop was not to be messed with, especially by me. His day job was an engineer for the BBC in the outside broadcast units and we would eternally argue about cars and their relative merits of being driven quickly. His ever sentence ended in "Ok", as if it proved what he was saying. "But you won't arrive any quicker because of the traffic, OK". I was happy in the knowledge of sneaking in to Christine's bed every morning, so I just smiled and ate his pork chop with the kidney attached, which by the way, were always wonderful.



Christine had an older brother, then in the Navy. He scuba-dived too, Seychelles and other exotic places, I only met him once or twice. Chris was a fairly quiet girl. She was not particularly outgoing, yet could easily hold her own in company. She did a Chemistry degree in one of the London universities, Queens I think. And eventually went on to be a solicitor, she was very bright. Chris and I spent three years together, initially in school, then we both went to London, and eventually we spent a year in the flat together above the Welsh Harp boat shop on the A5 in west Hendon. It was never going to work longer term, we were too different. As my first love, she still has a special place in my heart, I don't think she ever realised I had tried to kill her twice, only to escape by inches each time. I always wonder what sort of life she has had.

An issue, that I have had throughout my life is to find like minded individuals. I did have some luck with this from my school days, Keith Barlow especially, and In Hughenden I found a range of friends for doing

different activities with and some like minded thinkers, especially Ian and Roger.

But, apart from John Barber, I don't think I have ever befriended a person whom reflected my risk appetites and philosophical outlook. Even Jon was not particularly interested in problem solving. My friends have either been sporty types who I have done risky stuff with, or more thinking types that are less risk adverse, never the two combined. I have often wondered if others have found similar disparities with their close friends. Almost certainly, having a life partner or spouse with such similarities would be fun for a while then likely prove disastrous.

**I had a good friend in Frensham**, Fred Aldridge. He was not my type at all, but we spent significant time together discussing physics, the stars and philosophic questions. He lived with some older half-siblings about ten miles above Brighton in the countryside.. I went to stay with him occasionally. We used to shoot at the cows in an adjacent field outside his bedroom window. It was far enough away just to sting them a little on there rumps, good fun though. They also had a French moped thing with the engine above the front wheel, it was called a velocipede. I used to borrow this and do mad runs down the local county road and their gravel path. Fred did nothing like that at all, and I got on better with his half-siblings who in their late teens and a bit rowdy. They used to take us into Brighton for Saturday night out. They were into the drugs scene, I think his half eldest brother was a bit of a dealer, he was a typical wide-boy, getting us into all sorts of places we should never have been to at fifteen.



Brighton has appeared on regular occasions during my life. I stayed in the Grand Hotel on one of my first trips out of London with Polaroid. I was had been asked to look after a patch that had been vacated by another sales person. What a great disappointment. It was poorly run and run down. I arrived a bit late and could only get a ham sandwich, it was horrible, just dry sliced bread with a tiny piece of ham in the middle. These were the days after the 70's recession. I never went to another top class hotel after that.

**When in Watford, Jane and I** bought a vintage Tandem cycle. It was a 1928 model I think, and you could hardly lift it. When we tried to sell it, the guy saw our electric chain-saw, he didn't want the bike but bought the saw instead. I also sold my old well worn, (and part rallied around Wales), Ford Escort from Langley road driveway. Attempting to get the engine running after the cat had been standing there for months as I had a Polaroid estate, I had taken out the spark plugs and unhooked the petrol pipe leading to the carburettor, not a good idea, the spark jumped across to the petrol and whoosh the engine and surroundings went up in flames. I ran at full pelt to the local shop, a hundred yards down Langley road and without a by-you-leave, grabbed the shops fire extinguisher, ran back put the fire out. It worked though, the engine ran after that. This was just before a father arrived with his son to view the car. I was busily sweeping away the powder and black smoke marks from all down the side of the car, when they came into the drive. "Just a little bit of a fire I said" slamming the bonnet shut to hide the burnt bits. They bought it for five hundred quid, don't tell me that I cannot sell. Jane and I dined out on that five hundred for many years.



With my designer friend Chris Tidy from around the corner, we decided to attempt the London to Brighton bike run on the tandem. It's a strange thing but when peddling hard on a tandem, especially this heavy brut, you become completely convinced that you can be the only one peddling, your companion, is clearly just pretending to peddle. We did not take that run particularly seriously. We decided to have plenty of water stops along the way, surprisingly these all seemed to magically occur just as we were passing one of the many pubs along the way. By the time we got to the steep and long hill just before Brighton we were well oiled. We stopped at the top to mend a puncture, this took ages, probably just as well, I think we had sobered up a bit by the time we wobbled rather slowly down the hill.



**Jane and I went to Brighton** some twenty years ago, perhaps. No kids in tow. We sat on the beach and from a safe distance watched this rowdy, uncouth group of lads get drunk on 'vintage cider'. I know how potent this

stuff is as it was my first ever drink when I was thirteen in Frensham Heights, Fred and I sat on the 'beach' at Frensham ponds and got pissed, even then we only managed half the large bottle between us. These young thugs had 'borrowed' the old type of fold up deckchairs from the rack were you were meant to hire them. The lady came down to collect the hire charge, she didn't hang around for long after they started their well oiled abuse. Another 'large' youngish lady wobbled past them "Look the original fucking hulk" was what she got as she hurried past. The leader and most outspoken of this group, uttered this effective statement, the others all roared with laughter. Soon however, they decided to settle for some well earned rest and this required adjusting the deckchairs to a more prone position.

I still smile when I think of what happened next. The outspoken leader was drunkenly attempting to adjust his deckchair while still sat on it. He then sobered up pretty quick as the deckchair collapsed with his finger trapped between the wooden struts, with his whole, substantial weight pinning his finger between the struts. How he shouted, how he cried and how he cursed his stupid mates for not helping him quick enough, how we laughed and laughed until we were in tears, good job we were far enough away to smother our cries. I always think of Brighton beach in fond memory after this.

**Langley Road was a two up two down.** We did try to move at one time, but the house purchase fell through. So we decide to knock down the internal wall and make it open plan. Once finished I wanted to build a new fireplace. I tried this with little success, bricklaying should be easy I thought. It isn't. My erstwhile mate Keith Barlow was a refractory engineer, basically a flash bricky. I phoned him for some advice, he had already got me the bricks. After a few discussions and zero progress, "I'll come up" he says, you'll never manage it. And so he did and we worked well into the night. Now Langley road was end of



terrace and next door was a miserable family, an old couple with a live-in son of about fifty. He was the neighbour from hell. The kids ball was always thrown back flattened. But we got our own back. That night the old guy came around banging on the door telling us to stop all the commotion. We had pretty well finished anyway and it was time for some beers. Keith (pictured with Ross his eldest son, who sadly died kiting) made a great job of that fireplace and we had a celebratory party for our new look house some weeks after. This party was a grand affair, we invited just about anyone who we new or was in the local pubs. I remember being in my local across the road early that evening with some guy telling me that there was



going to be a party nearby later and I should go. It was noisy, stereo going full blast late into the night, very late. At about 3 am we saw an ambulance park up opposite next door. Apparently the old guy had died. Honestly, it had nothing to do with us, we carried on partying.

## JPH Marketing & Computers

When Morton Hodson went to the wall, (overspent in the recession on buildings), Hugh, (another consultant), and I bought (for £1) the direct sales team and ran it as an ongoing business. JPH stood for John, Pauline and Hugh. Pauline had to go quite quickly though. She still thought (as the old manager) that the business was hers to run as she liked, and she had different strategic views to myself and Hugh. Hugh, a very clever man eventually proved that he was unsuited to getting anything at all done. I purchased the business from him and ran it with a senior manager six foot seven Bob who had been a lock for Harlequins I think in his earlier days. JPH had at one time about twenty staff based in Park road Princes Risborough, but the business foundered due to my lack of attention and to Bob having a heart attack and dying a few weeks later. While it ran it did provide good sales leads for my consultancy and the other ex-Morton Hodson consultants. We also did a lot of marketing surveys, this was something I was particularly interested in as I knew that customer perception was key to nearly every business (and still is).



**JPH did an interesting study for Trading Standards** that mapped 'success' in terms of customer satisfaction across multiple offices, all of which were independently run. It was very effective, highlighting the best and worst performers and why (a blind test so no office knew who the other offices were). The worst performers instead of attempting to rectify their poor performance, pressured the senior management to stop doing the survey. So much for government funded departmental improvement. JPH also did a lot of work for Business Link



that worked under the DTI. JPH called businesses on their behalf to ascertain requirements for initiatives and help. This was all fed back into a massive database.

**Funnily enough many years later** I got a consultancy job in the DTI for revamping the Business Link website. I was head of the Human Resources section which was a central theme. That was a tough project. All the people working on it were highly paid consultants. I needed to liaise with all the other main departments such as The Treasury, Work & Pension and external partners such as ACAS and HMRC. I was at my desk in Victoria Street SW1 by 7.30 am, before the cleaners had left. I came in by motorbike (GSR 1000) and I did not leave my desk until 7.30 pm. I did that for nearly six months. I was 'earning' £800 a day, I say earning, but a big chunk was taken by the consultancy firm through whom I got the job, they were crooks basically. In one early meeting, I had managed to get a senior person from each department and the associated bodies, there must



have been twenty five around the table. The guy from Work & Pensions came with two other helpers as he was dumb. They signed for him and spoke his comments. This guy was costing the taxpayer a fortune to attend this meeting. I started the meeting by outlining what we were attempting to achieve with the new website.

This was simply to provide one single place where all businesses could find information across all the different departments and so lesson confusion. I then did a round the table discussion asking them to give a short comment on their specific involvement and any key issues they thought were helpful for future planning. So, when it came to this guys from W&P he stood up, signed something short to his helpers and sat straight back down. It turned out that his 'statement' was "*Work & Pensions is not going to co-operate*". I was furious, but as the lead for probably the most complex and involved 'theme' on the new website, all I could do was smile and move on to the next department.

So when you want to know where all you hard earned money goes, it goes to pricks like that who add nothing and should be thrown out of senior jobs in government. The other thing I learnt in this job was that senior departmental people follow around 'Minister' and when he, (or she - not many then), uttered some inane comment about an idea for change, they would go off and spend a fortune researching into this 'stupid' idea, for it of course never to see the light of day. I asked a leading department head looking after Training for Business how they made sure that the implementation met the desired plan the government had set out. She looked at me as if I had sworn at her. She said, "Oh no, the implementation has nothing to do with us, we just set the policy." So ladies and gentlemen, that is why 'nothing' that governments do ever gets implemented properly, there is simply no mechanism for assuring or measuring correct implementation. We are led by fools and morons who would last less than a week in a normal job.



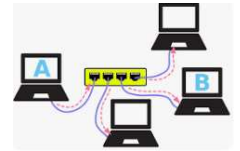
From the JPH website I put together in the later years, I received a call from Rockwell Engineering in Bedford who wanted to undertake a survey of how well their site engineers were doing. We did this work for a while and Rockwell decided that it was so effective at highlighting performance, they wanted to pay the engineer's bonuses on the results. I developed a spreadsheet system for doing just this and this ran for some years with Corinne eventually taking over the survey calls when the rest of JPH stopped. We lost this work when the whole of Rockwell Europe decided to use the scheme I had developed. Unfortunately while I went to present somewhere in Europe (no idea where now), I could never compete with larger businesses who had the language skills and staffing.



**Corinne learnt a lot though**, and she went on to help with attempting to sell a new management system I devised. The only outcome of which was an excellent training course for Corinne. She then went to do outgoing sales call for a local ISP company. While at University she got herself a holiday job selling computerised learning for schools, (Plato), and eventually ran the whole marketing of this company. We would discuss her workday, and I said to her one day, you do realise that you are doing a full marketing managers job don't you? She didn't appreciate this at the time, she now does though and it gave her many of the skills she now uses daily in her own business.



In the end, all I had left with JPH was an empty office in Princes Risborough. I spent a year setting up and testing a new small business computing system based on Microsoft's small business server. This seemed like a good idea at the time. It wasn't. It didn't seem I had learnt much about starting a business, and this 'load of crap' from Microsoft never worked



effectively and broke down consistently. I realised that it was just too unreliable, although what it said 'on the tin' it sounded like it solved all the computing issue for a smaller business. I did put a 'test' system into one of my consultancy client's JP Glass & Décor in Eastcote. This pretty well proved that this 'solution' was just going to provide endless unpaid

hours fixing everything that went wrong. Good old Microsoft. I eventually replaced this with simple networked Windows 95 computers that worked ok.



JP Glass was one of my long-term consultancy clients. When I first arrived the business was making a loss. Peter Spiers, the owner manager had no idea why he was not making any money. I started doing monthly management accounts for him. Like a lot of businesses in those days, the accountant did the figures once a year and then kindly told their clients the reasons why they had wasted a whole year earning nothing. It was soon clear what the problem was. Peter had many small business customers. They would arrive and buy a small piece of glass for a job. The manager on the desk, along with two ladies helping him would then hand-write the invoice and also

update the stock records. The cost of doing this admin worked out at around £10 per order. The customers often came in to buy glass worth less than a fiver. At least a five pound loss every time. The easy and obvious solution, introduce a minimum order charge. How long do you think it took me to get Peter to do this? Peter was one of your lovely easy going people with almost no business acumen or balls to get anything done. And of course, his manager thought it a hopeless idea too – because it was himself that had to tell the customers there was a new minimum charge, wasn't it! Many months went by before I managed to get Peter to make this small change and only then because the writing was on the wall as the company was running out of cash fast. Once done there were no complaints from customers, they just purchased more glass for stock or paid the minimum. Profitability from day one. Then, there came a recession, and another direct marketing plan with a really good and effective lady who kept bringing in new customers every day. Brilliant, the business went from strength to strength and became substantially profitable. I continued doing the accounts for some years until he got divorced and found a new lady from South Africa. I think she had probably been a crocodile wrestler in her formative years. She started working alongside Peter in the business. I lasted about another ten minutes as she decided she was certainly not having anyone else 'helping' Peter make decisions. After many years with Peter he never once acknowledged my input for saving his business several times. Ah well, their current balance sheet shows the business is now worth £2.6m



**The demise of the Microsoft small business server** started me thinking about a simple networking business. There were some specialist cabling companies around, but nothing simply designed for smaller businesses. These now needed to link up their separate PC's and run business-wide applications. It was the right opportunity at the right time and Jon and I had planned to do this together, him selling, me undertaking the installations and technical work. I think this business would have worked. But, he died on his way back after our first planning meeting. After that I closed the office in Risborough and went back to working from Ailort.



**As almost an after thought**, as I knew a lot about computing and had planned to start a this new networking business, I put a small advert in the local rag for computer repairs. Bingo, immediate work. This tied me over between the consultancy work. It was a useful and profitable aside, especially as I had chosen £40 an hour when I started. I didn't know what the going rate was, nor did anyone else I don't think. But as it was still £40 per hour many years later, I probably pitched it quite high to start. Eventually I started doing regular leafleting via the same local paper. I used a nice heavy grade smart looking card that people could keep. This was hugely effective and I had people coming to me years after the cards finished being distributed.



Consultancy morphed more and more into computer work; repairs, implementations for home offices & small businesses and some website hosting. I saved quite a few small businesses many thousands a year simply by installing networked PC's when other vendors were trying to sell them large central server installations with significant maintenance contracts. My systems were minimalist, and although breaking all the normal 'rules' like installing all the upgrades and complex anti-virus systems, my systems almost never went wrong and were ten times faster than anything else. The computer industry makes money on the unnecessary principle of overkill.

**Computer work was all a bit like watching paint dry.** It also meant dealing with people who had little technical understanding, for which, my basic character is not 'well suited'. It was the only business that I did not attempt to grow or set a future path for, always thinking that it was just an aside. It did however provide a reasonable living for my last fifteen years of work. By the end, I had created a very quick and effective process for creating new installations using standard computers (using my special windows set-up along with, crucially, SSD memory hard drives). I was then charging £50 per hour, but the work took minutes and was able to charge three hours work for half an hours actual time. It took longer to collect and return than anything else. This was perfect for me in the later stages. I would just collect slow, unreliable systems, do my special thing with them and return them as super-computers that started up in seconds. The retailers and vendors (such as HP, Dell, Samsung), did me a favour here, they put so much junk onto new systems, (since they were paid to do this by other companies) and they sold (and still do) systems with massive but older type hard drives (as people bought on the specification 'huge storage' that none ever needed), that these brand new systems were as slow as hell (is hell slow?). Once people had tried my set-up, they could never go back to these slow pigs of pc's and laptops. They were hooked and I got a lot of repeat business. Neil never agreed with me of course, he has a degree in computing now, and has always thought my view of Microsoft and it's rubbish standard installations was wrong, Ha.



Covid effectively stopped that business, although the work I did do became even more 'efficient' as I insisted that clients drop off and collect their systems. Then there was a VW camper van build and the move to Scotland, then a yacht, what next?

### Many (fast) Bikes

I blame it all on Stephen. He will have a different opinion of course as he was only seven at the time. Interested in motorbikes? I asked him. He always said yes to just about anything in those days. So of I pop to the local Naphill store and bring back a mag with all the latest motorbikes and their specifications. This was 1992, the Honda Fireblade had just been launched and had changed forever the world of sports bikes – this was quite unknown to me at the time.

**My bike life had actually started in the 60's** at Frensham Heights Boarding school. Myself and 'Hippo' a mad Italian lad who grew a beard at 13, decide one summer holiday to save up for purchasing a motorbike (Francis Barnett 197cc) when we got back. And we did, we even conned the school into thinking it was an engineering project – how unbelievably naïve can a school get? What we actually did with it was to take trips down to the local pubs and thrashing through the lanes, rather slowly in reality, just as well,- two up no helmets, no licence no insurance, those were the days. This bike ended up back in Cyncoed Cardiff in Bill Lewis's shed. After welding together the clutch plates, we spent many hours sliding it around Bill's adjacent grassy field. Bill liked driving too, We often went chasing around Epynt in his Mini 850. I had read about getting the rear out in a front wheel driven car, the mini was the first I think. I said to Bill, next bend turn-in and then back off the power quick. My god that worked; we went around three times fortunately in the middle of the road, then just carried on, I said I told you it would work. Bill had a lovely smirk.



**Bill eventually ended up on the Isle of Coll** in the inner Hebrides. He went there to work on an old castle that some Ex-army Major had procured for himself to become a lord of the manor. This Major ran a local army cadets group, (all 3 of them probably), and got people in to help his workload on the castle restoration by enticing them with promises of far flung adventures. Anyway, Bill bought the ticket and said

“come up and visit anytime” And so I did. Arriving early summer with Christine we embarked from the ferry via row boat as the pier had been blocked by a sunken ferry the year before. It was full of whisky, so the story went, and the locals were too busy getting all the whisky off and let it sink still tied up. It was a lovely day, I had Bill’s address, and the pub/store/hotel/post office put me through to his two digit phone number. “High Bill, I’m here” “Where?” “Here on the Island” “Oh God”. Not an auspicious start to our week’s holiday. But there was no leaving the boat only came once a week. Having driven up from Cardiff and arrived in Oban overnight we slept in the car parked on the Quay, blocking it so nothing else could get to the 6 am ferry, (I knew I would oversleep), I was tired and found a piece of soft grassland near the pier, lay down and had one of the best sleep of my life. Bill eventually turned up grinning as usual but moaning about our sudden appearance, “you did say come anytime”. Bill was a strange person, his parents were a bit Bohemian, and Bill was “an experiment” His parents let him do whatever he liked as he grew up and although he was a bit strange and unconformist, he was very self contained. He came to a part at my house once where we had oodles of rice meals. He proceeded to finish most of the large bowls all by himself. The next day he was back complaining we had let him eat too much, ha, I really liked Bill and hope he is well. He stayed on Coll and married a doctor, perhaps he is still there. Christine and I stayed in some cottage with an old lady half way down the island, it had a standpipe for water, we might have been half away round the world, not 100 miles from Oban.



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**The other Lewis (Steve),** who always had to outdo everyone else, tried the Francis Barnett 197cc in Bill’s field. But while he has plenty of

pro prowess for rugby and the like, his feel for bikes was not so good. He came off spectacularly, managing to sprain his ankle so badly he missed his one and only under 18 Welsh rugby trial. His mother told me off when I was about 7 years of age for encouraging Steve to ‘skateboard’ (an old roller-skate strapped onto a plank of wood, (should have patented that invention). And he dully fell off badly attempting to match my corner speed. Few could do that.

**I entered a Karting event in 2010** beating a field half my age. Especially pleasing was beating the flash git into second place. He turned up in his Porsche and pranced around telling everyone how good he was – he even got up to get the first prize until my name was called out, he looked at me and you should have seen the disbelief on his face, beaten by an old git! He came intending to thrash everyone else. He didn’t.

**It was an excellent mag** and looking at the specs of these sports bikes, it became clear they were rocket machines. Stephen seemed to like them too. He has never forgiven me for taking him out on the back quite frequently, carefully of course, but still pretty quickly, back then he ‘knew nothing’. Even in 1992 they had 0 to 60 mph times of under 3 seconds. I had always stayed away from motorbikes on the implicit understanding that I would surely kill myself. Then at the ripe old age of 42, I thought I had grown up



enough to risk getting a bike. I was wrong of course...but somehow I have survived this journey, but only god knows how. The very first outing in my unmarked second hand Red & White Exup FZR 1000cc bike was inauspicious. A quick flash up to the top of Cryers hill with Corinne on the back, only to slowly drop the bike attempting to turn it around in the shop car park. Fortunately, Corinne was unhurt. Dropping my bikes was to become a regular thing – I dropped every single one of them, I blame in on having short legs. These bikes over the years came thick and fast.



**And they got faster and faster;** Fireblade, Yamaha R1, Suzuki TL1000S, Suzuki GSXR's, BMW S1000R, BMW 1200 GS and finally a BMW 1000R. I was hooked on the adrenaline rush, I need to give the bike a thrash a few times a week or it bugged me. Bikes suited my nature, fast and furious, traffic rarely mattered, I could overtake in a flash, leaving me with an open road.



The fastest of them all  
Fireblade

all was the BMW S1000R and like the up the rulebook for speed and agility, this truly

was a rocket ship with 190 BHP in a light bike frame with astounding handling, braking and a quick shift gearbox so you could keep the throttle pinned when accelerating through the gears. It would accelerate at 120 mph still quicker than a



Porsche at standstill. In the early days my first real test came with the Watford Breakfast Club. A load of mad mostly younger idiots who met near Watford to travel on some fast and windy roads to some breakfast location usually to the north. Every week someone came off. The first ride is still a blur to me. Riding far outside my capabilities, trying (of course) to keep up with the fast guys, the world flashed by as I hurtled along following the track of the bike in front. To this day I have no idea how I survived that first trip. I learnt quickly, and eventually became a fast and capable rider, but still going at warp speed. It was all very stupid. The group eventually dwindled as riders either fell off or realised life was more important than death.



That was all before I met Neil and Nick. Sporting three Fireblades between us, those two were as bad as me back then. We had some 'exciting' trips across France and again we managed to keep the grim reaper at bay. I am a great believer in a sixth sense. Many times during my life I have slowed in cars and bikes for seemingly no reason, to find a tractor filling the road around the next bend, or a road full of water.

**In the mid 2000's I found the Spider Club.** This was a new venture run by a young and charming couple (Mark & Lizzi). They had convinced the



main bike manufacturers to provide their flagship bikes for a drop-down price and they setup a 'club' to hire these bikes for fun runs. Mark had a big Mercedes Sprinter van. He would load up the bikes and take them to Spain, the Alps, Austria, Scotland, anywhere there were great open fast roads. I went on all their first trips to Europe. Quite cheap when they started with accommodation, meals and even the beer thrown in.



Great fun, I was by far the oldest,

but the others were all sensible and poodled along. Mark was a bit bemused, he could see I was competent, but kept trying to slow me down. Didn't work on those roads. One of the best runs was 'The Ronda' a famous road north of Malaga that runs up into the mountains. I had the RSV 1000 for that trip. A tiny fast sports track bike, it went like stink around this mountain road. The very best road I ever rode on was called the Route Napoleon - from the Alps



right through to Nice in southern France. This pass went over several mountain ranges and I did it mostly on their brand new BMW S1000RR. The only time I have ridden a sports bike up in the rev range, through the gears, sweeping round bends on almost full throttle. I rode this bike most of the week, the others couldn't get it off me. I bought one when I got back, as my then GSXR 1000, which I had told everyone could never be improved upon, it had turned into a tractor when I got back on it. I actually thought there was something wrong with it, the Beemer was that good. This 1000RR ushered in a new era for sports bikes with much better handling, brakes, power and scary fun.

**Blasting away on my S1000RR rocket-ship,** somewhere near Devon, on a bendy A road, very little traffic. I was in the zone, sweeping into bends, out on full throttle blasting down a short straight, back on the brakes, sweeping around the next bend at somewhere over 80 mph as usual. Dropping down a short

hill, there was a nasty looking off-camber right hander at the bottom, my sixth sense kicked in, I slowed very quickly, keeping the bike near the hedge as I neared the corner, round which came a flying Pantechinon lorry that filled the road, his wheels over the centre white line. No room to lean the bike into the corner which tightened, (of course), I missed the lorry by inches, shrugged and blasted back to warp speed. One of many similar incidents, I always felt pretty invincible on a bike.



I did have few off's., but not many. I managed to end over end the BMW GS trying out the traction control – it didn't work very well! With no gloves on due to bent fingers before my Dupuytren's operation, I can vividly remember flying through the air thinking that I must not put my hands down, so I tuck-rolled then slid on my side with my hands up in the air, while the bike sailed past, cart-wheeling past my right ear to land in a very ungainly heap. Didn't do the bike of a lot of good, so I mended it and quickly sold it on. The next bike was my last. The BMW S1000R, was actually my quickest ever bike as it was dialled in for 'normal' road riding. It decided to throw me off the back when the anti-wheelie electronics packed up. It landed in a heap seeping oil from a cracked engine case never to go again, The end of my biking career. I got it all back on the insurance, that was my third full claim for a bike, the other two being stolen one in London the other from a pub down the road where the Publican phoned his mate to inform him there was a new GSXR 1000 outside. I watched him on the phone, I can remember the sly looks he was imparting in my direction. I was there to watch the rugby. No proof of course, but he went missing some time later owing the brewery a lot of money too.

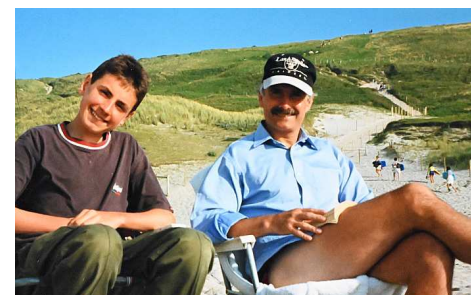
**In my early biking years** on the Exup, Fireblade, R1, etc when Steve was about eight or nine, I used to take him on the back. Sports bikes had a very high passenger seat, he would perch on the back and hold on like a limpet. We had a signal between us that if he banged my helmet with his, I would stop because he needed something. We did quite a few trips out, not as fast as my usual breakneck speed, but still fairly quick. Now that he has grown up, and is probably, by nature, more risk adverse than me, he considers that I was probably quite mad taking him out on my sports bikes.

**Now that I have finally stopped,** I look back in awe at how lucky I was at all the near misses. I lost my very dear college friend Jon Barber to his bike, I am sure he only bought one because I had one. He died just after visiting me complaining of the rear end sliding, I still cannot get over the fact that I had not warned him never to use the rear brake on a motorbike, I was distracted, we were discussing a new business venture. It was a rear end slide that killed him. I was also right behind a rider who went off and die when he hit the branch of a tree near Stokenchurch. **We were doing 120 mph** around a wide bend when his bike drifted into the nearside and went off the road into a deep ditch. He caught a large branch across his chest as he flew across the ditch. Part of his bike came back out of the ditch in front of me, I thought I was gone too then, I had to wait until I had made the bend, to get hard on the brakes, it missed me by a foot or so. He was dead before they put him into the ambulance. Mystic, a pub friend from the Harrow, plasterer by trade, lovely, lovely guy who enjoyed a beer or two and talking philosophical nonsense. He died in Italy when a car careered into him while queuing in traffic, unlucky. Perhaps God was being kind to me after dealing me the shit with Barclays Bank. I don't miss my bikes. Looking back, I know that I was very lucky and that luck was bound to run out. I do however now dream of bikes. Always the same, I have bought a new bike, confused about why I have done this, but I am riding away enjoying the thrill again.



### Kids & Holidays

The kids have always been a joy for me. Mainly because Jane has done all the hard work, while I disappeared to my jobs. businesses and mad endeavours and most of my time with them was weekends and holidays. We moved to Ailort in October 1987 when Corinne was seven and Stephen three. The move was just a few days before



Michael Fish's gale. We listened in bed to the wind that night, howling around the chimney and decided that this was quite a noisy house. Only in the morning did we realise we had slept through one of the worst ever UK storms. Before our purchase, I stopped my Tetra sales car directly outside and phoned the estate agent on my car-phone (not many had those then), and said, ok, why is it still on the market? It was not particularly expensive (£105k) and houses were selling quickly, this looked perfect, great position, house looked good, big driveway, backing onto the field behind.



The answer was "they are looking to sell to a young family". We met with them a few days later, we were the young family with two lovely kids. 'Sold', but the sale needed to be completed and I was doing my own conveyancing, (as I would), with the Lawyers playing dirty as they would too. Before completion, on a late summer's day, Jane and I sat on the hill overlooking the house and field, and we both had our hearts in our mouths knowing we would never find anything to match this house if it fell through, fortunately it didn't. I believe that house changed our lives significantly for the better, where would we be now if it

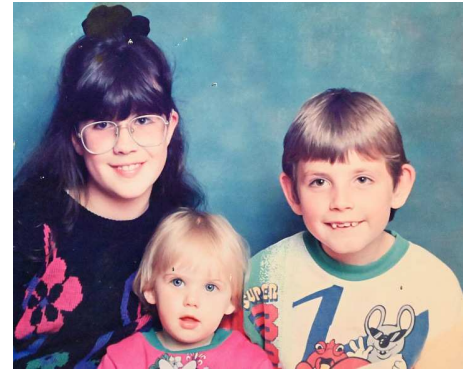
had fallen through I wonder?



**We enjoyed the house and area so much** that we decided to have another child. Lucky Bryony.

She was the most difficult birth. The third and the awkward one, just the birth, not Bry. A young nurse was attending and Jane had been in labour a long time. She was getting weaker and being pragmatic I decided that enough was enough and 'insisted' the nurse

to get someone senior to intervene. Good job, as Bry was wrong way up and distressed. It is lovely to have three such different children. We had some great holidays camping in Devon and Cornwall, finding the best places such as Port Isaac long before it became crowded. It has been fantastic watching them grow up and mature, helping sometimes along the way with their development and schooling.



**Bry & I went back to one** of our best camp sites a few years back, St Buryan had not changed at all, the shop, the pub and the camp site being almost unchanged since we started going there in the 1980's. Our go to place was The Old Success Inn in Sennen Cove. I sat with Bry when she was eighteen outside this Inn, smoking a Havana Cigar, and realised that when I was eighteen, I also sat in this very same spot overlooking the sea and sandy bay. *This was surreal for me, I had been transported into the future. Now with three grown up kids in this same treasured spot, overlooking the same view of the sea and bay. Were all those years real or did I just reappear sometime later to see my life recorded in my memory?*



Porthcurno beach is nearby, above which is the wonderful Minack

theatre, with an old hut that houses the first continental sub sea telephone cables. When we first went there this broken down hut, now a tourist attraction, had a broken door, with just a sign saying keep out, the massive undersea cables disappeared into the ground within the hut. These cables came from the large Cable & Wireless building just by the large car park, now a museum. It was on this beach that I did a fifty yard sprint to collect Stephen from under breaking waves when he was about three. He didn't seem to mind being swamped, but this beach has a wickedly steep shelf that piles up the waves as they roll in from the Atlantic. When older, and with good surf, Steve and I used to run down the beach and dive directly into these breaking waves, you had to get the timing right or you end up face planting into the sand, great fun. Years later, kids grown up and Jane and I had waded out neck high on the adjacent beach. It was calm, no one about, but the undertow nearly got us. I just managed to keep



a toe hold and gently walked us back. Quite a few have died from that beach apparently.

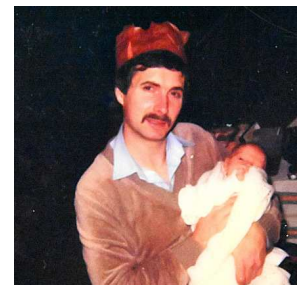
**We were incredibly lucky with these holidays**, only once in all those years did we get much rain. That was near Wadebridge, where we spent a few days in the cafes and swimming pool when the kids were quite young. I think the kids still think fondly of Devon and Cornwall and our camping fun times. I kept looking at houses to buy in those days. We could have bought a cottage on the front almost anywhere along the coast for £3k in those early days. Jane always talked me out of it, "too much trouble looking after it" she said, and she was probably right but they are now worth a million or two, ah well, we both still have our health and strength and three lovely kids and now also their three lovely partners, plus three lovely grand children. Life has been eventful, but overall, excellent.



**I tried to help the kids** with their 12 plus exams. I looked at past papers and realised that many of the questions needed a certain strategy to make them straightforward. I then developed a few simple techniques to deal with these. A good example were the questions asking the pupil to work out who comes into school first; "Janet comes in ten minutes before John, who is five minutes late and Keith has already been there for 15 minutes... Etc". Impossible for me unless I physically drew out a timeline on a piece of paper. The answer then pops out in front of you. It turns this meaningless question into a simplistic drawing exercise. Corinne and Stephen passed, although surprisingly not that easily. Bryony failed, but she has my difficulty with exam timing, we cannot, ever, make it to the end. Would it have made much difference to their future's? Tricky question, especially for Steve who chose to become medic. Corinne decided (her choice) to go to the girls Grammar, *Wycombe High* up the Hill next to the boys Grammar John Hampden.



**When it came to choosing A levels**, the school decided that they would have the upper hand for this decision for all pupils. This I understand was done for reasons of getting the best outcomes for the school and not the children. Myself and Corinne sat in a meeting with some senior staff. "Corinne is going to do English, Geography and whatever" (I cannot remember). But these were not the subjects that Corinne wanted to do. She was particularly set on Sociology having liked it at GCSE level. "NO, Corinne cannot do Sociology" "Why I asked". These people were not used to being put on the spot, parents and children were expected to do as they were told. "Well she can't". "why" I asked again. "Oh, her English is not good enough" they said. "I am sorry but that makes no sense, she is going to do English A level, how can her English not be good enough for Sociology?" "Well her English grade is not good enough for her to do sociology" "I do not agree" I said. They said "we are not discussing it further, this decision is final". "Ok" I said "how do I escalate this matter and to whom". Blank stares, clearly no one had ever asked this. Finally, we had an audience with the head, and she agreed to 'monitor' Corinne's progress in her



Sociology course for a few months. I think Corinne got an A grade in Sociology and was top or thereabouts of the class in her year. She then on to do Sociology in Nottingham Uni. Nuts, but nice to have helped. Bryony went to Misbourne. Not a bad school, I helped out in my recent years with Job interviewing for the upper school. But Bry chose to do her A levels at Amersham college and then went on to do Sociology and Psychiatry at a Bath Spa Uni where she met Tom. Later, she went on to do an MSc in Midwifery. My little perennial joke is that she is the only Master Of Science who knows nothing about science, Ha.



**Stephen sailed through his A' levels** at the brilliant (then) Royal Grammar, and chose to study medicine in Southampton Uni. where he met Clare. At Royal Grammar he broke his collar bone playing rugby, that and his cracked

leg when he fell from the changing matt at two years old were about the only injuries he had as a kid. Steve and Clare were both out working as F4 Doctors in Christchurch New Zealand when the first earthquake hit. I was on a biking



holiday with the Spyderclub in Italy, (they took the best bikes around Europe for some serious fun). The guys heard about the earthquake and knew my son was in Christchurch. They looked very solemn. I thought about it, listened to my inner sixth sense, and said “no, they will be fine” and fortunately they were, only just though, Steve was cycling with a friend and when they came back along the same path it had disappeared in the quake. The next earthquake was worse, and the after-quakes went on and on as before. They came home to Blighty. I had not realised until then that some after-quakes are almost as bad as the initial quake and they happen all the time.

### Waiting for Godot?

So, what's next? We all find that age gives an excellent position from which to judge. But if you still have you marbles, (for how long?), it can be difficult just to drift along doing inessential stuff like woodworking and building camper-vans. You cannot easily replace the cut and thrust of having to survive – both



physically and in terms of family provision.

It does seem to me, that our society is not tuned to use the older people who are still significantly capable. Some of us still have most of the mental abilities that we had during our earlier years. And, now we have significant experience to go with it. It is just a little bit galling that we cannot easily put this to good use.

I am not particularly deterred. My generation has had eighty years of relative peace. At one time after the cold war it did seem to many of us that the worlds was finally heading in a sensible direction. Democracies increased over

authoritarian regimes for the first time, and we lived in a fair and pleasant land. ***Jane and I have lived during the best age in three thousand years for 'the average' person.*** We have seen our moderate income create significant wealth for our retirement years, (due solely to house price inflation of course). Our family has survived well so far and I take great pleasure from their wellbeing.

**I have to end** by saying that while always an optimist, I do not fear my own death. I wish only to go when I decide it is right having lived a full, complex and in the main, a happy life. The world Jane and I leave behind is in doubt. The *Doomsday Clock* has been set at 90 second to midnight for the second year running. This is the closest it has ever been. It is *unfortunate* that humans have happened upon the means of total annihilation before our world politics is anywhere near ready for such power. I personally blame Einstein for this, if he hadn't been so bloody clever humans may have spent a few more hundred years getting the nuclear thing worked out. I have glimpsed and outlined some opportunities for survival for the coming generations that I hope will work out. But these do seem to be overwhelmed at present by humanities unthinking and universal death wish and any attempt to change this path is hampered by our 'social minds'. For me, understanding both history and technology, we have got '*oh so close*' to creating a stable political and economic environment. I still day-dream, and many of these are conjured around the wherewithal to be able to change the world and take it just a few step further forward. I know for many people this will seem quite ludicrous. But unless you dream, then you really have no hope!

My last thought therefore must be - have fun while you can, '*Carpe Diem*' - live for the day my friends.

*I'm off down the pub...who's coming*

JP