

11/9/16

Mickie the Mog's Blog

How my two sisters, Dave and I got Dad (aka James) to Greece by car

Day 1 (Saturday 03/09/16)

I suspected something was up when Dad got up at 3.30am and started messing about with suitcases, golf clubs and about a dozen cardboard boxes. He seemed to be loading them into a bigger car than our usual transporter. Sure enough about an hour later Minnie and I were bundled into our new cat boxes (quite spacious actually), but Lulu had other ideas. She's always been the clever one. She smelt a rat early on and hid under the bed. I think Dad was already stressed out by the thought of what was to come, so there was liberal use of the C-word and I don't mean Cat as he chased her round the house for about five minutes. When he finally caught and caged her, he was flustered enough to set off the house alarm when he was setting it. He gave up after a few attempts and some more choice expletives. We left about ten minutes late to pick up Dave outside Hiscocks, the pet food shop. A slightly irrelevant pick-up point in the circumstances, bearing in mind that Dad had loaded about 150 pouches of Felix Senior and 15 kilos of Royal Canin & IAMS Senior hard food, apparently because he didn't want to upset our diet with Greek food straightaway on arrival.

Dave Summerfield was waiting in the lay-by. He is the son of a family friend who has been driving trucks all over Europe for thirty years. He was the perfect driver for this trip, which would require him to drive our rented right-hand drive Ford Galaxy S-Max back solo to the UK. Only 2000 miles on the clock, but as you will see later that doesn't guarantee reliability. By the way, readers, you'll find I use the old writer's trick of prolepsis (foreshadowing) quite a bit. E.g. don't skip to Day 4 under any circumstances. Dad had initially planned to share the driving, but Dave was happy to drive the whole way. A magnificent man, but more about him in due course.

The journey as far as Maçon went fairly smoothly, despite the closure of the M20 and a two-hour delay at Folkestone owing to a train broken down in the middle of the tunnel. Dad was muttering “inauspicious”, whatever that means, but Dave wasn't bothered at all. Lulu and I slept most of the way, but as soon as we arrived in France Minnie started panting heavily and sweating through her tongue. She had a look in her eyes as if she were on hallucinogenic drugs. Totally spaced out. Her box was in the centre and her wild-eyed stare was fixed straight ahead at the windscreen. After a while, Dad worked out that her problem was the constantly moving images flying at her like a 3D movie. Since Lulu and I were directly behind the front seats we didn't have this issue. A cushion blocking out Minnie's front view solved the crisis, but she told me privately that she was determined to bolt for home at the earliest opportunity. Lulu said she couldn't be arsed and I concurred, but if the chance arises you never know your luck.

We passed through Champagne on route to Burgundy, with so many signposts redolent of fine wines, Epernay to Beaune, Nuits St George, Volnay and Pommard. Dave had chosen a truck stop outside Maçon for our first night because it has an excellent routier and various cheap hotels nearby. He knows absolutely all the roads, tolls and truckstops in France, and the times and distances between. However the first two hotels we tried were full, surprisingly since it was the end of the holiday season. The reason was the World Junior Wrestling Championships which were about to start in the town the next day, as Dad discovered from the Georgian and Indian teams. They were also staying in our third choice, the Fasthotel (46 euros for a double, with us allowed in the room). Dad's French is rather poor, as you

probably know but he doesn't. He had confidently approached the girl at Reception, "Avez vous une chambre double pour deux personnes, et trois gâteaux dans leurs cages?" "Quoi? Gateaux dans cages?" She looked at him in understandable disbelief. Then he realised his mistake, having misled himself by "gates" being Greek for cats. "Pardon, pardon, trois chats, trois chats..." "Pas de problem, monsieur. You are English, no?" English idiot in my opinion.

The boys reported that the food at the routier was outstanding quality and value - €15 for four courses and wine - no wonder the place was full of happy truckers, some of whom Dave knew. Back in the room we were let out of our cages of course. Time for the humans to sleep, without sheets since it was a very hot night. I decided it was time to play a trick on Dave. He'd been nice to us, but he's not a cat-nutter like say Dad's brother-in-law Graham, who is used to felines including me on his bed when he's sleeping, So in the dead of night I tickled Dave's feet with my whiskers. Brilliant! He leapt about a foot in the air and shouted, "What the f**k's that?" Definitely must have woken the wrestlers next door. Serves them right for stinking out the corridor with their trainers and socks, which they couldn't bear to have inside their rooms. Apart from Dad waking us all up at 1.00am when he had to eat three Dextrasol tablets because his blood sugar had dropped to 1.2 (even though he'd had a big meal: what's that about?), the first day ended as scheduled.

Day 2 (Sunday 04/09/16)

We awoke to what promised to be another hot day. Our plan was to skirt Geneva and go through the 13km Chamonix-Mont Blanc Tunnel, then south of Turin and Milan, aiming to get some way down the Adriatic coast by early evening. I shouted at Dad all the way into Italy but it took him about two hours to realise why. I'd spilt my water bowl and was having to lie on a wet mat. My backside was soaking by the time he changed it at their first comfort break. After that I reverted to the semi-comatose state that all three of us have adopted as the best modus vivendi in these cages. No one's eating much, but no "accidents" yet either. The rest of the day was uneventful, with easy driving on near-empty autostrade.

James and Dave make an odd couple. As you'd expect on a long road trip like this, they are discussing a wide variety of topics. They are getting on very well, with plenty of good humour and laughter, but God knows how much they understand each others' particular enthusiasms. James bangs on about the Romans and the Greeks of course. I've heard it all before. Many times. Dave is a motorbike nut, with a special interest in super-bikes like the Honda Fireblade CBR 9 (don't ask). He wants to develop his hobby into a business. He buys bikes on e-bay, disassembles them within a day and sells the parts on separately for a good profit. Robert M Pirsig couldn't hold a candle to this guy. He's fed up with long-distance lorry driving and thinking of breaking bikes full-time. James is encouraging him to go for it, since he reckons that Dave has sufficient technical expertise and a good enough business plan to ensure success. Anyway, a discussion about sprockets and swinging arms makes a refreshing change from Aristotle and Cicero, as far as I'm concerned. Bear in mind that we have to sit in the back listening to this stuff, literally a captive audience. Dave has a very amusing turn of phrase. For instance, if he wants to say that something has been successfully accomplished, he will finish with an emphatic "Bosh." So, "We've done 800 kms plus today, the cats are fine, we'll find a nice hotel, have a good Italian meal and sleep well tonight. Bosh!"

And so it came to pass. We stopped at Pesaro, a resort town about 40km north of Ancona. I was offered a slim chance to escape and disappear for ever into the Italian night. Trying to carry too much through the hotel door on arrival, Dad dropped my box and the door fell off. He reacted quicker than me and he got the door back on before I could say "arrivederci, papa!" He was limp as a wet leaf for a while afterwards. The lady in the San Marco hotel was delighted to receive us, being a ten-cat person herself.

Seriously. The boys had a fantastic meal at “C'era una Volta” (“Once Upon a Time” for the illinguists amongst you). We girls had an enjoyable, unencumbered roam around the large bedroom, followed by a calming, stretched-out sleep. Buona notte!

Day 3 (Monday 05/09/16)

Plenty of slack built into today's trip. We only had to do about 500 km today through the Mezzogiorno to Bari where our ferry was scheduled to depart at 7.30pm. Straight and largely uncrowded roads meant we arrived early at about 3.00pm. Dad was worried that things were going too well, referring to Monty Python's 16 Tons more than once and surmising aloud whether the Laughing Gods have spotted our smooth progress yet. Dave just laughs and ends his more optimistic forecasts with “Bosh!” He also has Dad in stitches with a well-told story about when he was in Malawi. Over many weeks an old village carpenter whittled a complete one-piece table for him by hand out of an enormous drum of African hardwood. For 40 quid. Viscount Linley would charge about £4000.

We embarked on the Greek ship Superfast 2 at 6.00pm and enjoyed the freedom of the pre-booked Pet Cabin (for adults and pets together), where we could be let out of our cages – much better than the horrible kennels on the car deck, where we'd have been shut in for the whole of the nine-hour crossing to Igoumenitsa. Incidentally, our pet passports haven't been checked once since we left Liphook. Dad and Dave found the self-service food only moderate, but they fell into an interesting conversation with a Greek lorry-driver, Marinus. Wide-ranging discussions on Greek, British and international politics ensued, with Dave being introduced to tsipouro for the first time. “It's not awful, James,” another of his favourite phrases. A mellow end to the day, with Dad happy to hear all the crew speaking Greek and feeling that he was “nearly there.” Still no “accidents” from any of us, but we have been on short rations since Saturday.

Day 4 (Tuesday 06/09/16)

Ominously heavy rain, thunder and lightning all night didn't seem to affect the smoothness of the crossing. We all slept well, apart from Dad who had panic-filled nightmares, apparently. He'd have given the seer Teiresias a run for his money, our Dad. We had to get up at 4.30am for disembarkation at 5.30. It was raining chair-legs, as the Greeks say, so we waited at a service station cafe for dawn and easier driving conditions. Dad said Zeus had it in for him and he might have to sacrifice one of the cats in appeasement. I think he was joking, but he's in a strange mood. Welcome to Greece!

We proceeded south on quiet roads through Western Greece, in rain of varying severity, the boys having a breakfast break of spanakopita in the small but not unpleasant gulf-side town of Amphilocheia. Dad estimated that we would be at our destination in Chrani, near Kalamata, by about 2.30 pm. “We're on the last leg now.” Never heard of hubris, Dad? It was about about an hour later when disaster struck. We were about to turn onto a new stretch of the A5 motorway . The car ground to a halt with a total power failure. Even with his considerable knowledge of car mechanics Dave was stumped. Modern cars rely on an Electronic Control Unit (“the brain”) and this had failed, including the hazard lights, and we were not well placed on the motorway access road. And the rain kept falling. After about an hour the motorway emergency assistance guys put us on a low-loader. Although the boys sat in the cab of the truck we had to stay in the car in our boxes until it was deposited in a lay-by off the next motorway exit, a safer location. The torrential rain storm continued. with frequent thunder and lightning thrown in for good measure.

Dad was using Greek swear words I didn't understand, like “malaka” and “gamo to”, but I got the gist. He had made and received various international calls by now and the Greek equivalent of the AA

was supposed to tow us to the Ford dealership in Agrinio, about 45 minutes away. An hour later they still hadn't showed up, apparently because they couldn't find us, said the call centre in Athens, even though we had given them our exact latitude and longitude. Before we left England, Dad had taken us to our lovely Dutch doctor, Hans, for final fitness-to-travel checks. He had bought some Feliwell cat-calming spray to use in the car. Hans said it was pretty useless, but Dad bought it anyway. I think he needed it more than us actually, but I did start to worry about his sanity when he started spraying it into his mouth like a dental hygiene wash. My little joke there, folks, but he was indeed looking grim by this stage. Dave, meanwhile was unhappy with the total inadequacy of the Ford Galaxy User's Manual. "As useful as a chocolate fireguard," he concluded.

Eventually the AA-equivalent truck arrived and towed us to the Ford dealership a few kilometres outside Agrinio. This economic centre of the Aetolia-Acarnania region was famous until recently for its tobacco production. "I could do with a Papastratos Number 3 right now, thank you very much," says Dad, who gave up smoking in 1977. The town isn't that far from Messolonghi but he wasn't feeling very Byronic. 4.00pm now and we had broken down before 11.00am. The Ford people could only start looking into the problem tomorrow and so we would have to find a hotel for the night. A mechanic would drive us into town so that the car could stay in the garage overnight for inspection first thing the next day. Transferring Lulu to the mechanic's car, her cage door half fell off and Dad went into meltdown. Lulu wasn't inclined to leave her cage, so crisis averted. The first hotel we tried was felinophobic and the next, The Imperial, said we girls would have to go in the basement car park and stay in our boxes. Dad reluctantly agreed, but in fact it was quiet down there and we had a reasonable night's kip. Amazingly, after four days not one "big job" so far out of any of us. After an unexpectedly good meal at the hotel, which was situated on the ring road too distant from the town restaurants, the boys went to sleep not knowing if we would get to our final destination even tomorrow. "Θα δούμε. We shall see," says Dad, totally spent.

Day 5 (Wednesday 06/09/16)

The day dawned with more rain, which had cleared by the time Dad rang the garage at 9.30am. The car was fixed and ready for collection in half-an-hour! Good news, since we had been fearing much worse than a 24-hour delay. The fault was a battery connection to the ECU which not even Dave would have been able to fix. Because the battery had drained, "Το κεφάλι πέθανε. It was brain-dead," said the very helpful mechanic. "It won't happen again." Disaster over and it could have been worse, said the boys. And yet...

We set off in high spirits, a day lost but behind us now. A pity that Dave will lose his free day before he leaves for the ferry back on Thursday night. No problems to and over the Antirion-Rion Bridge, a magnificent structure built over the Gulf of Patras before the 2004 Athens Olympics when Greece was rich with EU subsidies. Dad is in familiar territory here, from all his Classics trips to Olympia. Serene progress through Achaia and Elia, with Dave, who can identify every vehicle he sees, highly amused by the farmers' antiquated trucks, "I haven't seen one of those on the road for thirty years".

Round the Peloponnesian coast and into Messinia at last, with a brief lunch stop at Kalo Nero. "There are only two things I can't stand to eat: olives and yoghurt," says Dave. Messinia and its capital, Kalamata, are world-famous for their olive production. The weather was pleasantly sunny now but, strangely, when we reached the Athens-Kalamata motorway it was closed and we had to use the old road. We passed by ever more flooded fields and exhausted people clearing up in the villages.

It's 3.30pm now and we should get to Chrani by 4.00. At the Kalamata Airport roundabout we are stopped by traffic police blocking the Messini road. "There has been catastrophic flooding here, two

major rivers have burst their banks and it is impossible to reach either Kalamata or Messini. The road to Chrani may not be open for days. It's total chaos." The airport is closed but we stop in the car park and consider our options. I have to say that the boys now show some impressive Brit grit. "I'm bugged if we've come 2500km to be foiled with 25 kilometres to go," says Dad. "You show me a way and I'll drive it", says Dave. There's a security police station at the airport and standing outside is the spitting image of Melina Mercouri in her heyday. Except that this blonde police woman is packing a semi-automatic machine pistol and shouting at her two male colleagues. They slink off and Dad approaches with due caution. A lengthy but extremely friendly conversation ensues, mostly in Greek with a bit of English thrown in. He explains his predicament and makes a suggestion. "I have to get to Chrani today. What if we go the long way round: all the way back to Kalo Nero (1 hour), then back via Pilos and over the mountain to Chrani (maybe another hour)?" Melina firmly rejects this, "Όχι, προσοχή απ'εκεί. No, watch out over there. I can't guarantee it. The only definitely safe way is to go back and then round the whole peninsula via the coast road, Methoni and Koroni, and approach Chrani from the south. It's at least two-and-a-half hours and you must do it before dark." Dad gave Dave the bad news. He had already been driving today for nearly six hours, with only a short break. "No problem, this car hasn't got a tachograph. I'm fine. You know the roads. We'll get there by 7.00pm while it's still light. Bosh!" We rang our new landlady-to-be and she confirmed from what little she knew that Melina's advice was best. We also learnt that we would be arriving to no electricity and therefore no broadband. "Plagues of frogs and locusts next, " grumbled Dad, "Two fingers to the lot of them," he directed at no divine agency in particular.

Thanks to Dad knowing the roads in Messinia well, we were able to take a few short cuts and arrive in Chrani before seven, despite being held up on a section of winding B-road behind a truck-and-trailer for 15km. We were greeted outside Fotine's brother's supermarket by her Canadian husband, Bob. We bought a few provisions, followed his car up the hill track and we had finally arrived.

POSTSCRIPT: Dave set off early the next day for the UK and should be back there about now. Electricity and broadband were restored after a day or two. We three girls are settling in well, eating and sleeping a lot. As for Dad, he has a permanent smile on his face and is already talking about finding a Greek Cookery class taught entirely in Greek. If you ask me, he needs Greek Dancing lessons more urgently, to judge from the idiosyncratic Ζεϊμπέκικο (Zeibekiko) he keeps doing in the kitchen, shouting "Όρα" and "Yes" and then falling about laughing.

Bosh!



Μίκη Ντουλάπας

Mickie Wardrobe

Η Ιθάκη σ' έδωσε τ' ωραίο ταξίδι.
Χωρίς αυτήν δεν θάβγαινες στον δρόμο.

Ithaca gave to you the beautiful journey;
without her you'd not have set upon the road.

Constantine Cavafy

24/9/16

Settling In

Another day begins in eastern Messinia. We've been here in our new home for two weeks and I have to say it's a bit different from living on the outskirts of Liphook. For a start the nights are noisy. We've quickly adapted to the constant one-note leitmotif of the cicadas, but the desultory barking of the dogs kept us on full alert with our ears pricked for a few nights. There's just the one donkey down the hill who sounds off when he's fed up with the dogs. The cockerels start crowing two hours before dawn and the more persistent continue for some time after. That biblical notion of cocks crowing at dawn is an extremely loose approximation of reality in my opinion.

We've easily got used to this secluded rural estate and after a cautious start we've begun exploring the environs outside the house more. Except for Minnie, who only ventured beyond the back patio for the first time yesterday. She's the biggest cat yet by far the scariest, hiding under Dad's bed for most of the first week. Lulu and I have enjoyed sprawling out full-stretched on the veranda in the mornings and evenings. Better off in the coolness of the house during the day, since it's about 28° Celsius by noon-time.

I particularly like the dawn. So does Dad, who sits there each morning on the terrace in his underpants with his very English Breakfast cup of tea, trying to guess above exactly which part of the jagged mountains of the Mani the sun will appear. I can tell that he's very content from the way he talks to us. Yesterday he said to me, "There are more olives on these trees in front of us, Mick, than you could throw a million sticks at." The view is unspeakably spectacular. Eastwards beyond the canopy of olive trees beneath lies the Gulf of Messinia. Nature yields few straight lines apart from a sea horizon. Here at a distance of about seven miles as the seagull flies across the bay to Kardamyli (about which more later) its sharpness cuts a satisfying contrast with the higher horizon of the rugged Maniot peaks.

Our landlady, Fotine, lives in a bigger house than ours about 100 metres away. She has four cats and three new kittens at the moment. The adults are Bella, Zena, Lulu (Yes! She will now be referred to as Lulu Two) and The Male. Fotine and her husband Bob never name their male cats. "Males always roam and after a while never come back..." "It was ever thus", mutters Dad darkly. Bella is still feeding her babies and yet she was the first one to greet us. She turned up in the kitchen on our second day and wolfed down our grazing biscuits without the slightest demur. Then The Male tried the same manoeuvre the next day, but Lulu growled him off the premises. Minnie vanished under the bed of course, too frightened to emerge for about six hours. So the Great Anglo-Greek Cat Wars have begun. No problem really for any of us cats, it's Nature innit, but Dad is rushing about with a broom and making ridiculous "psst" noises. Very tiresome.

We haven't seen Zena or Lulu Two yet, but I'm sure our paths will cross soon. Dad says Bella's babies are delightful, especially the grey male with white socks. Fotine said he could have him to keep and he was tempted, but Mum was quite firm when he mentioned it in their Skypecast that evening. "Three cats is quite enough, thank you". I totally agree. It's going to be busy enough for us dealing with all the uninvited interlopers without having a permanent new young 'un in the family. Anyway, last I heard, Fotine's keeping this one and calling him Socrates. As all our Greek feline cousins, her cats are thinner than us. They look well-fed, though in no way "chubby", as our Dutch quack Hans impolitely deemed us when we went for our pre-Greece jabs. What a cheek.

And then there's the dogs. There were two when we arrived, Sousou and Pablo, her young son. Both

friendly, non-aggressive and used to living with cats. Unfortunately Sousou disappeared after a few days and hasn't been seen since. Bob reckons she might have been taken by someone who found her on the main road and fancied a pure-bred hunting dog. They have searched through the whole village and at least they haven't found a body, so we all hope she's OK, even if in a new home. We keep a wary eye on Pablo, who accompanies Fotine on her twice daily visits past our house to milk and feed the goats. He looks like he could get over-friendly. Lulu says, "One sharp clawing and perhaps a judicious bite on the snout if necessary will keep this big mutt in line, no problem," then she yawns and goes back to sleep.

Dad is making do without a car. So far so good, thanks to Fotine and Bob. They have driven him into Petalidi, Messini and Kalamata already, being more than happy to take him with them when they go anywhere by car. That's like going to Petersfield, Godalming and Guildford in terms of distance and size of town. The village supermarket, run by Fotine's brother Billy, is a peaceful fifteen-minute walk along empty tracks between the olive groves. The beach is a similar distance. When we first arrived, after the flooding of the two big rivers at the head of the bay, the sea was full of rubbish, including dead chickens, so Dad couldn't swim for a few days. Happily it is now clean, so he's swimming about 500 metres most mornings. The beach is a mixture of sand and stones, not the prettiest, but once in the warm sea it's wonderfully sandy underfoot and safe for weaker swimmers.

We've all settled into a very satisfying routine, very little different for us four-leggers from life in Liphook. There we had to watch out for the builders of the new property next door and here we cautiously observe Bob and his Albanian worker Plum building paths and driveways on the estate. Otherwise the usual eating and sleeping, with me snoring a fair bit as well. There was excitement when Lulu brought her first lizard in. She was shouting at Dad to get his praise, but he ignored her for those crucial first moments, absorbed as he was on his laptop. By the time he realised, she'd bitten off the lizard's tail, which lay quivering on the kitchen floor. Lulu dived under the bed with lizard in mouth for a good torturing session, growling Minnie and me out of range. Dad's long-handled brush wouldn't budge her, so he just left her to it and went out next door where he'd been invited for lunch. No sign of it under the bed when he returned, Lulu looking bored on the terrace but rather pleased with herself. An hour later the gecko appeared from under the bed, tailless of course. Fast dustpan-and-brush-action saved it for another day.

Dad's routine involves a morning swim and a sunbathe on a near-deserted beach. He has his favourite spot now, where he usually meets Max, a friendly white mongrel belonging to an elderly Greek couple who come down from their beach-side house for a daily swim at about the same time. Since he's spending a lot of time by himself, he talks to strangers at will. "Καλή σας μέρα, good morning to you." "Καλημέρα. Είστε Γερμάνος; Good morning. Are you German?" "Όχι, όχι, είμαι Αγγλος, Αγγλος. No, no, Englishman, Englishman..." Good Lord, can't they tell?

He talks to us too. And to himself. He came back yesterday saying he was sitting at the water's edge, when that classic George Best story came into his mind. The room-service waiter bringing the magnum of champagne to his room in the five-star hotel finds him entertaining three beautiful young women. "Where did it all go wrong, George?", he asks. And Dad's sitting there, with the sea gently lapping over his legs and the sun slow-cooking his skin, laughing out loud, "Where did it all go wrong, James?"

His current obsession is food, both for feline and human consumption. The cat food here is perfectly acceptable, say Lulu and Minnie. I'm on a low-protein diet for my kidneys and since Felix Senior Mixed Selection In Jelly works best for me he brought over no less than 150 pouches from England. His quest for these over here continues. He's seriously talking about taking empty suitcases on his short trip

back in November and bringing back another twelve boxes. As for his own food, he is making another of his many lists. This one is entitled: "What You Can't Get in Greece." He's had to cross off Colman's English Mustard and Marmite, which are widely available. The only item left on it so far is a particular tonic water. "House Rule No. 1 for Guests from England : Bring Fever-Tree Naturally Light Tonic Water," he states, adding grimly, "Otherwise you won't be let through the door." He's not kidding. Actually any type of slimline tonic is difficult to find here, since Gin and Tonic isn't a Greek tradition, more of a fancy modern cocktail.

There are six tavernas in Chrani, which he is gradually working his way through. He ranks them according to the following five criteria: Food, Service, Value for Money, Ambience and Melitsanasalata. He reckons that the last, being a massive favourite of his and invariably home-made, can differ wildly in quality and tells him pretty much everything he needs to know about a Greek restaurant. The best he's ever had was in 2011 at the Rex Restaurant in Corfu Town, quite close to that appalling cricket pitch.

He's also compiling a comparative list of supermarkets, visiting five big ones so far. "Did you know, Mick, that there are 220 Lidl's in Greece?" he announced proudly yesterday. I hope he's not planning to visit them all. He's rating Alpha Beta in Kalamata top so far and with undue alacrity has even signed up for a loyalty card. His final word on "What's Uniquely Available in Greece," (another list) : "Any country that has oregano-flavoured crisps as a staple must be doing something right."

He's taken to reading the local paper, "Θάρρος" ("Courage"), mainly for the small ads, but he was struck by an "On This Day" story recently. Around this date in 1920 was the day that Greeks often say changed the course of their history. King Alexander 1st of the Hellenes was bitten by a barbary macaque in the grounds of his palace at Tatoi. He was trying to protect his pet German Shepherd (named "Fritz" – what else?) from an attack by two of these monkeys in the Royal Palace Gardens.

His doctors announced that the wound was no cause for concern, but a few days later he developed septicemia and died, on 12th October, aged 27. The sudden death of the sovereign led to questions over the monarchy's survival and contributed to the fall of the Venizelist regime. After a general election and a referendum, his father, Constantine Ist, who had been forced into exile by the Entente Powers and Venizelos in 1917, was restored to the throne. And so Greek history took a different turn. Greece went on to lose the Greco-Turkish War with heavy military and civilian casualties. The territory gained on the Turkish mainland during Alexander's reign was lost. Winston Churchill wrote, "It is perhaps no exaggeration to remark that a quarter of a million persons died of this monkey's bite."

My sympathy lies with the monkeys, who were of course destroyed. Any worthwhile left-wing dialectic would assert the probability of the Alsatian provoking the attack in the first place. For me the moral is: if the King had had a pet cat instead of a dog, he'd probably have lived to a ripe old age.

By the way, you'll have to get used to these digressions into Greek history and culture. Dad is threatening to take over my blog completely if I don't allow them from time to time. "Your cat stuff is just Anglo-Greek whimsy for the YouTube generation," he scoffed in what I thought was a rather patronising and hurtful way. "We need to beef it up with some erudite anecdotes from time to time." I reluctantly agreed, since I don't want to be displaced altogether from the computer chair and its soft cushion.

Which brings me to Kardamyli, which he's been insisting should be included about now. In a very circuitous way it will link with his father, Thomas, and some interesting Wardrobian connections with the Greeks in World War Two.

Kardamyli is a gentrified village, about the same distance south-east of Kalamata as Chrani is south-

west. It has become popular with a certain sort of well-bred northern European type. Dad abhors the idea of its “flourishing expatriate community with its own website,” but is keen to visit the house of Patrick Leigh Fermor, built there in the 1960s and bequeathed as a museum and study centre to the Benaki Museum after his death in 2011.

Although Dad never met Leigh Fermor, he knew his great friend, the Byzantine scholar, Sir Steven Runciman. As a result he now possesses Greek editions of Mani and Rumeli with frontispieces not only signed by the author, but also displaying Leigh Fermor's personal sketches of the Greek landscape. His particular interest in him relates more to his war-time activities than his travel-writing.

The Special Operations Executive operation to kidnap General Heinrich Kreipe in Crete in May 1944 was led by Leigh Fermor and made famous in the film “Ill Met By Moonlight”, starring Dirk Bogarde. The SOE team, which included Stanley Moss, on whose book the film is based, had planned to abduct General Friedrich-Wilhelm Müller, the German commander in the Dodecanese who had a reputation for brutality towards the Cretan people. Kreipe replaced Müller, but the mission went ahead anyway. Helped by Cretan resistance fighters, the SOE team successfully abducted Kreipe and managed to evade the German troops searching for them. When the team reached the coast, they were picked up by the Royal Navy and taken to Egypt.

The route to the south coast pick-up point took them over Mount Ida, in Greek mythology the birthplace of Zeus. Kreipe is said, on seeing the white peak of Ida, to have recited in Latin the first line of Horace's Ode *Ad Thaliarchum* (1.9): “You see how Mount Soracte stands out white with deep snow.” At which point Leigh Fermor, a keen Horatian fan, recited the rest of the poem. He later remarked on the bond created between enemies because they had both “drunk at the same fountains” of learning. “It's a story that proves yet again the transcendence of a classical education,” remarks our lovable yet often pompous Dad.

This tale however is not especially the reason Dad is interested in Leigh Fermor. That's more to do with the activities and associations of Major Thomas Wardrobe, Intelligence Corps, based in Cairo during the same period of the German occupation of Greece... About which more later.

Meanwhile, back at Anaskelo House, Minnie is still under the bed.

Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere, et
quem fors dierum cumque dabit, lucro
adpone nec dulcis amores
sperne, puer, neque tu choreas.

Leave off asking what tomorrow will bring, and
whatever days fortune will give, count them
as profit, and while you're young don't scorn
sweet love affairs and dances.



Horace, Odes 1.9.13-16

Boss Cat Lulu Scaredy Cat Minnie

05/10/16

Our Neighbours

I've been in big trouble.

A few days ago Dad finally brought home his shiny new iphone with a Greek number, after a highly intricate buying process which involved three separate visits to the COSMOTE store in Messini. He needed to provide a Greek tax number (Α.Φ.Μ.), hand over his passport, give his great-grandmother's maiden name... OK, not the last one, but even as a cash buyer he was mightily frustrated. “Υπομονή, υπομονή, patience, patience,” he kept muttering to himself. Eventually he proudly brings his new toy home and after fiddling with it for hours, verifying codes, downloading WhatsApp, working out how to use Facetime and God knows what else, he leaves it on the table with his other “devices” and goes out onto the terrace for a restorative glass of Assyrτικο.

As you probably know, we cats like to eat greenery to aid our digestive system and then throw up indiscriminately. I'd be out chewing the cud earlier and guess where I jumped up to? The “device” table. A goodly chunder ensued, as my Aussie mates might say, and I let fly green bile and grass all over the iphone. The speed of Dad's reaction on hearing the first heaving of my stomach was impressive. I was off the table and thrown out of the house before I could complete my full vomit. I think “Μαλάκαγατα, wankercat” is a new Greek word he's invented just for me. Do I care? I kept out of his way until tea-time just in case. Apparently the iphone is perfectly fine after a wipe down, so what 's the fuss?

Early most mornings the constantly repeated recording of a dead man's voice cries out to us from the coast road below. “Ο ψαράς σας, your fisherman,” it pleads. Out of respect and familial sentiment the πλανόδιος πωλητής, the itinerant salesman, has kept his deceased uncle's spooky sales pitch on the fish-van's loudspeaker whilst he plies his trade up and down the local villages.

Slightly eerie too is why our new home is called Anaskelo House. “Anaskelos” in Greek means “on one's back.” Strange name for a house, Dad thought, so he asked our landlady Fotine about it. Her family owned all of the land round here for generations and in the field where she and Bob built their first house in 1991 the area has traditionally been known as the site of a woman's dead body, discovered long ago lying out in the open, “anaskelo”. Hence the name. No accompanying ghost stories or hauntings to relate, I'm afraid. The nocturnal howlings are just the dogs.

The house is built on one of a series of terraces on an east-facing slope, compact and singled-storied, with only four interior rooms but two patios. Dad spends much of his time on the sunny front patio, but the northern one offers shade for most of the day. Pale-yellow stuccoed, with rust-coloured shutters, some exposed stonework and a red-tiled roof with white finials, the building is surrounded by various fruit-bearing trees: oranges, lemons, pomegranate, fig, carob and of course olives. “You'll never need to buy a lemon again while you're living here,” said Fotine on our first day. The chimney is topped with the traditional stylised black metal bird weathervane, a common feature of the Greek vernacular. “Since there's no lightning conductor on this house, I guess the bird will take the hit and God help the chimney,” comments Dad, doubtfully squinting skywards.

The outside shower at the back is a particular delight, since its water is warm from the sun in the afternoon and ideal for Dad's post-beach sluicing sessions, au naturel naturally. I'm sure when he's singing in that shower I've heard the phrases, “Don't need no 'lectricitee, this hot shower is free, free.” He was born in Yorkshire. The whole estate, of about thirteen stremmata (more than

three acres) also includes a smaller guest house, a stone barn which stores equipment and has living accommodation, and the main house of our landlord and landlady, who also own many olive groves further up the hill.



Anaskelo House

Fotine and Bob lived in Canada for all of their working life. Fotine is a local Chrani lady who emigrated there twice, once as a child and again, after studying at Athens University, for two further degrees at the University of Manitoba. She was due to return home, but when she met Bob she stayed. Having built Anaskelo House as a holiday home for their annual visits, they then built the smaller house in 1996 and finally, when they moved to Greece permanently in 2003 they began to create the very attractive large stone house where they now live. Their son, Ioannis, is studying Music in Thessaloniki and aiming to become a concert pianist. They are looking forward with much pride to hearing him perform in the Megaron in Athens in October.

Bob is a lovely guy, a few years younger than Dad, but very fit from all the physical labour he enjoys doing every day. Together with his extremely hard-working Albanian labourer, Pëllumb (pronounced “Plum”), within five days they have just completed laying 50 metres of concrete driveway to the side of our house. He also loves making stone pathways, using the limestone he excavates from his own land. Before he retired to Greece he worked for Canada Post in Winnipeg, which Dad says is renowned as the coldest city in Canada.

“I’ve never met a Canadian yet who isn’t inherently decent and Bob is no exception,” states Dad with conviction. The motto in Greek on Bob’s tee-shirt therefore seems incongruous, though he didn’t actually know what it said until Dad told him. It’s the famous quote by St Augustine of Hippo: “My Lord, grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.” It’s a pity the saint bagged that witty one-liner first, since it could easily have been coined by Dad’s all-time favourite Canadian... Leonard Cohen.

In particular Bob hates estate agents and second-hand car salesmen, using an apposite turn of phrase when he advises Dad about the potential pitfalls of living in Greece. “Take your time doing your research, James, and be very *leery*.” I think it’s a North American word. I must confess I had to look it up in my Cats English Dictionary. As well as helpful advice, there is also plenty of practical help. Dad is always welcome to accompany both of them on their trips to the local towns. “The longer you can get

by without a car the less stress you'll have to deal with,” confides Bob, as he deftly performs an illegal 180° turn in the centre of Kalamata.

On the subject of driving, Dad came home from Petalidi the other day in an even better mood than usual. I jumped on his lap and employed my very deep, gurgling purr, the one reserved for special attention-seeking. It worked. “Mick,” he revealed, “I’ve just overheard my first decent altercation between two Greek motorists. They were shaking their fists and hurling insults at each other, with lots of “Βλάκας, idiot” and “Μαλάκας” flying about. Old-fashioned road rage as it ought to be. Brilliant!” I purred on in contented agreement.

Fotine, called “Fofo” by Bob, has a great sense of humour. Early on, she suggested that Dad looked like Jack Nicholson. It’s happened before, in Syria of all places, but he laps it up. “Given his naughty reputation with women, I take that as the highest compliment,” he chortled. She also calls him “Προδότης, traitor.” There are two supermarkets in the village, one run by her brother, Vassilis aka Billy, the other by Petros. Usually Dad uses Billy’s, but he let slip to Fotine that he occasionally sneaks into Petros. “Like Jack, I’m promiscuous,” he jokes. “As long as you don’t tell either that you’ve visited the other, you should be alright,” she advises as if discussing how to deal with concurrent mistresses. Village politics, eh? Meanwhile, Dad’s laughable obsession with supermarkets has taken him to nine different ones in three weeks so far and he ain’t finished yet.

Being very hospitable and an excellent cook, Fotine has already plied Dad with many gifts of food. To greet our arrival, she had left a jar of black olives marinated to her mother’s recipe, which probably means her grandmother’s, great-grandmother’s and back-into-antiquity recipe. I watched Dad closely when he first opened the jar and ate a couple. First he smiled, then he started laughing out loud. “These are the best olives I’ve ever tasted in my life, and I’ve eaten plenty, I can tell you!” Then he went quiet. Ate a few more, and started weeping. “The best ever...” he moaned. The only explanation I can offer for this bizarre behaviour is that he was on his third tsipouro at the time.



Fotine Bob

Needless to say, Dad feels extremely fortunate in his choice of rented home and a little embarrassed when Bob says, "We like having you as a neighbour, James, because you're not *stuffy*." The feeling's mutual, with Dad in awe at the amount of sheer manual labour they both put in daily on their land, from dawn to dusk.

Dad has also been invited to two delicious meals at the big house and Fotine brings dishes round to ours too. Here's a sample of the offerings eaten so far: courgette fritters with skordalia, pastitsio, briam, goat shanks with home-made noodles, fried aubergines, salad with home-made feta, bean soup, spicy green olives, goat's cheese. And olive oil as thick as honey, from an early press of immature olives that a commercial operation would never countenance.

Some of Dad's Greek friends are convinced that he has some Hellenic blood in his veins, a racial as well as an emotional bond with this country. Thomais, who has known him for 25 years, is so convinced that she wants him to have a DNA test. Dad knows he's half-Geordie and half-Scottish, but his father once cryptically told him that he might well have been born half-Greek, "if I hadn't already been married to your mother, son..." WHAT?!

Thomas Wardrobe was a 28-year-old flour salesman, one-year married with a child on the way when war was declared in September 1939. As a sergeant in the territorial army he was called up the next day. As a French speaker he was sent to Syria immediately to help liaise with the French army there. He would not see his wife again until 1945 when he would also meet for the first time his five-year-old daughter, Dad's elder sister Margaret.

After the fall of France in 1940 their overseas forces faced a dilemma. Should they stay loyal to the Vichy Government or to their erstwhile allies? The French army in Syria opted for the former course of action, resulting in clashes with British and Free French forces. By July 1941 the country was occupied by the allies. To what extent Thomas was involved we shall never know, though this period gave rise to a phrase he often quoted in later life if France came up in conversation. "They are a nation without honour," was all he would say. When pressed he would not elaborate.

He then spent some months in Palestine before arriving in Cairo, now an officer in military intelligence. Here begins the first of his two major encounters with the Greeks.

It wasn't until James was studying Classics at university that Thomas, acknowledging his son's growing devotion to the Greek world, both ancient and modern, began to unfurl a little of his wartime Levantine story. At about the same time James had introduced him to the Alexandria Quartet by Laurence Durrell and he was intrigued by how deeply enthralled his father was by these four novels, set in Egypt before, during and after the Second World War. He devoured them and discussed them constantly with his son. James plied him with other Modernists such as Henry Miller, but they were received without enthusiasm. For Thomas it was all about Alexandria. The Quartet proved to be significant for James too, since it was Durrell's translation of two Cavafy poems at the end of "Justine" ("The City" and "The God Abandons Antony") that triggered his life-long love affair with "the Poet of the City".

Thomas had no background in Classics at all. He was a working class lad who had pulled himself up by his bootstraps to get out of Gateshead and complete an external Economics degree from the University of London, whilst working for Spillers in Hull. In Cairo he met plenty of Classicists. "They were from a completely different milieu. Upper-class Oxbridge types generally, but now highly trained officers who

used their understanding of classical Greek to learn demotic, and I admired them greatly. I was briefing them before they were dropped into occupied Greece..” He mentioned some names, but woefully they were never written down and then forgotten. James has dredged his memory without any luck. As a consequence, he often wonders if they included those who are more famous in Greece for their work with the αντάρτες (resistance fighters) than they are in their own country: Monty Woodhouse, Tom Dunbabin, Xan Fielding and even... Paddy Leigh Fermor. As I paw the keyboard, Kardamyli is lost in the reflection of the dazzling sea.

One of the sources of Thomas's intelligence about German-occupied Greece came from refugees. But were they genuine refugees? As well as gleaned potentially useful information from these new-comers about the current situation in their homeland, it was his job to make sure that they weren't fifth-columnists sent over to spy in the host country of the British Middle East Command. He said later that he occupied many long hours interviewing newly-arrived Greeks, but he also spent time acquainting himself with the long-standing and flourishing Greek community of Alexandria. It was important for him to get to know that section of society into which the refugees, whether bona fide or not, would attempt to integrate themselves. As a result, he became particularly friendly with one of the wealthy merchant families. He confided to James that they had an attractive daughter and after a while her parents had indicated to Thomas that they were not averse to the idea of marrying her off to a charming and good-looking young British officer. How far things progressed was never established and anyway James was well aware that amongst his father's skills as a raconteur was a strong adherence to his own maxim, “Never let the truth get in the way of a good story.”

It was in this context that Thomas let slip his remark about the potential unfulfilled ontology of a half-Greek son. No DNA test required then. At this point I'll leave the Metaphysics of Being to the philosophicats. I'm losing valuable snoozing-in-the-shade time with this historical stuff. Suffice to say, Dad simply didn't have the brass neck to ask his own father if he'd been at it with a Greek. So the matter was left hanging in the air.

The next time Major Tom had dealings with the Greeks, it was December 1944 in Athens, there was snow on the Acropolis and the Communists (ELAS-EAM) had indirectly saved his life.

The Phoney War has ended. Today Lulu finally got fed up with Bella's incursions and when she appeared yet again at the open front door within her sight, it was “Right, I've had enough of this,” and she was off after her down the steps. Except that this time she chased her round the corner and out of sight until that dreadful screaming noise started, the screeching we make when we have a good cat-scrap. And it wasn't my imperious sister doing the caterwauling either. She sauntered back a minute or so later. “She may indeed well return, but I've made it crystal-clear to her that she's not welcome. She's definitely got the message,” and with a swish of her mighty tail she was back onto her daytime sentry chair.

It was about an hour later when we felt the earthquake.

”It's good to be just plain happy; it's a little better to know that you're happy; but to understand that you're happy and to know why and how, in what way, because of what concatenation of events or circumstances, and still be happy, be happy in the being and the knowing, well that is beyond happiness, that is bliss, and if you have any sense you ought to kill yourself on the spot and be done with it. And that's how I was - except that I didn't have the power or the courage to kill myself then and there. It was good, too, that I didn't do myself in because there were even greater moments to come, something beyond bliss even; something which if anyone had tried to describe to

me I would probably not have believed.”

Henry Miller

The Colossus of Maroussi

16/10/16

Dad goes into Kalamata Hospital

I would like to tell you that the earthquake came as a bit of a shock. The boring truth is that we three cats slept peacefully through our first “seismic activity” and also as a general rule I try to avoid puns.

Mid-afternoon there was a single massive jolting of the house, the fridge shook, the doors and windows rattled. It was over in a second. Dad continued working on his laptop, apparently assuming that a lorry delivering Bob's gravel or cement or sand had hit a wall as it went past. He gets a lot of such deliveries. Only later did we hear that there had been an earthquake out at sea near Koroni, about ten miles away on the south-east tip of the peninsula. No casualties or damage. A piffling 5 on the Richter scale. Dad said he had experienced much worse in Greece when sleeping in an Athens hotel room in 1995. The epicentre was over 100 miles away near Aigion in the northern Peloponnese. There were twenty-six fatalities and considerable damage to buildings. He was woken up in the middle of the night when he felt his room shaking. Never having been in an earthquake before, he rolled over and went back to sleep, assuming he'd been disturbed by a vigorous couple in the next room having it off. The waiter told him about the “seismos” next morning at breakfast.

Bob says Anaskelo House is very sturdy, built on solid rock and the walls are “three bricks thick”, but you have to take the threat of frequent earthquakes seriously. Many locals remember the Kalamata 'quake of 1986 which caused heavy damage and killed twenty people.

So, when we're not sleeping what do we get up to? I find the size and noisiness of the various insects here very annoying, though mostly quite tasty for a snack. There's a praying mantis living on a ledge next day that I've got my eye on. All these “buzzers” get me chasing them round the house day and night. Despite Dad's anguished cries of “Stop it, Mick,” I'm getting quite adept at catching and eating them. The louder, the tastier, I say. Minnie meanwhile is at last venturing out of the house and it is good to hear her rather special purr more often. It sounds rather like a well-serviced low-revving two-stroke engine. She's also recently come out on top in a three-metre stand-off with The Male, who yowled a lot when Minnie held her ground and refused to blink first.

Lulu and Bella seem to have negotiated an uneasy truce. Bella is a calico cat, with black, white and orange markings more frequently seen in cats here than in the UK. She's always looking for more food, even though she's Fotine's favourite and gets well cared for. She has a whinge which for reasons I personally don't understand seems to be attractive to the two-leggers, who all like her including Dad. I have some sympathy for her since she is still breast-feeding her three babies. She's clever too. I've watched her use her nose and face to force up the handle of the bin-lid, access anything worth eating inside and then drop the lid back down as if it hadn't been opened at all.

The daft young dog, Pablo, came a bit too close to the house yesterday and barked. Minnie and I high-tailed it inside immediately, but Lulu stood her ground looking down on him from “her” terrace with her head thrust forward like a lioness about to pounce on a gazelle. When Pablo barked again and made a move towards her, discretion overcame foolhardy valour and she retreated to the safety of the kitchen. At speed. I admire her aggressive nature, but personally I find charm and diplomacy works just as well for me.

As for Dad, where shall I start? In coming here, he signed up for what he calls the “experience of becoming a real Greek,” so he rather blotted his copy book recently. He was strolling round the village,

looking for some poor local to inflict himself upon, when he came across a sign in English outside one of the bars. Chrani gets some English though more German tourists in the summer, which explains the seven tavernas. “Useful if you want a wide choice of touristic souvlakia, I suppose,” says Dad in a slightly lofty tone. The sign reads: “Quiz Night – Tonight 9.00pm.” Suppressing his natural instincts to run a mile from the holiday-making British and of course fancying his chances, he duly turns up. The quiz-mistress, Pauline, who is also the Sunvil Rep for the region, put together a team of Brit retirees comprising one couple, two single guys and Dad. Usual format, eight sections of ten questions each, with a half-way break. A late surge after lying third at half-time brings victory! The prize is a litre bottle of Metaxas Five-Star, impossible to divide five ways except by drinking it. Dad staggers home through the olive groves after midnight, “I only lost my way home once,” he claims. He is “unwell” in the night and makes various promises to himself about alcohol the next morning, which I doubt he'll keep.

As for becoming a real Greek, he's got a long way to go. He went out of the house to pick a few lemons, brought them in, cut them open and found that they were oranges. “Well, they're all green, Mick.” At least he's in no danger of doing that with the grapefruits. “The goat ate the grapefruit tree,” explained an unhappy Fotine. “Now I'm feeding her leaves from the ξυλοκερατιά, the carob-tree. It improves the flavour of the meat,” she added darkly.

The next day he had to go into Kalamata to get a piece of kit to make the TV he brought over from Liphook work. For you technerdicats, something about needing to upgrade from MPEG2 to MPEG4. This involved visiting his favourite electrical store, Kotsovolos. It happened to be in darkness since they had a power cut at the time. He came home with a set-top box and a smile as wide as mine when I've just got the cream. “Mick, I think I've found the perfect way to seduce Greek women.” Yes, Dad? “What you do is, you say difficult Greek words or phrases very fast indeed, without hesitation or error,” he continued. What? “I went up to this very attractive assistant and before she could start speaking English, I got in there first.” And? “I said syllable-perfect and at speed, “Θέλω ένα ψηφιακό αποκωδικοποιητή, I want a digital decoding device...” “Bravo,” she laughed, “Even the Greeks can't say that properly.” She was almost swooning with delight, like the Imam eating his aubergine.” There's no fool like an old fool, Dad, but I'm glad you can now receive 40 Greek TV channels and the incredibly tedious BBC World Service.

Then the Sunday before last real life impinged and not in a good way.

Early in the morning he felt some discomfort on the left side of his stomach. It turned into a worse pain which by noon was so bad that it caused him to phone Fotine. Her doctor advised an ultrasound which meant a trip to A & E at Kalamata hospital. By the time he got to see the hospital doctor, after a 45-minute drive and a 90-minute wait in Reception, the pain had all but gone. The ultrasound and x-ray took an impressively fast ten-minutes. Dad had to smile to himself when the radiologist told him to lie down “anaskela”.

“No stones, but evidence of something having passed through, because of a dilation of the urinary tract. Probably gravel (or “sand” in Greek),” he said and prescribed some antibiotics. “End of story,” Dad thought and vowed to drink even more water than he already does. Some discomfort on Monday morning and pain in the afternoon was ignored. On Tuesday and Wednesday he resumed his daily routine, which included his usual sea swim. Thursday however brought more intense pain and a trip to Fotine's and Bob's doctor in Messini, where a second ultrasound found evidence of a smallish stone at the base of the ureter. Back to A & E, where a third ultrasound, X-rays, ECG, blood and urine tests resulted in his admission to the urology ward by about 5.00pm. And there he stayed for four nights,

under observation and treatment, with the stricture that he should “walk a lot and drink a lot.” Dad knew that the urologists wanted him to pass the stone naturally. Under the threat of a “trans-urethral procedure” he thinks he's shifted it and after 48 hours pain free and a clear ultrasound they let him go home on Monday morning.

From his hospital bed Dad had sent me an e-mail and asked me to include it in my blog. Here it is:

“My three fellow-sufferers in a small, well-equipped ward on the second floor are Ioannis, Stavros the Smoker and The Albanian. They have kidney stones much bigger than mine and wives much bigger than mine. They have all been invariably friendly and helpful. And chatty. I've been in a total immersion course of spoken Greek, since none of the six of them has any English. Whether some of my new Greek words and phrases, “bladder,” “dilation of the ureter”, “ultrasound”, “nice little injection (ενεσούλα for my Greek readers),” will prove useful in the future, I rather hope not.

There are some interesting differences in patient and visitor behaviour from a UK hospital. Here, although there are official visiting times, the wives ignore them and stay in the ward pretty much all the time. If they go home at all, it's not before midnight or one o'clock. One young entrepreneur visits the wards every day offering a range of private services: private ambulance transport, rentable TVs and... sun loungers for 3 euros per day for a more comfortable overnight visit. Though if there's an empty bed in the ward, one of the wives will sleep in it. So whereas in the UK you have patients in beds and their visitors might go out for a smoke, Stavros leaves the ward every hour to light up and Ioannis' wife commandeers the spare bed.

Despite the well-publicised cuts to the Greek Health Service, the morale of all the professionals is high. There is a tangible and co-operative spirit between the staff and the families which is born out of a culture of sharing the caring. This doesn't derive from a need to fill the gaps created by funding deficiencies, more from simple and unadorned family values allowed the scope to flourish.



General Hospital of Kalamata

The General Hospital of Kalamata was built about twenty years ago. A fully functional hospital with

all the major departments including A&E, this not unattractive cream-coloured building with bright green pipework sits in an olive grove amongst other large trees which house a noisy flock of starling, squabbling hysterically at dusk for their nests. It also supports a department solely dedicated to “Mediterranean Anaemia,” of which there is a much higher incidence among Greeks and Italians than with northern Europeans. It is also known as “thalassemia” or “sea in the blood,” which all Greeks possess in their souls anyway. In 2014 the results of the national healthcare system’s hospital reviews declared this as one of the top regional hospitals. I have benefited from a first-class level of care and treatment, all free thanks to my European Health Insurance Card.

One unfortunate consequence of the wives staying late is that it's impossible for any of us men to get any sleep until about 2.00am. For example, last night: the Albanian Wife in Black taps away on her laptop without cease until the early hours. Perhaps she's writing the Great Albanian Novel that we've all been waiting for. By midnight the other two stop chatting in normal voices and the stage-whispering begins. Stavros keeps telling his wife to clear off and let him sleep, but she's on a mission to save. Eventually the curtains are loudly adjusted and the windows slammed and the sun beds squeak and the plastic bags have to be emptied and refilled oh no she's opening a bag of crisps her third one tonight now she's gone to the loo for the umpteenth time which ends its flushing with a enormous fart and here's the night nurse to jab a needle in my bum and then Stavros starts snoring (Gold medal, Athens Olympics 2004) and Ioannis begins his apnoeic snortings and The Albanian goes walk-about with his catheter bag and the dogs start barking and the cocks crow and I'm whimpering and mewling Pie jesu dona nobis requiem with cotton wool stuffed in my ears and a pillow on my head... And another glorious day dawns in Messinia.”

Another downside was the pack of dogs in the hospital grounds but they didn't trouble Dad at all as he strode round the building guzzling his water. The gypsies did trouble him on one occasion. On a quiet Sunday afternoon with no security staff in evidence, two girls followed him into the lift as he was returning to the urology department. Then he realised they were talking to him, “one euro, fick, fick,” said the younger one lifting her skirt. He escaped from the lift and they followed him almost all the way to the ward, demanding “fick, fick.” He told them in no uncertain terms where to go fick, also shouting, “It's “fuck” in English by the way, not “fick.” Ever the pedant. On reflection he told me, “Robbery is their game, Mick, since they know they can get into the building without being challenged and roam around for easy pickings.” I knew he was back on form when he added, “I'd heard they were offering it for a sandwich in Athens, but this makes even the sun-lounger rental seem expensive.”

By now you'll be asking yourselves, “But who fed the cats for four days?” The magnificent Bob and Fotine of course, who also acted as Dad's personal ambulance service throughout. We've been getting on very well in particular with Fotine, who is determined to get to know us better, especially the reticent Minnie. Through feeding us twice a day, she has enticed Scaredy Cat from under the bed and even outside. They are firm friends now.

Minnie's take on this is somewhat philosophical. “Look, I have to obey Immanuel Kat or is it Kant on this one.”

“You what?”

“I'm obeying his first Universal Law, as expounded in one of his lesser known works, “The Categorical Imperative of the Obligate Carnivore.” ”

“Could you put that in simple terms, please, for a cat who doesn't spend all her time under the bed like you, pondering the big questions? I'm a writer not a philosopher after all.”

“Of course, Mick. For a cat, *“Food comes first.”*”

“Es ist gut.”

“Kant's dying words?”

“Yep.”

“So you do know something about 18th century German philosophy.”

You can see why more of Thomas' wartime story is going to have to wait until next week. In its place I leave you with a quotation from one of his favourite poems:

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

Edward FitzGerald

27/10/16

Ta Dekemvriana

The recent rains have revived the oleanders, resplendent in their pink and white blooms. The crimson flowers on our single bougainvillea are still in their full glory. It sits across the courtyard opposite the front steps, always in view from the terrace, the foreground to our seascape. Dad prefers it to the oleanders, saying that the Ancient Greeks associated the oleander, ροδοδάφνη, with funerals and death. Thanks, Dad, too much information.

We've been here for over seven weeks now and life has settled into a comfortable routine. For us cats this involves not much more than sleeping, eating, patrolling our new territory and having the occasional spat with the neighbours, usually Bella. Pablo chased me and Lulu up an olive tree yesterday which was, well, different. I could swear that Minnie, looking on from the safety of the terrace, had a smirk on her face. We haven't met Lulu Two yet, since she spends all her time in the barn where the goats and chickens live. Dad says she's the biggest of Bob and Fotine's cats because she has the best diet. There are plenty of mice and other delicious small mammals in and around that goat shed. It might be a bit far for us to “stray” there. It's a tempting idea – some serious hunting and the perfect diet for mousers, but I've heard the big billy-goat up there is rather aggressive so perhaps I'll stick to Felix pouches for the moment. “He's gruff,” says Dad, chuckling at his own pathetic joke, as usual.

The most exciting thing that's happened to me recently was when I followed Dad into the shower and he turned the water on. I legged it out of there shaking the water off my hind quarters as if I'd been scalded. I don't think he knew I was there, but you never know. He might be a bit upset at some of my acerbic comments on his sense of humour.



James' Personal Beach Pavilion

Dad's routine still involves going to the beach on most days. He has his favourite spot, midway between two beach bars, each at least 100 metres away. There are very few tourists in evidence at this time of year and he usually has the whole strand to himself. He has chosen one of three makeshift shelters as

what he calls his Personal Beach Pavilion. It consists of four vertical 3-metre scaffolding poles with four linking horizontal spars. The roof is strewn with some old bamboo branches and the vertical pieces are tastefully bound with some flotsam in the form of blanched upright tree-trunks. Beneath sit two ubiquitous white plastic chairs, one of many lying abandoned nearby. "In Bognor Regis, this would cost a fortune," he declared after he first took it over. He was mightily disconcerted one day when he arrived to find two foreigners had taken up residence in it for the day. He withdrew to the next "pavilion," glowering and muttering obscenities in their general direction. They never came back.

Dad is swimming at least two miles a week. Walking to and from the beach amounts to about another ten. A consequence of all this exercise is that he has lost almost a stone in weight since arriving here. His diet is also healthier. His major concern is how deep into the autumn months he can keep sea-swimming. "It won't be the water temperature that stops me before mid-November, but the sea conditions. So far, so good. Not much swell and often flat calm," he reports.

He still hasn't worn his new Orlebar Brown "swim-shorts", the fashionable men's beach apparel favoured by one recent former Prime Minister. "I'll be ready for them when my gut is less prominent than his." It's already much browner. He loves sunbathing and still adheres to the discredited principle that "brown blubber is better than white blubber." Friends who have been on summer holidays with him will know that he favours what he calls the Russian or Bulgarian method. When he was twelve he saw a photograph in National Geographic magazine of people sunbathing on a Black Sea beach, either in Bulgaria or the Crimea. It made a lasting impression on him – everyone was standing up.



Chrani beach (from a postcard)

Yesterday Dad announced that Tassos, owner of "The Ark" beach bar and, as it turns out, Max's Dad, was shutting up shop for the season. Consequently he had reclaimed all the intact white chairs on the beach including the ones in the Pavilion. So Dad found a couple of broken-backed ones in the bushes. "Just as serviceable, Mick. In fact more authentically Robinson Crusoe," he observed.

Which brings me to Gerhard. Last week Dad was standing in his Pavilion, lord of all he surveyed, when he espied an older man, still in reasonable shape, tanned but with a slight limp, walking along the

sea-line. Before Dad could issue a suitable greeting, the beachcomber said with a German accent: "Good morning, Mister Robinson," started laughing and approached. Dad finally got the joke, invited him to sit and they hit it off big-time. Gerhard and his wife Ulli were staying for two weeks in Chrani but knew the area from previous visits. They live in München where he had been a "cultural administrator" before he retired. A Theology and Philosophy graduate of Marburg and Heidelberg Universities, he was the answer to Dad's prayer: a two-legged who knew something about 18th Century German philosophy.

Gerhard has a keen sense of humour. "You like this Messinian coast, then?" Dad enquired. "Nah, too many Germans here for my liking," he dead-panned. "Ha, ha! And I'm avoiding the Mani because there are too many English there," replied Dad and that was the start of it. They met a few more times on the beach and exchanged contact details before the couple returned home, an enthusiastic Gerhard vowing to return and drag Dad kicking and screaming to the Mani.

When he's not on the beach, Dad often visits the local towns using the public bus service. The buses are modern and comfortable, but the service is quite old-fashioned. The Koroni-Kalamata route, for example, always has a conductor as well as a driver. One of the regular conductors is a very dapper gentleman who shouts "Κλείσε, shut (the door)" and "Πάμε, let's go" at the driver after every stop to get the bus moving again. He is the spitting image of Tony Curtis, albeit more dark-skinned, and Dad has to restrain himself from asking the conductor if he wouldn't mind entertaining the passengers with Tony's famously appalling Cary Grant impression from "Some Like It Hot." "His English isn't bad," Dad quips, "so I think we'll have him ready to perform by Christmas." The published timetable is not to be trusted. If the bus arrives early at the end of its outward journey to Koroni, it will be entirely at the whim of the two operatives as to whether the bus leaves up to fifteen minutes early for its return to Kalamata.

In mid-October 1944 the Germans left Athens. They had arrived in April 1941 to deserted and silent streets. Now when the last soldiers took the swastika down from the Acropolis and began to drive northwards through the city, happy crowds of Athenians embraced and waved blue and white Greek flags, while bells rang all over the city. There is a famous photograph of Damaskinos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, standing on the balcony of the Grande Bretagne Hotel, greeting the packed and joyous crowds thronging Syntagma Square. He had just become, or was about to become, Regent of Greece until the return from exile of King George II in 1946.

Dad planned to include the photo in this blog, but he couldn't locate it. Why Damaskinos, you may ask? Because he is one of Dad's modern Greek heroes. When the Germans began the persecution of Greek Jews in 1943, he openly defied the occupying authorities and, assisted by the Police Commissioner Angelos Evert, saved thousands of Jews in and around Athens. This he did by ordering the churches under his jurisdiction to issue them with Christian baptismal certificates. He also published a unique letter of protest, despite the threat of execution by firing squad if he did so. His dismissive reaction to the enraged SS Commander's intention was, "According to the traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church, our prelates are hanged, not shot. Please respect our traditions." Dad reckons this is the best and bravest recorded one-liner of the whole German Occupation.

Meanwhile, as the British army moved into Greece under the command of Lt-General Ronald Scobie, in order to "secure the liberation", Thomas Wardrobe was bivouacking in the Apennines in central Italy. In later years he told his children that he had never been colder in his life than during those autumn nights in the mountains. Then, six weeks later, in early December 1944 he received the best possible news. After five years away from home, he was told that he was being posted back to Britain

with immediate effect. He packed up his kit and reported to the small airfield from which he would begin a series of flights that would bring him back to Britain.

Imagine his exhilaration at the thought of being reunited with his wife Brenda and meeting at last his almost-five-year-old daughter Margaret. Fate however, what the Greeks call Μοίρα, your allotted portion, is looming too close. As he waits to board the small plane, he is handed a written signal from his headquarters. It reads, "Leave cancelled. Report for duty. Violence has broken out in Greece. Prepare to join Scobie in Athens."

On recounting this story Thomas admitted that it did fleetingly cross his mind to destroy the message, board the plane and if pulled up about it later he could claim that he had never received it. By the time his bosses realised he hadn't reported he would be long gone, heading for home. For whatever reason he obeyed orders and did his duty. He retrieved his luggage and sat half-heartedly watching the plane as it taxied away and prepared to take off. He saw the plane leave the ground but somehow fail to gain the necessary height quickly enough. It crashed into the hillside at the end of the aerodrome and burst into flames. There were no survivors.

This shocking turn of fate was due to the sudden outbreak of fighting in Athens in that first week of December between EAM-ELAS, the Greek communists, and Scobie's British forces who were supporting the new government and other right-wing elements. The so-called "Battle of Athens" was to last thirty-seven days and is known as Τα Δεκεμβριανά, the December events. Thomas ended his account by saying, "So it's because of the Greeks that I'm alive today and that you came into the world at all, son." James was a post-war baby, so Thomas' story is his story too. James and Greece? DNA test not necessary, belief in Destiny highly recommended.

Thomas added that it was ironic that EAM-ELAS, by starting the trouble on 3rd December, had saved him, since he was posted to Athens specifically to support the other side. The fact that the left-wing resistance were massively provoked by Churchill's shameful (James' word) change of policy towards Greece does not affect the momentous impact of the tragic incident in the Apennines on Wardrobe family history. Nevertheless, it's worth a very brief explanation. Churchill had heavily backed the ELAS andartes during the Occupation, since they proved themselves more effective than the royalist groups. After the liberation however, fearful of Greece acquiring a communist government and desperate to get King George back on the throne, he changed sides and supported the right-wing forces, including some who had been Nazi collaborators, for example, the infamous "Security Battalions." Some say the Cold War started with The Dekembriana, but enough of Greek politics for now.

So Thomas duly arrived and spent the next two months in Athens, or at least until after the ceasefire and the ELAS withdrawal from Athens in mid-January. There was snow on the Acropolis during that time, he said. He only left Attica once, getting a chance to see the Corinth Canal from the Isthmia road bridge. He finally got his abruptly delayed leave to return home. He never returned to Greece.

Thomas loved all popular music, not least Greek singers. In later life he was particularly fond of Nana Mouskouri's "The White Rose of Athens", much to the horrified amusement of his two musically hip grandsons. Some of the best Greek songs were written during the Occupation. Συννεφιασμένη Κυριακή, Cloudy Sunday, by Vassilis Tsitsanis, captures the mood of the period and is arguably the most well-known song in Greece. Greek readers who disagree are invited to reply with their own choice, for the benefit of Dad's on-going musical education. Anyway, he is convinced of the likelihood that Thomas would have heard and appreciated this haunting Tsitsanis melody in Athens in 1944. You can listen to it at the end.

Συννεφιασμένη Κυριακή, *Cloudy Sunday*,
μοιάζεις με την καρδιά μου *you are like my heart*,
που έχει πάντα συννεφιά, συννεφιά *where it is all cloudy, cloudy weather*,
Χριστέ και Πα-, Χριστέ και Παναγιά μου *Christ and my Pa-, Christ and my Panagia*.
Είσαι μια μέρα σαν κι αυτή *You are a day just like this*,
που 'χασα την χαρά μου *where I lost my happiness*.
Συννεφιασμένη Κυριακή, Κυριακή *Cloudy Sunday, Sunday*
ματώνεις την, ματώνεις την καρδιά μου *you make it bleed, my heart bleed*.
Όταν σε βλέπω βροχερή, *When I see you raining*,
στιγμή δεν ησυχάζω *I don't calm down for a moment*.
Μαύρη μου κάνεις τη ζωή, τη ζωή *You make my life, my life dark*
και βαριανα-, και βαριαναστενάζω *and I deeply, deeply sigh*.

Cloudy Sunday

by *Vassilis Tsitsanis*

<http://www.greecetravel.com/music/musicfiles/tsitsanis-sinifiasmenikyriaki.mp3>

13/11/16

Robbery on the Beach

Bob and Pëllumb killed the older billy-goat today. Dad and Fotine kept well out of the way, though he did tell her that he'd be happy to help her eat it. The goat's crime was nothing to do with stripping the grapefruit tree – that was one of the females. The she-goats invariably last much longer because they are milk- and therefore cheese-producers. No, Old Gruff's problem was that he turned out to be τζούφιος (or τσούφιος? Help me, Greek readers, apparently it's slang and it's not in Dad's dictionary). He was infertile – a death-sentence for a male goat in these parts. He now amounts to 28 kilos of prime meat in Fotine's freezer. “I told you he was big, Mick.”

In the past week the weather changed for the worse. Plenty of rainstorms, thunder and lightning. Έβρεχε καρεκλοπόδαρα, it was raining chair legs. Ironically the “fire season” has just officially ended, after which you're allowed to have garden bonfires. Dad is hoping this doesn't herald the end of his swimming season and beach visits.

Coming home from his last swim before the weather broke, he found himself in the role of The Good Samaritan. As he strolled past one of the small houses off the track up the hill, he noticed an unmarked car parked with the driver's door open. “Unmarked” simply means the rear number plate had dropped off at some point. He thought nothing of it and walked on. Then he heard an almighty crash of breaking glass. Turning back, he saw an old man had fallen to the ground behind the car, dazed and in shock. He was surrounded by glass fragments and his mobile phone was lying some yards away across the driveway.

Dad immediately hastened back to help him. He established that his name was Stavros and that he wasn't injured, apart from a slight cut on his left thumb. He managed with some difficulty to get him into a chair, talk comfortingly to him for a while, find a yard brush and clear up the glass from whatever it was the old man had dropped as he fell, possibly an empty demijohn. It was at this point that Stavros, quite a hefty guy, surged up from the chair and embraced Dad in a bear hug from which there was no escape. Multiple kisses of gratitude on both cheeks followed, offers of tsipouro, ouzo, wine, but no release from the grip.

It was evident to Dad from the strong smell of booze that Stavros was completely rat-arsed. Finally and gently extricating himself he sat him down again and they talked for a while longer. Dad recovered the house keys, led him inside and sat him on the bed. Once again Stavros arose under his own steam and another round of cuddling, kissing and epharistoing ensued. Further profuse offers of hospitality were refused but when it emerged that they both frequented the same bar in Chrani Dad did promise that he would partake of a small something there with Stavros next time they met. A few more kisses and body locks later and Dad escaped up the hill. He says he wouldn't be surprised if village gossip now gives a rather positive boost to the reputation of “the new Englishman.” And once again, as in the hospital ward, he was obliged to function entirely in Greek. Free drinks and more hugs await.

It's when the weather is poor that Dad goes on his trips to the local towns. He has been exploring the regional capital Kalamata recently and he is becoming fonder of it with each visit. With a population of about 70,000, it is a vibrant university town with a medieval castle overlooking the old quarter, which slopes down towards a fairly run-down commercial port. Dad says he hasn't seen a ship anchored there yet, but once the olive harvest begins a vast tonnage of oil will be exported through here. The second largest city in the Peloponnese, it has less of bigger Patras' urban sprawl and is therefore

more compact, more charming. The site of the castle was originally a Byzantine monastery but now not much more than medieval crenellated walls. Like most fortifications in Greece, it changed hands between the Venetians and the Turks innumerable times. The old town is an attractive mix of modern and old-fashioned shops with pedestrian walkways, really good restaurants, coffee shops and bars. Some impressive pre-1986-earthquake neoclassical mansions survive, whilst the Railway Park, a relic of a now-defunct system superseded by express coaches, is an intriguing graveyard of grand old-style carriages and engines. The two-mile promenade and town beach stretches away eastwards along the road towards the Mani, with Mount Taygetos looming nearby.



Kalamata from the slopes of Mount Taygetos

A few miles west of Kalamata is Messini, a town with a completely different atmosphere. “It's Dodge City, James,” says Bob. “I'm telling you, be very *leery* when you go to Messini, it's like the Wild West compared to Kalamata.” Really? It seemed to Dad like a fairly sleepy place dominated by its central square and shops which specialise in selling agricultural implements. The town has a strong gypsy presence, which can have a telling effect on the community. Bob tells the story. “Last year the local newspaper reported that a man ran into Messini police station for protection. He was being chased by a group of gypsies. They followed him into the building and, shocking though it seems, he got absolutely no help from the officers present. He was beaten up and the police were either unwilling or unable to stop what happened. Then the gypsies simply walked away.” So maybe the bypass is Messini's best feature.

On the other hand, Dad's only experience so far of this police station was when he needed to find out the requirements for his resident's permit. A young plain-clothes copper who may or may not have been CID was extremely friendly and helpful, going out of his way to make phone calls to establish exactly what was needed. But then Dad wasn't being chased by a pack of howling thugs at the time.

In an ideally flat coastal strip between Messini and Kalamata, yet very much closer to the former, is Kalamata International Airport. It has been in operation since 1959 and the existing terminal was upgraded in 1991 to accommodate the growth of holiday charter flights. It handles about 2,500 commercial flights a year, mostly between April and October. In size and function it reminds Dad of

Gibraltar airport, not least because of its additional military use. There is a Greek Air Force base which shares the same runway. This is predominantly a training facility and the daily high-altitude droning of jet- and prop-engined trainers above the Gulf of Messinia is part of the local soundscape.

This military base was the backdrop to an intense media frenzy in November 2001. Twelve British and two Dutch plane-spotters were arrested for allegedly taking photographs at an air show that was taking place there. They spent six weeks in jail while charges were brought, then released on bail. They returned for a trial at which eight were convicted of espionage and sentenced to three years in jail. The other six were found guilty of aiding and abetting them. Released again on bail pending appeal, they returned a year later to have the convictions overturned.

Anglo-Greek relations did not suffer. The leader of the group said, looking back, “Even at the time a lot of it was extremely funny because it was such a farce and it's not an experience that I would have wanted to have missed. We got to experience media work, a champagne reception in the Houses of Parliament and an ITV-made drama-documentary.”

Since plane-spotting is almost unheard of in Greece, they were asking for trouble, as far as Dad was concerned. British diplomats at the time called the incident a “cultural misunderstanding.” “Ha, ha,” he advises cheerfully, “There are plenty of those about. Just don't do an accidental μούντζα (moutza) round here or even a thumbs-up.” A moutza consists of extending all fingers of one or both hands and presenting the palm towards the to-be-insulted person in a forward motion. So be very careful if you are intending to indicate five or ten with your fingers. “And don't show the soles of your shoes to an Arab either.”

Once the weather recovered Dad was straight back to his Beach Pavilion. He went for a long swim along the shore line. Two of the three beach bars are now closed and there was virtually no one around at all. Just Max and his friend, whom we shall call The Smallish Brown Dog. In fact the SBD did what I did to Dave that first night of our trip in Maçon, only with his wet nose on a snoozing Dad's face rather than whiskers on feet. Same reaction - “What the f**k's that?” followed by a moment's gravity-defying levitation. He was just being friendly, Dad. He wants to be your constant companion.

After browning his front for an hour, Dad went to get his book to read before toasting his back à la Russe. As usual before swimming he had spread out his things in casual fashion all over the Pavilion, shorts here, shoes there, sun cream at the back, towel at the front, hat hanging on convenient branch peg.

His old black Nike tote bag, dating back to the Royal Birkdale Open of 1998, had vanished.

Dad searched the area high and low and checked that his valuables, including iPhone, cash and watch were still in his shorts and shoes. They were. So when and why would a robber steal what were the least valuable items? The tote bag was falling apart, its sole contents were a Bernard Cornwall historical novel, an ancient blood glucose checker he was about to discard and a pair of underpants. He concluded that an opportunistic snatch of the bag and its paltry contents must have happened when he was out of sight on his swim some distance away. At first he was mystified, then annoyed, then pleased that through sheer luck the expensive new iPhone had not been taken.

“A salutary lesson, Mick,” he said later. “I swear that apart from The Smallish Brown Dog there wasn't a living soul on the beach today. Not very rich pickings for the thief, anyway. The bag will soon be unusable, he won't know what in hell the blood checker is for and he almost certainly can't read English. That book will probably reappear on the “Every Book 1 Euro” stall in next Thursday's Kalamata Bazaar.”

What about the underpants, Dad? “Ok, Ok. I admit It is quite galling that some thieving toe rag is walking around in my Sloggi underpants.”

The next day required stringent security measures. New rules: take bare minimum to the beach and definitely nothing of value; instead of swimming 400 or 500 metres down the shoreline and back, do 100 metres back and forth keeping the Pavilion in sight at all times; use bilateral breathing so as to always keep the shore side in view. And so on, flavoured with a soupçon of paranoia.

Apart from one possibly dodgy local, a few German tourists and the inevitable two friendly dogs, the area was deserted. No problem. Same again the next day, except this time Dad now began to doubt his own sanity. After his swim, a second pair of underpants had disappeared. Nothing else. What the hell is going on? Had he even brought them with him today? Was he really becoming that forgetful? Was he condemned to go commando on a Greek beach for the rest of his life? Was someone playing an elaborate mind game with him, as The Magus did to John Fowles' hero on that Greek island so many years ago? Were mermaids coming out of the sea and pinching his knickers in revenge for him enjoying a daily pee in the briny? Παναγία μου, Mother of God!

Determined not to be defeated by this conundrum nor deprived of his daily swim, the next day he took decisive action. He abandoned his Pavilion and walked on to the only remaining open beach bar, the Maïstral, and took up a position five metres away from a couple of honest-looking tourists. A long swim and a sunbathe later, followed by the usual friendly greeting from Max and The Smallish Brown Dog, Dad retired to the bar for a drink, with all his possessions intact in a plastic bag apart from his shoes. He placed the bag on a chair and the shoes, stuffed with his pink socks, on the floor by his feet. Some time later he bent down to put on his socks and shoes. One of the socks was missing.



The Smallish Brown Dog, aka Thieving Toe Rag

In utter consternation and disbelief he leapt up and looked around. Lo and behold, five metres away The Smallish Brown Dog, henceforth to be named Thieving Toe Rag, had the pink sock between his paws. He had stealthily taken it without Dad having the slightest inkling. Mystery solved? Perhaps. Explaining the whole sorry saga to me later, he concluded with some relief, “Look, it's not quite an open-and-shut case, but I think SBD would be convicted in a court of law by his peers for the underpants

theft, if not the tote bag. What do you think, Mick?"

Speaking as a cat, firstly I think that Dad only has circumstantial evidence against Thieving Toe Rag. So for me it's an open verdict. Secondly, I firmly believe that dogs are stupid creatures if they steal what they can't eat. We felines are the world's greatest scroungers and thieves, but we only steal food. Thirdly, Dad should stop peeing in the sea.

Thomas arrived home in 1945 and was reunited with his family, which comprised his wife, mother-in-law and Dad's sister, the five-year-old Margaret. She vividly recalls her father's home-coming and her first ever meeting with him. "In 1940 Hull was taking such a pasting that Mother, Grandma and baby Margaret left. You may remember that many years later, whenever there was a thunderstorm, Grandma Coulehan used to hide under the stairs. I think that was a result of the Blitz. Hull was the most bombed city in Britain.

After lodging in various places, not all friendly, they ended up in Barnard Castle. First they had stayed on a farm called Mount Eff. I remember their son Joseph. He was about my age and we were both bullied by the pet lamb. As soon as we appeared in the farmyard he would come up and butt us. When I reached school age (4 years old during the war) we moved into Coronation Road in Barney. Miss Hare was the landlady and we three had the main bedroom. Mother and Grandma shared the double bed and I slept in my cot.

We regularly had visitors from the Wardrobe family, so I was used to meeting people off the train. One day in 1945 Mother took me to the station and we watched train after train come in. After a while I began to ask why we were there, but she was noncommittal.

That evening, after I had gone to bed, my Father finally arrived. Before retiring to the hotel which Mother had booked for the night, my parents went for a long walk along the banks of the River Tees. When they returned to the hotel, all was in darkness. They tried in vain to rouse someone. Whilst they were standing there wondering what to do, the local bobby came along. He also tried unsuccessfully to rouse the hotel. Then he said to the luckless pair, "I'm afraid that all I can offer you is a prison cell for the night." They declined his kind offer and went back to Coronation Road, where Father slept on the hard floor downstairs.

The next morning when I woke up I found a beautiful doll in Egyptian national dress at the foot of my cot. Mother said to me, "Where do you think that has come from?" I said one word, "Daddy!" I went downstairs and there he was, sleeping on the floor of Miss Hare's sitting room. I gently stroked his cheek to wake him up. We were immediate friends. When Mother came in we were having a big cuddle and talking the hind legs off a donkey."

Thomas had gone to war as a non-smoking, non-swearing fully paid-up member of the Sons of Temperance. He was a smoker and a drinker now, inevitably a changed man. When Brenda opened his suitcase she found a German Luger pistol he had brought home as a souvenir. With ammunition. She didn't ask how he had acquired it. Gradually some semblance of normality returned to his life. The family returned to Hull, Thomas went back to his old job at the flour and dog food firm, Spillers, and in due course on 17th August 1947 his son and heir James was born.

Meanwhile in Greece after two years of festering bad blood between the royalists and communists, ο Εμφύλιος Πόλεμος, the Civil War, began in 1946. It would last until 1949, leaving a legacy of bitterness between the two sides which is still evident in society and the political scene to this day. It also

bestowed on Greece a fiercely anti-communist security establishment, which was conveniently placed to support the right-wing dictatorship of “The Colonels”, the military junta of 1967 to 1974. But as I've said before and will no doubt say again, enough of Greek politics for now.

I conclude with some Walt Whitman, who is clearly referring here to Dad and his new best friend, Thieving Toe Rag:

Shine! shine! shine!

Pour down your warmth, great sun!

While we bask, we two together.

Two together!

Winds blow south, or winds blow north,

Day come white, or night come black,

Home, or rivers and mountains from home,

Singing all time, minding no time,

While we two keep together.

Sea-Drift, from Leaves of Grass

Walt Whitman

27/11/16

The Olive Harvest

The last stage coach out of Dodge City left a couple of weeks ago. To put it another way, the last direct Easyjet flight to Gatwick took off. The next UK flight to Kalamata will be on 1st April, so it's the express bus to Athens for the winter months for flights to London now. That's how Dad went to Athens at the start of his short visit back to the UK.

The weather was as grim that morning as the day we all arrived here with Dave in early September. Thunder and lightning, heavy rain, flash flooding of the road out of Chrani. Dad said, "It's Zeus telling me to bugger off for good this time." I wanted to offer an alternative explanation: that the King of the Olympian Gods actually wanted to *keep* him here for good, but I sensed he wasn't in the mood for my logic. Anyway, the Athens bus arrived on time and we were consigned to being fed by Fotine as planned, always a pleasure for us girls.

The bus driver chain-smoked throughout the three-hour journey, called a few chums on his mobile and made an unscheduled stop to let an old guy have a piss by the side of the road. No problem, no fuss. I'm beginning to understand why my perverse Dad loves Greece so much. A former student, Alina, picked Dad up at the Kifissos Bus Station and took him to a joyous reunion lunch with three other former pupils, Joanna Douso, Cat Myt and Gerry Z. The reminiscences and gossip were of the highest quality, albeit only mildly wicked. "There will be much more of this," they all five mischievously agreed.

Our Second Mum was at Heathrow for a very happy reunion after two months apart, during which she has been in Zimbabwe visiting her family and seeing her kids. The five days in Liphook were full-on with appointments, meeting friends and family, together with general sorting out of New Shepherds Farm issues. Dad reflected to me later that he only missed three things about England. Firstly, certain foods, like soft cheeses and decent chocolate biscuits; secondly, going to the movies, which is difficult in Greece until he gets a car; thirdly, and the only important one, going out with friends to pubs, restaurants and social events.

I'd like to record that their trip back to Chrani was uneventful. Unfortunately Dad had his wallet lifted by a pickpocket in a packed metro as they both struggled to get five cases off the train at Monastiraki station. This rather spoiled Mum's first ever night in Athens. It was supposed to involve a romantic dinner in a Thision taverna beneath the Acropolis rather than form-filling in a police station off Stadiou. Dad was condemned to relive the whole incident again and again in his head all evening, since in hindsight he had identified exactly who were the culprit and his accomplice, the "distractor." He absolutely hates the idea of being taken for an easy tourist mark, a theft victim yet again, to the extent that he was nauseous, sweating and physically sick during that night, such is the sensitivity of the old boy's over-proud self-image.

Dad consoles himself with the fact that his wallet contained not a cent of cash, only cards which he cancelled within forty minutes of the incident. "At least the bastards have got nothing, even though I've been mightily inconvenienced." I hope he never meets them again, because he would certainly recognise them and I worry that he might confront them. More Len, more Zen please, Dad. Incidentally, the Greek for pickpocket doesn't translate precisely into English but is equally expressive. Ο πορτοφολάς, *the portofolas*, is literally "the wallet man", hence "the wallet thief." *To portofoli* is a wallet.

On the other hand, in mitigation the Smallish Brown Dog had no malice aforethought in his thieving and I am pleased to record that he has now been forgiven, even though he tried to nick one of Dad's shoes on the beach yesterday. Some of my readers have objected strongly to the derogatory renaming of Smallish Brown Dog as Thieving Toe Rag, so after discussion with The Victim I shall revert to SBD in future. "He looks so sweet in the photo," say some of Dad's sappy friends.

The wallet incident happened on a Wednesday evening. To cap a bad couple of days, Dad found out on their return to Chrani on the Thursday afternoon that Leonard Cohen had died. Since his first album, "The Songs of Leonard Cohen," came out in 1967 Dad has always been a massive fan and the older they both grew the deeper his devotion. He loves his wisdom, his political anger and above all his wit. "No other song-writer explores the human condition like Len and then he makes me laugh as well." The e-mails of condolence were pouring in for days afterwards. In tribute Dad danced his appalling *Zeibekiko* to "Dance Me To The End Of Love." Yes, believe it or not, Greeks, the music fits. Try it!

Mum loves it here as much as Dad. The tracks through the fields remind her of the village back home, as does the freshness of the local produce, whether fruit, vegetable or meat. Especially the goat meat! The warm climate suits her better too, though we are having olive wood fires in our massive fireplace every evening now, as the autumn nights get cooler. Very cosy for cats.

Now that the tourists have all gone the locals have been preparing for the most important period of the year, the olive harvest, which in Messinia takes place in November, December and sometimes into January. They call it *το ελαιομάζωμα*, olive collecting. They have been brush-cutting below their trees, buying new nets, sharpening their chainsaws and checking that their petrol-driven beaters were in good order. Suddenly over the past few weeks the previously deserted groves are full of activity and the noise of machinery.

Dad accompanied Bob when he wanted to fix a chainsaw. He turned off the main road up a track leading to the middle of nowhere. After a few hundred metres they came upon Stathis' shop and mechanic's workshop, a treasure trove specialising in all manner of equipment for the harvesting of olives: power-driven beaters on long poles, machines for stripping cut branches and separating the fruit from the leaves and twigs, generators, chainsaws, handsaws, even manual beating tools though the days of much physical thrashing and shaking by hand are long gone. Nets and sacks you buy elsewhere. Seeing how busy and successful Stathis' place is brought home to Dad the immense significance of olives to this region.

Mum and Dad spent a day helping Bob and Fotine with the harvest. They helped at the grove of Fotine's cousin, Maria, who has eighty trees. This took two days to harvest and amounted to about 60 sacks. One 50 kilogram sack converts to 10 litres of oil. At a rate of 3.50 euros per kilo for oil with low acidity, that's 35 euros per sack, grossing a little over 2000 euros for 600 litres of oil.

The typical process of collection of "olives for oil" goes like this. Pëllumb climbs the tree and uses a small chainsaw to thin the branches, pruning those heavy with fruit. Bob strips the cut branches with a petrol-driven machine, which separates the olives and leaves from the wood and delivers the fruit straight into a sack. Once the branches have been stripped in the machine, at a later date they are either burnt, given to your goats or (rarely) shredded.



Erwin uses the power-driven beater

Meanwhile Erwin, another Albanian worker, follows behind Pëllumb, using a battery-powered beater (like a hedge cutter but with prongs). The olives fall onto green nets, each covering an area of about 15 by 10 metres, laid under the trees. Mum and Fotine do a final hand beating to get any fruit missed by Pëllumb and Erwin. Then they fill baskets with the olives and olive-bearing twigs and deliver them to the hand-operated shaking machine. Dad has become a dab hand with this “shaker” which separates the olives from the twigs and leaves and drops the fruit into sacks. The nets, eight to ten of which they use in total, are then dragged and spread out under the next trees. Fotine remembers how much harder the olive collection was without power-driven machines when she was a girl.

At the end of the afternoon the sacks are tied up and left to be collected by a guy with a tractor, who charges one euro per sack to transport them all to the co-operative pressing factory in nearby Petalidi.





Dad is now an expert with “the shaker” Mum masters the branch stripping machine

“Eating olives” from a different variety of tree have to be harvested much more delicately. You cannot use the same beating techniques and they are best picked by hand.

Greece produces 2,000,000 tonnes of olives a year, making it the third biggest producer in the world after Spain (nearly 8 million tonnes) and Italy (just over 3 million tonnes). Messinia has been declared the leading Greek prefecture in olive oil production (38% of national output in 2014) and is of course world-famous for its Kalamata eating olives.

Last year Bob and Fotine collected thirty-five tonnes of olives to produce seven tonnes of oil – a bumper harvest. Normally they pick until mid- or late January. However Bob is predicting that for the first time in five years they will finish all their picking before Christmas. This year they are expecting a devastating loss in volume of as much as 50%. Most of the trees in the region including theirs are suffering from δάκος, *dakos*, a disease caused by the olive fruit fly. The green fruit loses its pulp, turns brown and drops prematurely to the ground. The only solution is to harvest early and fast, collecting the olives before they become discoloured and fall. It is a race against time to pick the best trees first and inevitably leads to a lower yield. Overheard in a local bar last week, “Last year I got four sacks worth, now I've filled one pail...”

Like farmers the world over, the locals are resilient and thankful for small mercies. In Puglia in southern Italy olive growers have been fighting a different insect since 2013. It arrived from the Americas and spreads bacteria (*Xylella fastidiosa*) which causes trees to dry out and die. Although some new trees begin fruiting after three years, many varieties do not make fruit until they are five to twelve years old. So the loss of whole trees is devastating, as the ancient Greeks knew. When you invaded an enemy's territory, you destroyed their economy first, by cutting down their olive trees.

Fotine complains bitterly about the local government, which levies an obligatory tax on the farmers in return for a commitment to spray their groves against the *dakos* earlier in the season. Unfortunately this is done in a cursory manner, giving protection only to a minimal number of trees. “Next year,” she says, “we shall pay to have the spraying done privately and thoroughly, even if we are paying twice over.”

Although the volume is down and probably the quality too, the 3.5 euro per kilo price they are getting is good, subject to a low acidity level. Most Greek oil is classified as Extra Virgin, which means it has

an acidity level of less than 0.8%. Fotine scoffs at the standard classifications. “The best oil has less than 0.3% acidity and is far beyond this arbitrary measurement in its quality. It's just a definition invented by some marketing board to help the retailers.” Mum and Dad have already tasted her new cold-pressed oil and they are still drooling.

Enough of olives. My sister Minnie is a transformed cat. You may recall that she spent most of her first fortnight in Greece under Dad's bed and was enticed outside with difficulty. Now she roams far and wide over the adjoining olive groves for hours at a time. According to Bob, she had started to expand her territory while Dad was away in England, but one morning last week Mum and Dad feared that she had gone for good. We were let out at our usual time, about dawn, and when Dad called us for breakfast half-an-hour later, no show by Minnie. Since she is the greediest of the three of us, this was unusual but not unduly worrying. After a few hours Dad went searching and calling, which meant of course that Lulu and I answered his calls and followed him around. I'm afraid we can't distinguish between his different name-calling – it's just Dad-calling to us. By now he was starting to become concerned.

Mid-morning she was spotted by Fotine on a neighbouring grove about 100 metres from home, but then no sign until teatime, eleven hours after she'd disappeared. Just as Dad was planning to leave food and water outside for the night, Fotine rang to say Minnie was outside their house, near the creek. Dad hot-footed it over to find her on her way home, happy as a lark and eager for her tea. Panic over. Her version of events is as follows, “Being of a nervous disposition I was spooked by some noise soon after we were let out. I jumped off our high terrace wall down unto the Swedish man's estate below and then realised I couldn't get back up again. I spent the day in the lower fields beneath the wall and then worked my way round and back up via the creek which comes out beyond Bob and Fotine's place. Being a cat who knows where her home is, I do know my way, for God's sake. Especially when it's teatime. What is Dad like? Has everyone forgotten Immanuel Ka(n)t's Categorical Imperative;’

James may have had the Greek communists to thank for the possibility of his post-war conception, but without Dr. Simpson, Brenda's GP, he would never have made into this world alive. When she was nearly full term he went on holiday to North Wales. He was however concerned about Mrs Wardrobe. After a few days he phoned up his surgery and on hearing that she still hadn't given birth, he drove back to Hessle near Hull and organised the caesarean operation by which he was born. Unfortunately in those days there were few regimes in place to prevent thrombosis, which James's mother got very severely in her leg. She was brought home to Redstacks in Heads Lane, Hessle, on a stretcher and she was bedridden for the best part of her son's first six months. One of Thomas's sisters, Mary, came up from Birmingham to look after him.

James's earliest memory is being bitten by a horse. His sister, Margaret, recalls the incident. “I'd taken you round the corner from Heads Lane to feed the horse. You did this regularly without mishap. On this occasion you held the bread between your fingers instead of on the palm of your hand. I had to hit the poor animal really hard on the nose until he opened his mouth to protest and then I could pull your fingers out. What a howling then ensued!”

The family were still living at Redstacks when they bought their first car, an Austin 8, registration number DWF 460 (what a memory Dad's sister has!). At some point after that they moved to 37 Lowfield Road, Anlaby, which James remembers well, along with the government's free issue to all pre-school children of delicious concentrated orange juice and disgusting cod liver oil (“cog oil”).

He also recalls the long car journeys, usually to and from Gateshead to see Thomas's aged parents.

Margaret remembers playing I Spy on these trips, "One time when it was your turn you said the letters M,N. We spent ages trying to guess. Finally we all gave in and you proudly announced that the answer was Mummy's (K)nees". Precocious even then. His own enduring memory is of the return journeys in the dark, lying on the back seat unable to sleep and longing for the arrival of the street lights which meant they were nearly home.

Another memory is being taken over water to a farm in Holland by Auntie Gwen, a close family friend. James was impressed that you could get across the North Sea so quickly by boat. In fact they had only crossed the Humber estuary by ferry to the village of New Holland in Lincolnshire.

In 1952 when James was five and Margaret twelve-and-a-half Thomas left Spillers for a new job on the other side of the Pennines and the Wardrobes left the Hull area. James has never been back.

In memory of the incomparable Leonard, I finish with the lyrics of one of Dad's favourites. He would like it played loud at his funeral:

*Ah we're drinking and we're dancing I loved you for your beauty
and the band is really happening but that doesn't make a fool of me:
and the Johnny Walker wisdom running high you were in it for your beauty too
And my very sweet companion and I loved you for your body
she's the Angel of Compassion there's a voice that sounds like God to me
she's rubbing half the world against her thigh declaring, declaring, declaring that your body's really you every
drinker every dancer And I loved you when our love was blessed
lifts a happy face to thank her and I love you now there's nothing left
the fiddler fiddles something so sublime but sorrow and a sense of overtime
all the women tear their blouses off and I missed you since the place got wrecked
and the men they dance on the polka-dots And I just don't care what happens next
and it's partner found, it's partner lost looks like freedom but it feels like death
and it's hell to pay when the fiddler stops: it's something in between, I guess
it's CLOSING TIME it's CLOSING TIME*

*Ah we're lonely, we're romantic Yeah we're drinking and we're dancing
and the cider's laced with acid but there's nothing really happening
and the Holy Spirit's crying, "Where's the beef?" and the place is dead as Heaven on a Saturday night*

*And the moon is swimming naked And my very close companion
and the summer night is fragrant gets me fumbling gets me laughing
with a mighty expectation of relief she's a hundred but she's wearing something tight
So we struggle and we stagger and I lift my glass to the Awful Truth
down the snakes and up the ladder which you can't reveal to the Ears of Youth
to the tower where the blessed hours chime except to say it isn't worth a dime
and I swear it happened just like this: And the whole damn place goes crazy twice
a sigh, a cry, a hungry kiss and it's once for the devil and once for Christ
the Gates of Love they budged an inch but the Boss don't like these dizzy heights
I can't say much has happened since we're busted in the blinding lights,
but CLOSING TIME busted in the blinding lights*

of CLOSING TIME

Closing Time (from "The Future" 1992)

Leonard Cohen

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jP7pN_3_JQI

06/12/16

Trial by Greek Bank

Heavy rainstorms accompanied by now familiar bouts of thunder and lightning have curtailed Dad's sea swimming. Snow has fallen on Mount Taygetos across the gulf. It looks like his last swim of the year might have taken place last week on the western coast at Cow's Belly Beach. Doesn't sound much of a place, does it? In Greek it's *Voidokilia*. It is suggested somewhat tententiously in the guide books that this beach is Homer's "sandy Pylos" where Telemachus was welcomed by King Nestor when searching for his father, Odysseus. Anyway, when you see the photograph you'll appreciate why in September 2014 The Times rated it "One of the Best Beaches in the World." No kidding.



Voidokilia Beach

It takes a bit of finding, though the locals know it well enough and no doubt it is swarming in July and August. Hidden behind dunes, it slopes gently down to sandy, lake-like water, almost too shallow, not at all cold for late November. When Mum and Dad visited it, a lone fishing boat sat serenely at anchor. The fisherman hailed them with a friendly "Yaaaa" and resumed his silent reverie. Dad swam virtually the full circuit of about 1000 metres and returned to find Mum taking selfies galore with the bay's magical beauty as her background. A "must see" for their visitors next year.

As the nights have drawn in, they have been involved in a few evening cultural events. The novelist, Victoria Hislop, who is undoubtedly as colossal a philhellene as Dad, visited Kalamata recently to promote her new novel, "Cartes Postales from Greece." It is set in the Peloponnese and is her first novel to have a completely contemporary setting. The event was organised by Victoria's Greek publisher and involved her reading extracts and being interviewed by a TV journalist. She spoke impressively for an hour-and-a-half almost entirely in Greek, answering questions about this book and about her writing career in general with admirable fluency. The audience were virtually all Greeks. Dad had a chat with her afterwards and got her to sign his copy.

She is more famous and well-loved in Greece than in Britain because she committed the rights of her first novel “The Island”, which featured the leper colony on Spinalonga in Crete, to a Greek TV channel rather than to an international film production company. The channel, MEGA, made a 26-part TV serial from the book and thus secured her popular reputation amongst Greeks. She spoke movingly about the friendship which had developed between her and a former leprosy sufferer, Manoli, who became chief advisor and consultant on the TV production and to whom she dedicated the series. She also made some very favourable comments about the charms of Kalamata. A good diplomat as well as a successful novelist.



Oh, look, it's Daniel Craig. No it isn't. It's Old Wardrobe emerging from the waters of Cow's Belly Bay

A few days later they accompanied Bob and Fotine to the Koroni Festival to hear a performance by their son Yannis of “Baroque Musical Jewels of the 18th Century.” Yannis had answered a late call to play with the recorder player and baroque specialist, Anastase Demetriades. On the piano of course, since harpsichords and cembalos are in short supply in this small seaside town. The recital comprised sonatas and partitas by Loeillet de Gant (Dad: “Who he?”), Telemann, Handel and Scarlatti. Consummate as Demetriades was, the highlight of the programme was Yannis' solo of a Scarlatti sonata. In his final year studying music at Thessaloniki University, he is an extremely talented pianist, with a realist ambition of developing a professional career, probably abroad. Mum and Dad are looking forward to listening to him again soon in concert in Kalamata. Meanwhile, if they get to Thessaloniki, he has promised to take them to hear some decent live *rembetika*, Dad's favourite music, often referred to as Greek blues.

Dad has been renewing a long-standing acquaintance with the Greek banking system. As in the old days much stamina and patience is required. Do not expect a short visit to a Greek bank. They are much more high-tech nowadays of course, with high security entrances and exits. They also have a ticketing system, like the UK supermarket delicatessens, designed for... fair play and orderliness.

His first encounter required persistence and the use of logic. Picture the scene at the Bank of Piraeus,

Messini. Dad gets ticket 112 when the number being dealt with at the counter is 57. His ticket says, "Average waiting time 42 minutes." No change there then from the Seventies. "At least you can go off and do your shopping and if you time it right you don't have to queue too long when you come back," remarks Dad optimistically.

He has come in with a 200€ note which he wants to change into smaller denominations, since all Greek shopkeepers hate receiving large notes and are always short of change. Forty-five minutes later the golden moment for ticket 112 has arrived. Dad presents the crisp new note and in impeccable Greek politely asks the cashier to change it into smaller units.

"Do you have an account with this bank?" asks the weary-looking clerk.

"I'm afraid not."

"Then, sir, we cannot change it."

"Why is that?"

And for the first of many occasions to come, the dreaded phrase is uttered: "*Capital controls*." Dad will soon discover that this is the Greek banks' equivalent of "Computer says No."

"But I brought it in from England with me."

The cashier shrugs. He is hoping that Dad will slink away in defeat so that he can invite Number 113 to enjoy a similar low level of customer service.

Dad persists, "I'm only trying to help the local shopkeepers here. You know they don't like big notes."

The cashier examines the note carefully, perusing its freshly-minted newness with suspicion, "Where did you get it from?"

Resisting the strong temptation to reply "in a laundry" Dad explains the bleedin' obvious, "A British bank. I exchanged it from pounds sterling before I came to Greece."

The cashier is thinking, "This *xenos* (Johnny Foreigner) isn't going to go away." Without a further word, he hauls himself out of his chair and goes to the main till, returning with two 50€s and five 20€s.

"Thank you very much indeed." Result!

Moral 1: Beware of "*capital controls*" (about which the rules seem to change every day) being used as an easy pretext for unnecessary refusals.

Moral 2: Definitely don't take No for an answer in Greece.

The National Bank of Greece, also in Messini, is the scene for Dad's next banking adventure. He wants to open a current account, a process he knows will be fraught with all the difficulties posed by γραφειοκρατία, *graphiokratia*, bureaucracy. He pre-arms himself with all the documents he can think of which might be demanded of him: passport, Greek tax number (A.F.M.), proof of Greek address, proof of UK address, evidence of funds in UK bank account, Greek utilities bill, blood type. OK, not the last one. He knows that an essential element in Greek bureaucracy will be to give his father's first name. It appears on all official documents. Thomas, OK?

As they enter the bank, Dad is pessimistic. "It's long odds that I'll leave here today with a National Bank of Greece current account passbook." He was wrong. He got the passbook and it only took him three hours of his life. Here's what happened.

Hour 1: Dad gets ticket 77 as number 21 is being catered for. Mum notices that a lady sitting at a separate desk seems to be dealing with account queries and updating passbooks. It seems unlikely that a counter clerk will open a new account, so Dad abandons the wait for his number and joins the old-fashioned queue for Kyria Sotiria, the desk lady. She is a plumpish, bespectacled blonde in her forties, who works calmly at her own pace despite constant interruptions from impatient customers.

At the end of Dad's first hour of queueing, they are graciously received by Kyria Sotiria. "I am English and I live in Chrani. I would like to open an account in this branch." A reasonable opening gambit, you might think. "That is not possible for foreigners," she replies. "Why not?" ventures Dad, with sinking heart and fast-wilting documents. Kyria Sotiria foolishly attempts the coup-de-grâce far too early, "*Capital controls*." Computer says No, eh? After an hour's wait, Dad definitely won't be settling for rejection after a mere 30-second skirmish. "So, I've come to live in Greece for ever and I have to deal in cash for the rest of my life?" Kyria Sotiria gazes at Dad curiously and looks as if she'd like to retort, "Are you mad, coming to live in Greece for ever?" Instead, knowing she needs to shift this *xenos* before he settles, she now slopes the shoulder with all the skill of a professional underling. "You must go upstairs to see the Manager."

Hour 2: Kyrios Nicolaos Kalapothakis resides in a quiet and spacious office on the first floor, well-insulated from the barely suppressed chaos below. He is a jovial middle-aged man, mustachioed and overweight. Dad explains his predicament, towards which Kyrios Nicolaos is wholly sympathetic. He is a specialist in the open double-handed gesture much favoured by the Greeks, as if he were blessing you like The Pope doing his Urbi et Orbi routine. It means, "I am in complete and utter sympathy with you but my hands are tied. We are all trapped by the inexorable Fates of Bureaucracy and we must ever endure our unending pain together in this Vale of Tears," kind of stuff. Dad tries another angle, "The local police tell me there's a new rule. I need to have a Greek bank account to get a Resident's Permit. If I stay here for more than six months and I don't have a Permit I'm technically breaking the law and can be fined. How can any foreigners come to live in Greece in these circumstances?"

Kyrios Nicolaos studies all Dad's documents with painstaking diligence and then looks up at him conspiratorially. "Well, there is a way." Yes? "You have to transfer at least 10,000 euros from abroad into the new account. This will meet the current requirements of *capital controls*." Completely unfazed and with estimable poise, Dad plays his ace of trumps, "OK, I can do that today." Forthwith, KN telephones KS and instructs her to open KJW's new account as normal when he comes down to see her again.

This productive ten-minute meeting with the Manager is followed by a 50-minute wait in Kyria Sotiria's queue. She is a popular lady today. Meanwhile the noise level on the ground floor continues to rise as more or less fifty punters' disgruntlement at the chronic delays increases.

Hour 3: At last it's Mum and Dad's turn to sit down again with Kyria Sotiria. It will take the whole of the third hour to open the account. The process, involving a great deal of paperwork, is interrupted by: printer jams, printer running out of paper, stapler jams, stapler running out of staples, much rummaging in drawers unearthing no more staples, KS receiving numerous personal calls on her mobile. These concern her forthcoming hairdresser's appointment, what she needs to buy in the shops for dinner tonight and why her mother is such a difficult woman. At one point a private package arrives which needs to be signed and paid for, ergo much rummaging by KS in her handbag for money.

All this is done with customers in the queue leaning closer and closer to the desk to ascertain Dad's private business more precisely. Finally the general level of shouting and complaining causes KS, hitherto a paradigm of grace under pressure, to blurt out, "Όχι καφενείο. Ησυχία, σας παρακαλώ! This

isn't a cafe. Quiet please!" In the end, Dad signs seventeen pieces of paper, pays 100 euros into his new account and walks out with his shiny new passbook. What about the requirement to deposit 10,000€, I hear you ask? Never mentioned once by KS... Incidentally, English readers, the Greek for capital controls is *capital controls*... Why indeed should they take linguistic possession of such an abomination?

At this point I have to share a small dilemma. James's story will increasingly allude to people who are still alive, perhaps including you. On the one hand I want to tell the truth; on the other, one doesn't want to give offence even at the expense of uproarious entertainment. I could easily change their names to protect the guilty. Curled up on the sofa and luxuriating in the sun for hours on end I have been able to give the matter much thought. I have come to the conclusion that I shall generally use first names only, which may or may not be authentic. See you in court!

In 1952 Thomas moved to a new job as a management consultant with Urwick Orr & Partners in their north-west division. This was a relatively modern profession, of which Colonel Lyndall Urwick was a notable pioneer with a significant reputation as a British thinker on management and administration. He was for example the first writer to apply the concept of "span of control" formally to the business environment.

Specialising in sales and marketing, Thomas would be supporting clients in the Liverpool and Manchester area. This brought the family to Altrincham, a southern outpost but not yet a suburb of Britain's second biggest city. Thomas wanted to live in adjacent and posher Hale, but he was overruled by his wife who wanted her mother to be nearer the shops. This was only one of many mother-in-law battles he fought and lost in the post-war era. So they moved into 11 Willow Tree Road, almost in Hale but not quite. Hale Cinema was at the end of the road where the children were to spend many a happy Saturday afternoon at the weekly matinee shows.

Grandma Coulehan took over the bedroom at the front of the four-bedroomed, detached house overlooking the bowling green opposite. She was able to enjoy watching the bowls and more importantly keep tabs on all the comings and goings, including what time Thomas got home at night. She was a formidable 82-year old by now, similar in appearance to the grandma in the Giles cartoons, but in her day she had been the youngest primary school headmistress in Yorkshire. She had a key influence on James' education in his formative years, but more about Grandma in later episodes.

James was sent to Loreto Convent School, which accepted boys only in the first couple of years. He remembers his first teacher, Miss Shortall, who was very tall and not short at all. There were six boys in a class of about 30. Five of them including James were regularly the top five pupils. Then came all the girls, after which at the bottom of the class was David. His salvation from being bullied for stupidity was a beautiful elder sister called Annette. The convent school was a carefree and joyful place where James remembers some lusty singing of "All Things Bright and Beautiful, The Lord God Made Them All."

Unfortunately, as well as the bright and beautiful things, He also made the Irish Christian Brothers, for whose brutality James was utterly unprepared when the time came to leave Loreto and proceed as an eight-year-old to St Ambrose College, Hale Barns.

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 (King James Bible version)

30/12/16

Zimbabwe Interlude

Before they went away on their African trip, Mum and Dad accompanied Bob and Fotine to the olive-pressing factory. At this time of year, as the thousands of sacks of all the members of the co-operative arrive without respite, the work continues 24 hours a day seven days a week. I've included a few photographs showing the cold-press process of turning olives into green liquid gold.



First a sack of olives is poured through a grill The olives are conveyed towards their to separate out the larger twigs. final separation from smaller detritus.



The olives are washed via a roller before entering
The oil from the first press is collected

the enclosed pressing machine (not shown). in containers below the output funnel.

The oil that emerges from the pressing is surprisingly thick and, from the pressing that Mum and Dad witnessed, of the highest quality. They are looking forward to the day when they can watch fruit from their own trees being processed to produce the highly-prized Huile de Doulapas.

They also went with Bob to hand-pick wild olives. Then they set about soaking them, changing the water daily for four days before marinating them in brine and other ingredients (Fotine's mother's recipe). They should be ready to eat by next April.

Their stay in Zimbabwe was short but packed with activity. On arrival at Harare Airport after a long, tiring but uneventful flight via Doha and Johannesburg, they were met by a bewildering number of Mum's extended family including her parents and most importantly for Dad her children, Edith and Edwin. Although he had got to know them at a distance through Skype, WhatsApp and phone calls this was their first meeting in the flesh. A much-anticipated, significant but easy moment for all three of them. Also present was Carol, Mum's niece and her ward from the time her mother, Mum's sister, died. In January she will start her degree course in Chemical Engineering at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. After protracted expressions of greeting all round, and two stops at houses on the way, they dined with the family at Auntie Deliwe's. The gifts from Greece, freshly pressed olive oil and local honey, were very well-received. After this extended getting-to-know-you session they were driven with hair-raising aplomb by Deliwe to cousin Brian's brand-new duplex in the quiet residential district of Greendale, which would be their base whilst in Harare.

Virtually all the roads in the city have craters for potholes, so the driving skill of weaving and zigzagging even in the face of on-coming traffic is essential. Another prerequisite for driving at night is the ability to spot and avoid pedestrians on the road and cyclists with no lights. The only roads Dad saw without any potholes were the highway from the airport into town and the avenue from there to Mugabe's residence. Necessary for a quick getaway, perhaps. Hopefully very soon.

Their first official engagement involved a visit to the Greek Embassy to finalise the tourist visas for Edith and Edwin to come to Greece for the Christmas holidays. The Greek Ambassador, Leonidas Kontovounesios, had specifically asked to meet Mum and Dad, following an unworldly exchange of e-mails a month or so before. The lady responsible for issuing visas had been somewhat reluctant to agree to Dad's requests on behalf of his step-children, so he had engaged in a correspondence

directly with The Top Man. Here's a verbatim quote from the Ambassador's reply, which shows how Dad clinched the visas and made yet another Greek friend:

Dear Mr Wardrobe,

I have to congratulate you for your Greek on two counts regarding my surname.

a. You use the correct vocative "Κοντοβουνήσιο" for surnames. Most Greeks today would have said "Κοντοβουνήσιε".

b. You spell it correctly with "η". Most people would have spelt it "Κοντοβουνίσιε," which is wrong, as I am -βουνήσιος and not -ίσιος.

More seriously, of course we will grant a visa I have already diarised you for Friday the 9th of December and will try not to miss our appointment myself.

I look forward to meeting you.

Kind regards,

Leonidas

Result or what? I was yawning with boredom at this point and thinking of a slow forty winks on the computer chair when Dad insisted that I report this coup and also add his comment, "Please tell my scoffing friends that extreme grammatical pedantry, which I prefer to call linguistic exactitude, sometimes pays off tenfold..." So I have.

The Embassy of Greece, which doubles up as the Ambassador's Residence, is an attractive, white-stuccoed mansion tucked away in its own grounds at the end of a cul-de-sac in the secluded, back-water district of Avondale, overlooking Royal Harare Golf Club. Most of the embassies are sign-posted off its main avenue, which is lined with magnificent purple-flowered jacaranda trees. An enormous, high-walled, fortress-like structure reveals itself as the embassy of the new colonialists of Zimbabwe, The People's Republic of China. One sign splendidly indicates the way towards "The Embassy of Yugoslavia." The potholes in this area are relatively small, only about two feet in diameter and four inches deep.

Leonidas turned out to be a charming if somewhat talkative host who had connections in Kalamata and a number of acquaintances in common with Dad, including two former Consul Generals from London in the Nineties, Alkiviadis Karokis and George Kostoulas. More about the maverick Kostoulas much later, folks, but suffice it to say here that he was Leonidas' first boss in the Foreign Service. Delicious Greek coffee and γλυκά, sweets, were served, whilst his wife Katerina, the Attaché, stood in for the absent visa lady and completed the necessary requirements, despite numerous interruptions owing to power cuts, an endemic problem. Discussions ranged from the merits of the highly-rated Hellenic School of Harare to the annual training programme of Zimbabwe Armed Forces officers in Greece. Nowadays you can measure the number of expatriate Greeks remaining in the country in the hundreds, their forebears having come almost exclusively from either Cephallonia or Cyprus.



Edith, Leonidas, Katerina, Dad, Mum and Edwin outside the Embassy of Greece

Leonidas and Katerina have been in post for three years and are proud of the restorative work they have done on the house and gardens, despite little financial support from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally, personal contact details were exchanged with a view to meeting up again in either Harare or Greece.

Next day the wedding of Mum's sister, Deliwe, and Malven went off without a hitch. As with all the best weddings there was much jollification, plenty of food and drink and dancing, here African-style. Dad was particularly taken with Mum's talents in traditional Zimbabwean dance which involves an inordinate amount of bottom wriggling and leg movement off the ground. He did not attempt to participate. Instead he took the opportunity to get to know the family better.

One of Mum's brothers, Mugove, is qualified in agricultural management and he was interested in the possibility of introducing olive-growing into Zimbabwe. At the moment olive oil, whether Greek or otherwise, is imported from South Africa and there are severe restrictions on the import of foodstuffs. (Even Leonidas is having difficulty getting his olive oil supplies in. "You need a bigger diplomatic bag," advised Dad.) Since olives are now Dad's specialist subject, he was able to answer most if not all of Mugove's pertinent questions. Overall it was a splendid day on which even the heavy seasonal rains stayed away.



Some of Mum's extended family, including her parents on the left

Then it was off on a 13-hour road trip to Victoria Falls via Bulawayo, taking care to avoid the cattle, goats and donkeys grazing freely by the side of the main roads. Virtually all tourists to the Falls fly in and fly out again without seeing what is really going on in Harare and in the country generally. This long car journey was a real eye-opener for Dad. Much of what he observed made him angry. For example, in the vast and fertile farmland region south of Harare towards the town of Gweru, he saw thousands of acres of prime agricultural land abandoned and uncultivated. No money for seed. He was shocked by someone's sick joke about the farmers, "They are farming grass."

Equally outrageous were the thirty-two police road blocks they encountered on this round trip. They were stopped at eight, "arrested" at three and fined once (15 US\$) for only having one emergency triangle in the boot instead of two. These blocks, usually set up on the main roads and at junctions a few kilometres either side of all population centres, purport to be vehicle checks, but Dad soon realised their more sinister purpose. The locals well understand that the police levy "fines" on drivers on virtually any pretext in order to line their own pockets. But for Dad this is more than merely legitimised corruption. "Bear in mind that Zimbabwe is a police state and under such a system the police need to be highly visible at all times," he observed bleakly. "What better way to intimidate and constantly remind the populace of their overbearing presence than this?" He could not envisage a more telling example of how Mugabe's vile dictatorship controls the people, though promoting poverty and starvation through official policy works well too here, as in North Korea.

The economic situation is indeed dire, as widely reported in the international press, and now made even worse by the recent introduction of bond notes. This is a cynical mechanism whereby you print notes without officially needing to issue, and be responsible for, your own national currency. Everyone is desperate for US dollars, however disgustingly grubby the ones in circulation have now become. Everywhere there are long queues outside banks. Bartering goods and possessions is a way of life.

Cash shortages have driven the more enterprising to new stratagem. Twice in supermarkets, Dad was approached by locals who offered to pay for all his groceries with their bank cards. Dad would then give them the equivalent in cash dollars. Meanwhile, Mugabe is reliably reported to have taken 6 million US\$ with him on his month-long Christmas holidays to Singapore.

“The saving grace of Zimbabwe are the people,” continues Dad more positively. “They remain friendly and welcoming, despite their hardships. Perhaps their natural fatalism and acceptance of their lot allows the oligarchy to get away with more than another, angrier population would, but you have to admire their undaunted resilience. And I always felt perfectly safe, even when strolling in the midst of very poor areas in Harare, where the crowds of street traders and pedestrians were invariably cheerful and helpful. In ironic contrast, the well-heeled Christmas shoppers in the boutiques of the white middle-class ghetto of Borrowdale looked wary and miserable, as if knowing in their hearts that it is no longer possible to recreate Surrey in southern Africa but still trying to nonetheless.”

On a happier note Victoria Falls, or Mosi-oa-Tunya, *the smoke that thunders*, is truly spectacular. It is rightly acclaimed as one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. The 1.7 kilometre wide, 108 metres high waterfall is best seen during the Zambezi River's flood season from February to May. Although Mum, Dad and the three youngsters came in a low-water month, there are benefits to this period. Firstly, less spray makes for more comfortable viewing; secondly, it is possible to see the foot of the falls and most of its face at this time of year. The natural environment of the rain forest created by the unceasing mist enhances the dramatic and breath-taking display. What must David Livingstone's reaction have been when he first came upon this remarkable place on 17th November 1855? He later wrote, “No one can imagine the beauty of the view from anything witnessed in England. It had never been seen before by European eyes; but scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.”

As well as Wardrobes, Chiyangwas, a group of Swedes and possibly some angels, guess what? There was a party of eighteen Greeks at the Falls that day. They get everywhere, don't they? Mum overheard two ladies talking, recognised the language as Greek and started chatting with them. Dad joined in and before you could say *mikros kosmos*, Efi and Eleni had invited them to dinner in Kifissia...

A “Sunset Cruise” on the Zambezi ensued, at which hippos, crocodiles, waterbucks and a variety of wildfowl were observed, but not a glimmer of sunset. Dud weather, as they say in the RAF, but still a relaxing enough excursion with plenty of free booze.

The final highlight was a visit to a notable man-made structure. Outstandingly beautiful in the elegance of its early twentieth-century colonial architecture, the Victoria Falls Hotel was built in 1904 and remains by far the best hotel in Zimbabwe. The nightly room rate was too expensive for Dad's party of five to take up residence there, but they did enjoy an excellent buffet dinner at one of its restaurants, Jungle Junction. Dad ate grilled crocodile tail, venturing “It tastes like chicken,” as he prodded it around his plate, half-expecting it to jump up and bite him. Mum and Dad have vowed to stay here if and when they return.

On this trip, much to the amusement of the young 'uns, Dad became rather attached to Zimbabwean pop music, listening to all the big names such as Tocky Vibes (yes, really), Killer T, Jah Prayzah, Winky D and Freeman. He already knew the work of the nation's treasure, the now elderly Oliver Mutukudzi, whom Mum has seen in concert in the UK quite recently. Dad was amused to see a newspaper hoarding in Harare proclaiming “Tuku – I'm not dead.” “On the other hand,” quips Dad, “He's so old he may not have realised yet that he is actually dead.” The best US-influenced African music has great energy and invention. Dad's current earworm is Ammara Brown's Mukoko (*Honeycomb*), which has an

irresistible high-tempo urgency to it. Check it out at <https://www.google.gr/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=mukoko%20youtube> "There's some great booty-shaking on the video too," comments Dad.

So, after a full-on yet rewarding nine days they returned to Greece, accompanied by Edith and Edwin. Mum's children were stepping into an aeroplane for the first time in their lives.

Back in Messinia we had a quiet time while Mum and Dad were away. Too quiet for Minnie actually. She disappeared after breakfast two days before they were due to return and still hadn't come home when they got back to Chrani. After a fretful night Dad tracked her down the next morning with Bob's help. She had by now spent three nights in the wild but in the end they located her surprisingly quickly in the furthest and most inaccessible part of the creek beyond the big house.

First contact was made when they heard some plaintive miaowing which became gradually louder in response to Dad's calls. Then she came up to him crying like a "big softie," reported Lulu who happened to be outside duffing up *The Male* at the time. The absconder was cradled home like a baby lamb by Daddikins. Pathetic, really, you might say, but we four have been together for over eleven years now. Once back indoors my twitchy twin wolfed down a whole pouch of food in about twenty seconds and slept contentedly on her favourite sofa for the rest of the day. Crisis over. "She's lost weight," noted Mum. "Me too, with all the stress she's caused me," said a very relieved Dad. Since then she's stayed indoors most of the time and seems to have overcome her fear of whatever set off this latest bout of bolting.

Anyway, I have a much more unlikely if rather bizarre story, thankfully with a happy ending, to tell you about the Return of a Beloved Pet. You may recall from my second blog that Bob and Fotine's dog, Zouzou, disappeared a few days after we arrived in September and she never returned. Fotine feared that she had gone for ever and was probably dead. Bob thought she might have been taken by someone who fancied a good-looking hunting dog, since Zouzou had a bad habit of roaming as far as the main road. They searched high and low throughout the village, but found not a trace.

Three months passed. Fotine once said to Dad that everybody gets to know everything in a village like Chrani. One day a local told her that she thought she had seen a dog matching Zouzou's description in a fenced field up in the hills. This isolated piece of land, featuring a barn but no house, belongs to a widow whom Bob diplomatically describes as "having psychological problems." Fotine is less polite about "the mad woman." They made a couple of visits to the place and although there were six dogs, numerous cats and a dozen chickens enclosed behind a high fence, there was no sign of their favourite hound. A few days later Fotine made yet another drive past and lo! there was an emaciated and sorry-looking Zouzou imprisoned behind the fence. She was excitedly wagging her tail and crying to see her Mum, who rushed home to fetch Bob. They quickly returned with all necessary equipment to release their animal from captivity, by force if necessary. As it turned out, Bob was able to stretch over a gap in the fence and easily lift Zouzou out. There was no sign of any human presence in the area, so the rescue was effected without further ado.

A very felicitous outcome, though what lies behind this random abduction remains a mystery. Meanwhile, Zouzou is putting on weight, sports a pretty new collar and is a happy dog again. As for the suspected captor, the black-clad Cruella De Vil? "Θα δούμε, we shall see," says Fotine ominously. In the meantime, me and my sisters are steering well clear of all widow women.

Edith and Edwin have enjoyed their first overseas adventure and are due to return to Harare soon.

They clearly like Greece, despite the “cold” weather. Their pleasure at seeing the sea for the first time ever was a joy to behold, as was their splashing around and paddling in it on a sunny 15C Boxing Day at Voidokilia. Dad has promised to teach them to swim when they return in the summer. “But definitely not poofterstroke...” he adds firmly. Poofterstroke is his Aussie friend Rob's term for breaststroke.

So ends our first four months in Chrani.

“How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.

How long? Not long, because you shall reap what you sow.

How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Extract from “Our God Is Marching On!” speech, 25th March 1965

Martin Luther King

1

19/01/17

Greek Winter



I am helped into position for resumption of my authorial duties

Dad never warned us about the severity of the Greek winter! He wishes me to report that he is “having difficulty getting the cats out of the house at all.” We have sensibly gone into the feline version of deep hibernation, which means sleeping in front of the wood fire for most of the day and all of the night. I've found it quite difficult to raise the energy to get back to my blogging, but here I am once again. I'm heartened by the old expression, “You can teach a interesting cat to write, but you can't teach a boring cat to be interesting.” True for humans too. My sisters have also become quite lazy. Lulu got quite stroppy with Dad the other day when he tried to push her out for our daily “walk.” Apart from the odd food raid by The Male, the Cat Wars have ceased until the better weather arrives. A bit like ancient two-legged warfare which was also seasonal. At the cost of personal experience I now understand why the ancient Greeks never campaigned in the winter. Sensible chaps.

Alerted no doubt by some last-item BBC news coverage, friends from the UK have been sending vaguely irritating messages of sympathy, using phrases such as “It's positively balmy here,” “Quite spring-like,” “Come home all is forgiven,” “Why not recant and spend the winter in England?” Dad retorts magnanimously, “I'm not rising to it. They are clearly suffering from green-eyed envy and I take pride in forgiving the lot of them.” But when the rain is lashing down with particular ferocity, he does revert somewhat to type, “Those bastards will still be in their winter long johns next month when I'm basking in the sunshine...”

So, what's been going on? For most of the past month the weather has been either very cold or very wet. Christmas Day and Boxing Day were both a sunny 15°C, but then the trouble started. The Greek media was obsessed with the amount of snow that fell in the week between Christmas and New Year. Their

main focus was on Athens and the surrounding areas, but plenty fell in many other regions, including Crete and the central Peloponnese. (News reporting is as Athenocentric here as it is Londonocentric in the UK, though in its defence nearly half the population of Greece lives in greater Athens.) More snowfalls recently have cut off hospitals and main roads, but Messinia has not been affected at all. The mountains opposite are looking quite alpine, their white peaks acquiring an exquisitely pink hue just before sunset. On the rainy days of course they are invisible across the gulf.



The nearest snow we've had has been on the mountains across the water

After a four-day lull from New Year's Eve, the snows came back with a vengeance in northern Greece and, more unusually, in the Sporades and other islands. A metre's depth of snow was recorded in Skopelos and Alonissos, with up to two metres in Evia. A state of emergency was declared on these three Aegean islands. Less than an hour's drive from Athens in Attica and on Lesbos the situation has become increasingly desperate for the refugees in the camps. There are in all about 60,000 stranded in Greece and 10,000 of them are living in tents. In the end the Greek navy sent a warship to Lesbos to take some on board for shelter, but only a few hundred. The shocking TV images of dilapidated, snow-covered tents have highlighted what is a chronically miserable situation here at the best of times. The attitude of the rest of the world, including the EU, is that these refugees are Greece's problem but of course the Greeks lack the resources and the organisation to solve this extra crisis. Meanwhile, the Big Freeze continues in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, where the refugees who managed to get out of Greece are in difficulties with the weather too.

The locals are all saying that winter is not usually as cold as this year. Dad is sceptical and says that he will reserve judgement on Greek winters until he's lived through two or three. He admits that in all his fifty or more lifetime visits to Greece, he had never been here in the months of December or January. Mum keeps reminding him that it's still better than English weather. Dad mutters about "wishful thinking on the part of the natives." In my opinion he is spending far too much time comparing the

global positioning of Liphook and Chrani and muttering about azimuths and zenith angles, making calculations as if he knew something about meteorology and astronomy, or even physics. Which he doesn't. "There is a difference of about 15° in the respective latitudes," he opines, "which means the maximum solar elevation of the sun is also about 15° degrees higher in Chrani. So why isn't it warmer?" Well actually, Dad, on the sunny days, it is. If I may use less technical language, unfortunately the sun hasn't got his hat on and isn't coming out to play too much at the moment.

As the weather deteriorated the highly competitive national TV stations became heavily involved in the escalation of "worstness." To begin with, they proclaimed that it was the worst winter for nine years, then fifteen years, then twenty-five years and finally since the '60s. The temperatures were -5°C, then -12°C, then -18°C and the winner was -20°C somewhere in the northern wastes of Thrace or Macedonia, probably at an ungodly 4.00 am. The sanest and least hysterical view according to Dad is expressed by Vangelis, his car rental man, who lived in Sweden for many years. "For Greece as a whole there have been two short but exceptionally severe cold spells. As for Messinia, yes, it's colder than normal this year. No snow, but it's got down to zero degrees Celsius on a few nights. As for the heavy rainfall..... I'm afraid this is normal!" Oh dear.

Winter is also the Hunting Season in Greece. For us this means being woken up from our afternoon nap almost every day an hour or so before dusk by the loud noise of gunshots. Bird shooting seems to be as popular a hobby in this area as elsewhere in the country. Generally the Greeks will shoot indiscriminately at any bird that flies into view. Recent official reports state that of the 345 species of birds assessed in Greece 32% of these species are being killed illegally in significant numbers. This includes for example turtle doves, golden orioles, raptors, herons and pelicans. The Ionian islanders in particular enjoy killing wild birds in excess during the spring migration. Birds which are exhausted after their long journey from sub-Saharan Africa are shot in their thousands by hunters in a tradition which has been going on for many decades.

As far as our Chranians are concerned, the targets seem to be more the small songbirds, which are plentiful in the trees around here. There is an old man in his late eighties, Mihalis, who shoots in the olive groves every day behind and in front of our house. The only quiet afternoon we have had recently was when he went to the funeral of his younger brother, aged 84. He wears thick pebble glasses and is so blind that most of our sparrows, tits and wagtails have to be extremely unlucky to be shot by him. In fact, when he gets too close to our boundary wall Fotine has to shout at him, "Don't kill us, for God's sake!" I guess it was him shooting an hour after dark yesterday.

When he does manage to down something, he can't find it for collection, so guess what? I told you I thought Bella was a clever cat, but I didn't understand at first why she was walking past our place so frequently these days with a bird in her mouth. She's cottoned on to the fact that there are free bird-bodies in the fields. Good on you, but don't get shot by Mister Magoo's 12-bore, Bella. I'm ashamed to admit that we three sisters are too well-fed at home to be bothered even with such easy prey. So the bird-shooting season, which doesn't officially end until 28th February, is just a noisy nuisance for us all, Dad included. Does anyone sell earplugs for cats?

We've had our first trip out in the cages since the Big Odyssey to Greece in early September. We went to Messini for our annual check-ups and vaccinations. Our new vet, Costas, is young, bearded and very enthusiastic (he even offers home visits). His English is poor, so most of the accompanying discussion took place in Greek. There was one bizarre linguistic hiccup, however. Early on, before the injections (and I was first up on the table, so I saw all this at first hand), Dad asked if Costas could also administer anti-worming tablets. The vet nodded then asked what sounded like "rabbits? rabbits?..." Dad was

confused, but assumed “rabbits?” must be a question about our hunting habits and therefore the need for worming treatment. To make absolutely sure he had understood properly, Dad did his well-remembered impersonation of Bugs Bunny, bent forefingers to ears and top teeth protruding over bottom lip. I thought for a moment that he was going to start hopping up and down. The horrified look on both Mum's and Costas' faces was priceless. Then Dad realised, too late, that Costas had been saying “rabies? rabies?” but with a truncated “a” sound (like “rabbies?”). He was merely enquiring whether we needed anti-rabies boosters as well. Rooted to the spot in deepest embarrassment Dad slowly lowered his fingers and drew back his upper incisors. Afterwards he commented to Mum, “He probably thought I'd been partaking of illicit substances. At least I didn't make it worse by chewing a carrot and saying, “What's Up , Doc?” “

Talking of dope, Messinia isn't famous just for its olives. It is well-known throughout Greece for the quality of its marijuana. The authorities estimate that annual production of the drug nationally is somewhat over 80 tons. So Greece is not a significant drug-producing country and marijuana is its only home-grown illegal product. Maintaining the long tradition of hashish production dating back to Ottoman times, Crete and the Peloponnese are the top growing regions. The holy grail for potheads though is the Kalamata red seed. One of Dad's friends, an Athenian in her fifties who now lives in the Aegean, gets all her cannabis supplies from a Messinian dealer. She tells an amusing story that hit the press here a few years ago.

One warm summer's night a forest fire, not an uncommon occurrence in Greece, started blazing on a hill near Pylos in western Messinia. Usually people retreat from these fires as fast as they can, seeking safety out of reach of the all-consuming flames. Not so on this occasion. It was reported that dozens of trucks and 4x4s were seen heading up the hill *towards* the fire as fast as they could go. It was the cannabis farmers desperately trying to rescue their plants from destruction. This hill offers the perfect growing conditions for marijuana and its cultivation on the slopes was widespread. It is not recorded how successful the growers were in saving their precious crops.

Dad has expressed some doubts about whether I should have included this, which I regard as an interesting topic. I miaowed at him for a logical explanation and finally he confessed, “OK, Mick, the truth is that there are some of your readers back home who have, shall I say, a “habit” and much as I love all my friends I don't fancy them upping sticks and moving here permanently in the expectation that this is a dopehead's paradise.” Appealing to his classicist's better nature, I reminded him that some historians think the cult of Dionysus in ancient Greece involved inhaling marijuana smoke. The idea of the Bacchae being out of their skulls on cannabis leaf made him chuckle. “Ευοί, ευhoι”, he uttered the maenads' frenzied cry. “Are you telling me that Euripides got it wrong? If Pentheus, king of Thebes, had legalised pot he wouldn't have been torn limb from limb by his mother and the other crazy women? Spying on them from a tree didn't help of course. Alright, you can publish...”

Meanwhile in the mid-1950s the Wardrobe family were putting down roots in north Cheshire. Brenda and Tommy (he was always Tom to his friends and Tommy to his wife) sent young James to the local Christian Brothers school for two years as a stopgap. They had always intended him for the prep school of Ampleforth College but failed to get his name down early enough for him to start as an eight-year-old. Many years earlier, perhaps even before he was married, Thomas had visited Ampleforth whilst travelling in North Yorkshire. He vowed to himself that if ever he had a son and if he could afford it this would be his boy's school.

In the meantime as a temporary measure until he was ten, off James went in an offensively garish

maroon and navy striped blazer to suffer the savage and relentless “discipline” of these neighbourhood Irish zealots in their black habits. They each packed a gutta percha strap in their belts and administered summary justice on the spot in the middle of the lesson for any perceived offence. “Not paying attention, Smith? Come to the front.” Whack! “Looking out of the window, Jones? Come up here.” Whack! “Picking your nose, Wardrobe? To my desk now.” Whack! It was not as if they were any good at teaching. Two stories will suffice.

James's academic progress thus far had been extremely promising. Now it went downhill, particularly for a while in arithmetic, a subject in which he had previously excelled. The school could shed no light on the matter, so the formidable ex-headmistress, Granny Coulehan, got involved. She tested her grandson's mathematics with forensic precision, only to discover that he knew all his times tables perfectly, except for 9 x. It turned out that he had been away sick on the day the nine times table had been taught. Perhaps the maths teacher had been too busy whacking to notice. From that day forth Granny monitored James's performance like a hawk. Whenever he was absent from school for measles, chickenpox or any other childish lurgy, he became her pet teaching project. On recovery he went back to school knowing more than the children who had attended every day.

On another occasion he received a poor English report which said that he didn't seem to be able to follow the lesson very well. This intrigued Thomas who took the unusual step of himself going to a parents/teachers evening. He returned in a good mood and reassured his son, “Don't worry, it's not your fault you can't understand the English teacher. I asked him to explain the problem and his brogue was so thick I couldn't understand a damned word he was saying either!”

Only years later did James discover that ironically the school was run not by the *Irish* Christian Brothers at all, but by their De La Salle partners-in-crime. By his own admission he was probably coasting towards the end since he knew he was leaving for boarding school. So the only recorded blip in his academic career wasn't entirely the fault of St Ambrose College. School motto? “Vitam Impendere Vero : To devote your life to the truth,” a quote from Juvenal whose complete epigram isn't so inspiring or complimentary. See below, noting the word *never*. Most famous alumnus? Lonnie Donegan. “Are you skiffing again, Donegan? Come here.” Whack!

Whatever the state of his schooling, it was during this time that he began his informal education about the opposite sex. On one of the innumerable trips to Newcastle to see relations, including Thomas's ailing parents, they visited his youngest brother and family. The daughter was the same age as James, almost to the day. They were sent off to play and the cousin took him to the upstairs bathroom and suggested that they take all their clothes off. She was quite a dominant character and James agreed willingly enough. He remembers that she started running a bath, then she took him into her parents' bed to play “mummies and daddies.” All this before James had even started trainspotting. Nothing transpired beyond fully-clothed-again cuddling but needless to say that afternoon made a lasting impression. There was no repetition and the cousins lost touch in their early teens. Visits to the north-east became less frequent after his paternal grandparents died, in quick succession, in the mid-1950s. Much much later in life James wondered if the young girl's precocity derived from some sexual abuse she might have suffered.

Being devout left-footers Tommy and Brenda always sent their children to Catholic schools. Margaret had been sent to Princethorpe College in Warwickshire when James was pre-school age. This establishment was run by Benedictine nuns. Its Headmistress was Mère Walburga, who from his sister's detailed accounts specialised in psychological rather than physical methods of absolute control. Just the mention of her name gave James the willies for years and he never even met her. Since Margaret was a

spirited and questioning girl, she clashed constantly with the authorities and left in 1956 as soon as she could. She has since pointed out to James that 1956-57 was the only year in their childhood when they were at home together as brother and sister. Which is why you could justifiably say that James was brought up as an only child.

There was much laughter and enjoyment in this pre-boarding period, including the family's presence at a momentous cricketing event in July 1956, but more of that later.

*Ille igitur nunquam direxit brachia contra
Torrentem; nec civis erat, qui libera posset
Verba animi proferre, et vitam impendere vero
He never was that citizen
who would attempt to swim against the torrent;
who would freely deliver his opinion, and devote his life to the truth.*

Satires, book I, Satire IV: Juvenal

30/01/17

11. Putting Down Roots

Want to hear how to get a Residence Permit in Greece? Ever read *Catch 22*? Familiar with the works of Franz Kafka? “Der Process” (*The Trial*), perhaps? Actually, in the end Dad acquired his permit surprisingly easily, once he had found out what documentation is required *at this very moment*. Regulations change so frequently that even so-called experts don't keep up. The guys who know the latest requirements are the local police, since they issue the permits. Being both promiscuous and manipulative, Dad has acquired yet another New Greek Best Friend. There seems to be a different one every week. Theodosis is the head of police in Petalidi. Having done his research and armed with the six required documentary elements, Dad set off to the local nick to get his “yellow card”.

EU expatriates often don't bother to get a residence certificate. They know that they are entitled to live and work in Greece as members of a fellow EU state. They can enter Greece with a valid identity card or passport, regardless of the planned duration of their stay. What they don't know, or they ignore it if they do, is that after 90 days' residence they are technically breaking the law without a permit. Those who don't register are subject to a fine. However it is very rare that this certificate is ever requested. One of the beauties of living here is to discover how often the Greek authorities are just not aware of European Union directives, such as the ones relating to resident-aliens. Apparently some of them don't even know that this certificate exists, but I suspect there's a lot of judicious pretending going on. In many cases they simply expect to be shown a tax identification number (AFM) as proof of residency. Most Greeks know their AFM number by heart.

So why is Dad bothering to get a Residence Permit? Is he worried about the remote possibility of being fined? Is he getting more nervous in his old age? Well, yes, he's definitely more windy in general than when he was a young buck, but there are two specific reasons for it, one practical and immediate, the other precautionary. In the next couple of months Mum and Dad hope to buy a car. In order to complete this transaction he has been informed by Vagelis that he will definitely need a permit. The second reason is Brexit. “Who knows what fucked-up bureaucratic obstructions lie ahead of us over the next five years?”, speculates Dad. “There are four future possibilities, which in order of my preference are: 1. a reciprocal arrangement for expats in Britain and the EU; 2. some sort of visa requirement, whether free or not, whether one-off or renewable; 3. the whole of the EU blows apart at the seams, Grexit finally happens and Britain has to do a separate one-to-one deal with Greece; 4. I'm dead anyway and corpses don't need visas.” So registering his residency might be useful for the second and third eventualities.

The police station in Petalidi is tucked away down an alley through a set of black metal gates off the main street and up some steps. From there a veranda leads to a first floor set of premises above an accountant's office. “I never saw a lock-up,” sniggers Dad gleefully afterwards. I've never understood why he is always fearful of entering police stations. He explains his phobia thus: “For some reason I've always believed that my life consists of a constant stream of illegal acts. Something to do with my Catholic upbringing and being imbued from birth with the guilt of Original Sin? I fight against it of course but I instinctively try to avoid such places as cop shops and more especially churches whenever possible.”

Theodosis is a tall, good-looking man of humorous disposition in his late thirties with a relaxed manner in keeping with his casual “plain clothes.” Dad made his tentative request, explained his problem (see

below) and presented his documents. These comprised: his passport; two additional passport photos; his tax number (AFM); his National Bank of Greece passbook, which has to show a minimum of 4000 euros in his account; his lease agreement as evidence of local address; and a copy of his replacement European Health Insurance Card as proof of adequate medical insurance. Dad thought the last item would be the deal-breaker.

When he was robbed in November on the Athens metro, he lost his EHIC card. He had organised a new one which was sent to his Liphook address. Richard, his helpful neighbour, had scanned and e-mailed a copy to Greece but the original still lay on the kitchen table at New Shepherds Farm. Dad showed the detective the police report of the theft which specifically named the EHIC card as one of the stolen items. He crossed his fingers, convinced that the card itself would be required and a copy unacceptable. Theodosius had listened patiently to Dad's doleful tale and he now inspected the paperwork with due care. He soon looked up at Dad and said, "No problem at all. I can accept the new EHIC copy. The documents are complete, but do you realise that when you return in a couple of days to collect your permit there is a big fee to pay? Δυστυχώς το ποσό είναι πολύ υψηλό, I'm afraid the amount is very high." He tried to keep a straight face but he was laughing even before Dad could ask how much. "Thirty cents for the official stamp!" howled the copper, which started Dad guffawing too. New Best Friends, see. "You've missed a trick there. You could charge 100 euros easy," cackled Dad, tears streaming down his face. "This is Greece," hooted Theodosius. "We're broke and we charge 30 cents while Germany charges 150 euros for the same permit!" Ha, ha! What's the Greek for schadenfreude?

The whole process, including the inevitable form-filling, took less than half-an-hour. The upshot was that Dad returned the following week, paid his paltry fee and collected his five-year permit. When it expires and provided he has paid all his taxes he can apply for a "blue card" which is valid indefinitely. Next stop the second-hand car dealers...

Some of you have been asking about the standard of Greek drivers. Dad has been driving in Greece since the early '70s and is well aware of their idiosyncrasies. In the Mediterranean way they take more risks when it comes to overtaking, so you have to be aware of the need to take evasive action occasionally in the face of an on-coming overtaker. Dad drives quite slowly. He asserts proudly, "In the six weeks since September in which I've hired a car, I've overtaken about 2% of the number of vehicles that have overtaken me." He likes to shout with ironic relish, "Go on, my son!" if the overtaker is attempting what he feels is a dangerous manoeuvre. Visitors to Greece will be familiar with the mini-shrines to be found by the roadside, often on the crown of a bend. Such tragic memorials are too commonplace here.

Otherwise they drive sensibly albeit with slightly less consideration for other road-users than in the UK. Some of their habits are actually more logical, for instance the use of the horn. In Britain using your horn is regarded as an impolite initiation of enemy action, a symptom of road rage, and being beeped at is taken as a gross personal affront. The Greeks toot their horns simply to let you know that they are there. In Athens they usefully alert you by horn if they are behind you at traffic-lights which have just turned green and if you have been slow to react. This is helpful. It saves you having to bother watching for the green light. You can concentrate on looking at your smartphone instead. Also, they use the hazard lights all the time whereas the Brits turn them on only in extremis. This is usually done to signal an abrupt stop, perhaps for a handy spell of double parking or a chat with a mate. Parking in general is chaotic, with much disregard for signs and lines, so Dad has much yet to learn in this respect, viz. what exactly can you get away with?

The true joy of driving in Greece are the empty roads. Away from Athens there are so few vehicles

that being behind the wheel is a stress-free pleasure, comparable to driving in the UK in the 1950s. The motorway between Kalamata and Korinthos is unbelievably quiet, as are all the minor roads in the central Peloponnese. The downside is that there are plenty of toll stations on the new motorways and so for example it costs 15 euros to drive from Kalamata to Athens Airport just using the toll roads. Many of them were built or upgraded by foreign companies, who take the toll income as part of their construction deal. A few years ago the public were particularly angry about what was seen as a provocative hike in toll charges. Greek media reported that almost six out of ten vehicle owners were simply getting out of their car the moment they reached the toll gates, lifting the bars with their hands and driving on without paying a cent. And the operators in the booths let them do it. Defiant populism in action.

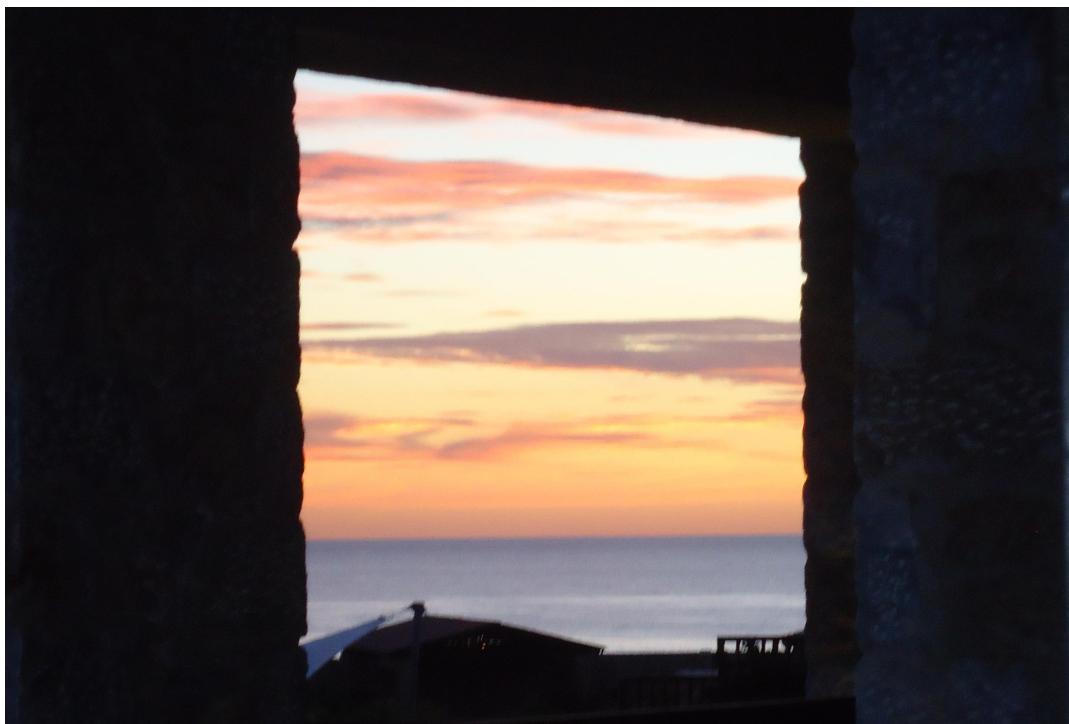


Ancient Messini, a lesser-known classical site within an hour's drive of Chrani on deserted roads

We've been contemplating our first five months here. Dad's been re-reading one of his favourite novels, *The Great Gatsby*, and ruminating about lights across the bay.

Gatsby believes in the green light, Dad believes in the red light. Scott Fitzgerald's anti-hero associates the constantly flashing light on Daisy's distant dock with his former lover. His yearning for her is entwined with his obsession to grasp the American Dream and the green light signifies his hopes for The Future.

Dad's light on the other hand is just a short-lived reflection of the sunset glinting by chance off a particular windowpane halfway up the mountain opposite. An ephemeral occurrence which lingers for perhaps half-an-hour a day and then dies with the sun. No previous relationships involved in this symbol, just a communion with the reality of his idea of Greece, a dream come true. Still now, after all these months, he sits on his terrace as the winter sun drops in the south-west and shakes his head in wonder. The red light represents the fulfilment of his release from The Past, a fifty-year-old *idée fixe* about living here, and the knowledge that he is now content with The Present.



Yet another of those Greek sunsets

Robert Knowles was James's best friend in those mid-1950s pre-Ampleforth days. He lived about half a mile away from Willow Tree Road in a small terraced house just off the main road which led to their school in Hale Barns. James remembers both Robert's parents as very kind and welcoming people. He spent a great deal of time round at their house, not least because they had a television, an item still too dangerously new-fangled for the Wardrobes to consider purchasing. His favourite programme was the wrestling on ITV, especially if Mick McManus or Jackie Pallo were on the bill. Nevertheless, his parents approved of Robert as a friend for their son, not least because he was never known as “Bob” or “Bobbie” and this accorded with their oft-repeated stricture that James was *never* to be addressed as “Jim” or “Jimmy.” Brenda could be very stern about this in a Mrs Hyacinth “It's Bouquet” Bucket northern-snobbish way.

The boys were sports-crazy and Mr Knowles was a massive Manchester United fan. He regularly took them both to Old Trafford, not only for the Saturday afternoon First Division matches but also to the evening mid-week Youth Team games. The ground was only six miles away.

The atmosphere at the Wednesday matches was just as exciting as for the weekend fixtures, with the stadium only slightly less full. The MUFC Youth Team in the mid-50s was justifiably the pride of the club. They won the FA Youth Cup Final in five consecutive seasons from its inception in 1953. This team included the second generation of the Busby Babes before the best of them graduated to the first team, which won the League in the 1955-6 and 1956-7 seasons: Eddie Colman, Mark Jones, David Pegg, Billy Whelan, Duncan Edwards, Albert Scanlon and a very young Bobby Charlton. “ὄν οἱ θεοὶ φιλοῦσιν ἀποθνήσκει νέος, He whom the gods love dies young”. The first five died in the Munich Air Disaster in 1958.

Not surprisingly James became an adoring United fan and fondly recalls being allowed through and down to the front of the standing-only tiers with Robert for the perfect pitch-side view. Another magical memory of those frequent pilgrimages was the taste of the Bovril and the Wagon Wheels at half-time. His favourite players in the first team were Tommy Taylor, the England centre-forward who was also to lose his life at Munich, and Johnny Berry, an entertaining and tricky old-style outside-right who provided many of the crosses for Taylor's goals. He survived the crash but his injuries ended his career.

Thomas naturally supported Newcastle United, but James doesn't recall any conflict of interest at home on the issue. He was happy to absorb the tales of the exploits of Hughie Gallacher, "Wor Jackie" Milburn and Bobby "Dazzler" Mitchell, never refusing the offers of "double pocket money if Newcastle win." The Toon were at their peak in the 1950s, winning the FA Cup three times within a five-year period. He was taken to see them occasionally at St James' Park, whilst Margaret vividly recollects a family outing to a thrilling 5-4 win against Manchester City in a 3rd Round Cup replay at Maine Road. Records show that the Magpies lost to Millwall in the next round. That's bathos for you, or as the Geordies would say, a reet let-doon. In the end Thomas' genes, no doubt aided by the financial incentives, won through. After leaving the Manchester area for good at the end of his teens James subsequently supported Newcastle. "It's an incurable chronic disease I've inherited from my father," he explains. "It's generally not much fun these days, but what can you do if it's in the blood."

Nowadays if he mentions to Greek football fans that he supports the Toon, they always reply, "Nikos Dabizas?" A solid central defender who transferred from Olympiakos in 1998 and played for Newcastle for six years, he featured in two losing Cup Finals, the first of which James watched in a bar in Pangrati alongside a rabid Geordie. That weekend he was in Greece visiting a UK Education Fair at the Athens Hilton, so he took the International Admissions Officer of Newcastle University along as a lucky mascot. It didn't help – Arsenal won 2-0. It was small consolation to them both that all the locals in the bar were on Newcastle's side. Reason? They were supporting Dabizas, one of their own. His major claim to fame, against Arsenal once again, was being completely bamboozled by Dennis Bergkamp's spectacular pirouette goal in an important league match in 2002. As a neutral (Lulu says "and neutered") cat, may I please be forgiven by Geordie readers for giving you this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3G3v9ikyHo> "He couldn't even chop him down for a penalty," recalls James in disgust.

Back in the mid-Fifties James and Robert also enjoyed other sports, including cricket. James's first bat was a Peter May Autograph Stuart Surridge of which he was inordinately proud and which he treated with an excessive amount of linseed oil. Cricket brings us to one of James's "I was (nearly) there" stories, embarrassing though it is to tell. In July 1956 the whole family went to the second day of the Fourth Test Match at Old Trafford versus Australia. They picnicked on the grass beyond the low white boundary fence in front of the north stands. The Australians were batting near the start of their first innings and not much was happening. The stylish left-hander Neil Harvey was in but hadn't got off the mark. After lunch the eight-year-old James started whingeing, declaring that he was bored and wanted to go home. His sister reluctantly agreed to take him so that their parents could enjoy the match in peace. After a short ride on the train from Warwick Road station they arrived back in Willow Tree Road an hour or so later. Margaret turned on the radio (no TV, remember) to see how the cricket was progressing. She was astonished to hear that Neil Harvey was still batting and yet still on 0 runs. Then she discovered that he was now in his second innings. Jim Laker had ended the Australian first innings with 7 wickets for 8 runs in 22 balls and the Aussies were following on. Harvey got two ducks, Laker went on to take 19 wickets and James missed one of the most celebrated passages of play in arguably the most famous Test Match in cricket history. The moral? Do try not to give in to your

whining children, otherwise it might lead to lifetime regret and disappointment.

A year or two later when he had become a more patient and enthusiastic spectator he and Robert became junior members of Lancashire County Cricket Club and spent many happy hours there in a members' enclosure where women and children were allowed, next to the pavilion. The Roses fixtures were unmissable and though Yorkshire-born James always firmly supported Lancashire. He recalls seeing a bespectacled Boycott early in his career in his first Old Trafford Roses match. Cyril Washbrook's '50s team included the celebrated England batsman Geoff "Noddy" Pullar and fast bowler Brian Statham, but the player the boys liked most was a high-class off-spinner called Roy Tattersall, or "Tat" for short. It was his misfortune to be a contemporary of Jim Laker who kept him out of the national team.

No apologies for all the sport. It was the best part of young James's childhood. No more next week, I promise. Just old-fashioned parenting, elocution lessons in preparation for the big move to the posh prep school and ... trainspotting.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And then one fine morning— So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald

16/02/17

12. "The Hot Gates"

Will Spring ever arrive? When the sun shines, there is definitely some warmth in it now and you'll find all three of us stretching out on the terrace soaking it up. Unfortunately there have been continuing spates of either rainstorms from the west or cold fronts from the north. So Dad is getting a bit stir-crazy. Since not much has been happening and Chrani at the moment is "dead as Heaven on a Saturday night" (Cohen), Dad wants me to tell you about his belated Christmas present to himself: a metal silver-grey Bisley SoHo 15-drawer filing cabinet. Exciting or what? He collected it from near Patra last week and that was a saga in itself, as you will shortly read.

Why was he so thrilled with this mundane piece of office furniture which he had ordered a month ago from England? It's all to do with that aged chestnut, excessive paperwork, or as he puts it, "drowning in pieces of paper," which doesn't work for me at all as an effective use of metaphor. He feels caught in the icy grip of institutional bureaucracy whose main raison d'être is to demand and produce mostly useless pieces of red tape. It's probably no worse in Greece or Britain than anywhere else, but if you have Dad's cautious hoarder's mentality whispering the old devilment in your ear, "I'd better keep this old council tax bill/antique bank statement/used BA boarding card, etc, *just in case...*" you've got an ever-growing storage problem. He couldn't find what he needed in Greece, so he ordered the Bisley online and had it shipped free to a UK freight company in Peterborough. They specialise in deliveries to and from Greece, charging only £35 for their "Patra Express" with self-collection available a couple of weeks after dispatch.



"Nothing much is happening today." The feline diarist sits on the Bisley and takes a break. Alas, his elation subsided a few days after collection. He was studiously filing his documents away in

neat classification when he realised he'd already run out of space with plenty more stuff left to store. He needed more drawers. I wanted to misquote Roy Schneider from Spielberg's film about the big fish, "You're gonna need a bigger Bisley," but I could tell he wasn't in the mood for jokes. Incidentally, in the same film playing a world-weary shark-hunter is one of his favourite actors, Robert Shaw, sadly and prematurely deceased. Oozing menace his stock-in-trade, he had been a classic villain in Dad's best-loved Bond movie, "From Russia with Love." Dad once told me that as a teenager he'd always fancied a pair of Rosa Klebb's shoes (UK 8, EUR 42) with which "to do a bit of damage." He looked as if he could have done with them now. So, hoping to cheer him up, I went and sat on the Bisley, cleverly posing for the camera. Thus he recovered his sang-froid and on reflection decided that the "first" Bisley was a very worthwhile acquisition.

It had arrived in a place called Charadro near Patra on the day before he was due to pick Mum up from Athens. The usual direct round trip from Chrani to Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport is about 600 kilometres or 375 miles. Going via Patra would add an extra 200 km. Too much in one day, especially since she was arriving in the evening and Dad didn't fancy driving back in the dark. So he decided to go to Patra, pick up the cabinet, continue to Athens to meet Mum, then they would stay in a B & B near the airport which he had discovered on the internet. The next morning they would have a leisurely drive back home. A good wheeze, you might agree, killing two birds with one stone. Unless you happen to be familiar with the road from Patra to Korinthos...

The morning drive to Patra along the western coast of the Peloponnese was uneventful, almost pleasurable, the Ionian Sea to the left glittering seductively in the winter sunshine. The road, almost devoid of traffic until you reach the outskirts of the third biggest city in Greece, was familiar both from our September trip over here and from Dad's many previous visits to Ancient Olympia. The new by-pass round the south of the city makes life much easier than in previous times.

The "warehouse" of the trucking company turned out to be a shed in a car park outside the hillside village of Charadro, located a few kilometres up the mountain behind Patra. It overlooks the spectacular Rio-Antirio suspension bridge, which was completed in "the good old days" just before the 2004 Athens Olympics. In that period before the recession Greece had access to plenty of funding, including EU subsidies, for major civil engineering projects such as this.

By prior arrangement he met the British lorry driver who ran the haulage company and had a house in the village. He was on his way again within half-an-hour with the cabinet safely stowed aboard.

He encountered the roadworks as soon as he rejoined the main road east.

The motorway from Athens to Patra has an appealing name redolent of ancient glory and classical achievement: Ολυμπία Οδός, Olympia Road. This is highly misleading. The road will never reach as far as Olympia in our lifetime. The stretch from Elefsina (west of Athens) to Korinthos has been upgraded to a three-lane motorway, but the money ran out for the crucial 120-kilometre length between Patra and Korinthos. The original ambition was, and still continues to be, to construct this new motorway whilst operating it at the same time. There is therefore simultaneous construction activity all along the road, not just in some sections. Work began in 2008 to replace the Old National Road, which Dad remembers from years ago as a mightily dangerous two-lane highway with a middle "suicide" overtaking lane. The project was expected to take six years, with a completion date scheduled for the end of 2014. However, the Greek government debt crisis led to considerable delays, with many elements including tunnels and bridges still under construction.

In other words, for the driver this road is a complete Εφιάλτης, an Ephialtes, a nightmare. The whole

distance from Patra to Korinthos is one long roadworks. A veritable dog's breakfast. A journey that should have taken two hours went on for three-and-a-half. Nevertheless, there were a couple of factors that made it slightly better than travelling on the M1 on a bank holiday weekend or on the M25 during the morning rush hour. Firstly, there was plenty of traffic but not that much. This is the Peloponnese in winter, remember. Secondly, the vista for the whole journey was stunning: the snow-capped mountains of Parnassos to the north and the serene, cerulean waters of the Gulf of Patras and then the Golf of Corinth almost lapping up to the road itself. Mum's plane landed at 1720 and Dad finally arrived without mishap at 1800, so all's well that ends well. Janet Wilkinson's B & B is six kilometres from the airport in Peania, just off the motorway and incredibly convenient. A talkative Geordie (She's even met Nikos Dabizas!) with a Greek husband, she has been living here since 1976 and she provides an excellent, welcoming service at very reasonable rates. Mum and Dad will use it again and recommend her to any friends with awkward arrival or departure times.

So, how does a person become a nightmare? Who was Ephialtes? At this moment you probably feel a classical interlude is heading your way. You're right. It's all in Herodotus. Ephialtes of Trachis betrayed the Greeks, mainly Spartans led by King Leonidas I, who were defending Thermopylae, "The Hot Gates," a narrow pass in northern Greece between the mountains and the sea. In 480BC, only "wide enough for a single carriage" it was the only route to the south for the invading forces of the Persian King, Xerxes. Ephialtes showed the Persians a mountain goat track around the Greek position which enabled them to outflank and defeat "the 300 Spartans." The allied Greek forces initially numbered about 4,000 men but Leonidas sent most of them away. He himself remained behind with a rearguard composed of his 300 men, a Thespian contingent (*not* actors, darling, just men of the Boeotian city of Thespieae) and an unreliable Theban detachment.



Film Poster for "The 300 Spartans" "Come and take them"

Copyright 1962 - 20th Century Fox

According to Plutarch, Xerxes demanded that the Greeks surrender their weapons. Leonidas laconically replied, "μολὼν λαβέ, Come and take (them)." You can buy tee-shirts in Monastiraki emblazoned with this historic catch-phrase. The Thebans deserted to the Persians at the first opportunity, the Spartans and Thespians (*not* with handbags, dear) fought to the death. Ephialtes expected to be rewarded by the Persians, but this came to nothing when they were defeated decisively by the Athenian fleet at the battle of Salamis. He fled with a price on his head and was killed for an apparently unrelated reason about ten years later. So the nightmare of betrayal for the ancient Spartans becomes personified for the modern Greeks in the name of the traitor.

Non-Classicists, may The Twelve Olympians have mercy on your unenlightened souls, are perhaps familiar with the tale from two Hollywood movies. The first, “The 300 Spartans,” was made in 1962 in the heyday of the Western genre, starring beefcake Richard Egan as Leonidas and Sir Ralph Richardson as the wily Athenian leader, Themistocles. In an early scene, depicting the Congress of Corinth held in late 481BC, the Greeks are discussing the best strategy for dealing with the imminent Persian invasion. Dad swears that Sheriff Egan of Sparta actually says, in a John-Wayne-like drawl, “We’ll cut ‘em off at the pass.”

The second movie “300” came out in 2006 and reproduces the graphic style of the comic book on which it is based. There is little historical veracity here, but the film is notable for the hilariously camp portrayal of Xerxes by the Brazilian actor, Rodrigo Santoro. The English actress Lena Headey gets to take her clothes off as Leonidas' wife, a useful grounding for Cersei Lannister's “Walk of Atonement” in Game of Thrones, Series 5. Ephialtes is pictured as a grossly deformed Spartan with rather more than just a chip on his shoulder.

ὦ ξεῖν', ἀγγέλλειν Λακεδαιμονίοις ὅτι τῆδε
κείμεθα τοῖς κείνων ῥήμασι πειθόμενοι.

*Go, tell the Spartans, stranger passing by,
That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.*

Epitaph on the Cenotaph of Thermopylae, attributed by Herodotus (Book 7, Chapter 228.2)

to the lyric poet, Simonides of Ceos (c556-469BC)

Greek schoolchildren learn about the Battle of Thermopylae when they study the Persian Wars as part of their History curriculum. Sacrosanct, you would think. Not necessarily. Last week The Times, shadowing Greek press coverage, reported that the Ministry of Education was considering plans to scrap the study in high schools of texts such as Sophocles' Antigone and Thucydides' History of The Peloponnesian War. This would free up classroom time for “studies surrounding gender equality and sex education.” When Dad read this, he was apoplectic. After he had stopped frothing at the mouth, he began his diatribe, “Gender equality? Study “Lysistrata” and “Medea.” Sex education? Read “Hippolytus.” Will this politically correct nonsense give students the opportunity to deal with any of the following? Love, hate, loss, compassion, pride, anger, obsession, suicidal depression, vengeance, the abuse of power, man's relationship with the supernatural, the impact of war, the state versus the individual, the state versus the family, the nature of “barbarism”? NO, but it's all there in Greek drama. This is preposterous, it's like our lot ditching Shakespeare.” He spluttered to a halt. “Another Ephialtes,” he murmured to himself as he tossed another olivewood log on the fire.

Tommy had four sisters and three brothers, Brenda four brothers. If not for the War they themselves would almost certainly have had more children closer in age to Margaret, born in 1940. Brenda lost a child in 1946 and then nearly lost her life having James in 1947 when she was almost 38, so his birth by caesarean section marked the end of the Wardrobe breeding programme. Their two children were therefore incredibly precious gifts, especially their late-arriving “son and heir.” Margaret admits that her nose was put of joint by this upstart, since she was no longer the sole focus of her parents' attention. But they were both well-loved and equally treated.

Brenda was a caring and devoted mother, befitting her kind and gentle nature, and responsible for every aspect of the child-rearing. “Your mother's a saint, son,” Tommy frequently averred and he

meant it. A father of his time, he saw his role in the family as that of bread-winner, a job he took extremely seriously. As for parenting skills, proud and fond of his children as he was, he hadn't a clue. James remembers him throwing Mars Bars in his direction from time to time, perhaps after a successful day wooing a new client over a boozy lunch. Tommy was an old-style paterfamilias. He was always approachable and witty, good fun to be around when he was around, but there were little if any physical displays of affection. There was a bizarre late-flowering Victorianism in play. For example, the parents were addressed as “Mother“ and “Father,” never Mum and Dad (too common) or Mummy and Daddy (too personal). Although there were enjoyable family-of-four outings and holidays, James tragically cannot recall one instance of father-and-son-only bonding sessions, such as playing or spectating at sport together, just the two of them. So he grew up as a Mummy's Boy, and although this doting Mummy compensated as much as she could as we shall discover later, she didn't play football or cricket.



Tommy and Brenda at a “do,” probably in the late 50s

Robert and his family afforded him indispensable companionship but most of the time he was a solitary child in a houseful of adults, often left to his own devices. He invented games: carpet mini-cricket with clothes pegs for fielders; hitting golf balls as high in the air as he could with a tennis racket (until one went through the dining room window like a bullet, leaving a neat hole without shattering the glass), endlessly kicking a football or batting a tennis ball against the garage door.

Sometime around April 1957 James' first cousin, Anne Forsyth, came to live with the family for three years or so whilst training as a physiotherapist at the Manchester Royal Infirmary, a career path also chosen by Margaret. Her mother, Betty, lived in Acocks Green, near Solihull, with another of Tommy's sisters, Mary. On occasional trips there, on route to visit Margaret at Princethorpe, James would snuggle up in the dog basket with Judy and her daughter, Auntie Mary's two Airedales, while the adults droned on about whether Aneurin Bevin was bad (Tommy) or good (the others) for the country. It was from this basket or thereabouts in July 1957 that he watched fast bowler Peter Loader take the

first post-war England hat-trick, against the West Indies at Headingley, on Auntie Mary's flickering black-and-white television. To this day the smell of a damp hairy dog is a pleasurable sensation for James and he still retains a soft spot for that terrier breed.

Anne's father, Eddie, had wasted away in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp and on his release he was repatriated to die at home, his family the sorrowful witnesses of his barbaric treatment. Henceforth no Japanese products were permitted in any Wardrobe household, at least until the 80s as far as James recalls. In effect Tommy became the ward of his widowed sister's only child and he generously supported the latter stages of her education. Anne retains very tender memories of her Uncle Tommy.

Soon after Anne's arrival there strode into James's humdrum and isolated childhood the elder brother he never had. Ted Miles announced his arrival in heroic style, driving an open-top car he had built himself. He was the 20-year-old boyfriend from Birmingham and he became a regular visitor at weekends. For James he was a breath of fresh air. Ted was full of fun and seemed delighted to spend time with Anne's young cousin. An enthusiastic and talented games player himself, he took a genuine interest in the boy's love of sport. They played football and cricket in the back garden, Ted denying him goals or fooling him with his leg-break bowling. At some point he was shocked to discover that no one had ever taught James to ride a bike. Sixty years later they still laugh at the memory of Ted's deceit. They found a bike and went out onto Willow Tree Road. He said, "OK, you pedal and I'll hold onto the saddle, so you can't fall over. I won't let go." James set off in the comfortable knowledge that Ted was supporting him. Halfway down the road he looked back to see Ted, fifty yards behind, bent over with laughter. Without realising it he had been riding unaided virtually from the start. "That's how you fool someone into riding a bike," grinned Ted. "Simple, isn't it?" For which James was and still is eternally grateful.



James aged 7 with Judy

To his father he is ever thankful for an eclectic appreciation and love of music. Tommy was a very keen

fan and an astute judge of all popular styles. He took great pleasure in educating his children in what he thought was worthwhile and what was rubbish. Although his own tastes were rooted in an earlier age (His absolute favourite was Fats Waller), he was amazingly knowledgeable and open-minded about “the modern stuff,” which in the mid-50s meant rock 'n roll. So from an early age James developed a discerning ear and a wide acquaintance with all the historic and contemporary music and singers of the previous fifty years. The BBC Light Programme was always on the wireless and Tommy would test his children thus: “Is this Bing Crosby or Frank Sinatra? (Easy.) Is this Ella Fitzgerald or Sarah Vaughan? (A bit harder, but not much.) Johnnie Ray or Frankie Laine? (Intermediate.) This is Al Bowlly, now deceased. How did he die? Who's his backing band here? (Advanced, for a nine-year-old. *Answers: in the London Blitz; the Ray Noble Orchestra.*)” And so on. Tommy loved the crooners, who were all over the '50s Charts like a rash: Bing, Perry Como, Nat 'King' Cole, Ronnie Hilton (who he?) et al. He could hold a tune himself, often entertaining his friends at social gatherings, with piano accompaniment from Brenda. His repertoire included various Irish ballads, such as Mother Machree and The Mountains of Mourne, but his showstopper was a Rosemary Clooney number, “Who's Sorry Now?”

Brenda had more high-brow tastes, particularly opera, and she treasured above all the voice of the outstanding English contralto, Kathleen Ferrier, who had died in 1953 aged 41 of breast cancer. Her versions of “Blow the Wind Southerly,” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-Z8cmo7cbs>) or “What Is Life?” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07h_LuVVoyg) always return him to happy memories of his mother. He was absorbing teenager Margaret's music too, played on 78rpm shellac: Little Richard, Fats Domino, The Goons, skiffle, including the stonkingly popular (you've guessed it) Lonnie Donegan.

His own musical predilections were childish: “Robin Hood”, “The Ballad of Davy Crockett”, “Rock Island Line” (you can't keep a good Lonnie down) and especially “Freight Train” by the picturesquely named Charles McDevitt Skiffle Group featuring Nancy Whiskey. He could take or leave Elvis and Bill Haley, but then one day his listening preferences changed irrevocably. The Damascene conversion took place round at the house of an older boy, Peter Ashworth, who was the son of a golfing chum of Brenda's. They were mooching around doing nothing in particular when Peter put a new 45rpm vinyl record he'd just bought on the gramophone.

It was “That'll Be The Day” by Buddy Holly and the Crickets. James's musical world had changed forever.

I inadvertently misled you last week. I had promised trainspotting and elocution lessons, but the musical backdrop to the lad's life got in the way. Perhaps next week, perhaps not...

*Well, that'll be the day when you say goodbye
Yes, that'll be the day when you make me cry
You say you gonna leave, you know it's a lie
'Cause that'll be the day when I die*

*Well, you give me all your lovin' and your turtle dovin'
All your hugs and kisses and your money, too
Well, you know you love me, baby
Still you tell me, maybe
That some day, well, I'll be blue...*

"That'll Be The Day" (1st two verses)

written by Buddy Holly and Jerry Allison

Recorded by The Crickets (1957)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xuE9HkBYIs>

02/03/17

13. “The Smell of Burning Meat Thursday”

Spring weather finally arrived in mid-February, with daytime temperatures rising to about 18°C. Thankfully just before we ran out of firewood. All the neighbouring olive groves and even the grassy surrounds of the house are white-carpeted with marguerites, interspersed with blue and red poppy anemones, all-yellow daisies and in the shade of the trees pale lemon primroses. “Tell the non-botanists that marguerite is just a fancy word for a big daisy,” suggests Dad.



Spring flowers north of Anaskelo House

After what seems like weeks shrouded by low-lying clouds, the peak of Προφήτης Ηλίας, Prophet Elias, has reappeared in sharp definition, the high point of the Taygetos range still snow-topped, still magnificent across the bay. At 2404 metres (7887 ft) above sea level it is the tallest mountain in the Peloponnese and only 500m lower than Mount Olympus, where the gods that Dad worships live. Obviously it doesn't give Mont Blanc, which by a remarkable coincidence is exactly twice as high (4808m), a run for its money but you have to ask yourself: would you rather live all year round in Chamonix or Kalamata? Since Dad hates the cold and abominates snow, except for looking at on distant mountains, the answer is a no-brainer.

To its west Taygetos dominates the skyline of Kalamata, but on its eastern flank it overlooks Sparta. It gets a very early mention in Greek literature via one of Homer's extended similes, when he is comparing the virgin princess Nausicaa in “The Odyssey” to the goddess Artemis. Historically, this mountain was crucial as a natural defence for ancient Sparta and is frequently mentioned in literary sources. One “fact” beloved of schoolchildren about the Spartans is that they threw “unfit” infants into one of Taygetos's gorges. Recent archaeology conducted by the University of Athens has unearthed adult remains at the foot of the chasm of Καιάδας, Caeadas, demonstrating that it was perhaps mainly a place of execution for criminals, but the notion of chucking weak, sickly, deformed or mentally

retarded infants over a cliff is much more entertaining and memorable for the young learners of today, especially Year 9 boys.

Meanwhile, Lulu has exchanged her indoor chair for the sentry post on the terrace, where she luxuriates blissfully in the sun. We have to be on guard since it's that time of year when rogue males appear on the estate looking for females. These fun-seekers howl to announce their intentions and then dash off the premises when Pablo or Zouzou arrive to chase them. It's a daily performance which we very much enjoy watching from our al fresco spectators' gallery. The naughty boys won't be deterred and keep coming back. They leap about like March hares with fireworks tied to their tails. One of them is a lively young tabby with a white chest who is quite a character. The other day the three of us encircled him while he just sat there unperturbed, staring us down. It was like the final scene in "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly," except that this duel ended with Young Tabby and Lulu doing "noses" in an extremely friendly manner. I hope Lulu isn't in love again. It ended in a great deal of upset last time with that notorious neighbourhood lothario, Black Cat Roger, the Casanova of Chiltley Lane. As for Bob and Fotine's cats, Bella keeps a respectful distance as she accompanies her Mum on the daily walk-past to feed the goats, The Male hasn't been around for a while and we don't see the others at all. The goats were tethered behind the house the other day, so we saw them face-to-face for the first time. I was the only one brave enough to go and have a close look at them. Strange creatures, bleating and needy.

Although Minnie and I enjoy basking on the patio, we have to vie with each other for occupation of the sole sun-lounger. We are also in serious competition with Dad, although his exposure of flesh so far this month is confined to neck-up-only sun worshipping. Full προσκύνησις, proskynesis or prostrating in adoration, towards Helios will have to wait awhile. According to the historian Arrian when Alexander the Great allowed his Persian subjects to perform proskynesis to him as their new King, his Greek contingent disapproved because they believed it was only acceptable to worship a god, not a mortal. Helios is a god, so no problem.

Two of Dad's favourite smells of all time intermingled last week, on a day of total sunshine which was the Festival of Tsiknopempti: the aromas of sun tan lotion and charcoaled meat. "If by some remote chance there were an everlasting Heaven for my nose, these would be its constituents," he says. All connected with his best lifetime memories, of course.

Τσικνοπέμπτη, Tsiknopempti, literally "The Smell of Burning Meat Thursday," is part of the traditional pre-Carnival celebrations, somewhat like Pancake Tuesday in its original purpose. Before the fasting season of Lent arrives you have to eat up all the spare meat, so this is like Greece's national Kebab Day. "Brilliant!" exclaims Dad, the souvlaki grease dripping from his fingers and running down his chin, "Every country should have a day like this." In the Greek Orthodox tradition Wednesday and Friday are fasting days, as Dad and his friend Paul remember all too well from their trip to Mount Athos in 2012, and therefore Thursday is the best day for this annual gorge-fest. It takes place in the penultimate week (Κρεατινή, "Meat Week") before the start of Greek Lent. The last week before Lent is Τυροφάγου, "Cheese-eating Week", then the serious forty-day fasting business starts on Καθαρά Δευτέρα, Clean Monday.

Talking of food, there are two top-class recent meals out to report on. The first was at a gem of a fish restaurant, very popular with locals, called Ξημέρωμα, Daybreak. It was recommended some time back by Stergios, one of Dad's former students. It is situated about a kilometre beyond the eastern end of Kalamata's promenade, down a track off the road to Areopoli. It overlooks the sea, but on the breezy day Mum and Dad went for lunch it was more gemütlich to eat inside within range of a roaring log fire. They ate a perfectly-cooked σφυρίδα (mérου blanc in French, a species of grouper), grilled prawns

and a delicious plate of χόρτα, horta.

Horta needs some explanation for those of you not familiar with Greek cuisine. It literally means “greens,” ie boiled green leaf vegetables, which sounds very boring indeed. However, whether eaten hot or cold, horta is seasoned with olive oil and lemon, which gives a zesty edge to the taste. And you never know quite what leaves you'll be getting. Our First Mum's favourite was Swiss chard, but the Greeks use as many as eighty different kinds of “greens,” depending on the area and the season. So whatever you've got in your back garden or in the fields around will suffice, which might include mustard, dandelion, wild sorrel, chicory, fennel, kale, mallow, wild leeks or charlock, even the fresh leaves of the caper plant, and many more. So next time you see the rather off-putting translation “Boiled Greens” or “Vegetables” on the English version of a taverna menu, give it a go. You might be very pleasantly surprised.

The second memorable dish was goat stifado, or stew. Stifado is best known in Britain as a Greek beef stew, but in these goat-eating regions you're as likely to be eating prime chunks of the Bearded Ones. On a Saturday night when Mum and Fotine were away, Bob and Dad went to “Το Καπηλείο Της Σεβαστή, The Pothouse of Sevasti,” in the next village, Kalamaki. Sevasti's husband died a few years ago and as a relatively young widow she needed to earn a living, so she opened up her simple taverna. There is no menu, you get what she's got on the day, but on this occasion we knew what was coming since Bob had sold her a quantity of goat meat the day before. And mouth-watering it was too, with plenty of fresh village bread to soak up the moreish gravy. Add to that a drinkable litre of house white, a good-humoured patronne and a friendly environment where no one minds her smoking in the kitchen or the presence of her well-behaved dog around the tables and you'd have Rick Stein drooling at the “authenticity” of it all.

According to UK tour operators, bookings for Greece for 2017 are up by 40 per cent as travellers shun Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia because of terrorism. Thomas Cook expects to send 2.5 million tourists here this season - a rise of 500,000 compared with last year. The travel operator Kuoni said that its sales to Greece have leapt 30 per cent year on year. After the slump of the last two years due to unfounded fears such as “We won't be able to get any cash out of the ATMs,” it amounts to some good news on the horizon for this economically beleaguered country. In which case, you taverna owners, as well as your usual burnt offerings that we Brits love so much, get plenty of “goat stew” and “boiled vegetables” on your English menus.

The big family news of the week is that after some time spent traipsing round the second-hand car garages and stalking the Kalamata dealerships, Mum and Dad have finally bought a car. It belongs to that class of vehicles which Dad has learnt is called “Compact SUV.” Mum is a petrolhead who understands these things. Dad regards cars as ever-diminishing assets needed for getting from A to B, ideally without ever breaking down. They have bought a low-mileage VW Tiguan which was a demo car in an Athens showroom. Dad says his wallet is hurting, but at least they are now permanently mobile and can also chauffeur their visiting friends and family around in comfort this summer. There was some administrative hassle involving transfer of ownership, registration, insurance, etc., and even another trip to Theodosia The Policeman for a γνήσιο αντίγραφο της υπογραφής, an official copy of signature, but nothing unexpected. Theodosia had to charge Dad 90 cents this time, so the change from one euro went into a tin “as a donation to the Petalidi police pension fund,” amidst much laughter from the uniformed lads.

A Volkswagen? Rather different from 1957 when the Wardrobe family car was a black Hillman Minx...



More like Tommy and Brenda's Hillman Minx than Mum and Dad's 2016 VW Tiguan

Up to and including 1957 the family always took their summer holidays in England. That meant the sodden and windswept beaches of Saltburn and Redcar when they were living in Hull, then the similarly sodden and equally windswept beaches of North Wales when they were based in Cheshire: a hotel in Llandudno, a caravan in Conway, a rented house in Llanbedrog not far from the Butlin's Holiday Camp in Pwllheli. The weather was consistently appalling every year, James's sole consolation being that he mastered many card games. The Wardrobe cousins sometimes joined them for these trips: two of Margaret's contemporaries, Anne and Roma, and two girls and two boys born post-war, Christine, Mary, Ian and Edward. James vaguely remembers a houseful at Llanbedrog in 1957. There had been another older cousin, Jimmy Walker, an RAF fighter pilot who had been killed in a blue-on-blue incident at the end of the War. A bomber landed on top of him as he himself was touching down on the runway of his home aerodrome. James was named in his memory. He also had three cousins on his mother's side, but they were born and raised in Australia so he hadn't met any of them yet.

Only two emotions from those dismal holidays stand out. Firstly, there was the excitement of seeing the boxer Randolph Turpin train in an outdoor ring on the top of the Great Orme in Llandudno, where he had bought a pub which still bears his name. In 1951 he had defeated Sugar Ray Robinson to become world middleweight champion and became an instant national celebrity. He lost the title to Robinson a few months later and his life went downhill from there. He committed suicide by shotgun in 1966.

Secondly, he recalls the confusion arising from being taken to see "The Student Prince" on a particularly miserable afternoon in Pwllheli by Margaret and Anne. He thought he'd be seeing the Italian-American tenor Mario Lanza as the young prince and he certainly heard his singing voice, but the actor Edmund Purdom was mouthing all Lanza's songs! He didn't care to grasp the contractual complexities of the dispute between the Hollywood studio and the singer which created this absurd amalgam of the Purdom/Lanza character, and it rather spoilt the film for him. On returning home his mystification increased when Tommy pronounced cryptically, "He's not a patch on "Jeegly" anyway," and would

utter not a word more on the subject. It took the ten-year-old a long time to come to terms with the enigmatic and sinister figure of “Jeegly,” whom he imagined somewhat as later generations saw “Keyser Söze” in “The Usual Suspects” (1995) or “Rollo Tomasi” in “LA Confidential “ (1997). It turned out that “Jeegly” was the world-renowned Beniamino Gigli , an outstanding tenor of an earlier era.

As for Lanza, he went on to do the singing *and* the acting in three more films before dying apparently of a pulmonary embolism at the age of 38. At the time of his death in 1959 he was regarded as “the most famous tenor in the world.”

Back home in Altrincham, one of the next-door neighbours was Duncan Kirkland, a bright boy a couple of years older. He introduced the young Wardrobe to trainspotting. Nowadays this hobby is viewed with ridicule and suspicion as the preserve of nerds and wierdos, but in the '50s it was perfectly socially acceptable for young males to stand for many hours at the end of a station platform, writing down numbers. It was the age of the steam locomotive, which retains to this day its power to attract attention in a way that no electric or diesel engine ever will. For James this all-consuming activity ticked all the boxes: it satisfies an appetite for categorisation and classification; it's competitive; you can do it by yourself; it gets you out of the house; you learn about steam technology and the history of the railways; you can flatten pennies into lethal razor-sharp discs (later, folks).

James is not in this group, but does anyone recognise the station?

The books in the schoolboys' hands in the photo above were published by Ian Allen, who single-handedly triggered the post-war explosion of trainspotting as a British pastime. His regional ABC booklets of engine numbers were the bibles for young enthusiasts “bagging” as many new locomotives as they could find. James's most-treasured possession for the next two years was his ABC British Railways Locomotives Combined Volume (costing ten shillings & sixpence in old money), which covered every sector of the national rail network. By the time steam gave way to diesel the Ian Allen Loco-Spotters' Club had 230,000 members.

And this was when Brenda came into her own as a dutiful mother, regrettably not fully appreciated at the time by her demanding son. When James had bagged most of the local engines, he wanted to go further afield but he was still too young to travel far by himself. Therefore Brenda took him to Crewe (for the LMS west coast line), where she sat stoically on the cold platform all day long with a debilitating stomach bug, Doncaster (for the LNER east coast line) which included a detour to the engine sheds (“shedding”), and to other distant yet highly rated railway junctions. She stopped short of “cabbing,” the absolute pinnacle for James which involved persuading the driver or fireman of a stationary engine to let you climb up into the cab itself. This then merited a capital “C” next to the number in your booklet, not just an underlining. There was one occasion when his father was pressed into service as a minder but he didn't possess Brenda's qualities of patience and self-sacrifice. So it was an unsatisfactory afternoon on York station, cut short by Tommy's urgent need to get to the nearest pub after only an hour or two of “spotting.”

His mother was also busy preparing him for boarding school. She was keen to ensure that he could swim effectively once he arrived there and she took him regularly to the local public baths. He acquired a reasonable breaststroke but more importantly he would be completely at home in his new school's pool from the outset, adapting easily to the front crawl and quickly gaining his swimming colours.

She dreaded the possibility that James might be bullied for having a Mancunian accent, of which he himself was totally unaware. This led to regular weekly trips to elocution lessons, which seemed a terrible waste of valuable trainspotting hours. As chance would have it, there was another new boy,

Marsden, with a much broader Lancashire accent who started that same term and he copped the flak instead. The real story is about a mother doing everything in her power to look out for her son.

So she wouldn't have been pleased to hear about what he got up to when he went with some older children to a popular yet rural trainspotting point where a branch line to Chester crossed over the main west coast line to Scotland. Whilst they waited for the trains to come and go, they amused themselves by putting pennies on the tracks. After one train had passed over it the penny was partially squashed, so it needed four or five trains' worth of compression to get a completely flattened and evenly rounded disc. It wasn't as dangerous as it might sound, since the nearby signals always told the boys when the next train was due. They didn't even need to worry about being caught trespassing on railway property since the location was surrounded by empty fields. His mother came across one of his ex-penny discs one day and quizzed him about it. He lied successfully that he had found it on the pavement.

In early September 1957 James boarded a train at Manchester Exchange station to begin a new life at Gilling Castle, the prep school of Ampleforth College. Here he would encounter the Classical world of the Romans and the Greeks for the first time.

οἷη δ' Ἄρτεμις εἴσι κατ' οὐρεα ἰοχέαιρα,
ἢ κατὰ Τηϋγέτον περιμήκετον ἢ Ἐρύμανθον,
τερπομένη κάπροισι καὶ ὠκείης ἐλάφοισι·
τῆ δέ θ' ἄμα νύμφαι, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο,
ἄγρονόμοι παίζουσι, γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα Λητώ·
πασάων δ' ὑπὲρ ἣ γε κάρη ἔχει ἠδὲ μέτωπα,
ῥεῖά τ' ἀριγνώτη πέλεται, καλαὶ δέ τε πᾶσαι·
ὣς ἢ γ' ἀμφιπόλοισι μετέπρεπε παρθένος ἀδμής.

And even as Artemis, the archer, roves over the mountains, along the ridges of lofty Taygetos or Erymanthos, delighting in the pursuit of boars and swift deer, and with her sport the wood-nymphs, the daughters of Zeus who bears the aegis, and Leto is glad at heart—high above them all Artemis holds her head and brows, and easily may she be known, though all are fair—so amid her handmaidens shone the maid unwed.

The Odyssey (Book 6, 102 -109) by Homer

25/03/17

14. Costa Navarino

There have been so many demonstrations against austerity measures in Greece over the past seven years that news coverage of the latest conflict with police tends to get a trifle yawn-worthy, however much one may feel for the suffering of the people. Even so, the protests in Athens a couple of weeks ago caught Dad's attention and made him laugh. The reason? The Cretan farmers came to town, tooled up for a fight. They were supported by about 2,000 fellow-sufferers from far-flung rural corners of the country, including the Peloponnese and northern Greece. The inevitable punch-up with the coppers, accompanied as always by comprehensive live television footage, erupted after the Minister of Agriculture refused to meet a 40-member delegation demanding that the government repeal the latest range of tax and pension reforms.

Dad has started to hear TV commentators now refer to η κρίση, the crisis, with its stringent bailout budget targets demanded by the Troika, as η δεύτερη Κατοικία, the second (German) Occupation, which is not comical at all. So what amused Dad about this latest clash? Firstly, it was the sight of the farmers' quite deliberate choice of weapons, with which to beat the shields of the riot-police: shepherds' crooks. This was a very clever piece of propaganda in front of the cameras, engaging public sympathy much more than you do when you park your tractor in the middle of the motorway, which just pisses people off. Everyone loves a poor shepherd, here vainly beating the symbol of his simple profession against the high-tech armour of the agents of repression. And then, to cap it all, the TV turns to focus on a single farmer holding up a lurid pair of red underpants, on which he has written, "Take these as well."

Mum and Dad's accommodation plans when they arrived in Greece involved renting a house until they found a suitable one to buy. So far, so so good, with the long-term rental from last September of Bob and Fotine's Anaskelo House. Whether the property they eventually purchased was brand new, needed a bit of work or some serious renovation was an open question, but what was absolutely certain was that they would not go through the hassle of building their own home.

So this week they have bought some land which can be built on... In other words, a 180° volte-face. The area used to belong to Fotine's father and is situated alongside her and Bob's estate. What persuaded Mum and Dad to take on a much bigger project than originally intended is that this sloping piece of land of about 5,000 square metres (1.25 acres) has the same incomparable view across the gulf as their rented house, a similar walking distance to the sea of about 800m and it meets all the legal requirements for a building permit. The land was owned by a Swiss guy who no longer plans to settle in Greece. Fotine knows him well and felt that he would be a willing seller, as it proved. That no estate agents were involved was a bonus. Also the seventeen olive trees and numerous carobs.

Andreas, their μηχανικός, surveyor, is the best friend of an alumnus of the Hellenic College of London, where Dad was Headmaster for fourteen years. He gave the thumbs up and liked the price too. Once an agreement was reached with Ben from Zurich the long-drawn-out business with the lawyers began. Both buyer and seller were ready to move quickly, but lawyers the world over like to take their time. Why is this? A cynic might say that the longer they take to complete their procedures the more they justify their fees, but I couldn't possibly agree. Especially as I have a few loyal readers who are members of the legal profession.

Ben's lawyer came down from Athens with power of attorney to sign on his behalf and she met Dad in the notary's office in Petalidi. There was a hour's wait for confirmation that the money had reached the

correct Swiss bank account, during which the notary's young dog kept them all amused. The contracts were signed and so, after about three months of what Dad calls “buggering around for no apparent good reason,” in the end the deal was done relatively quickly.

The first task of ownership was to clear the old boundary walls of all the overgrown bushes and vegetation in preparation for the building of a new μάντρα, stone wall, and fence around the whole property. This involved three full days' labour by Dad and a local man, Makis, who came highly recommended by Fotine. Unlike Dad, he knew what he was doing, although his deft one-handed use of a chainsaw would have given any passing Health & Safety Executive elf the screaming habdabs. No helmet, no safety greaves, no high boots. Dad would have sliced off his own foot within the first five minutes and he fully expected the corpse of a self-amputating and blood-spattered Makis to be stretchered off the premises to the accompaniment of his bereft and ululating wife well before the end of the day. Not so. Instead Dad ended up in awe of the other man's absolute mastery of such a lethal weapon.



The hidden boundary wall before Makis's chainsaw intervention The exposed wall afterwards





Makis in the undergrowth Note the sea and mountain view
in the background

His own contribution consisted of following behind Makis and creating numerous piles of sawn branches and shrubbery which though freshly cut burnt surprisingly easily. In fact, to ignite them a few weeks later would risk a conflagration of material that by then would have become dangerously dry and might get out of control when lit. And it's only March. From the beginning of May until the end of October lighting any fires in the open is strictly forbidden in Greece.

Dad also keeps an eye out for snakes. "They are waking up now from hibernation," warns Bob gleefully. "The big ones are harmless but watch out for the small poisonous variety. When working on the land, always wear proper shoes and thick gloves..." So far the snake count is two: one dead, one alive but not for long; both green blighters about a metre in length. Makis is more worried about σκορπιούς: "Meester James, be careful for scorpions." He certainly shall. Injuries to date? Only when Dad inadvertently used Makis's foot as a fulcrum for levering a big stone, but no toes were broken. The sixty-nine-year-old's only adverse physical reaction to all the hard graft has been sneezing and a streaming nose. The bees are busily gathering pollen but he didn't anticipate the symptoms of hay fever this early in the year.

Damage to equipment? Bob's pickaxe handle has had to be replaced twice already. Stathis, the ironmonger in Petalidi, fixes a new one in a couple of minutes for three euros. He also sells fork handles, but Dad refrained from asking for some. You can buy four candles at the corner shop. The joke doesn't work in Greek, obviously.

Makis is a fit 55-year-old Athenian with two grown-up children and two stents. He left the city for Chrani five years ago because there were no jobs and he now picks up whatever casual employment becomes available locally. Unfortunately this is a common situation for willing workers in Greece today. On the fourth day he cleared the rest of the site of unwanted scrub. Then the local JCB man, Antonis, loosened and pulled down the old stonework. Dad and Makis have now begun to unpack the stones by hand and sort them before Artur the Albanian arrives to build the new wall. As they work, Makis points out the wild asparagus, the sage, the horta and other worthwhile plants and herbs.

After this exertion and to celebrate Mum's birthday, they went off for a weekend break to the sumptuous Costa Navarino resort, about an hour away on the west coast. The first phase of this massive tourist complex, already comprising two 5-star hotels, two decent golf courses a spa, a conference centre and many more facilities, opened in May 2010, less than a year before the death of its originator and

driving force, Captain Vassilis Constantakopoulos. A local Messinian who made his fortune in container shipping, his grand vision was two-fold: firstly, to give Messinia a prominent place on the global tourist map, and secondly to allow the people of the area to remain in their homeland. He had begun buying up land in the 1980s and started construction in 1997.

Captain Vassilis lived to see the opening of the first hotel and golf course and now his children continue with what is estimated to be twenty years' further development, which will include at least two more hotels, three more golf courses, private beachfront villas (starting price 2.2 million euros) and townhouses, the creation of a health retreat from an old monastery and the conversion of an old village into a hideaway resort. All this on 1200 hectares purchased on both west and east coasts of Messinia, with 580 million euros spent so far and an estimated total investment upon completion of all phases of a billion euros. Sustainability and the protection of the natural environment take a high priority, with olive production and other agricultural activities a key feature.

Costa Navarino has already transformed the local economy, with 1200 employed directly and many subsidiary beneficiaries in the tourist trade. Kalamata Airport has been renamed in The Captain's memory and he is very fondly remembered by the people in this area. A successful micro-economy has been created in Messinia through one man's grande idée, which in time will come to match the successful tourist-based island economies of world-famous hot spots such as Mykonos and Santorini. As a footnote on what the hotel magazine calls "a new paradigm destination," its existence and future potential were major factors in Dad's decision to settle in this particular region of Greece.



Enjoying the facilities of Costa Navarino

Mum and Dad's brief stay was relaxing and blissful, with spa treatments for Mum, plenty of swimming in the 20m indoor pool and some long-overdue golf practice on the Dunes driving range for the Old Boy. By accident Mum found herself in the Men Only Sauna, but she doesn't seem to have suffered any long-term trauma at the sight of the wrinkled genitalia of a septuagenarian Scandinavian gentleman, the only other occupant, who seemed unable to raise so much as an eyebrow at her presence.

The resort is named after nearby Navarino Bay, famous for two historic military engagements that both took place here, but separated in time by 2,252 years. Apart from two narrow entrances north and south, the bay is blocked off from the open sea by the island of Sphacteria.

The first battle is fully described by the contemporary historian, Thucydides, in Book 4 of his masterly

History of the Peloponnesian War. At the beginning of the war in 431BC the Spartans had invaded Attica and besieged Athens. After the death of Pericles, their leader and premier statesman, the Athenians turned against his defensive strategy and utilising the strength of their navy they took the war to the Spartans' back yard, namely the Peloponnese. In 425BC, employing a sea-siege, they succeeded in trapping between 300 and 400 Spartan hoplites on Sphacteria and taking them hostage. Thucydides writes, "Nothing which happened in the war caused greater amazement in Greece" than this unaccustomed surrender of the Spartans. Their capture gave the Athenians a significant victory and important bargaining power in subsequent peace negotiations.

The second encounter was a naval affair, the Battle of Navarino, which took place in the bay on 20th October 1827. The Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire had begun six years earlier and by now the Great Powers of Britain, France and Russia were supporting the revolution politically and militarily. The allied fleet, under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Codrington, intercepted the Ottoman–Egyptian navy at anchor in the natural harbour of Navarino. The superior firepower and gunnery of the Allies turned the engagement into a turkey shoot. The enemy fleet was almost totally wiped out. Of the 89 Egyptian-Turkish ships that took part in the battle, only 14 made it back to Alexandria and their dead amounted to over 8,000. The Allies didn't lose a ship and suffered only 181 deaths. It was the last major naval battle in history to be fought entirely with sailing ships, although most fought at anchor in the confined space of the bay. The victory ensured the survival of the fledgling Greek state. Codrington, regarded as a hero by the British public and by the Greeks, was criticised back home in government circles for having grossly exceeded his instructions in provoking a showdown with the Ottoman fleet. He is celebrated on the memorial monument to the battle in the main square of Pylos.

Finally, on a personal note, I have to tell you about a rather traumatic visit to the vet's that Dad and I had to endure. Owing to my kidney disease, first diagnosed in 2012 just after our first Mum's death, I have to go for blood tests to check my urea and creatinine levels, etc., every six months. At the moment I seem to be stable enough, thanks to the pill which Dad meticulously grinds into powder and "disguises" in my meal every night. If he tried to administer it whole, I'd spit it out and bite his fingers for good measure.

Costas in Messini said he wasn't set up to do these blood tests, so Dad found a nice vet in Kalamata who said he could do them. Along we go to the very friendly, but quite old, Dionysis. Dad was a bit surprised to find when we arrived that there was no nurse in attendance and that the vet was intending to extract the blood from one of my two jugular veins (the normal procedure with cats) by himself. Hans in Liphook always has a veterinarian assistant present and then the whole process takes about five minutes. This catastrophe took about an hour.

Having shaved my neck right down to the skin he fails at his first attempt. He then rings round for assistance with the second vein. Eventually, after about twenty minutes' delay, a man described to Dad as "another vet" arrives and attempts to insert the needle. Having been very well-behaved so far (imagine if this had been those scowlers and growlers, Lulu or Minnie!), I jumped back in reaction to the pain he caused me. Both vets had failed, I myself was bleeding and bruised and Dad was looking increasingly desperate. "Next week," says Dionysis, since neither vein was any longer accessible until the bruising had subsided. By now Dad was freaking out at the sight of my bald and swollen neck. "How will this not happen again next week?" he manages to articulate through his anger and dismay. "We can sedate her if necessary," replies a clearly embarrassed Dionysis. What? For blood tests? Ephialtes! Dad gets me back to the car and starts sobbing. "They hurt her, they hurt my baby," he keens and shows

Mum my neck. Actually, I feel better than I look. I purr softly to cheer him up. I'm just wondering what happened to my tea since it's way past my feeding time. Mum drives her two babies home. Dad gradually recovers his composure.

Fret not, my cat-loving friends, there's a happy ending. Dionysis later apologises on the phone and assures us that his wife, also a vet, would be in attendance next time. Dad bravely takes the risk of having the "next time" and the whole process is completed a week later in just a few minutes. No sedation. Sensibly this time Dad stays in the waiting room. The lady vet knows what she's doing, though I do resent her saying to Dad afterwards that I'm χονδρή, fat. Cheek! I suppose that she's used to Greek cats, who all look like anorexic super-models to me.

Why Dionysis tried to take the blood the first time without assistance, we shall never know. Twenty-four hours later he calls and goes through all the results in detail. Apparently I'm in good nick, all things considered. My neck hair should just about have grown back to its luxuriant best when I have to go for the tests again...

Happy Greek Independence Day! Let's end by celebrating kicking the Turks out of Greece!

The National Anthem of Greece (and Cyprus)

Σε γνωρίζω από την κόψη *We knew thee of old,*

Του σπαθιού την τρομερή, *O, divinely restored,*

Σε γνωρίζω από την όψη, *By the lights of thine eyes,*

Που με βιά μετράει τη γη. *And the light of thy Sword.*

Απ' τα κόκκαλα βγαλμένη *From the graves of our slain,*

Των Ελλήνων τα ιερά, *Shall thy valour prevail,*

Και σαν πρώτα ανδρειωμένη, *As we greet thee again,*

Χαίρε, ω χάρε ελευθεριά! *Hail, Liberty! Hail!*

"Hymn to Freedom" (1823) by Dionysios Solomos, translation (1918) by Rudyard Kipling

28/04/17

15. Persian Interlude

Dad has been away for two weeks, partly in the UK but mainly on a trip to Iran. His main purpose was to visit the 6th and 5th century BC archaeological site of Persepolis, the network of palaces of the Persian kings, Darius the Great and his son Xerxes. He wanted to explore the other side of the story of the Persian Wars, described in detail from the Greek point of view by Herodotus. He discovered a great deal more than he had bargained for.

You can go there as an independent tourist unless you are American, British or Canadian. These pariah nationals have to be on an official tour and are supposed to stay in their group with their Iranian guide at all times. No "free time" to fraternise with and subvert the locals. As it turned out, their relaxed, good-humoured and liberal-minded guide, Mohammad, ignored this stricture, so Dad and his regular travelling companion Paul managed to go "off piste" by themselves as much as they wanted.

He gave me this full account after his return.

"At Persepolis the monumental size both of the site and the structures is striking. Some of the columns are 21 metres high, which exceeds even the height of the columns of the Roman Temple of Bacchus at Baalbek (Heliopolis), built some 600 years later. I was left with the general impression of an extravagant and ultimately futile public display of power, abandoned in the desert, reminding me of Shelley's poem "Ozymandias."

Paul always writes an "electronic postcard" to his family and friends on his return from his travels. In his Postcard from Persia he captures perfectly his feelings about both the ancient and the modern manifestations of the hollow vanity of kings: "Persepolis offers two ironic examples of hubristic ambition, spaced two-and-a-half millennia apart. How the mighty are fallen. Carved out of a mountainside, the palace complex was built in the sixth century on a breathtaking scale by Kings Darius and Xerxes. Grandiose, spectacular. All the hype is admissible at this stunning site. But what doomed magnificence. Persepolis was burnt to the ground by the marauding Alexander The Great less than 200 years after it was built. He needed 3,000 camels to cart away all its treasures. At the entrance, just next to the loos, lie the remnants of a rusting tent city built in 1971 by the Shah to mark 2,500 years of the Persian monarchy. It was a lavish affair with sixty heads of state and monarchs from around the world. Few Iranians made the guest list. It was a PR disaster for the Shah, as opponents railed against his extravagance. The revolutionary clock was ticking for the dynasty."

Meanwhile, the official site guidebook has a hilariously air-brushed version of the early fifth century BC conflict in which the Greeks sent both father and son packing in a crucial series of victories won over an eleven-year period. "The Authoritative Guide to Persepolis" states, "When the Athenians and other Greeks plundered his western provinces and burnt the rich city of Sardis, Persia's western provincial capital, *Darius threatened them with a punitive expedition but did not live to carry out his threat. His son and successor, Xerxes (486-66 BC), was a man of magnanimity, artistic talent and appreciation of beauty. He was forced by Darius' generals to invade Greece but his armies and navy were defeated and he abandoned plans for further campaigns.*" My italics added in astonishment. What a travesty of the truth. No mention of the Battle of Marathon, the encounter that ensured the survival of the fledgling Athenian democracy and saved Western European culture and civilisation from being strangled at birth.

The Athenians themselves understood the importance of this victory which they celebrated wholeheartedly

and through barely-disguised allegory in the architectural sculpture of the Parthenon. You could reasonably argue that if they had lost at Marathon our hellenic inheritance of drama, literature, art and philosophy would never have seen the light of day.



A limited panorama of the vast Persepolis Relief sculpture of subjects bringing gifts to the King

The major architectural highlight of the trip was undoubtedly the 17th century Naqsh-e-Jahan (“pattern of the world”) Square in Isfahan and its accompanying buildings. They are magnificent memorials to the vision of the outstanding Safavid king, Shah Abbas I (1587-1629). Although it is the world's second largest square after Tienanmen Square in Beijing, it is far more enchanting, especially when first chanced upon under a full moon. With its grandeur and visual appeal Isfahan is Iran's top tourist destination for good reason. When the dams upstream are opened (only for about two or three months a year) allowing the Zayandeh river to flow, its medieval bridges are a delightful source of people-watching. Guess who we saw there? A group of Greek tourists. They get everywhere.



The dome of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan The Tomb of Hafez, Shiraz

In Shiraz the lamp posts along the centre of its dual carriageways are hung with brooding individual photographs of young men killed in the Iran-Iraq War, the sad propaganda of an eight-year conflict which consolidated the power of the new regime. I don't know whether any of these were “basijis,” the Islamic volunteers who chose to clear minefields by walking through them, firm in the belief that they would go to heaven as martyrs.

The main attraction in Shiraz, the Aramgah-e Shah-e Cheragh, "Mausoleum of King of the Light," was unfortunately closed to non-Moslems during a period of Three-Day Prayers, but there were other worthwhile sights, including the Vekil and Nasir-al-Molk mosques and some exquisite Persian gardens. The setting of the tomb of the national poet Hafez, Iran's equivalent to Shakespeare in quotability, is a peaceful respite from the bustle of traffic beyond its walls. Hafez wrote of love and nightingales and drunkenness, presumably on Shiraz wine. That esteemed grape variety survives here only in vineyards producing raisins and grapes for eating.

We only spent one day in Tehran. The tour operators must be aware that it has few redeeming features. The snow-capped Alborz mountain range is an attractive backdrop to the city, but it is viewed through a thick veil of pollution caused by its four million cars. Any attempt by pedestrians to cross the traffic-choked roads is dicing with death. The National Jewels Museum, securely sited in the vault of the Central Bank of Iran, is both an immensely valuable state treasury and a testament to the vulgarity of centuries of conspicuous royal consumption.

So my best memory of Tehran is personal, not touristic. On our first evening we met up with Sofia Koutlaki, a former teaching colleague in London, and her Iranian husband Hossein. They have been living in Tehran for ten years and Sofia has been teaching English (and Ancient Greek) at various universities and institutes. She has also written an extremely informative and useful book, "Among The Iranians: A Guide to Iran's Culture and Customs." Highly recommended for any new travellers to Iran and you can buy it on Amazon. We spent a most entertaining evening with them in a popular traditional restaurant, "The Dove's Nest," well-known for its live music. There were two sets whilst we were there, the first singer in Farsi, the second in Turkish. Persian traditional music relies on both improvisation and composition, and is based on a series of modal scales and tunes which must be memorised. The lyrics are often taken from the poems of Hafez and other medieval Sufi poets such as Rumi. The themes are universal, unrequited or lost love, etc. The four-piece band fascinated me: the line-up comprised a hammered dulcimer (santur), an end-blown flute (ney), a large frame drum (daf) and an oud, which is a type of short-necked lute. Those boys knew their stuff. They were tight, and loud – mesmeric! So what did it sound like? An Iranian friend of Sofia who lived in Athens said to her once, "Greek music is like the waves of the sea, Persian music is like the movement of the caravan."

The most extraordinary entertainment was still to come. One evening in Isfahan Mohammed asked the group if they would like to see some "wrestling". All agreed and off we went, six silver foxes and ten suitably veiled silver vixens. Wrestling it definitely was not, rather a unique celebration of testosterone-fuelled Persian manhood. In a small circular arena thirty-five men and one eight-year-old boy undertook "zurkhaneh," meaning "house of strength," a bizarre blend of physical exercise, theatre and religion that dates back thousands of years. Accompanied by the deafening beat of two giant drums and with much posturing, for an hour-and-a-half they performed feats of strength and skill, including press-ups, aerobic movement, juggling, spinning like dervishes and working with heavy wooden clubs. We were privileged to gain a rare insight into the Persian way of life which said more to me about Iran than all the wonderful gardens, pavilions, mausoleums, bazaars and mosques we visited. It also inclined me to relocate Iran culturally much more in Central Asia than in the Middle East. This performance, full of pride and respect for others, displayed the richness of a Persian tradition that is barely touched by the iron-fisted and dogmatic theocracy of the mullahs.

Talking of which, on our final day we visited Hasrat-e Masumeh, the tomb of Fatemeh, the shrine which is the physical and spiritual centre of Qom. She was the sister of Imam Reza, the only Shia imam to be buried in Iran. Qom is home to the hardline clerics who run the country. From here in 1962 Ayatollah Khomeini made the speech criticising the Pahlavi Shah Mohammad Reza which led to his exile. Real

political power lies with the Spiritual Leader, together with his small council of conservative priests. There have been only two Spiritual Leaders so far since the 1979 Revolution. It's a job you do until death, as used to be the case with Popes. The present incumbent, Ayatollah Khamenei, is apparently suffering from terminal prostate cancer and so is destined soon for The Other Place, wherever and whatever heaven or hell that may be for him.



Zurkhaneh in full swing. Those wooden clubs in each hand are very heavy.

The architecture of Qom is impressive, with the famous golden dome of the shrine made up of 128 kilos of the stuff, but the atmosphere of religious certainty is disturbingly oppressive. Pilgrims will soon be mono-railed in to the centre of this Shiite mini-Mecca. One woman in our group was scolded, albeit smilingly and politely, for wearing a slightly see-through head scarf. The zealotry here, or bigotry if you prefer, is mighty suffocating, especially to someone as hostile as I am to any form of institutional religious practice.

Meanwhile the currency, rials, takes some getting used to. 1,000,000 Iranian rials is worth about £20. In practice the locals have already knocked a nought off and deal in "tomans," so your twenty quid becomes 100,000 tomans. Mohammad said that the people were just waiting for the government to catch up with reality and officially revalue 10 rials to 1. The central bank has already requested the powers-that-be to replace the rials with tomans and it looks like this could happen fairly soon. So Iran's currency will change its name and value after nearly eight decades.

The food we ate was mediocre at best. I accept that we sampled nothing home-cooked and visited mainly tourist restaurants. After a week chicken kebab accompanied by the ubiquitous charcoaled tomato, or lamb and aubergine stews, always served with rice and bubble-wrap flat bread, palls. No alcohol is permitted, which didn't bother Paul or me in the least, but I enjoyed my first bacon sandwich on returning home more than usual.

You won't be surprised to read that I'm not planning to go back to Iran anytime soon. I suppose you could enjoy living there if you weren't:

a) *a woman*. Who knows what goes on within an Iranian home, but the hejab is strictly enforced in public. This requires women to cover hair, arms and legs and to wear clothes that disguise their body shape. The first women to remove their headscarves in the Dance of the Hundred and Seventy Seven Veils on entering the British Airways cabin for the return flight to London were Iranian. On more than one occasion during our trip we were told by locals that one in three marriages ends in divorce.

b) *a member of the LGBTQ+ community*. The former President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, aka "I'm a dinner jacket", famously declared that there are no homosexuals in Iran. It therefore seems illogical that there are no urinals in the men's public lavatories. We all use cubicles. What are the authorities protecting us from? After all, they cannot be fearful of the temptation of all of us heterosexuals looking at each other's genitalia. There may be a simpler reason for no urinals. Notwithstanding, homosexuality certainly carries the death penalty here. This is a country said to carry out more executions than any other state except China.

c) *a vocal supporter of Donald Trump*. Obviously. And don't go round shouting "Bomb Qom!" even though you might prefer it as a long-term solution for US-Iran relations to destroying the underground uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, which is only 100 miles down the road.

d) *a golf fan*. OK, so I'm being really frivolous now. The Iranians are mad keen on football, even though women are banned from attending live matches, which take place in stadia surrounded by high walls. You can follow all the major European soccer leagues on TV. But there's no chance of any US or European golf tournament coverage, so I missed Sergio Garcia finally winning his first Major at the US Masters. To my knowledge there are no golf courses in Iran. That's the price you pay for travelling to "interesting" places.

In conclusion and on a much more positive note, without a shadow of doubt the saving grace of modern Iran are its delightful people. They are extremely open, friendly and welcoming to strangers of all nations. The foreigner is treated to old-fashioned courtesy, ready smiles and endless curiosity. Paul sums it up, "Maintain eye contact for ten seconds and you are sure to get a smile. The dialogue crackles, the questions fly. "Do you think we Iranians are all terrorists?" No. "Where do you come from?" Inglistan. "How old are you?" 70. "But you are still beautiful!" And they meant it."

Immediately after this trip Dad's sister Margaret, her husband Graham and their sister-in-law Liz came out to Greece for a holiday. I am pleased to report that all three of our first visitors from abroad are extreme cat lovers, so we were delighted to receive lots of attention. And extra biscuits. Graham, who is a 79-year-old Professor of Physics, actually speaks pretty good Cat. He employs a particularly wide range of pusser words, uttered in that ideal high-pitched whinging tone that we enjoy so much. I was therefore very happy to reward him by sleeping on his bed every night. Even Lulu joined me there towards the end of the week. Dad commented on the happy harmony of Graham's baritone grunt-snoring and my mezzo-soprano nocturnal wheezing.

They visited Olympia, where Dad did his passable impersonation of a knowledgeable tour guide. Graham manfully trotted the stade (192 metres) and Mum completed the δίαυλος, "double-furrow," up and down the stadium. Another visitor, preparing to run, removed his shirt and was promptly whistled at in no uncertain terms by a site bouncer. Dad shuddered, remembering Qom.



Graham, Mum, Liz and Margaret in front Mum prepares for her two-stade run
of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia

Heavy rain caught them out at Ancient Messini, less-heralded yet still rewarding local classical remains. The caretaker of the small museum had lived in Australia for many years and Graham had a chat with him about the state of Greece today. The attendant summed it up succinctly, "How many oranges do I have to sell to buy one fighter jet?"

They also ate in some of Mum and Dad's favourite restaurants, agreeing that the best meal they had was at "Ξημέρωμα, Daybreak," a fish place just outside Kalamata. They enjoyed a delicious array of fresh squid, octopus, anchovies, sardines and συναγρίδα, dentex (like a big sea bream), all perfectly cooked and washed down with decent Moschofilero house wine. Margaret tried out one of the Greek words she has learnt on the waiter: "νόστιμο, delicious." It was well received.

The swimming season has begun. Since Easter the weather has warmed up to about 25°C and the sea temperature, Dad insists, is now no cooler than it was last November. "Perfectly comfortable for swimming, as long as you don't hang about. And better to swim before the afternoon on-shore breezes rough up the sea." He is also sun-worshipping again. His stated ambition is to turn the hairs on his legs blonde by mid-May. Max and Smallish Brown Dog have reappeared. They seemed pleased to see Dad, the only other living being on the beach. In fact Max was a bit over-friendly, trampling on the beach towel and slavering over Dad's prone torso. Such distractions of a Greek summer beckon.

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Once a man came to me and spoke for hours
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
About "His great visions of God" he felt
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
He was having. He asked me for confirmation,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
Saying "Are these wondrous dreams true?"
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
I replied, "How many goats do you have?"
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
He looked surprised and said,
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
"I am speaking of sublime visions
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed.
And you ask about goats!"*

*And on the pedestal these words appear: And I spoke again saying,
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: "Yes, brother - how many do you have?"
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair! "Well, Hafiz, I have sixty-two."
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay "And how many wives?"
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare Again he looked surprised, then said, "Four."
The lone and level sands stretch far away." "How many rose bushes in your garden,
How many children,
Ozymandias, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1818 Are your parents still alive,
Do you feed the birds in winter?"
And to all he answered.
Then I said, "You asked me if I thought
Your visions were true,
I would say that they were
If they make you become more human,
More kind to every creature and plant
That you know."
Becoming Human, by Hafez (1325-1389)*

03/05/17

16. Gilling Castle Prep School

One midday In early September 1957 the ten-year-old boy stood on the platform of Manchester Exchange Station listening half-heartedly to his father's aphorisms of encouragement. "Always remember to stick your toes in and pull your socks up," advised Tommy, who had a fondness for multiple metaphors. James nodded in contrived eagerness, but his mind was elsewhere. He was unaware how difficult a parting this must have been for his parents, sending him off for the first time to North Yorkshire until Christmas. No half-terms, no weekend exeats in those days. This was a three-month stretch with no remission. Communication would be via a weekly letter. Still, they had been through it all before with Margaret and this was the start of their master plan to provide for their "son and heir" the best possible Catholic education available in the country.

James on the other hand had no notion of what to expect. He was uncomfortable in his new uniform, into every piece of which Brenda had sown a Cash's name tape, on which was woven in blue against a white background: WARDROBE 370, the eponymous logo that would sit next to his skin for the next eight years. It was even emblazoned on the lid of his new trunk, which stood next to him on the platform. Who would have thought that sixty years later his similarly identifiable but by then threadbare school rug would be the preferred bedding in Greece of his three beloved feline companions?



You may be smirking now, Wardrobe 370, but just you wait.....

Rather than loiter aimlessly until the express arrived from Liverpool Lime Street on its way to York, with its reserved compartments for Ampleforth boys, he wanted to dash to the end of the platform to bag a few new engine numbers. He was however astute enough to realise that this was not good form at a time dedicated to solemn farewells. And so they waited.

When the train arrived, James met his first Benedictine monk, who turned out to be the regular accompanying adult, since he had family in Warrington. Father Justin Caldwell, of whom you will read more later, was one of the decent ones. James would learn in time that all monks fell into one of four categories: “decent,” “harmless,” “steer clear if possible” and “*TO BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS.*”

Until York the journey was uneventful. James was introduced to a few Lancashire boys of his own age, some of whom would become lasting friends. At York Station the bedlam began. A special Ampleforth College train took the combined multitude of boys who had arrived from London as well as from Liverpool/Manchester a further fifteen miles up the main east coast line and then onto a branch in the direction of Pickering. The uncontrolled and rowdy energy of 150 older youths, cooped up together in

the stifling carriages for another hour, was daunting to the timid newcomer, who was glad to arrive at Gilling station.

The prep school boys could walk up the hill to Gilling Castle, whilst the teenagers were put on single-decker buses not unlike those seen in “All Creatures Great And Small” or “Call The Midwife” for the short final leg across the valley to the senior school. The railway station served the village of Gilling East. It had closed for regular passenger services in 1953 but freight traffic and the Ampleforth Special continued to use the station until the branch line was finally closed in July 1964.

The school building itself, which began as a fortified manor house in the 14th century, was and remains extremely impressive. The foundations of that early edifice form the cellar of the subsequent Elizabethan structure, which was later expanded and remodelled in the 18th century, possibly with the aid of Sir John Vanbrugh, the English Baroque architect of nearby Castle Howard and of Blenheim Palace. It was the home of the Fairfax family, of whom a distant cousin was its most famous member: Thomas Fairfax, the Parliamentarian general and commander-in-chief during the English Civil War. The right wing in the photograph housed a large dormitory on the main floor named Fairfax.



Gilling Castle. James's first dormitory was in the large-windowed wing on the left.

The history of the house passed James by on that first night, of which he can remember nothing except that he was surprised to find that he was not at all homesick. Those feelings of loneliness and loss kicked in badly on the second night. He was comforted with kind words by the boy in the next bed, who was now in his second year and had been through it all before. He assured James that he would get over it and he would gradually feel better each night. He was right. His name was Johnny Stirling, a charismatic, carefree and sociable boy who already had a famous uncle and would go on to have a more famous sister-in-law. His uncle David founded the SAS and his elder brother Archie married Diana Rigg. So, to complete the name-dropping, he even has a celebrity niece, the actress Rachael Stirling. Johnny

was closely related to the Frasers, who were regarded as top-drawer Scottish Catholic aristocracy. Like other patrician families such as the Bowes-Lyons, the Parker Bowles and the van Cutsems, they sent their male children to Ampleforth as a matter of course. Johnny however was admirably free of any upper-class aloofness and all the more likeable for that. Later, in the senior school, he would go on to become the trumpet-player in the school rock band. A very decent bloke.

In those days Gilling had only three Years - what we would now call Year 4, 5 and 6. The equivalent of Years 7 and 8 were completed in Junior House, situated across the valley and next to what everyone called SHAC (Senior House Ampleforth College). Gilling Castle merged with and was renamed St Martin's in 2001 and houses all the five year groups of a standard modern prep school.

An early introduction to the Classical world came through the four "houses", to one of which each pupil was assigned on arrival. As nowadays they were designed to foster teamwork and a healthy spirit of internal competition. They were: Athenians, Corinthians, Romans and Spartans. He was pleased to be named a Spartan, but soon found himself wondering how the Romans had got in on this otherwise Graecian line-up. Rather as the Greeks themselves must have done in 146BC after losing the Battle of Corinth, which allowed the Romans to take them over. Macedonia became a Roman province, while southern Greece came under the surveillance of its praefectus (provincial governor). Some Greek city-states managed to maintain partial independence and avoid taxation. Plus ça change... Anyway, the poet Horace reckoned that the Greeks won in the end through their insidious reverse take-over of Roman culture: "*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio*. Conquered Greece captured her savage conqueror and brought her arts to rustic Latium." (Epistles 2.1. 156-157).

Meanwhile, the Gilling Romans provided the stiffest opposition to the Spartans in the sporting arena, thus being deemed the main opposition. The noisy and luxury-loving Athenians and the money-grubbing Corinthians were mere contemptible also-rans.

James had missed the First Form since his parents had not put his name down early enough, so he was one of only half-a-dozen new boys in the Second Form. His housemaster was The Monk On The Train. Father Justin was a gentle, shy and warm-hearted man in his early thirties who had himself attended Gilling and then Ampleforth as a pupil. His sensitive pastoral care was perfect for Wardrobe 370, who never knew his luck in that Fr Justin had only arrived at the school as a teacher and housemaster after his ordination as a priest the previous year. His passion was chess and in James he found a fast and enthusiastic learner who would manage to beat his mentor only rarely before he graduated to Junior House two years later. He remembers many untroubled hours trying out new opening gambits in Justin's study, listening happily to a limited collection of classical music and in particular to the second movement of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony with its flute nightingales and clarinet cuckoo calls, whilst striving to maintain his hard-fought position at the top of the school chess ladder.

There were four other monks on the teaching staff and an assortment of lay teachers. The Headmaster was Fr Hilary Barton, who ruled in a benign though somewhat detached manner. His nickname amongst the boys was Spot Bum, for a reason we shall discover later. In November 1957 there was an epidemic of Asian flu which struck the school badly. Most of the boys, including James, were in bed and many of the adults as well. The dormitories were converted to infirmaries. All lessons were suspended. In this crisis Fr Hilary came into his own. At one point he seemed to be almost the only active member of staff on his feet but he carried on, by sheer sense of duty and determination perhaps, until others were up and about.

Fr Gregory O'Brien was a shouty disciplinarian who ran the chapel and taught James how to be a good altar boy. He was a chalk-thrower who completely blew his top when one day the intended victim took

pre-emptive action and blocked the missile by cleverly raising his desk lid as a defensive shield. The impotent fury of the bullying priest remains a vivid and comic image in James' memory to this day.

Fr Gervase Knowles, the Third Form housemaster, was another Lancastrian, an older cousin of Fr Justin. He was keen on rugby and his brother had played for England against the All Blacks. He was genial, chuckled a lot and taught Maths and Geography. He also chose the weekly Saturday evening films, which ranged from comedies such as "Genevieve" and "Kind Hearts and Coronets" through war movies such as "Reach For The Sky," "The Dam Busters" and "The Yangtse Incident" (a boy in James' class called Robertson was briefly famous because his father had commanded the destroyer *HMS Consort* which tried to pull *HMS Amethyst* off the mud bank near Nanking in 1949. He was awarded a DSO.) to more serious fodder like "The Winslow Boy" and "The Woman in White."

And then there was the incomparable, the non-pareil, the magnificent Fr Maurus Powell. At 85 years of age he was still teaching two classes of Latin: the weaker Second Form set and the elite Third Form potential scholars. Fate decreed that James's first Latin lessons would be with this outstanding teacher of Classics. He can do no better than quote from Fr Maurus' obituary, recorded in the Ampleforth Abbey Necrology: "As a teacher of Latin and Greek to small boys Fr Maurus was undoubtedly a genius. His pupils readily assumed his own enthusiasm, energy, thoroughness. He always demanded and invariably obtained a high standard of scholarship. It was remarkable how his enthusiasm, his youthfulness and his flexibility of mind remained with him to the end. His classes were always carefully prepared and planned and no master ever fitted more into a forty-minute class. He was always searching for new ways of 'putting-across' what he had to teach. Many are the boys who have been set on the path to classical scholarships by him. Many more are those who learned a satisfaction in work well done."

James settled quickly into his well-ordered new existence. The academic work was going well, not least the Latin. He devoured Hillard & Botting's Elementary Latin Exercises, aided by the standard grammar book, Kennedy's Shorter Latin Primer (the title of which was easily vandalised to Shortbread Eating Primer). The exercises, in batches of ten, to be translated from English into Latin and vice versa, centred around two of Caesar's generals from the Gallic Wars. Here's a flavour: "Labienus and Cotta captured the Gauls/Belgians/barbarians and sent them to the rampart/camp/town." Fr Maurus on the other hand did not take prisoners. He was a hard taskmaster. But James's experience with Grandma Coulehan stood him in good stead and he knew how to stay on the right side of this crotchety old monk, now handicapped by arthritis, severe deafness and chronic bronchitis. And the logic of the language itself appealed to him greatly.

After a few weeks of term there was a rearrangement of the settled subjects such as Maths, French, Latin. As a new boy James had been allocated initially to the lower sets. He was now promoted in all subjects.....except Latin. This was a deeply disappointing and incomprehensible setback. He was consoled by one of the kindest members of staff, Major Blake-James, who went off to consult Mr Brown With The Withered Hand, the teacher of the top Latin set in the Second Form. They reported back with what they insisted was good news, although James was still dubious. Rather than undervaluing his performance, Fr Maurus on the contrary had decided Wardrobe was too good to be taught by anyone except himself and he wanted to guarantee his readiness to join his elite band of scholars the next year. It seemed that he was not going to let such a prize catch fall into the hands, withered or not, of the far-too-nice Mr Brown. So James saw out the year, working alone as he had done from the start, and progressing far beyond the standard of the rest of the lower set, and of the upper set too, under his personal tutor's beady eye.

The French teacher, Miss Porter, noticed that James couldn't read the blackboard from the back of the

class. This led to an eye-test which confirmed that he was short-sighted. He was condemned to wearing the free NHS Piggy-from-Lord-Of-The-Flies, wrap-around-the-ears, circular specs, which frankly took a bit of getting used to. Within a year or so he had persuaded his parents to part with some cash and buy him a more fashionable horn-rimmed pair.

Outside the classroom he started piano lessons, played cello in the school orchestra and was selected to sing in the choir, who would provide the trebles for the senior school's annual concert. He had missed out on Handel's "Messiah" the previous December, but now enjoyed the evening trips across to SHAC for the final rehearsals and performances of Bach's "Mass in B Minor" and in the following year Haydn's "Creation." He learnt to read and sing Gregorian plainchant with its square notation. To this day he relishes the stark, haunting beauty of the "Dies Irae" in the plainsong requiem.

Team games took place six afternoons a week and he discovered rugby for the first time, playing in the backs and the forwards before settling into the shin-kicking life of a hooker. He was awarded his swimming colours quite early on, the badge for which was sown by Matron onto what Australians would term swimwear for concealing budgerigars.

Boxing took place in PE under the watchful tuition of "Sargie." On one memorable occasion James was drawn to fight a trainspotting friend of his, William Morris. They cooked up a cunning plan to pretend to hit each other but not actually land any hurtful blows. After about thirty seconds of pussy-footing about the ring in what must have been a laughably obvious charade, Sargie stopped the fight and yelled, "If you two don't start punching each other properly, I'll start hitting you both myself." William and James wasted no time in trying to put each other's lights out. The verdict on this bout is not recorded. The best boxer of their Year was a self-contained yet confident boy called Robert Nairac, destined to be murdered twenty years later by the Provisional IRA whilst working undercover in Northern Ireland as a Military Intelligence Liaison Officer.

Soccer was not a school team sport, being regarded as a plebeian activity. Nevertheless, the boys supported their favourite First Division teams, although strangely only James seemed to support Manchester United. His darkest hour of the year arrived on 6th February 1958. The news of the Munich air disaster reached him at morning break in the Bootroom where the government's free milk was distributed. He was completely distraught. He was being teased for sissiness by other boys when Major Blake-James (who else?) intervened. He tore the others off a strip and spoke comforting words to the young Red. By chance, forty years on, James found himself at a dinner party sitting opposite the daughter of Blake-James, now long deceased. He told her of her father's concern for the young boy so long ago. The daughter wept openly at this stranger's tale, a serendipitous memory of her father's kind nature.

On Sunday afternoons the boys were taken to the nearby woods for "cubbing", an informal version of scouting comprising various group activities such as building bivouacs, camp fires, etc. Or you could disappear into the bracken with your friends, strip off and receive some much-needed extra-curricular sex education.

One day James, Johnny and a gormless boy called Roger were given useful instruction by a fourth boy, "Podge," about how babies were made. Podge's authority in these matters derived from the fact that he already sported some pubic hair growth. He explained in grave tones that firstly one of the partners in the endeavour must smack the bare bottom of the other participant. He demonstrated this by wacking the buttocks of the willing Roger with stalks of bracken. The other two were impressed and joined in enthusiastically. The second and most important step, explained Podge sagely, was then to insert your willy into the partner's bum. "I live in the Isle of Wight," he added, "and these practices are rife down

there.” Roger, perhaps not so slow-witted after all, understandably demurred. So Johnny, who was capable of an impressive erection for his age, helpfully offered to have a go with James, but the latter declined on the grounds that he did not wish to become pregnant just yet. Thus the opportunity of future fame via buggery by Emma Peel's in-law was lost. The sex education lesson was ended, they pulled up their shorts and bounded joyfully back through the bracken to rejoin the official pursuits.

It had been a happy year, in which cleverness and a sense of humour had been his best allies socially. He was never bullied. He never even acquired a nickname. What could top "Wardrobe"? Margaret had once sympathised with him that he would be unable to marry into a less embarrassing surname, as she planned to do. But throughout school and in later life it never bothered him. When he heard his mother spell out to some obtuse apparatchik, "W-A-R-D-R-O-B-E, like the furniture," he adopted this ploy successfully for many years. Then the time came when officials began to look blank, presumably because they didn't understand, or were no longer capable of spelling, such a furniture word.

The sea was quite rough today, but Dad went for a long swim anyway. It suited his mood. He was angry. And he was grieving. He has just heard that a very good friend and former colleague from the Eighties, Peter Templeton, had passed away. This news came as an enormous shock, since he has always regarded Pete and his identical twin brother Paul as indestructible, unbreakable. Pete was a high achiever with immense self-belief, a creative entrepreneur and innovator in the field of education. His was a life-affirming spirit. Always fun to be around, he worked hard and played harder. Above all, Dad admired him for his moral courage and his resolute determination to live his life his way and to the full. Rest in peace, fellow child of the Sixties.

Pete played a mean air guitar, drunk or sober but always with that manic grin, to the best Keith Richards' riff of them all: Gimme Shelter. In his memory, here it is. It's just a shot away:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3rnxBizoU>

14/05/17

17. The Olive Buds Of May

John, the friendly Englishman whose land borders the plot recently acquired by Mum and Dad, commented that he knows summer has arrived when the sun starts to rise north of the peak of Profitis Ilias. This event took place a few weeks ago, though there is still a smidgen of snow visible between its highest ridges. May has come in hot and dry, with 32°C temperatures forecast for today and tomorrow. "Good for the beach, but not for the olives," says Fotini.

The olive trees are in full blossom, appearing to be covered in a white glaze which etiolates their natural greenness. The tiniest teardrops which will develop into the fruit are still barely visible. The bougainvilleas and oleanders are flowering again, delivering some much-needed colour to the parched landscape.



Olive blossom: you can just see the small white pearls which will become the green and purple fruit

The hot weather is not ideal for us girls either, so we just conserve our energy and sleep in the shade most of the time. Long-haired Lulu seems to be feeling the heat enough to put her off her grub. Unless that's because she's been eating too many lizards. She's certainly been chasing them across the patio. Not only are these geckos plentiful but we hear that the snakes are too. They have emerged from hibernation and can be seen in the fields but not yet round the house. If they've got any sense they'll keep away from an estate with eight of us cats roaming all over it.

Vassilis, the fencing materials supplier, seems to be a snake expert and he was giving Dad some instruction. "There are four types of snake in this region. The biggest and commonest, called τυφλίνος, the blind one, may not even be a proper snake at all." A limbless lizard, then, like the British slow worm. "The only poisonous one is quite small and is the οχιά, the nose-horned viper." So far Dad has spotted four "blind ones" and I'm not prepared to say a word about any encounters we three might have had with any of them.

Lulu also picks up a lot of burrs in her coat at this time of year. She gets ratty with Dad when he teases them out as gently as he can but sometimes with difficulty. And to cap it all, we've had the indignity of vaseline smeared on our heads at different times in the past few weeks. "You kill ticks by smothering them to death with grease, since they can't breath through their exposed skin anymore," explains Dad. It seems to have worked for my sisters, but I'm a bit too good at rubbing the vaseline off from behind my right ear onto any handy piece of furniture. Ticks favour heads, especially close to our ears for some reason. So I'm getting two coatings per day at the moment.

That's life for a pampered cat in Greece, I suppose.

In the previous summer holidays before he started at Gilling James's mother had taken him on a trip to London. They stayed with Uncle Clem, Brenda's youngest brother, and Auntie Louie in Ilford. They visited all the major tourist attractions but the only highlight worth mentioning was a day at the Oval to watch the fifth Test Match against the West Indies. James really enjoyed seeing the "Three Ws" in action, Worrell, Weekes and Walcott. A young Wes Hall was in the touring party, but not yet in the team. England won the match and the series comfortably.

In the following summer of 1958 Brenda took him on his first ever trip overseas, to Belgium. She had spent her teenage years in the 1920s at a convent school in Mechelen, north of Brussels. Her father had sent her across the water since she was being bullied at her English school. She retained happy memories of Belgium, keeping in touch with the nuns and some former schoolmates. The first couple of days, staying with a schoolfriend's family, were uneventful. Heist was a quiet seaside resort on the West Flanders coast between Zeebrugge and the Dutch border. He swam in the sea once and played endless games of "pick-up sticks" with the daughter of the house, who repeatedly played her 78s of Pat Boone singing "April Love," and "Love Letters in the Sand." He was never a great fan of the crooner afterwards.

Brussels was much more exciting. First there was the Manneken Pis, the naughty statue beloved of schoolboys everywhere. Then there was Expo 58 with the newly-constructed Atomium its central feature. Brenda refused to take James, who was discovering a head for heights, to the top sphere, which caused some childish disgruntlement. They came to the crowded entrance of the British Pavilion. James looked round and couldn't see his mother so he entered the pavilion anyway, assuming she was close by. The exhibits along the one-way system were interesting enough but obviously not a patch on the view to be had from the pinnacle of the Atomium. He emerged from the exit about twenty minutes later where he wasn't surprised to see a British bobby – it was the UK Pavilion after all – but he was taken aback when the constable approached and asked, "Are you James Wardrobe?" OK, so our policemen are friendly, but to be addressed personally by one of them in the middle of Belgium? That was impressive, he thought. "Your mother's looking for you. She's a bit upset. You'd better come with me."

Upset? To put it mildly. Back at the entrance she thought she'd lost him for ever in the maelstrom of the World Fair. After anxiety, distress and then relief came unbridled maternal fury, the force of which the son never experienced before or since. Weeping, shouting, the works, the whole megillah. His punishment was to be dragged through the exhibition a second time, this time sticking close. The displays of national advances in science and technology held no interest for him. Any lingering hope of reaching the summit of the 165-billion-times-magnified iron crystal was extinguished. What was all the fuss about? He hadn't considered himself lost at all, cocooned in all that Britishness. How would she have felt if he'd gone AWOL in the Russian or the Mexican tent?

They had a day trip to visit the nuns, then stopped in both Ghent and Bruges on the way back to Ostend. Relations between mother and son had normalised, so he tried his luck, “Please can we go up to the top of the Belfry?” Success in both cities! The towers were 88m high in Bruges with 366 steps and 91m high in Ghent with nearly 400. Perhaps she felt a little guilty about the Atomium (102m with a lift), more likely she just wanted to make her self-centred and demanding child as happy as she could.

His best discovery on this holiday was Belgian chocolate, especially the distinctive richness of Côte d'Or with its logo of a trumpeting elephant. What's that about? Must be something to do with the Belgian Congo. Although the brand is not readily available in Britain, James found it recently in the duty-free shop of Johannesburg Airport. So, friends, if you ever find yourself waiting for a flight home from Oliver Tambo International, don't forget chocoholic Wardrobe.



The Brussels World Fair: Expo 58

On his return to school for the new academic year James duly found himself in the elite Latin group of four. The Chosen Few also included Charles, Quentin and Peter. They would spend the next three terms going up to Fr Maurus's small room at the very top front of the building. On the way they were careful to avoid the cleaner known as Ma Floors. She was called this because she was in the habit of shouting at passing boys, “Keep orf ma floors.”

Maurus's cell was compact, its crammed bookcases lined with religious and classical tomes. With arm outstretched you could just swing a Mickie-sized cat around without her touching the walls, which were adorned with a number of agreeable water colours. They depicted local views painted by Maurus himself in his younger days. He had been an accomplished artist.

They sat around a small square table. The geriatric monk sat facing the window, James to his right, Peter to the left and the other two opposite their teacher. That singular omnipresent smell which attaches itself to all very old people did not deter them from mastering the gamut of infinitives, participles, subordinate clauses requiring the subjunctive mood, in fact the major portion of the Shortbread Eating

Primer. It was no surprise that at the end of the year these were the four boys who won all the bursary awards to Junior House. But it was not all plain sailing.

When there was to be a test, Peter was moved to a side table behind and to the left of Fr Maurus, but within touching distance of the main table. The boys knew from its feedback whether his hearing aid was switched on or off. Sometimes the old man, in irritation at the constant high-pitched whining of this infernal device, deliberately turned the wretched thing off. On one occasion during a particularly difficult test the out-of-sight-round-the-corner Peter managed, he thought, to switch off what Maurus called “this devilish implement.” The miscreant then proceeded to open his Kennedy and read out loud to the other naughty boys all the correct answers. This ingenious piece of cheating went well for some time. Suddenly the aged monk released a blood-curdling shriek and swung his left arm back with some force, catching Peter full on the chops. The hearing aid was still turned on. Or perhaps Fr Maurus wasn't as deaf as people thought. All further tests that year were conducted in perfect silence.

Of the characters in this mini-drama, Peter was a baker's son from Bolton who remained a friend of James throughout Ampleforth, Quentin's father had built Kuwait's sewage system and Charles's family had a successful steel business in Sheffield. Charles Young was justifiably proud of his elder brother, Hugo, who had just been accepted to read PPE at Balliol and who went on to become the most distinguished political commentator of his generation, writing for *The Guardian* until his death in 2003.

As for Fr Maurus, within four months of these boys leaving Gilling for Junior House, his final ambition was fulfilled. At some point during the last year of his life he had remarked that his wish was to be allowed “to work to the end.” On 31st October 1959 he taught his two Latin classes as usual. Early on the morning of All Saints' Day he had a heart attack and died the next day, All Souls' Day, in his eighty-seventh year. His remarkable sixty-one-year career as a schoolmaster had ended two days before his death. James was luckier than he ever realised at the time to be one of the very last nascent classicists to come off Maurus's prodigiously successful assembly line.

The other charismatic schoolteacher of the Third Year was Mr Lorrigan. Although he was a tough disciplinarian, he was a manic enthusiast in all the subjects he taught: English, History, Music and almost certainly some others which James can't remember. He had high expectations of all his pupils, a sine qua non for any great teacher. John Buchan's Prester John, Magellan's (ship's) circumnavigation, Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*, any and every topic was meat and drink to this star performer. Tommy, who knew talent when he saw it and liked to back a winning horse, decided to cultivate the Irishman for James's benefit. When the parents came for the occasional allowable visit, they took the Lorrigans out to dinner at *The Black Swan* in Helmsley and of course all four adults got along swimmingly. James sat in silence, suitably embarrassed. He wondered if this sort of sucking-up would actually do him any good. Better to concentrate on polishing off the rather tasty *Pâté Maison*.

In fairness to Lorrigan, James never noticed any subsequent favouritism. He thinks he progressed well in his classes because he loved those subjects and respected the teacher. For the end-of-year Concert and Prize-Giving he was selected to sing a solo, “The Minstrel Boy,” a patriotic and sentimental Irish ballad of the type his parents adored. He likes to think that it was his talent rather than his father's influence that got him the gig. Here's John McCormack, another favourite in the Wardrobe household, singing it better: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgwQcUhKceg>

During this year he suffered two memorable accidents, both to his left hand. The first took place at home on Christmas Day. Two of his presents made a lethal combination. One was a multi-tool Swiss Army penknife, a gift from Margaret and Anne which did not go down well with Mother, for reasons

that will become clear. No doubt James had dropped hints about how useful such an implement would be for “cubbing” activities in the woods on Sunday afternoons. The mind boggles. The other gift was a chocolate football, hollow and about the size of a coconut, provenance unknown. James took himself off to examine the best way to break open the football. Nowadays he would simply drop it on the floor, throw it against a wall or hit it with a 5lb ball-pane hammer, as any sensible adult would do, but instead he foolishly used the technique which in modern times causes what the British Society of Surgery calls “avocado hand.” (You cut the ripe fruit in two lengthways with a sharp knife, then you need to get the stone out. So you cup a halved avocado in your hand, plunge in the knife to spear out the stone, but the flesh is softer than you think, and...off you go to A & E.) James selects the largest blade on the penknife, clasps the football in left hand and ... hey presto! Much howling ensues, amidst shattered pieces of chocolate and blood on the floor, and general family hysteria. James still has a scar on his palm to remind him of what sailed in on that Christmas Day in the morning.

The second incident took place in the Carpentry workshop at school. “Sargie”, the ex-army PE teacher and formidable boxing referee, also taught woodwork as part of the curriculum. It was good fun doing unspeakable things to wood with saws, planes, hammers, nails, screws and...chisels. Sargie was particularly keen on teaching his young soldiers how to make good joints (no, you dopeheads, not that): everything from mitered butt to mortise & tenon, through half-lap, tongue & groove and dado. Perhaps he had told James not to support his piece of softwood with his hand directly in front of where he was chiselling to create a groove. Perhaps not. The chisel sliced neatly and deeply into the interdigital fold between thumb and forefinger. Howling, blood, pieces of wood on the floor. And a second lasting scar, still proving sixty years later that James had been using a 5/8” chisel that day.

His two years at Gilling Castle came to a successful conclusion and he was ready for the move to Junior House the following September. Which leaves one small matter to clear up. Why was the Headmaster known to the boys as Spot Bum?

Normally the boys had communal showers, but on Sunday evenings they had baths which were situated in a mixture of individual and group bathrooms. Most weeks Fr Hilary would visit the bathers when he was on duty and ask the boys individually to stand up out of their bathwater and do a 360° turn. His pretext was to check that they did not have any spots or rashes on their bottoms. That's it. An intermittent 15-second event. No psychological damage inflicted at all. In fact, James forgot about this mild voyeurism for at least thirty years until Ampleforth began to hit the press as a nest of paedophiles. Since 1996, three Ampleforth monks and a lay teacher have been convicted of crimes against more than 30 pupils, from the 1960s to the 1990s. So people started asking him if he'd ever “been abused” when he was there. His answer was and still is a definite No. But as a boarding school master now you'd be crucified for what might even have been a genuine health check rather than a low-key letch.

Over the next six years James came across not a whiff of anything untoward from either the monks or any other staff. There was however a good joke about a rather brusque monk, a housemaster who had been a doctor in a previous life, to whom boys were occasionally sent in an emergency. It went like this: “So, what's the problem, Smith?” “I've got a pain in my arm, Father.” “Right. Take your trousers down..”

*The minstrel boy to the war is gone,
In the ranks of death you'll find him;
His father's sword he has girded on,
And his wild harp slung behind him;
"Land of Song!" said the warrior bard,*

*"Though all the world betrays thee,
One sword, at least, thy rights shall guard,
One faithful harp shall praise thee!"*

*The Minstrel fell! But the foeman's chain
Could not bring that proud soul under;
The harp he loved ne'er spoke again,
For he tore its chords asunder;
And said "No chains shall sully thee,
Thou soul of love and bravery!
Thy songs were made for the pure and free
They shall never sound in slavery!"*

The Minstrel Boy, by Thomas Moore (1779–1852)

who set it to the melody of The Moreen, an old Irish air.

02/06/17

18. The Music Stops

Early season sees a few German tourists on Chrani beach and plenty of Greek families at the weekends. The locals bring their pet dogs. There was a pug yesterday in what looked like a pink dress, which on closer inspection turned out to be a pretty gingham check harness. There is a marked difference between the way the Greeks treat their lapdogs and their attitude towards their much larger guard dogs. They spoil their pet pooches every bit as much as the British, whereas the guardians of property are tied up outdoors all year round and so resort to ceaseless barking, usually at each other and mainly at night.

Max and Smallish Brown Dog tolerate this weekend invasion of their beach space, though occasionally they show excessive interest in the interlopers, much to their owners' chagrin. The other day Max helpfully attempted to push the presumably blind dog in front, as if on Brighton beach, all the way up to the Greek equivalent of St Dunstons, as the classic Noel Coward joke goes. (St Dunstan's being the well-known holiday home for the blind. If you really don't know this story go to <http://www.jokes2go.com/jokes/9541.html>)

Meanwhile the young men show off their proficiency at that annoying pit-pat game, beach tennis. They hit the ball hard and flat at their opponents' bodies and yet maintain long rallies. With nearly 50% of Greek youth unemployed they might as well spend their time honing their beach skills. I mean the ones still left here of course, since 400,000 university graduates have already left the country since the “crisis” began seven years ago. Dad counted fifteen “μαλάκας, malakas” and its cognates in five minutes during a doubles game last week, that's one “tosser” every twenty seconds. This commonest of swear words can be used in the widest range of situations, from outrage shouted at an errant motorist to a term of endearment to a close friend. Anyway, Dad was so impressed by the sheer volume of its usage in such a short space of time that he now calls beach tennis “The Malakas Game.”

Dad had recently returned from a short trip to England where he attended the funeral of his friend, Peter Templeton, and was one of the eulogists. He found it strangely comforting and perfectly apt that, despite a well-planned order of service, moments of disorganisation occurred. Handling chaos was one of Pete's outstanding characteristics, as his close friend Los observed, not least when he had created the mayhem himself in the first place. So one of the poem readers arrived late and missed his slot. No one cared, and there were a series of fine tributes with amusing stories, not least from his children and his youngest brother Dougal. Los also nailed his Gatsby-like quality of “romantic readiness,” what Fitzgerald calls an extraordinary gift for hope and which Dad always admired in him as a rare ability to reject utterly the obstructive impossibilities of life.

Afterwards there were welcome and poignant reunions with the older members of the tribe, but also the opportunity to get to know the younger generation of this extensive and talented family. All the mourners were invited to take a piece of Pete's art from his studio collection as a memento. Mum and Dad chose an oil painting (below) which might well represent order within chaos, so an ideal remembrance.

The next instalment in the Templeton story will be the wedding in a few weeks' time in Spain of Pete's identical twin, Paul, which Mum and Dad are delighted to be able to attend and which I shall no doubt be reporting on with tigerish glee. Many tales will be told there about both twins and more of the already ample mythology will transpose itself seamlessly into reality.



Untitled by Peter Templeton (1948 - 2017)

Meanwhile back at home, I was limping for a few days but the problem has been resolved thankfully without resort to a Greek vet. The cause was a small thorn or burr spike embedded in the pad of one of my front paws. Our Australian visitor Pil knows all about cats and dogs and she did her Androcles to my Lion, so I'm fine now. Dad chortled that I had RSI (repetitive strain injury) from "all that tapping on the keyboard." I didn't understand the acronym, which he then explained in pedantic fashion. This annoyed me since I was in some discomfort at the time, so I peevishly miaowed that not just typists but onanists like him could get it from too much STM. He looked blank. I had to explain to him that it stood for Slapping The Monkey. Which shut the Big Malakas up.

In August 1959 the Wardrobe family took their last holiday together in Britain. In future years they would join the tourist explosion of the early '60s to explore continental Europe, especially the Mediterranean. They went for a fortnight to Looe in Cornwall, stopping for a night in Exeter with the Spencer family, whose son Michael was a Gilling friend. His father, Seymour, was an eminent psychiatrist who would soon become consultant at the Warneford hospital in Oxford, where the university's psychiatry department was based. Among his patients therefore were troubled undergraduates who were permitted to take their Finals from within its walls. People used to say that Warneford "college" would regularly have come top of the Norrington Table since it produced proportionately more Firsts than any of the real university colleges. Seymour was a supremely gifted man, a wonderful eccentric with a great sense of humour inherited by Michael who went on to become a Queen's Counsel.

In the September James's Year started their two-year stretch at Junior House, which was situated a few hundred yards west of the Abbey and the main school buildings, on the north side of Ampleforth valley. It was pretty much self-contained, the boys, about 100 across two Years, only using the senior school's gym and music centre. Less picturesque and spacious than Gilling, but perfectly adequate in its facilities. Here at least the lavatory cubicles had doors, even if their wooden seats were too small for 12- and 13-year-olds' backsides, leading to noisome rear-edge encrustation issues.

The House was run by three resident monks, the Housemaster Fr Peter Utley and his two assistants, Fr Edmund Hatton and Fr Geoffrey Lynch, all categorisable as “decent,” though the youngest, Geoffrey, could get a bit snippy at times. Fr Peter was admired by all the boys for having spent two seasons as a county cricketer with Hampshire in his early twenties. Wisden records that he was a right-arm fast bowler who took 90 wickets in 1927 and 1928. He was also respected and loved for his easy manner and instinctive charm. Corporal punishment was still the standard punishment at Gilling and SHAC but hardly ever employed if at all under Peter's leadership. His magnetic personality ensured a high standard of behaviour in a happy environment. He ran Junior House for 28 years until his sudden death in 1968 at the age of 62.

Fr Edmund was a genial monk with many talents. His father, Sir Ronald Hatton, was a renowned pomologist, responsible for building up the East Malling Horticultural Research Station, so his son knew everything there was to know about apples. Not surprisingly he was the Abbey's Orchard Master for over thirty years. He was an excellent net bowler who greatly improved the boys' batting technique through many patient sessions of turning his arm over at them in their breaks and free time. His ability to drop the ball on a good length time after time was astonishing and it helped to ingrain their forward defensive technique. Edmund's study was welcoming and comfortable. James spent many hours reading his vast collection of yellow-edged National Geographic magazines, fascinated by illustrated articles on the wider world, from shipping on the St Lawrence River to the wheat harvest in the American Midwest and of course, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, the prevalence of vertical sunbathing on the shores of the Black Sea.

Fr Geoffrey was in charge of the Chapel and made James one of his three sacristans. God knows why. He was already beginning to show the early symptoms of irreligiousness which would grow into full-blown agnosticism by the age of sixteen. Their job, let loose in the sacristy every evening, was to prepare all the materials and robes for the next day's Mass. Egged on by James, they soon began to eat the hosts and drink the altar wine. Geoffrey never found out, since they carefully rationed their consumption, a wafer here, a judicious swig there. Many years later he lost a leg in a car accident but he still lived to a ripe old age, as most monks do. A significantly above-average proportion make it to their nineties and beyond. This poses a conundrum about the relationship between asceticism and longevity more interesting than the simpler monastic issue of why nuns rarely suffer from cervical cancer.

Most of the teaching staff were lay, itinerant subject specialists from the senior school. They delivered what looks to modern eyes like an eccentric curriculum, not at all “broad-based,” to use contemporary jargon. For example, from this time forth, James would never receive another school Geography lesson. There had been no Science (nor labs) at Gilling, nor would there be at JH. Plenty of English, History, Religious Studies, Latin, French and Maths. And ... Classical Greek.

The lower sets probably did Geog and Sci, but James through natural selection now began his inexorable journey towards the elite Classical stream of the upper school and beyond. He adored learning this second dead language. New alphabet? Yes, please. Rough and smooth breathings? Easy-peasy. Iota subscripts? Why not? More verb tenses than Latin? The aorist, oh yeah! The middle voice, the optative mood, contract verbs? Bring 'em on. No ablative case for the nouns? All those prepositions instead! So what? He was a delirious duck in water, a pig in muck, a Mick that's got the cream.

The teacher was a new Classics master, a young thruster called Mr Canavan who also taught the class English, so Greek derivations were high on the agenda: hyperbole, bathos, tautology and many more. All grist to the Young Wardrobe's mill, for whom Abbott & Mansfield's *Primer of Greek Grammar* became the bible. If you believe in the significance of those fateful events which when looking back on your

life you can see defined and shaped its course, starting Greek was one such moment.

Every school has its fair share of eccentrics and the Ampleforth Common Room was no exception. The dapper Mr “Balls” Dizer taught them Maths that year. He was constantly fiddling with something in his trouser pockets. On some days he would produce a golf ball or a ping pong ball from his grey flannels. His legendary back-story, handed down through generations, included a classic schoolboy joke. It goes like this: One day whilst fiddling as usual he put a golf ball in his left pocket and some minutes later, after writing some formulae on the blackboard, he pulled it out of his right-hand pocket...

Mr T.E. Danks (inevitably nicknamed “Ted”) taught Latin. When James boldly wrote “T.E.Danks” in the space for “Teacher” on the front of his vocabulary book, the elderly pedagogue had a fit. “Cross that out immediately. Never use my initials again, Wardrobe. My name is MR Danks.” In fact he was an excellent teacher in the old-fashioned manner who worked the boys hard but rewarded them every week by stopping the lesson early and reading them a chapter of a book they absolutely loved. It was some sort of autobiography of an American test pilot and adventurous daredevil. Danks' dry-as-dust sense of humour guaranteed that the name of the author and the title of the book were never revealed. So the class were always on tenterhooks for the next episode with no danger of spoilers. To this day James has never discovered who the writer was. Too early for Chuck Yeager, and he doesn't know of any others who would fit the bill. Clever old Ted.

Regrettably, although all the academic work was going extremely well, James's musical education hit a brick wall and never recovered, much to his life-long regret. At Gilling he had taken piano lessons and he now decided on a change of instrument. He announced that he wanted to learn the violin. His parents agreed and bought him a beautiful, slightly less than full-size, model. Off he trotted every week to the Music Centre in the main school where all individual instrumental lessons took place. His teacher was a middle-aged man of florid complexion, whose identity is lost in the mists of the past. He might have been French or Belgian. If he could have remembered his name, James would have broadcast it here large, happily condemning him to posthumous public infamy. He had long, straight black hair, in the style of Harry Potter's Potions Master, Severus Snape. Unfortunately his preferred potion was alcoholic, and plenty of it. It was James' bad luck to be timetabled as this drunk's first pupil early on a Monday morning. Combine an evil hangover with the vexatious sound of childish scratching on the violin and what do you get? A vile (my apologies to anti-punsters) and explosive temper.

In those days you generally accepted with varying degrees of stoicism the bad behaviour of your Elders And Betters. So the twelve-year-old tolerated the regular shouting and abuse for one or maybe two terms. Then in the holidays he declared to Tommy and Brenda that he wanted to quit the violin forthwith and furthermore he was no longer interested in playing any musical instrument at all ever again. His parents were in a quandary, since they knew better than he what was at stake. Once you've given up some specific skill-learning as a child, especially in music, you rarely come back to it. With a view to negotiation and confident in his son's capabilities, Tommy suggested, “All right. Get your violin out and play us something, a tune, anything you've learnt. Then we'll decide if it's worth continuing with.” James rosined his bow and went into battle. He played a couple of tunes. Tommy stopped him. He had heard enough. “I agree. You can give up...”

Oh well, he was never going to be a Paganini. For a long time afterwards he blamed the inebriate elbow-bender for putting him off, but he also blamed himself for a certain lack of stickability and for not at least achieving a level at which music-making could become a rewarding lifetime hobby. If only he's chosen the clarinet or the guitar. So twenty years later he taught himself the tenor sax and enjoyed many hours of amateurish fun, growling down the horn at every opportunity, like a demented

Morton Frog, his favourite childhood puppet in The Pinky and Perky Show. Not exactly Stan Getz or Ben Webster, but nevertheless...

Morton Frog, circa 1960 (Yes, yes, it's an alto sax)

Elsewhere, on the literary front, he was reading voraciously. His range was eclectic, including Agatha Christie, Saki, Dickens, Dennis Wheatley. He particularly relished the latter's Gregory Sallust series, which was one of the main inspirations for Ian Fleming's James Bond novels. He enjoyed Wheatley's occult thrillers too (eg *The Devil Rides Out*) but he didn't tell the Benedictines that. All prose reading, since you did poetry in class, and all British writers. The Irish and American canon would come later.

The weekly film show included some crackers, most memorably a French short, "Le Ballon Rouge," which follows the adventures of a young boy who finds a sentient red balloon that follows him around Paris. However, the major Wardrobian cultural event of 1960 took place in the summer holidays between the two Junior House years: a family trip to Italy and the Passion Play at Oberammergau in Austria.

And so we beat on...

"If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the "creative temperament" - it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again."

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Great Gatsby

26/06/17

19. Owls, snakes and killer chickens

The air temperature is 36°C and the summer weather is set fair. The Dutch couple who have rented the small house next door spend most of their time wandering about with no clothes on. During the day we just find some shade with any breeze there might be and wait patiently for the cool of the night. We've all lost weight, even Minnie, as our Liphook vet Hans predicted we would.

As a kitten eleven and a half years ago I was briefly a putative transgender cat. My original given name was spelt Mickey because when Dad and my first Mum took us home they had been told by our natural Mum's human Mum (keep up!) that Minnie and Lulu were female and I was male. Dad tells the story of our first visit to the vet, Scottish Andrew who talks "heeland" like Dr Cameron of "Doctor Finlay's Casebook." This took place after an intense week of "male bonding." "This little fellow has really taken to me because we're the only boys in the house," Dad chortled when I insisted on jumping on his chest and squeaking at him during "Coronation Street." Obviously I was trying to tell him that I was a girl, but he was having none of it.

Informed that I was a boy, Andrew checked my sex as a matter of course. "Janit, will ye taek a wee luke a' thies?" The nurse confirmed it. I was a girl. Slightly dazed by this news, Dad then asked the vet the question he had been chewing over about our paternity. Minnie and I are clearly black-and-white "domestic short hair" twins, but from the same litter Lulu is a long-haired tortoiseshell. How come she is so different? "Two fathers," replied Andrew with the hint of a mischievous glimmer in his eye. Really? "It's no uncommon. It's called heteropaternal superfecundation." Whaat? "Aye, it happens with humans toooo..."



Heteropaternal half-sister Lulu between the twins at ten weeks old

Weighed down by this mindboggler and also by a surfeit of six-syllable words, Dad staggered out of

the surgery and on reaching home reported my newly-discovered femininity to Mum Number One. Ever practical she said, "No problem, we'll just spell her name differently." "But what about my male bonding...?" Dad began, and was silenced with a look.

So in Greek my name is a shortened form of Michaela, since Mikis (eg Theodorakis) is a boy's name.

Until the late eighteenth century Enlightenment virtually all Christian Greeks were named after an Orthodox saint, for example Elias, Anastasios, Theodoros, Maria, Evgenia. Names of classical gods and mortals, heroic or historical, and Byzantine figures then became popular and they remain part of the fashionable modern corpus, eg Achilles, Socrates, Aphrodite, Athena, Electra. Dad was delighted to meet a Likourgos last week, whose owner gratifyingly was aware of the ancient Spartan origin of his moniker.

It is no longer enshrined in Greek law that the first name has to be a saint. Any appellation is appropriate nowadays "as long as it is not contrary to good morals or does not offend the child's personality." (from *Family Law in Greece*, written by an Ismene, whose prototype was feisty Antigone's wet sister.)

"James" as a given name is a little problematic over here because it's not instantly recognisable when first used by Dad to introduce himself. He overcomes the difficulty now by adding "like James Bond," which dispels any puzzlement and always raises a laugh. Although Dimitris is a conventional hellenisation of Jimmy, and vice versa, James is actually cognate to *Ἰάκωβος*, *Iakovos/Jacobus*. In official Greek documents Dad is no longer James William Wardrobe because the father's name (in the genitive case) is always inserted between a person's first and last name. Patronyms are a big deal. So his bank account and car registration paperwork, for instance, record him as James Thomas Wardrobe. Tommy would have liked that.

Meanwhile, our beauty sleep has been disturbed recently by two noisy Scops Owls. The Greek name for this owl is *γκιώνης*, *gionis*, but it is often just called the nightbird. They are a common summer visitor in the eastern Mediterranean and are easily identifiable since they are the only small owls with ear tufts. They were spotted by Dad at dusk canoodling on the top of our nearest telegraph pole and they are clearly very fond of each other. So they "piuwww" loudly and intermittently throughout the night just outside our window and wake up the whole household. Makes a change from the midnight roosters, the all-night barkers and the most familiar noise of the summer, the tztziking of the cicadas, I suppose. And yet Bob has alerted us to an even more distinctive sound of nature, "Wait until you hear the din of the local turtles copulating. That's truly appalling. It'll really wake you up." Something else to look forward to then.

The national bird of Greece is another small owl. Slightly bigger than the Scops, it is the Little Owl, also known as Athena's Owl (*γλαύξ*, *glaux* in classical Greek, *Athene noctua* in Latin). It is common across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East but not native to Britain where it was introduced in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, probably as a result of a resurgent interest in Greek and Roman civilisation, the same motivation that delivered the Parthenon Marbles to northern shores.

In ancient art, this owl is invariably depicted in close attendance to the classical goddess of Wisdom and this mascot or attribute of Athena is a traditional symbol of knowledge and perspicacity. So why the association? Scholars cite an indeterminate etiology which to this simple cat is a fancy way of saying that they don't exactly know. There are two plausible explanations: firstly the reflection off its eyes in the dark gives the appearance of an "inner light;" secondly, this particular bird was common on the top of the Athenian Acropolis, a place dedicated to Athena (who is *γλαυκώπις*, *glaukopis*, owl-eyed, in Homer) and the locals took the presence of so many Little Owls there as sacred to her. Hence the

owl and the personification of wisdom were linked and through time the same “wise bird” recurs in many subsequent cultures.

Most famously it is depicted on Athenian coinage dating back 2,500 years. Athena's Owl became the standard reverse of the Athenian tetradrachm (the four-drachma piece) after 510BC and the coin was colloquially known as the “Owl” in ancient times.



The reverse of an ancient Athenian tetradrachm. Athena's head is on the obverse.

Whilst on the subject of wildlife, I have a couple of snake stories for you. We were all three of us amused to hear that Bella brought a viper (οχιιά, *ochia*) home as a present for her Mum the other day. As you do. Even though it was dead Fotine freaked out since this is the rarer, venomous type. I wonder which of us three will be the first to bring our Mum and Dad such a trophy? In England Minnie, a keener and more efficient hunter than me (useless) and Lulu (easily bored), used to specialise in rehousing rats, dead and alive. So I guess it will be her. We live in hope of a bit of excitement.

Then Fotine went up to the barn to collect her chickens' eggs. Lo and behold, there was another snake, alive this time, in the nesting basket! What happened next, before Fotine's eyes, astonished her. She used a stick to lift the basket out of the shed and tipped the snake onto the ground. In a spectacular avian frenzy all the hens attacked the intruder, pecking it to death and then one of them proceeded to devour it. After two minutes there was no trace of the snake. With Tippi Hedren in the Fotine role, Hitchcock could have conjured up a great early scene in “The Birds.” We sometimes forget that domesticated chickens are actually birds. Dad remembers his surprise twenty years ago in Zakynthos at seeing the neighbouring farmyard hens roosting every evening in the low branches of olive trees. Anyway, Bob says he's refusing to eat any fresh eggs from that particular killer chook for a few days.

Back on the beach teenage human courtship rituals involve plenty of screeching too. A typical scenario might be: the boys and the girls sunbathe separately for a while, but the boys soon get bored of chatting about football, basketball, etc, and want to go for a collective swim. The girls resist in a desultory matter and then give in too easily. They primp themselves for a gentle immersion into the sea. They enter gingerly, perhaps up to their knees. This is the moment the boys have been waiting for. They splash the girls vigorously with their forearms or bomb them with mighty belly flops at close range. The girls squeal and shriek but stay in the water. All is well in the unchanging world of Mother Nature.

One of the lads had this sentence printed on the back of his teeshirt: η λύση στην κρίση είναι το μεθύσι, *the solution to the crisis is drunkenness*. Lost in translation the Greek words have an attractive rhyming

quality, on which Dad complimented the youth who smiled back sheepishly. The truth is that he'd almost certainly never been drunk in his life - it's not in his culture and he probably wouldn't be able to afford it anyway. Thanks to the never-ending Crisis, which began when the lad was in primary school.

Dad observes such shenanigans chiefly at his favourite beach bar, the Caribbean, where the young proprietors, William and Iphigenia, are unequivocally welcoming and friendly. They love old western pop music and were delighted when Meester James gave them a triple-CD copy of The Old Grey Whistle Test's 40th Anniversary album, featuring such '60s and '70s classics as The Who's Baba O'Riley, Thin Lizzy's Whiskey In The Jar and Short People by Randy Newman. Nevertheless their favourite subgenre is reggae, not surprisingly given the name of their enterprise.

As the summer heat gathers pace, Dad rises early and retires to bed late. Yesterday at six in the morning he was watching the Morning Star rise in the east. Before he'd put his glasses on. "Actually," he quipped, "because of my cataract I saw *five* Venuses rising at the same time, all in a neat circle..." The classical Greeks and the ancient Egyptians before them thought that Venus was two separate objects, a morning star and an evening star. For the Greeks the morning star was Phosphoros, "the bringer of light" and they called the evening star Hesperos, "the star of the evening". In the Hellenistic period they worked out that Venus was actually a single object.

At the end of the 1959-60 academic year James went on the Junior House scout camp expedition to Loch Earn in Perthshire. Memorable moments were: bagging his first and only Munro, Ben Vorlich; trying and failing to catch trout with his bare hands by tickling them; making fires without matches; and entertaining the troops round the campfire by performing a parodic sketch. The skit was based on a cigarette TV commercial which ended with the well-known line, "You're never alone with a Strand."

In fact it would be a year or two before James was frequently alone with a Player's No. 6. He had already experimented with tobacco with his mate Robert Knowles when they were about ten. Brenda had put an immediate stop to that when she found a packet of five Woodbines in the pocket of his shorts. He was banged to rights and fessed up. If you told the old lady in the corner shop that you were buying fags for your parents she would readily sell them to you along with your Smarties and gobstoppers. Those were the days. So the start of his fifteen-year career as a hardened smoker was put on hold for a while.

The main event of the summer was the two-week family holiday, first to Italy then finishing off with a visit to the Austrian village of Oberammergau to see the decennial Passion Play. This event derives from a vow made in 1634 by the inhabitants of the village that if God spared them from the effects of the bubonic plague they would perform a passion play every ten years. Brenda had seen it as a twenty-year-old in 1930 and promised herself that one day she would take her own family to witness this rare performance. They travelled by train and coach via the most useless tour operator ever devised by gods or men, the Catholic Travel Guild. I kid you not, an outfit just for touristic left-footers. The accompanying guide was a young priest along for the ride on a freebie who would have been unable "to organise a root in a brothel with a hand full of 50s," if I may be so bold as to use an Australianism.

Here's a small sample of what went awry: having transferred in Paris from the Gare du Nord to the Gare de Lyon for the sleeper to Genoa, it was only Tommy's grasp of French that stopped the group getting on the wrong train to the wrong destination; At Genoa they all failed to get on the correct connecting service down the Ligurian coast; at the end of the holiday they watched their train back

to Calais, with their reserved couchettes, leave Munich station without them aboard thanks to the incompetent cleric's inability to read a timetable. James remembers sitting on his suitcase on the platform and weeping from tiredness and frustration, whilst Tommy found the group another route to the Channel. They were lucky to even get seats on this final overnight leg.

None of this diminished James's joy at the *newness* of it all. Going to sleep that first night in the middle of France to the constant chatter of the wheels on the track and then waking to an achingly beautiful vision of the Alps at the border crossing of Domodossola would never be forgotten. Then came wonderment at his first encounter with the Mediterranean and the lifestyle of its people. He was enraptured by the warmth of the sea, the heat of the sun, the taste of the food, the relaxed character of the Italians.

The first week was spent in the small beach resort of Cavi di Lavagna near Sestri Levante. One day they went on a small boat across the bay to Portofino. The sea was choppy on the return crossing and many fellow trippers were throwing up over the side. James was proud of having inherited "Coulehan sea legs" from his mother and perversely he really enjoyed the voyage back.



The Wardrobe family at Portofino, August 1960

Then they were off, on his 13th birthday, to Florence via Pisa. The Leaning Tower was a must-do ascent to the summit, but Brenda was nervous about it and Tommy had gone AWOL. So Margaret got the job of escorting the intrepid heightmeister. She vividly recalls: "We went right to the top whilst the parents watched anxiously from below. There were no railings, so we had to be very careful when we passed anyone. I tried to make sure that we "hugged the wall" all the time. Nowadays Health and Safety would go bananas."

An enjoyable overnight stop in Florence was followed by the drive via Bologna to Innsbruck and then on to Oberammergau. The ski jump at Innsbruck looked strange, standing in a green field. James remembers little of the Passion Play except that it was very long and, since he already knew the ending, rather tedious though he did harbour hopes of a technical error at the crucifixion scene. No such luck.

The Catholic Travel Guild sprang one last unwanted surprise. On arrival back at Victoria the whole group was invited to Mass in the chapel of Westminster Cathedral “as a special treat.” The celebrant was the idiot priest-guide and guess what? He needed an altar boy. Up pipes Brenda proudly, “James is *fully trained and experienced* in this role. You'll be delighted to do it, won't you dear?” What a way to end a holiday.

*The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar
'O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!*

*Pussy said to the Owl, 'You elegant fowl!
How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long have we tarried;
But what shall we do for a ring?'
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
To the land where the Bong-tree grows
And there in the wood a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose,
His nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.*

*'Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?' Said the Piggy, 'I will.'
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.*

The Owl and The Pussycat, by Edward Lear

17/07/17

20. “The Sea, The Sea”

Mount Taygetos is lost to view in the July heat haze. Last week the temperature reached an unseasonal 45°C and has now settled at an average merely in the high 30's. The Ministry of Culture took the unusual step of closing archaeological sites around the country, including the Acropolis in Athens. Behind our house the burnt grapes are shrivelling into raisins on the vine. We three are immobile during the day and then enjoy sleeping outside on the forecourt when the relative cool of the night arrives. We are too listless to see off Bella or The Male when they come to visit, usually to nick our food. In fact, all five of us were lying on the forecourt within a few metres of each other recently, too beaten up by the sun to be bothered with even a howl and a skirmish. Dad has taken to throwing fallen lemons at The Male on his retreat from raiding our biscuits. The old yowler is not in the least deterred.

We've been entertaining two-legged visitors. Michael and Rob are former colleagues of Dad, both teachers. They both love watching almost all sports, notably football, cricket, tennis and rugby. With Wimbledon, test cricket and in particular The Lions vs The All Blacks decider due, Dad was under some pressure as their solicitous host to deliver a Great British Summer of TV Sport, in Chrani of all places. Then he discovered that Yiannis at the local bar had recently acquired a “special decoder,” which enables him to live-stream Sky Sports and all other UK channels, provided we all keep our mobile phones and other devices turned off. Ask not the reason how... “We all have to make a living,” says 43-year-old Yiannis, pushing back his shoulder-length locks as he manipulates the keys on his barside laptop. The New Zealand rugby viewing was accompanied by Full English Breakfasts, one each for Michael and Dad, and two for Rob. “Small portions, Headmaster, small portions,” declares Australia's grown-up version of Oliver Twist. A massive bonus for Dad is that Yiannis can now show all four days' live coverage of The Open Championship from Royal Birkdale. Result!

Michael teaches History and Politics. He is the ideal person to explain to puzzled Greeks the whys and wherefores of the self-inflicted wounds of Brexit and the hung parliament. I'm very proud of Michael's insightful comments on the current Prime Minister, forcefully stated: “She is anti-charismatic. James's cat Mickie has more charisma than Theresa May...” For their part the locals know that their country is the economic basket-case of Europe, but they are astounded by the inept lack of vision in current British politics, in which they are generally interested and well-informed. As for their own relationship with Brussels, Yiannis quotes Yanis Varoufakis, former Finance Minister, “For Greece the EU is Hotel California. We can checkout anytime we like, but we can never leave.”

Rob is an Australian P.E. teacher and swimming coach, so he and Dad are front-crawling relentlessly every morning. They clocked up about ten kilometres last week. The Rob express is about three times faster than Dad's slow goods train, but the Aussie compliments him politely on his “languid” style and gives him tips on improvement, for example, watch that “lazy” left arm, more leg kick required, etc.

By lunchtime the onshore breeze makes the sea choppy, so they religiously plough their maritime furrows before noon. With his own personal lifeguarding dolphin on “sharkside,” Dad is able to take on longer and more adventurous swims. Yesterday they swam round the rocky headland to the north and discovered a number of isolated coves and caves, only accessible by sea. These were sparsely inhabited by middle-aged Northern European naturalists. Having avoided Scylla and Charybdis, man-eating monster and whirlpool both, in order to get there, the boys decided to hold station forty metres off shore and retreat with caution. Wearing earplugs saved them from succumbing to any unlikely

temptation from the siren songs of these forlorn and sagging creatures. All over the Mediterranean, including Greece, the nudists' habitat is invariably to be found either side of similar outcrops of rock at the end of sandy bays.



Before, during and after...what exactly?

Burt Lancaster (from "The Swimmer" 1968) aged 53; Rob McHarg, 53 next month; Old Wardrobe, 53 17 years ago

Sirens, the femmes fatales of The Odyssey, lure sailors to their death on the rocks. In Greek folklore they are closely associated with mermaids. So the Greek word for "mermaid" is γοργόνα, Gorgon, with its strong connotation of danger. The most famous of her kind is Medusa who will turn you to stone if you look upon her. In British folk tradition on the other hand the mermaid is usually perceived romantically as a benevolent and attractive being. Many years ago, Dad learnt from a Greek fisherman that if a mermaid appears whilst you are sailing in the Aegean, she will always ask the same question, "Ζει ο Βασιλεύς Αλέξανδρος; Is King Alexander alive?" and woe betide you if you don't answer correctly. She is Thessalonike, Alexander the Great's sister. So he learnt to reply, "Ζει και βασιλεύει και τον κόσμο κυριεύει. He lives and reigns and conquers the world." This answer will please her and you will pass on your way in calm waters. Otherwise in her anger she will raise a terrible storm, dooming your ship and every sailor on board. I reckon that some legends are important to know, don't you?

I took a particular interest in one of the lads' many discussions. Can cats swim? Michael was adamant that we are all perfectly capable swimmers, like our first cousin the tiger, but we just would rather not. Dad suggested chucking us in the bath to find out, but as usual it was just one of his bad jokes. Rob was non-committal, being more of a dog person whose hound named Bentley does a passable doggie paddle. If they'd taken the trouble to ask me, I could have told them that we domesticats can indeed swim competently and some of us actually enjoy water, for example the Maine Coon, the Turkish Van and the Bengal cat. For all of us, by the way, the preferred stroke is the kittie paddle.

How is Mum and Dad's house coming along? Slowly. They have completed a "beauty contest" of architects and have selected Katerina, whose brother Linos is a civil engineer. So they are all perusing and discussing designs, prior to submitting the application for the planning permit. It will be in a

modern style, with plenty of glass and stone. Meanwhile, Dad is always interested in the “other life” of people he meets. Katerina's husband, Manos, also a civil engineer in the same family firm, is a keen spear fisherman and free diver. He can hold his breath for two-and-a-half minutes and go down to 30 metres. Linos's hobby is acting. He has recently been performing with the leading drama company in Kalamata, the Μεσσηνιακό Ερασιτεχνικό Θέατρο, the Messinian Amateur Theatre, in an adaptation of Maria Iordanidou's novel, “Loxandra”, which was popularised on TV in the 1980s. Loxandra is a Greek matriarch living in Asia Minor and Constantinople in the late 19th and early 20th century. The main character is based on the author's grandmother, the plot revolving around her relationships with her extended family over a forty-year period in the waning decades of the Ottoman Empire. Linos played her son, an uneducated sea-captain, to much laughter. This is a world lost to the Greeks after the 1922 “Catastrophe,” a milieu to which many families are personally connected through earlier generations, a historical period brimming with national nostalgia.

This was a classy and entertaining production set in the open-air amphitheatre of Kalamata Castle, overlooking the lights of the city and the sea, playing to a packed house over four starry, moonlit nights. With plenty of live music and dynamic acting to savour, the non-Greeks thoroughly enjoyed their evening, which also included an amusing Karaghiozis shadow puppet interlude. Karaghiozis, akin to Mr Punch, is a poor yet wily trickster who always survives his various misadventures.



The “Loxandra” actors take a bow. Linos is centre-left, bearded and wearing a white suit

What first gets a child interested in the classical world? Often a spellbinding Greek myth, sometimes a distinctive English word derived from Greek or Latin, a trip to a Roman villa or perhaps one of those quaint Hollywood epic movies. In James's case it could even have been Kirk Douglas as Ulysses in the 1957 Italian-made film of the same name. And now in the second year of Junior House the Greek class was storming ahead, reading Xenophon's “Anabasis” in the original language. This is a true tale from 401BC of survival against the odds, replete with descriptions of fateful battles, desperate marches and even the hunting of wild asses, ostriches and bustards. And a happy ending. How could a thirteen-year-old ever forget the moment when the 10,000 abandoned Greek mercenaries, beleaguered in hostile territory and fighting their way back through Anatolia to the coast, finally reach the sea and salvation? “θάλαττα, θάλαττα, the sea, the sea,” shout the vanguard. For that matter, can any Greek, ancient or modern, live for long without the sight of the sea, which *wherever you are in Greece* is never

more than fifty miles away.

Their teacher was one of Ampleforth's senior Classics teachers, Father Barnabas Sandeman. He was a knowledgeable and enthusiastic scholar, but his classroom discipline was poor. So the boys took the unmerciful mick. His nickname was "Bou," since his bald pate and sharp beak reminded them of the marabou stork, one of the ugliest birds in Christendom. James's path would cross with his many times over the following five years. Bou was always kinder and more tolerant towards him than he deserved.



Some monks wore black trousers under their habits; others, like Fr Barnabas, did not.

(Drawing found in the back of Wardrobe's Ancient History notebook, circa 1963)

As all British children at the start of the 1960s knew, history began in 1066 with the Battle of Hastings and for classical streams it ended in AD 180 with the death of Marcus Aurelius. Take a bow, Father Edward Corbould, a young and good-humoured History teacher who did James's class a massive service with lifelong benefits. That year, enjoying a curricular freedom that no longer exists, he filled in the 900-year gap in their European history: the decline and fall of Rome, the Byzantine Empire, including Justinian and the campaigns of Belizarius, the Moors, the Dark Ages, Charlemagne.... What a boon! Thank you, Edward, you eccentric enthusiast.

The leaders of the top sets worked their way steadily towards the Senior School entrance scholarship exams in the summer term. The written papers were taken in the main gym by both Junior House candidates and many from other prep schools. James only remembers wrestling with some tough Maths questions. The interview was something else, like the scene in "And When Did You Last See

Your Father?" by William Frederick Yeames. Chaired by the Headmaster, Fr William Price, and flanked by his Heads of Department, all monks, this viva was the most daunting that he has ever faced, more rigorous than his Oxford interview or any subsequent job-seeking interrogations. Fr Cuthbert sat behind James's left shoulder, the bad-cop monk guarding against any sudden bolt for the door, and fired his one-liners in from fine leg. He was Senior Mathematics Master. "So, Wardrobe, what is a logarithm?" In an adrenaline-fuelled state of heightened awareness, James could sometimes be too clever for his own good. If in doubt, make 'em laugh. "Something I look up in a log book, Father," he quipped. Not a twitch from a single one of them. Well, he wouldn't be getting a scholarship for his Maths anyway. Fr Basil Hume, Senior Modern Languages Master, was kinder, as befits the most saintly man he would ever meet in his life. "I don't think you are really a modern linguist, Wardrobe, are you? Would you agree?" Yes, Father." Then Fr Patrick Barry, Head of Classics, got stuck in and for most of the rest of the half-hour James was in familiar territory, where he made a decent fist of showing that he had some academic potential after all. Fr William was impressed that he was reading "A Tale Of Two Cities," so James wisely expiated on Dickens rather than on the latest Dennis Wheatley. The upshot was a small award which could be added to his Gilling bursary and so the total amounted to the same value as one of the minor scholarships.

This academic year was the happiest of his eight at boarding school. He was in a small dormitory with three other boys, one of whom was a new boy who would follow the same route as James through Ampleforth and go on to read Classics at Cambridge. Robert Lister lived in Coventry and was a keen fan of motor racing. For James the trainspotting hobby had morphed into aircraft spotting, but his interests included Formula One too. He had seen Jack Brabham win the British Grand Prix at Aintree in 1959 and was by now a loyal devotee of Jim Clark, the unassuming Scottish driving genius. Since Clark raced for Lotus, who were using Coventry Climax engines, James and Robert formed an immediate bond. Until they went their separate ways at university they remained firm friends.

Another friend in that dorm was Peter Loftus, old Fr Maurus's smackee two years before in the Gilling garret. Since he lived in Bolton, they began to meet up in central Manchester in the holidays and watch a newly-released film together. They favoured epics, none more so than "Spartacus," Kirk Douglas's most famous sword-and-sandals movie. One scene, featuring the naked back of Jean Simmons in the bath, was seared for ever on the young teenager's brain. He read and was enthralled by Mary Renault's "Last Of the Wine," her historical novel set in 5th century BC Athens. All such extra-curricular excursions into the ancient world reinforced his motivation to specialise in what were, along with English and History, his best subjects.

Things were going too well. He achieved his highest cricket score ever (70) and started having golf lessons at Wilmslow Golf Club, where both parents were members. In Extra Carpentry he produced a passable oak stool and a side table which were still being used in the family home twenty years later. His Confirmation name was Michael, a name chosen for some long-forgotten reason. The ceremony took place in a temporary hut next to the Abbey Church which was being rebuilt. The event, an accepted rite of passage for young Catholic teenagers, meant nothing at all to him. The divinities he was interested in lived on Mount Olympus.

On the horizon where lay his Senior School future two clouds loomed – a monk and a disease.

On the fifth day they did in fact reach the mountain; its name was Theches. Now as soon as the vanguard got to the top of the mountain, a great shout went up. And when Xenophon and the rearguard heard it, they imagined that other enemies were attacking in front; for enemies were following behind them from the district that was in flames, and the rearguard had killed some of them and captured others by setting an ambush, and had also taken

about twenty wicker shields covered with raw, shaggy ox-hides.

But as the shout kept getting louder and nearer, as the successive ranks that came up all began to run at full speed toward the ranks ahead that were one after another joining in the shout, and as the shout kept growing far louder as the number of men grew steadily greater, it became quite clear to Xenophon that here was something of unusual importance.

So he mounted a horse, took with him Lycius and the cavalry, and pushed ahead to lend aid; and in a moment they heard the soldiers shouting, “θάλαττα, θάλαττα, The Sea! The Sea!” and passing the word along. Then all the troops of the rearguard likewise broke into a run, and the pack animals began racing ahead and the horses.

And when all had reached the summit, then indeed they fell to embracing one another, and generals and captains as well, with tears in their eyes. And on a sudden, at the bidding of some one or other, the soldiers began to bring stones and to build a great cairn.

The Anabasis, by Xenophon 4.7.21-25

06/08/17

21. Noisy Nights, Norwegian Nudes and No-brained Numpties

Over the past few weeks we've been having our nocturnal beauty sleep disturbed big time. Here are four of the reasons why.

A few Sundays ago we had to spend the night under Mum and Dad's bed. The storm that brought relief from the weeks of heat was prodigious: sheet lightning, rolling thunder, bucketing rain for hours on end. Rob was still here then and he'd shut all the windows against any water ingress, but he still got wet from water running down an inside wall above his bed. Dad didn't help much. He muttered, "Don't you just love the power of nature," yawned a bit and went back to sleep straightaway, whilst the rest of us waited in trepidation for the thunder to die away. It seemed like about six inches of rain fell in three hours.

Next, we have to put up with the noisy and ubiquitous bug-eyed insects that inhabit the olive trees and "sing" when the temperature gets to 25°C. The cicada has a pair of ribbed membranes called tymbals at the base of its abdomen. It makes its "song" by contracting the internal tymbal muscles. This causes the membranes to buckle inward, producing a distinct sound. When these muscles relax, the tymbals pop back to their original position. Scientists still don't fully understand how they produce such extreme volume. The noise is the males' mating call and is at its peak in the heat of the day. However, it's been so hot recently that even at night the temperature remains at or above 25°C, so the blighters keep going until nearly dawn. Then it's time for them to start again.

With a lifespan of 17 years, cicadas are among the longest-living insects on earth. Dad says that they've been mentioned in literature since the time of Homer's "Iliad". Hesiod and Aristotle describe them too. The ancient Greeks used to eat them, as do the Chinese today. But they'll eat anything. So by way of experiment I caught one the other night and started chewing it. Not a good taste. Its death cries were so loud that Dad was up out of bed and shouting the usual abuse at me within seconds, "For God's sake, Mick..." etc. Anyway, be careful when you're ordering tzatziki in a restaurant not to ask for tzitziki, τζιτζίκι, which is Greek for cicada.

Thirdly, an affable Slovakian couple have been renting the small house next door. Yuri, pronounced "Your Eye," strums the guitar with more enthusiasm than talent and sings late into the night, accompanied by his harmonising wife, Katerina. His repertoire began with "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da," so we knew we were doomed from the start. Then "Yellow Submarine," "Stand By Me" and so on. You get the picture. "L-i-i-i-i-fe goes on" indeed, but largely bereft of sleep. I was tempted to ask Dad to crown Yuri with his own lyre in a bid for silence, but in truth he's a friendly guy so we continue to tolerate these classics from the Guitar Beginner's Songbook. Yesterday Dad even gave him a lemon for his Campari.

Finally, Jimmy, Dad's Liphook tree surgeon, came out for a working holiday to prune the twenty-four olive trees and half a dozen carobs on our new land. Dissatisfied with the latinate "arborist" or "arboriculturist," Dad calls him his dendrologist and he has apparently invented a new equivalence, δενδρολόγος, *dendrologos*, a neologism which amuses Fotine. The nearest Greek word apparently is δασολόγος, *dasologos*, but that means "forester" to me.

They worked hard from 6.30 to 10.00 every morning then stopped when the temperature reached the high 30's C. They discovered that fifteen of the olive trees have fruit, so Mum and Dad will be olive farmers sooner than they expected. If all goes well until the November harvest, they might even get

up to 30 litres of their very own oil.

Jimmy, a strapping 35-year-old who is training for an October charity marathon run, turns out to have a severe liking for the sauce. Being on holiday he let his hair down. He wasn't joking when he said he was a ten-pint-a-night man, but that didn't include the gin and tonics. At bedtime he was out like a light, but later... We were woken in the early hours by tortured shouting and loud farting, which continued intermittently throughout his drunken slumbers. To be fair to him, he was always up and ready for work at dawn the following morning, bright as a lark, and always a cheerful companion.

Not that we need any excuses for sleeping twenty hours a day, but those are some of the causes of our extended catch-up catnaps.

Meanwhile Dad has been learning about local Chrani tourism politics. Bookings are down this summer and the restaurants are quiet. The beach bars are crowded only at the weekends when the local Greek families arrive en masse. Gone are the golden years when a single tour operator would buy up the whole accommodation capacity for the entire high season. The traditional and well-established resorts of Stoupa and Kardamyli, only twenty miles across the Gulf, are full. Why the discrepancy? Because this place is not set up to be a tourist resort, despite its sandy beach, its apartments close to the sea and its adequate variety of restaurants and bars. No night clubs, no jet skis, no paragliding. This suits Dad nicely, but he felt sorry for the locals. So he decided to investigate.



Veranda restaurant, 9.00pm on a Friday night at the end of July: empty, apart from the dendrologist on his eighth pint

During The Open Golf coverage at Yiannis' bar he got talking to a marketing consultant who specialises in tourism and who knows the Chrani scene well, since his Greek partner has a house here. Simon was scathing about the general lack of professionalism when it comes to selling the village to tourists. "With a few notable exceptions, the restaurateurs here are just farmers who serve food in the summer," he declares. They have no interest in marketing the area as an all-round tourist destination. "There are two associations of local businessmen, who are rivals and agree on nothing," concurs Yiannis. They both agree that small communities in other countries in the face of difficulties often come together. Look at how in Britain many village pubs, faced with closure by the brewery, have been saved by community intervention and local financial investment. The Greeks on the other hand move

apart from each other when the going gets tough, in business at least. Jealousies and malicious gossip abound.

Yiannis tells the story of his long-running feud with the restaurant next door about car parking. “The commonest word in English round here is ONLY, as in *Parking here ONLY for clients of restaurant.*” This season his neighbour opened a new bar round the corner and has put a notice advertising it directly opposite Yiannis' establishment. Cheeky! He has also been known to lock foreign non-clients' cars inside his lot overnight when they went to another restaurant. Not the best way to build Chrani's reputation.

So the absence of a spirit of co-operation means that Chrani has poor branding as a resort. The upside is what Dad likes, for example that people in Koroni and Petalidi drive straight through without stopping. According to Dad's hairdresser, Maria, having relatively few visitors along this coast suits most of the locals in the area. A hard-working Athenian who married a local man, she believes strongly that they lack both interest and ambition to change the situation to their financial advantage. She says, “They moan about the Crisis, sit around hoping for a bumper olive harvest and that's the extent of their efforts. I really don't think they want any more tourists.”

In August 1961 James accompanied his parents on a Fred Olsen ferry from Newcastle to Oslo. To while away the time on the overnight crossing he played chess with an amiable old Norge gentleman who had a Solzhenitsyn beard and spoke little English. They were combining a driving holiday to Norway in Thomas's new Sunbeam Rapier with a visit to one of Brenda's Australian nieces, June. She was the daughter of Norbert Coulehan, a relatively successful novelist who had emigrated to Melbourne before the war. June had married a Norwegian sea captain called Christian Lossius and they lived in Hamar, a nondescript town south-east of Lillehammer and about 80 miles north of Oslo.

Christian was a quiet and retiring man who was absent at sea most of the time. June was bossy and overbearing. She had been the first female jockey in Australia, with cups and medals in a Melbourne museum now to prove it. She was interviewed on Australian radio in November 2016 when a woman won the Melbourne Cup for the first time.

There wasn't much for James to do in Hamar for a week so he mooched about solving chess problems and listening to pop music on Radio Luxembourg. Marvellous stuff like: “Runaway” (*Del Shannon*), “Cupid” (*Sam Cooke*), “You Always Hurt The One You Love” (*Clarence Frogman Henry*), “Well I Ask You” (*Eden Kane*). James heard later that June annoyed Brenda immensely by telling her that her son should stop mooning about and go out and get a girlfriend. When they left they were all so pleased to get away that they forgot their passports and had to do a U-turn at Lillehammer to return and fetch them. The rest of the holiday in the mountains and fjords of western Norway was a joy, as was their stay in Oslo. There the highlights for James were the Viking Ship Museum and the Vigeland Sculpture Park. So many nudes! He insisted on trying - in vain - to embarrass Thomas by photographing him in front of one of these voluptuous ladies.



Thomas poses inscrutably for his delighted son in Vigeland Sculpture Park, Oslo

James came across June a few years later when she came to stay in Altrincham to be near her aunt when she was having her baby. The idea was that Brenda could offer support during June's pregnancy. Margaret remembers witnessing her nearly drive poor Mother to a breakdown through her complete lack of sensitivity. James steered clear, June returned to Norway for a while after the birth, soon got shot of the Norwegian and returned to Australia.



Ampleforth Abbey and College from the air – a safe distance

Fate, hooded in its black cowl, rolled up the frayed sleeve of its Benedictine habit, dipped the adamantine tip of its imperishable quill into the pot of crimson ink and in neat italic script wrote the letter D next to the name WARDROBE. The boy was thus assigned to his Senior School House and an assuredly wretched future in the “care” of the most Miserable Bastard Monk who ever prowled the ill-lit corridors of Ampleforth College. Fr Oswald Vanheems OSB was the Housemaster of St Dunstan's House.

Vanheems' face even in repose was Misery personified. The corners of his wide mouth were permanently etched downwards into a grim scowl. In over four years James never saw him smile once. Perhaps he beamed occasionally at his favourites, those callow pillars of the establishment who sucked up and brown-nosed their way to some position of status in the house and the school, objects of contempt to James and his cynical cronies. Even the house colours were a sickly brown.

Vanheems and James never got on from the start. On the one hand the teenager was an increasingly sullen and antipathetic individualist, too stubborn in maintaining the independence and primacy of his own ego. In other words, quite normal for a smart but self-conscious fourteen-year-old. On the other, the elderly monk, the one and only Housemaster of Dunstan's from its opening in 1935 to his death in 1968, was by the early Sixties completely out of touch with the psychology of teenagers now imbued with the growing phenomenon of youth culture. One example suffices. Gifted with a fine singing voice he was First Cantor in the Monastic Schola for many years. For him, however, the boys' all-embracing obsession, pop music, was simply the devil's work and never to be played or heard in his House.

At the time James blamed Vanheems 100% for the non-relationship. On reflection he was also at fault, but the adult in the pastoral role must undertake the greater share of responsibility. The Miserable Bastard Monk certainly advanced James to the early conclusion that if this man represented what Christian charity was about you could stuff the Kingdom of Heaven and all its saints.

His Junior House friends fared much better in their house allocation. Peter somehow got into St Bede's, everyone's first choice but notoriously difficult to join unless you had a family connection, because the Housemaster was the magnificent Fr Basil, soon to become Abbot, later Archbishop of Westminster and then Cardinal Hume. Robert went to St Thomas's, presided over by the arch-humourist Fr Denis Waddilove, known to all the boys as Black Sambo because of his swarthy complexion and to those whose pleasure lay in spoonerisms as Fr Waddis Denilove.

Given the sex scandals in which Ampleforth has been mired over the past forty years, you could say that James was lucky to have a Housemaster who was just a dismal and cheerless cunt rather than a paedophile. Fair comment in the grand scale of things. Nevertheless, in a large boarding school where the Housemaster's role is far more influential in the life of an individual pupil than the Headmaster's, Vanheems represented the Establishment and he simply drove James headlong into subversive rebellion against every aspect of its authority - not merely the school rules, but the whole hierarchical structure of this patrician institution and of course its religious underpinning.

James was thus marked out as an unhelpful non-contributor to house and school life. He was not at all a loner, remaining on friendly terms with most of his year group and the older boys in the house as well. Fortunately as a potential Oxbridge scholar in the highest First Year class he had an unrealised future asset value for the school which needed to maintain at all costs the industrial churn on which its academic reputation depended. So because he was bright the powers-that-be cut him some slack. Added to which he always worked hard and generally delivered the goods in the classroom, where he was happiest.

In those days School Monitors, as prefects were known, still had the power to beat younger boys for serious misdemeanours. James had been touched by neither cane nor strap since Gilling and he vowed to himself that these officially sanctioned thugs would never lay a hand on him. And they never did. In his House they were hypocrites who blithely broke the rules they were empowered to enforce. His overt subversions were subtle, evasive, unobtainable, mocking, on the edge of yet just within the boundaries of the rules. As with the "winklepickers" that weren't winklepickers incident.

One morning after full school assembly in Big Passage (sic), James was called back by the House Monitors.

“Wardrobe, do you think those shoes are acceptable?” grunts G., a particularly obnoxious and spotty 17-year-old oaf. He is contemplating James's feet and rubbing his stubbly chin with bright yellow, nicotine-stained fingers (Did Vanheems not register this prima facie evidence of persistent criminal activity at all?). “They seem like winklepickers to me,” he adds, addressing his leering associates who nodded assent. Shoes with sharply pointed toes, in the early 1960s the height of Mod fashion to which James keenly aspired, were strictly forbidden in the as yet unwritten but broadly understood school dress code.

“They aren't winklepickers, they are *chisel toes*,” explains Wardrobe calmly, with as much feigned deference as he can muster. Which indeed they were, the very latest sawn-off fashion in men's footwear, the first to be seen anywhere in the school and clearly a source of envy for these ill-shod buffoons.

“They look like chopped-off winklepickers to me,” retorts G. unpleasantly.

“Winklepickers by definition have sharp points, with which one may attempt to pick winkles. These shoes are neither sharp nor pointy.” James can barely conceal his derision at G.'s failure to understand the simple logic of winklepicking.

“Are you trying to be funny, Wardrobe?”

“Not at all. These are black, lace-up shoes made of leather in accordance with the official school clothing list and ... they are not pointed.”

A period of silence ensues. The Superior Beings are at a loss, frustrated by this Clever Dick from the Fifth Form. So they skulk off without a further word and the matter is closed. The power of ratiocination has prevailed. The pattern of righteous and intellectually justifiable dissidence is set. The following term G. was sporting a fine pair of chisel-toed shoes of his own, his pride and joy and an unwitting tribute to Wardrobe's sharper and predictive sense of fashion.

His covert activities, such as smoking and gambling on the horses, came to the fore in his second year and were always well-concealed. He smoked off-site in those early days and used another boy's telephone account at the bookies in Helmsley for his betting. Drinking would come even later, whilst the availability of illicit substances at school was unheard of in those days of innocence.

Vanheems was an unsavoury affliction but the onset of virulent acne at about the same time was a greater burden to endure and it lasted for about eight years. It is generally accepted that the primary cause of acne vulgaris in 80% of cases is genetic, so James has Thomas to thank for it. His chest, back, neck and face still bear the scars today and the disease certainly accounts for why James has always been such a devout sunbather. He discovered early the benefits of sunlight on his condition and later he was even prescribed weekly bouts of artificial UV light therapy in the school sanatorium. The persistent pustular eruptions also affected his self-esteem throughout his teenage years. Being plastered with Clearasil is not a good look, but it seemed to be the only generally available medication back then. Whether the monk or the spots left greater mental scars is an open question.

In the next episode you will meet James's new friends, committed freedom-fighters all: Patrick Donnell (Dunstan's), Bill Wakely (Wilfred's) and Dan Worsley (Edward's).

How Young Boys Are to Be Corrected

Every age and understanding should have its proper discipline. Whenever, therefore, boys or immature youths

or such as cannot understand how grave a penalty excommunication is, are guilty of a serious fault, let them undergo severe fasting or be disciplined with corporal punishment, that they may be corrected.

The Holy Rule of St Benedict, Chapter 30

19/08/17

22. Festivals, Forest Fires and School Friends

Summer is the height of the πανηγύρια, *panegiria*, season. A panegyri is a local festival usually but not always associated with a saint's day. They range from major, week-long events in a town like Messini to a single evening of live music, as in a village like Chrani a few nights ago. The band line-up was keyboard, drums, guitar, bouzouki and female vocalist. The musical genre was what Athena, Yiannis' wife, calls “heavy laïkó.” Λαϊκό followed after the commercialisation of the earlier 20th century style of ρεμπέτικο, *rebetiko*, and was the mainstream popular music of Greece during the 1960s and 1970s. Heavy? Well, it went on until five o'clock in the morning.



The laïkó band in action at the Chrani panegyri One of the many roast piglets eaten that night

Many panegyria take place on or around 15th August, the feast day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, known as “Panagia.” The Chrani event was on 17th, Dad's birthday, but even so he refrained from embarrassing himself on the dance floor in front of hundreds of Greeks and a few tourists. The traditional food served at these festivals is γουρουνόπουλο, *gourounopoulo*, roast suckling pig, but they looked like full-sized hogs to Dad.

As I write this, I can hear the siren of the Petalidi fire-engine racing past on the main road. Greece is having a bad year for forest fires, always a problem in late July and August, but these are perhaps

the worst tinder-box conditions for ten seasons. Firefighters battled more than ninety forest fires last week, the outbreak fed by dry winds and the excessively hot weather. Especially severe were the blazes near Athens and on the Ionian islands of Zakynthos and Kefalonia. The fire in Kalamos, a coastal holiday spot some 45 kilometres northeast of Athens, spread overnight to three more towns and damaged dozens of homes. A state of emergency was declared in this area, as elsewhere. This fire near Athens was burning unchecked for a second day, damaging dozens of homes. A village was evacuated in the Peloponnesian region of Ilia, north of Messinia, which Fotine remembers was the site of the worst fires in 2007, when more than seventy people lost their lives.

There is always much debate about whether the cause of these fires is accidental or deliberate. "It's arson according to an organised plan," Justice Minister Stavros Kontonis, also the MP for Zakynthos, told state TV when asked to comment on the dozen fires burning on the island. "There is no doubt about it." On the other hand, no investigation has begun into possible malicious fire-raising and there is no trace of forensic evidence of course. According to the "Cui bono? *Who stands to gain?*" principle, the finger of guilt is usually directed at developers and owners of land within designated forestry areas, accused of employing a drastic clearance strategy. Conspiracy theories are inescapable, including, "It's the Turks wot done it..." "...? And why would they?" "Their tourism is down this year, so they are trying to drive tourists away from Greece and back to Turkey." Well, I'm only a dumb cat, but really...

The police arrested a suspected arsonist yesterday because "fire-making materials" were discovered in his car. He claimed to be on his way to a local church to light candles. He did however also admit to practising voodoo in his spare time.

Dad believes that there are a number of plausible accidental causes. In the past sparks from defective power lines have been proven to start these conflagrations, for instance in Koroni a few years back. Sunlight magnified through a piece of broken glass can have the same effect as striking a match. Then again, a carelessly tossed cigarette butt can set it all off. Bear in mind that Greece has the highest number of smokers in any EU country, according to a recent survey. 37% of adults smoke, compared with less than 16% in the UK. "Whatever the causes," declares Dad, "what we need are some prolonged thunderstorms to dampen and cool everywhere down." We three furry ones all agree with that.

Patrick Donnell

The other dozen or so new boys in Dunstan's were a nondescript bunch. A couple had come up from Junior House with James, including the vey vey cultured Quentin, one of Fr Maurus's four stars from Gilling. He turned to History after O-levels, going on to Oriel College, Oxford. Digby went on to become a monk and Dominic, well, Dominic was already a nutjob when he arrived. It was incongruous that Dominic liked to solve personal problems with his fists and yet played the clarinet with such sensitivity. The outstanding scholar in their midst happened to be the youngest boy in the school on his arrival. He already had an O-level pass to his name, taken as a twelve-year-old at his prep school the previous summer. His name was Patrick Donnell.

Patrick occupied the next bed to James in the new boys' dormitory and they got on well from the start. Over the next four years and beyond, their relationship would develop into an intense platonic amour. For each of them it was their first love affair, rather than merely a deep friendship. They nourished and fed off each other's minds, relishing a common pursuit where any questions could be asked, all cultures were explored and no topics were off limits. Where did this emotional and intellectual interdependence stem from? James felt isolated, abandoned to his Vanheemian fate by the bourgeois

ambition of his parents, Patrick was escaping from the religiosity of his neurotic Irish mother. So they recognised that each was stubbornly trying to survive “on his own” and that they were both looking for rational solutions for their irrational problems. So they bonded, they were a couple, Tweedledum and Tweedledee. They came to be seen as a natural pairing in their Year, even in the School as a whole.

Some of the fruits of their unique and often reciprocal extra curriculum have survived in James's aging psyche to this day. They were a pair of hopeless teenage romantics of course, searching for the impossible, but at least they could probe for universal truths together. In the false presumption of their maturity their conclusions were definitive: Beethoven over Bach, Géricault over David, Keats over Pope and William Blake atop the lot of them. They examined any and all aspects of art, music, theatre, cinema, literature, language, history, philosophy and psychology that came their way. Patrick was a Modern Linguist, so James learnt about Rabelais, Molière, Racine, Voltaire, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Sartre, Gide and Camus; also Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderón, Lorca. In return he delivered Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, the tragedians and Aristophanes; Virgil, Catullus, Ovid, Horace, Livy, Tacitus and Suetonius. Together they explored existentialism, impressionism, surrealism and modernism, delighting in the shocking discovery of the newness of these fashionable movements and ideas.

They were by no means just an Academy of Two. The tools of cultural analysis and literary criticism were being honed every day in the classroom by an outstanding set of subject teachers, about whom you will discover more in the next chapter.

It was inevitable that they would go to war on the absurdity of religious faith, which they saw as an affront to the intellect. Here's 15-year-old James in a Religious Education class. The topic is “*Someone/thing must have started it all off...*” Father Edward (the Byzantine historian): “So let's call this originator, creator or demiurge, “God.” Therefore some form of “God” exists. Yes, what is it, Wardrobe?” “Surely, Sir, accepting the existence of a Prime Mover in the beginning doesn't prove that it exists now? This “God” could have died since... Starting something off doesn't presuppose a continuance for eternity.” “Thank you, Wardrobe,” sighs a slightly exasperated Edward.

This brings us to the ironic paradox at the heart of Ampleforth's educational philosophy. Unappreciated at the time by teenage resentment of petty restrictions on their freedoms, the system was in fact enlightened and liberal enough to encourage the boys genuinely *to think for themselves*. It thus ran the risk that they would think their way out of the Catholic Church and away from the faith upon which the whole institution was founded. As Bill, another close friend, puts it, “It allowed us to escape the religious enthrallment which was one of their primary objectives; they taught us to think, and a few of us took them up on it.”

So by the age of about sixteen you were either in it or out of it for good. The chore of attending mass seven days a week before breakfast with an additional High Mass and Compline on Sundays confirmed Wardrobe and Donnell in their apostasy. Patrick went all anthropological about the ritualism of organised religious worship. When the reminder bell for mass rang, he would say, “Time to inspect thighbones in the western clearing again...” St Dunstan's House was located east of the Abbey church.

*

Bill Wakely

The Combined Cadet Force (CCF) was compulsory for all boys. Its activities took place on Monday afternoons. James and the other new boys were commanded to attend their first square-bashing session in the quarried-out overflow car park which was to be their parade ground for the rest of the year. They had been platooned off in alphabetical order in advance, so they vaguely knew where

they should stand or slouch until the instructing martinets arrived. A boy unknown to James from another House and wearing an equally ill-fitting uniform sidled up to him with a grin, chuckling at some private joke which he seemed keen to share. "You won't believe this, but I'm supposed to stand next to someone called WARDROBE...!" and he burst out laughing. "I'm Wardrobe," answered James and waited patiently for the chortling to subside. "I'm Wakely, Bill Wakely," came the unembarrassed reply. And that was the beginning of James's only contemporary Ampleforth friendship which has lasted to this day.

Among much else that the two had in common was an abiding sense of ridicule for the military posturing of the Corps, as the CCF was known. In those days there was no getting out of it, no "community service" option until later in the Sixties. However, two older boys in Bill's House had succeeded against all the odds two years previously in being allowed to opt out on grounds of conscience. Fred Halliday and Charlie Fawcett, notorious for their outspoken left-wing politics, wore black shirts and wore CND lapel badges. The authorities tolerated them, the rest of the school adored them. Fred went on to become Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics. Before his untimely death in 2010 he had written many books particularly on his specialism, the Middle East. He spoke twelve languages competently including Arabic and Persian. So, as a seventeen-year-old, he already possessed a formidable intellect which comfortably won the argument about the right of pacifists to be excused the military service of the school CCF.

When Bill reached the Sixth Form, since there were now precedents for exemption, he tried to get out of the Corps too. His Housemaster was Fr Dominic Milroy, a liberal-minded young monk at the other end of the simpatico spectrum from Vanheems. He went on to become an Ampleforth Headmaster sometimes criticised for being "soft on discipline," but he always knew well enough how to deal with chancers like Bill.

Bill is summoned to Dominic's study. "It has been reported to me that you've been bunking off Corps without good reason," says the Housemaster quietly, tamping down the tobacco in his favourite pipe.

"Sir, I've been meaning to talk to you about that. I've been having moral qualms about the whole business of training to kill people when I'm actually a conscientious objector. Like Fred and Charlie were, Sir, as you will remember. You may not have been aware of my strong views on...." He was bullshitting manfully, but Dominic wasn't buying. He knew Bill too well. As well as being his Housemaster, he also taught him A level French and Spanish, they being Modern Linguists both.

"Listen to me. You are a lazy boy who simply finds the discipline of the CCF irksome and tedious. In no way can you convince me that you claim ownership of the same political views as Halliday and Fawcett. So here is the stark choice that confronts you. Either you can hold to your "pacifist beliefs" and I shall give you a damned good thrashing. Or you can start turning up to Corps again on a regular basis and that's an end to the matter."

"Thank you, Sir. I'll go back to Corps."

But not for long. Bill had an alternative and ultimately successful strategem for ridding himself for good of the pipsqueak toy sergeants who tried in vain to keep him in line. Abandoning the failed tactic of bunking off, he decided to become a complete nuisance. So he turned up regularly on parade looking like a dishevelled hobo and arguing the toss at every single opportunity.

He himself recounts what happened: "I looked like an escaped POW and clearly didn't give a fuck in perpetuum. So I was put on detention twice a week - "defaulters' squad" - and I never bothered to turn up for that either. Matters had to come to a head. Openly refusing to take the whole thing seriously was

too dangerous an example for the authorities to allow. It was Dominic who told me that a “collective” decision had been taken to drum me out of the CCF. He tried unconvincingly to sell it as a disgrace and regretfully announced that he was going to beat me soundly for it. My immediate feelings were mixed, glad to be out of the silly game but not yet fully appreciative of my achievement, nursing sore buttocks accompanied by moral outrage and an abortive monitorial resignation. I postured about the thrashing and handed in my monitor's tie, outraged at the spanking. Dominic refused my 'resignation' on the grounds that I was already enough of a subversive influence, I didn't need to play the martyr as well. Fair enough. I was striking an attitude and we both knew it. But by the time of the next parade day, when I didn't have to attend, my regrets were few.”

Despite his generally defiant attitude Bill had quite a successful school career, playing Number 8 for the First XV until he was sacked for telling the newly appointed coach, former England full-back John Wilcox, what he thought of him.

His finest hours were in the School Play. As MacDuff he was disarmed by Macbeth in the final scene, but Macbeth generously gave him his sword back so that the proper Shakespearean conclusion could be reached. The following year he was an acclaimed Thomas More in Robert Bolt's “A Man For All Seasons,” triumphantly performed a year or so before the Paul Schofield film version came out.

*

Dan Worsley

Dan Worsley was a fellow Classicist, a chirpy character with a floppy fringe who was always game for a laugh, especially if it involved breaking the school rules. He and James had a similar sense of humour. They became firm drinking buddies in the Sixth Form. Dan came up with a wheeze for tabulating, over the course of a whole term, a tariff guide for the different penances meted out by the various monk-confessors for the same set of sins confessed. This required him to confess identical wrongdoings every week to one of a dozen different priests and then draw up the results. After this scientific but time-consuming piece of market research, he was then able to tell you who for instance was the most lenient confessor to go to for Avarice or Anger, and most especially for Impurity in Thought, Word and Deed.

The major daily preoccupation and pastime of choice for over five hundred boys, exiled for months on end in grim surroundings in the North Yorkshire Moors, was masturbation. Morning, noon and night. It was also no doubt the sinful recreational activity of the novices and postulantes (most of whom were Old Boys since the school was the monastery's chief recruiting ground), cooped up in their monastic cells. Self-abuse was the biblical Sin of Onan, a misdeed which every good Catholic boy needs to confess. He must receive penance and be absolved. So confession was organised on an industrial scale, a key element in the weekly school timetable.

Every Saturday evening the monks would swarm out of the abbey and take over dozens of nooks and crannies around the main school building and hear confessions. There was therefore a wide choice of available confessors. Here's a typical scenario: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been two weeks since my last confession. I have been impure in thought, word and deed...” “Was it by yourself or with another, my child?” queries the hooded figure. “By myself, father.” “Was it in a waking moment?” “No, father.” “Did you *intend* to waste your seed, my child?” “Yes, father.” The older monks were generally kinder, helpfully seeking grounds for mitigation, whilst their younger brethren responded with more severity. Perhaps they had seed-spilling issues of their own. If you were unlucky you'd get a lecture on self-control and restraint at this point. Then the penance and absolution were issued. “Five

Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys. Te absolvo in nomine Patris, etc. Go in peace, my child.”

So Dan's findings were invaluable. “Don't go to Father Wilfrid for wanking, go to Paulinus – no fulminating diatribe and just a few Hail Marys.” “For simple effing and blinding, Cuthbert's your man.” And so on. If it sounds like they were making a mockery of the Sacrament of Penance, an integral component of Catholicism, believe me, they were. In Church doctrine, by the way, mandatory private confession only goes back to the Council of Trent in 1551.

En passant, there was a good “confessional” joke doing the rounds at the time about the wonderfully posh, some might say snobbish, abbey guest-master, Fr James, who could honestly claim lofty aristocratic connections. He hears a boy's confession. The lad has been impure in thought, word and deed. “Was it by yourself or with another, my child?” “With a lady, father.” “Really? Lady who...?”

The Lord instituted the Sacrament of Penance, principally when after his Resurrection he breathed upon his disciples and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’ [Jn 20:22f.]. The universal consensus of the Fathers has always acknowledged that by so sublime an action and such clear words the power of forgiving and retaining sins was given to the apostles and their lawful successors for reconciling the faithful who have fallen after baptism.

Doctrine, Chapter 5

The Council of Trent (1551)

*When they said REPENT REPENT
I wonder what they meant
When they said REPENT REPENT
I wonder what they meant
When they said REPENT REPENT
I wonder what they meant.*

The Future

Leonard Cohen (1992)

13/09/17

23. Beach Life

As the Greek families and the tourists with children depart in preparation for the start of the new school year, Chrani reverts to its more placid autumnal occupation by the silver surfers. The predominant language of the beach becomes German or English, sometimes Russian. Yiorgos, the long-suffering car park attendant at the Caribbean Beach Bar, has gone home for a well-deserved rest. One day in August he had to deal with 200 vehicles in an area where there is sensible parking for not more than forty. Dad has been reflecting on the summer season and he shared his observations with us, based on clocking up more kilometres up and down the bay since April than completing a return crossing of the English Channel (18 nautical miles from South Foreland, NE of Dover, to Cap Gris Nez, if you're interested). Not to mention many exhausting hours on a sunbed.

In the sea: advice for “proper” swimmers:

1. Swim in the mornings before the swell gets up from the on-shore breezes. If swimming in rougher conditions go against the current for the first half and then it's less tiring coming back on the return leg.
2. When establishing a new route, check especially for rocks just below the surface.
3. Take care to avoid motionless, elderly Greeks usually wearing white sunhats and positioned in small groups about 30 metres off-shore. They maintain station for extended periods and call it “swimming.” Dad prefers to call it “chatting-at-sea.” They do not give way, their attention solely focused on their thalassic gossiping. It is their sea after all.
4. Ignore the anchovies nipping your legs. Better than the sting of a jellyfish, of which there has been a plague in the Gulf of Patras this summer, but none around here.
5. Beware of children in canoes. They haven't a fucking clue.

On the beach:

6. Your most useful accessory will be an over-sized clothes peg, as in the photo. Use to attach towel to sunbed and then, “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!” Lear may have lost his kingdom, but he wouldn't have lost his beach towel with one of these. Much favoured by German tourists, especially before and during their breakfast. Note Dad's ironic emblem on his (below).



An invaluable beach tool “Reserviert” would have been better

7. The outer edges of most fixed bamboo beach umbrellas are placed at eye-level, so try to avoid head-bashing them on a regular basis, as Dad still manages to do.

8. Avoid the front rank of sunbeds. Dad learnt his lesson after taking his first direct hit on the head from a malaka-tennis ball. Profuse apologies from the malakes, but nevertheless...

9. Greek language on the beach will confuse you. On his first trip to the seaside in Greece many decades ago Dad thought all girls were called Ella and all boys Elatho. He soon came to understand that the plaintive and largely ignored calling cry of the mother-bird to her recalcitrant chicks, “ Έλα, έλα 'δω,” (Ela, ela tho) meant “Come,” and “Come here.” Now he has graduated to listening in on nearby couples who wrongly assume that he is the usual uncomprehending, barbarian foreigner. Λάθος, *lathos*, mistake!

10. If you want to copy the locals your beach drinks should be either cold coffee (frappé, freddo espresso or freddo cappucino) if you are young, or hot Greek coffee if you are old. Beer? Foreigners favour Mythos, probably because the name sounds both Ancient and Greek, whereas the natives are happy with Alfa or Fix as well. No one with any social pretension drinks Amstel, though the company is behind the recent revival after 41 years of absence of a historic beer called Mamos, which is being brewed in its original home, Patra. It is only available so far in the Peloponnese, but they hope to roll it out throughout Greece in the near future.

But enough of Old Wardrobe, it's Mum's outstanding progress in swimming I want to mention. At the beginning of the season she didn't trust her technique and she was timid about going out of her depth. Now Dad can't keep her out of the water and her front crawl is very dependable, mightily impressing her Australian swimming coach, Rob of Blog 20, who reviews her performance via video link from Zurich. She loves snorkelling! Dad claims to be perfectly happy that his protégée's freestyle is now faster than his own. I'm a bit suspicious about this. As you know, he is very vain.



Mum comfortable amidst the rocks

As for us cats, we have come through a whole year here pretty unscathed, though I'm not looking

forward to my six-monthly blood tests next week.

So what was happening at home in those Ampleforth years?

Grandma Coulehan died peacefully, aged 91, in the middle term of James's first year in Dunstan's. He was summoned to his housemaster's study after morning prayers to hear the news. After a perfunctory condolence from the execrable Vanheems, he was told, "It has been agreed between the School and your parents that you will not attend the funeral, so as not to disrupt your studies." Just like that. He had been very close to his grandmother, who had started him on his path to scholarship and had always been his friend. Perhaps this was the start of his enduring resistance to any decisions, however trivial, being made about his life by other people. Feeling that he should at least have been consulted, he deeply resented all those who were party to this judgement. The stubbornness and independence of spirit he had inherited from this wise and tough old lady was mightily strengthened that day.

Summer holidays abroad were now spent without Margaret who married Graham, a PhD Physics student at Manchester University, in 1963. James and his parents discovered the French Riviera one year and the Balearics the next. His attraction to the whole Mediterranean lifestyle grew, though Greece and the Levant at this point were still just an exotic and distant fantasy.

The fortnight in Nice was particularly good fun. In the Sunday Times small ads Brenda had found a first floor apartment in Nice, on a lively central street parallel to and just behind the Promenade des Anglais. It was situated directly opposite a brothel and so James was able to research some sociocultural aspects of the "real world" which were not on the school curriculum. He sat on the balcony most evenings, notebook and watch in hand, and marvelled at the girls' smart professionalism as they touted for business on their doorstep. He watched the choices the tarts made regarding who and who not to solicit, timed the length of their clients' visits, noted the long working hours and calculated their workload on a busy night. One evening on the way to a local bar with Tommy, he was disappointed that only his father was approached, not he, the handsome teenage son. Tommy scuttled on in silence and James wished that the older man had at least asked the going rate, so that he could extrapolate and record in his journal a prostitute's average daily takings. He still had a lot to learn.

They travelled the length of the Côte d'Azur, from Menton to Saint-Tropez, where Tommy hoped in vain for a sighting of Brigitte Bardot. James was denied access to the Casino in Monte Carlo - "trop jeune" - so he played the fruit machines in the lobby whilst waiting for the adults to re-emerge. He soon lost his francs, since he had not yet mastered the key prerequisites for success, which are revealed below. For the first time in his life he ate Chateaubriand steak and fried whitebait, revelling in the distinct *unEnglishness* of it all. The seeds of his resolve for foreign adventure were sown.

A few months later James passed his driving test, largely thanks to the dedication and strategic planning of his devoted mother. For weeks she made him drive her everywhere in her island-blue Morris Mini, including the 100 miles over the Pennines back from school prior to his test. A series of lessons were also booked, ending on the day itself, and her master stroke was to schedule the event on a half-day-closing Wednesday: shops shut, less traffic, thoroughly organised Brenda, mission accomplished. Previously, but only on one occasion, she had persuaded Tommy to share the burden and go out as the accompanying passenger. From the moment he sat in the car he was jumpy. James sensed his father's nervousness and his concentration was affected. When they returned after a shorter than usual practice drive, they both said to Brenda, almost simultaneously, "Never again..."

As an independent driver James was able to get to the golf club more. His coach, Fred Taggart, was a

canny and extremely likeable old Pro who had played in six Open Championships in his youth, his best finish being eleventh at Sandwich in 1928. His final appearance was at St Andrew's in 1939, by which time he was already firmly established as Wilmslow's club professional. On the practice ground and on the course he bestowed upon James a workable swing, in the workshop adjoining his premises he introduced him to the delights of Worthington White Label. Fred was only permitted to enter the clubhouse bar if invited by a member. He often accompanied Tommy and a couple of other members there after their regular weekend four-ball. After a while he would retire gracefully to his shop and leave the serious drinking to Tommy and his friends.



Fred Taggart in his golfing prime, 1929

One of these cronies was not only Tommy's regular golf and drinking partner but also his boss. Bob Love's bulbous red nose gave the game away. So did his gentle swaying at the bar as if he were being blown back and forth by a stiff breeze. Bob's son Robert was James's age and also a Junior member. After the occasional father-and-son friendly match the teenagers would observe their patriarchs' complete mastery of the Nineteenth Hole. Needless to say they were impressed by their parents' apparent ability to hold their drink.

Tommy however did perplex James on one occasion. "Son, do you want to know the secret of drinking whisky and staying sober?" he confided. "Yes, please," answered James, curious about a potentially useful piece of knowledge.

"Dilute the scotch with 100% water, creating an equal measure, and you can drink twice as many whiskies *without getting drunk.*"

"Surely that depends on how many whiskies you have. Obviously you consume the same amount of alcohol either way. You mean *whilst getting equally drunk,*" the annoyingly logical son replied.

"No, you've missed the point, the addition of water means *you don't get as drunk as you would without it,*" asserted the knowing father triumphantly, as he beckoned the steward for his fourth refill. When James noticed Bob Love nodding in agreement, he gave up in despair.

Bob was now standing perfectly still on one leg, not oscillating at all as he played the nearby fruit machine. He was singing the same refrain over and over again every time he pulled the lever. These gambling machines were aptly named "one-armed bandits" (in Britain anyway – in Australia they are "pokies"), since in those days they really were operated with a mechanical joystick. The head of the north-west division of Urwick Orr and Partners regarded himself as an expert in most matters, not

least in gambling lore. James moved over to watch the action. Spying him, Bob carefully explained how to improve the odds of achieving a winning line of similar fruits or even the jackpot.

“There are two essential requirements, James, which must always be met if you wish to maximise your chances on these machines. Having inserted your sixpence, you must stand on your right leg. Secondly, and this is of paramount importance, “ he stressed, now in full management consultant mode, “you must sing “We'll Gather Lilacs in the Spring Again”, pulling the lever only and always on the word “Spring.” Allow me to demonstrate...” One-legged Bob inserted his coin, sang the first line of Ivor Novello's sentimental 1945 hit, pulled the lever at the appropriate moment and... he did not topple over even when the jackpot line, Tic Tac Toe, appeared. The sixpences overflowed onto the carpet. Doggie now and stork no longer, Bob dropped down onto his hands and knees with surprising agility, collected every coin with studious care, arose with a beaming grin and a wink in James's direction before staggering off to buy whiskies-and-water all round.

These men were in their early fifties, you might say at the peak of their powers.

Despite his aversion to all varieties of superstitious ritual including those favoured by gamblers, James admits that ever afterwards until the arrival of button-operated fruit machines he always stood on one leg and sang “We'll Gather Lilacs” when playing the pokies. Sometimes he won, sometimes he didn't.

As well as teaching his son to drink “sensibly and in moderation,” Tommy also introduced him to billiards and snooker played on full-size tables at his other favourite watering-hole, the Hale Conservative Club. If Ampleforth had played snooker matches against other schools, by dint of many hours' assiduous training James would definitely have been in the first team, with or without his lager-and-lime accompaniment. The club was less than a mile from home, thus reducing the risk of being nabbed by the coppers for driving under the influence. Tommy once proudly introduced him to another member thus, “I'd like you to meet a dear friend of mine, Doctor X, a very fine GP who is currently serving his third ban for drink-driving...” The widespread introduction of roadside breathalyser tests would soon put paid to this offence being regarded as a badge of honour.

Around this time James had his first-ever date with a girl. She was called Hillary and was staying on holiday for a few weeks with Robert Love's girlfriend. They went to see “Zulu” at Hale Cinema and sat in the back row. All was going well until the final attack when Colour Sergeant Bourne, played by the splendid Nigel Green, says, “The sentries report Zulus to the southwest. Thousands of them.” James grasped his opportunity and made a vain assault of his own on Hillary's impressive pair of zulus. His southern skirmish from the waist was foiled by her combination, whether by accident or design, of a skirt with a full-length slip beneath. The northern descent from the top of her blouse was impossible for the tyro, so he conceded defeat, sat back and sang “Men of Harlech” along with Private Owen (Ivor Emmanuel) instead. At least he'd had a good snog and the film was truly brilliant... The art of disengaging a bra clasp one-handed would have to be mastered at a later stage.

We'll gather lilacs in the spring again

And walk together down an English lane

Until our hearts have learned to sing again

When you come home once more

And in the evening by the firelight's glow

You'll hold me close and never let me go

Your eyes will tell me all I long to know

When you come home once more.

“We'll Gather Lilacs” (1st 2 verses)

from the musical “Perchance to Dream” (1945)

by Ivor Novello

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvC8gz-cq88>

10/10/17

24. On the Trail of Patrick Leigh Fermor

I had my neck shaved last week. Dad took me back to Kyrios Dionisis, the vet in Kalamata, for my six-monthly blood tests. There was no repeat of the debacle in March, since it had been arranged that Dionisis's wife, also a vet, would be in attendance. I put up a better fight this time, having waited for Dad to retreat to the waiting room. "She was stronger and harder to hold this time," my doctor said afterwards. "I think she remembered from before." Too bloody right I did, and I'll remember next time as well. Lulu and Minnie's only concern when we arrived home was that their tea was a hour late.

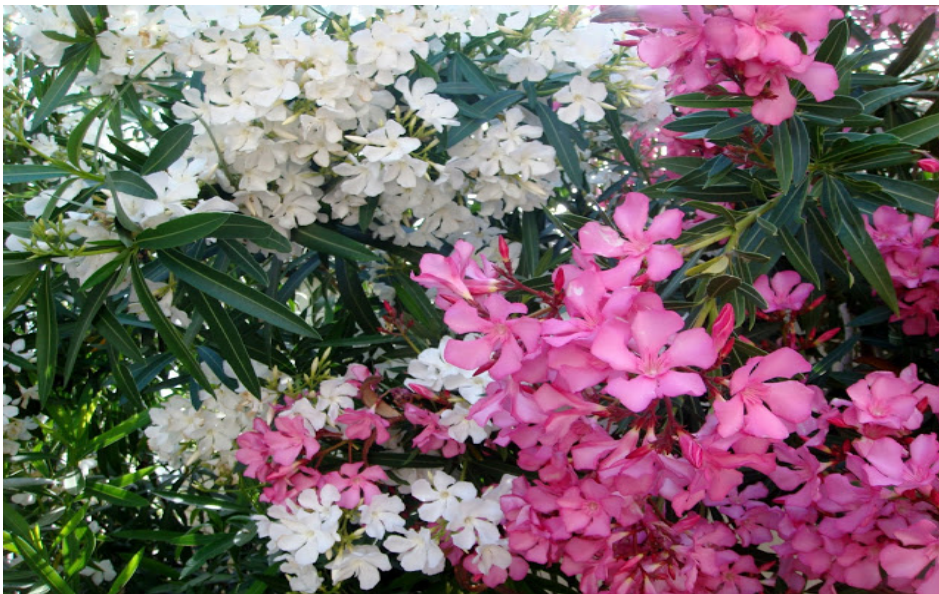
My results were not as good as last time with urea and creatinine levels up, so since my kidneys aren't functioning quite as well as before Dionisis has put me on a complete Royal Canin Renal diet, including the pouches now instead of Felix Senior. I already have the dry food, which my sisters love to Hoover up when they can. And I'll keep going with the powdered pill, which Hans has always reckoned is the most effective element of my treatment. So far I'm not that partial to the new pouches and Dad is having to shoo off Lulu and Minnie who are keen to finish off my leftovers. No doubt The Male will come raiding for my special food as well. I had to laugh when Fotine told Dad that the whinging scavenger has finally been given a name: Mahmood. Anyway, I feel fine at the moment and I just hope I can last long enough to use the cat-flap in our new house and also to finish writing Dad's story... Incidentally we all had our twelfth birthday on October 5th.

Regarding the house, Mum and Dad have now signed off on our architect Katerina's design, so Linos, our thespian μηχανικός, civil engineer, is now preparing the structural plan including the requirements to meet necessary building regulations, prior to applying for the permit. The πολεοδομία, planning department, has recently relocated from Kalamata to Messini as part of a major reorganisation which means, you've guessed it, γραφειοκρατικό χάος, bureaucratic chaos. Fortunately the mechanikos not only possesses a calm nature and a sharp sense of humour but also knows all the planners personally. "Realistic timescale for the permit?" asks Dad. "We shall see what we shall see," replies Linos with the merest scintilla of irony. So don't ask when the first spade will enter the ground.



Simple photorealistic external impression of Villa Doulapas

In the meantime, since the planting season is upon us, Dad intends to clear a narrow strip of the land on one side next to the fence and plant a run of oleander saplings for attractive cover on the southern boundary. We've chosen oleanders because they have striking red, pink or white flowers; in bloom for six months in the Mediterranean climate they need little water and generally thrive well in this region. Dad had to overcome his abiding reservation about this poisonous evergreen shrub. He has always been wary of its traditional association with the ancient Greek Underworld. In classical times it was linked with death and used at funerals. It turns out that he is not alone in this sentiment. Many Greeks don't like oleanders, though when questioned they don't give a straight answer and can't come up with a good reason why not. Strange, eh? I'll have to do more research when my busy lounging-about and sleeping schedule allows.

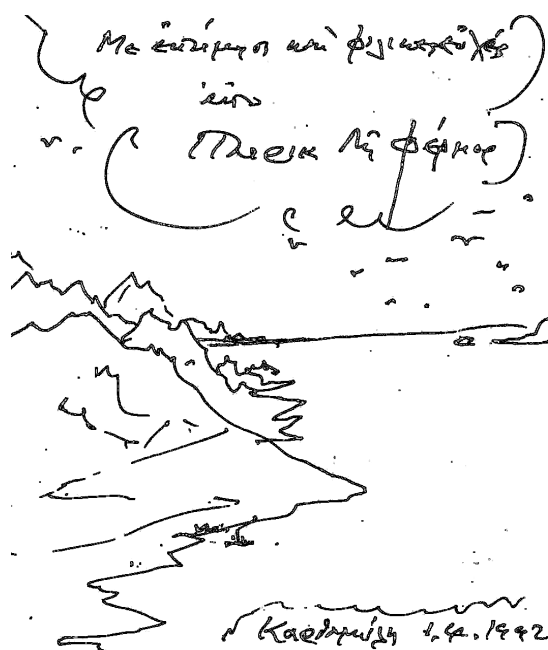


In Greece oleanders can be expected to bloom from April through October with the heaviest bloom usually occurring between May and June.

Dad has finally got round to reading Patrick Leigh Fermor's "Mani," thirty-two years after his first trip there with our First Mum in 1985. They had a memorable holiday based in Gytheio during a summer of intensely high temperatures even by Greek standards. Dad remembers news reports of the abnormally high number of heat-related deaths that year. On their return Mum gave him a copy for his birthday, inscribing "Memories!" among other words inside the front cover. He only discovered this when he blew off the dust and opened the book prior to his latest expedition to this "middle prong" of the southern Peloponnese with our Second Mum. He also possesses a Greek version, with a much-valued drawing and signature inside the frontispiece by the author himself. Part travelogue, part history of the Maniots, "Mani" is informative, well-researched and occasionally amusing. Paddy, known to locals by his wartime nom de guerre, Michali – Michael was his middle name – knew his Greece inside out but his prolix style can be irritating. He loves to use ten words when five would do. If you want to discover how many different ways there are to describe an outcrop of bald rock or a Maniot peasant's crinkled face, he's the writer for you.

The first break in their journey was unsurprisingly in Kardamyli, which although very different from

Paddy's description in the late 1950s retains a genteel and slow-paced charm. The home that he and his wife Joan had lovingly built in 1960 was donated on his death in 2011 to the Benaki Museum, which is in the process of renovating the house before reopening it to the public as a centre for arts and literature. They had requested in the donation contract that it be used for cultural purposes, for example as a writers' retreat. The village of Kardamyli itself has a long history. It is named by Homer in Book 9 of the Iliad as one of the seven cities offered by Agamemnon to Achilles in a futile attempt to persuade the sulking hero to rejoin the war against the Trojans.



In the frontispiece of Dad's Greek copy of 'Mani': "With respect and friendly wishes from Patrick Leigh Fermor, Kardamyli, 1.4.92," with the author's sketch of the view south from his house.

Out of curiosity they stopped for lunch in Stoupa, a notorious package tourist resort much favoured by the British for over forty years. It has an excellent bypass.

As one travels further south the greener and more fertile Messinian Mani gives way to the dramatically harsher Laconian or Deep Mani, Η Μέσσα Μάνη. Mum and Dad stayed in a recommendable hotel overlooking the picturesque bay of Limeni village, the port of the flourishing nearby town of Areopoli. Sheer cliffs descend to the sea, steeping down from the bare and bone-white slopes of the Taygetos range. Now they understood why, observing the mountains daily from across the gulf, you can easily and mistakenly believe that there is snow up there in summer.

Limeni was the home of the head of the most powerful family in the region, the most famous Maniot revolutionary, Petrobey Mavromichalis. His house is now a museum, a restored stone tower, as are all the buildings in this weird renovation of a historic village. Two of the three restaurants here are grossly overpriced (lobster risotto: 90€). "Walk on," cries Dad in anguish when he spies Mum licking her lips as she reads the street menu of one of these rip-off eateries. There are no shops, no kafeneion. The only conclusion one can draw about Limeni is that human life only exists here in and for the tourist season. Its spirit of place is palpably contrived in this Disneyland version of a real Maniot settlement. Yet it exists beneath the glorious backdrop of a barren and majestic mountainous landscape.

It certainly did have a life in the past, not only in Mavromichalis' day but in the twentieth century

too. Leigh Fermor records the village women's mirololy, mourning song, for the two allied airmen who crashed their fighter plane in the bay in January 1944 and were buried with all due honour in the local cemetery. They were later re-buried near Athens. Over breakfast in their hotel Dad overheard an elderly Greek recalling the eye-witness account of the incident told to him by his elder brother, then a young boy.

"There was an enemy ship moored in the bay," he explained, "and it was strafed by three Spitfires. It returned fire which hit one of the aircraft. Unlike the other two fighters it never came out of its dive. The boat was sunk and lay on the seabed along with the plane for many years." A two seat Spitfire being used for operational (rather than training) purposes in 1944? Dad smelt a rat and did some research. Sure enough, divers have found the wreckage of a Bristol Beaufighter MkVIC in the Limeni waters. Manned by pilot and navigator, these maritime strike aircraft were widely used towards the end of the War in the Mediterranean theatre. Here's an excerpt he unearthed from the Operations Record Book of 227 Squadron, flying out of Benghazi at the time:

"26/1/1944. 301FTU, 227 Sqn. Dived into sea while attacking caique. At 1117hrs, posn. 36.42N, 22.25E sighted two-masted caique 80 tons anchored in bay bordered on three sides by high hills up to 1200 feet. Two attacks in which all aircraft dropped bombs with unobserved results. Vessel damaged by many fire with cannon. In diving to attack, "E" was seen to crash into the sea, apparently unable to pull out of dive. Further attacks abandoned owing to difficulty of approach. "E" disintegrated and no survivors were seen.

Crew: F/O Alexander Harold WILL (Pilot) AUS/420093 RAAF Age 20 KIA

F/O Brian FINDLEY (Navigator) 136376 RAFVR Age 20 KIA.

Both buried in Phaleron War cemetery."

So the historical event itself is tragically genuine, even if the locals' account was mistaken in some of its details.



Limeni village with its renovated stone houses

The next day began with a subterranean boat voyage through the Diros Caves, a few kilometres south of Areopoli. The 3000-metre tour through the largest of the three lake caves with their beautiful,

strangely shaped limestone formations is well worth the relatively high cost of an entrance ticket. This is the domain of Charon, ferryman of souls. In 2015 an impressive Neolithic-era discovery was made in one of the three caves: a burial from roughly 5,800 years ago containing two well-preserved adult human skeletons, one male and one female, with arms and legs interlocked in a “spooning” embrace.

Further south, nestling at the head of a small bay, Gerolimenas is a delightful waterside village, a bit touristy in the summer but clearly with a life of its own out of season. Mum and Dad's lunch was delicious home-style cooking at Akrotainaritis Restaurant where the patronne's father had entertained PLF whilst he was writing 'Mani'. She knew him well in her youth and was proud to call herself his friend.

This was just a two-day trip so they did not get down to Cape Matapan, also known as Tenaro, the southernmost extremity of the Balkan peninsula. Vatheia, with its now abandoned stone tower houses but still arguably the best example of south Maniot vernacular architecture, must await a future visit. To reach the very tip of the most southerly point of mainland Europe after Punta de Tarifa in Spain requires a 45-minute hike. Tenaro is of course ancient Ταίναρος, Taenaros, where lurks the entrance to the Underworld and the home of Hades, god of the dead. “There'll be plenty of oleanders flourishing down there, then,” concludes our horticulturally doom-laden Dad.

There were a few boys in Dunstan's higher Years whose memory is worth briefly recording for varying reasons.

Prince John Radziwill wept openly at the news of President Kennedy's assassination since he had a personal connection through Jackie's sister, Caroline Lee, who was married to a relation of his. During high tea on that grim November afternoon the wolf pack teased him without compassion, ever resentful and envious of his aloof urbanity and his impeccable credentials as a true Polish aristocrat.

Henry Bennett was half-Spanish and lived in the Portuguese resort of Estoril. Mad on football, he was a huge fan of Benfica and introduced the rest of the House to the talents of Eusébio, long before the player who is considered by many to be one of the greatest footballers of all time came to the attention of the British public through his exploits in the 1966 World Cup and again in the 1968 European Cup Final.

Dave Marchment was an affable, shambling giant who played lead guitar in the school rock band. James and Patrick greatly enjoyed his company. It was shocking and sad to hear twenty-five years later of his early death from some rare disease.

Then there was Tony. Two years older, he was short, spotty and overweight. He was incorrigibly unacademic and made no particular contribution to house or school life, sporting or otherwise. But he had something – you might describe it as an innate capacity for *friendliness*, which expressed itself generally in a polite and sociable interest in others, specifically in a kindness towards the younger boys who therefore without hesitation liked and respected him. It was rumoured that he had his own car, illegally garaged in Ampleforth village, so that on whole holidays such as All Saints' when the boys were allowed out for the day he could drive to York, Leeds or Scarborough whilst the hoi polloi rode the local country lanes on push bikes.

Even bicycles were a privilege afforded only to Sixth Formers. In James' and Patrick's case this meant heading for the nearest pub, not too near the school to get caught yet not too far to ride back after five pints of bitter. Since the hostelrys in market towns were licenced to stay open all afternoon on

market day, they had a well-planned schedule of where best to head off to depending on the day of the week. Thirsk, Malton, Helmsley, Kirkbymoorside or Easingwold more or less covered their needs, though they also favoured a quiet pub in the remote village of Hutton-le-Hole, where after a hearty lunch of gammon, egg and chips the landlord was happy to lock them in for the afternoon and let them smoke their Players No 6 to their hearts' content whilst they played endless rounds of piquet.

Meanwhile Tony was reputedly touring the full extent of Yorkshire, no doubt accompanied on his wide-ranging excursions by his talkative chum, "Spud" Murphy.

Tony's father was an innovative engineer who had revolutionised the potential capabilities of mechanical diggers and bulldozers in his post-war Uttoxeter factory. The name of Joe Bamford's company was taken from his initials, JCB, which stood for Joseph Cyril Bamford. After school Tony joined his father's already successful business and turned it into an international world leader. He became Sir Anthony Bamford, later Lord Bamford, every year bestriding the lofty peaks of The Sunday Times Rich List as chairman of one of the UK's biggest private companies. However frequently and wherever in the world James catches sight of one of those distinctively yellow machines, he reflects on how teenage Tony's natural ease with people must have transferred effortlessly into a key management skill for the world-beating entrepreneur. He has always enjoyed following from afar the career of someone who according to the usual familiar and limiting institutional criteria would have been judged a "failure" at school. One of a number of lessons to be learnt from this tale is that "leadership" comes in many guises. Another is that it is perfectly possible in business for nice guys to succeed.

Which leaves hanging in the air the question to which James has no answer: whatever happened to his friend, the more extrovert and apparently smarter "Spud"?

On the subject of business, in the Sixth Form James briefly ran an enterprise of his own. It started as a lending scheme for material that was absolutely not at all available in the extensive and well-stocked School Library. Regarded by many at the time as pornographic, these banned books would have been instantly confiscated if discovered by the authorities, with dire punishments ensuing. The top "sellers" were *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Lolita*, *Fanny Hill* and *My Secret Life* by Walter (The Sex Diary of a Victorian Gentleman). Quentin came up with a deliciously apt name for the operation: "Pornodrobe." As part of this specialised service James also laboriously copied out in longhand for his eager clients bawdy poems such as "Twas on the good ship Venus," and "The Ballad of Eskimo Nell." Of these he had acquired from scribes of an earlier generation precious and ancient but torn and dog-eared manuscripts which contained some variations in key verses. So he meticulously employed his budding classicist's skills in textual criticism to produce up-to-date and definitive versions. The rigger buggers in particular loved this stuff.

The demand for the books from hordes of desperate onanists grew at a dangerously fast pace. His sex-mad clientele was no longer satisfied with what James, if caught, might have tried to justify on the grounds of artistic and literary merit. Actually any amount of casuistry could not have saved him. He would have been done for on a simple technicality: all books brought into school from home at the beginning of term had to be approved by the housemaster.

The blighters started asking for magazines: *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Men Only*. It was surely only a matter of time before the regime would cotton on and he would be dobbed in by some establishment toady, a wanker with a conscience. Anyway, a secret is something you only tell one person at a time, so the word would soon reach the wrong ears. One dissatisfied customer, one unfulfilled tosser could upset the whole nipple cart. Then one day, Nick, the Head of House and one of his most regular pornodrobic consumers, warned James that the net was closing in and he wouldn't be able to protect him from

what might be an expulsion offence if Vanheems found out. So not without some relief James shut down the whole operation – his first and only effort as a promising purveyor of high-class porn ending in fear and cowardice.

“Well, you'll just have to find another way to *épater la bourgeoisie* (shock the middle classes),” scoffed Patrick, who was fond of quoting his favourite poet, Charles Baudelaire. So the Paul Raymond manqué returned to reading authors he really liked - Waugh, Huxley, Greene, Hemingway, Fitzgerald - instead of those whose arousing passages and pages he had had to mark up for the convenience of his more urgent, less literate borrowers. And throughout it all the Men In Black Habits never laid a glove on him.

Ἑπτὰ δέ τοι δώσει εὖ ναιόμενα πτολίεθρα
Καρδαμύλην Ἐνόπην τε καὶ Ἴρην ποιήεσσαν
Φηράς τε ζαθέας ἠδ' Ἄνθειαν βαθύλειμον
καλήν τ' Αἴπειαν καὶ Πήδασον ἀμπελόεσσαν.

And seven well-peopled cities will he give thee, Kardamyle, Enope, and grassy Hire, and sacred Pherae, and Antheia, with deep meadows, and fair Aipeia , and vine-clad Pedasus.*

The Iliad, Book 9, lines 291-294, by Homer

* Aipeia is the local district where Chrani is situated!

25/10/17

25. Philip O'Riordan Smiley

Dad was fulminating with rage this morning. He had been watching a sports review on BBC World TV. "Those Tristrans at the Beeb are complete idiots. They know nothing. Nobody cares about factual accuracy any more..." What brought this on? In a piece about the lighting of the Olympic flame in Greece prior to next year's Winter Olympics, the reporter said, "The flame was lit by the rays of the sun, as is traditional, on Mount Olympus." The photo-footage correctly showed the lighting ceremony taking place at Olympia, a mere 500 kilometres from the mountain. Oops! Lathos, mistake! The connection is of course Olympian Zeus, but let's leave it at that.

He recovered his good humour when Stephanos, a new friend who is building a tool chest for him, regaled him with a story proving that Greek women are the very best when it comes to multi-tasking. "I was driving in Athens," he explained, "in slow traffic, behind a driver who seemed slightly distracted. On closer observation I saw that the lady in front was doing five things, all pretty much simultaneously: 1. using her mobile; 2. smoking a cigarette; 3. drinking a coffee; 4. eating a sandwich; 5. driving her car. Impressive, n'est-ce pas?" (Stephanos lapses into French sometimes, since he was brought up in Belgium.) Indeed, but more so if it had been on the motorway at 140kph than in Athens at 10kph, of course.

Dad has decided to plant a few cypresses amongst the oleanders. He wasn't deterred when Manos, his architect's husband, told him with some glee that in classical times the cypress was a symbol of mourning and in the modern era it remains the principal cemetery tree in both the Muslim world and in Europe, especially Greece. "We have a good expression," adds Manos. "Πάω στα κυπαρίσσια, which is literally "I'm going to the cypresses," and actually means "I'm dead and buried, I'm pushing up daisies..."

On the feline front, you may already know that there are ten of us on the whole property, of whom eight are female. That leaves Mahmood and his young protégé, Zena's son, who is still a kitten really. Simos is a beautiful all-black cat with a temperament that appeals to the two-leggers. Last week he made an error of judgement when for the first time he accompanied Mahmood all the way to our house. Lulu was in a rather nowty mood so, having seen off Mahmood, she took one look at Simos and chased him up the nearest olive tree. She then tried to climb the tree herself to get at him. Dad intervened and she retreated in disgrace. She terrified little Simos so I don't think we'll be seeing much of him for a while.

I was right about my new renal pouches, by the way. I like the chicken, but I'm not keen on the tuna or beef ones at all. Whereas Lulu and Minnie will eat the lot if they get the chance. Or the intrepid Mahmood, if he can evade our sorority of sentries.

Finally, on news from Greece, do you want to hear about Dad's latest madcap scheme? At the moment the sea is flat-calm, the air temperature is 28°C with wall-to-wall sunshine. Last year he had his last swim of the year in late November and he's been contemplating how to extend his season into winter and beyond. The solution is of course a wetsuit, supplemented with swimming cap, gloves and socks. Thus, neoprene-skinned and seal-like, he can plough up and down Chrani bay on halcyon days, feeding his open water swimming addiction, whilst the sane people, Greeks and foreigners alike, will be safely tucked up in front of their log fires. After due consultation with my sisters I have decided to expose

Mad Dad the Englishman with a photograph of him in full rig in the next episode. Though he himself will only be “exposing” his nose, mouth and chin...

It is generally acknowledged that Fr Paul Nevill OSB has been Ampleforth's greatest Headmaster so far. He reigned for thirty years and died at his desk in 1954. A visionary who enlarged and modernised the school, his legacy to the boys of James's generation was the formidable raising of academic standards. In the early 1960s his successor, Fr William Price, was cock-a-hoop at the news that the school had topped one of the earliest published A-level league tables, a triumph for the left-footers over their High Church Anglican rivals such as Winchester and Westminster. Key to this success had been Fr Paul's strategy of appointing, from the wider market outside the monastery, at least one star performer in each of the major academic subjects. These outstanding lay practitioners ushered in a Golden Age of high-class teaching across all the scholastic disciplines, perhaps no longer matched since those heady days of the Sixties and Seventies.

Aside from the Classics Department but still within James's orbit, the staffroom roll of honour included: in English, Danny Griffiths and Algy Haughton, themselves pupils at Cambridge of the controversial literary critic, F. R. Leavis; a superlative History team including Thomas Charles-Edwards, Tony Davidson and Stephan Dammann; the Modern Linguists John McDonnell, dear to the hearts of Patrick and Bill, and Dave “Dick” Criddle, who taught James O-level German in the VI Form with great efficiency and a poker-faced sense of humour.

Some of the monks were good too, whether or not their Oxford University degrees had been acquired through the back-door route of St Benet's Hall, the private Benedictine residence set amidst the dreaming spires. They included: the afore-mentioned linguist Fr Dominic, youthful and in touch with the Sixties generation; Fr Denis, who valiantly tried to put some Physics into James; and Fr Brendan Smith, his Additional Maths O-level teacher who taught him how to “integrate” and “differentiate” successfully, though God knows what all that was about. Fr Brendan was Housemaster of St Aidan's and at a later date left the monastery to marry the mother of two boys in his House.

As for Classics, the biggest academic domain in the school, what a collection of talent it was.

Walter “Wally” Shewring was the most donnish and probably the cleverest of them all. Among his published works, his 1980 prose translation of *The Odyssey* would receive critical acclaim and is still in print to this day. As a young man he had been a friend of the Arts and Crafts Movement sculptor, typeface designer and printmaker Eric Gill and was his literary executor. This duty became a burdensome task in his old age when the revelations about Gill's incest with his daughters emerged in the late 1980s.

Bernard “Basil” Vazquez was a man with a beautiful soul, a quality that Christians call “purity of heart.” His Spanish father had been killed in the Civil War. His inherent compassion and joyful humanity caused him occasional problems with classroom discipline, but most of the time the wolves hunted other prey. They respected his deep scholarship and unbounded enthusiasm for teaching the subjects he loved. In addition to his mastery of ancient languages, including Sanskrit, he absorbed any language needed so as to be able to pass it on to any boy who wanted to study it, for instance Chinese and Japanese.

Hugh “Hardy” Amos was a new arrival who went on to become Head of Classics at Wellington College. He invited the Classical Sixth to his family cottage in the village to watch the 1964 Tokyo Olympics on

his flickering monochrome TV. Since radios were banned and no televisions were countenanced in the school, this was a rare and kindly treat.

The portly “*Bogs*” *Borland* introduced James and his fellows to Homeric Greek, specifically Books 5 to 12 of *The Odyssey*. He said they were “the best bits” and he was right. They are certainly the most entertaining for new learners. He had a disconcerting habit of suddenly leaving the classroom without a word and returning a few minutes later to continue where he had left off. Hence his lavatorial nickname.

Then there was *Laurence “Larry” Eyres*, a friendly old guy who permanently wore a neck brace. The word on the street was that he had survived the Siege of Kut. Kut Al-Amara is a town about 100 miles south-east of Baghdad and was the scene of what one historian has called “the worst defeat of the Allies in World War I.” This beleaguerment of a British-Indian garrison by the Ottoman army lasted 147 days. All relief efforts failed, at a cost of around 30,000 Allied killed or wounded, with Ottoman casualties estimated at around 10,000. After a humiliating surrender in April 1916 the survivors were marched to imprisonment in Aleppo. What the boys really wanted to know was whether Larry's ever-present cervical collar dated back nearly fifty years to his Mesopotamian adventure and what would happen if he took it off. They were too polite to ask and never found out.

So, along with the previously mentioned Fr “Bou” *Barnabas*, Fr Patrick “The Snow Queen” *Barry* and the young thruster *Canavan*, they would have comprised a redoubtable pedagogical contingent even without their *αφρόκρεμα*, *aphrokrema*, their *crème de la crème*, the show-stopper at the top of the bill.

The star turn in Classics was about 40 when James first met him. He was prematurely bald, short and stocky with the purposeful gait of a recently retired pugilist. He wore metal-framed spectacles that were too tight for his face and it seemed entirely possible that he did not remove them even at bedtime. Actually, since the arms of his glasses were embedded in his temples, creating deep furrows on either side of his ruddy face, his students were of the opinion that they were welded to his skin, probably since birth. Behind the thickish lenses glittered a gaze that gave the game away: the glint of an intellectual, yes, but also of a man who can't stop himself from being very witty indeed. His name was Philip Smiley and he signed himself P.O'R.S. Foolish boys therefore assumed that his middle name was O'Reilly, but his Classical Sixth knew it was O'Riordan and contemptuously dismissed the feeble rhyming joke of the uninitiated. He taught only the Sixth Form, specialising in Ancient History and the Oxbridge Classical General Paper. He was without question the best teacher James ever encountered in his life, either as pupil or as colleague.



Philip Smiley in 1956,

seven years before he started teaching James.

What makes a great teacher? Three pivotal elements are *condiciones sine qua non*, necessary conditions, for outstanding teaching. The first is of course profound subject knowledge and infectious if not batty enthusiasm for all aspects of it, stretching far beyond any examination specification to be taught. Their passion for their field of interest even gives the impression that these people take their speciality to bed with them every night.

One way or another they are consummate and well-organised communicators. This is when the many variants of irresistible eccentricity can emerge, whether as a natural extension of the teacher's persona or as a deliberate construct of effective performance. Engagement with the learners often involves humour, but this is not at all de rigueur. As long as the word "boring" is never used against your lessons, you might still make the grade without appreciable comic gifts. Beware also of becoming the entertainer who is popular with his or her pupils throughout the year but ends up teaching the class much less than they deserved or expected. Unfortunately they only find this out when they get their exam results.

The third feature is more elusive and indefinable, the characteristic that makes miracles. It is the ability to imbue in learners the belief that however low their confidence at the start they can really do this subject and achieve success. It is an assumption, a "given" on the part of the teacher that all things are possible. It transmits itself individually and collectively, deriving from the teacher's own self-confidence in his powers of alchemy. He or she *will* turn base metal into gold and "if you are in my class you'd better believe it." And so we still remember these teachers for the rest of our lives because of their unqualified faith in us. Modern pedagogic parlance uses the phrase "setting high expectations," but this seems too narrow a definition of an exceptional teacher's ambition for his students.

Smiley's engagement with both his subject and his pupils was so compelling that they were eager for his next lesson immediately after the current one had finished. They did not want to wait until tomorrow. Yet his methodology was incredibly old-fashioned. Inspirational exposition and lively

discussion, yes, but followed by about fifteen minutes of ... dictation. In response to any moaning, he simply retorted, "The only way I can get notes dictated is to dictate them to you."

Notwithstanding, these concise notes put red meat on the bone. They were so expertly organised that all you needed to do to get an A grade in A-level Ancient History was to write them down accurately and revise them carefully before the exam. You never needed to read or refer to any text book whatsoever. They included all the core facts and arguments but in addition his prize nuggets and references that were guaranteed to impress the examiners. In fact the Classical Sixth invariably got two As each, since over a two-year period the combined Lower/Upper Sixth class did rotating one-year courses in the Greek History syllabus one year and the Roman History syllabus the next.

His sense of humour was legendary and extended far beyond the Classics Department, since his witty aphorisms were quoted more than any other member of staff's in the informal samizdat circulations, legal or otherwise, which appeared around the school from time to time. In class punchy one-liners were his trademark, but they were only one weapon in his vast armoury. He told stories and digressions which appeared to be "red herrings" and which were encouraged by the boys but which cleverly served his wider purpose. Whether he spoke about Henrik Ibsen, the Books of the Maccabees, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk or the morning he stood on the rim of Vesuvius in March 1944 the day before one of its biggest eruptions since AD79, he knew exactly what he was up to. It was all grist to his mill. Nowadays it's called a broad and balanced education.

One day he went off-message thus, "If you are ever fortunate enough to go to Greece, you may think that your extensive knowledge of Classical Greek will aid your comprehension of the locals. Not so. Take the simple matter of "Yes" and "No" in the modern language. Yes sounds like Nay which means No in English and is often accompanied by a slight movement of the head from side to side which you will mistakenly take to confirm negation. No is Ochi, usually uttered with a raising of the chin so that the head appears to be nodding in assent. Very confusing. Now where were we? Ah, yes, the Delian League..." James never forgot his first ever lesson in Modern Greek.

Years later, when James first found himself, with no teacher training, tasked to insert the rudiments of Latin into a lupine class of thirteen-year-olds, he could do no better than to model his classroom technique on the approach he had admired so much in his hero and mentor, Philip Smiley.

It turned out that Smiley, an Old Amplefordian himself, had been in St Dunstan's House under Vanheems in the late 1930s. If any boy could have shifted the sclerotic Housemaster's permanent grimace into a smile, it would have been P.O'R.S.

Sayings of Philip Smiley

"Power isn't a stamp collection, is it?"

"Don't roll about the room."

"The first rule of the schoolmaster : never let them get behind you."

"Alexander climbed up the ladder of Hellenism to the throne of Persia, then kicked it away."

"Life is not a featherbed."

"The thrill of my morning - a peasant on a tractor." (when his voice was drowned out by a mower outside the classroom window)

Will you assume a less recumbent posture whilst insulting me?"

Cicero was a whining old prig.

"Anyone who breaches that subject will find himself digging my garden tomorrow afternoon."

"What was it?" as waitresses say.

"I don't wish to be crude about this matter, but..."

"I kept the Japs out of Portsmouth." (in answer to the question, "What did you do in the War, Sir?")

"This comedy will cease or you will be expelled."

"A barber with a beard is like a doctor with a disease."

"If I find 'Fanny Hill' circulating round my class, it'll be a cheap way for me to get hold of a copy."

"If I'd had a shotgun I would have put you out of your misery. You looked like a dying rabbit coming in from that cross-country this afternoon."

"The Romans were sedulous apes."

"Do you mind not making so much noise while you're drawing in your notebook?"

"I am neither a hawker, a huckster nor a butcher's boy."

"It is my custom when I am in a bad temper to give fair warning of such."

"You remind me of the Lady of Shalott, or something."

"If my fly-buttons are open, please inform me."

"If you're feeling religious, join some other monastery, will you?"

Recorded passim in the back of James's Ancient History notebooks (1963-1965)

14/11/17

26. Destination: Cambridge...

Dad has just come back from one of his short trips to the UK. He went to the dentist and had a tooth extracted. He's spent the last few days swigging salt water and muttering about avoiding a "dry socket," whatever that is. Since he's back swimming in the sea he must be swilling his mouth with plenty of sea water anyway. He says the temperature doesn't warrant "the full monty" (see photo below), just the old neoprene vest that he's had for years. I would really like to see the old synthetic rubber fetishist cresting the waves, but we girls never get to the beach of course. No doubt he will report back on his maiden voyage soon and I shall record it all. I just hope some myopic old fisherman doesn't net and spear him as his catch of the year.



For some reason the frogman Orca especially likes the cap

As usual on his return he was very pleased to see us all and delighted that my lingering limp has now disappeared. He is a great worrier where his cats are concerned. One morning he noticed that Lulu's lower lip and chin was bright red. "She's got consumption or tuberculosis or something dreadful," he groaned and waited for her to start coughing up blood. Finally he worked out what we three already knew: she's been biting tails off lizards again.

Dad reckons that instead of kicking his heels whilst waiting for the building permit to arrive he can at least get on with some landscaping and tree-planting. Stephanos who lives close by has been helping

with setting up a watering system for the young trees and shrubs we are planting. All we need is for Yiorgos, the local tractor driver, to bring the water for our 2,000 litre tank. Easier said than done, since now that the harvest has begun he is busy transporting everyone's olive sacks to the co-operative for pressing. Also he tends to do a full day's work only intermittently. On the first day he drinks, on the second he sleeps it off and on the third day He rises again. So Dad needs to catch him at his next Resurrection.

So far Stephanos and Dad have put in six two-metre cypresses which should grow at a rate of a metre per year. Next will be the oleanders, interspersed with a couple of pomegranate and persimmon trees.

Since antiquity the pomegranate has always held strong symbolic meaning for the Greeks. In ancient times, they were offered to the goddess Demeter and to other gods for fertile land and for the spirits of the dead. Most famously, the seeds of the fruit are the MacGuffin, as Alfred Hitchcock used to call an immaterial plot device, in the myth of Persephone and her marriage to Hades, the god of the Underworld. In modern times as well the pomegranate is a symbol of good fortune, abundance, youth and fertility. Tradition has it that on New Year's Day a pomegranate must be broken on the door's threshold for good luck. They are also prominent at house-warmings, weddings and funerals.

As for the persimmon tree, the most widely cultivated species is called *diospyros kaki*, but the Modern Greek name for its orange, sweet, tomato-looking fruit is λωτός, *lotos*, which leads to the assumption that this is the lotus referred to in Book 9 of Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus's storm-tossed ships arrive at the land of the Lotus-Eaters, where the natives give some of his men the intoxicating lotus. As soon as they eat this fruit, they lose all thoughts of home and long for nothing more than to stay there eating more. Only by dragging his men back on board and locking them up can Odysseus get them off the island.

Incidentally, the 1972 BBC TV series “The Lotus-Eaters” contributed to our Dad's lifelong obsession with Greece. It was a drama about ex-pats living in Aghios Nikolaos in north-east Crete. The plot became increasingly ridiculous but the setting and the life-style completely enraptured Dad. The central characters were played by Ian Hendry and Wanda Ventham (mother of Benedict Cumberbatch), although his personal favourite was the local police captain, played by Stefan Gryff. He simply wanted to be there with them all. The theme music for the series was Stavros Xarchakos' beautiful melody, Τα τρένα που φύγαν, *the trains that left (took my love away)*, and it stoked the centripetal force of his longing for Hellas even more. You can listen to Vicky Moscholiou's definitive version here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJI-HamuntI>

Homer's Lotus-Eaters lost the desire to return home. As Dad's second olive-harvesting season comes round, he has been reflecting on his first year here. It came as no surprise that, if “home” means England, the lotus-eating has already taken full effect. The truth struck him that he couldn't *not* be here for the rest of his life, a revelation with which he is supremely content. He would have to be expelled, kicking and screaming, by a xenophobic government, which of any European country is least likely to be Greek, to leave this place now. He could enjoy living elsewhere in Greece, but Chrani and its surrounding area is a hidden gem. Recently in Yiannis' bar he met Eddie, an ex-pat who has been living here for twelve years. “You know what? In all that time, it hasn't changed much at all...”

He was sipping a Fix beer whilst pondering these circumstances. He got to thinking why the most historic Greek beer, well-known to generations of foreign tourists, should have such an unhellenic name. Having found out the reason, he is insisting that I pass on his findings, since he thinks even some of my Greek readers may be surprised to hear them. So here they are...

The Great Powers installed the Bavarian prince, Otto, as the first modern King of Greece in 1832. In need of a decent beer, he brought his personal brewmaster with him. The name of his fellow Bavarian was Herr FUCHS, already the brewer to the Wittelsbachs in Munich. Fuchs transliterates loosely into Greek as ΦΙΞ, FIX, so that was the name put on all the bottles when the family brewery opened years later in 1864 and introduced the Greek public to beer. Ironically Otto was deposed in 1862, but the German-style lager went from strength to strength. The label is now in its third incarnation, the brewery having gone out of business from 1983 to 1995. After struggling to survive until new ownership came in 2009 Fix Hellas is now undergoing a successful revival.

Cheers! Just don't try transliterating Watneys or Whitbread into Greek...

So what finally can James say about the Catholic Eton of the North? He benefited from first-rate teaching which in the end was the reason he stuck it out. The general regime was actually quite liberal for a boys-only boarding school of the Sixties though uncompromising on religious observance. It was his particular misfortune to have to suffer a fossilised and anhedonic Housemaster in loco parentis.

Tommy and Brenda got their wish – their son had received the best Catholic education that they could afford. By a sad irony he gave them no thanks at the time nor for some while afterwards for their personal and financial sacrifices. Ungrateful little sod that he was, he took for granted the transmission of academic excellence that he had experienced there. Only later, when he himself became a schoolmaster, did he begin to appreciate the quality of the teaching from which he has profited throughout his whole life. Instead he dwelt on his misery and abandonment, imprisoned in the middle of Nowhere, which was geographically known as the North Yorkshire Moors but metaphorically to James and Patrick as The Slough of Despond. Boredom, petty constraints, teenage angst and the total inaccessibility of girls constituted the narrative of their daily lives.

The only remotely fuckable women they ever saw were the young Irish skivvies who cooked and cleaned under the over-scrupulous supervision of the old crones who ran them. These mesdames would report you to Vanheems for even looking. Patrick however did manage to strike up a tentative and friendly relationship with a particularly attractive girl who cleaned their room for a while. James would discreetly withdraw so as to let them converse in private. Patrick reported back on what a sad life she led, in effect procured and transported from some rural backwater in Ireland to work under slavish conditions as the lowest menial in a posh school. It certainly helped the boys to grow up a bit. They appreciated better the reality of their own lot, so they bleated less and reached a more mature *modus accommodandi vis-à-vis* their frankly privileged situation.

Throughout his four-and-a-half years there James's best experience outside the classroom was the Wednesday film, the highlight of his week. The movies were chosen by Fr Dominic until September 1964 when the film-nut Fr Stephen Wright took over and continued to pick titles with equal discernment. Dominic favoured classic French cinema, although he was obliged to gratify the masses with lighter fare from time to time. James owes the start of his love affair with the movies and the realisation that cinema was an art form to these two young monks.

Friendly Warning from Mickie: My readers who are not interested in film buffery are advised to skip the next four paragraphs.

Here's a sample of the films James and his friends, especially Patrick and Bill, lapped up. Let's start with the French stuff: Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups*, which began the New Wave, & *Jules et Jim*; Marcel Carné's *Le jour se lève* & *Les enfants du paradis* (one of the great romantic classics of international cinema

and still in James's Top Three); Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*; *Le Trou*, a superb prison escape drama; *He Who Must Die*, Jules Dassin's version of Kazantzakis' Christ Recrucified with Melina Mercouri in the Mary Magdalene role; for light relief *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday & Mon Oncle* by Jacques Tati, the Gallic precursor of Mr Bean.

Alain Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* deserves a special mention – it emptied the entire theatre in minutes, apart from James and his crew who lasted the full course of this baffling enigma, an experimental fusion of the New Wave and the New Novel. These pretentious teenage pseuds were in love with themselves for having actually heard of the scriptwriter Alain Robbe-Grillet, the novelist most associated with the Nouveau Roman trend of the 1960s. They didn't care whether the Man and the Woman had met in Marienbad last year or not... They wallowed in the surreal narrative structure and even more in their intellectual superiority over the long-departed plebeians, who were much happier with Disney's *Swiss Family Robinson* and *In Search Of The Castaways*.

Other foreign treats included the superb Soviet film set in World War Two, *Ballad of a Soldier*, whilst memorable American movies included *On the Waterfront*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Eight Days In May*, Hitchcock's *Rope*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, and Billy Wilder's *Witness For The Prosecution*.

British highlights offered the chance to lust after newcomer Julie Christie in *Billy Liar*, whose eponymous protagonist (Tom Courtenay) became an instant role model. As did Alan Bates in *Whistle Down The Wind*. For laughs the best comedies featured Peter Sellers in *I'm All Right Jack* and *The Wrong Arm Of The Law*. Bill summed it up succinctly, "God bless (Dominic) Milroy for the movies."

James's final term was his seventh in the Sixth Form, when the post-A-Level scholars were prepared for their Oxbridge exams sat before Christmas. All seemed to be progressing well until the final sting in the "Yempeldump" tail.

For no other reason than that Patrick was heading for Gonville & Caius in his father's footsteps, James also opted for Cambridge. University entrance advice was non-existent - you just applied for where some relation had gone before or you took pot luck. He chose Peterhouse, any logic for which decision is lost in the mists of the past.

Just as the exams began in late November disaster struck. Very heavy snowfalls in north Yorkshire brought down power cables throughout the region. The school totally lost its electricity supply for a crucial number of days. The candidates were required to write by flickering candlelight the most important examinations of their lives so far. James reacted badly. Instead of dealing resolutely with what Fate threw at him, he sat there in despair. He railed silently at this farce that four years of determination and hard work had led him to and bitterly mocked the stupidity of the school for not having back-up generators.

Some of his papers were a fiasco, especially the Latin and Greek verse & prose compositions, which demand high levels of both concentration and creativity. Although he was interviewed by an uninterested don at Peterhouse, probably as a perfunctory token to the school, a letter of rejection would arrive in the Christmas holidays.

His final day at Ampleforth contained a bizarre meeting with Vanheems. When he went to bid what he expected to be the most brisk and peremptory of farewells, the old monk sat the eighteen-year-old down and tried to deliver some kind of sex "talk," an anachronistic embarrassment to both parties. No inkling of it survives in James' memory, desperate as he was to get over the Pennines and out of Yorkshire for ever. Perhaps the nub of it was along the lines of the well-documented advice of the

previous Headmaster, Fr William Price, whose parting counsel to a leaver was, “Never stay alone with a woman when you are drunk.”

All that remained for James and Patrick was a ceremonial scissoring of their newly bestowed Old Boys' ties and a solemn vow to reappear at the school when Vanheems died in order to dance on his grave. In the event he lasted barely three more years, at the time still the first and only St Dunstan's Housemaster. As for the boys, when they heard the news they simply couldn't be bothered to traipse back up north. They had moved on. In 1974 James attended Bill's wedding in the abbey church as his best man. He has never returned.

So, having been turned down by Cambridge, how did the darling of Athena, goddess of wisdom, get into Oxford? As the detached Peterhouse interviewer said to the dispirited James, readers, “You'll hear before Christmas.”

In the meantime, enjoy the US re-release trailer of his favourite French film, *Les Enfants Du Paradis*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfqRRYDLKS8>

“It makes “Gone With The Wind” look like an antisentimental comedy. And it's thirty minutes shorter.”

Liphook Bugle, November 2017

02/12/17

27. Long John and Short George

You can tell that it's the height of the olive-picking season because by lunchtime there's no bread left in the Chrani supermarket. "The Albanian workers take it all every morning, so there's none to be had if you come later," explains Fotine. Early each day a large group of them waits outside Billy's, hoping to be picked for olive harvesting by the local farmers. They remind Dad of the longshoremen in "On The Waterfront," standing around and hoping to be selected for a day's work by nasty "Johnny Friendly" (Lee J. Cobb). Here however the employers are unironically friendly and so the Albanians are readily taken on, not least because they are regarded as good workers. Most of them have fluent Greek which is widely spoken in southern Albania.

They are a mixture of legals, semi-legals and illegals. Those with residence permits are allowed to work – no problem, but at this time of year demand for short-term labour is intense, so many come across the border just for the critical few months of the picking season. Some arrive on a three-month tourist visa which does not allow them to work, but the Greek authorities at the frontier generally turn a blind eye to the fact that male-only "tourism" from Albania to Greece peaks in the winter. Others take a bus to a spot short of their own border, walk across the mountains avoiding any control posts and then hop on another bus to the Peloponnese or wherever olives need to be picked. Simple, as an Albanian meercat might say.

Other news? There were two unconnected events of note this week. The first snows of the season have fallen on The Pyramid, the high point of Mount Taygetos across the gulf. This peak has the formal title of Profitis Ilias. But why are there hundreds of other mountain tops all over Greece with the same name?

When the Roman and consequently the Byzantine Empire became Christian, the old gods were expelled but their association with certain traditional attributes did not disappear entirely from Greek religious culture, especially in rural areas. Many Orthodox saints acquired the characteristics and some of the names of the pagan deities. For example, St Demetrios inherited from the ancient goddess Demeter patronage of crops and fruitfulness; St Dionysios maintained the god Dionysus's link with Naxos and his Bacchic connection with wine. Dad was excited to find that Helios the sun-god, aka Apollo, who was worshipped in ancient times on mountains and hilltops, ceded his shrines to the Hebrew prophet Elijah, who goes by the very popular Greek boys' name of Ilias. Hence all the high places are now named after him.

From our terrace the white-topped peak of our particular Profitis Ilias stands almost due east. At dawn it seems to be push-starting the sun on its skywards journey. In the Bible Elijah is lifted heavenwards in a chariot of fire, but Dad prefers to adhere to the pre-Christian image of Apollo's chariot setting forth every day to enlighten the world of mortals. He wants to start a campaign to rename The Pyramid Mount Helios, but the Orthodox Church wouldn't like that at all. So he contents himself with private daily adoration of Phlegon, Aeos, Aethon and Pyrois, the magnificently relentless and utterly reliable horses of the sun-god.

The second event was the baptism of the wetsuit ... at the second attempt. Dad's first effort was thwarted by too strong a swell and he has been waiting impatiently for calmer conditions. When the historic day finally arrived, he was so desperate to get his kit on for a lengthy swim that he mistakenly put his leg into one of the rubber armholes. "The wetsuit is supposed to be a snug fit, but this did

feel rather too tight,” he explained to us afterwards. “I had a devil of a job getting my foot out. I was hopping and dancing about on the foreshore like the lunatic I am fast becoming. Fortunately I had the whole beach to myself and my foolishness went unobserved.” Although the sea temperature is still not that cold, autumn swimming is a much more pleasant activity with all the gear on (gloves, socks, cap as well), despite all the faffing about before and afterwards. Even in the coldest month, February, the sea is 15°C in the Messinian Gulf, which is not far off the thermometer reading off Eastbourne in August, so Dad is hopeful of plenty of opportunities for his winter swimming.

Now for some cat gossip. Mahmood has disappeared, just as Bob says all male cats do in the end. We almost miss him trying to nick our food every night. Bella and her daughter Ella have been neutered, without any mishap. I am quite fond of young Ella, since she has the same Batman-mask face as me. I remember when the three of us were spayed back in 2006. Lulu and I were fine but as soon as she was de-caged Minnie bolted up a large juniper in the back garden and wouldn't be coaxed down for hours. Then she developed an infection where she'd been stitched and had to go on antibiotics. I put it down to climbing up that tree too soon after the operation.

Lulu has recently been involved in two prolonged squeaking sessions. Last week we had a night-time storm with the usual intense rain, thunder and lightning. What was different was the loudest howling wind we've encountered since we've been in Greece. I wasn't unduly perturbed but Lulu got quite frightened. She demanded Dad's reassurance at four o'clock in the morning before she'd stop her importunate eeking. Minnie was spark out, no doubt dreaming of her next feeding time. It was too early even for her to start her customary whinging for breakfast. Normally about sunrise she starts shouting, “Now, breakfast now, breakfast.” Waking from a deep slumber the other morning I mistakenly thought she was telling Dad in no uncertain terms, “No Brexit, no Brexit,” which would be strange indeed, given that Minnie is the least political of animals. I clarified my mishearing with her later. She confirmed that she has absolutely no interest in Brexit provided it doesn't result in import tariffs being imposed on Felix pouches.

Later, when Dad went to plant the oleanders with Stephanos, Lulu insisted on following them all the way to our new land and then attention-squeaking non-stop whilst they were trying to work. The upshot was that Stephanos did all of the digging – no surprise there – while Lulu “helped” Dad extend the watering system. At least she could report back that the job was complete and that Dad, despite his small part in the enterprise, was extremely satisfied with the result.



Cypresses and oleanders planted on the southern border.

Note the stones cleared by Antonis' JCB – useful for walls, terraces and patios later.

While they were working, Stephanos told him about his English landlord's three cats. They are called Miss Fledermaus, Miss Olive and Mister Howard. Pretentious or what? When Lulu recounted this to us, she added in a rather snooty tone that she would quite like to be called "Miss Lulu" from now on. Not by me, mate. Speaking as a tom-girl I would detest being addressed as "Miss Mickie." As for Minnie, her only response to a fancy new appellation was, "Would there be extra food involved?"

In the 1960s university entry procedures were handled by the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA). Making six choices and giving an order of preference, one could apply for both Oxford and Cambridge. James had done this, making Oxford his second choice. Some of his exam papers must have been good enough for his "pooled" application to Oxford colleges to be picked up by Godfrey Bond, Senior Tutor at Pembroke, who had a spare Classics place.

James drove down to Oxford on a frosty day in early January. Determined to make the most of his reprieve and put on a good show, he fortified himself with a double brandy at The Bulldog public house in St Aldates. His afternoon interview with Bond and the philosopher Donald Macnabb went well. Although he had been offered a college room for the night, he drove straight back to Cheshire and awaited his destiny. A few days he received a positive response. Massively relieved, he was well aware that he had just had the luckiest break of his young life. Not many can claim to have been rejected by Cambridge and then accepted by Oxford for what is plausibly a more prestigious Classics degree, *Literae Humaniores*, colloquially known as "Greats."

In the nine-week period at home that followed, two incidents stand out, one involving a very tall and the other a very short man.

Quite often Tommy came home late "from the office," sometimes worse for wear. He usually had a tale to tell which Brenda and James politely ignored. One evening, knowing his son's predilection

for blues music, including the British blues and R&B scene of the Yardbirds, Alexis Korner and John Mayall, he announced, "I've just been having a drink in The Rembrandt with Long John Baldry..." The Rembrandt was round the corner from Tommy's office in Whitworth Street. It was a fashionable upmarket restaurant run by two gays, where he frequently took clients. His wife and son looked askance at this news. They knew about his tall stories as in, "I bought John Lennon a drink on the Mersey Ferry before anyone had heard of him..." Brenda sighed, "Oh Tommy!" James muttered, "Yeah, sure," and they both carried on watching a less than riveting episode of "Z Cars." Tommy was unusually quiet for the rest of the evening. He was plotting.

A couple of nights later, on returning home and without uttering a word Tommy triumphantly presented his sceptical family with an autographed copy of the blues singer's latest album, signed "To Tom with love from Long John. XXX." Time to say touché, you unbelievers. It turned out that the 6'7" bluesman, at that time approaching the height of his fame, had been recording a TV Special at the Granada studios which were not far from the Rembrandt. He hung out there since he knew the owners well and Tommy, being Tommy, got chatting before he found out who the guy was... Later on Rod Stewart and Elton John would play in Long John's band and become lifelong pals. Elton took his stage surname from his friend's first name. When he became suicidal about his sexuality and Baldry helped him, he acknowledged Long John's support in his song, "Someone Saved My Life Tonight." Here's a clip from a Beatles's TV Special, featuring the tallest Hoochie Coochie Man himself, singing "I've Got My Mojo Workin'" from about the time Tommy met him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eroobdCORsI>

On another occasion when Tommy declared that he'd been drinking with Pat Phoenix (Elsie Tanner), Violet Carson (Ena Sharples) and the rest of the cast of Coronation Street in the pub next to Granada TV, his wife and son were rather more inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Soon after he heard that he'd got into Pembroke, James came home from the pub one night and as he entered the hall he heard a babble of voices in the drawing room. He tried to sneak upstairs to avoid the happy throng that Tommy had invited back for a nightcap after some formal dinner or similar function. His father heard the front door shut and intercepted him mid-stair. "There's someone I really want you to meet, son. Come and join us..." he insisted. Among the guests was a barrister in his mid-thirties whom Tommy had met through a solicitor friend and who had become one of his drinking buddies in town. On one famous occasion Tommy had broken up a fight between the lawyer and his second ex-wife in the foyer of the Midland Hotel. His name was George Carman, at that time practising on the Northern Circuit, mainly with criminal and personal injury work, not yet the national celebrity he would become thirteen years later.

Tommy the proud father introduced his son thus, "George, this is James who has just gained a place at Oxford. You're a Balliol man, and I wonder if you have any words of wisdom for him when he goes up?" George, a diminutive 5'5", was quite drunk but he always knew how to command an audience's attention. He surveyed the expectant - and mixed - company, looked James in the eye and declared, "I am most pleased to meet you, James, the son of my good friend Tom. I have only one piece of advice for you when you get to Oxford. It is this. Make sure you fuck as many women as you possibly can..." The look of shock and horror on Tommy and Brenda's faces was priceless, never to be forgotten. James just managed to keep a straight face and mumbled, "Thank you, George, I'll try to remember that." Soon afterwards he beat a hasty retreat. The matter was never brought up in the family again.

Carman's breakthrough into the big time was his defence in 1979 of the former leader of the Liberal Party, Jeremy Thorpe, who was charged with conspiracy to murder. Having successfully undermined

the credibility of at least one defence witness, George's greatest coup in this trial was to ban Thorpe from entering the witness box in his own defence. He correctly estimated that the risk of the arrogant politician incriminating himself far outweighed the subsequent public disquiet at several matters left unexplained by his client. Thorpe was acquitted but his political career was in shreds. George on the other hand was going places.

Among many celebrated cases he defended the comedian Ken Dodd against the charge of tax evasion. It was revealed during the trial that Dodd kept very little money in his bank account, having £336,000 in cash stashed in suitcases in his attic. When asked by the judge, "What does a hundred thousand pounds in a suitcase feel like?", the buck-toothed Liverpoolian, once described as "the last great music hall entertainer, replied, "The notes are very light, M'Lord." George joined in on the courtroom comedy act, at one point observing, "Some accountants are comedians, but comedians are never accountants." The trial lasted three weeks and Dodd was acquitted. By now a famous QC, George was involved in many further high-profile, often libel, cases. The media loved him. James never forgot his hilarious and fitting advice.

So what to do for eight months before going to university the next October? James and Patrick had spent the previous year fantasising about possible trips, the most ambitious of which was to circum-hitchhike the whole of the Mediterranean littoral. It was a crazy idea – Algeria and Albania were off-limits. Israel would have to be avoided if they were to include Lebanon and Egypt, or vice versa. But especially for Young Wardrobe an extended visit to the sunny south had become an obsession.

Brenda had been elected Lady Captain of Wilmslow GC in December and was about to embark on a busy year of office, so Tommy got to work on some of his many contacts. He had a client who was the managing director of the northern division of Bass Charrington, which happened to be the UK distributor for the cheap and popular Cyprus sherry, Emva Cream. Yuck, I hear you say, but the brewery guy had a close personal connection with the owner of the family winery which produced the stuff. (Emva Cream was exported almost exclusively to the UK, though surprisingly its second biggest market was Sudan. The Cypriots themselves steered well clear of it.) The boss was called Dimitri Hadjipavlou and the company, ETKO, was based in Limassol, Cyprus's second biggest town and its major port.

Through his British contact Tommy engineered an invitation for his son to visit the Hadjipavlous, "which may or may not result in a job," he suggested. "It's not Greece, son, but it's the best I can do," volunteered James's extremely supportive dad. Tommy had spent a lifetime helping his extended family and friends and now he was delighted to deliver the goods for his own boy. This was an exotic opportunity. James bit his father's hand off, needless to say. Neither of them had any inkling of the impact this foreign expedition would have on James's life.

Maps were consulted, letters of introduction exchanged, careful plans were drawn up which included the purchase of a "tropical" suit. A one-way BOAC air ticket was bought, from Manchester via a refuelling stop in Athens to Nicosia, with the departure set for 28th February 1966. In his luggage was a copy in the original Greek of Homer's Odyssey, Godfrey Bond's pre-course reading requirement prior to James's arrival at Pembroke. For the eager young adventurer, though, it was Cyprus not Ithaca that beckoned.

*Ἰκοίμαν ποτὶ Κύπρον,
νάσον τᾶς Ἀφροδίτας,
ἴν' οἱ ἐλξίφρονες νέμον-
ται θνατοῖσιν Ἔρωτες,
Πάφρον θ' ἄν ἑκατόστομοι*

βαρβάρου ποταμοῦ ῥοαὶ
καρπίζουσιν ἄνομβροι.

*Would that I could go to Cyprus,
the island of Aphrodite,
where the Loves, who soothe
mortals' hearts, dwell,
and to Paphos, fertilized without rain
by the streams of a foreign river
flowing with a hundred mouths.
The Bacchae, lines 402-408, by Euripides*

31/12/17

28. Aphrodite's Isle

Dad picked his olives before Christmas with the help of his neighbour Stephanos. It didn't take long. Only three of the trees had enough fruit to be worth the effort, yielding a meagre sack and a half, 70kg to be exact. To put this into context, Bob and Fotine will collect about seven tons from all their trees this season. Mum and Dad's twenty or so trees had been left untended for many years, so much more time was spent pruning them than picking the fruit. However, In future years they should produce a much better harvest. Fotine remembers that as a teenager when her father owned this land she helped him fill six sacks, about 300kg, from the five biggest trees. So the new owners have an achievable target for next year.



Stephanos begins a severe pruning of one of the productive olive trees

The ground beneath needed clearing too, for ease of positioning the nets in the future. More enjoyable than this hard graft was setting the bonfires for all the pruned branches. Although most of the time Dad remained sensibly upwind of the fires, a sudden swirling gust caught him unawares, with flames briefly singeing his eyebrows (*not bad*), nasal hair (*excellent*) and top-of-head hair (*not much left anyway*).

They added their olive collection to one of Fotine's pressings (55 sacks!) at the local co-operative and she gave them their proportionate 12 litres of oil. A pleasing practical solution, but it means that we'll have to wait awhile for the pure 100% *Ladi tou Doulapa*, aka *Huile d'Armoire* or *Oil of Wardrobe*. Dad won't be applying for his appellation d'origine contrôlée certificate any time soon.

The prospects for this year's "eating olives" à la Wardrobe are much brighter. We were able to pick a large pail of purple olives each as big as your thumb for marinading, which should be ready for consumption in a few months' time. Everyone in this region is fixated on their olives and Dad is no exception. As last year we shall use Fotine's traditional recipe, as follows:

Recipe for marinading raw eating olives

Ingredients:

For every 1 kg olives

100 ml vinegar

100 ml olive oil

2 tablespoons coarse salt

water (8 to 1 ratio to salt)

bay leaves; other herbs, eg oregano, at your preference.

Instructions:

- 1. Place all the olives in a large pot or bucket, cover them with water and place a big plate in the pot to keep the olives fully submerged.*
- 2. Leave olives in water for 10 days (or longer if you want to reduce the bitterness even more), changing the water every day.*
- 3. Leave the olives for 24 hours without water, but treat with salt to aid drying process. You can soak them in pure vinegar for 24 hours before drying if you wish - Dad doesn't do this.*
- 4. Add olives to sterilised jars, making sure they are packed as tight as possible. Cram in as many as you can.*
- 5. To make the brine, for each kilogram of olives, add 100ml vinegar, 100ml oil and 2 tablespoons coarse salt to 500ml water. Add 2 or 3 bay leaves. Boil the mixture and allow to cool.*
- 6. Pour the brine in the jars filled with olives to the top of the rim, until it begins to overflow - it is important that no air remains in the jar. You can add some oregano, chillies, etc., at this stage.*
- 7. Screw the lids on the jars, label them and leave them in a dark cupboard usually for about two months, less if you prefer a more bitter taste. You should test the flavour of the brine after a few days and adjust with more vinegar/oil/salt as required.*



Well, as big as Dad's thumb anyway.

Meanwhile Dad has continued to enjoy his winter swims, the famous wetsuit ensuring a comfortable passage in the ever-cooling sea. Chrani beach belongs exclusively to him these days, with not even Max the Dog for company. On one occasion he did meet an old guy, Theodoros, walking along the shore. He seemed suitably impressed by Dad's unseasonal natation. "Will you swim in January and February too?" he asked politely. "Yes, I hope so." "Good luck with that!" he said with a wry and slightly disbelieving smile, shaking his head and disappearing swiftly up the bleak strand.

The only problem with Dad's wetsuit is that unassisted he is unable to zip the back up fully to the nape of his neck. Imagine a rubber kangaroo bouncing and capering on its hind legs whilst endeavouring to pull a sack onto its back and shoulders with its front paws. It was probably a good thing that Theodoros didn't witness this sure-fire evidence of certifiable insanity.

Dad's friend and project manager Andreas swims all year round just in his trunks. He follows in the webbed footsteps of his mother who did the same throughout her life. He swims at the far end of the Kalamata promenade near the Filoxenia Hotel. Here are his essential rules for avoiding hypothermia and keeping the blood circulating.

1. Swim for a maximum of 20 minutes.
2. Don't stop.
3. Always have two towels available afterwards.
4. Walk or jog for 10-15 minutes when you get out of the sea.
5. Have a hot shower as soon as you reach home.

"Human madness comes in many forms," opined Lulu from her sofa bed as she watched one of Dad's heroes, Lewis Pugh, on the telly swimming in the 0.7° Celsius waters of the Arctic Ocean. Like the members of the well-known Serpentine club, Andreas is somewhere in the middle of a cold-water-swimming-proclivity continuum which stretches from Pugh at one extreme to Dad at the other. Minnie's only comment was that a good sixth piece of advice would be to have food as soon as possible after swimming.

The Comet 4B, the pride of the British aerospace industry in the '60s, touched down at Nicosia airport at 10.00pm local time after a four-hour delay in taking off from Manchester Ringway. A brief refuelling stop at Ellinikon gave James his first ever opportunity to plant feet on Hellenic soil. The airside waiting lounge was underwhelming. Tawdry souvenir shops displaying evzone dolls in their short-skirted fustinellas and miniature plaster Parthenons held no interest for him. The notices and signposts on the other hand caught his immediate attention. He delighted in being able to read and understand ΕΙΣΟΔΟΣ (*entrance*), ΕΞΟΔΟΣ (*exit*), ΑΦΙΞΕΙΣ (*arrivals*), ΑΠΟΧΩΡΗΣΕΙΣ (*departures*) – what joy! Classical Greek had come alive in the modern language before his very eyes.

He was met by a charming, smartly-dressed young man who spoke excellent English and whom he mistakenly took to be one of the Hadjipavlou family since his car was a magnificent limousine (it turned out to be the only black saloon he ever saw in his six-month stay on the island). James had a lot to learn. No uniform, no cap, see. Mihalis was the boss's chauffeur who had been instructed to bring the visitor back to Limassol. He apologised that owing to the delayed arrival of the flight he would be taking James to a hotel for the night. They would drive to Limassol the next morning. In those days it was a two-hour journey on a moderate two-lane highway from the capital to the major port. It was nevertheless at the time still the best road in Cyprus.



Metaxas Square, central Nicosia, in the 1960s

After a quick meal in the empty hotel restaurant followed by a deep and dreamless sleep, he awoke to the clamorous sounds of Nicosia street life. Opening the windows and shutters onto a small balcony, he felt the warmth of the early morning sun, stretched his arms skywards and laughed out loud. How wonderful and strange that he could actually have been sunbathing on the first day of March! The intensity of the spring light, the unrelenting blare of car and bus horns, the cries from the market

stallholders below, the *smells* - aromatic coffee, freshly baked bread, souvlakia - the bizarre sights of donkey and stray dogs mingling with the motor traffic and every generation of Levantine townsfolk, all these exotic sensations overwhelmed his consciousness with a force barely diminished by the long passage of time. Perhaps this was the moment that triggered the budding classicist's "modern" philhellenism. There would be many more such epiphanies, with a wealth of knowledge yet to be acquired about the contemporary Greek (and Turkish) way of life, but this was certainly Day One of the fulfilment of his lifelong obsession.

Mihalis began James's education with a chatty introduction to Cyprus as they sped due south under a cloudless sky, along the largely deserted arterial road across the fertile central plain of Messaoria. He learnt that the total population was under 600,000, of whom about 445,000 were Greek and 105,000 Turks, and all of them, in the towns certainly, spoke fluent English. The number of inhabitants is twice that figure in 2017. There were *five* separate armed forces operating on the island, Greek National, Turkish National, Cypriot National Guard, British (20,000 in total largely in and around the two Sovereign Base Areas) and since 1964 the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), comprising at the time Austrian, Irish, Finnish, Swedish, Danish, New Zealand, Canadian and some British personnel. Their task, according to UN Security Council Resolution 186, was to prevent a recurrence of fighting following the intercommunal violence which broke out in December 1963, three-and-a-half years after independence from British rule. The resolution also enjoined the peacekeepers "to contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and to facilitate a return to normal conditions." They are still there more than fifty years on.

Mihalis had an interesting take on the major benefit of the island being armed to the teeth. "We don't have a tourist industry here," he explained. "Just a few visitors to Famagusta. But we have the soldiers instead, who boost our economy better than tourists. They are here all year round and they spend most of their wage packets in all the bars, restaurants, night clubs, strip joints and brothels. There's plenty of entertainment in Limassol!" James was already licking his lips.

After an hour or so, at the point where the road turns westwards they stopped for a break. They sat in the sun outside the Halfway House at Kofinou where James had his first Turkish coffee, sweet and scented. It was renamed Greek coffee after the 1974 invasion. He learnt how to pour a few drops of cold water (*always* an accompaniment) into the small cup so as to send the grounds to the bottom. He smoked his first local cigarette and savoured the distinct "Balkan" flavour. It was made from sun-cured Latakia tobacco, quite unlike Virginia and more akin to the Sobranie Russian fags Tommy had once been given "by a client" and had passed on to his son.

It would be sometime later that he would discover from some Brit that this cafe was totally off-limits to all British service personnel, owing to the frequency of dangerous incidents here in the past, going back to EOKA days and continuing post-independence. It was situated at the point where the Larnaca road meets the Nicosia route as it heads toward Limassol. "You simply drive past without stopping," he was told in no uncertain terms.

A different "place where three roads meet" (from Delphi, Daulis and Thebes) was the source of trouble in classical mythology too. Without knowing who the stranger in the chariot blocking his path was, Oedipus killed his natural father, King Laius, in an archetypal instance of road rage. The question of who has the right of way at junctions is often a bit of a bugger, isn't it?

Kofinou was notorious for an altogether different reason. During the EOKA campaign of the late fifties, this was an ideal location for ambushing British transport, well removed from the safety of their bases. Later, this was one of the areas where violence erupted regularly between the Greek and Turkish

communities.

They continued on, James blithely ignorant of such local history. Most British people of that era knew the names Makarios, Grivas, EOKA and Enosis (union with Greece) from the news reports of the troubles in the '50s. James had been made aware of the wily Archbishop and the egregious Colonel by his father, who regarded both as anti-British bogeymen. As for EOKA, Tommy equated them with the terrorist Stern Gang whom he had come across directly in Palestine during the War. At this early point in his stay James understood little about Cypriot colonial history. By the time he left he had a more solid grasp of the political issues but he was surprised never to have met a single Greek Cypriot who now claimed after six years of independence to want Enosis. His overall conclusion was that Tommy's opinion about Makarios was misplaced but he had been accurate about Grivas, whose legacy of interference in Cypriot politics culminated in the ruinous Turkish invasions and occupation of 1974.

They soon arrived in Limassol, a sleepy, down-at-heel port which was the centre of the wine and spirits trade in Cyprus. It had a population of 44,000 Greeks and 6,000 Turks who lived together in much greater harmony than their compatriots in Nicosia or Famagusta. There was no physical boundary of demarcation between the Turkish quarter and the rest of the town as there was elsewhere.

Apart from being the chief exporting town, Limassol was also the commercial hub for the soft drinks trade, essential oils, tiles, fruit canning and ... carob kibbling. The carob grinding factory at the western end of Archbishop Makarios III Avenue, at the time the perfectly adequate two-lane bypass, emitted a distinctive and not unpleasant smell which in the season wafted over large areas of the town. It was an unforgettable aroma.



Limassol in the early 1960s

The essential, if not the only, guidebook to the island in those days, “*Everybody's Guide to... Romantic Cyprus*,” of which James still possesses his battered 1963 (11th edition revised) copy, quotes a contemporary writer on the ξυλοκέρατο, *carob*: “No one who has ever smelled them at close quarters can mistake carobs – those almost comic vegetables, if that is what they should be called, which grow on evergreen trees and look like scarlet runners when they are new and green in early summer, hanging down in

clusters from the branches. Later on, they turn black and hard, and a sort of honey drips from them and they haunt the Mediterranean ports with their unforgettable smell. Cargo boats take them far from their native land and their uses are absurd and almost illimitable, for they emerge in their final stages as anything from food to face cream.” (Mona Messer, *Stranger's Vineyard*, p89).

Dimitri Hadjipavlou's office was situated near the bonded warehouses of his family company, ETKO. James received a warm greeting from the kindly and hospitable businessman who seemed delighted to be acting as host to this new visitor to his country. His first task was to show James a couple of hotels to choose from. The first was in a ideal location on the seafront but was run-down and soulless, so they moved uptown to a more modern two-storey establishment in a quiet street off the bypass. The Alasia Hotel was owned and run by the diminutive and ever-cheerful Pipis. The friendly ambience was just what was needed. An affordable long-term rate was negotiated under Dimitri's watchful eye and James settled down to begin the happiest days of his life.

“The beauty of Cyprus is a perfect blend of mountain and plain, and of hills that slope to deserted bays half-screened by olive trees.

If I were obliged to spend the rest of my life out of England, I sometimes think I should like to live on the magic isle of Delos in the Aegean. But this is an idle thought, for no one except the guardian of the ruins is allowed to live there. My second choice would be Cyprus.”

“In The Steps Of St Paul”, p110, by H.V.Morton (1936)

20/01/18

29. "Be more goat"

Max the White Dog, Dad's occasional beach companion, has been a busy boy. A couple of months ago he was hanging around Billy's restaurant, where a beautiful Labrador called Amy lives. She belongs to Eleni, Billy's daughter. Last week Amy had ten pure white puppies, all doing well. At first Dad thought that Max had simply been a successful opportunist as males like to be, but it turns out that he had been invited into the yard for an officially sanctioned coitus. Anyway he has since sensibly retired to his beach bar and will no doubt reappear when the coast is clear.

Meanwhile, Bob and Fotine's four nanny-goats are giving birth too. The young billy has done his duty and won't be going in the pot for the foreseeable future. Unlike Max his longevity depends solely on productive performance.



Two-day-old kids in Bob and Fotine's barn

Dad has always been very fond of goats. He often used to tell his more obedient and biddable teenage students to "be goats, not sheep," in an attempt to banish their natural herd mentality and to encourage independent thinking.

Once whilst driving along a deserted road in Kephallonia he came across a mixed flock of sheep and goats, a common enough sight in Greece. As they often do they were blocking the road, so he parked the car and he and our First Mum sat back to watch their progress. On the far side of the road was a series of craggy rocks. In their midst rose a steep and tricky incline yielding access to a ledge on which grew a tasty-looking bush, very attractive if you were a hungry herbivore. One of the goats galloped up the slope with faultless footwork and began munching the greenery. It was a rare treat in the parched countryside of a Greek summer. However, an intrepid but foolhardy sheep had decided to follow the goat. With great difficulty it finally managed to reach its leader on the narrow ridge and joined in the feast.

After a while Nanny had eaten her fill and skipped casually down the precipitous gradient. But the sheep was stuck. Realising too late that it totally lacked goatish descending skills, it started bleating piteously. No amount of coaxing by the shepherd would entice this animal down and in the end with much grunting and cursing the old boy had to climb up and rescue his foolish beast. At the bottom of the cliff the goat in question was watching the whole proceedings intently and with what Dad reckoned was a devilish smile on her sly and sagacious face. "You could almost see her thinking, 'Serves it right for following me without forethought of the consequences. Sheep really are very stupid indeed..'," sniggered Dad. And the moral? You can encourage humans to be more goatlike, but don't bother telling sheep.

On the way to the next village south of Chrani there is a striking example of the congruence of old and new Greece. In the centre of a roadside plot of land sits the abandoned skeleton of a half-built two-storey house. Incomplete buildings such as this are a common feature of the Greek landscape since the economic recession began eight years ago. The concrete structure has a staircase to the upper floor where a small flock of goats can usually be seen taking refuge both from inclement winter rain and from the heat of the summer sun. They have to come down the staircase for their food, where chickens peck away in the grass all day long, but Dad has never driven past without seeing at least one of the goats upstairs. It is an unsolved conundrum why they bother going up when they can shelter equally effectively downstairs. Do goats get easily bored?

The owner has run out of money - the usual story - and given up on the construction project. But the family land is still essential to his livelihood in the time-honoured way : olives, chickens, goats. Maybe his children or grandchildren will finish the house one day. He just shrugs and says, "Τι να κάνουμε; What are we to do?" Rural life must proceed as it always has done, and in the meantime the astute goats have five-star accommodation with a magnificent and unimpeded view of the Mani.



I just trot up the stairs in my master's half-built and abandoned house to get a better view, OK?

Dad is growing a beard, a more-salt-than-pepper, scruffy appendage of questionable attraction. Not to become more goatlike, by the way, just because in the winter he can't be bothered to shave. Unfortunately he may now keep it longer than any of us would want, owing to an incident last week in Messini. He had popped into our vet's to make an appointment with Costas for us to go for

our annual vaccinations. An old guy was sitting there waiting for his wife to be served. As soon as he saw Dad he greeted him effusively like an old friend, to which The Grizzly One politely replied with all the usual salutations. It was clearly a case of mistaken identity, even though Greeks often greet total strangers with enthusiastic familiarity. After half a minute or so the affable gent realised his error and in apology said that Dad looked just like a close mate of his. No problem, on the contrary Dad was over the moon. At last he had been taken for a Greek, rather than a foreigner! He is convinced, probably correctly, that it was the beard wot done it and so the wretched thing will now be retained awhile for the purposes of ethnic identity experiments.



What nationality do you think this old git might be?

The only other incident worth recording amused me greatly, but not my sisters. Dad was snoozing on the verandah in the late afternoon sunshine with Lulu snoring contentedly on his lap. Her "stertorous recurring semibreve" (Leigh Fermor) was suddenly interrupted by Minnie who hadn't realised that Lulu was there and who fancied some me time on Dad's lap herself. She jumped up and landed fully on top of her sister. All hell broke loose. I was reminded of the moment when I woke Dave up in France by tickling his bare toes with my whiskers. There was a double dose of hissing and a startled cry of "Whoa! What the f**k!" Both the cats skulked off, each wary of the other. Dad resumed his recumbent posture and - guess what? - after a few minutes I was ensconced on his lap instead. Result!

Finally, apropos of my earlier remarks about the multi-tasking skills of Greek drivers, Dad has now had hair-raising personal experience of these. He has discovered a guy in the next village who runs a communal taxi service to Athens including the airport. You share the good-natured Dimitri's smallish Mercedes with other pre-booked passengers and the rates are very reasonable, for instance 50 euros to the centre of Athens, which is about a three-hour trip each way. Or in this driver's case, rather less. He has been doing this long-distance taxi work for twenty-five years and it shows in his formidable high-speed skill set. He goes every morning and in the summer twice a day sometimes. Crammed into a rear seat on his last visit to Athens, Dad was able to observe Dimitri's simultaneous accomplishments: answering the phone, writing in his notebook, drinking his coffee, steering with his knees - all at 140 kilometres per hour, albeit on an empty motorway. Frightening? Μόνο λίγο, Only a little. Impressive?

Πολύ, Very! And he even whips his sunglasses off in the motorway tunnels with expert aplomb.

The use of communal taxis in the Greek world is very long-established. Dad first came across them in Cyprus in 1966...

James's first weeks on the island were a time of wonder, variety and discovery. They say that your real education begins when you leave school...

Dimitri organised a schedule of visits to the factory and plenty of generous hospitality. After a while it became clear that he was unsure of the teenager's actual reasons for coming to Cyprus, though he deemed it improper to enquire directly. James had hoped for some low-grade job, but Dimitri explained that Cyprus employment law prohibited him from taking on foreign nationals. However he was more than happy to allow his young visitor open access to the winery for the purposes of research, so James decided to use his time to learn as much as he could about wine-making. He could just about survive on the monthly allowance Tommy would be sending him and the last thing he wanted to do was to return to England. The future would take care of itself, he reckoned. And it certainly did.

In the mornings he could ring Dimitri's office for a car to take him to the ETKO winery on the outskirts of town. It was a large plant situated on the Nicosia road close to a deserted and tree-lined shore. Not another building in sight, unlike today when its location would be regarded as central, before the miles and miles of resort hotels stretching almost halfway to the capital started to go up. The tourist areas of Famagusta and Kyrenia were lost to the Greeks in 1974, so they replaced them by intensively developing Paphos and Limassol instead.

James gained plenty of useful knowledge about the wine-making process. He took detailed notes about every stage: the pressing, fermentation, storage and maturation. He even recorded that although the machine-separated grape stalks held no commercial value "they were well liked by goats." He observed sample analyses, familiarised himself with blending procedures and got to know the full range and types of the twenty or so wines produced there. The company also distilled a grape brandy called "Anglias," which accounted for about 55% of the Cyprus brandy market. It was the locals' favourite spirit, having a similar caramelly flavour to Spanish Fundador or Terry Centenario. Cypriots did not on the whole drink ouzo.

This was a period of great expansion for the business. At that time ETKO had tank space for 4 to 5 million litres of wine, but new tanks were being built to increase capacity by 50%. The table wines were mainly for home consumption whilst the fortified wines, especially Cyprus sherry, went for export. Britain was consuming half the island's production and the Hadjipavlos had the brand leader, the sweet and sickly Emva Cream. Cyprus was becoming the UK's third leading wine supplier behind France and Spain. A major factor was that its "sherry" was more affordable than Spanish sherry. But consumer fashions change and the fortified wine market began to shrink. Cyprus sherry sales in the UK fell from their peak in the early 1970s by some 65% by the mid-1980s. The final blow came when the EU ruled that as of January 1996 only fortified wine from Jerez could assume the title of sherry.

One day Dimitri sent James on a trip out of town, accompanying a salesman who had business to conduct at RAF Akrotiri in the nearby sovereign base area. The bizarre sight of so much untouched Britishness, from the architecture of the red-brick buildings to the neatly-trimmed lawns, the all-English signposts and the gleaming rows of parked Lightning fighter jets, came as a shock. The best aspect was the spectacle of a thousand pink flamingos standing, mostly one-legged, in the peninsula's vast salt lake, the island's largest inland body of water. Then they drove over the western end of the

Troodos mountain range en route to the north-coast towns of Morphou and Kyrenia. As they crossed the watershed the view was simply astounding. Below lay the pine-covered northern coastal strip and beyond the bluest sea James had ever seen. The distant haze concealed the brooding mainland of Turkey, a mere fifty-five miles away.

Back in Limassol his early introduction to the modern Greek language was both fascinating and bewildering. In those days the written language of, for example, the newspapers was καθαρεύουσα, *katharevousa*, the "purified" formal officialese which differed markedly from δημοτική, *demotic*, the vernacular spoken by ordinary people. Katharevousa, an artificial construct, was much closer to Classical Greek, so James could straightaway make a reasonable fist of reading news articles. But when someone *spoke* Greek, he couldn't understand a damn thing. The main reason for this was the same obstacle that has blocked an easy conversion to Modern Greek for Classical scholars of every generation since the Renaissance.

The study of Greek in the West expanded considerably from the mid-fourteenth century. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 drove many Byzantine Greek scholars into Western Europe. Greek texts were at that time universally vocalised with the medieval articulation that survives to this day. James, along with all other learners apart from those in Greece and Cyprus, had been taught the Erasmian pronunciation of Ancient Greek. This dates back to the sixteenth-century Dutch scholar's system of replicating what he believed was the way the ancients actually pronounced the letters of their alphabet and its associated diphthongs. Modern Greek however has morphed into a quite different spoken version of the same alphabet. Just two examples: Beta and Delta have lost their plosive value, becoming V and TH; the vowels Eta, Iota, Upsilon and the diphthongs OI and EI are all pronounced /i/. Very confusing for someone taught to pronounce Greek "the ancient way" to adapt to the phonology of modern speakers, but James soon mastered the basics. And he had a good teacher.

Everyone in Limassol familiar with the Alasia Hotel adored Yianni, the perfect barman. He was an impeccably smart seventy-year-old, lean and small of stature, bald as a baby and beloved of his clientele. He knew your drink before you sat down but he always waited politely for you to order it anyway. He was genteel in the best sense of the word: cultured and courteous, and he was the first friend James made on the island. He was happy to teach the young Englishman many essential phrases such as, "Θέλω παγωμένη μύρα, I'd like an ice-cold beer." "Τα ίδια, παρακαλώ, The same again, please." "Υπάρκει ένα τασάκι; Is there an ashtray?" The first ten words James wrote in his vocabulary book came from Yianni. They were the Greek for: woman, man, night, life, breakfast, garden, mother, car, girl, beautiful. Make of that what you will. The word for *drunk* is 37th on the list, but we'll come to that later.

Of course he was predominantly hearing the Cypriot accent and picking up some dialectal variations of Standard Modern Greek. But there was one way in which he was being exposed to metropolitan Greek: through the lyrics and singers of virtually all the music on the wireless. He had heard some film scores by Χατζidakis ("Never On Sunday") and Theodorakis ("Zorba The Greek") back in England, but now he began to enjoy the full range of popular (λαϊκό) and artistic (έντεχνο) songs with their haunting microtonal melodies. He was quickly drawn to the unique voice of Grigoris Bithikotsis, at the peak of his powers and fame in the 1960s.

On his transistor radio he could also keep up with UK pop music through the Forces Broadcasting Service. The Number One hit in March was a great song but paradoxically incompatible with the glorious Cyprus spring weather in which he was basking: "The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore," by the Walker Brothers (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koO-rnus45M>).

There were two other long-term residents of the hotel. They both worked as civilian signals specialists on the Akrotiri SBA alongside their military colleagues. The two sovereign base areas served an important role as stations for SIGINT (signals intelligence). Indispensable during that Cold War period they continue to provide a vital strategic part of the UK communications gathering and monitoring network in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The older man was just about to finish his tour of duty and he departed soon after James arrived. His fellow worker was a flamboyant and extrovert 38-year-old Irishman who now took James under his wing. His exuberant personality suggested that he had kissed the Blarney Stone more than once, but he was reticent in one respect: he never discussed his work. On all other matters however, especially those of which the Benedictine-educated boy knew nothing, he displayed the true gift of the gab. He was fussy about his appearance and in his mannerisms, even a touch effeminate, but he possessed a winning asset: massive self-confidence. James's smooth-shaven, baby-faced mentor also had charm by the bucketful; the callow youth had precious little of this stardust and was desperate for it, so he immediately became an enthusiastic pupil.

The expatriate lifestyle suited Pat perfectly. He was what used to be called in polite society "a ladies' man" but might now in a more vulgar age be termed a "shagmeister." He had three women on the go when James first met him. His life was therefore complicated and extremely busy, but he was more than happy to spend time introducing an absolute beginner to all the fleshpots of Limassol.

The red light district was suitably seedy, a smallish downtown area replete with night clubs and brothels. It thrived on the wages of all the military personnel who were stationed in the district. James concentrated on developing his drinking habits - he didn't have spare pocket money to spend on the women anyway. And he was still young and until recently Catholic enough to worry about what his mother would think if she ever found out. One establishment was bar, strip joint and brothel all in one. On limited funds he would drink at the counter and from time to time engage the waiting tarts in innocent conversation. Since the boy was neither a threat nor a potential client, they were generally friendly and receptive. On one bizarre occasion, he found himself discussing Greek philosophy with a fine-looking blonde prostitute who at least pretended to be enthralled by the boy's exposition of Plato's Theory of Ideas. She did have to excuse herself and pop upstairs for twenty minutes or so from time to time throughout the evening, but James didn't mind the interruptions. This was real life!

On the floor the acts were very tacky indeed. James remembers one British couple, Harry and Cora. They played out a strip scenario in which Harry was a fisherman complete with net and trident while Cora writhed on the floor gradually divesting herself of her mermaid's flimsy costume. You knew Harry was supposed to be at sea since he stood on a fully-inflated plastic lilo. No Lord Chamberlain's Office to censor performance, so James saw stuff that would cause all good men to lock up their daughters. Once there was an impressive bikini-clad female fire-eater and sword-swallower who concluded her act by swallowing a needle on a white thread and then appearing to pull the thread, now a bloody red, from her umbilicus.

James also chatted with some of the regulars. One very drunken Scottish squaddie explained to him that he had spent his whole life on a fruitless quest. His holy grail was to find a woman whose pubic hair was truly and authentically "as blonde as the hair on her head, laddie." He had scoured the brothels of the world, paying particular attention to those in Scandinavia, all to no avail. James cautiously took note and continued his own excessive drinking. That was the night he fell asleep clutching the lavatory bowl after having consumed a monstrous amount of ouzo. The Greeks say that there is no cure for a hangover induced by this heinous spirit. The next morning, ill as he was, when he cleaned his teeth he

became drunk again. He has never touched ouzo since.

Meanwhile Pat had just taken delivery of a wedgewood blue Triumph Spitfire. On St Patrick's Day, he took James in his brand-new open-top sports car to a lunchtime drinks party at the nearby apartment of some army nurses of his acquaintance. Pat celebrated his patron saint's day by drinking too much. When they left, he claimed to be fit to drive, even after he had knocked over the donkey cart.

Neither man nor donkey was harmed, but the contents of the cart were overturned and the driver was understandably angry. The incident had happened just round the corner from the main police station. The coppers were on the scene very quickly, smelt Pat's breath and escorted all concerned into the nick. Interviews were held and statements taken. Before the days of breathalysers and blood tests, the police had to make a judgement about Pat's state by other, more primitive means. He claimed to have proven his sobriety by walking perfectly along a straight white line on the floor. The police were unsure, so they consulted James, who was completely sober since he only drank at night. "Why is he laughing and talking so much?" they asked. "It's not normal behaviour. He's drunk." "No, you have to understand that he is Irish," blagged James, "and that all Irishmen are naturally happy today of all days because it is St Patrick's Day. They can't help themselves. It's customary for the whole of Ireland. It's not the drink." After a couple of hours Pat was released without charge. As they departed he thanked James for his support and confided, "If only they knew that I can only walk the line straight when I'm completely pissed. It's a party trick. When I'm sober I can't do it at all."



Triumph Spitfire drivers, steer well clear of donkey carts at all times

Earlier in the day, when they had first arrived at the nurses' flat, Pat had presented James thus: "He's a nice chap but in my opinion we really need to find him a girlfriend." A general discussion ensued about all the women they knew who might prove suitable for the young lad. This match-making project was undertaken enthusiastically and given due consideration by all concerned apart from the subject himself. Names were proposed, lists were drawn up, glasses were replenished. Finally a consensus was reached. Pat summed up the decision, about which James had had absolutely no say and judged the matter to be a jolly jape at his expense. "Maud and Gerry Brown have just arrived from England and they have a daughter about James's age. I'll arrange an introduction..."

True to his word, Pat invited the Brown family for drinks six days later at the Alasia Hotel bar. On 23rd March 1966 James met his Moira, which is the Greek word for Destiny. Her name was Pauline.

Hints for Visitors

Don't be surprised if an unknown person greets you in the street. It is considered good manners if you return such a salute.

Enjoy the hospitality of the Cypriot. Eat whatever he offers you, whether you enjoy it or not. If this is impossible, eat at least some to make him feel that you accept his hospitality.

Cyprus meals have many courses. It is better to go lightly on each course and eat something of everything than to pass things up.

If you are offered preserved fruits in a home, take one, or one spoonful if you are offered jam. You are not expected to empty the dish. If you are offered coffee, it is not polite to leave before the coffee cup gets cold.

Don't be surprised if a shopkeeper offers you a chair and perhaps lemonade or coffee. It is the proper setting for good bargaining.

Be friendly with the peasantry. You will hear them tell interesting stories of the village characters, their saints, quacks, wedding ceremonies, etc.

"Everybody's Guide to... Romantic Cyprus," (11th edition revised) (1963)

08/02/18

30. Boy Meets Girl

This year's Αλκυονίδες Ημέρες, Halcyon Days, have been warm and sunny as well as calm. Originally this storm-free period was considered to be the seven days on either side of the winter solstice, but if you ask local people now they are as likely to specify "the third week in January." Perhaps experience has taught them that one month later is generally a more reliable time for this fabled spate of blessed weather. Halcyon, αλκυόνα, is the Greek word for Kingfisher and derives from the mythical daughter of Aeolus, Αλκυόνη, Alcyone. Aeolus was Keeper of the Winds, as Odysseus found out to his cost when he upset him.

Her story goes like this. When her husband drowned, Alcyone threw herself into the sea but the gods saved her and transformed them both into kingfishers. When Alcyone, clearly not a wise bird at this stage, made her nest on the beach, winter waves threatened to destroy it. For his daughter's sake Aeolus quelled his winds and kept them calm for a while each year, so she could lay her eggs. Thus these days became known as the "halcyon days," when storms do not occur.

Anyway, Aeolus is doing a good job at the moment allowing Dad to do his particular thing on the beach. For a 30-minute swim it takes him about twenty minutes to get ready to enter the sea. First the wetsuit, next the socks, then the goggles and earplugs followed by the swimming cap and finally the gloves. Pedantic classicist that he is, the old boy tells us that this lengthy rigmarole reminds him of "the arming scene" of a Homeric hero before he goes out to fight. What on earth is he talking about?

He then patiently explains to us ignorant felines that there are a number of set-piece descriptions in The Iliad in which a warrior arms for battle, notably Paris, Agamemnon, Patroclus and Achilles. In each of these scenes the fighter arms from the feet up and puts on, always in the same order, his greaves, body armour, sword, shield and helmet. Finally he picks up a spear. This ὀπλισις, *hoplisis*, arming, is usually followed by the hero's ἀριστεία, *aristeia*, his most outstanding feat of arms in battle. I'm wondering whether it's just the getting ready part that he's comparing, not the fighting bit. "Well, I suppose my battling with the briny feels like a sort of aristeia too..." he concludes in all seriousness.

What else has he been up to whilst Mum's away in England? He's started playing backgammon again after a gap of forty-five years. The reason he gave up was that he thought he was quite a good player until he encountered a Turkish taxi-driver in Antalya in 1973. They played nine games in a cafe overlooking the old harbour. Dad was trounced 9-0 and wounded pride took its heavy toll until Stephanos persuaded him to try again last week. He won enough games for the contest to be enjoyable and for him to want to keep playing this time.

He's also been following on Greek TV the latest developments in the long-running saga of the "Macedonia name" dispute, which may or may not be coming to a head. Without going into the full details of what seems to foreigners a pettyfogging issue but a matter of national importance to virtually all Greeks, I can tell you that the problem dates back at least to the Balkan Wars in the early 20th century. The disagreement arises from the ambiguity in nomenclature between the Republic of Macedonia, a region of Yugoslavia until its break-up in 1991, and the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon, which falls mostly within the adjacent Greek province of Macedonia.

The Republic got into the United Nations in 1993 by agreeing to be called The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) for all official purposes, with the UN insisting that this is a temporary

description, not a *name*! So for the past twenty-five years the Greeks have referred to their annoying northern neighbour as either FYROM or just "Skopje." And guess where FYROM sits in the UN General Assembly? Greece rejected seating the Republic's representative under M [as in "Macedonia (former Yugoslav Republic of)"], and the Republic rejected sitting under F (as in "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"). Instead, it is seated under T as "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and placed next to Thailand. The Balkans, eh?

Balkan politics is and always has been a completely unintelligible nightmare to the West, but there is one American diplomat who certainly understands the "naming" problem. Matthew Nimetz, a 78-year-old UN special envoy, has been chewing over this single word and its international ramifications for twenty-four years. The Greeks fear "cultural theft" (Who owns Alexander the Great or the Vergina Sun (see below)?) and the irredentist ambitions of FYROM's extreme nationalists. So they continue to oppose offering the formal right to a name that they insist is Greek. They have blocked all applications so far by FYROM to join NATO and the EU. Recently, however, dialogue to achieve a solution has been stepped up since the government of Macedonia is intensifying its efforts to join the military alliance, which is equally keen to enlist this new member.



On the left the flag of the Greek province of Macedonia, on the right the Republic of Macedonia's first national flag after independence, which was subsequently modified in order to assuage Greek objections. The Vergina Sun symbol was depicted on a golden larnax (small coffin) found in a 4th-century BC royal tomb probably belonging to Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great.

So, last Sunday hundreds of thousands of flag-waving, chanting protesters brought Athens to a standstill in a massive demonstration caused by fears that Nimetz's negotiations may now be reaching a conclusion unfavourable to most Greeks. It seems that Alexis Tsipras's government is preparing to concede the use of the contentious name Macedonia, probably with some modifier such as New or Northern or Upper, in order to reach a compromise. His reasons for this are not entirely clear, but probably stem from his need for rock-solid international support vis-a-vis his uncertain relationship with NATO "ally", Turkey.

The protest's organisers even wheeled out - literally, since he was in a wheelchair - the 92-year-old composer Mikis Theodorakis to harangue the crowds about the threat to the country's sovereignty if Tsipras gets his way. "Defending the rights of your country isn't nationalism, it's patriotism," croaks the querulous composer of *Zorba The Greek*. "We must not agree with the falsifying of history." The beloved national icon also called for a referendum on the issue. The government definitely won't countenance this, since opinion polls show that an overwhelming majority would oppose any settlement allowing the use of the "M" word or its derivative.

The irony of "history" in this case, says Dad, is that back in the classical day the southerners, not least the Athenians, looked down their Attic noses at the Macedonians for speaking some dreadful northern dialect and being virtual barbarians, not really proper Greeks at all. The 4th century BC orator and politician Demosthenes characterised King Philip II, father of Alexander, as a "barbarian" (*Third Olynthiac*, 16 & 24; *Third Philippic*, 31), since he counted as Greeks only those who had reached the cultural standards of south Greece. It suited his political purposes not to take into consideration ethnological criteria, and he expressed his contempt for Philip rather forcefully: "He is not only no Greek, nor related to the Greeks, but not even a barbarian from any place that can be named with honour, but a pestilent knave from Macedonia, whence it was never yet possible to buy a decent slave" (*Third Philippic*, 31). Two-and-a-half thousand years later Athenian politicians play a different tune. Mikis and his mates wouldn't dream of saying that about Alex's dad nowadays.

Faced with a popular backlash Tsipras may panic and perform one of his famous U-turns. If not, his SYRIZA-led government will be annihilated in the next parliamentary elections which must take place by late October next year. They will almost certainly lose anyway, such is the general disillusion with their sorry performance to date.

Meanwhile, until the matter is finally resolved, nonplussed travellers entering northern Greece from the Republic of Macedonia and those crossing the border in the opposite direction will both continue to be greeted by roadside signs welcoming them to "Macedonia."

The three guests arrived for drinks at the Alasia punctually, as they inevitably would since Gerry was a RAF officer. They had landed in Cyprus a couple of months before, in the early hours of New Year's Day, to find all the duty staff at Akrotiri Arrivals celebrating the onset of 1966 with tremendous alcohol-fuelled vigour. The family was then billeted for a while at the hotel before moving to a temporary "hiring," a nearby apartment just off the bypass. Pat had therefore got to know them in their first days on the island.

After the initial introductions James planted himself on the bar stool next to Pauline. The presence of the three "adults" faded into insignificance behind him. Under Yianni's beneficent and watchful gaze the teenagers appraised each other with interest. The eighteen-year-old girl was a stunner. Whereas he was awkward, spotty and bespectacled, she was petite, slim, stylish, delicate as a small bird. Above all her large eyes commanded his attention. They were the dominant feature of an attractive oval face which was framed by her carefully coiffured light brown hair and *they were smiling at him*.

She told him later in their relationship that she had forgiven his opening conversational gaffe without a second thought. Bear in mind that he either didn't know or had forgotten her family name. This is his disastrous opening gambit: "Hi, I'm James Wardrobe. Very good to meet you." So far so good. "I'm Pauline, though I'm often called Paul. That's a strange surname you have." She doesn't mess about then. "Well, it's more interesting than being called Smith or Jones." That should draw a chuckle of agreement. "My name is Brown, actually." Whoops! Doomed before he has even started.

To his amazement the ground beneath his perch does not at this moment open up, nor consign him to the depths of that inner Circle of Hell where the souls of the gormless and the gauche reside in their cringing embarrassment for all eternity. Time stands still. Tumbleweed is rolling silently along the deserted Archbishop Makarios III Avenue. Yianni stops polishing glasses for an instant and James knows from the look of frozen horror on the kindly barman's face that he wishes he had the requisite trapdoor lever at hand to put the young idiot out of his misery. Instead, *mirabile dictu*, wonderful to

relate, *she keeps smiling* and looking as if she quite likes what she sees. This surprising reaction allows the yammering and smitten imbecile sitting opposite her to regain a modicum of composure.

Many years later they would laugh at the idea that if she had kept her maiden name when they married she could have become Pauline Brown-Wardrobe. Or at least he laughed.



18-year-old Pauline at Episkopi Beach Club after a swim

Who knows how the opening conversation then developed? Enough to say that they got on swimmingly, largely thanks to her easy sociability which was in strong contrast to his anxious ineptitude. In his cloistered life so far he had had little interaction with girls and he was therefore terrified of them, including this rather good-looking archetype of the alien species. She turned out to be good fun too, a family trait she shared with both her parents, notably the extrovert and jocular Gerry who was the natural life and soul of any party, enlivening any gathering he attended. James warmed to them all and a successful evening passed far too quickly.

Yianni and Pat had played their part exquisitely but afterwards the Irishman was deeply disappointed in his young protégé.

"Did you ask her out on a date, then," he enquired.

"No, I was too scared. I really like her and I was hoping you might ask her for me?"

"Bejasus! Certainly not. I'm no Pandarus. You have to ring her up yourself..."

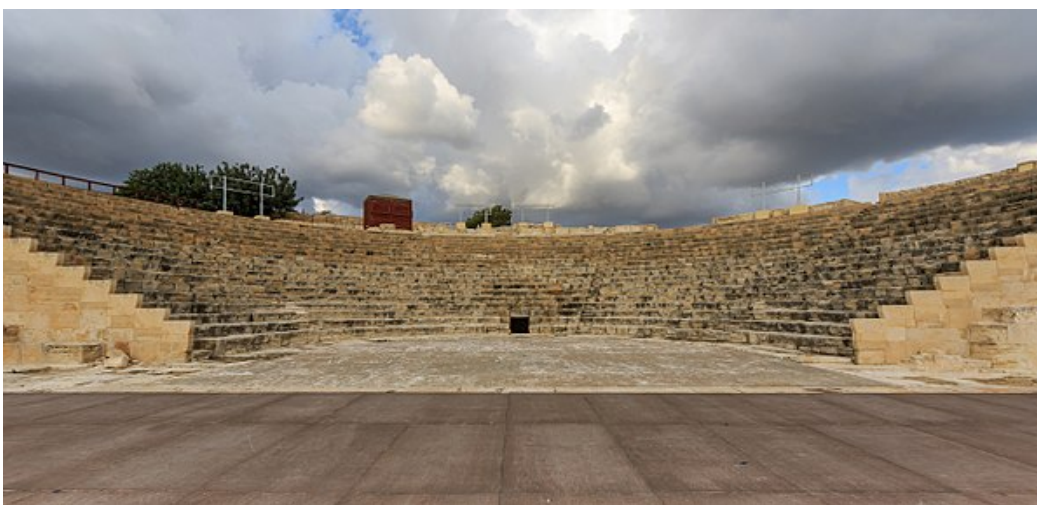
”Well, will you at least find out first if she might agree if I do ask?” Hopeless and clueless.

Pat finally agreed to ”take her out for a spin” in his new two-seater, which was only slightly donkey-cart-dented. It never occurred to James in his naivety that the Lothario With A Love Machine would take the opportunity to make a pass at her himself. The Man reported back after a few days that he had taken her to a quiet beach for a picnic lunch. Pauline commented later that she had wondered what his true intentions were when he spread out his car rug on the sand, but he behaved reasonably honourably with merely half-hearted flirting before asking what she thought of The Boy. It must have felt strange for such a serial womanizer to sound out a female on someone else's behalf, but he did as he had been asked. The Girl admitted that she would be very happy to see The Boy again. On hearing this encouraging news James girded his loins and made the phone call.

It turned out that on the following Saturday afternoon the Brown family was driving up to RAF Episkopi and so Pauline invited James along. Gerry, as the Physical Fitness Officer responsible for all the sports events and facilities on the base, had to attend a football match in Happy Valley, the outdoor complex which at the time boasted the only grass soccer pitch in Cyprus. Maud wanted a sneak preview of the married quarters, situated on the cliffs above and to which they would soon transfer for the remainder of Gerry's three-year tour of duty.

They arranged to pick James up from the hotel but when her parents disappeared into the bar for some long-forgotten reason Pauline stayed with him in the entrance hall. Delighted to see each other again, they chatted inconsequentially, with shining eyes only for each other. On the fifteen-mile trip to Episkopi, her 2½-year-old brother, Stephen, sat in the back between them, proving to be only a minor distraction. Gerry kept being told off by wife and daughter for calling James ”Charles” at least three times, but the boy with the butler's name didn't mind at all. He felt enveloped in the welcoming cocoon of a family with no pomposity and bags of joie de vivre.

Happy Valley was half-an-hour's drive away along the main route to Paphos. Beyond the odoriferous carob factory at the western end of the Limassol bypass, the landscape at first yielded only olive groves and cultivated fields. After a while on the righthand side the distinctive three-storey keep of Kolossi Castle, a fifteenth-century stronghold of the Knights Hospitallers, emerged like a brooding sentinel guarding the approach to the peninsular Sovereign Base Area.



Originally constructed at the end of the 2nd century BC, the heavily-restored theatre at Kourion took its current dimensions during the 2nd century AD.

If you turned left you drove for a few miles along an extended avenue surrounded by fruit orchards to reach the airfield and base of RAF Akrotiri. But Gerry turned right and headed up the hill towards Curium, or Kourion. The road bisects the archaeological site of one of the most important ancient city-states on the island. Most famous for the Greco-Roman Theatre and the pan-Cypriot Sanctuary of Apollo Hylates, it is located on a limestone promontory about a hundred metres above the coast of Episkopi Bay. Nowadays it is well-frequented by tourists and visitors who enjoy performances of classical drama in the theatre with its spectacular view over the southern sea. In the '60s the whole site was always deserted. As James-Charles had already discovered, squaddies did not on the whole waste their leisure time gazing at old ruins.

The road then dropped down into the cantonment of RAF Episkopi and you entered one of the many Little Englands to be found wherever in the world there are British military bases. The red-brick buildings with their freshly-painted woodwork and neat exteriors could have fooled you into believing that you had been magically transported on Her Britannic Majesty's request back to the homeland. The well-watered green patches of Happy Valley at the bottom of the hill were Gerry's pride and joy but they seemed to the English escapee totally foreign in this barren and rock-strewn Mediterranean terrain.

As for the football match itself, the two teenagers wouldn't have known the final score even if it had been ten-all. They were entering a phase of mutual besottedness, although neither would have admitted it yet. She talked about how the late arrival of Stephen, nearly sixteen years younger than her, meant that he had in effect two mothers. He was thoroughly spoilt but a sweet child and deeply loved. She had broken up with a long-standing boyfriend in order to accompany her family to Cyprus. Not a difficult decision since the relationship was going nowhere, but it demonstrated that she was a determined and strong-willed character. He talked about his family too, but she particularly enjoyed his sense of humour when he discussed the novel he was reading. It was "Catch 22." He laughed as he explained about how Major Major Major Major got his name. He enthused about this book because it confirmed once and for all that he was not alone in believing the world of mankind to be thoroughly absurd. She liked that.

It would take one more meeting, a real date, before they committed themselves to each other. That would take place at Niazi's restaurant a week later in Limassol's Turkish quarter where the "meze" of never-ending dish after dish of grilled meat of every description was a gastronomic revelation. The full Turkish Cypriot kebab comprised something like sheftalia, shish, liver, chicken, lamb, steak and God knows what else. Burnt flesh with fresh flatbread and thick yoghurt - one of the world's great pig-out cuisines, but not for vegetarians obviously. And the kokinielli flowed. This cheap and lethal house red wine is, according to the British Military Open Encyclopedia, also used for cleaning carburettors and stripping paint, and never to be mixed with KEO beer.

They drank far too much. They found themselves a short taxi drive later canoodling on the stairs below the family apartment, wondering where and how they could rid James of his virginity. Obviously not in the flat above, so an unwise decision took them to beneath the stairwell where the dustbins for the whole block were situated. He did not perform well, grazing his knees on the cold, tiled floor. She was non-committal, he felt like an abject failure. They parted with what he was certain would be their last-ever kiss.

As he trotted back to his hotel in anger and despair, he held a big stick to fend off the bondu dogs. These were said to be direct descendants of Kitchener's pack of foxhounds abandoned when the future Earl left Cyprus in 1879 after spending a year there as a young officer in the Royal Engineers. His task had

been to undertake a topographical survey for the British army, as he had already done in Palestine, of the newly acquired protectorate. These hounds were pretty harmless but at night they moved around the waste ground in small packs and they were definitely not tame. They were however smart enough to keep out of the way of Homo Furiosus.

He heard some recorded western pop music emanating from a late-night bar. He recognised the band. It was The Spencer Davis Group thumping out their latest hit "Somebody Help Me."

"My sentiments exactly, Steve Winwood, I know how you feel," he muttered to himself. With wild dogs roaming in the vicinity, "Keep On Running" would have been equally appropriate.

... and Patroclus arrayed himself in gleaming bronze. The greaves first he set about his legs; beautiful they were, and fitted with silver ankle-pieces; next he did on about his chest the corselet of the swift-footed son of Aeacus, richly-wrought, and spangled with stars. And about his shoulders he cast the silver-studded sword of bronze, and thereafter the shield, great and sturdy; and upon his mighty head he set the well-wrought helmet with horse-hair crest, and terribly did the plume nod from above; and he took two valorous spears, that fitted his grasp. Only the spear of the peerless son of Aeacus he took not, the spear heavy and huge and strong; this none other of the Achaeans could wield, but Achilles alone was skilled to wield it, even the Pelian spear of ash, that Cheiron had given to his dear father from the peak of Pelion, to be for the slaying of warriors.

The Iliad, Book 16, lines 130-144, by Homer

English Translation by A.T. Murray, 1924

28/02/18

31. Are You An Anchovy Or A Vaseline Boy?

Dad has been having some strange dreams recently. Last night's was a cracker. He met Hitler in 1939 before the War. He was snooping around the Führer's house but had to escape into the garden when Adolf returned unexpectedly. He was immediately seen skulking behind some bushes and told to "Clear off out of my garden." As Dad left, Hitler turned to his entourage and remarked, "That boy must be a Belgian." Any Jungians out there with a theory? Answers on a postcard to Mickie the Mog, Greece.

I thought I was dreaming too the other day. All three of us were snoozing peacefully in a row on our sofa when one of the unknown marauding males came in through the open door looking for food. Since there was none available in our bowls he jumped on the table and started ripping open the bag which contains my special biscuits. Cheek! We just let him get on with it, unusually for us, which surprised Dad. He came in shrieking like a maenad. The tabby boy ran off and then whilst we were being reprimanded for being too meek and subservient towards this interloper, he poked his enormous face back round the door and stared down Dad as much as to say, "OK, you've had your fun and games, but please would you now serve me some of that rather tasty grub. I'm tame, see, and not afraid of you." We admired his fearless persistence. Dad didn't, obviously, and resumed his howling banshee act. Mister Tabs hasn't been back since.

Meanwhile human folly abounds. Artur the Albanian builder is on leave from his national service with the Hellenic army. He has to do his statutory nine months' conscription as part of his route to Greek citizenship. He has lived in Greece since he was a child and in meeting this requirement, which is mandatory here for all males aged 19 to 45, he will be able to proceed with his application to become a Greek. Dad asked him what life as a conscript was like. Artur shrugged his shoulders and explained, "We sit around all day, get paid virtually nothing and our guns don't even work." What? Everyone knows that Greece spends a higher percentage of its GDP (about 2.6%; cf UK 1.8%) on defence than any other EU member state and you're telling me that you can't get your rifle to fire? "They are old American weapons. Useless. The government should give us Kalashnikovs, which the gangs back in Albania like best."

Presumably the decent modern kit goes to the professionals rather than to the conscripts. I hope so. Why does Greece with its parlous economy spend so much on its armed forces, including compulsory military service? Speaking as a cynical old pussycat who has been round the block a few times, I reckon that conscription is a cheap way of keeping unemployment figures lower whilst at the same time maintaining morale about "national security." Another consideration that keeps defence spending high is that it greatly pleases France and Germany, who make 10% and 15% respectively of their annual arms sales to Greece. Note that reduction of this exorbitant defence budget has never been imposed as a bail-out condition by the EU bosses.

However, the main factor is Greece's fear of Turkey, its NATO "ally." Encroachment incidents are reported weekly in the hyperactive media, usually involving the two countries' jet fighters in eastern Aegean airspace. The latest clash was at sea, near the pair of islets over which the two neighbouring states almost went to war in 1996 when soldiers from both sides landed on the outcrop called Imia by Greece and Kardak by Turkey. This time it looks as if a Turkish coastguard vessel might have deliberately rammed a stationary Greek patrol boat. At least that's the version we are getting in the press here. Some retired admiral was quoted, saying, "This was clearly not a one-off accident. It was an intentional

act of aggression . . . part of a design to lead to a heated episode.” And so on. The only certainty is that these clashes over territorial rights will continue as long as the waves of the wine-dark Aegean Sea, rich in oil and minerals, break on the Anatolian shore.

The Macedonia Naming issue drags on. Dad was down at Billy's Place watching Bob and Fotine's team, Panathinaikos, playing Larissa in a league match last week. The "Sour Cherries" team from the Thessalian regional capital, all had this unsubtle message printed on their purple shirts: Ο ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΜΙΑΟΥΣΕ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ, which means "Alexander (The Great) used to speak Greek." Imagine "Robert The Bruce used to speak English" on Toon shirt fronts. It wouldn't be allowed in the Premier League, but this political slogan is perfectly acceptable here and was very well received by fans of both sides.

As with football fans the world over, Greek supporters have derogatory nicknames for the opposing teams, some ruder than others. PAOK, the team of Thessaloniki, are known as "Gypsies" and as "Bulgarians." As we have seen with "Macedonia," people here can get very upset by the inappropriate use of names. When George Babiniotis, professor of linguistics at Athens University, published a new Dictionary of Modern Greek in 1998, he was taken to court by an outraged PAOK supporter. For the word "Bulgarian" the descriptive dictionary had provided a dual definition, first its normal use referring to people from Bulgaria, and second a definition (marked as vulgar and derogatory) to denote "a fan of PAOK football club." Babiniotis lost the case and his publisher was ordered to delete the second definition from every unsold copy of the dictionary. The ruling was later overturned on appeal. At least the learned professor had been wise enough not to add an extra definition of "chicken" as : "the emblem of PAOK, a double-headed eagle," a long-standing and disrespectful joke by rival fans.

Of the three main Athens clubs, AEK was set up by Greek refugees after the 1922 Asia Minor debacle. Its initials stand for "Athletic Union of Constantinople," the city with which it has always been associated since its foundation. So to opposing supporters they are the Χανούμια, *hanoumia*, "the Ladies of the Sultan's Harem."

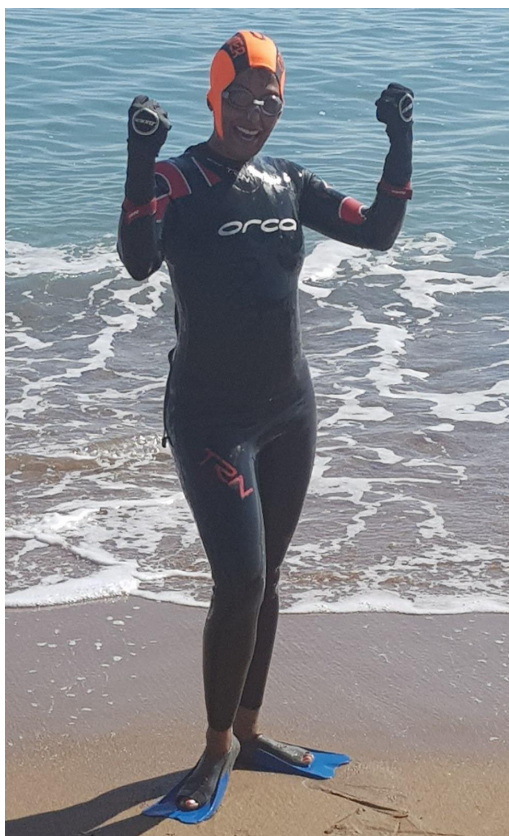
Olympiakos is currently the most successful and perhaps the best-known club overseas, thanks to their Champions' League and Europa Cup appearances over the past few decades. Their fans are the Γαύροι, *gavri*, "the Anchovies," because of their team's original and continuing association with the sea and with Piraeus, the port of Athens. Their traditional enemy is of course Panathinaikos. The atmosphere is always intense, usually fanatical and sometimes violent when they play the "derby of the eternal adversaries" (ντέρμπι των αιώνιων αντιπάλων), which is also called the "mother of all battles" (μητέρα των μαχών). In 2012 the match was abandoned when petrol bombs, flares and missiles were thrown at fans and police, causing parts of the stadium to be set on fire.

Panathinaikos is the most successful Greek club in terms of achievements in the European competitions. Managed at the time by Ferenc Puskas, it is the only Greek team to have reached the final of the European Cup (now the UEFA Champions League), which they lost 2-0 at Wembley in 1971 to an Ajax team packed with Dutch national players including Johan Cruyff. After the first couple of minutes of his last-ever BBC match commentary Kenneth Wolstenholme abandoned his embarrassing and risible attempts to pronounce the Panathinaikos goalie's name and simply referred to him for the rest of the match as "the goalkeeper." "Takis Ikonómopoulos" isn't that difficult to roll off the tongue, surely?

Those were the club's glory days. Today its fortunes have faded to the extent that the current owner, a shipping magnate with media interests, is desperate to extricate himself from a debt-ridden imbroglio largely of his own making. As we have seen in England too, billionaires do not necessarily make successful football club owners. Meanwhile, pity the players who haven't been paid their wages since last October.

Their fans are known as Βάζελοι or Βαζέλες, *vaseles*, "Vaseline boys." This was originally a reference by working-class Olympiakos fans to the poshness of a club supported by upper-class Athenian society, the equivalent of Brylcreem Boys with their slicked-back hair. These days the class differentiation has diminished and the two clubs have broadly similar fanbases. The nickname is far more insulting now, with its implication of a particular sexual preference on the part of Panathinaikos aficionados. Political correctness hasn't reached the terraces here yet, nor will it in the foreseeable future.

Changing the subject from football to swimming, I can confirm that Mum has started using Dad's wetsuit, on the occasions when the weather and sea state allow. Here's the photographic evidence.



OMG! Mum's at it too with this winter swimming lark. No comments about her fitting the wetsuit better than Dad, please.

The next day James rang Pauline to apologise for his drunken ineptitude. His worst fears were unfounded. She was happy to meet and they agreed to go "for a long walk." They circumnavigated Archbishop Makarios III Avenue to the point where the bypass joins the coast road. They sat on the deserted beach in the spring sunshine not far from the municipal park and its rather run-down zoo, where the solitary elephant stood gazing wistfully south across the sea, remembering its lost herd. They cautiously reviewed the relationship so far and then exultantly dived into it headlong. But their commitment to each other faced practical difficulties. Logistical problems loomed. The Browns were about to move from the Limassol flat to their permanent married quarters in Episkopi. The teenagers would have to rely on the infrequent bus service, allied to Gerry's good will as an occasional chauffeur, if they were to see each other as much as they wished.

Over the next few months a pattern was set whereby James travelled up to the base numerous times a week in the morning and then returned home on the last bus. It left from RAF Episkopi's shopping area shortly before midnight. This precinct was known as Dodge City because of its striking resemblance to a Wild West main street, with its raised wooden sidewalks and sun-bleached clapboard buildings. Having off-loaded merry, alcohol-fuelled returnees from Limassol at the end of the outward journey, the driver, fortunately for James, had to get the bus home to its depot in town. Otherwise there would have been no "last bus" back. It was always the same driver (another Yiannis) and Young Wardrobe was invariably his only passenger. The vehicle was an old Bedford, a rattletrap brightly coloured in red and green with extensive roof railings to aid the transportation of goods and cages.

Above the middle of the front windscreen but within Yiannis' reach was a device commonly found in such buses. It was a multi-play deck for 45 rpm vinyl records. The driver had a limited supply of music to entertain himself with throughout the half-hour journey. He frequently intoned a low and tuneless accompaniment. James got to know and love these popular songs. He did not yet appreciate that they were highly successful examples of the Έντεχνο, *entechno*, "Artistic" genre developed and popularised by, in particular, Theodorakis and Hadjidakis. Through dint of repeated listening to Yiannis' limited collection of Greek pop, he learnt the words and melody of his favourite, a Theodorakis ballad sung by Grigoris Bithikotsis called Καημός, *kaimos*, "Sorrow." Ironically, although its theme is bitterness and a broken heart, it became an anthem of happiness for the new young lovers, and later a blissful reminder of their carefree Summer of '66.

In 1987 they returned to a much-changed Limassol for the first time since the 1960s. For old times' sake they visited many of their old haunts, including the entrance to the notorious block of flats which had witnessed their first coupling. The ground-floor stairwell was still there, now a general storage area and just as dismal and unappealing as it had been on The Night Of The Disturbance Behind The Dustbins. The sentimental 40-year-olds were amazed to think of what had taken place there. "Fancy a grazed knees reprise?" quipped James. "No, thank you, dear," was Pauline's firm retort. Then they both giggled at the fond memory of their youthful passion. The recollection had softened by then into a comfortable private joke.

As spring turned into summer their routine was idyllic. The family dwelling was a ten-minute walk down the hill from Dodge City on a small estate of Englishmen's castles, identical detached, three-bedroomed, red-brick houses with small gardens front and back. You can see them on Google Earth to this day. They were perched on the cliff above the beach which could be reached on foot in two ways. The dangerous route was to take a track down the front of the cliff, but this tricky path took you too close to the nesting colony of the local griffon vultures. Being buzzed by a bird of prey with an eight-foot wingspan and a protective maternal instinct is no joke, as a startled James found out one day when he must have passed too close to some of her chicks. So the preferred direction was down the back of the ridge into Happy Valley. The sports fields were linked to the shore by a 300m single-track vehicle tunnel with a narrow pedestrian walkway. It had been excavated and constructed by the Royal Engineers many years before. Drivers flashed their lights before entering and then the car in first had priority. English politesse and military self-discipline ensured that instances of "me first" road rage never occurred. The tunnel exit opened out onto a wide, shallow beach, typically crescent-shaped, with a sailing club to the west and sufficient space between the cliffs and the sea for a small nine-hole golf course complete with putting "browns," built from clay and topped with a mixture of sand and oil.

The hub of Episkopi Beach was a recreational area with separate sections for officers (and their families) and other ranks. There was a bar, changing rooms and a restaurant known as "Shabby Din's," a bad pun. The place was run by an Indian called Shahib Din. His cheapest offering was a hard-boiled egg

lathered in curry sauce. This became James and Pauline's dish of choice since they had little spare cash. They often took pre-school Stephen to the beach which meant Maud provided some extra funds. He was no trouble to look after whilst they swam and sunbathed in their own private paradise. Life could not get any better than this for the love-struck pair. All the while, from the bar's speakers floated the sounds of Dusty singing "You Don't Have To Say You Love Me" or Paul Jones crooning Manfred Mann's "Pretty Flamingo," the musical backdrop to their cloudless nirvana.

They often babysat in the evenings too, releasing Maud and Gerry to visit the Officers' Club with its wide range of regular and one-off entertainments. The house band, led by a singer called Mario, played a mixture of Greek standards, still beloved of foreign tourists to this day, for example "Dance the Sirtaki," and western hits such as "Strangers In the Night." Sometimes the youngsters went along too and James then stayed over on the couch. Gerry dined out for years on the story of the first time he saw James's energetic hyper-Twist on the dance floor. What creased him up was not so much the lad falling over a lot in his shiny-soled shoes, but his instant leaping up and carrying on in manic and serious fashion as if nothing untoward had happened.

There were lunchtime and evening barbeques with family and friends on deserted nearby beaches, at Pissouri and Curium, swimming under the moon and stars. They hired a car for a few days and visited the small yet historic town of Paphos, with its single fish restaurant near the quay. In a viilage near Aphrodite's Rock they tasted for the first time rahat locum, lemon-flavoured, rose-scented, pistachio-filled. It was an astonishing revelation after previously knowing only Fry's so-called "Turkish Delight." Most momentous of all for James, however, was not a single event but an unexpected natural progression: in no time at all he had been unconditionally accepted as part of Pauline's family. This helped to mend his angst-ridden teenage soul after those dire years at boarding school.



Pissouri beach, circa June 1966. She loved Cliff Richard, he was more of a Hank Marvin fan.

Meanwhile what was he up to when in Limassol? In order to eke out his money, he left the Alasia and rented the annexe of a bungalow round the corner in Aristotelous Valaoritou Street. He visited the

ETKO factory less and less, abandoning his vinology project but still maintaining good relations with the Hadjipavlou. He accompanied the younger generation to midnight mass on Easter Saturday, his first experience of the initially puzzling mix of the formal and the informal which characterises Greek Orthodox ceremonies. He lit his candle and learnt the Easter greetings. He saw less of Pat Woods now and visited the red-light district infrequently. After one fairly drunken evening he foolishly accepted an invitation back to a well-heeled young Cypriot's neoclassical mansion on the promenade. They drank plentiful Scotch, a pleasant change from cheap Anglias brandy. When it became clear that he was welcome to "stay the night," he just managed to get home unscathed. On another bizarre occasion, having chanced upon two heirs of the Lanitis family (the biggest citrus producers on the island) in the Alasia bar, he found himself invited to a dinner dance with the sister, but chaperoned by the brother, at the only resort hotel on the eastern coast road, the Miramar. It soon became clear that operating in tandem they were checking him out as a possible suitor for the girl and believed him to be older than he was, perhaps in his early twenties. He knocked them back by telling them his real age but he still managed the rarity of a free three-course meal that night.

The escapades became fewer and his life proceeded on a more even keel. Things would liven up again in July when his long-awaited and much-heralded soulmate, Patrick Donnell, came to stay for the rest of the summer.

Είναι μεγάλος ο γιαλός
είναι μακρύ το κύμα
είναι μεγάλος ο καημός
κι είναι πικρό το κρίμα.

Ποτάμι μέσα μου πικρό
το αίμα της πληγής σου
κι από το αίμα πιο πικρό
στο στόμα το φιλί σου.

Δεν ξέρεις τι 'ναι παγωνιά
ραδιά χωρίς φεγγάρι
να μη γνωρίζεις ποια στιγμή
ο πόνος θα σε πάρει.

Ποτάμι μέσα μου πικρό
το αίμα της πληγής σου
κι από το αίμα πιο πικρό
στο στόμα το φιλί σου.

*The sea-shore is long, the waves are high
The sorrow is great and bitter the sin.*

*Within me a river, bitter blood of my wound
and your kiss on the mouth more bitter than blood.*

*You do not know the frost of a moonless night
To know not at which moment the pain will take you.*

*Within me a river, bitter blood of your wound
and your kiss on the mouth more bitter than blood.*

Καημός, Kaimos, lyrics and music by Mikis Theodorakis (1962)

29/03/18

32. God Bless Melina Mercouri

If you were to ask a Brit to name a famous Greek woman of the modern era, no doubt many wouldn't be able to come up with a single name. Of those that could, some might name the multilingual chanteuse, Nana Mouskouri (best song = "The White Rose Of Athens"), still at it at 83. The film buffs might mention one of Dad's favourites, the actress Irene Papas ("The Guns Of Navarone," "Zorba The Greek," "Z," "Captain Corelli's Mandolin" et multa alia), still with us at 91 years of age. But I suspect most would say Melina Mercouri. She is best known in the UK not only as a flamboyant and expressive stage and movie actress but as a right pain in the arse about what the British call the Elgin Marbles and the Greeks the Parthenon Marbles. She loudly banged the drum for their return to Greece when she was Minister of Culture in Andreas Papandreou's PASOK governments from 1981 to 1989 and again from 1993 until her death in office on March 6th 1994. So, well-known in the UK but not thought of especially fondly.

The Greeks on the other hand regard her as a national treasure, a heroic icon of hellenism. They still call her simply by her first name, as if she were a beloved deceased relative. Woe betide the unwary foreigner who casts aspersions on her memory. She is revered as much for her international political campaign against the junta of the colonels as for her acting (and singing). When the regime revoked her Greek citizenship, she gloriously announced, "I was born a Greek and I will die a Greek. Mr Pattakos (the Minister of the Interior responsible for implementing the decision) was born a fascist and he will die a fascist." She was right. Pattakos died in 2016, having publicly declared that he did not regret any of his actions during the dictatorship.

In honour of this undisputed epitome of Greekness the day of her death is commemorated by the Ministry of Culture every year in a very specific and practical way: all the sites and museums for which it is responsible throughout the whole country have free admission.



Notice outside the Museum at Olympia on March 6th.

Dad deliberately chose "Melina's Mercury Day" to make his eighth visit to Olympia, disproportionately gleeful to be saving the equivalent of about a tenner. As he frequently tells us, born in Yorkshire he has short arms and deep trouser pockets. The Acropolis of Athens may be mayhem on this free day, but Olympia was empty, the sun was shining and Dad was happy as a donkey in a field of carrots. He even tried to bait one of the museum caretakers who was guarding the "Hermes of Praxiteles," an exquisite statue in polished Parian marble which is a major highlight of the permanent exhibition. "This is probably a very good Roman copy of the Greek original, you know, and not, as the museum claims, the actual work of Praxiteles." He was pushing his luck but the man just kept smiling politely at this cheeky foreigner as if he were mad as well as ignorant.

There's no equivalent in Britain to Melina's Day, is there? Glenda Jackson Day doesn't do it for me at all - anyway she was never Minister of UK Culture. She only made it to Junior Transport Minister before she fell out with Blair.

The following week Dad went back to Delphi, in his opinion "the most outstanding classical site in Greece." He was taking his sister Margaret and her husband Graham on their first visit. It was surprisingly crowded both on the site and at the museum. In the room where the frieze of the Sicyonian Treasury is displayed he had to raise his voice to be heard above an official guide with a French group. He was accosted thus by the room steward, an assertive young lady looking for a moment of excitement in a boring job: "Are you a guide? Unlicensed guiding is not permitted." "No, I am English," he deliberately non-sequitured. "He's a classicist," added Margaret, in support of her baby brother. "And this is my family," he continued. "I just happen to be explaining in detail what I know about these outstanding examples of archaic architectural sculpture." "Well, please lower your voice. You might upset the registered guides..." Dad didn't know whether to be annoyed by her interruption or flattered by the implication that his exegesis was superior to that of the paid escorts.

Graham was particularly struck by the magnificence of "The Charioteer," a life-size bronze masterpiece of the Early Classical period in the severe style. He felt it would make a suitable addition to the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum, but wisely kept his voice down as he uttered this blasphemy. "And it would make an excellent candidate for the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square. Imagine a pigeon sitting on his head..." The three of them beat a hasty retreat.



The Charioteer of Delphi, c 470BC

Where does Dad stand on the Marbles? He will only go so far as to say that they shouldn't be split between two museums but be viewed all together in one place. For example, it's ridiculous to have some slabs of the Parthenon's east frieze (depicting the Twelve Olympians) in London and some in Athens. It's one piece of art and should be put back together. At present, four gods are in Greece and eight in Bloomsbury. On balance he would plump for the reunified architectural sculpture to be housed in the New Acropolis Museum, but he accepts that this will never happen. It is not an issue that is susceptible to common sense.

As well as our house and their own, Bob and Fotine have two cottages on their property which they rent out, mostly in the summer to tourists of every European denomination. It's in the off-season that the more entertaining people come to stay. Recently an American couple from Kentucky were our neighbours for a month and they hit it off with Dad big-time. He learnt a great deal from them about "the northernmost of the southern states," having only known it previously for its bluegrass, its horse racing and Muhammad Ali.

Every year Stephen and Natasha work only from June to November and then go travelling. What do they do for a living? They are sky-diving instructors. You can imagine how excited Dad was to explore the boundaries of their (in)sanity. He found them disturbingly normal, highly organised and very good-humoured - admittedly in a black way - about their obsession, once a hobby and now their profession.

Dad asked all the obvious questions. "What do you do if something goes wrong?" he enquired. Stephen explained that they do roughly ten to twelve jumps a day for five months and so "it's a matter of *when*

not if something untoward happens.” He never forgets what a doyen of tandem parachuting told him during his training: “When you have a problem, you can do one of two things. You've got about fifteen seconds. You can either cry for your mammy for the rest of your short life or you can take action and deal with it.” In other words, you don't have time to panic. They are in their forties now and have been skydiving for twenty years. So far, so good. ”And if you can't solve the problem?” pressed Dad unnecessarily, in the grip of a macabre fascination. Stephen grinned wickedly and gave a suitably Delphic response: ” You move towards the White Light...”

They were both remarkably clued up about world affairs, not least European politics including the state of the Greek economy. In a discussion about Greece foolishly joining the eurozone in 2001, the Kentuckian summed up the mistake perfectly: ”It was like someone marrying an ugly woman with a rich father. It's OK for a while, but then...”

As the weather heated up, James was happy to spend more and more time at the Brown family home in Hampshire Terrace (sic) and on Episkopi beach. An additional resident in the cliff-top married quarters was a stray tabby cat whom Pauline named Florence. It turned out to be a male, a reversal of the mistaken gender issue that entitled me Mickie forty years later. When correctly identified, Flo kept his given name too.

Meanwhile Gerry had got to know the car salesman in Limassol from whom he had bought his Simca saloon. He enquired if Antonis had any *very cheap* old bangers that might be of interest to James. The dealer wanted to keep Gerry sweet in the hope that he would buy a new Renault Caravelle to take back to Britain when his tour of duty ended. Military personnel serving overseas could buy a car tax-free provided they owned it for a year abroad and kept it for a further two years on their return to Blighty.

He said he had a totally clapped-out Zephyr Zodiac Mark 1 which was unsellable and only fit for the breaker's yard. Since it was worth nothing, James could have the aged jalopy for free, provided he paid the tax and insurance. Antonis stressed that the Ford, registration F861, could conk out permanently at any time. James nevertheless bit his hand off, paid about the same amount as two weeks' car hire rental to make this bucket of bolts legal and proudly drove off the first vehicle he had ever owned. She was a 1950s green sedan with a cream roof. Amongst her various idiosyncracies the gear lever was an American-style column-mounted shifter, she had a front bench seat, her tyres were bald and she was not at all happy about going up hills. He only needed her to survive for a couple of months. She lasted a fortnight.

James made a few successful sorties up to the Sovereign Base Area, learning to gun the throttle well before he reached the start of the ascent of Curium hill, the only way of ensuring that F861 would make it to the top. He was now ready to drive to Nicosia Airport early one morning to pick up Patrick, who was coming out until mid-September when they would both return to England together. But that dreaded day of reckoning was not in his thoughts as he set out in eagerness and exhilaration to meet his best friend. The main road ran alongside the empty coast. He reached Amathus beach, a deserted spot just out of town and the Ford ground to a halt.

Despite his best efforts he failed to revive the precocious beast, walked back into town and got Antonis to send out a mechanic. By the time the car was fixed it was too late to start out again for Nicosia. Patrick would have landed hours before and they had no way of communicating with each other. There was no telephone at home, so he rang the BEA desk at Nicosia Airport from a call box. There had been no passenger called ”P.O.Donnell” registered on the flight from London. As James sat on his front porch

pondering his next step, a taxi pulled up and out jumped Patrick. An expensive but logical solution to the problem of James's no-show.

They had much to catch up on. Patrick was eager to meet Pauline but he would have to wait until the following morning when she had arranged to come into town and join up with the boys at the Alasia. They spent a lazy, gossip-filled afternoon swimming and sunbathing then after dusk visited some of James's favourite drinking dives. He introduced Patrick to the "traditional" Cypriot nine-course meze and they downed an inordinate quantity of kokkinelli. The next morning, hung over from the cheap red wine and ill from excessive sun, P.O.D. was in a dreadful state. He staggered manfully round the corner and up to the hotel for that critical first encounter with his best friend's amour.

As the boys climbed the Alasia's entrance steps, Pauline came out onto the porch to greet them. This was the moment when Patrick could contain himself no longer and he unrestrainedly threw up a goodly portion of the previous evening's dinner. Pauline was directly in the firing line but she was not the sort of girl to be fazed by a sudden splurge of purple vomit on her pretty dress. Patrick was mortified, James was embarrassed, but she simply said, "Well, Patrick, I'm delighted to meet you too. Welcome to Cyprus!"

Yiannis helped to save the day. A sponge down with a damp cloth and a strong coffee later they were all able to laugh about the "first impression" made by Patrick, a joke which lasted down the many years of their tripartite friendship.

When James looks back into his past, he can see that whereas eighteen-year-old Pauline was already an adult, the boys were still just naughty teenagers with a lot of growing up yet to do. Boarding school had retarded their emotional growth and distorted their social development. In the end James just about made it to the cloud-covered, non-descript and rather tedious uplands of "maturity," forever thankful to have retained a robust streak of healthy childishness. Patrick grew up too, but whether his inner adolescent demons were finally banished for good is, sadly for James, now unknowable.

At the time all three of them were embarked on a sublimely carefree Mediterranean holiday to which the end was not yet in sight. So they made the most of it, with F861 behaving herself for a while at least.



Having arrived in Cyprus with long hair, Patrick has just had a close encounter with a local barber

As the high Cypriot summer sweltered on, a sporting event that aroused multigenerational national excitement in England was taking place. With Patrick's arrival the 1966 World Cup finals almost passed James by, but not quite. There was no TV in his semi-bungalow, which didn't matter anyway since Cyprus's single television channel offered no coverage of the matches. Part of the furniture in the front room was an enormous, old-fashioned wireless replete with knobs and dials which could receive the British Forces Broadcasting Service. This in turn took a live feed from the BBC World Service for the radio commentaries.

Late at night local time the boys listened in the darkness of their parlour to the semi-final, in which England played an exceptional Portuguese team led by Eusebio. They tried to imagine Bobby Charlton's rocketing shots from outside the penalty box, two of which won the game for the hosts. The following Saturday, July 30th, they joined Gerry in Episkopi to listen to that famous victory against West Germany. Eventually they did get to see the match on the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation's evening-only TV channel. CBC showed the first half one week later, and the second half, plus extra time, two weeks after the actual final was "all over." Back in the UK Margaret and Graham's first child, William, was baptised on the Sunday after the final. Thomas had to replenish the booze he'd got in for the post-christening party since the victory celebrations the evening before had taken their toll on his original supply.

On the island the philosophical and practical pursuit of hedonism continued unabated. The languid days on the beach, the lively Limassol nights, fuelled sometimes by Greek mezes, sometimes by Turkish kebabs, always by an almighty consumption of alcohol, seemed like gifts from a bounteous god granted only to the feckless young. A well-loved haunt frequented by the happy threesome was a night club where the house band, a rock group composed of Brits from the SBA, did passable cover versions of current UK hits. These included such gems as "Paint It Black" and "Play With Fire" by the Stones, Chris Farlowe's "Out Of Time," "Sunny Afternoon" by The Kinks and most memorably "Wild Thing" by The Troggs.

One fine morning in mid-August F861 coughed her death-rattle on the Limassol bypass and gently

freewheeled to a standstill by the side of the road. Two of Antonis's men towed her off to the scrapyard, since no further resuscitation was feasible.



F861 on the Limassol bypass, about to begin her final journey

The end of James's long sojourn in paradise was fast approaching too. Having considered their dwindling finances, the boys concluded that with a month to go they could afford two weeks' car hire. They decided to make do with the bus for a while and get a car for the final fortnight's Last Hurrah.

Near the cliff edge close to Pauline's house was a large seat-shaped rock with a gorgeous view south over Episkopi beach and the scalloped sea beyond. Here the two lovers would often sit in the cool of the evening and discuss their uncertain future. Now, as James's inevitable departure date loomed, they needed a solution to the Great Question: how could they stay together for ever in the face of circumstances which were about to force them apart? Romeo had to return for Oxford, Juliet's parents expected her to stay in Cyprus and even ("Finally, after nine months here!" reiterated Gerry) get a civilian job on the base. It was time to face reality. The reluctant boys booked their flight home. The parting date would be September 15th, Battle of Britain Day.

Determined to make the most of the hire car they toured the island widely, from Paphos to Famagusta, from Larnaca to Kyrenia. They were escorted by a Turkish Army corporal round the Byzantine fortress of Saint Hilarion, said to be the inspiration for the fairytale castle of Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. They admired the 10th century Bellapais Abbey, set in the village where Laurence Durrell wrote "Bitter Lemons." They marvelled at the extensive archaeological ruins of ancient Salamis. They attempted and failed to see the sunrise from the top of Mount Troodos, the highest peak in Cyprus. Leaving home half-an-hour too late, they got about two-thirds of the way up the pine-clad mountain when Helios's chariot and horses pre-empted them, appearing roseate then golden in the eastern sky.

On this last outing they were accompanied by the teenage daughter of an RAF friend of Maud and Gerry. Patrick was understandably tired of playing gooseberry and had started dating her. He thought he might have a fighting chance of being deflowered before he left Aphrodite's Island. Maddeningly this was not to be, though it didn't take him long after arriving at Cambridge to achieve what all young

men crave.

For Pauline and James time was running out too fast. One evening, whilst plotting moves on “our rock,” they evolved a possible resolution to the dilemma of their impending separation. Common sense dictated that their mad plan was doomed to failure, but, what the hell, they had nothing to lose...

Wild thing

You make my heart sing

You make everything groovy

Wild thing

Wild thing, I think I love you

But I wanna know for sure

Come on and hold me tight

I love you

Wild thing

You make my heart sing

You make everything groovy

Wild thing

Wild thing, I think you move me

But I wanna know for sure

So come on and hold me tight

You move me

Wild thing

You make my heart sing

You make everything groovy

Wild thing

Oh, come on, wild thing

Shake it, shake it, wild thing

Wild Thing, lyrics and music by Chip Taylor (1965)

<https://youtu.be/hcu8pjWNEgg>

15/04/18

33. "You can't bring a plane down with walnut whips"

We had some very strange weather before Easter. For two days a brown fog descended on the gulf and the surrounding areas. It covered everything outdoors with red dust: the paths, the roads, the cars, the furniture on the verandas. Athens suffered from this too, and especially Crete. Elderly Cretans were advised by the Ministry of Health to stay indoors or wear masks if they ventured out. The source was vast quantities of Saharan sand blown on a southerly wind, first from the direction of Libya and then from Egypt. It happens every few years here, but similar freak conditions can occasionally cause the same phenomenon as far north as Great Britain.

A more welcome gift from Africa has been the return of the swallows. In large flocks they perform their close-controlled aerobatics, particularly near pools of clean water, astounding all of us earth-confined creatures with their joyful, high-speed swooping and darting. Along with the delicious scent of the orange blossom around our house, they are a sure sign that summer is just around the corner. On the other hand, Minnie has picked up our first seasonal tick of the year between her shoulder blades, so Dad is smothering it to death with vaseline, his usual ploy.

He is not hardy enough to cast aside his wetsuit yet, even though the sea is now *μπουνάτσα*, *bounatsa*, dead calm, and the water temperature is rising. Some Greek families appeared on "his" beach over the Easter holiday weekend and one young man seemed happy enough to swim for ten minutes or so just in his shorts. The beach bars are getting ready to open for business on 1st May, which is about when a rubberless Wardrobe will adapt his pelagic habits for the summer. In the meantime he might gradually divest, first the cap, then the gloves, then the socks... His very own Dance of the Seven Rubber Bits, though not as sexy.



Dad has started sunbathing again, so I'm keeping a sleepy eye on him. He'll be swimming wetsuitless

soon.

He didn't swim on Easter Sunday, since he was invited to a six-hour goat-eating fest at Bob and Fotine's. The usual Paschal meal is lamb but they preferred to cook baby goat this year. The other guests included the family of Fotine's brother, Billy, who runs the local supermarket and restaurant. The current short-stay tenants were also there. Hajo, a retired German architect who worked at Olympia on the 2004 re-erection of the single massive Doric column of the temple of Zeus and subsequently on the partial restoration of the Philippeion, prefers to be called Fotis, for reasons that he is not prepared to reveal. He has good Greek and is a committed Hellenophile. Matina and Costas are a married veterinarian couple, who were amused to hear about our adventurous land-and-sea journey to Greece in a Ford Galaxy. Matina specialises in cats and dogs. I was pleased to hear that she takes cat welfare very seriously. Her first question to Dad was: "Are they sterilised?" Costas is more relaxed, being a sheep and goat man.



Vegetarians, look away now! Baby goat kebab on the souvla (spit) on Easter Sunday.

As well as the wonderfully tender barbequed meat there was the traditional favourite, *κοκορέτσι*, *kokoretsi*, consisting of the offal, mainly liver in this case, wrapped in intestines and grilled long and slow on the spit. Fotine didn't make the notorious, Lenten-Fast-breaking *μαγειρίτσα*, *magiritsa*, this year. This is an offal soup usually consumed immediately after midnight mass on Holy Saturday. Dad thinks we girls would probably enjoy it more than him. The Greeks seem to love it, once a year at any rate, though conditionally. Many only like it "the way my mother makes it." When Dad enquired why, the best answer he received was from Jiannis, the local bar-owner: "You can only trust your own mother to clean out the guts properly."

On the cat front, I had my neck shaved again for my six-monthly blood tests. I went to Kyrie Dionisis in Kalamata, as before. He always gets his vet wife in to help now, after the debacle the first time when he tried to take the samples without assistance. He likes to kiss and cuddle me before he gets his

razor going and I must say I rather like the close attention. The truth is, I'm a sucker for any human interaction. I'm what's known as a "sociable" and "friendly" cat.

We got the results the next day, which were generally encouraging. For those of you who are au fait with feline biochemistry (and I know some of you are!), my markers for kidney function are much improved, much to Dad's relief. My urea is down almost to the top of the normal range and my creatinine is back within the acceptable limits. This is good news, suggesting that the renal diet is working, as well as the pills. I still hate those special pouches and I wish I could have some decent Felix occasionally. The hard food is preferable so I've more or less made it my staple by rejecting the wet stuff. The sisters seem happy to Hoover up my leavings, as does Simos, Fotine's young male. He has been hanging around our house recently and he howls a great deal for no apparent reason, as his dad used to do. He's still very young, less than a year old, and we old ladies generally take no notice of him.

Finally, before I begin the next episode of *Portrait Of My Dad As A Young Man*, I want to recount an amusing experience he had at Gatwick Airport on his last trip back from the UK. His hand luggage was flagged up by the baggage scanner as containing something untoward. The security guy went through his backpack to find out what the machine didn't like. He produced an unopened packet of three Walnut Whips. "The small amount of cream inside the whips has been detected by the scanner," he explained. He put the offending confectionery back and handed the bag over. They looked at each other. Before Dad could say a word, the bag checker beat him to it. He wished him a pleasant flight and with the merest hint of a bureaucratic smirk he uttered the unforgettable punchline: "You can't bring a plane down with walnut whips."

The day before their flight home the boys accompanied the Brown family on a trip to RAF Akrotiri, which was putting on a large and well-attended fete to celebrate Battle of Britain Day. At some point in the afternoon, in the midst of happy crowds who knew nothing of their personal sorrow, James and Pauline said their desperate goodbyes. Their sole means of communication now would be by letter via the British Forces Post Office service. They promised to write to each other every single day until they could meet again in the Christmas holidays. As it turned out, James fulfilled this vow and Pauline nearly did. He has no recollection of how he got back to Limassol on that Saturday or how he and Patrick spent their last night in Cyprus, but he can vividly recall the gut-wrenching despondency of the worst day of his life up to that point.



James contemplates his imminent departure from Limassol.

The next morning Patrick takes a memorable photograph of his friend, sunk in misery, whilst they wait for their pre-booked communal taxi to Nicosia. He is wearing his smartest attire. The lightweight dark blue suit and the powder-blue thinnest cotton shirt are clothes his parents had bought for him more than six months earlier, keen to equip their beloved son correctly for his adventure to the subtropics. The ubiquitous bondu boots he had acquired locally. His only other pair of trousers, his treasured Egyptian blue linen hipster jeans with a white leather belt, have virtually fallen apart through overuse and been reluctantly discarded. James's distracted, vacant stare says it all: he feels as if he is face-to-face with the abomination of desolation. At least Patrick is there to look after him. In due course they reach the centre of the capital city.

They have time to kill until their evening departure, so they go to a matinee showing of the latest American-Italian epic movie, "The Bible: In The Beginning." The cinema is empty and so is James's brain. The film completely passes him by, although he knows the plot anyway: it's the first twenty-two chapters of Genesis. He empathises with Adam, being kicked out of the Garden of Eden. Patrick confirms afterwards that this is an oeuvre of no distinction whatsoever. "Definitely one where you ought to read the book instead," he chortles, trying to raise James's spirits. At least it had passed the time until check-in.

Of the half dozen other films James had seen in Cyprus, either at the Officers' Club or in a Limassol cinema, all were eminently forgettable bar one. The exception was the 1964 remake of Ernest Hemingway's short story, "The Killers," starring Lee Marvin, John Cassavetes, Angie Dickinson and Ronald Reagan

(in his last ever movie role). It was directed by Don Siegel, who went on to collaborate many times with Clint Eastwood, and it remains one of James's favourite Sixties gangster flicks.

At the departure gate they were approached by a young couple, who introduced themselves as members of the Hadjipavlou family. They were on their way to commence their degree courses at London University. James had maintained a good relationship with Dimitri throughout his time in Limassol and he had recently visited him to thank him for all his generous hospitality since his arrival in March. He had mentioned the date of his London flight, so Uncle Dimitri had told his niece and nephew to look out for him. In contrast to James, the pair of bright young things were happy and excited at the prospect of living and studying in England.

As the plane took off and left Mount Troodos in its wake, he silently bade farewell to the enchanted land where he had learnt more of practical and psychological value in six months than in all his years at boarding school. The monks had taught him the benefits of asceticism but he had discovered hedonism for himself. They are two sides of the same coin of course, each philosophy endorsing the pursuit of The Extreme. For example, fasting at one end and feasting at the other. "Everything in excess," the boys used to proclaim, deliberately inverting the wise words of the ancients: μηδὲν ἄγαν, *meden agan*, nothing in excess. Pausanias, the second century AD travel writer, described how this maxim was carved on the temple of Apollo at Delphi. James and Patrick rejected its universal message of "moderation in all things" chiefly to provoke and annoy their parents. How tiresome teenagers can sometimes be. Nevertheless, they had learned a valuable life lesson, that the difference between self-denial and self-indulgence can be cigarette-paper thin.

Reflecting on this section of his life, James consistently retains one false memory. He cannot remember a single day when it rained. The sky was always blue and the sunshine omnipresent. Yet meteorological records for Cyprus in 1966 show "extremely high levels of precipitation," about 30% above the annual average. Thus are myths created, out of faulty recollection.

In a wider historical context, given the frequent eruptions of communal violence in Cyprus throughout the 1960s, the timing of James's stay had been fortuitously perfect. 1966 happened to be a peaceful period in the island's turbulent post-war history. After the junta took power in Greece in April 1967 intermittent troubles started up again. As it was, he had the freedom of the whole island that year, even though there were always some no-go areas for British service personnel.

Patrick's parents met them at Heathrow and James stayed the night with them in Gidea Park, near Romford where Dr John Donnell was a local GP. The following day he took the train from Euston to Manchester. He stood in the corridor for the whole of the three-hour journey, not wishing to be in the close presence of other humans. He was lovesick, yes, but he was also pondering a looming eventuality. He knew that very soon, probably this same evening, he would have to drop the bombshell of the young lovers' "mad plan" on the unsuspecting Thomas and Brenda.

Pauline and James had considered all the options for how best and quickest to stay together. Gerry had decreed that he would not permit his daughter to return to England to "live in sin" in Oxford. It was patently impossible for James to stay in Cyprus, jobless and broke. They wisely decided against a game-changing pregnancy. So the solution was to get married.

The crucial first step was to win over Maud and Gerry, since until the Family Law Reform Act of 1987 the age of marriage without parental consent was 21. Pauline cleverly approached Maud first and her mother did the rest. Gerry was in fact delighted to be welcoming James into the family on a permanent and formal basis. "I won't be losing a daughter, I'll be gaining two sons," he wisecracked, meaning

Patrick as well. It took James a while to get the joke. A joint plan was then formulated whereby Pauline would travel to Cheshire for Christmas to meet Thomas and Brenda while the wedding would take place in the Catholic church in RAF Episkopi during the Easter holidays, around the end of March. The Browns were C of E, but a Catholic ceremony would be a sine qua non for the Wardrobes. If they agreed at all. Pauline and James would both still be nineteen years old. The married couple would then return to the UK and, hey presto, their time apart would only have been a bearable six months.

But how would James's parents react? Their consent was the critical issue and was in the forefront of James's mind as the West Coast train sped northwards. Cordial greetings were exchanged at Manchester Piccadilly station and he arrived back home in a dreamlike yet determined condition.

The family had a cocker spaniel called Simon. Originally it had been Margaret's, but when she left home the dog stayed behind. James always helped with the dog-walking duties when he was around, usually taking a half-mile route around the block of local houses. He always took this walk alone. Thomas would later recount how he knew something big was afoot when his son asked him if he would like to accompany him on Simon's walk that evening. "This was an unexpected first-time offer which I could not possibly refuse," he recalled with some amusement.

They got as far as a bench in a small garden of remembrance when James asked his father to sit down. He told Thomas the whole, unmitigated story, to which the older man reacted in his usual calm and thoughtful manner. He possessed to a high degree the admirable quality of consideration, rarely if ever yielding temperamentally to circumstances, and James was grateful for his father's equanimity that night. Thomas said that he would have to discuss the matter with Brenda but he was at least glad of his son's assurances that he would not be deflected from his university education.

At some point soon afterwards they agreed to give their parental consent to the marriage, deep though their misgivings must have been. They were reasonable people who realised that refusal could cause regrettable and antagonistic repercussions with their wilful boy.

James relayed the good news to Pauline, who had now finally succumbed to Gerry's request to "get a job." She had secretarial skills, so her father used his contacts to get her work in a typing pool in RAF Episkopi's administrative centre. She hated it. Much to Gerry's chagrin and embarrassment she successfully engineered her own dismissal after a few months.

Meanwhile at the beginning of October Thomas and Brenda drove James to Pembroke College, Oxford, for the start of his four-year Classics course, pretentiously entitled "Literae Humaniores," but colloquially known as "Mods" and "Greats." This Latin name, meaning "more human literature," was originally designed to distinguish it from the other main field of study when Oxford began, i.e. *res divinae*, theology. James's parents however had other preoccupations. Was this utterly unknown girl, Pauline, about to destroy in its infancy the university career of their darling only son, they wondered...

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Book of Genesis, chapter 3, verses 23-24 (King James Version)

Charlie Strom (Lee Marvin): "Whoever laid this contract wasn't worried about the million dollars, and the only people that don't worry about a million dollars are the people that have a million dollars."

The Killers, written by Gene L. Coon and directed by Don Siegel (1964)

You can watch the whole of "The Killers" on YouTube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sokG0CvhljU>

11/05/18

34. Friends Ancient and Modern

The beach bars and seasonal restaurants are all open for business. A couple of hostelrys, “Billy’s Place” and “Ellas,” were operating in tranquillity all winter but now the general bustle in what the Sunvil brochure calls “a quiet seaside hamlet” is palpable and expectant, even optimistic. Dad hopes that the annual warfare between the local restaurateurs will be low-key this year. The ancient Greeks tended only to go to war with each other in the dry season and it’s much the same with their modern counterparts. Collateral damage for tourists can include having your car locked into one restaurant’s car park overnight because you went to the establishment next door for dinner.

“Veranda” was also open in the off-season, not its summer upper balcony but downstairs by the welcoming open fire, if you gave Tasos twenty-four hours’ notice for his excellent *στιφάδο*, *stifado*, or *κλέφτικο*, *kleftiko*, delicious alternatives to the relentless grills offered everywhere else. Stifado is a stew typically made from meat, tomatoes, small onions and herbs. It is usually made with beef but Tasos also does a supreme version with wild pig. Kleftiko is a classic of Greek cuisine, named after sheep-stealing brigands, *κλέφτες*, *klephtes*, who would cook the lamb in hidden mountainside ovens to avoid its detection. Ideally a leg or shoulder will be very slow-roasted until the meat is about to fall off the bone. You don’t know which dish you’ll be getting until you turn up. It depends on what Tasos’s butcher could provide that morning.



Tasos insists on displaying the “Veranda” menu

Sitting in the warmth of the blazing olivewood logs on a winter’s evening, Dad has got to know this tall, good-humoured local man well and enjoys his company. In return, he is always greeted as “My friend James Bond.” Tasos was from a very poor family by all accounts. His sister was at school with Fotine. During his national service he was selected to be an Εύζωνας, *Evzone* – a great honour. The height requirement for these presidential, formally royal, guards used to be two metres, ie 6’6”, but you can be a bit shorter these days. The minimum nowadays is 1.87 metres, which is 6’1”.

These are the soldiers, colloquially known as Τσολιάδες, *Tsoliades*, who are pestered by tourists for photographs outside the palace at the top end of Syntagma Square, where they are always on duty in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Visitors watch in fascination as they perform their impressive Silly Walk, trained as they are to goose-step with their feet reaching shoulder level. John Cleese, eat your heart out. The major attraction, however, is their traditional ceremonial costume: pom-pom clogs, white stockings with black silk garters, short kilt with 400 pleats (representing the four centuries of Ottoman occupation), intricately embroidered waistcoat, white shirt with wide flowing sleeves, red baize cap with black silk tassel. The juxtaposition of such feminine clothing on these fine specimens of hulking manhood is wonderfully camp and appears hilarious to foreigners with no knowledge of its ethnic roots in the War of Independence. Dad cheekily asked the former elite guardsman to dress up for him, but unfortunately and to his everlasting regret Tasos had sold the uniform quite cheaply when he left the army. It would be worth a small fortune now.

“Veranda” is situated in down-town Chrani overlooking the sea, positioned between the “Kipos”, *Garden*, and “Sokrates’” restaurants. Over the years Tasos has had some difficulties with his competing neighbours. One story goes back to when he was much younger. He was engaged to Sokrates’ daughter. He owned the land next to his newly-opened restaurant and, foolishly as it turned out, he agreed to sell the plot to his future father-in-law. In due course the engagement was broken off but the land now belonged to Sokrates. Being a businessman rather than a philosopher, Sokrates promptly built a rival restaurant on this prime site. Unsurprisingly, from that day forth no love was lost between them and any further Socratic dialogue ceased. Tasos’s response was to build a high wall between the two properties, a lasting and symbolic reminder of his displeasure at being duped. Whether a victim of conspiracy or cock-up, he does not speak well of Sokrates..

More recently, last summer in fact, Yiannis of “Kipos” nearly ran him over when he was standing minding his own business in the alley between their two eateries. A verbal altercation ensued which developed into fisticuffs, initiated by the bad-tempered patron of *The Garden*. He knocked Tasos to the ground and eventually the police were called. They did what coppers all over the world do when faced with a “domestic”, namely nothing. To add insult to injury, Yiannis opened a new bar last summer adjacent to the north side of “Veranda”, so that Tasos is now surrounded by his enemies on three sides with only his view to the sea unimpinged. They all eye each other warily across their man-made frontiers, plotting death by a thousand souvlaki sticks, whilst the holidaymakers stroll nonchalantly past, oblivious of these territorial hostilities.

Round the corner a different and much friendlier Jiannis, who idiosyncratically has always Romanised his name with a “J” rather than a “Y”, is enthusiastically gearing up for the World Cup. He is football-crazy and in the “Poseidon Bar” he has four large TV screens all tuned to sports programmes, usually soccer. He follows all the main European Leagues and has expert knowledge of all the teams and players. Jiannis is an invaluable source of local gossip for our inquisitive Dad and he has also taught him plenty of specialist Greek football vocabulary. Actually, many English words are used unchanged: “goal”, “penalty”, “corner” and “offside”, for example. They also share a common interest in music, particularly blues and rock from the ‘60s and ‘70s. Dad is introducing him to the delights of the Zombies and Steely Dan at the moment. These activities will be put on hold during Mondial 2018.



Jiannis and his wife Athena, owners of the Poseidon Bar

Dad's main port of call is the Caribbean Beach Bar, which he uses as his base for swimming, winter and summer alike. The team has reassembled with only Giorgios the friendly car park attendant not required yet. He will appear in July and August to orchestrate the chaos of parking too many cars in too small a space. Meanwhile cool dude Takis plies the customers with frappés and freddos under the efficient supervision of the owners Williemos (Greek? Yes, from Syros) and Ifigeneia. Those of you with an interest in anthroponymy, or even onomastics generally, will want to know that the popular name "Takis" is an abbreviation of the diminutive of Panayiotis, ie Panayiotakis. Or perhaps you won't.

The Caribbean Bar photo (below) also shows their grey-haired worker, Titos. He cleans the foreshore, puts out the umbrellas and beach beds, undertaking general labours throughout the season. In the winter he is the only living soul Dad encounters on Chrani beach, since all year round the little Albanian dossen in a wooden shed next to the bar. His heavily-accented accent is difficult to understand but the two of them communicate well enough. Titos was the cause of one of Dad's most amusing memories from these past months. On the evening of Tsiknopempti ("Burnt Meat Thursday") in February, Dad was invited along with Bob and Fotine to a family meal of much grilled flesh and plentiful wine at her brother's restaurant, which was otherwise shut for food but not for drinking.

Apart from their private table of eight there is just Titos drinking quietly in the corner, as he does on

most evenings. In comes the local tractor driver, George, burly, bearded and clearly already well-oiled with booze. He joins the table, continues drinking and occasionally shouts “Bob” at Bob, for no apparent reason beyond liking to shout the word “Bob.” At Bob. Who merely grins and suggests that it’s time for George to find a good woman to marry. So things are livening up nicely. Eleni, Fotine’s niece, has some traditional folk music playing. The Dionysiac spirit moves George to rise and attempt some half-remembered hop-and-shuffle dance moves. Titos seizes the moment, leaps up and joins in. The contrast between the wondrous agility of this lithe and nimble elf and the inelegant stumblings of the inebriated giant is a joy to behold, but Titos’s dancing is the real revelation: highly accomplished, not Greek at all, more Turkish or Egyptian in style. Fluttering hand movements, swaying hips, rhythmic twirling of his slender frame, all in perfect harmony with the music, an Albanian matador toying with his Minotaur. Dad’s jaw drops. He is taken back to a memorable night in a Beirut dive where the leading male dancer had gyrated his similar fey routine around the happy punters’ tables.

All that was needed now was for Tasos, even without his regalia, to march in with his feet rising to his shoulders and Dad would have gone to heaven, dead from laughter.



The Caribbean Beach Bar crew: (from left) Takis, Titos, Willimos and Ifigeneia with daughter Melina

After months of Cypriot sunshine James found the city of Oxford In the autumn of 1966 to be a dank and dismal place. If you ask graduates of the university for their best memories, their replies will invariably embrace events cocooned in the shining, summery days of Trinity term: Eights Week, punting on the Cherwell, Commem Balls, drunken parties after Finals, etc., etc. They have conveniently forgotten the damp and dreary winters in an area where the monks who founded colleges in the middle ages no doubt chose this insalubrious, low-lying, marshy spot in order to deter the feeble and the irresolute.

His college accommodation was a sparse fourth floor garret above the Master's Lodgings, far removed from the main quads. On one occasion he passed Harold Macmillan on the rickety stairs, when the then Chancellor of the University was staying below as a guest of Pembroke's top man, Professor Ronald McCallum, a modern historian who coined the term "psephology" and had been one of Tolkien's Inklings. This did not inhibit James, after too much beer, from answering nocturnal calls of nature out of his attic window into the Master's private garden below.

The Oxford climate suited his mood. He worked hard but did not feel the need to socialise much with the other freshmen, who seemed to him to be schoolboys still, naturally hell-bent on enjoying themselves but not quite fully grown, as he now sensed he was after Cyprus. He rarely visited the college bar or the Junior Common Room. He grew his first beard. Whatever the English winter might cast in his direction, no matter, he had found within himself Camus's "invincible summer." He joined no college societies nor clubs, sporting or otherwise, preferring to live an ascetic and reclusive life, whilst waiting stubbornly and patiently for the Big Reunion at Christmas and Pauline's Permanent Arrival after Easter.

His fellow Classicists were an unremarkable group with whom he had little in common. One of them, Malcolm, proudly told an incredulous and uncomprehending James that after his Classics degree his life plan was to become an accountant. Another, Giles, already knew that he would become a lawyer. As for he himself, it used to be the case that Catholic mothers' most fervent prayer was for their sons to become priests. Brenda had sensibly seen the light many years before, but both parents understandably hoped that their boy would opt for some kind of steady professional career. When Thomas asked the inevitable question about what James might do for a living after Oxford, the son had replied not entirely in jest, "I would very much like to be a taxi-driver on a Greek island."

Malcolm indeed became an accountant and Giles a lawyer, which left only James a failure in his ambition, never reaching the longed-for taxi ranks of Corfu or Mykonos.

James's closest chums were elsewhere, Patrick at Cambridge and Bill at Bristol. Nevertheless, straightaway, and for the second time in his life through an accident of the alphabet, he found a new friend. It had happened before with WAKELY in 1961. On the first night of term the seating at dinner in Hall for all the new Pembroke undergraduates was organised by surname. The "W"s were placed in the minstrels' gallery with an excellent view of the thrumming scene below, where the excited newcomers were gazed upon rather too severely by past college grandees and illustrious alumni, portrayed in profusion on every wall. He found himself sitting next to WEBBER, aka Geoff, a Portsmouth lad reading French and German. They hit it off at once. He was less noisy than most of their fellow diners on that high-spirited evening, a quality which James appreciated, and he clearly had a sharp, observant sense of humour. Geoff would go on to become a great friend of Pauline too, whom he sweetly and distinctively used to call "Paulie."



Pembroke College Hall, in the summer of course

James avoided Old Amplefordians and all other braying toffs as a matter of policy, an instinctive protection against catching a late-flowering dose of upper-class twitishness. Nevertheless he occasionally came across them by accident.

One morning in early October he was strolling up St. Aldate's when a gleaming, fire engine red, open-top Ford Mustang pulled up beside him and the driver shouted, "Hello, Wardrobe!" "Well, bugger me sideways and call me a badger if it isn't Pahlabod," uttered an extremely surprised James. He recognised the older one of the two nephews of the Shah of Persia, who had been recent contemporaries at Ampleforth. They were there because their mother, Princess Shams, the Shah's elder sister, had converted to Catholicism before they were born. This one was rumoured to have had his sixth-form room in St Bede's House decorated and kitted out wall-to-wall by Harrods at unspeakable and princely expense. Given his provenance, why wouldn't this gossip be true? So the sports car was no surprise but, since he hadn't been academically able enough to get into the Oxbridge Scholarship or even Entrance sets, James was shocked to find him now in Oxford. He knew him moderately well at school because he had been in the same classes as Bill and Patrick and the Middle Eastern royal had always been friendly towards him.

"What are you doing here?" James enquired, politely enough.

"I'm enrolled at the university, starting a Modern Languages degree," beamed The Fresh Prince of Persepolis.

"But you never took the entrance exams..," ventured the middle-class English oik to the privileged Persian.

"I've matriculated as an undergraduate via St Benet's Hall."

Which explained everything. This hall of residence was set up for young monks of Ampleforth monastery to have the chance to acquire an Oxford University degree without having to pass a college entrance exam. So in this case here was proof that wealth and status could buy and sell the Benedictines

as easily and smoothly as anyone else. As Christ rightly says (*Matthew 13.12*), “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.” Wardrobe bid Pahlabod good luck and cheerio. As the Mustang accelerated away with appropriate wheel squeal and engine roar, James felt his politics lurching a few thousand miles further to the left. He never saw nor heard of the Iranian again.

He settled quickly into the academic routine. Lectures tended to be in the mornings with tutorials in the late afternoons. After supper in Hall he would study, consuming the complete works of Homer in the bard’s original language. This would be accompanied by the constant output of one of the pirate radio stations whose signal was within range. He was also embarking on the rest of a huge reading list, which included the Greek tragedians and historians, the Roman poets, Cicero et al. Every night without fail he wrote long love letters to Pauline, which he hurried out to post in St Aldate’s before the porter shut the college gates until dawn.

The open lectures were of variable quality. The worst were delivered by dust-dry dons with execrable communication skills and no interest whatsoever in their audience. The undergraduates voted with their feet and within a few weeks these solipsistic intellectuals were left only with a few diehard students, gluttons for punishment and/or the higher peaks of esoteric wisdom. The university authorities acknowledged this problem a year or so later by instituting “training in lecturing skills” courses for the academic staff. By the time he graduated four years later James noticed no discernible improvement.

On the other hand there were many competent and personable performers as well as a few outright stars. The best, and nearest of the Classics dons to Philip Smiley in charisma and style, was the irrepressible John Griffith, of Jesus College. He deservedly played to packed houses every week. James’s roll of honour would also include the magisterial Martin West (University) on Greek tragedy, the husky-voiced Robert Levens (Merton) on Catullus and the quietly brilliant Robin Nisbet (Corpus Christi) on Horace.

James’s major leisure pursuit centred on developing his love and knowledge of films. He regularly attended the two o’clock matinee at the Scala in Walton Street. The worlds of Bunuel, Bergman, Godard, Fellini, Kurosawa and other visionary auteurs opened up to him. In the darkness of an empty cinema he soaked up their unique and different commentaries on the human condition. He also signed up for the OU Film Society whose termly programme always featured some worthwhile gems.

Its films were shown in the lecture hall of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History on Parks Road. To enter and exit this room you had to walk past glass display cases featuring amongst its multitude of stuffed animals and birds the most complete remains in the world of the extinct dodo. Then past the Pitt Rivers Collection, an extensive array of ethnographic and anthropological artefacts, including shrunken heads from remote South American tribes. On the way out in the semi-darkness, after a showing of, for example, Hitchcock’s “Psycho,” you could easily be spooked. You just had to keep your nerve and get one in at The White Horse or the King’s Arms before closing time.

In the first week of term he found a note in his pigeon-hole in the porter’s lodge. It was written in a neat, elderly hand and it said, “*Dear James, please forgive this personal enquiry from a total stranger. I help Fr Michael Hollings at the OU Catholic Chaplaincy and I happened to see the name WARDROBE on a list of their new undergraduates sent to us by Ampleforth College. If your mother’s name is Brenda, née Coulehan, I believe that we are related, in fact cousins. If so and if you would like, I would be delighted to make your acquaintance. You can contact me via the Chaplaincy. I will understand completely if you would not want to meet me. Yours, Bill Brown.*”

The last thing James had in mind in Oxford was ever to darken the door of the Catholic Chaplaincy, which happened to be a mere hundred yards from Pembroke, further down St Aldate’s. However, this

was a living relative whom his parents had never mentioned and his final sentence was intriguing: *“I will understand completely if you would not want to meet me.”* What exactly did he mean? Was this a black sheep of the Coulehan flock? His curiosity got the better of his distaste for Catholics and a few days later he found himself ringing the doorbell of a top-floor flat in Wellington Square.

The person he was about to meet was the naughtiest old man he had ever encountered in his life. The two second cousins once removed, despite a gap in age of over forty years, would go on to become loyal and lifelong friends.

“O light! This is the cry of all the characters of ancient drama brought face to face with their fate. This last resort was ours, too, and I knew it now. In the middle of winter I at last discovered that there was in me an invincible summer.”

From “The Return to Tipasa,” an Essay by Albert Camus (1952)

06/06/18

35. Violence at the Vet's

These are lazy days. We spend most of our time sleeping, eating or mooching about in the evenings and in the delicious cool of the night. If an imprudent gecko ventures into our domain we vie to bite off its tail but that's about the extent of our excitement at this sweltering time of year. I did however make a trip recently in my cage to Kalamata which proved to be rather too exciting for my vet Dionisis.

Readers may recall that the results of the recent blood tests to monitor my kidney function were excellent, much improved on last September's to Mum and Dad's great relief. However, because my glucose reading was elevated, Dionisis wanted to retest after a month or so. This could be an anomaly caused by stress and I do find the hour-long journey to the vet's surgery quite a trial. So we would get a better diagnosis with a fructosamine test, which gives a three-week average, a bit like diabetic Dad's HBA1c analysis gives a long-term average result.



The author considers the future direction of feline non-fiction whilst her Dad envisages his next chicken souvlaki pita.

Dionisis always gets his vet wife to draw the blood and he holds me tightly with both hands, whilst Dad sits in a catatonic state in the waiting room. It should take a few minutes. Not this time. I was in a

snippy mood after being caged up for too long. After allowing the right side of my neck to be shaved (in the photo you can just see the triangular patch where the white fur is growing back), I realised straightaway that Dionisis wasn't gripping me firmly enough. So I decided to create some mayhem. I wriggled and struggled to break free, employing a southpawful of claws and making it impossible for the lady vet to take the serum sample. My regular preprandial boxing practice with Lulu came in handy.

Then I noticed that Dionisis had a seriously swollen and punctured right index finger. Ha, ha! He must have been bitten by another cat, which explained why he couldn't hold me properly. The wife is shouting at him, I'm giving it a right go and Dad next door knows something is up since too much time has elapsed. I fight the good fight. Unlike Minnie I'm not a biter myself but I am something of an expert at two-handed pawsy clawsies supplemented with energetic torso-twisting. Twenty minutes later they give up. Dad can't understand how the two of them can't perform a simple procedure. He wants to make a scene and cry out, "Question: how many well-qualified and experienced Greek vets does it take to extract a blood sample? Answer: at least three..," but he opts instead to get me back to Chrani as quickly as possible. "She was very angry today," ventures the lady vet. No, I wasn't, I was just taking felicitous advantage of her wounded husband. Dad, on the other hand, was effing and blinding all the way home.

Some days later a deeply apologetic Dionisis told him the whole story. The day before my visit he was scheduled to neuter a cat who had recently had kittens. Having sedated her he realised that "her breasts were too full" and it was too soon to operate. He administered an antidote. As he was carrying the cat to a recovery area, he accidentally knocked the tray she was lying on against the intervening doorjamb. The startled pussy, galvanised into immediate consciousness, dug her teeth into the nearest available object, which was the vet's finger. And she bit down to the bone. A visit to hospital, stitches, antibiotics and bandages ensued, and Dionisis returned to work. Only an occupational hazard after all, he thought, a mere inconvenience.

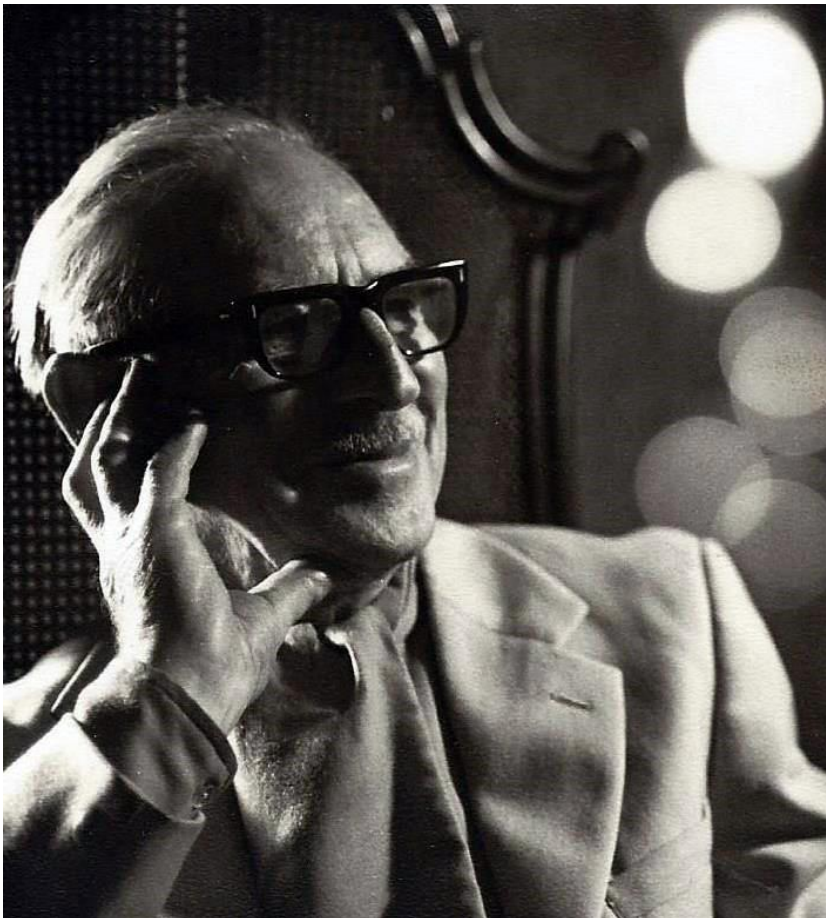
He admitted that he should have postponed my visit and he confessed that he had been over-optimistic about dealing with my case. The outcome suited me. He and Dad decided to leave the glucose test until my next six-monthly check, with me in the meantime being observed for any untoward symptoms, such as drinking too much water or losing weight. So with luck I shouldn't have to return to Kalamata until October. Result or what? Living in Greece is always full of surprises, whether you have two or four legs.

As for the naughty mother cat, she has now finally been "done."

A small, dapper, neatly-mustachioed man in his mid-sixties answered the doorbell. Beneath his horn-rimmed glasses and prominent nose, Bill Brown's skin was somewhat broken-veined and blotchy. This was a lived-in face which nevertheless bore an unmistakable resemblance to the Coulehan relations with whom James was familiar. His clothing was a little flamboyant, perhaps what you might expect an artist or other creative type to wear, and its outré style matched the unconventional décor of his small apartment. The walls of every room were covered in modern paintings, mostly originals, and the living room was cluttered with unusual, if not bizarre, objets d'art.

James's first impression was of a smart, jovial Yorkshireman with a light West Riding accent and a ready smile. He was clearly delighted to meet "Brenda's boy." It became immediately apparent that he knew a great deal more about the Wardrobe family than James knew about him.

Bill explained the family history that connected them and a little about his own life. His and Brenda's grandmothers had been two McLoughlin sisters who had married two brothers. Their daughters ("double first cousins," he joked) married a Coulehan from Hull and a Brown from Bradford, where Bill had been born. He had been a professional chef and had worked happily at Harewood House for the seventh Earl for many years. He had seen war service in the Lebanon, of which he had fond memories but which ended in an unrevealed disaster. On hearing that James was reading Classical Mods, he waxed exceeding lyrical about Baalbek, insisting the youngster visit this magnificent Roman site in the Beqaa Valley one day. Forty-four years later James fulfilled Bill's instruction and sat happily amidst the tallest extant columns in the classical world, silently celebrating the moment he had first heard of this ancient city from his elderly cousin.



Bill Brown displays his characteristic cheeky grin

The block of flats in Wellington Square was owned by the OU Catholic Chaplaincy and Bill was the resident warden for its students. He also looked after some other residences and did odd jobs for the Chaplain, Michael Hollings, of whom he spoke very highly and as it turned out not without due cause.

They agreed to meet up again and James trundled off back to Pembroke, very pleased to have met his colourful and slightly eccentric cousin. Then two strange events happened, the second of which explained the first.

In his next occasional telephone call to his mother he described visiting Bill and how pleased her

cousin had been to meet Brenda's son. The short silence on the other end of the line was a fraction too long. She recovered quickly and said that it had been very many years since she had last seen him. Brenda added that Thomas had met him once in Egypt during the War. She ended by warning James "not to get too friendly until you know him better." He was left wondering why she was so cool about a relative she hardly knew.

A few days later he found himself – definitely by chance and not by design - in the Odeon cinema in Magdalen Street sitting next to "Bummy" Spencer, an Old Amplefordian who had been a friend at Gilling but less so in the senior school. He was now reading Law, which we should properly call Jurisprudence, at Hertford. Bill Brown had mentioned that he had met Bummy and a few of his school chums first at a chaplaincy get-together and then when he had invited them to drinks in Wellington Square.

By way of small talk before the main feature began, James said, "I gather you've met my cousin, Bill Brown?"

Bummy blurted out rather too vigorously what he hoped was an amusing reply, "Bad luck that he's your cousin. I'd steer clear of that old queen if I were you. He's just after your arse. He'll pay for it, mind..."

James wanted to retort, "How much did he pay you then, *Bummy?*" or at least "So what?" but he was too angry and hurt to react. The penny had dropped and he now understood his mother's guarded response on the phone.

He was damned if he was going to be put off by the bumptious Bummy from meeting Bill again. He was also annoyed with himself that he hadn't recognised at their first meeting that the old gentleman was homosexual. On the other hand, despite Ampleforth's future notoriety as a hotbed of pederasty, he had encountered nothing in this regard useful or relevant at school, his "gaydar" instinct still embryonic. He would become better attuned through knowing Bill.

It would also prove to be a major benefit of this long-lasting friendship that as a straight man he would never feel any threat or fear from homosexuality, such as he still occasionally detects in heterosexual friends who claim to be tolerant and enlightened modern males. Meanwhile he would always be at ease in the company of men who it should be remembered were at that time not only a marginalised but still an outlawed community. In fact, it was not until the following year that the House of Commons finally passed Lord Arran's and Leo Abse's "Buggers' Charter," the 1967 Sexual Offences Act which decriminalised consensual sex in private for men over 21. This legislation was a limited breakthrough, after which most gay men would sensibly still not come out for decades.

So James blithely went round to Bill's on a regular basis and learned about an intriguing and secretive world which he himself would never inhabit. He usually arranged the next meeting, whether for drinks or a meal, at the end of the current visit. He did not wish to embarrass all parties by turning up unannounced when Bill might be "entertaining" one of his young men. Despite his advanced years he was still promiscuous and practising, and indeed even paying for it from time to time. James soon realised that behind the chirpy, upbeat façade his cousin was lonely and desperate for a loving relationship. He was surprised to hear how common it was for impecunious male undergraduates to prostitute themselves and he was upset to find out how ruthlessly these predators took advantage of Bill's affections.

Although his cousin took some solace in his devout Catholicism, his real saviour from suicidal despair was The Reverend Michael Hollings. He was a truly extraordinary man. This compassionate, generous,

non-judgemental priest was Bill's guardian angel, as he no doubt was of many others. James met him at the flat on numerous occasions, never of course at the chaplaincy, which as a proud apostate he studiously avoided. Michael was tall, aristocratic in manner and background, a holder of the Military Cross with an unswerving vocation to help his fellow men and women. Bill was fortunate, through the happenstance of living in Oxford, to have found himself within the orbit of his compassion. From Michael's obituary, including the full citation for his MC awarded at the age of 20, is well worth reading :

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-the-rev-michael-hollings-1279945.html>

Once, after one of Bill's gloriously extravagant dinner parties, at which the *pièce de résistance* was always a luxurious pudding of baroque design involving perhaps home-made meringue, stiffened cream, peculiar nuts and exotic fruits, Michael stunned James by taking him aside and pointedly thanking him "for looking after Bill and caring about him." As far as the young cousin was concerned, it was this honourable priest who was giving Bill a home, a job and constant moral support, so he said, "But you're doing that, not me." Michael was unequivocal in his reply, "Believe me, James, you are."

An unanticipated reward in befriending Bill was to be the privileged recipient of a lifetime of stories, often hilarious, sometimes touching, always tinged with hopelessness. Many of these involved the wartime escapades. As an army chef in Lebanon he had enjoyed much more freedom and opportunity than in pre- and post-war Britain to have sex with men: Arabs, guardsmen, probably even Arab guardsmen. A grand old time was had by all in those heady Beirut days and the military hierarchy mostly turned a blind eye. During the War, homosexuality was grounds for dismissal from the forces and for harsh imprisonment. There was an official ban on lesbians and gays serving in the armed forces but with Britain in serious peril from the Nazis they weren't fussy about who they recruited.

So in the end Bill was unlucky or too blasé. He was arrested and charged with buggery or sodomy or gross indecency or some such indictment. Found guilty at court martial, he served time in a military prison in Lebanon before being sent home in disgrace.

His journey back to Blighty took him via Cairo where he knew that Brenda's husband was stationed. They met for lunch. Bill's version of the meeting pictures Thomas as friendly but distant. Maybe Major Wardrobe got wind of the reason for Sergeant Brown's abrupt return to Britain - he was an Intelligence Officer after all - or perhaps Bill told him. James can't remember the details and his father's version when quizzed over twenty years later was non-committal to say the least.

This all gave an added piquancy to the Sunday lunch which Bill insisted on hosting for the three Wardrobes when he heard that James's parents were coming to visit their son in Oxford for the weekend. They weren't keen but they yielded to their son's insistence on a family reunion.

As usual Bill surpassed himself with a perfectly roasted sirloin of beef and a full variety of appetising accompaniments. After a slow start Brenda and Bill happily shared memories and gossip about their common ancestors. Thomas was uncharacteristically subdued, which James put down to paternal concern about the continuing sanctity of his son's anus. Ironically the existence of Pauline, the as yet unmet fiancée who might threaten the whole Oxford appletart, was in this instance a reassurance to his father. It at least confirmed that James seemed more interested in girls than "girls." Although his parents never met Bill again, their worries about the friendship faded, especially when they subsequently learnt how well Pauline got on with him too. Years later Bill admitted to James that he had always fancied him, but a sense of family honour and loyalty had protected the naive young

cousin. "I never made a pass at you out of respect for your mother..," he laughed.

With the end of James's first Michaelmas term came the traditional college review of undergraduates' academic performance, entitled "Collections." (This same word is also used confusingly to mean the college exams taken at the start of each term on material covered in the previous term.) All the Fellows of Pembroke are seated in a long row in the SCR dining room with the Master at their centre. Each begowned student is summoned in turn and sits on the solitary vacant chair in the middle of the room. James expects the inevitable question asked in such circumstances: "When did you last see your father?" but instead he hears his Tutor appraising his scholastic achievements as if he himself were not actually present. Thus, "Wardrobe has had a good first term, produced some thoughtful essays and is generally rising to the required academic standard." Then the Master says, "Well done. Keep it up. You may go." The whole process lasts thirty seconds at most and is a complete waste of time unless you have done absolutely no work at all throughout the term.

He received much more of a salutary jolt at his final one-to-one tutorial of the term when Godfrey Bond berated him for producing a sub-standard essay on Catullus. "This is pabulum," said Bond witheringly, using the Classicists' ultimate rebuke. Pabulum is what the Romans fed their cattle. Suitably chastened, James made sure that his next offering was at least fit for human consumption.

With joy in his heart he at last heads off to meet his beloved Pauline who is arriving at RAF Brize Norton for the Christmas holidays and her First Summit with Thomas and Brenda.

"Of the millions of men under my command in the War,

not one would ever have got up to that sort of thing."

"This sort of thing may be tolerated by the French, but we're British - thank God."

1. *Comments in the parliamentary debate on the Sexual Offences Act*
attributed to Bernard Montgomery, 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein (1967)

04/07/18

36. Wedding in Cyprus

At last Efthymia, the queen bee of the Messini planning department and Linos’s bane, has deigned to raise her bejewelled and weary thumb and forefingers to sign off on our building permit, six months after its submission. The thirteenth and final signature needed in this undertaking, accompanied by multiple official rubber stampings, was attained last week. There is no formal public objection process here to slow down the passage of applications, but other masterpieces of Greek bureaucracy are pre-eminent in causing frustrating delays. For example, three separate letters of consent are required from different archaeology departments: ancient, Byzantine and modern. Any artefacts discovered during the excavation phase must be reported immediately. Dad enquired diplomatically of his earthmoving team if they understood the concept of “the blind eye.” They chuckled knowingly. Nothing much historic has happened in the immediate vicinity anyway, although the local area is mentioned specifically in *The Iliad*. So the bulldozers which were already on site began work on the same day.



Three excavators and a civil engineer: The beginning of Day One

(from left) Stavros, Antonis, Takis and Manos

Some Greek friends have half-jokingly told Dad that the traditional custom is to kill a cockerel and pour its blood into the foundations for good luck. This practice had already been recorded by one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology, James George Frazer, in his celebrated late-Victorian study of comparative religion, *The Golden Bough*. He wrote, “In modern Greece when the foundation of a new building is being laid, it is the custom to kill a cock, a ram or a lamb, and to let its blood flow on the foundation-stone.” This seems to me to be needlessly gruesome, but then although we cats are the subject of much superstition, we aren’t superstitious ourselves. Jiannis is equally dismissive of this folklore. He says, “No one has been doing it for a hundred years. Now it’s just ιστορίες γι’ άγριους, *istories yi’ agrious*, stories for savages, nonsense.” So there won’t be any ceremonial throat-cutting sacrifice, just what has come to be its modern equivalent: wrist-slittingly interminable photo-snapping for instant posterity. Unless Linos finally loses his rag with Efthymia and drags her along for ritual slaughter.

At this time of year Dad has to keep his wits about him in the sea. Yesterday he was ploughing his wine-dark furrow when an enormous pink plastic inflatable swan, full of over-excited Russian toddlers, nearly cut across his bow. Surely the international law of the sea is swimmer before swan? He was about to shout, “Ahoy and avast, Battleship Potemkin, change course or the big duck gets it!” when it veered off back towards its home port, the beach bar appropriately named Η Κιβωτός, *I Kivotos*, The Ark. Otherwise, apart from the occasional canoe or paddleboard, there will be few other maritime hazards until August, when shoals of bobbing Kalamatians and floating Athenians will appear in the offshore shallows.



Two beached sea creatures

On a recent trip to England Dad visited an exhibition at the British Museum entitled “Charmed Lives in Greece: Ghika, Craxton, Leigh Fermor,” in which a fascinating collection of documents, paintings and photographs charts the friendship of the English writer and the artists Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas (also known as Niko Ghika) and the hellenophilic John Craxton. Leigh Fermor wrote most of “Mani” at Ghika’s villa in Hydra, while Craxton often stayed and worked at Paddy’s and his wife Joan’s house in Kardamyli.

Although Dad is quite knowledgeable about Greece’s contemporary writers and musicians, he knows little about its modern artists, believing from a position of profound ignorance that much of their output is highly derivative of parallel Western European trends. So some of Ghika’s work on display was an eye-opener. His house in Odos Kriezotou in Athens was donated to the Benaki Museum in his lifetime and, as The Ghika Gallery, now houses much of his work. It is on Dad’s list of places to visit. He was a towering figure of Greek twentieth-century art, a life well articulated in Craxton’s informative and affectionate obituary, written in 1994 when Ghika died at the age of eighty-eight: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-nikos-ghika-1447272.html>

Craxton himself lived for many years in a Venetian harbour-side house in Chania. He adored the Greek landscape and he also painted pleasure: poets and shepherds in Arcadia, sailors in bars, cats

at play and in repose. Since he loved cats, he must in my opinion have been a sound character. His painting below captures what we excel at: sleeping. One of the exhibits quotes him: “Joan and I shared a lifelong affection for cats. Paddy had less admiration and called them “interior desecrators and downholsterers.”” What a cheek!

Nevertheless PLF tells an amusing story about an Athenian tomcat who lived at a taverna in Plaka next to an open-air cinema. At the same time every night he would sit on the wall with his back to the restaurant and watch the adjacent cinema screen. “After exactly five minutes he would saunter away again over the roofs. The waiter’s verdict on this procedure was obviously correct. “He comes for the Mickey Mouse cartoon every night, “ he explained. “You could set your watch by him.””



Reclining cat, 1961, by John Craxton

The young lovers spent the first night in London where they refreshed their relationship in a seedy Paddington hotel. Then they went to visit Pauline’s maternal grandparents in Woodford Green. They stayed for two nights in the small terraced house where the elderly couple had lived since before their only child Maud was born there between the wars. These two-up, two-down council houses would soon be torn down and the occupants rehoused in a brutalist high-rise apartment block a mile down the road. This was the Sixties, man.

Pauline’s grandfather, a retired gardener who had survived the trenches of the Western Front, would never adjust to life in a third-floor flat with no outside space and he died within a year of the move. Pauline loved her grandad dearly but she could never forgive him when she heard that on the day they had to move into the tower block he had drowned their beautiful black Persian cat, Inky, in the back-garden water vat. No pets were allowed to be kept in the new apartment.

As for his widow, Edith was an extremely resilient woman, mentally and physically, To misquote the celebrated Australian advertising slogan for King Gees shorts, “Any tougher, she’d rust.” She survived

her husband by twenty years, giving Gerry time to become a specialist in Les Dawson's mother-in-law jokes, often told in her unblinking presence. He found it even more hilarious that neither Edith nor Maud found them funny at all.

Now ready to sortie up north, the youngsters travelled to Manchester by coach and were met in Piccadilly Gardens by James's parents. The initial meeting went well and Pauline was given a very hospitable welcome. Brenda had prepared a special meal, ending with James's favourite pudding: crème caramel. She was unaware that many years before Pauline had had an unfortunate vomiting experience with this wobbling and glutinous mud pie dish, a popular 1960s custard dessert. Not only was she unable to countenance *eating* the two-tone beige and brown stomach-heaver placed in front of her but just the sight and smell of it induced queasiness and nausea. She heroically resisted the urge to be sick and thus avoided creating an embarrassing early impression. After dinner she made James vow that he would never inflict, nor be party to another inflicting, crème caramel on her as long as they both shall live. No matter, zabaglione became his favourite instead.

The Christmas period en famille went well. James was surprised and relieved when having plucked up courage to announce that he would no longer be accompanying his parents to Sunday Mass Brenda simply said, "OK, we'll see you later." He was however perfectly content to stick to the earlier agreement that the wedding in Cyprus would be a Catholic ceremony, a concession made to ensure his parents' consent. They stayed in Altrincham for a week, seeing some movies including the epic "Doctor Zhivago." The musical backdrop to the visit was James's latest LP purchase, "Pet Sounds" by The Beach Boys.

On the final morning before their departure, Brenda visited Pauline in her bedroom and in tears begged her not to get pregnant too soon. This was a sensible and heartfelt request but unnecessary since neither of the teenagers had the slightest intention of burdening themselves with children at this stage of their lives.

Pauline returned to Cyprus to prepare for the wedding which was set for 27th March, Easter Monday. All the arrangements for The Big Day would be undertaken and completed by the Brown family. James just had to turn up looking moderately presentable, ideally accompanied by a Best Man. Patrick was delighted to accept this role and to revisit Cyprus, albeit briefly. Over in Cambridge he was in high spirits. No longer a virgin, he had a liberated girlfriend who was a student at Girton. He was also earning some pocket money as an occasional life model for an attractive middle-aged sculptress. As an extra reward for him standing nude and motionless on a plinth in her studio for hours on end, she finished the sessions with some enthusiastically delivered and well received fellatio.

The Wardrobes' intentions about attending the wedding were not clear at this stage. Brenda had recently completed a successful year as Lady Captain of Wilmslow Golf Club but Thomas was still working assiduously as a senior partner at Urwick Orr. They were non-committal about travelling abroad to an event for which they had little if any enthusiasm. Their son, perhaps unsurprisingly given his blinkered perspective on the matter, did not actually care whether they came or not. Since he had gone away to Gilling as a ten-year-old in 1957, he had spent less than thirty percent of the last ten years living at home with his parents.

Meanwhile, Margaret was ruled out since she was expecting her second child in early May. Graham was keen to support his brother-in-law and he thought seriously about hitch-hiking across Europe and catching a ferry from Piraeus, but in reality this was not a feasible option. Bill Wakely also considered thumbing his way to Cyprus and back. It would prove to be an impractical plan for him too.

James returned to Oxford for the Hilary Term. Life continued much as before, apart from a short-lived

phase of plagiarism. Along with two other Pembroke classicists he had realised the potential for avoiding unnecessary writing, thanks to Godfrey Bond's set routine in their weekly group tutorial on Epic Poetry. He would always ask one of the eight students to read aloud his essay, briefly quiz the essayist on his offering and then initiate a collective discussion. Giles, John and James recognised that their tutor never requested the reading of a second essay and he never collected them in for inspection, let alone marking.

So the three of them established a writing syndicate, each producing an essay every three weeks which the other two simply copied. As luck would have it, Bond always seemed to ask a copyist to read "his" work and never the author. Fortunately James had done the requisite background reading and survived an interrogation on John's piece. Giles however nearly came unstuck after presenting James's opus on the authenticity of Book 24 of The Odyssey. He was thoroughly unprepared. "So, Giles, How do you justify your statement that the Alexandrine scholars ... blah, blah?" asks the gimlet-eyed tutor. Giles stutters, "Er, um, er... blah, blah." After that close shave the errant threesome decided that it would be less stressful actually to write their own weekly essays.

As March approached, it became evident that only James and Patrick would be present on the groom's side of the aisle of Saint Pius X Church in RAF Episkopi. The guests would comprise mainly air force chums of Gerry and Maud plus some Cypriot friends. Pauline's chief bridesmaid, Dawn, was coming out from England, the other two were RAF daughters resident on the base. The marriage celebrant would be the chaplain, the Rev John McBrierty, a cheerful, hard-drinking Irishman. He explained to the non-Catholic Pauline that there existed for her an obligation to receive instruction in the true faith before being permitted to marry a Catholic. This would involve a series of lessons. The familiar nonsense: no contraception, no abortions, bringing up the (four? six? eight?) children as Catholics, etc. Halfway through the first session Pauline and Father John declared a truce. They both sensibly agreed that this was a waste of time and he'd just conduct the wedding service anyway. He poured them both a large sherry and Pauline went home victorious.



A recent photograph of Saint Pius X Church, RAF Episkopi. The trees and the bushes weren't there

in 1967, but otherwise the place and the blue sky are the same

Thomas and Brenda sent their regrets on being unable to accept Maud and Gerry's invitation to the wedding, the reasons for which James can no longer remember. They were nevertheless extremely generous in their financial support, not only paying for his and his bride's airfares but also increasing his monthly allowance on their return to Oxford.

So in mid-March James flew to Nicosia sans famille, to be followed a few days later by Patrick. On the flight he worked his way relentlessly through the Attic Greek of Euripides's "Medea," which along with mastering "The Bacchae" constituted Bond's directive for Easter holiday work. It never occurred to the young husband-to-be that this ancient revenge tragedy contained salutary lessons for the twentieth century on upright marital behaviour.

For the wedding James had packed his conventional dark suit, white shirt, silver-grey tie and black shoes, but on a whim he had spent an extravagant sum on a flamboyant, big-flowered, blue shirt from Hall Brothers of 119 High Street, a long-standing gentlemen's tailors and outfitters who were manfully striving to keep up with the Swinging Sixties. (They were most notable for being the creators of one of the great fashion trends of the twentieth century : Oxford bags.) He now arrived wearing this shocking eyebrow-raiser. He had also let his hair grow long, since he intended to step off the plane as a fully-fledged hippie, challenging the conformist norms of dress and appearance of the fast-encroaching setting of an Royal Air Force base. A futile gesture. Gerry took one look at him, gave him "the bum's rush" straight to the barber's from the airport and "smartened him up sharpish."

Gerry was encountering more serious issues with the local bureaucrats. For the marriage to go ahead on a Sovereign Base Area he needed documents signed by both the British and the Cypriot authorities. The UK officials were about to shut up shop for the long Easter weekend and Cyprus was already celebrating, as a national holiday, the four-day Muslim holiday of Eid Al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice). Finally, in order to get the requisite signatures, in desperation Gerry persuaded the SBA police to accompany him out-of-hours to the homes of the appropriate English and Turkish Cypriot officials where force majeure encouraged them to put pen to paper.

Waking up at dawn on Easter Monday in his billet two doors' away from the bride's home, James was happy to see a set-fair, cloudless blue sky. At the allotted time mid-morning he walked up the hill with Patrick and across the scrubland to the church which was situated close to the shopping centre of Dodge City. The two of them had spent a quiet stag night at "Arif's," a favourite Turkish restaurant of theirs in Limassol, musing on the world in general and their own future in it.



The happy couple: Pauline weighed 6 stone 10 pounds (43 kg) on her wedding day;
James, shorn of his locks, is shod in his favourite shiny shoes

On a perfect Mediterranean spring day the marriage ceremony went off without a hitch, although there was too much kneeling through the nuptial mass for Pauline's liking. The reception and the wedding breakfast were held in the Officers' Mess, Gerry declaring that, given the ridiculously cheap prize of booze on the base, he had saved a fortune by paying for a wedding in Cyprus rather than in the UK. In his speech he joked that earlier in the morning he had had all road exits off the SBA, both to Paphos and Limassol, blocked off by his mates in the RAF Regiment (who were responsible for base security), so as to guarantee the groom's attendance. The Best Man's and the Groom's speeches were unremarkable and largely joke-free, but it mattered not since by now the Duc De Nicosie champagne was flowing freely. Father John was in his element, rejoicing in the bounty of Gerry and the Lord. The guests included Maud and Gerry's closest Greek Cypriot friends, Costas and Irene Soleas, who at the time ran a single sports equipment shop in Limassol. They would subsequently expand the family business to become one of the biggest sports retailers in the Near East.

In the midst of all the merriment James and Pauline left as unobtrusively as they could, driving off to take a short honeymoon break in Famagusta, then the island's premier resort.

They had married for hard-headed practical reasons, but the two young lovers would be the last to deny that it was both a wondrously romantic and a seriously meaningful event for them. For nineteen-year-olds to stay together happily for life, until Pauline's untimely death forty-five years later, was a statistical freak, an improbable outcome in the eyes of most observers, including their families. They

themselves never had any doubts that they were ideally suited. Mutually compatible, their greatest gift to each other was that he taught her how to think and she taught him how to feel.

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Gospel according to St Matthew, chapter 19, verses 3-6 (King James Version)

03/08/18

37. A Right Eyeful

Dad has just returned from the UK where he had an operation to remove a cataract from his right eye. We greeted him with squeaking (Lulu), rubbing (Minnie) and non-stop high-pitched purring (me) to show him how happy we were to see him. He was delighted to see us in fine fettle and told me about his minor surgery.

His doctor friends and his GP had independently recommended the same ophthalmic surgeon, an Irish lady whom they all rated highly. They also added with grins and chuckling some worrying remarks such as, “She’s the best, but she’s mad as a hatter,” “She doesn’t suffer fools gladly,” “She’s good, but she’s tough” and “She takes no prisoners.” So Dad was very interested to meet this formidable woman. As it turned out the two of them got on well when he discovered that one of her sons had read Classics at Balliol. She in turn took the joke when he responded to her question in the operating theatre, “Are you allergic to anything?” with “Only Benedictine monks..” “There are none of *them* in here,” she swiftly replied.

Although he could see nothing during the fifteen-minute procedure, he could hear everything. Some poor student doctor was receiving her pearls of wisdom about cataract surgery. He seemed slow on the uptake. She: “Would you use your left or right hand for this?” He: “Left?” She: “For heaven’s sake, I’ve told you before, that would make it much more difficult. Look at my right hand. It would be very awkward to get my left round there...even dangerous.” He: “I see.” She: “Well, I’m not sure you do.” And so on. Dad had to quell the laughter in his heaving chest at one point. Her impatience was hilarious. He was very thankful it was She and not He doing the job.

The process was quick and pain-free, the outcome successful. She removed most of the myopia from his eye thanks to the new plastic lens and he was driving again within four days. Dad’s only gripe is that he is categorically banned for swimming for “a month,” so as to guard against infection.

At the post-op assessment a week later the following interchange takes place:

“When you say no swimming for a month, do you mean a calendar month (31 days) or a lunar month (28 days)?” asks my adorable pedant. She looks at him quizzically, already in full knowledge of his daily routine in the Greek sea. He knows he is pushing his luck.

A pause, then a clipped response, “Four weeks.”

“And can I go in straightaway just up to my neck to cool off, wearing goggles?” He’s really chancing his arm now, but she must be in a good mood. Or maybe she likes his chutzpah.

“Alright, you can do doggie-paddle...” Woof! Why not go for broke?

“Thanks. Would you agree that the sea is less infectious than a swimming pool?,” daring to venture a new dialectic.

“Possibly.” The tersely delivered reply signals an end to any further concessions. She has seen where this could lead and concludes, “I know about you Classicists. My son’s the same. You can argue convincingly that the chair you’re sitting on is actually a table..” Phew, Dad! You just about got out of there unscathed, which is more than could be said of the ill-starred trainee on ophthalmology rotation the week before.

The upshot is that he's back on the beach more or less behaving himself, with brief, begoggled head-up visitations into the briny. Willie confided to Dad that Sotiria, Dimitra and Mimi, the three waitresses at the Caribbean Beach Bar, had missed him. This pleased him tremendously. Colours seem so much brighter now and his sharper visual acuity has certainly enhanced his ability to admire the callipygous beauty on display at the height of the basking season. It is not all good news. Removal of the blurring effect of the cataract also has its disadvantages. It is an unfortunate fact of beach life that in-your-face instances of cacopygy outnumber callipygy by about ten to one. And this is made worse by the modern fashion for minimalist bikini styles which are almost invariably not a good look. At least the trends in mens' beachwear have moved towards parrot-smuggling shorts, spacious and seemly, although Dad persists with his sagging variety of black Speedo trunks. Not an attractive look either in my feline opinion for a seventy-year-old with a paunch, but he won't be told. He thinks that along with the goggles and the swagger it makes him look more like a "proper swimmer."



Dad in his quarry: "It's gonna be a ***** big basement."

Meanwhile, the excavation works for the new house have been completed and the area is being



Three weeks later: a big basement indeed.

prepared with ironwork and shuttering for the concrete foundations. For reasons of ease of digging out a slope, the basement will be larger than originally intended but I'm sure Mum and Dad will find a good use for the extra space. Perhaps overstaying guests unaware of Benjamin Franklin's maxim ("Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days") will be consigned to the depths on the fourth day. The plan is to use the extracted high-quality limestone rocks for terracing, patios, pergolas, steps and walls without needing to purchase any stone at all.

Famagusta in the spring of 1967 was not yet the internationally famous tourist resort that it would become over the following seven years. There were only half-a-dozen hotels in the sandy beach area of Varosha, south of the Old Town which housed the Turkish quarter. Its speedy development up until its death in 1974 spawned a plethora of high-rise hotel blocks, some of which can be seen already in place in the early 1970s photograph below. Set as close as possible to the sea and facing east, one unintended consequence of the skyscrapers' proximity to the shoreline was that by mid-afternoon even in high summer the sun was eclipsed by the tall buildings. Sunbathing on the beach then became impossible. This unfortunate phenomenon was known as "the four o'clock shadow" and it was never mentioned in the tourist brochures.

James and Pauline stayed at one of the longest-running and best-located establishments, the Hotel Constantia. Although it was only four storeys high, they were still obliged to abandon their sun-worshipping well before tea-time. The dining room had an unusual feature: a large and living tree, probably an olive, perhaps a carob or a fig, formed its centrepiece, the broad trunk stretching up and through a space in the ceiling. The hotel staff were justifiably proud of this impressive arboreal feature set regally in their midst.

Since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus Varosha has become the world's most notorious ghost town, a no-man's-land of forsaken and decaying buildings. It is a fenced-off and inaccessible district which former inhabitants and other interested observers can view from a first-floor building in Deryneia two kilometres away on the Greek side of the Green Line. For many years the same rotting washing on neglected clothes lines was visible from there, hung out just before the population of about 39,000 fled for their lives ahead of the advancing Turkish army.



Famagusta in the early '70s. Hotel Constantia is one of the low-rise buildings on the far headland.

The Constantia is now one of these abandoned hotels, but as Mother Nature continues to reclaim the area perhaps that mighty tree still flourishes in its sad and silent dining room amid the man-made dereliction. These days sea turtles nest in peace on the deserted strand once frequented by Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and Brigitte Bardot.

The honeymooners returned to RAF Episkopi in preparation for their departure to England. They heard that the post-wedding party back at the house had been an uninhibited success and according to Gerry "Patrick played an absolute blinder," replenishing the glasses of all the guests deep into the night and then doing most of the clearing up afterwards. Patrick's version was more modest and dispassionate: "They were all pissed, I was sober, so it made sense to impose some order on the chaos."

Before embarking on their life in Oxford, the couple stayed for a week with Thomas and Brenda in Cheshire. On the Saturday afternoon of their visit they witnessed a most extraordinary event. Never seen before nor since by either of them, Thomas's behaviour for ten minutes was totally out of character. In front of the television, first he stood up, peering in disbelief at the murky black-and-white screen, then he began whooping and shouting, finally he danced a nifty variant of an Irish jig, initially of anxiety, at last of unrestrained ecstasy. The reason for this was a horse called Foinavon and the occasion was the 1967 Grand National, which featured arguably the greatest upset in the history of steeplechasing.

Thomas was a member of the Racquets Club in Liverpool. He had joined this gentlemen's club in Upper

Parliament Street in order to entertain clients to a decent lunch in civilised surroundings rather than for any reasons of sport. Every year, however, the club held a well-attended and boozy Grand National Auction Dinner, after which bidding took place to “buy” a horse in the forthcoming race. The favourites went for big money, so Thomas bid successfully for a rank outsider “just for a bit of fun,” no doubt egged on by Bob Love and/or other cronies. Foinavon was a 100/1 at the bookies (444/1 starting price on the Tote on the day!) but the winner of the club auction would simply trouser a high percentage of whatever the total sales were on the night – a considerable sum. Thomas also put some pounds on the nag at the local bookmaker. It had no chance. The owner and the trainer didn’t even bother to attend the Aintree meeting.

The first three-quarters of the race was unremarkable with the usual smattering of fallers. As the thirty-plus remaining horses approached the 23rd out of thirty fences Foinavon, ridden by John Buckingham, was comfortably at the back of the field. Then an almighty pile-up at the twenty-third caused by a loose horse brought down virtually all the runners. Except Foinavon. He developed a 100-yard lead before any of the others recovered, extended it to 200 yards, jumped the last seven fences cleanly and held on for a fifteen-length victory. If you watch the BBC recording via the link below, you will appreciate Thomas’s priceless reaction to the biggest win on the gee-gees he would ever have in his life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLN4wmfuDPM>

James and his mother had unsurprisingly had a bet on Greek Scholar which came a respectable fourth, ridden by one of the top jump jockeys of the day, Terry Biddlecombe. At one point he seemed to be closing fast on Foinavon but fell away in the final stages. By then James and Pauline were shouting for Foinavon too. “Go on, my son!”

In July 1981 the Racquets Club building, including all of its facilities and records, was looted, burnt and destroyed in the Toxteth riots, after which in 1985 it was rehoused and reopened in Chapel Street. Meanwhile in 1984 the twenty-third fence at Aintree was finally named the Foinavon.

Arrival in Oxford brought on their first marital tiff. James had arranged digs for them in Iffley Road in one of the chaplaincy residences looked after by Bill. It was a dingy room but had a pleasant ground floor view of the OU Athletics Track opposite, the venue where Sir Roger Bannister ran the first-ever mile in under four minutes in 1954. Pauline’s idea of acceptable accommodation was somewhat removed from her husband’s. Within a few hours (“tout de bloody suite,” insisted the bride) via the small ads in the Oxford Mail they had found something better further up the same road. James apologised to Bill, who had worked hard to make a room available in mid-academic year, and then a few days later he was summoned to an urgent meeting with the Pembroke College Dean to explain his absence from his room in college.

James’s staircase scout had reported that Wardrobe’s bed had remained unslept in after the start of Term, yet Bond confirmed that he was attending his tutorials. Ian Grant, Dean and Lecturer in Mathematics, was an affable young don who listened with incredulity and some amusement to this nineteen-year-old’s tale of marriage, a *fait accompli* which meant he could no longer live in college. James said he thought he had indicated on the accommodation form he had filled in before Easter that not only did he not require a room in the *second* year (the purpose of the form), but nor for the imminent Trinity Term either. This was either disingenuous or naïve. Dr Grant explained that the College required its first-year undergraduates to spend the whole year in college, except “in exceptional circumstances.” However, since marriage constituted an exception, he quickly accepted the situation and hoped that the Bursar could re-rent the room immediately, otherwise James would

have to pay for it. He never heard from Grant again, whose unfussy and logical approach to the matter was much appreciated.

Pauline got a job with a TV rental shop in Broad Street, which meant they got themselves a cheap television deal. Throughout the coming weeks on TV and radio James followed closely what was for him the big news story: the Colonels' coup in Greece and its aftermath, including the eventual failed counter coup by the 27-year-old King.

At that time James knew little about post-war Greek politics and even less about the bitter, endemic hatred between the Right and the Left which retained its potency a generation after the Civil War in which this putsch had its roots. And he knew nothing about the active role traditionally played by the monarchy in the political life of Greece. He came to understand this subject later, but to this day he has never fathomed the truth behind one fundamental question: Why did King Constantine as Head of State swear in the Colonels as the legitimate government on that first day of the coup d'état? The Greek nation never forgot this. By giving the Junta constitutional sanction he was unknowingly also signing the death warrant of his own monarchy in the years to come.

The Oxford summer yielded its traditional delights: tutorials al fresco in the Fellows' Garden; punting on the Cherwell; lazy hours, sometimes together with Geoff, at idyllic riverside pubs such as The Trout and The Perch; the excitement of Eights Week. To James's relief Pauline and Bill Brown got on well from the start. An added bonus for him was that there were no end-of-year university exams to sit. His course would last for four years and his important Classical Moderations papers would be taken after five terms in the following March.

The highlight of the summer was the annual Pembroke College Ball. The ball committee had an enviable reputation for booking the best bands. The previous year they had secured Manfred Mann and for 1967 they had managed to enlist The Who. This was something of a triumph, even though the days of stadia concerts were still a little way off and it was not yet beneath the most popular groups to play in small venues and at college or university events. There was a great deal of competition between college ball committees, with many Eights Week and Commemoration Balls scheduled every summer, often as many as four on the same Saturday night of Fifth Week.

All the Pembroke grounds and facilities were given over to the occasion, with a large marquee in Chapel Quad hosting the main acts. There were four bands, a discotheque and various non-musical entertainments. With the Ball in full swing, at the start of The Who's set James and Pauline found themselves very close to the band, a few feet away from the drums of Keith Moon. No stewards nor security barriers in those days, especially not at a college ball. They had heard that Moon was a genuine lunatic, the real deal, and they wanted to see him in full-blown nutjob mode for themselves. After thundering through a couple of well-known hits it became evident that the drummer was focussing his attention solely on Pauline. Perhaps this was his well-tried seduction technique. On receipt of Mrs Wardrobe's coldest stare he began hurling lascivious remarks and making lewd gestures in her direction with his drum sticks. During the next lull in the highly-amplified rock bedlam, Pauline shouted at him, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the rest of the group, "Behave yourself!" Entwistle laughed, Daltrey smiled and shrugged his shoulders as if in sympathy, whilst Townsend did not react. And on they continued with the mad Loon undeterred, now turning his lecherous scrutiny onto another Glamorous Young Thing in the front rank.



Pembroke College Ball, late May 1967, shortly after smooching to the leading anthem Of Britain's Summer of Love: Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale."

There was another insane drummer, still unknown to the Wardrobes, on parade that evening: Ginger Baker. Cream had released their first album to critical acclaim a few months earlier, but they were as yet only prominent amongst the blues fraternity. James and Pauline must have seen them play that night but they had no recollection of it afterwards. It was later, during the summer vacation, that Patrick introduced them to "Fresh Cream" and then sometime in the autumn that they made a pilgrimage as avid fans to a small basement night club in Reading, where along with no more than a hundred others they heard Bruce, Baker and Clapton perform the whole of "Disraeli Gears" before the November album release. Again they stood near the drums, but this time they were rewarded with a close-up view of a spectacularly manic, eighteen-minute Baker solo, "Toad."

Predictably, with both The Who and Cream in the same line-up, the Pembroke ball committee had over-reached themselves and suffered a financial loss. They drew in their horns the following year, booking the gospel singer P.P. Arnold, who had a spell of fame in the late '60s. They returned to form by booking Pink Floyd in 1969 and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, featuring the superb saxophonist Dick Heckstall-Smith and a pre-Rolling-Stones Mick Taylor on lead guitar. But all that lay in the future.

callipygous : adjective

Definition: *pertaining to or having finely developed buttocks*; synonyms: *callipygian, shapely*; origin: *late 18th century, from Greek kallipūgos (used to describe a famous statue of Venus), from kallos 'beauty' + pūgē 'buttocks.'*

Source: *www.vocabulary.com, et al (2018)*

02/09/18

38. Dog Bites Man

Dad is sleeping outside on the terrace these days, since indoors is stifling even at night. He lies on the sun-lounger and stargazes. In early August he was looking out for the Perseids, a prolific annual meteor shower to be seen above Kalamata to the north. You can hardly miss these shooting stars in the clear moonless night sky. Since we also spend the nights outside in the summer, he feels it incumbent to instruct us and any passing strangers in identifying constellations such as Capricorn, Aquarius, Pegasus, Andromeda and the planet Mars, a prominent red object in the south after dusk, closer to Earth than it has been for fifteen years. We take no notice and doze on.

The set-fair weather broke just for one day, with a typically spectacular Mediterranean thunder and lightning storm. Usually I am unperturbed by these whilst Minnie and Lulu play their familiar roles as scaredy cats, diving under the nearest furniture until the noise has passed. This time I have to confess, dear readers, I took colossal fright and buried myself ears to tail under the double bedspread. This is a photo of my re-emergence when the weather quietened down.

That bout of thunder frightened me so much I had to take cover...

Meanwhile, down at the beach bar Mimi, the friskiest of the young waitresses, has been extending Dad's grasp of Greek. He asked her to give him a new word or a difficult phrase to pronounce every day. She started him off with σκουλίκουρμικότρύπα, *skoulikomyrmikotrypa*, worm-ant hole, which he mastered quite quickly. She was giggling the next day when she gave him πορδοκόφτης, *porthokoftis*, and told him it meant a "thong," pointing to her nether regions. (Note to users of Australian English: this type of thong is not one half of a pair of flipflops.) Dad was immediately suspicious and considered the etymology of this evidently hilarious noun. He soon realised how she was teasing him: πόρδος, *porthos*, means fart and κόφτης, *koftis*, is a cutter. So a "porthokoftis" is a fart-cutter, which I suppose describes pretty accurately a major function of a thong. Heaven knows what word Mimi will come up with next. Mum has warned Dad not to enjoy these "lessons" too much.

What else has been happening at the beach? As August draws to a close, the Greek families give way to Northern European silver surfers, so the atmosphere is quieter, less crowded and more genteel, but less entertaining. There are still some interesting conversations and amusing gossip to be had. Dad found himself chatting to a British bassist called Winston, who had just finished an exhausting six-week European tour with rock band Massive Attack. (Mykonos and Santorini, eat your heart out – Chrani Beach is the "in" place.) One snippet from him was that in Denmark they performed at the same festival as Nick Cave, who, would you believe it, turns out to be "a lovely bloke." Ha! Winston then had breakfast with Cave's major collaborator, Warren Ellis, who gave him the impression of being quite sane in spite of his crazy on-stage antics.

Then there are Dad's neighbours, the Greek vets, Costas and Matina, who are extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about many genres of Western and Greek modern music. Matina particularly likes anything by David Sylvian or Brian Eno. Costas tells interesting anecdotes about Greek musicians. Dad liked one about four famous and successful old-time Greeks who each had a son following him into the music business. The sons formed a band together but since not one of them was as talented as his father, they ended up working on a cruise ship...

As the second anniversary of our arrival in Chrani approaches, he has been reviewing what he really doesn't like about Greece:

1. You need a chainsaw to cut Greek bread on the third day;
2. Turning on your hazard lights is generally accepted as justification for abandoning your car anywhere you like, whether in crowded streets or on empty roads;
3. Too many beach umbrellas are set too low, at head height, with frequent resultant damage to pate and forehead;
4. If you stand still in the sea you are likely to be bitten by small fish, particularly the *σπαράκια*, *sparakia*, two-banded bream. They are Greece's equivalent of baby piranhas.

And that was all he could come up with, so his personal Reverse Brexit must be continuing to prosper.

The summer vacation passed uneventfully. James got a job at Oxford Crematorium mowing the lawns in the Garden of Remembrance. When the hearses were backed up in the main drive he chatted with the waiting undertakers.

"So, what firm of funeral directors are you with?"

“The Co-operative Society.”

“Really? I never knew the Co-op did funerals..”

“Oh, yes, our motto is : You Get Your Divvy When You Die.”

His first task every morning was to collect the previous day’s flowers from the colonnaded walkways outside the chapel and wheelbarrow them to a vast floral dumping ground, hidden from view behind a hedge fifty yards away. This mound of putrifying tributes had developed its own distinctive and overwhelming perfume of decay, a pungent smell too sickly-sweet to bear for longer than it took him to dump the still fresh flowers from yesterday’s obsequies. He viewed this rotting pyramid as a perfect metaphor for the inexorable corruption and death of physical beauty, treating it always with unhealthy respect. After a while he was sacked because the head gardener said his “lines weren’t straight enough,” although the real reason was that James disputed the man’s humdrum political opinions too successfully during the tea-breaks.

Together with Patrick they visited the Lake District but the weather was consistently poor, driving them in desperation to the bright lights of Blackpool, their first and last visit. They scoffed at the tawdry entertainments, played the fruit machines enthusiastically and enjoyed the fish-and-chip suppers immensely. At the Pleasure Beach Pauline and Patrick frightened themselves on the Big Dipper, a thrill which James was content to forgo. They visited the house in Lytham St Annes where Pauline had lived as a child when Gerry was stationed at RAF Lytham in the 1950s. Spending the dismal summer in England reinforced in them the imperative of the Mediterranean sun which stayed with them for ever afterwards. They returned south via the Wardrobe family home, where some pointed remarks were made about how they “should be a couple” now they were married and not a trio, with Patrick tagging along. They ignored the comments as a matter of principle. This was grist to their Sixties iconoclasm after all and the social values of their elders and betters were treated as part of ancient history.



The height of dudeness: Patrick and James in the Lake District, summer 1967

They moved into a first-floor flat between the Iffley and Cowley Roads on a quiet junction with a handy off-licence opposite. Its cheapest alcoholic offering was draught sherry from who knows where and

this became their staple. 22 Bullingdon Road would be their home for the next three years. An elderly lady whom they rarely saw lived downstairs and a succession of student tenants rented the garret above, the most lively and friendly being a Northern Irish girl called Karen. She had a colour television, a ready supply of dope and a rabid Prodigy for a father. For a time she also had a very clever boyfriend who gained a starred First in Greats. He became a junior Minister under Thatcher, held various Cabinet posts under Major and is now Provost of his old school, Eton. Karen probably doesn't feature much if at all in William Waldegrave's memoir. At least James and Pauline knew how to pronounce his surname correctly twenty years before the press and general public had to come to terms with it ("WARgrave").

The focus of James's second year was his Classical Moderations (Mods) exams in March 1968. He worked harder than most, stressing himself enough to be prescribed sleeping pills by the college doctor for the only time in his life. He was rewarded with an Upper Second, scoring a string of unexceptional Betas in the thirteen Language and Literature papers. He toyed with the idea of changing to Medieval & Modern Greek for Final Schools under Professor Constantinos Trypanis, who was acknowledged in his obituary in *The Independent* in 1993 as "by a long chalk the best medieval and modern Greek scholar of his generation." Here's the full obit:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-professor-constantine-trypanis-1479891.html>

The Pembroke Tutor in Ancient History, Dr Peter Cuff, dissuaded him. "You can learn Modern Greek anytime, but this is your God-given chance to do Greats. Don't waste it." He was right, of course. He was also losing three Pembroke Mods students to Law, PPE and Philosophy & Psychology, so he was desperate to maintain a viable Classics group for Finals. As it turned out, Trypanis left Oxford for Chicago that summer after 21 years at Exeter College, so sticking with Ancient History and Philosophy was the correct decision for James on two counts. He was already reading Cavafy, thanks to Lawrence Durrell, and other modern poets in the original anyway. As for the early 14th century *Chronicle of the Morea* and the 17th century Cretan romance *Erotokritos*, well, maybe in another lifetime?

Peter Cuff had a brusque no-nonsense manner and a pronounced strabismus of the eyes, causing each of them to look in a slightly different direction. James and Malcolm shared his weekly tutorials, perching at either ends of the sofa in his study. When he barked a question at them, one eye looked directly at James and the other at Malcolm, so of course they both answered at once. At first this led to great confusion, but they resolved the issue privately by agreeing to alternate all their answers irrespective of the cast of Cuff's gaze. This generally worked well, although he occasionally interrupted with some irritation, "I wasn't asking you, James," or vice versa.

He was a specialist in the economics of the imperial Roman period. Thanks to him both students gained a very thorough grounding in the political and economic history of the Roman Empire. He even made them research Marxist interpretations of the ancient world, now largely discredited. This included the work of Mikhail Rostovtzeff, a notable Russian Classicist of an earlier generation who used terms such as proletariat, bourgeoisie and capitalism freely in his work and shoehorned them into his authoritative tome *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (1926).

"So, what's Rostovtzeff's general theory about the collapse of the Roman Empire," demands this non-comedic version of Marty Feldman.

"He attributes it to an alliance between the rural proletariat and..." (Malcolm)

"No, no, Malcolm! I was asking James..."

“... the rural proletariat and the military apparatus in the third century AD.” (James)

“Exactly.” In fairness to Cuff, he really pumped the right stuff into them, with James getting Alpha in this paper in Finals. Having only just scraped into Pembroke, he had now in horse racing parlance “trained on,” winning the College Classics prize the following year.

One of Cuff’s talents was to pick outstanding tutors in other colleges when farming out his undergraduates for their specialist subjects. Such reciprocal arrangements were common practice at the time and probably still are. For Greek History James had chosen the less popular fourth century BC option, including Alexander The Great, and was sent to J.K.Davies, a young don who had just arrived at Oriel. Not for the first nor last time, Wardrobe fell on his feet. John Davies was a superlative tutor, a delightful man who went on to become Emeritus Professor of Ancient History and Classical Archaeology at the University of Liverpool.

Philosophy, a compulsory 50% of the curriculum until a major Classics revamp two years later, was at first a considerable struggle. James often found Donald Macnabb’s explanations confusing and difficult. During tutorials the elderly don would frequently absent himself from the room and return to his seat munching yet another chocolate biscuit. When he retired the next year his successor as Fellow and Lecturer in Philosophy was a Cambridge graduate only three years older than his pupils. Simon Blackburn immediately made the subject palatable, even enjoyable. He was a crystal-clear thinker and natural communicator who later became Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge. Word has it that Oxford missed a trick in not appointing him to its own Chair when they had the chance. And ... he always shared his chocolate biscuits with his students.

Meanwhile, Pauline was enjoying her most fulfilling job in Oxford so far. Thanks to her secretarial skills she became the Personal Assistant to John Tawney, Director of the Oxford University Colonial Records Project, whose office was in St Giles. Tawney was a former Deputy Provincial Commissioner in Tanganyika, whose aim, in his own words, was to discover, “in as short a time as possible the maximum number of privately owned papers relating to the period of colonial administration in all the territories administered by the British Colonial Office from 1925.” In this task he was greatly supported by the formidable Dame Margery Perham, an Honorary Fellow of St Hugh’s and a historian who specialised in African affairs.

These two were the Project’s inspiration and driving force. Pauline liked and admired them both tremendously and her work was always full of interest. She arranged meetings with potential donors and contributors, including the Tory politician, Iain Macleod. He had been Colonial Secretary under Macmillan in the early ‘60s. Contrary to his public reputation as short-tempered and impatient, she always found him charming and helpful. The Project ended in 1973, by which time Rhodes House Library had become the repository for what is today the largest and richest archive of colonial-era personal papers in Britain.

With Mods out of the way James started writing for *Cherwell*, the university newspaper, which had its offices in a cramped outbuilding in the grounds of the Oxford Union. He had asked to do the film reviews but that plum job was taken so he worked as a general news reporter. The editor was a small, wiry, highly energetic St Peter’s undergraduate, a born journalist called Martin Leeburn. He would go on to a successful career with Reuters and in PR. When bumptious “Officers of the Union” such as Giles Brandreth dropped by to sell their wares to Leeburn, he would give them short shrift. After they had departed, he would say, “I’ll decide if and when these self-publicists are newsworthy, not them.”

Martin suggested that if James came up with any interesting topics for features he would print them.

He straightaway liked the eager newcomer's idea for a story based on his attempting to gatecrash all five of the College Balls being held on the same Saturday night at the end of Trinity Term.

On the due day Pauline, James and Geoff, suitably attired in gown and DJs, set off at dusk for St Anne's, one of the women's colleges situated in north Oxford. The major attraction here was to be Julie Driscoll and Brian Auger & The Trinity, whose psychedelic rendition of "This Wheel's On Fire" was a resounding hit that summer.

They chose a secluded lane outside the college grounds, with only an eight-foot wall to surmount to gain illicit entry into a quiet, darkened area of the gardens. Unaware of his impending fate, Geoff was confidently hoisted up onto the top of the wall. As he straddled it, an audible growl followed by a loud woof emanated from within the perimeter. They hadn't reckoned on the presence of a security patrol accompanied by a large and aggressive Alsatian. The guard dog jumped up at Geoff before he could retrieve his dangling and DJ-trousered left leg from inside the wall. It dug its teeth into his calf and hung on tightly as every well-trained attack dog should do. A grim tug-of-war ensued between James trying to drag Geoff back by his right limb to the outside and the snarling animal straining to get the interloper down on the inside. As they both tussled intently in this elemental struggle for possession of Geoff's upper half, as well as having his leg savaged he felt the additional pain of his tenderest parts being further tenderised astride the rough-hewn top of the stone wall, as they were pulled this way and that.

In the end, after much Sturm und Drang from all three parties James won the battle and pulled a shocked and wounded Geoff down to the safety of the pavement. He was white as his frilly shirt, bleeding profusely from his leg bite and sporting a severely torn trouser leg. From over the wall they heard the dog bark either in satisfaction or disappointment as its handler called it to heel, job done.

As they retreated in disarray to Bullingdon Road to examine the full extent of Geoff's injuries, they heard in the distance the strains of music drifting towards them through the warm summer air. It was the opening number of Julie Driscoll's set: "This wheel's on fire, rolling down the road, best notify my next of kin, this wheel shall explode."

After a couple of stiff brandies Geoff was declared fit to return home. There would be no need to notify his next-of-kin, his dear parents in Portsmouth, certainly no more gatecrashing escapades that evening and of course James's article was never written.

"If your mem'ry serves you well..." This one's for you, Geoff.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkCBVZHrstE>

"This Wheel's On Fire" (Bob Dylan/Rick Danko, 1968),

performed by Julie Driscoll and Brian Auger & The Trinity

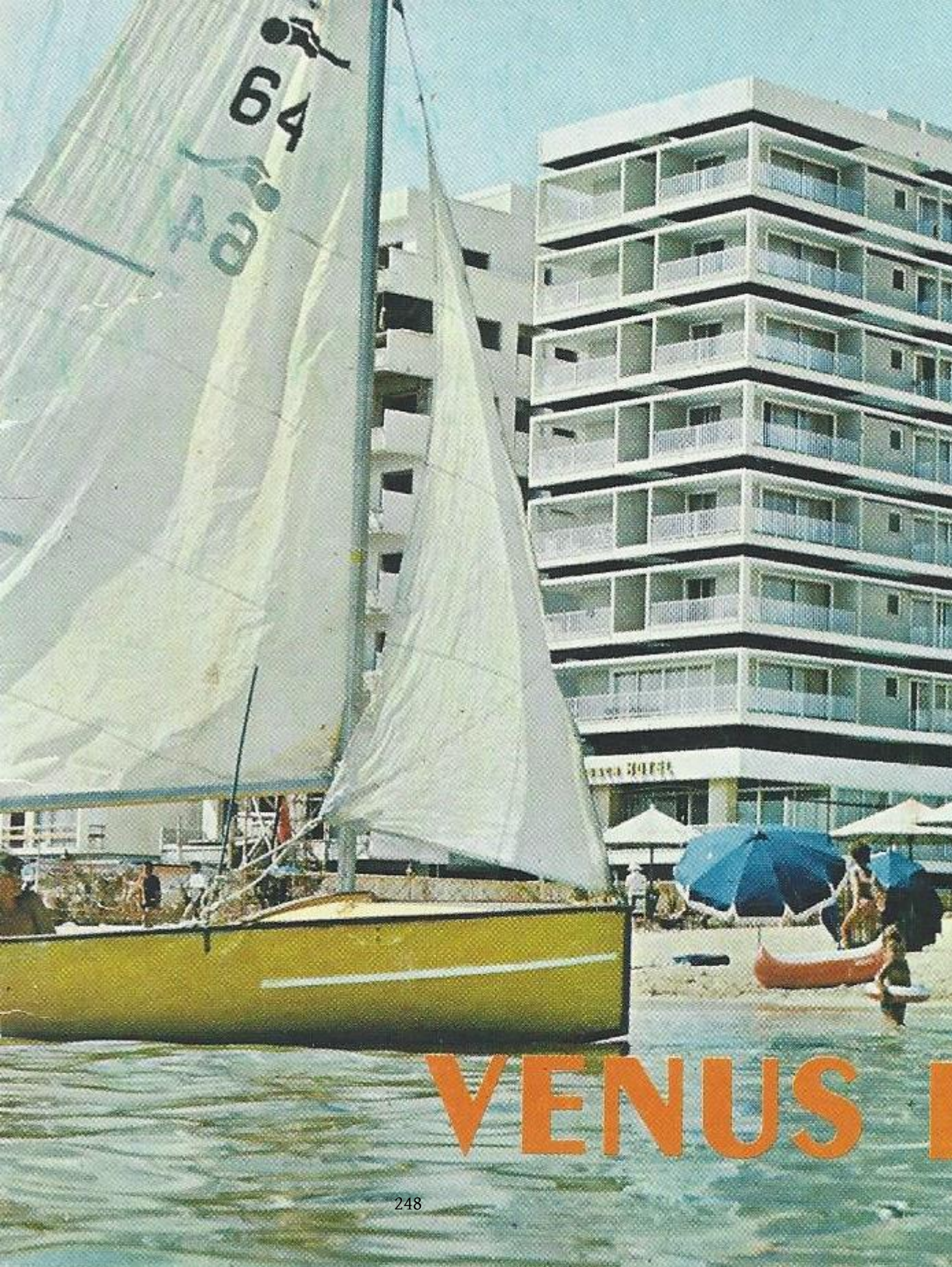
20/09/18

39. Exploded and Unexploded Bombs

From time to time Dad plays backgammon with John Woodward, his English neighbour. John is a retired hotelier who has been living in Chrani since 2000. He originally came to Messinia to manage the nearby Sunrise Hotel in Kalamaki for the Cypriot owner, Spyros Florentiades, who is a longtime friend of his. He liked the area, found an excellent piece of land and built a house. Back in 1973 Spyros asked the 27-year-old Londoner to manage his hotel in Famagusta. Little did John know what would happen to the Venus Beach Hotel and to the whole resort a year later in July and August 1974.

This is John's extraordinary story, as related to Dad last week, of his personal involvement in the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and its occupation of Famagusta.

His first year in charge was uneventful. Even after the July 15th pro-enosis ("union with Greece") Nikos Sampson coup, sponsored by the military junta in Athens, and the failed assassination attempt in Nicosia on the President, Archbishop Makarios, by the Grivas-inspired EOKA B gang, tourists still came and went to the popular beach hotels of Varosha. It was the height of the summer season after all. Black Mac, as the Brits called him, had escaped unscathed to Paphos and then to London. There were rumours of Turkish warships off the north coast, but "life carried on as normal."



The front cover from the brochure of the hotel managed by John.

Then five days later the first phase of the invasion, code-named Operation Attila, began with the establishment of a Turkish army beachhead at Kyrenia. Fierce fighting now erupted in the north of the island but it did not yet directly affect Famagusta. The tour operators aided by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) troops began evacuating foreigners not only from the Kyrenia area but also from Varosha. The hotels were full of Northern European holidaymakers, mainly Swedes, Danes, Germans and British. John moved his wife Brigitte, together with his four-year-old daughter Nicola and secretary Irene, south to the safety of the nearby British Sovereign Base Area of Dekhelia, but he felt that he himself had a duty to stay behind since there were still between fifty and sixty guests in the hotel.

The Turkish advance had been halted, the coup regime of Sampson had ended after eight days and a ceasefire was being negotiated. Talks were about to begin in Geneva between the three guarantor powers (Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom) with a view to finding a peaceful solution. Nevertheless, there was frequent overflying of the town by Turkish fighter jets, no lack of ominous smoke visible from distant fires and the worrying sound of sporadic gunfire.

The Venus Beach was now the only hotel with someone still in charge. Elsewhere management and staff had legged it and abandoned their remaining guests to fend for themselves. John visited a few of the neighbouring establishments, where he found that the unsupervised kitchens had been raided for food and general chaos reigned. At his own hotel on the other hand he imposed much-needed order. He turned off the electricity and converted the basement restaurant into as safe a communal area as he could. Its large sea-facing windows were blocked out with mattresses and he brought all remaining customers to sleep there in relative security. Army trucks were still evacuating people to Dhekelia but now stragglers from the other hotels were arriving at the Venus Beach because word had reached them of some degree of organisation there.

On 23rd July, three days after the initial hostile landings, the general ceasefire was due to commence at noon. The Turkish Air Force had other ideas. John was standing on the front steps of the hotel when he saw two Turkish F4 Phantoms screaming straight towards him at low altitude down the line of the main thoroughfare, Kennedy Avenue, patently with malign intent. He dived into the hotel, grabbed a mattress to shield his head and ran down the steps to the basement. The 500lb bomb struck the building when he was about halfway downstairs. After the noise of the explosion and the clouds of dust, he expected fire but instead he vividly remembers his surprise at water pouring down everywhere. It came from the tank on the roof, which along with the top third of the eight-storey hotel had been destroyed. There was no panic, no hysteria and miraculously no casualties. Having gathered his senses, John realised that every door and window had been smashed, the vacuum from the blast sucking the shattered glass inwards, but the precaution of the mattresses had saved everyone from injury.

He went out onto the terrace and looked up. He got the impression that the hotel was leaning over but this was a shock-induced illusion. Other hotels had collapsed completely from the bombing attacks but the lower half of the Venus Beach was structurally sound. It was obvious to John that the warplanes had targeted hotels. He would find out the next day how lucky he had been.

Covered in dust, he went to collect Spyros and they returned to the hotel. Everyone had by now dispersed and there was nothing useful to be achieved by staying. In a car packed with food, whisky and cigarettes and armed with a handy-sized kitchen knife he drove the few miles to Dekhelia to find his family.

“I had no way of getting in touch with my wife, nor she with me” explains John. “She had heard that the Venus Beach had been bombed and didn’t know whether I was alive or dead. She was desperately trying to find out if I had reached another part of the British camp, which was swarming with thousands of refugees.” So she had an announcement put out on the camp tannoy for a “Mr Woodward.” And who should turn up in response but the up-and-coming actor Edward Woodward, star of the long-running TV series *Callan* and recently “burnt to death” as the police sergeant victim in the 1973 cult horror movie *The Wicker Man*. When the Turks landed he had escaped from Kyrenia where he had a holiday home.



John today with a souvenir of the bomb shrapnel which nearly killed him.

John discovered that his family had flown out of RAF Akrotiri to the UK on a windowless transport plane the previous day. There was indeed a Mr Woodward on the same flight, but it was the one who would become the eponymous hero of *Breaker Morant*, not Brigitte's husband. So he settled down to some heavy whisky-drinking with a group of Swedish ex-guests. At some point in the night he announced that next day he would return to Famagusta. The ceasefire was holding, the town was unoccupied and he wanted to see what had happened to Spyros, who had stayed behind. "Madness!" cried the Swedes. "Anyway they won't let you off the base.."

He didn't sleep that night. All civilians who had arrived at Dhekelia had been given strict orders not to leave the base. Nevertheless, the following morning he showed his passport at the SBA exit and drove back to Varosha without any issues. He found Spyros outside the badly damaged Venus Beach Hotel.

"You were lucky to get out alive," says the owner.

"I know," replies John.

"You don't know! Follow me," retorts Spyros dramatically.

Up they trot to the sixth floor where sitting on a single bed in one of the guestrooms rested an unexploded five-hundred pounder. It had penetrated three floors of reinforced concrete to reach its final position. John is convinced that if this second beauty had gone off with the first it would have brought the whole building down. However many mattresses you like would probably not have saved the occupants.

John contacted the UN bomb disposal squad who agreed to come and remove it the next day. Spyros was not happy with their proviso. They had said, "We reserve the right to detonate the bomb on site if necessary." Spyros's response was, "Either you take the bomb out of the building first or we shall." At this point he reasonably judged that he could reconstruct the hotel if there was no further damage. So he organised a pulley system to move the bomb outside himself if the UN proved difficult. As it turned out, once the team of army engineers had assessed the situation, they disarmed the remaining undamaged fuse and used Spyros's ropes and pulleys to manoeuvre the still dangerous beast to the ground, where they loaded it onto a truck and departed.

John had spent the night in his apartment and he now decided to stay on for as long as circumstances would allow. Why? He gives three reasons. The Geneva talks had started and along with most others he wasn't expecting a second push by the Turks. Secondly, he felt a sense of loyalty towards his Greek Cypriot boss stuck glumly in the midst of the wreckage of his most prized asset. Finally, he admits, he wasn't prepared to let go of the lifestyle he loved and give it up unless he really had to. "I wasn't afraid, since I felt that the local situation was no longer dangerous," he concludes.

He stayed for about a week, having made contact with Brigitte via telegram, whilst the reality gradually dawned on him that there was nothing left for him to do in Famagusta. He also learnt that his mother's cancer was now terminal. So he headed for Limassol to meet up with the previous manager of the Venus Beach, Michael Frangos, who was awaiting a ferry to Athens. When John arrived, Michael had already left.



John in 1974 (second from right) contemplates the unexploded bomb alongside the UN Bomb Disposal Officer and workers from the hotel.

In the introduction to Victoria Hislop's novel *The Sunrise*, which is based on these events, she gives an acknowledgement to Michael's father Theodoros, who for many years owned and ran Biotys, a successful Greek restaurant in the West End. John has often wondered if some elements of his own story, garnered by the novelist from either father or son, found their way into her book.

He quickly returned to the UK on an Akrotiri-Brize Norton flight. He found his mother fading fast in Barnet hospital. She was sent home to die and passed away soon afterwards, in the first week of August. After the funeral, with his wife and daughter now living with his father and supporting him in his loss, he decided to go back to Cyprus and if possible to rescue his possessions from his Famagusta apartment. Irene also wanted to return to see the boyfriend she had left behind.

With Nicosia airport now closed, there were no flights to Cyprus. The RAF only did one-way “compassionate” flights out of their Akrotiri base, not in. Flying to Athens was difficult as the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean was worsening. They went on a MALÉV Hungarian Airlines Tupolev Tu-124 (“It had deckchairs for seats”), with a three-day delay in Budapest. Then a ferry to Limassol. By now the Geneva peace talks were going nowhere and on 14th August two divisions of the Turkish army advanced beyond their previously observed UN ceasefire lines in what became known as the second phase of Operation Attila. By the time they reached Limassol and met up with Spyros, the Turks had taken Famagusta and moved as far south as the edge of the Dhekelia base, where they halted. They had no reason nor desire to antagonise the British and they did not intend to threaten what is technically a British Overseas Territory. They had captured 37% of the island and the new ceasefire line became the United Nations Buffer Zone, known ever since then as the Green Line.

This is the point at which John’s story livens up. So far he has been the victim of unfortunate circumstances. Now he decides to turn the tables a little on Fate and defy the occupying Turks. He wants to collect his things from his apartment, so he decides to try and get back into Famagusta via the Sovereign Base Area. “You’re crazy, you’ll never get past the British, let alone the Turkish checkpoint,” says Spyros.

But John wants to see if it can be done and he has a simple plan, based on the serendipity of owning a *white* car. Every day a UNIFCYP convoy left the safety of the Sovereign Base Area to visit various positions the peace-keeping force still maintained to the north. It would pass through the town. All the UN vehicles were painted white, with some sky-blue insignia. So, armed with Her Britannic Majesty’s passport and no little bravado, he waits next morning at the SBA exit to the Famagusta road with Irene as his passenger, since she also wants to retrieve her possessions. The convoy trundles through the British checkpoint and he surreptitiously attaches his little Fiat 124 to its tail, tacked on behind the last truck. Unchallenged, he then passes through the Turkish barrier, again without incident. He is now in enemy-occupied territory. When they reach the Varosha outskirts he peels off and soon reaches his flat. He loads up, then again at Irene’s apartment, and they drive back and out into the SBA without being stopped. Piece of cake.

People are astounded. The word goes fast round Larnaca and soon both English and Greek Cypriot friends are asking him, “If you go in again, will you do this errand for me, collect such-and-such from here or there?” Spyros wants the ledgers from the safe of his other hotel, the Sandy Beach, his relatives want stuff from their hotel and apartments in the commercial area, a lawyer wants his gun and passport from his office, a doctor wants a canteen of silver cutlery, some fur coats and a stamp collection, a night-club owner even wants his Triumph Stag driven out.

So in he goes using the same “tail-end Charlie” ploy, again with Irene, this time deeper into the town – a more dangerous move, since they are more likely to be noticed. First they collect Dr Economides’s silver and fur, then the lawyer’s passport, though they find no gun. The Stag belonging to the Aristocats guy has had its electrics ripped out and is undriveable. Who knows, it might still be sitting there today, mouldering into rust in the shadows of the decaying tower blocks.

He drives further on, nervously approaching his last stop, the Sandy Beach Hotel. He sees not a single person. Dogs and chickens roam the streets. He enters the hotel office, his hand is shaking so much he can’t get the key in the safe. It finally opens and they start clearing out the contents. At this point a fully-armed Turkish soldier enters the room, asks what they are doing and ... kindly helps them load up the car with the ledgers before disappearing. “The back seat is full,” recalls John, “the boot won’t close, never mind, it’s time to get out!”

Down Kennedy Avenue, past the Golden Sands, then the road home opens out into an area full of orange groves. 150 metres ahead a tank emerges from the trees, turns to face John's car and blocks the road, which is too narrow for a quick U-turn anyway. He stops, gets out and walks slowly towards the tank, not exactly flourishing his passport but trying to look as innocent and as English as possible. From its top hatch the tank commander emerges and asks him, "What are you doing here?" We're just going to the British base..." "You shouldn't be here – drive on and out!" And he did.

You might think this incident would put the frighteners on him and he would now behave himself. Not at all. He was in great demand, especially with the Greeks, who would probably be shot on sight if they attempted similar incursions. "I still wasn't fearful for my safety and I felt an obligation to help people who had lost so much. And ... it was exciting," he confessed.

So he made three more "invasions," always using the UN convoy to get across the Green Line on the outward journey. Returning in an unaccompanied vehicle he was always allowed through the checkpoints since he was a UK citizen entering British territory.

On one occasion he went across with another Brit in his white Vauxhall. They parked outside the man's house and realised that it had been broken into. Inside they came across a Turkish infantryman, fully tooled up with sub-machine gun and grenades. Caught in the act of looting, he ran off. He wasn't supposed to be there either.

The next trip was the height of folly. Spyros asked him to drive into Famagusta harbour, a strategic position, and rescue his yacht. John had never sailed nor motored a boat in his life, but "Spyros gave me full instructions and the key to the engine." It was almost certainly providential for him that the entrance to the walled port was bristling with soldiers. He had a sensible reason to withdraw. As it was, he had serious misgivings about whether this was a one-man job, especially as he was that one man. "I'd have had to have been James Bond to get the boat out, so I gave up and turned back."

On his final visit there, again accompanied by the intrepid Irene, his mission was to collect diamonds from the factory safe of one of Spyros's business partners. The problem they faced was that the turn-off from the main road to the plastics factory was within sight of a Turkish guard post. They ran the risk of being seen dropping off the back of the UN convoy, which was still being closely observed after it had passed the checkpoint a few hundred metres back. When he was round the corner he turned off onto another side road. Immediately two soldiers stepped out in front of the Fiat. Although they spoke no English it was clear that John and Irene were under arrest. The servicemen sat in the back and directed him to an army camp outside the town.

They told their interrogators that they had come to get Irene's car, a plausible and pre-rehearsed story that would check out. The authorities kept them waiting a long time until they sent them under armed guard to the garage where the vehicle was supposed to be. Its existence at the address given was duly verified. Eventually, somewhat chastened and sans diamonds the daring duo were escorted to the SBA border and told never to come back.

And that should have been the finish of it. Famagusta was now too risky for him if he were caught a second time, so what did he do? He had a go at getting into Kyrenia instead.

He managed to cross the Green Line in Nicosia by blithely waving his passport at all and sundry and reached the outskirts of this charming town on the northern coast which had been taken at the start of the invasion. But there were too many checkpoints as he got closer. Finally he was stopped and taken to a patrol point. He was sent back after signing a document, no doubt used for propaganda purposes, which declared that he had been "fairly treated" by the Turkish army.

Thus his adventures on the island came to an end. He put his trusty little Fiat onto an Athens ferry, drove through Yugoslavia in torrential rain with no windscreen wipers, had “a small accident,” and finally reached the land of his birth if not of his heart.

And now, after more than forty years, two elderly English gentlemen with long memories sit in a kafeneion in southern Greece, exchanging tales and playing tavli at a pace so slow that the locals regard it as intolerable gamesmanship. The pair care not. They are comforted by the heat of the sun by day and the stridulation of cicadas at night.

“The coup by the Greek junta is an invasion, from the consequences of which all the people of Cyprus will suffer, both Greeks and Turks.”

*Archbishop Makarios III, President of Cyprus 1960-1977, from his speech delivered to
The UN Security Council (19 July 1974)*

“Even if the Turkish Cypriot community did not exist, Turkey would not have left Cyprus to Greece.”

Rauf Denktaş, Vice President of Cyprus 1973-1974, Milliyet (23 July 1985)

24/10/18

40. Cyclone Zorbas

The summer ended abruptly with a weekend of 80kph winds, heavy rain and a very angry sea. Greek media called it Cyclone Zorbas. The TV weather girls even played Zorba's Dance and showed a clip of sirtaki dancing to accompany the music – totally inappropriate, given the mayhem this tempest caused as it passed over the southern Peloponnese. The Times preferred to call it a “medicane,” kindly educating us with the explanation that it combined the features of a hurricane with a more conventional Mediterranean storm. True hurricanes are unable to form over the Med because the seas are too shallow to fuel the huge energy needs of a proper tropical cyclone. Also, its large islands and peninsulas reduce the supply of the warm moist air that tropical storms need to develop.

Cyclone Zorbas curtailed Dad's swimming activities

Nevertheless Zorbas was a good name for it, reflecting the storm-tossed opening scene of Kazantzakis' eponymous novel and the subsequent 1964 film adaptation by Michael Cacoyannis. The Narrator (Alan Bates in the movie) has to sit out a massive rainstorm in a kafeneion in Piraeus, waiting to catch his delayed ferry to Crete. He feels he is being watched; he turns around and sees a man of around sixty peering at him through the glass door. The man enters and immediately approaches him. He is Alexis Zorbas (Anthony Quinn) and he will change the life of The Narrator for ever... Enjoy watching the beginning here:

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0057831/videoplayer/vi2145583385?ref_=tt_pv_vi_aiv_1

Anyway, our storm blew up as much as a third of the nearly-ripe olive fruit off the trees, much to the chagrin of local farmers, and put a stop to Dad's swimming for five days, though he's back splashing about again now. He was more annoyed that we lost electricity supply for six hours and therefore Wi-Fi during the Saturday fourballs of the Ryder Cup. He had to drive to Petalidi to find a café where he could fire up his laptop and continue watching his most-beloved golf tournament. We just hunkered down and stayed inside the house for a couple of days. Which was not unlike the ginger tom who lives at the supermarket in Nea Koroni where Dad buys our Felix pouches. He took this photo of the big lad having an upside down snooze in the handicraft section.



“My name’s Lord Ginge. I belong to this shop but I’m not for sale. Actually, I own this establishment.”

What else has been going on? Stephanos, who lives in John’s guest apartment and does jobs for him in return, went off to Pylos in May for six months with his landlord’s blessing to earn more lettuce in the tourist industry. (There are many Greek slang words for “money,” including μαρούλι, *marouli*, lettuce. Dad’s other favourites are μαϊντανός, *maïdanos*, parsley, and φραγκάκια, *frankakia*, little francs.) Fluent in four languages, he seemed to be happy in his employment as a receptionist at a family-run hotel there. But to everyone’s surprise he returned suddenly to Chrani at the height of the season after “an unfortunate misunderstanding.”

In August with the temperature in the high 30°Cs a Greek holidaymaker rings up to make a booking. Stephanos explains that there are no rooms available. The enquirer then asks “So what shall I do?” possibly rhetorically, perhaps expecting the helpful receptionist to recommend another hotel. At this juncture you need to know that Stephanos has some bizarre and strongly-held views about how humans should always be striving to commune directly with Nature, the environment and the universe in general. So *he isn’t joking at all* when he replies, “Why don’t you and your family try sleeping under the stars?” Of course the man thinks he’s taking the piss and complains to the owner. Words are exchanged, Stephanos resigns as a matter of principle and, lo and behold, he’s back in Chrani.

Meanwhile I’ve been to the vet in Kalamata to have my six-monthly blood tests. All OK, except the glucose level again, but the additional fructosamine test proved it wasn’t diabetes, much to everyone’s relief. It gives a three-week-average blood sugar level, a bit like Dad’s HBA1c readings, and it was well within the normal range. So why the high glucose result? “Stress,” says Dionisis. Well, I could have told them I was stressed. I spent the hour-long journey shouting at Dad and since he refused to take any notice I was thoroughly sick in my cage just before the airport roundabout. He had to stop and clear it up before we got to Dionisis’s surgery. So, yes, Dad’s glucose level would have been well up too.

He was reminded of his unfamiliar status as a Venerable Old Git when he was invited to an annual dinner organised by the village σύλλογος, *syllogos*, association, to celebrate “The International Day of Older Persons” at a local restaurant. This “Day” (October 1st) is a United Nations wheeze in honour of the elderly that has apparently been going on since 1991. Still, at eight euros per head for a three-course meal and free gifts afterwards, he wasn’t knocking it. He found himself sitting next to Fotis, the former Chief of Police for the whole of Messinia, and his wife Georgia, also an ex-copper. They were amusing and delightful company. At one point Dad found himself decrying the almost total absence of donkeys in rural Greece nowadays. All the farmers have trucks instead. Fotis fixed his gaze on Dad and deadpan as the best stand-up comedian said, “James, there are still a great many donkeys all over this country. It’s just that they only have two legs..”

As soon as the academic year ended in June 1968 Pauline and James set out to hitchhike to Cyprus. The Brown family would be returning to the UK in September when Gerry’s tour of duty at RAF Episkopi finished, so this was their last chance for a free summer holiday on their favourite island.

They were totally ill-equipped – tentless, no sleeping bags, not even a rucksack between them. Armed only with raincoats and one small suitcase as if they were merely going away for the weekend, they got as far as Bavaria after the usual mishaps and detours which all hitchhikers expect and some even relish as adventures. Though not Pauline, who always preferred her creature comforts. Unfortunately the standard mode of student travel in the ‘60s was forced upon them out of financial necessity. Their lifts included a chuckling high-speed drunk who dropped them in the middle of nowhere, miles south

of the Brussels-Aachen highway. They were rescued and put back en route by a cool dude in a red Mustang – Belgian this time, not Persian. After some miserable nights sleeping under bridges and in bus shelters, they gave up thumbing and caught a train from Munich to Athens.

They stayed for a couple of nights on the roof (the cheapest option, natch) of a seedy hotel near Omonia Square where Geoff had slept under the stars the previous summer. They made the first of many subsequent visits to the Acropolis. In those days the Parthenon wasn't roped off and you could clamber over its cella and stereobate without being whistled at by the tourist police.

Then they boarded an overnight ferry - does "deck-class" still exist in these softer times? - from Piraeus to Limassol, encountering a wild Zorbas-like Aegean storm which lasted several hours. The deck was indeed the place to be, since the confined space below was airless and soon reeking of contagious vomit. James reckoned that he was one of very few on board who kept the contents of their stomach to themselves that night. Even the crew looked queasy. Afterwards he was typically boring and boastful of his "sea legs, inherited from my mother's maritime side of the family."

When the ship finally docked there was a near riot by the local and international passengers frustrated at the lengthy and unexplained delay in disembarkation, which Gerry witnessed with amusement from the quayside. "The British wouldn't behave like that," he wryly observed. "So how was your trip?" he enquired with a knowing grin. James managed to restrain Pauline from greeting her adorable dad with strangulation. Two months of sun and sea followed, a mini-reprise of their idyllic "Summer of '66."

They killed a sheep for James's 21st birthday dinner in the Turkish village of Episkopi. It took a lot of getting through. The delicious grilled parts of every piece of the animal just kept on coming. Just when you thought you'd eaten it all, viz. the liver, the kidneys, the sheftalia (kebab sausages), the chops, the steaks, still more meat arrived. The host was a former mayor and prominent member of the community who always ensured that he kept Gerry sweet. He hired out coaches to the RAF bases, where the Physical Fitness Officer was responsible for organising transport for all their away sports matches. You might call it a meaty contract (sorry, folks), which the Turkish businessman understandably did not want to lose.

As guest of honour, James found himself sitting next to the aforesaid Mr Combos during the meal. He asked him what were the main issues that he had had to deal with as mayor. Combos explained that shootings were frequent. Every family had guns, as a protection against the time when the Greeks would attack, as they had in the past and as they surely would again in the future (and indeed they did, in 1974). In the meantime, the villagers were prone to use their weaponry against each other in feuds, either long-standing or fresh. He added, "I also spent too much time protecting the female donkeys from interference from the young men..."

Seated on his other side was an army officer who was on a short solo visit from the UK and whom Gerry had invited along for the evening. He seemed to know a great deal about aeroplanes and meteorology. The conversation turned to parachuting. James asked him, "Have you done much?" He replied politely, "Well, a bit." An embarrassingly naff and naïve question in the circumstances, James. This guy turned out to be Officer Commanding the Red Devils, the Parachute Regiment's renowned display team.

This was the period when James attempted to change his first name to Jake, in the belief that such a hip praenomen would enhance his "groovy" image. It didn't catch on. His family scoffed at this foolish pretension and refused to cooperate. Friends and acquaintances were confused, whilst strangers who had been introduced to "Jake" were at a loss when his wife persisted in calling him "James." The appellative experiment was abandoned and he grew a Zapata moustache instead.

The trip home, for which they had now acquired sleeping bags, took them on a ferry via Rhodes, Athens and the Corinth Canal to Brindisi. Their hitching was much more successful in Italy, no doubt aided by a new tactic: Pauline doing the thumbing and James hiding behind a bush until the driver had stopped. A truck laden with grapes took them from Bari to Modena, a splendid distance of 700 kilometres up the entire leg of Italy. This involved an overnight break in a lorry park, where they had to exit the cab at speed when the driver started fondling Pauline. He was surprised, to say the least, when undaunted they jumped aboard again the next morning for the rest of the ride north. His meagre reward when he dropped them off was a packet of fags from RAF Episkopi's Dodge City NAAFI.

The journey ended in style with a lift from Ostend to Piccadilly Circus in a Rolls Royce with CD plates driven by the wife of the Ambassador of Belgium to the Court of St James's. She was returning to London alone after visiting her family. Her car had never before been stopped and searched by Customs at Dover, she said, and she couldn't understand why. Her dishevelled and dodgy-looking passengers declined to explain the obvious reason. They just had enough coins left to get them by tube from the West End to Pauline's grandmother's flat in Woodford Green.

Back in Oxford James's parents come for their first visit to Bullingdon Road. Since they are late arriving, James goes outside and stands in the street looking out for them. Soon the familiar Triumph 2000 is sighted heading towards him but travelling untypically fast. As the car approaches, he sees Thomas at the wheel with a determined look on his face and Brenda giggling hysterically in the passenger seat. He is about to jump out of the way when the vehicle comes to a sudden halt. "What's so funny?" he asks his mother who is still convulsed with mirth. Through her tears of laughter she explains, "When we were driving through the centre of Oxford just now, your father was annoyed to see "so many long-haired layabouts everywhere you look in this town." He said he'd like to run them all over. Then he turned into your road, saw you and exclaimed, "There's another of those hairy yobbos. I'll get this one." and accelerated. I replied, "I wouldn't do that, Tommy. He's your son." "



Brenda and her “hairy yobbo” son

They enjoyed coming to Oxford to see their son and daughter-in-law and always took them out for a good meal at a decent restaurant. Although Restaurant Elizabeth was regarded by many as the best in the city, they all felt that it was living on its past reputation and much preferred La Sorbonne, a new establishment situated down a narrow alley off The High. The French cuisine was outstanding, the crème brûlée to die for. When they could afford it the place was James’ and Pauline’s first choice for rare special occasions. One of the young chefs employed by the patron was a friendly and immensely charismatic “long-haired” enthusiast of food. They never knew his name. It was Raymond Blanc.

Patrick came over to visit too. He had had an interesting summer travelling through Eastern Europe with some Cambridge mates in a VW Campervan. They just got out of Czechoslovakia a few days before Soviet tanks put paid to the Prague Spring. One weekend he turned up clutching a recently-purchased record. “You’ve got to hear this..” he said. It was the first album of an unknown Canadian folk singer-songwriter. They played and replayed *Songs Of Leonard Cohen* late into the night until the gramophone needle was almost blunt. They loved the melodies, the haunted voice and the sparse arrangements, but they struggled to understand what the hell the lyrics meant. “And Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water and he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower.” Whaaat? And thus did Leonard Cohen (peace be upon him) enter their souls, never to leave.

The two sets of parents-in-law finally met when Maud and Gerry came to stay at Willow Tree Road for Christmas 1968. All went smoothly. Everyone spent most of their waking hours watching the BBC live coverage of Apollo 8, holding their breath when Borman, Lovell and Anders went out of radio communication on the far side of the moon. This was the the first manned spacecraft to leave low Earth orbit, reach our moon, orbit it and return safely to Earth. Thanks to Anders’ iconic photograph, *Earthrise*, the human race saw its own planet from outer space for the first time and was amazed to discover that it appeared as a blue and white-clouded object.

Just before the following Easter James, Pauline and Patrick travelled up to Liverpool to stay with Bill Wakely at his father’s mansion and to visit Aintree for the 1969 Grand National. The weather was rainy and dismal, the race not very memorable - the winner was Highland Wedding - but they still had a great weekend. Bill introduced them to cannabis. It made Pauline sick, James silly and Patrick philosophical. They raided Mr Wakely Senior’s drinks cabinet and had a grand old time sampling his Scotch. When he found out, they were long gone. According to Bill, the irascible old tyrant seemed to hold James in particular responsible for the depletion of his single malts, which was not an entirely unfair judgement.

They bought a minivan in which Pauline learnt to drive. The driver’s side window fell out if you slammed the door too hard. You had to double-declutch to change down, especially from 3rd to 2nd gear. Nevertheless she passed her driving test with ease, even though at one point the examiner had to get out of the vehicle to reattach one of the windscreen wipers. When he gave her the pass certificate, he said that he was amazed at her skill in changing gear “as if she were a lorry driver.” She replied that out of necessity she knew no other way of doing it.



Pauline wouldn't have been allowed to take her driving test in this vehicle under today's regulations.

So came to an end the third of James's four-year course. With no university exams it was the least stressful and most enjoyable year of all. He continued with his Cherwell reporting and worked with Down syndrome children under the auspices of the OU branch of a national charity called Toc H. His friends on three-year courses were revising for Finals whilst he could make the most of yet another Oxford summer, idealised in memory. Pauline was now working for an architect who was the diocesan surveyor for Oxfordshire. She had a new best friend called Maggie who lived in Canal Street in Jericho and who possessed a rare asset: a 625-line UHF television that could actually receive a third channel, the exotic and highbrow BBC2.

*And Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water
And he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower
And when he knew for certain only drowning men could see him
He said all men will be sailors then until the sea shall free them
But he himself was broken, long before the sky would open
Forsaken, almost human, he sank beneath your wisdom like a stone.*

2nd verse of "Suzanne," the 1st song of Leonard Cohen's 1st album,

"Songs Of Leonard Cohen" (December 1967)

24/11/18

41. The End of Academia

It's time for an update on the house-building, which is progressing well in continued fine weather. The basement and ground floor skeleton is complete, with the first floor structure due to be finished well before Christmas, according to Manos. The photograph below shows the work so far. Unlike in the UK all the floors/ceilings of modern Greek houses are constructed throughout with reinforced steel concrete (expensive!) in addition to the usual stress-bearing columns and joists.

This is a strict legal requirement, one of many earthquake protection regulations in a country which is one of the world's most seismically active, registering hundreds of events every year. The good news is that most of the quakes that strike Greece have their epicentres under the sea. The ancient Greeks acknowledged this by attributing earthquakes to the God of the Sea, Poseidon.



And the view across the Messinian Gulf to the Mani is still there...

Greece straddles the complex boundary zone in the eastern Mediterranean between two major tectonic plates, the African and the Eurasian, with southern Greece sitting above the much smaller Aegean Sea Plate which is wedged between them. Its western edge runs down the Ionian Sea, not far from the Peloponnesian coastline.

Three weeks ago just after midnight a 6.8 Richter Scale earthquake occurred west of the Peloponnese, about 30km south of the island of Zakynthos, where it caused some damage. The tremor was felt in Athens and as far away as Albania, Italy, Libya and Malta. Our next-door neighbour reported feeling her bed shaking for up to thirty seconds. Yet we three and Dad slept through it all, undisturbed and righteous. This encouraged him to tell us about the first time he ever felt a quake.

In 1995 he was staying in Athens on quite a high floor of the Hotel Intercontinental in Syngrou. During the night he was awoken by a trembling sensation. In his seismic naivety he put it down to the couple in the adjoining room enjoying an excessively vigorous bout of nookie, turned over and went back to sleep. Next morning at breakfast the waiter asked him if he had felt the μεγάλο σεισμό, *megalo seismo*, big earthquake. He was shocked to discover that the tremor had had an epicentre nearly 100 miles away in Aigio, a seaside town on the north coast of the Peloponnese. It had registered 6.5 and yet caused huge devastation. Twenty-six people were buried and killed under the debris of two multi-storey buildings, an apartment block and a hotel. Back in his room Dad watched the live coverage of the aftermath on TV and knew one thing for certain: he would recognise the next earthquake he felt for what it really was, with no misinterpretation. And so he did, on numerous subsequent occasions.

Mum and Dad had a delightful long weekend in Santorini, staying as guests of Lefteris Zorzos, a former student, who runs the smart family hotel in Pyrgos village. It has definitely taken over from Mykonos as the premier Greek island for international visitors, especially for tourists from the Far East. For mid-October it was surprisingly busy, as if it were still the high season.

The tug-of-war there between sustainability and tourism development has reached peak intensity. New constructions now account for up to 90% of all buildings. From 2004 to 2015, the number of hotel beds grew by 50%, whilst up to five cruise ships a day can disgorge 20,000 sightseers onto the island. Meanwhile, in the past eight years the local population has shot up from 15,000 to 25,000. The mayor, Nikos Zorzos (no relation to Lefteris), has warned about the dangers of over-development and asked for limits to be set on construction before the island loses its unique charm. The locals are cashing in whilst the sun shines and sets on their unique caldera. They may be only interested in serving foreign tastes these days but they must beware of killing the goose that lays the eggs of gold. For Dad it was indicative of a depressing trend that for the first time ever in Greece he sat in a café to be told that *they did not serve Greek coffee!*

What else has been going on? Dad was minding his own business the other day, sunbathing on Chrani beach after his daily swim when a fully-kitted-out Triton strode forth from the sea clutching an enormous octopus. Hence the photo below. The traditional smacking to death on the rocks and cleaning ritual followed, no different from the practice of ancient fishermen three thousand years ago. Dad did not photograph this part of the routine out of delicacy for the more squeamish reader.

But this picture has a very sad connotation for all of us now as part of a final communication. Four days after it was taken, on the morning of the birthday of our friend, Mary Lou White, Dad attached it to our e-mailed greetings. She replied within the hour, expressing her amusement at the big squid pic. Tragically that afternoon she unexpectedly collapsed and died in her Birkdale home. Mum and Dad were in complete shock when they heard. She was a supremely loyal and caring friend to them, as well as to our first Mum. She was the greatest lover of cats, including us three, that you'll ever come across. We knew her very well as kittens and for all the years before we came to Greece. When she visited Chrani last year we recognised her immediately. Even Minnie the scaredy-cat who is extremely wary of humans jumped onto her lap within thirty seconds of her arrival and stayed there for ages in deep purring mode. We shall miss you, Mary Lou. If there is indeed a cat heaven, we shall meet you again, surrounded by a blessed eternity of all your feline friends.

Finally, as a footnote to my last blog, Dad has found out that the tom cat pictured at his ease on a shelf of decorated pottery is actually called Pipis. (Incidentally, ginger cats are called "orange" cats here.) His latest kittens are currently living happily with their mother inside the supermarket under a pallet next to the wines and spirits section. Only in Greece...?



Big octopus caught off Chrani beach

After, or sometimes in addition to, the Zapata moustache came many variant appendages of facial hair, including the Trumpet Player's wisp, the Ho Chi Minh goatee, the Mungo Jerry mutton chops and the untamed Full Set. Only the Nordic or Solzhenitsyn beard was not attempted since this would involve a clean upper lip and in spite of James's love for the films of Ingmar Bergman he was much too fond of his luxuriant and fashionable moustachio.

In the 1969 Long Vacation he got a labouring job on a construction site at the Clarendon Press in Walton Street. The OUP was refurbishing and extending its premises there. As always he enjoyed the banter and down-to-earth humour of his fellow-workers. The young bucks had discovered that the second-floor apartment opposite, with its large picture windows facing the street, was occupied by a young woman who slept naked and opened her curtains at the same time every morning. The lads were therefore in the habit of assembling on the upper scaffolding at the due moment for a quick and not at all surreptitious gander. If she occasionally rose early and caught them out of position, the cry "Curtains" went round and they all sped up the ladders "like ferrets up a drainpipe," as Alf, an elderly and somewhat world-weary colleague, wryly observed. Meanwhile, James was learning how to operate a pneumatic drill and how to calculate the height of distant objects using trigonometry, both skills long forgotten.

Early one July morning just before 4.00am he got up to watch on live television the first steps of Neil Armstrong on the moon. He was amazed to find, when he arrived at work, that not one of his building mates had the slightest interest in Apollo 11 or watching an event which he reckoned was truly historic, exciting and momentous. Their attention on the other hand was fully focused on the curtains opposite.

All the OUP staff were on holiday during the building works. The room with the printing presses lay silent and abandoned. One day, although told it was off-limits, James sneaked in through an unlocked door and immediately noticed that the end of a run of documents had been left on some of the presses. On further scrutiny he discovered that they were the Oxford University Entrance Scholarship question papers for the following November. They were face-up and encompassed a variety of subjects. He considered and rejected a number of criminal and potentially lucrative options, reluctantly leaving the print room intact. He shook his head in disbelief at the appalling ease of his security breach. He checked again a week later and the exam papers remained there on open display.

They stayed in Paris for a week in a pension near La Madeleine. They did all the touristy things, including the Louvre, Notre Dame, the Left Bank, Montmartre and the Eiffel Tower. Pauline devoured *The Magus* by John Fowles, James ate too much Steak Tartare. They saw *Bullitt* in a cinema which still employed cigarette girls. Back in Oxford it was nose down to the academic grindstone for the final year. Sunday evenings were enlivened by a new BBC TV comedy programme which rapidly became cult viewing amongst the undergraduate community. James particularly enjoyed the in-jokes about philosophy and he later became very fond of Spiny Norman. The show was of course Monty Python's Flying Circus.

Pauline was now working as the secretary of a genuinely eccentric academic and loving it. Martin Dent was a 44-year-old lecturer in Politics at Keele University who was taking sabbatical leave in Oxford in order to write a book, in all likelihood on Nigeria, where he had been an Administrative Officer in the Colonial Service. He had been dismissed for conduct that was "bad for the British Empire." His 2014 Telegraph obituary is a delight to read. A link to it is provided at the end of this chapter. It highlights his immense qualities as a human being, not least in his later efforts to promote cancellation of Third World debt, but also his complete lack of personal organisation.

Pauline had arrived at his rented house to find utter chaos. His hand-written papers were all over the dining room floor, some chewed to bits by his badly-behaved dog. His trousers were held up by his tie and in general he had no grip at all on normal day-to-day living. On the other hand he was very bright indeed, charming, witty and generous. So she enjoyed producing ordered typescripts for him and generally organising his life.

On one occasion he took Pauline and James out to dinner and told them a story which illustrated his zany character. One day he found himself out of curiosity visiting a cattle auction somewhere off the M6. Before he could stop himself, he started bidding for a calf to see what would happen. He ended up buying it. At the end of the auction the farmers drove off in their trucks with their live purchases. Martin asked the auctioneers if they would deliver his animal to Keele. They explained that it was his responsibility to transport the cow away and soon, please. They then packed up and left him stranded, holding the rope attached to the young bovine. His car was a VW Beetle, so he opened the back windows and with some difficulty attempted to usher the mooing beast onto the back seat. With the calf's head sticking out of one window and its tail out of the other, he finally managed to squeeze it in. He then blithely sped up the motorway back to his university, probably unaware of the amusement this bizarre sight was causing other drivers. Daisy's subsequent fate is unknown.

A dozen or so years later James worked with an Economics teacher, Nigel "Bomber" Wells, who had

been a pupil of Martin Dent's at Keele. He confirmed that all Dent's students had adored him and that he was still as barmy as ever. "Bomber" was unconventional too in a different way, but you'll have to wait until the Lansdowne years to hear about him.

In the Easter vacation before his Finals James found himself in the Men's Surgical Ward of the Radcliffe Infirmary. He had been admitted in great agony, suffering from a kidney stone. He was given an epidural and told that he was entitled to claim that he now knew the pain of childbirth. A forthright Australian anaesthetist explained that his pain, measured in "dols," units of pain intensity on a 21-point quantitative scale, was as high, if not higher than a woman in labour. The scale was devised in the 1940s by a group of doctors in the USA. It never caught on because they tested their subjects by burning their hands. The Aussie's comment was of little comfort since he added that if James didn't pass the stone naturally the ensuing operation would involve access to the ureter through the penis. No sound-wave lithotripsy in those days, boys! He was also instructed to drink as much water as he could.

When she heard the news Brenda drove down from Altrincham and came straight to the hospital with Pauline. Geoff visited too, decidedly ashen-faced and grim. James felt that they all looked at him as if his next visitor might be an extremely ununctioning Catholic priest. If this was an added incentive to the patient to drink literally gallons of water per day, it worked. After a few days he shifted the stone and was immediately more comfortable. However, he wasn't discharged since the doctors wanted him to expel it completely whilst still an in-patient. No longer in discomfort, he spent his time shaving the bedridden patients in the ward and generally helping out as an unpaid orderly. On the Saturday afternoon he managed to find a room with a TV to watch the Chelsea-Leeds United Cup Final. He eventually passed the stone after he'd been sent home and gave it in for analysis. The results showed up nothing untoward. The doctor agreed that "the grit in the oyster" which grew into this painful pearl was probably generated by a boozy incident which had occurred at Ampleforth some years earlier.

Gormire Day was an odd whole holiday for a school such as Ampleforth to celebrate, since it had no religious significance at all. On this day in the summer term every pupil had to make their way to Lake Gormire near the foot of Sutton Bank, a distance of about eight miles, for the annual school picnic. Most boys walked but the Sixth Form could use their bikes. There were a number of pubs en route so, whatever the original purpose of this ritual might have been, it was now generally regarded by most of the older boys, James included, as a perfect opportunity for an extended pub crawl.

In 1964, after a number of stops for liquid refreshment, a select group of three Classicists, Dan Worsley, Roger Hadow and James, found the road ahead blocked by a gang of baying and drunken pedestrians who regarded cycling to Gormire as poor form. The group included Patrick's elder brother, Anthony. Dan was in front and simply rode straight at them, forcing them to jump aside and leave a gap for him to race through. At high speed and in close order behind Roger, James expected him to do the same, but at the last moment the middle rider chickened out and braked. Eye-witnesses of the inevitable collision later confirmed that whereas Roger remained upright and undamaged James was seen to somersault spectacularly, bike and all, into the roadside ditch. He landed on his back, luckily on grassy soil and narrowly avoiding the tarmac road surface. Whereupon without fuss he leapt up, straightened his handlebars and rode off. Being drunk probably helped.

Although feeling bruised and battered, he enjoyed the rest of the day. That night he was shocked to find that his urine was dark with blood. Next day the school doctor sent him to the sanatorium for observation where he stayed for a few days until his water was clear. His only visitor was a suspicious Vanheems who wanted a full account of the accident. James obliged, omitting only one pertinent fact: all participants and observers had been copiously full of beer. He never gave the matter a second

thought until he made the connection with the kidney stone six years later.

For all University Examinations candidates were required to wear formal academic dress known as subfusc. This comprised dark suit and socks, black shoes, white shirt and collar, white bow tie, gown and mortarboard for men, with equivalent for women. Final Honour Schools exams always began at the beginning of June with Literae Humaniores (Classics), so it was customary to be wearing this gear during a stifling early summer heatwave, a generally accepted part of the ordeal. A more pressing dilemma for James was the ongoing live TV coverage of the 1970 World Cup matches from Mexico, especially England vs Brazil on the Sunday evening before a key paper. Should he revise or watch the game? Naturally he watched the match and suffered no adverse consequences the next day.

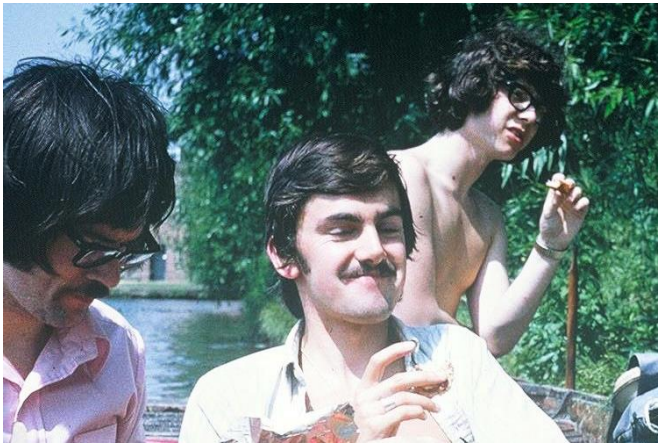


James wearing obligatory subfusc and Pauline in fashionable mini-dress outside Schools after his final exam

His exams finished before many had started, for example Geoff's Modern Languages. This had the advantage for the Classicists of being able to indulge in more than one post-exam celebration. These revels invariably involved alcohol and punting, following by indiscriminate jumping into the Cherwell or Isis rivers.



Geoff before Finals



James, Geoff and Michael on the River Isis after Finals
and before leaping off their punt

All that now remained was to hang around for the results, which would be posted on noticeboards in the Examination Schools on a due date shortly after the end of Trinity Term. A few days before the official promulgation, the doorbell rang at 22 Bullingdon Road. On the doorstep was a middle-aged man wearing a brown trilby. His left eye held James's astonished gaze but his right eye seemed to be looking over the younger man's left shoulder.

"Dr Cuff!" exclaimed James in surprise. "Would you like to come in?"

His tutor looked nervous and a bit shifty. "No, thank you. I've just come to tell you not to leave Oxford yet at any cost. Don't mortgage your future.."

What the hell was he talking about? What mortgage? Why had he trekked over here from Boars Hill?

"We may need to see you at short notice," continued Cuff, "but a decision about that hasn't been reached yet."

Then James understood the meaning of this cryptic advice. Cuff was one of the University Examiners in Classics that year. He was telling James enigmatically that he might be summoned for a Viva Voce, an oral exam on his papers in order to determine the class of his degree. Gulp.. Ironically this was

an unnecessary tip-off. James was staying in Oxford for a while anyway, since he was about to start a summer job at the British Leyland Motor Corporation manufacturing plant in Cowley. The Roman Historian would reveal nothing further and slunk off in an undonnishly furtive manner. Was James on the boundary between a Second and Third, or between a Second and a First? From the very fact of Cuff's visit and his own assessment of his performance in the written papers, James felt it must be the latter. In the end he was not called for interview and was awarded a Second.

In those days Seconds at Oxford were not divided into 2:1s and 2:2s. In a later and less Delphic conversation Cuff explained, "It was touch and go, but we just couldn't find quite enough alpha papers to viva you for a First." No matter, James was more than happy with his Upper Second, especially since he had barely scraped into the university in the first place.

The Telegraph's obituary of Martin Dent, 4th June 2014

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/10875464/Martin-Dent-obituary.html>

14/12/18

42. Stardom at last? Not a chance

You British cats could take a tip from Greek politics. It might prove useful in your next general election. Here in Greece, where admittedly voting is compulsory, there is always an additional 'candidate' on all ballot papers: “None of the Above.” And occasionally “None of the Above” actually wins the election. When this occurs, all listed candidates are eliminated and they start again with fresh names locally.

The ancient Athenians invented “democracy” of course, but their “direct” form had many flaws and was widely criticised by such contemporary intellectuals as Thucydides, who records some of its historical failings, and Plato, who systematically argues against this political regime in *The Republic*. In modern times most people are proud of their “representative” democratic systems. But what would Pericles make of our type of democracy if he arrived in today’s Britain via Dr Who’s Tardis? Observing the current parliamentary chaos and the patent inadequacies displayed by MPs in running the country “on our behalf,” he might smile and say that the Athenian version was no worse than its more sophisticated descendant.

On a lighter note, here’s what the view will be like from the master bedroom of our new house.



View from the main bedroom

Not much else to report from Messinia this month, though Dad was able to enjoy one of those moments when something occurs here which you would never see in Blighty. This time he was driving along the busy road from Messini towards the airport when he had to slow right down for a flock of about thirty sheep. They were moving towards him in diamond formation along the opposite carriageway about as fast as mutton can travel. Uncannily they never strayed into the oncoming lane, without any apparent guidance from sheepdog or shepherd. The galloping ewes passed by, on the loose yet full of controlled purpose. Only then did Dad espy an old shepherd about 70 metres behind his flock, out

of breath, cursing at the top of his voice and staggering to catch up. It then became obvious that the sheep had done this trip on the main road hundreds of times before and couldn't be bothered to wait for their decrepit master to lead them home. They were almost goatlike in their insouciance and it made Dad smile.

University life may have ended but the Wardrobes weren't finished with Oxford yet.

The Cowley car works, to the south-east of the city and formerly the home of Morris Motors, was now part of what was now grandly known as the British Leyland Motor Corporation (BLMC), following the merger in 1968 of Leyland Motors and British Motor Holdings. That summer James had a variety of jobs there and his eyes were opened to the widespread and endemic graft, thievery and restrictive practices of the workforce. This was seven years before Michael "Torchy" Edwardes took on Derek "Red Robbo" Robinson and the unions, cleaning out the Augean stables of the troubled and by then nationalised UK car industry. The avowed Communist Robinson was union convener at Longbridge in Birmingham, whilst its sister plant at Cowley was in the more militant grip of Trotskyist shop stewards.

During the workers' annual summer holiday, a skeleton staff of regulars, supported by temporary employees such as James, kept the production line running albeit at a much reduced pace. His first job was cleaning the interior roof girders in one of the main buildings, a task for which he volunteered since he wasn't afraid of heights. In his last school summer holidays five years earlier he had worked at height as a scaffolder's mate, delighted to earn better money than the general labourers.

Next he was assigned to a team of eight dispatch drivers. This involved driving the brand new cars off the production line to a holding car park a few miles away. These were mainly Morris 1300s and 1300 GTs. All the drivers in the group would then be driven back to the plant in a minibus for their next run. With generous breaks and without speeding you could easily do twelve trips per day. But James's minibus was in the hands of a full-timer who was a rabid shop steward. After their first delivery James's team, mainly student temporaries like himself, climbed aboard the minibus in the expectation that they would be driven back immediately in order to collect another new vehicle for dispatch. The shop steward had other ideas.

"We stay here for at least half-an-hour each time," he explained. "So read your newspapers and relax. By the way, you can drive these new cars as fast as you like. You're allowed to write two off totally before you get sacked by management. At least you can if you're in the union.."

"What about the need to 'run in' a new engine for the first 500 hundred miles?" asked one of the students naively. "Isn't that what the dealer always tells the buyer to do?" The shop steward just laughed in his face.

So every day in the parked bus they read each other's newspapers from cover to cover and learnt to play a mean game of gin rummy, accomplishing an average of only four trips a day.

On at least one return journey every day the minibus driver would take a detour via his home, slow down and toss a sack of purloined car parts over his hedge into his front garden. He explained that this practice was rife and "one of the perks of the job." He told them a story which James had no reason to disbelieve of a BLMC employee who had built a complete Mini entirely from components he had stolen from work.

James's final Cowley stint was spent as a warehouseman in a parts storehouse, a treasure trove of components for every type of British Leyland vehicle. The security was lax and it must be confessed

that certain worn elements of the Wardrobemobile were serendipitously renewed. Not the whole minivan obviously. He was only there a week.



The Wardrobes were (almost) in this film

Pauline and James then embarked on their extremely short-lived movie career. Oxford and its colleges had regularly been used as location sets for major film and TV productions, well before *Morse* arrived on the scene to show everyone else how it should really be done. Two years previously James was annoyed to have missed the chance to be an extra in a film which used Pembroke College. It was *Decline and Fall... of a Birdwatcher*, an adaptation of Waugh's novel starring Robin Phillips as Paul Pennyfeather. So when Billy Wilder came to town in 1970 to shoot *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, the Wardrobes were ready. It was to be Wilder's "Big One," a Road Show movie lasting two hours and forty-five minutes with an intermission. With a 260-page script and a budget of ten million dollars it was his most expensive movie. Plenty of dosh for extras, then.

James and Pauline were signed up and costumed for three days' work as Victorian onlookers during a rowing scene on the Isis in a flashback sequence about young Holmes's Oxford days. Robert Stephens in the title role rowed down the river as a member of the university crew, a massive struggle for him since the rest of the boat were actually that year's OUBC Boat Race team. Meanwhile, an elegantly dressed

young lady and a police constable with impressive sideburns and moustache stood on the crowded bank, waving and cheering when so instructed by a man with a megaphone. James was pleased to observe that Wilder actually sat in a director's chair with DIRECTOR written on the back. Later that autumn they were eager to see the film as soon as it was released. They were mightily disappointed to find that the whole Oxford sequence had been cut. The postscript to this chapter explains what happened. At least they could take comfort from being able to say truthfully at dinner parties in the future that they had "worked with" the Hollywood genius who made *Double Indemnity*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Some Like It Hot* (Pauline's favourite movie) and *The Apartment*. And, believe me, they did.

Finally that summer James did some work selling advertising space for *Isis* magazine, which was undergoing one of its regular financial crises. Robert Maxwell, the wealthy owner of Pergamon Press and baron of Headington Hall, had rescued it a few years before, putting money into the historically prestigious university weekly, and the tycoon had now handed it over to his eldest surviving son, Philip, who was studying at Oxford. James liked working with Philip and respected his humility as well as his business acumen. They did not keep in touch, so in 1991 it was with great interest that he next came across him on TV delivering the funeral eulogy before his wayward father's burial on the Mount of Olives. It turned out that unlike his younger brothers, Ian and Kevin, he had never pursued a career working in his father's discredited publishing empire. Rather, he had fled to Argentina to escape his father's bullying and had honourably kept his distance from the subsequent scandals.

Then it was time for James and Pauline to pack up and leave Bullingdon Road for good. They had spent three-and-a-half very happy years there, but they were ready for some "real life" away from the ivory towers. John Davies had suggested to James that he should do a postgraduate BPhil in Ancient History, but this would only have been a feasible option if he had gained a First. Besides, he wanted to do something "modern and relevant" next.

They sold the van for £40 cash, Gerry collected their possessions and drove Pauline to Hale Barns where by coincidence the Browns now lived, only a few miles from Tommy and Brenda in Altrincham. He was now working as a training officer in the north-west division of the Hotel and Catering Industrial Training Board. James followed them north hitchhiking for the last time in his life.

Being a married undergraduate meant that he had lived all year round in Oxford and never been merely a visiting term-time student. He was thus able to view the Gown from the perspective of the Town and had acquired a deeper understanding of the city itself, not just of the university. He later came to the opinion that Oxford was probably the only megalopolis in Britain where he would be comfortable residing permanently.

As for getting a job, he had studiously avoided the "Milk Round" whereby companies toured universities to promote and advertise their employment opportunities directly to final-year students. Whilst others were flapping about for their first "proper" placement in order to kick-start a career, he remained determined to enjoy university life for its own sake to the very last moment. Unlike future generations of graduates, he had the luxury at that time of being in a strong position to get white-collar work pretty much whenever he wanted it. He knew in his heart that university had ruined him for a lifetime of 9 to 5 employment, so he was putting it off as long as possible.

A brief holiday with the Browns on the Norfolk Broads followed, memorable only for Pauline discovering maggots in her mattress and James stoving in their wooden barge amidships, thankfully just above the waterline. Back in Hale Barns he finally started applying for positions suitable for university graduates. In the meantime he earned money as a petrol-pump attendant at an all-night service station.

From time to time that autumn they went to Old Trafford or Maine Road to watch United and City. It was a period of great success for both clubs, yet you could usually just turn up and buy a ticket on the day. On one midweek evening in October they went to see United play Chelsea in a League Cup match. Along with the rest of the stadium they were on their feet when George Best scored this winning goal:

https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/video/george-best-receives-pass-and-runs-through-on-goal-1B27489_0003

When they returned home they were able to watch it again on Sportnight With Coleman. This televised goal became an integral part of the Best canon. Note Ron “Chopper” Harris’s despairing and failed attempt to scythe George down – hilarious! At the end of both their careers “Chopper” gave this pithy assessment: “George was a superb player, one of the very best I attempted to kick in 21 years.” About this time, on a visit to James’s parents, Thomas greeted them grim-faced. He sat them down and began, “I have to tell you both something very serious...” James hadn’t a clue what to expect but Pauline sensed that she was about to hear that a terminal disease had been diagnosed.

Looking as though he only had weeks to live, Thomas continued, “I’ve failed a breathalyser test and been banned from driving for a year.”

From sheer relief, Pauline burst out laughing, which did not go down well with the paterfamilias. He simply stared at her, with a face like a bag of spanners. She apologised in embarrassment before he told them the whole sad yet somehow predictable story.



58-year-old Thomas in 1969, two years before his retirement

Following “a few drinks” after work in Manchester, he was stopped quite late at night on Princess Parkway by the cops. He felt harshly treated because there was no other traffic around. “I was driving carefully,” he explained, “definitely not speeding. I wasn’t doing anyone else any harm.” It turned out that he had been trundling along as usual at about 20mph on this notorious dual carriageway, unaware that he was asking for trouble. The police could hardly *not* have pulled him over. So now James had to stop himself laughing at the absurdity of his father’s reaction.

Unfortunately it was no laughing matter for Brenda who had to spend the next twelve months chauffeuring her errant husband to business meetings all over the north-west. Ironically Thomas was in his last year at Urwick Orr and once his ban expired he was only weeks away from retirement.

Meanwhile, James made some applications to work as a computer programmer and was invited for a couple of interviews in London. These involved logical aptitude tests. Companies were looking for graduates of all disciplines, since Computer Scientists were thin on the ground and usually employed for hardware development anyway. Digital information technology had only recently emerged from its infancy.

After his second test and interview he was offered a job by the Joint Computer Bureau of the Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea. Having accepted the position of COBOL Programmer, he was scheduled to start on 1st December. The Bureau’s premises were in Rochester Row, close to Victoria Street. Since Patrick had a flat in Bayswater whilst working as an EFL teacher, it was agreed that James would stay with his best friend until the Christmas holidays. In the New Year Pauline would move to London and a new phase of their life would begin.

“The shooting schedule ran for six months and resulted in a rough-cut that came in at three hours and twenty minutes. The movie was originally structured as a series of very specifically structured linked episodes, each with its own title and theme. The opening sequence was to feature Watson’s grandson in London claiming his inherited dispatch box from Cox & Company, and there was also a flashback to Holmes’ Oxford days to explain his distrust of women. All were shot, but deleted from the final print. What happened? Well, it appears that United Artists suffered several major movie flops in 1969 that pretty much scuppered the road show format for Wilder’s massive project. Studio execs ordered the movie to be cut to fill a regular theatrical running time, whittling it down to a two hour and five-minute version. The episodic format made the pruning process relatively simple, so cut were the opening sequence, the Oxford flashback and two full episodes titled “The Dreadful Business of the Naked Honeymooners” at fifteen minutes, and “The Curious Case of the Upside Down Room” at thirty minutes. We can only hope that the full footage can one day be restored, although a full print is not currently thought to exist.”

The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes (1970), Trivia, IMDb

14/01/19

43. Farewell, Lulu : 5th October 2015 – 18th December 2018



Lulu in her prime in August 2012

If you are not a sentimental cat lover, you might want to skip the next few paragraphs.

My beautiful, feisty sister Lulu died a week before Christmas after a very short and sudden illness. Our Dad was understandably shocked and distressed. Briefly, here is the story of her passing. In seeming perfect health, albeit with some gradual weight loss over the past six months, one Sunday morning she was surprisingly off her food and unusually lethargic. A burst blood vessel in her right eye had recurred. Then she began to have seizures, every six hours or so. Dad was able to calm her convulsions with cuddling and soothing words but she was clearly a very sick cat. On Monday our vet Dionisis kept her in for tests and would ring with the results the next day.

That night Dad howled in anguish at the inevitability of her demise, mourning her death whilst she was still alive, just as Andromache does for her living husband Hector in *The Iliad*. He railed inconsolably, illogically, at the cruel God whose existence he denies. After a sleepless night he was almost ready for Dionisis's phone call to say that she was gone. After more seizures he had sedated her and she had died peacefully quite early on Tuesday morning. The blood tests did not help diagnosis but his speculation seems plausible: epileptic fits brought on by an underlying lethal condition such as ischemic encephalopathy or hyperthyroidism.

Dad collected her immediately and with Stephanos's help buried her on our land, the view from her grave overlooking our new home, the mountains and the sea. Her resting place, marked by a small stone cairn, is just below the olive tree from which we first harvested our own olives almost exactly one year ago.

So what was Lulu like? Although we three were all from the same litter she was physically quite different from her black-and-white siblings: a long-haired tabby-tortoiseshell like our natural mother

with the most luxuriant tail you'll ever see on a cat. When Dad and our First Mum went to get two kittens, me and Minnie, from our extremely posh birthplace in the Steep Mansion of the Benson-Colpis (Where? What? Like the Garden of the Finzi-Continis, no?), Dad espied Lulu in the corner of the vast kitchen and declared, "We shall have three, not two!"

She was always our leader, the cleverest and the bravest. Although smaller than us two, she was the dominant female, ever prepared to protect our territory and our food against marauding cats and dogs bigger than herself. Like all felines she was determinedly independent. Once when Dad went to collect her from a day's confinement at the vet's, he found a label attached to her cage. It read, "Lulu Wardrobe - escapee!" When she was younger and we were still in Liphook, she roamed beyond our territory and she also had the most boyfriends, notably "Roger," a local tom. We don't know what his real name was but we christened him after his favourite leisure pursuit.

She could be bad-tempered, enjoying a good hiss or growl at life's annoyances and irritations, but she was thoroughly sociable and loving too. She hated being groomed, a necessary task to keep her long hair free of knots and tags. It was oddly comforting for Dad to give her a final grooming, for once with no resistance, before he buried her. She delighted in standing on his keyboard, producing zzzzzzzzzzs or #####s, and deliberately settling on top of mobile phones and remote controls as if to say, "I am more important than these foolish devices." And indeed she was. Rest in peace, Lulu.

On a clear day in January when the wind blows cold, "the sun has teeth," say the locals, "ο ήλιος με δόντια, ο *ilios me thondia*." This doesn't slow down the work of our magnificent builders. Northern Europeans, including the workshy British, often exhibit a tendency to look down their noses at the Greeks, stereotyping them as idle, ill-disciplined fraudsters who deserve to be paying the price for living beyond their means. Nothing could be further from the truth with our shuttering team, our brickies and all the other tradesmen so far employed. They are energetic, meticulous, skilful professionals who work at an impressive pace to meet Manos's deadline for occupation of September/October this year.



Northern view of the construction so far.

They are also not surprisingly cheaper than their cousins in construction in the UK. One of numerous reasons for this is the local custom of paying wages in φακελάκια, *fakelakia*, little envelopes. To the extent that we recently ran out of brown ones, large and small, necessitating a quick trip to the stationer's for a new packet of fifty.

Now I must go back to sitting quietly on Dad's chest, two sorrowing mourners together.

Pauline moved to London in January and the couple soon found a flat in Harlesden. This was the capital city you can see in Cammell and Roeg's *Performance*, or the early scenes of Mike Hodges' *Get Carter*. The music scene encompassed The Rolling Stones at their best (*Sticky Fingers*), George Harrison's critically acclaimed triple album, *All Things Must Pass*, the emerging glam rock of T. Rex and, in the following year, David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust.

In sociopolitical and cultural terms the zeitgeist of the early Seventies was still rooted in the "Swinging Sixties." James has long maintained that the '60s only really began in 1963 with the Profumo affair or à la Philip Larkin's observation sometime "between the end of the Chatterley ban and the Beatles' first LP." And, he contends, the decade ended in 1972, about the time of the terrorist attack at the Munich Olympics, or arguably in late 1973 with the Yom Kippur War leading to a quadruple rise in oil prices, which plunged the West into recession. But in 1971 the general mood was still upbeat and optimistic, with young men's hair growing ever longer, their flared trousers widening alarmingly into bell-bottoms. As for the girls, since miniskirts couldn't get any shorter, along came hot pants.

Together with the two other successful new entrants to the Joint Computer Bureau, science graduates Philip and Christine, James went on a series of training courses somewhere in West London. Since the mainframe computers they would be programming were ICL System 4s, the British equivalent of IBM 360s, first they learnt the low-level assembler language, Usercode. Up to this point in his life, James had assumed that the only significant number system was base 10. Even 12 pennies to the shilling and 20 shillings to the pound were about to be scrapped on Decimal Day that February. Now *binary*, *hexadecimal*, *bits* and *bytes* entered his thinking, as well as terms such as *flowchart* and *compiler*. Well, he had deliberately opted to move on from the world of Pythagoras and Euclid, hadn't he?

The three of them then learnt COBOL, designed for business, which by 1970 had become the most widely used programming language in the world. They were then cast into the "programming pool" at Rochester Row with about fifteen colleagues, all engaged on the same task: Decimalisation (ironically), i.e. to convert all the two councils' software from £sd to £p as soon as possible and definitely before the end of the six-month transition period in August. Amending the work of other people's programmes gave no room for creative manoeuvre and was a soulless endeavour. James was also having difficulty with the humdrum nature of regular office hours and the prospect of only a few weeks' holiday per annum.

The lunch break was the best part of the working day. Within easy walking distance was St James's Park, where accompanied by Philip he would feed the ducks and try to identify the many different species of water fowl. The first important lesson he learnt here from his new friend was that coots have white beaks whereas their close relatives, moorhens, have red ones. Philip was a highly engaging, intelligent and amusing person with whom James shared a common philosophy on the State of Man, the Nation, the World, the Universe, etc., so it was quite natural that they would dream up fantastical "projects" together, some legal, some illegal, to pass the time at work. The most ambitious of these was the Kabul Run.

James produced a detailed flowchart, the basic tool of programming logic, to show how the pair of them could have a great time *and* make money legally from overland trips to Afghanistan via the “hippie trail.” His algorithm managed the following process, suitably simplified here:

Step 1: Go to Western Germany and buy a quality Mercedes saloon car whose bodywork has been damaged, but not irreparably, in an accident. It must be drivable before repair.

Step 2: Drive the car to Syria, where the quality of metal repairers is second to none, and fixing the damage to a high standard is much cheaper than in Europe.

Step 3: Drive on to Kabul, where the demand for high-quality Mercs is currently insatiable, and sell car at a good profit.

Step 4: Use money to buy and ship back a range of products very fashionable in the West, especially cotton and hemp textiles, kaftans and sheepskin coats, but also beads, ornaments, joss sticks, etc.

Step 5: Fly back to UK/Europe, sell Afghan goods and make even more profit on the original investment.

Step 6: Return to Step 1 and repeat until too rich to give a damn.

Such fantasies helped James to get through his day as a glorified council worker. By mid-summer, however, he knew that he needed a new direction. It would take him another nine months to leave but he was already formulating a plan. He had unfinished business with Greece for a start, never having spent more than transient time there. Philip seemed happier with the programming tasks he was assigned. He would go on to work for the Digital Equipment Corporation, a major American company in the computer industry, and have a successful career in I.T. Christine left the Bureau within a year, taking up a university post in Kano, northern Nigeria.

Other lunchtime pursuits included swimming at the local public baths (free for RBKC staff) and frequent visits to the Tate Gallery on nearby Millbank. James and Philip favoured the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century galleries, whose contents they got to know particularly well. James tried hard and failed to empathise with the encaged, abstracted figures of Francis Bacon, much beloved of Patrick. He preferred the quiet subversion of Magritte’s “*Man with a Newspaper*” or the bizarre naivety of Chagall’s “*The Green Donkey*.”

Together with their wives they also socialised in the evenings, although with young children Philip and Maggie didn’t get out so much. As ever, London was a wonderful city for concerts, theatre, cinema, the arts in general, and the Wardrobes took full advantage of its opportunities. Memorable highlights were Manitas de Plata’s flamenco guitar at the Royal Albert Hall, Michael Hordern in Stoppard’s *Jumpers* at the Old Vic, and the very different but equally brilliant movies, Alan Pakula’s *Klute* and Dusan Makavejev’s Yugoslav “black wave” masterpiece, *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism*. They saw plenty of Patrick too, until later that year he decamped to Barcelona to teach English, learn Catalan and quite quickly marry a local girl called Roser. He left his high-grade stereo equipment and large record collection with James for safekeeping, absolutely no hardship for his friend at all.

In the summer, since on Thomas’s retirement James’s parents had no further need of two cars, Brenda gave him her maroon 1965 Ford Anglia Estate. Having wheels enabled them to move out to the more salubrious suburb of Finchley. They also inherited some furniture for their flat since the senior Wardrobes had sold 11 Willow Tree Road prior to moving to Scarborough the next year. Brenda was quite rightly determined to remove her husband from the negative influence of boozier Bob Love (remember “We’ll Gather Lilacs”?). Thomas was particularly pleased to sell the house to a charming

Pakistani family, since he knew this would upset his next-door neighbour, Stanley Kirkland, with whom he had never seen eye-to-eye on a number of issues.

After a meagre one week's annual leave spent with the Browns on the coast in Seaford, East Sussex, where Gerry was now working, James was more determined than ever to abandon his routine existence and if possible spend the following summer in mainland Greece. He would ideally quit the Bureau in mid-1972 and have the backstop of a new job lined up for September on their return from two months in the sun. Teaching in a private school was a possibility, since no professional qualification was required and the start date of a new academic year would be ideal. That winter he began to peruse the adverts in the Times Educational Supplement and he also undertook some one-to-one EFL tutoring. He was offered a full-time job teaching English in a frontisterion (language school) in Chalcis, Euboia, but he declined it for two reasons: they wanted an immediate start; and Pauline was not interested in moving abroad permanently. On the other hand, she was all for a long summer holiday the next year and a permanent relocation out of London afterwards.



Brenda's gift would take them to Greece and back the following year without mishap.

She had endured a succession of fairly tedious jobs. One such required her to cold call local GPs in their surgeries. One day the telephone conversation went like this:

“Good morning. Is that Dr Closet?”

“Yes, speaking,” replied the nominatively challenged and understandably wary doctor.

“Hello, my name is Mrs Wardrobe, and I'm ringing you about...”

“Look here, “ he exploded in cupboardly fury. “I'm absolutely sick and tired of these nuisance calls making fun of my surname.” He then shouted a few choice expletives down the phone and abruptly hung up.

Undeterred, Mrs Wardrobe rang him back, insisted that this was her actual surname, demanded an apology (which she received) and expressed sympathy about their common, and his lifelong,

misfortune. They concluded their business amicably, leaving Pauline feeling quite lucky. “There’s always someone worse off than yourself,” she opined to James that evening.

Next spring the inexorable tide of history encouraged the two boroughs of WCC and RBKC to go their separate ways and each to set up their own computing departments. The Joint Computer Bureau would be disbanded, all staff made redundant on 31st March and re-employed by one or other council the next day. By accepting the redundancy but not the re-employment, James was entitled to state unemployment benefit, since he had not technically resigned from his post. The dole would be a safety net until he found a temporary job for a few months or in case he didn’t. Then they would be off on their Grand Adventure to visit the romantic ruins of his dreams: Delphi, Olympia, Epidavros, Mycenae, Tiryns..

He spotted a small line ad in the Situations Vacant section of the TES, inviting applications for the position of Classics Master from September 1972 at a prep school in Liphook, Hampshire. Whether the place was pronounced Liffook or Lip-hook he knew not, but this seemed worth a try. At the least, if he were appointed it would give him the security of an assured job to come back to. He could find out how teaching suited him - he realised the school holidays would -, do it for a couple of years and then, who knows? So he sent off his CV and covering letter to The Headmaster, Highfield School, and awaited developments. Within a few days he received a reply, inviting him for an interview.



January 2013: Lulu the intrepid bushy-tailed warrior investigates the snow.

ὥς ἄρα φωνήσας κόρυθ' εἶλετο φαίδιμος Ἴεκτωρ

ἵππουριν: ἄλοχος δὲ φίλη οἶκόν δε βεβήκει

ἐντροπαλιζομένη, θαλερὸν κατὰ δάκρυ χέουσα.

αἶψα δ' ἔπειθ' ἴκανε δόμους εὖ ναιετάοντας

Ἴεκτορος ἀνδροφόνοιο, κιχήσατο δ' ἔνδοθι πολλάς

ἀμφιπόλους, τῆσιν δὲ γόνον πάσῃσιν ἐνώρσεν.
αἶ μὲν ἔτι ζωὸν γόνον Ἑκτορα ᾧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ:
οὐ γάρ μιν ἔτ' ἔφαντο ὑπότροπον ἐκ πολέμοιο
ἴξεσθαι προφυγόντα μένος καὶ χεῖρας Ἀχαιῶν.

So spake glorious Hector and took up his helm with horse-hair crest; and his dear wife went forthwith to her house, oft turning back, and shedding big tears. Presently she came to the well-built palace of man-slaying Hector and found therein her many handmaidens; and among them all she roused lamentation. So in his own house they made lament for Hector while yet he lived; for they deemed that he should never more come back from battle, escaped from the might and the hands of the Achaeans.

The Iliad by Homer, Book 6, lines 494-502. Translated by A.T. Murray.

25/01/19

44. Three Journeys and a Job Offer

As he heads north towards the mountains of Arcadia, lustrous with fresh snow against a crisp blue sky, the ageing foreigner turns on his car stereo system. The sunlight gleams off the long, bare highway – no traffic, no people, just the biggest herd of goats he'd ever seen in his life a few kilometres back. A few had ambled across the tarmac in search of better grazing on the other side, where most of the busy flock were already jostling for the best shrubs and plants. None of the hundred take the slightest interest in the lone vehicle passing through their territory. David Gilmour's four-note guitar riff challenges the silence of the pastoral idyll. The primary theme (B♭, F, G [below the B♭], E) of Pink Floyd's tribute to Syd Barrett inexplicably yet magically matches the sparse solitude of the setting and the stony contemplation of the driver.

He hopes and expects that no one will be at his destination. *“Remember when you were young, you shone like the sun. Shine on you crazy diamond. Now there's a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky. Shine on you crazy diamond.”* The band's psychedelic elegy to their lost friend coalesces wondrously with the visual eclogue of the deserted Peloponnesian landscape to create a few perfect moments of acceptance in the mind of the melancholic driver. He realises that for the first time in over a month he is not thinking about death. He feels γέρος αλλά γερός, *géros alla gerós*, “old but strong.”

A small town, inappropriately named Megalopolis (“Big City”), comes into view. He drives straight through in less than five minutes, noting the pleasant café-lined central square but intent on a location slightly further north. Gilmour's buddy from childhood, Dick Parry, interrupts his thoughts with a baritone saxophone solo which then mutates somehow to a tenor horn. How on earth does he do that seamless switch of sax when he plays this at a live performance? Beyond the outlying buildings a sign directs the stranger down a track to the left of the Andritsena road and after 400 metres he finds himself in an empty car park. An iron gate next to a couple of locked sheds is open. He had come prepared to climb over fences, but no need. He listens for a while longer to the music then kills it off at the opening bar of track 4: *Wish You Were Here*. He has arrived at his objective.

It is the little-known archaeological site of Ancient Megalopolis, founded like Ancient Messini in the aftermath of the Spartan defeat in 371BC at the battle of Leuctra by the Thebans under the command of Epaminondas. (If you know any Greeks called Nondas, this is the full name they were christened with.) He established both cities in order to minimise Sparta's future sovereignty in the area. Megalopolis justified its name, becoming the capital of the Arcadian League, a federation of numerous Peloponnesian townships, and in its day boasted arguably the largest theatre in the Greek world, with a maximum capacity of about 20,000 spectators. The architect responsible, Polykleitos the Younger of Argos, also designed the much more celebrated theatre at Epidavros (where max. seating was c14,000). By the time of Pausanias, the 2nd century AD travel-writer, Megalopolis lay mostly in ruins and there is little left to see today.

However, the visitor's wish is fulfilled. The place looks as if it has been abandoned by modern as well as by ancient mankind. There are only a few buildings worth viewing for a casual tourist: the theatre of course, though only the lower tiers of seating have been excavated; some columns in what must have been an enormous agora; and the outline of a massive council-chamber. But for our solitary pilgrim with his specialist antiquarian interests, this is a piece of heaven. Clambering freely over the limestone blocks in this peaceful setting, he is happy to be alone and on the loose to explore the site without

restriction. Imagine how much richer would be the experience of *sole occupancy* just for one joyous hour of the Acropolis of Athens, Delphi or Olympia! No longer possible these days at The Big Three, but still achievable at many hundreds of minor Greek archaeological sites, ignored as they are even by the Ministry of Culture. Ancient Messini may rightly be called “a hidden gem” in the guide books, but this is a truly undisclosed treasure, unknown even to most Kalamatians.



Theatre (c370BC) at Ancient Megalopolis, birthplace of the historian Polybius.

An hour later he returns with lifted spirits to his car and starts the ignition. “So, so you think you can tell Heaven from Hell, blue skies from pain? Can you tell a green field from a cold steel rail? A smile from a veil? Do you think you can tell?” wails Gilmour, as the traveller drives leisurely back up the hill for an ελληνικό σκέτο, *elliniko sketo* (greek coffee without sugar), in the quiet, sun-drenched plateia of the modern town. “Oh yes, yes,” he laughs to himself, “On days like this, I think I can tell..”

Whilst waiting at a roundabout on the old Guildford bypass, James tried to check on his road map how to proceed to this confounded village called Liffook or Lip-hook. Carelessly edging forward he bumped into the car in front. This could be the start of a bad day. A fateful sign perhaps from the God of Teaching about what might be an inauspicious interview? But neither car was visibly damaged and the other driver was amenable to forgetting about the incident altogether. The Ford Anglia sped off down the A3 In the direction of Portsmouth.

On his arrival at Highfield School he was warmly greeted by the Housemaster, Peter Barham. The de facto Deputy Head was a bespectacled 40-year-old with thinning blond hair, articulate, friendly and very easy to like. Since it was the Easter holidays there were no boys in residence, so James had a guided tour of the empty school, including its spacious grounds and playing fields. It occupied a glorious rural setting, surrounded by woodlands and meadows. Indoors, the old-style wooden desks

with lift-up lids lined the parquet-floored main corridor, since the adjoining classrooms had been cleared for a thorough triannual purge. James noted the extensive graffiti carved and inked into the desks by generations of errant schoolboys. Was this mild vandalism tolerated by a more liberal regime than Ampleforth had been, he wondered. Barham explained that Highfield was a traditional boys-only boarding prep school, feeding all the top public schools in the south, especially Winchester, Eton, Harrow, Marlborough, etc. The honours boards in the wood-panelled dining room displayed impressive lists of successful scholars. The school roll was about 140 boys, aged from 8 to 13.

He added that the school was a family business started more than sixty years earlier by the Headmaster's father, Canon Mills. The Head would join them later after he had concluded some business on the estate. They repaired to the Housemaster's Study and the formal proceedings commenced. Peter Barham's questions were of the standard variety that you would expect in an interview for a teaching appointment. James felt he handled them well, especially those regarding his total lack of relevant experience. He liked the fact that although his timetable would consist mainly of Latin lessons there was some Greek available too. Other duties and extra-curricular activities, including helping with team sports, held no fears.

As James began to relax, a man in his late middle age entered the room. He acknowledged their presence but did not formally introduce himself. He plonked himself down in the armchair next to the Housemaster's desk. He was wearing a check shirt, red braces, grey flannels and well-polished brown shoes. He had a healthy, florid complexion and intelligent eyes gazing out from behind horn-rimmed spectacles. He seemed to need to keep his glasses on his face by squeezing up his cheeks and tensing his jaw at irregular intervals.

Peter Mills's questions were totally unanticipated. They came from way beyond left field, to the extent that three in particular have stayed with James ever since. To Peter Barham's obvious embarrassment the Headmaster enquired, "*Will you inherit a lot of money when your father dies?*" Whaaat? James remembers staying in "earnest candidate" mode and giving some circumspect but long-forgotten reply.

To this day he is not certain about the purpose of this query. Was Peter trying to assess how much to pay him if he took him on? Unlikely. When James got to know this extremely clever but socially awkward gentleman better, he reckoned that it was an inept attempt to search between the lines of his CV to discover what made this young man from a quite different milieu tick. What were his long-term expectations and ambitions? Peter knew the value of an Oxford Classics degree and he was aware that Ampleforth was the best Catholic public school in the country, but on paper James had a background from Up North, entirely "another country" as far as those inhabiting the Surrey, Hampshire and Sussex borders were concerned. Yet he had no northern accent and had something of the look of a London wide boy. As well as his rather too modern three-piece grey herringbone suit with flared trousers, he was sporting shoulder-length hair and a full beard. What sort of character and personality did this 24-year-old who knew all about gerunds and gerundives really possess?

Before James could dwell on the matter, Peter bowled him another googly. "*Would you be prepared to shave your beard off if I offered you the job? I'm a little concerned that it might frighten the children...*" Again, whaaat? James had reacted badly in a previous interview (not for a teaching post) when told that he would need a haircut if he was to be considered, but this time he wisely said Yes.

Then the Head asked him, "*How many miles to the gallon does your car do?*" For the third time, whaaat? The reason for this question became clear just before James's thought-provoking afternoon ended. Now Peter drove James round Lip-hook (aah, so *that's* how you pronounce it) in his battered Rover 2000, with its broken window on the driver's side, to look at possible staff accommodation. Either of

the two potentially available properties viewed would definitely be acceptable to Pauline, so things were looking up.

On returning to the school, the purport of Peter's "*miles per gallon?*" probe became clear. He said, "Drive your car round to the back of the Sanatorium and I'll give you your expenses." James was mystified but did as requested. The eccentric Headmaster then personally hand-pumped four gallons of 4-star from his underground petrol reservoir into the maroon Anglia. James thought to himself, "If I'm offered this job, how could I refuse to work for a man like this?"



The bearded "child frightener" and the sheepskin-coated Pauline in 1972.

One evening about a week later Pauline answered the telephone in the hallway of their Finchley flat. She came back into the living room and said, "There's a strange man on the phone who wants to speak to "Wardrobe." I think it's for you." It was Peter Mills. After some introductory humming and hawing he offered James the job and seemed to want an immediate answer, which was readily forthcoming.

His future employer was ruefully apologetic about having to put something in writing. "I have to write you a formal letter of appointment apparently, which stands for a contract or something these days..," he tailed off. The call was duly concluded and James went to give Pauline the good news. She was delighted to be moving to the country, since it would mean she could get an Old English Sheepdog. They now had a roof over their heads and at least one secure job to come back to in September after their return from Greece. As James said, "I can do it for a couple of years and then we move on." Little did they realise that they would never leave Liphook in Pauline's lifetime.

In due course a one-page letter arrived. In addition to all the basic stuff discussed at the interview, the conditions included: "attending Chapel at least four times a week, helping every day with Games

and not erecting a TV aerial on the chimney of the accommodation provided by the school without the prior permission of the Headmaster.”

James later discovered that Peter had recently had a bad experience with the PE teacher’s school house roof damaged by aerial installers and he wanted to avoid any costly recurrence elsewhere. What the Headmaster never knew was that the cowboys also dropped a brick down the chimney and blocked the flue. The teacher’s wife, who spent most of her time at home, started getting headaches and was slowly succumbing to carbon monoxide poisoning until the sweep found and removed the blockage. She lives today to laugh and tell the tale.

To fill in the three months between leaving the Bureau and departing on their road trip, James somehow got a job looking after the accounts, including payroll, of a property and construction company in Mayfair. He had learnt a bit about accounts when decimalising the councils’ financial programs, so he blagged his way in and then taught himself enough for his bosses to be disappointed when he left at the end of June. One of them said, “We were just about to offer you promotion and the opportunity to gain professional qualifications as a Management Accountant.. You have a great future in this business.” A narrow escape or a missed opportunity? Either way, he was in the adamantine grip of the Olympians by now.

They put a second wing mirror on the Anglia, bought a roof rack and a two-man ridge tent, moved their possessions to Maud and Gerry’s garage in Seaford and off they went on the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry, intent on passing through Western Europe as speedily as possible.



In a lay-by in northern France

They had agreed to share the driving but that plan went out of the window sharpish when James shouted at Pauline for going the wrong way round a roundabout somewhere in the region of Beauvais. She declared, “Right, you can do it all from now on,” and went on a one-woman driver’s strike. “But that’s 4000 miles there and back,” spluttered James. “Serves you right for shouting at me. And why was that farmer on an oncoming tractor screaming at me as well?” And so it came to pass that James occupied the wheel for the whole trip.

They had made up their differences by Reims and enjoyed a quick visit to the thirteenth century Cathedral, a irresistible masterpiece of High Gothic architecture. Moving swiftly through Germany and Austria, they began the three-day-long trek on the Yugoslavian autoput, at the time probably the most dangerous and accident-prone major road in Europe. The “Brotherhood and Unity Highway” stretched for 1200 kilometres from the Austrian border via Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade and Skopje all the way to the Greek frontier. The most modern “motorway” in the country was a three-lane carriageway, one each way and a “suicide lane” between for overtaking in both directions. The sides of the road were littered with wrecked cars and trucks, abandoned in place for long periods of time. In the summertime the road was particularly busy.

Pauline noticed that they were often overtaken by battered Mercedes saloons crammed with passengers and luggage. “Are they all going to Kabul, via Syria?” she cheekily asked her husband. He didn’t rise to the bait. “No, they are Turkish Gastarbeiter (“guest workers”) going home from Germany for the summer. They tend to take all their possessions back and forth with them when they go.” James was happy for them to speed past him and he rarely ventured into the middle lane.

The adventurers proceeded through Yugoslavia without mishap, enjoying the food (which usually featured dumplings) at the excellent campsite restaurants. After Belgrade they passed through vast fields of sunflowers in full bloom. The landscape became more varied, more hilly, but they knew they were truly in the Balkans when they arrived at a town south of Skopje called Tito Veles. The place was a throwback to Ottoman times: dilapidated stone minarets; men in fezes riding donkeys, or smoking nargiles in the roadside cafes; dogs and chickens roaming the streets.

They pressed on to the grimy, ramshackle lorry park that constituted the border crossing into Greece at Evzonoi. Here James encountered for the first time in his life a Turkish or squatting toilet. It was squalid and unhygienic but he was desperate. Having carefully assumed the correct posture, he was rewarded with the chance to peruse some fine examples of the graffiti art which were encribed on the back of the bog door. He nearly lost his balance through laughter at the most apt double entendre he has ever come across in a public lavatory. The epigram read, “This is the shit-hole of the Balkans.”

Half-an-hour later they passed through immigration control. At last they had “arrived.” Greece lay before them, ready to yield her past glories and present benefactions. They headed for Thessaloniki, where they rested up in a campsite near the airport. They beheld Mount Olympus in the middle distance and were content.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWGE9Gi0bB0>

“Shine On You Crazy Diamond”

(Gilmour, Waters & Wright)

from *Wish You Were Here* by Pink Floyd (1975)

18/02/19

45. A First Hellenic Odyssey

Just as this year's cold and rain-filled January ended and a sunny 18°C Greek February began, Dad disappeared on a short trip back to snow-bound England. He was going to another funeral. Twenty months after his twin brother Peter died, Paul Templeton succumbed to the identical disease, pulmonary fibrosis. Like his sibling he had extraordinary gifts which touched and in many cases changed for the better the lives of people he met, including Dad's. And Dad loved him for it. He worked with both of them for nine exhilarating years in the 1980s where they introduced him to the alchemy of making the seemingly impossible come true and, what's more, they did it on an outrageously regular basis.

Many tributes were delivered in the packed Cotswolds village church by friends and family members, including Paul's five sons and his two surviving brothers. The eulogists' evocations overlapped and merged, painting a satisfyingly familiar picture of his talents. They rightly praised his optimism, self-belief, passion, energy, creativity, humour, generosity and fearlessness. He was a relentless force of nature, whose *modus operandi* was to motivate others to join him in changing the world of teaching and learning. As a long-standing friend of his said, "His metier was inspiration." And all this achieved with an infectious and child-like sense of playfulness and a proper disrespect for the conventional pomposities.

By the graveside, as Paul was laid to rest in the plot adjoining Peter's, Los Haward, a soul-mate and colleague from those heady Lansdowne days, murmured to Dad, "With both of them gone, who will sanction our irreverences now?" Ave atque vale, *hail and farewell*, you "glass always full" merchant, you self-styled "imaginator."

Back in Greece, our parochial area is about to benefit from access to some foreign cuisine. Dad went to the next village to get his chainsaw sharpened by Haris, the local motorbike mechanic, and noticed preparations opposite for the opening of a new restaurant. He went over and introduced himself in his usual jocular manner, "Hello, I'm James, like James Bond," which sadly and predictably always breaks the ice here. He found himself in conversation with Ursula, a German lady married to Stavros, who intends to open in about a month and will offer German as well as Greek dishes, all year round. This could be a big hit with expats yearning for the food of their homeland. "So, Eisbein mit Sauerkraut und Kartoffeln, then?" ventured Dad. She laughed and replied, "Natürlich! Alle Arten von Schweinefleisch, *Of course! All types of pork.*"

Later that evening Dad told us about his discovery of Ursula's Restaurant, as it will be called, and said he was looking forward to trying it out. As I burrowed more deeply down the bedclothes on yet another chilly night, I purred (with gross apologies to my readers), "Well, it could be wurs(t).."

They drove south from Greece's second largest city and soon discovered Platamon, a sandy paradise on the shores of the Thermaic Gulf. James was slightly miffed by a dining confusion that had occurred in downtown Thessaloniki the previous evening. In what he thought was pellucid demotic but obviously wasn't, he had ordered tamosalata and was served a tomato salad (τοματοσαλάτα, *tomatosalata*). So he learnt two valuable early lessons about Greek restaurants and their food. Firstly, he shouldn't have expected every item written on the menu to be available; secondly, the owner told the complainant in no uncertain terms that fresh tamosalata was of course only obtainable in winter months. His

clear implication was that the foreigner sitting in front of him was a idiot. “Everyone knows it is out of season in summer..” Which is no longer the case in these frozen-fish-roe times we live in now. As for menus in Greek restaurants, these days James ignores them and just asks, “What’ve you got today?”

Platamon Beach campsite lay below the eastern slopes of Mount Olympus and was overlooked to the south by a prominent twelfth-century Byzantine castle. There were few dwellings in the vicinity and the deserted strand stretched for miles. Decades later this stretch is now regarded as one of the most significant tourist destinations in Northern Greece, but in 1972 it was peaceful and unspoiled. Swimming, sunbathing and reading occupied the next few days, before the exertions of the Grand Tour began.



The wooded campsite on the sandy beach at Platamon, east of Mount Olympus

“Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo,” are the opening lines of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which James read that week at Platamon. Weird indeed was the incongruity of ploughing through an Irish modernist novel on what must have been in ancient times Aphrodite’s and Apollo’s local bathing and besporting place, the shore closest to their home on Mount Olympus. But such an imagining also seemed apt in a comfortably Joycian way.

James has to confess that he has never read *Ulysses* and to this day feels pangs of guilt about his continuing lack of resolve towards this masterwork. Surely all the symmetry and structural correspondences between *The Odyssey* and one of the most important novels of modernist literature would appeal to his classical mindset? It might pay off, but what if it reinforced, and not in a good way, Joyce’s own words: “Life is too short to read a bad book.” Perhaps there is still time.

Meanwhile, the nearest most Greeks get to Irish modernism is a pint of draught Guinness at the James Joyce Irish Pub in Monastiraki, a popular venue in central Athens since it opened in 2007 and became famous for its steak & stout pie, fish & chips and sausage & mash. Sláinte!

They moved on, vowing to sojourn at Platamon again on their way home. Soon they passed through the Vale of Tempe, a 10-kilometre gorge lush with vegetation from the waters of the Pineios River and

celebrated by Greek poets as a favourite haunt of Apollo and as the home of the nine Muses. Despite the modern road running through it, the steep valley still retained a palpable spirit of place. According to the seventh century BC poet Hesiod's *Theogony* ("The Birth of the Gods"), they were daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, Titan goddess of memory. They were personifications of inspiration in literature, science and the arts. Individual Muses survive as officially-listed first names of Greek girls today, notably Calliope, Clio, Thalia, Melpomene (as Meni) and Urania. Apart from Calliope (8th June) the Name Day of all the Muses in the Greek Orthodox Calendar is 1st September. This is another historical example of how elements of paganism were subsumed into, and not rejected by, Christianity.

After a while they headed inland to the Meteora, a spectacular rock formation which hosts one of the largest and most precipitously built complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries, second in importance only to "Άγιον Όρος, *Agion Óros*, "the Holy Mountain", better known to non-Greeks as Mount Athos. The six surviving monasteries – there were originally twenty-four – are built on immense natural pillars and hill-like rounded boulders that dominate the local area. The name "Meteora" is derived from a Greek contraction meaning "suspended in the air." Rising high above the Thessalian plain, the sandstone megaliths with these religious buildings perched atop average 300 metres in height, with several reaching 550 metres.



The Monastery of Great Meteoron in modern times. Note the wooden hut-balcony on the right, to which baskets were hauled before the steps were built.

For many centuries the only means of access was by ropes, long ladders, nets or baskets. James and Pauline were able to climb up to the Monastery of Great Meteoron via steps cut in the rocks in the 1920s, though they noticed that goods if not people were still being hauled up in baskets at the time of their visit. They were shown round by a friendly young monk whose serene countenance uncannily replicated the face of Christ displayed in the many icons in the church.

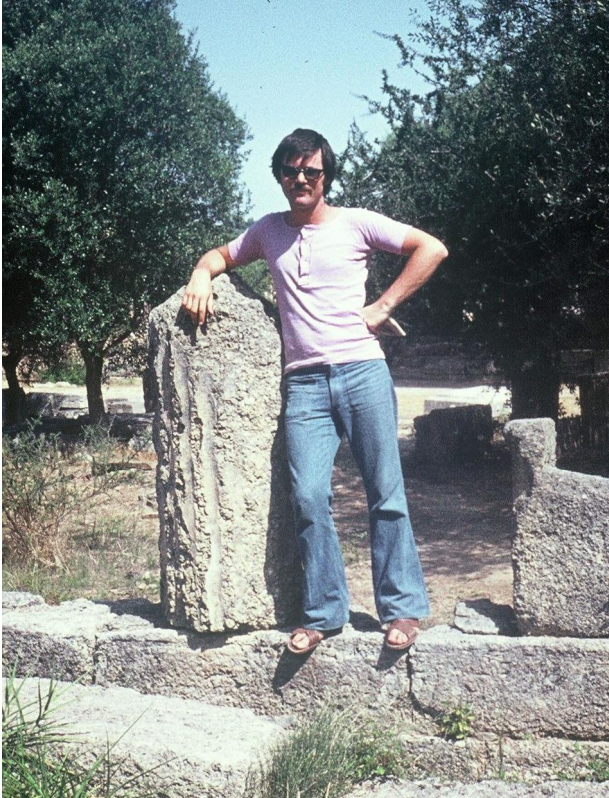
Next stop was the first major classical site on their itinerary and still, forty-five years later, Numero Uno in Greece as far as James is concerned: Delphi. The whole world knows the place as the site of the Oracle but you have to visit it physically to appreciate the transcendent atmosphere of the setting.

Its compact, sloping location lies on the south-western side of Mount Parnassus, beneath the sheer cliffs of the Phaidriades, “the Shining Ones.” It is these rocks which create the special magic. They change colour according to the time of day and the weather conditions, with their hue moving along a spectrum from dark grey to light pink. Add to that some fine archaeological remains and a magnificent view over the valley and the coastal plain to the distant Gulf of Corinth and the result is genuinely spectacular.

A puncture on the way down to the small port of Itea did not delay them long enough to miss the geriatric yet still serviceable car ferry over the gulf to Aegion. At last, the Peloponnese! Beyond the unattractive port city of Patras they found a delightful campsite at Kato Achaia, its deserted sandy beach overlooking the entrance to the gulf. They stayed here longer than planned since James foolishly fell asleep in the sun and, as they would say in Yorkshire, burnt his back to buggery. Whilst he languished in discomfort in his overheated tent for a couple of days, Pauline made some new friends, including a English lad from Poole and his Danish girlfriend. They had been hitchhiking around Greece and were delighted with the offer to accompany the Wardrobes at least as far as Olympia.

As it turned out they stayed on as passengers until the Ford Anglia reached Navplion the following week. On more than one occasion, when the locals discovered the girl was Danish they became particularly friendly, exclaiming, “Η βασίλισσα μας! Η βασίλισσα μας! *I vasilissa mas! I vasilissa mas!*, Our queen, our queen!” This was a patriotic reference to Queen Anne-Marie, wife of King Constantine II, who had fled Greece five years earlier after the military junta of the Colonels began. The rural Peloponnese would remain fiercely royalist throughout the duration of the right-wing regime, which at the time still had two more years to run.

James had been advised to stay off the topic of the current government during their travels and generally he did. Later in the trip, shortly before leaving Greece, he decided to broach the matter with some people he met in a restaurant. They immediately shushed him into silence and whispered, “We can’t talk about this in public – you don’t know who might be listening..” This spoke volumes, given how Greeks will normally discuss politics at the drop of a hat. It graphically highlighted the abnormality of the prevailing situation. Usually they thrive on debating current affairs. As the old joke here goes, “If there are five Greeks in a kafeneion discussing politics, there are six political parties.”



The first of many visits to Ancient Olympia

The only other tangible evidence they saw of the dictatorship was its emblem posted prominently on the side of the railway bridge over the Corinth Canal, ineluctably visible from the road crossing. What was more striking for James and Pauline was the total absence throughout the whole journey of any sound of the music of Mikis Theodorakis, their favourite Greek composer but a persona non grata as far as the Colonels were concerned. He had been imprisoned and then exiled for his outspoken opposition and his whole body of work was officially banned. A university student caught playing a Theodorakis record received an 18-year sentence, and, it was said, even a man who could not help remarking that a passing policeman was whistling a Theodorakis tune was arrested for listening to him.

On to Ancient Olympia, about which readers will be glad to be spared a guided tour, then across the remote and beautiful wilds of Arcadia to Nafplion via Tripolis. In a campsite in the Argolid, James heated up a tin of stuffed vine leaves for his supper, a dodgy dish of which his wife sensibly did not partake. Violent stomach pains ensued, necessitating the emergency call-out of a local doctor. A portly man of middle age, he struggled to access our wounded hero inside his non-heroic ridge tent but once there he promptly diagnosed a case of acute food poisoning. A starvation diet of black tea without milk, aided by appropriate medication and plenty of rest, gradually solved the problem. Its legacy however remains to this day. Never will James touch *ντολμάδες*, *dolmades*, even if freshly home-cooked. Even the sight of them has been known to induce a repugnant queasiness.

From their base east of Nafplion, they explored the charming port town that was the first capital of the Greek state from 1821 to 1834, visited the Late Bronze Age sites of Mycenae and Tiryns, and marvelled at the magnificent ancient theatre at Epidavros. They left their Bournemouth friends in Tolon and

headed up to Isthmia via Roman Corinth. Their final big stop was Athens, staying in a pleasant wooded campsite on the western outskirts of the city. A return visit to the Acropolis was obligatory, as was the National Archaeological Museum.



You could roam freely over all the Acropolis monuments in 1972

The long journey home was looming but they made the most of the leisurely drive northwards. Somewhere near Kamena Vourla after a late-night swim they gate-crashed a beach party and made some instant Greek friends. The flowing wine and drunken dancing to live music would have been a riotously memorable way to end the best and longest holiday Pauline and James would ever have, but they were not quite ready to quit Greece yet. They paid their respects to Leonidas at Thermopylae on their way to a second but all too brief stay at the idyllic Platamon. Then, on James's 25th birthday, 17th August, with heavy hearts they departed.

The journey home was fairly uneventful. They ran out of petrol south of Skopje and were helped by a friendly French couple who even returned James to his car against their direction of travel after taking him and his jerrycan to a petrol station. "I hope you've learnt your lesson now," said Pauline. Ever the chancer, he said he had, but he hadn't. He stupidly ran out again a few years later in Liphook, but at least on this subsequent and final occasion he was within walking distance of home.

That night they witnessed a breathtaking thunder and lightning storm from the restaurant of their Balkan campsite and slept in the car for the first time on the trip. They had not seen rain since leaving Thessaly a month earlier. A second puncture in Austria proved to be the only other excitement from then on until Dieppe. The Anglia had done its job splendidly, suffering no mechanical breakdown

whatsoever.

They rested up at Maud and Gerry's in Seaford and then set out for Liphook on a new adventure and a fresh phase of their lives. Would they like living in the sticks? Would they miss London? What would working in a school be like? Would James's colleagues all be boring old farts? How would he fare as a teacher? He was excited to find out the answers. Meanwhile they were both looking forward to the future and feeling grateful for the past.

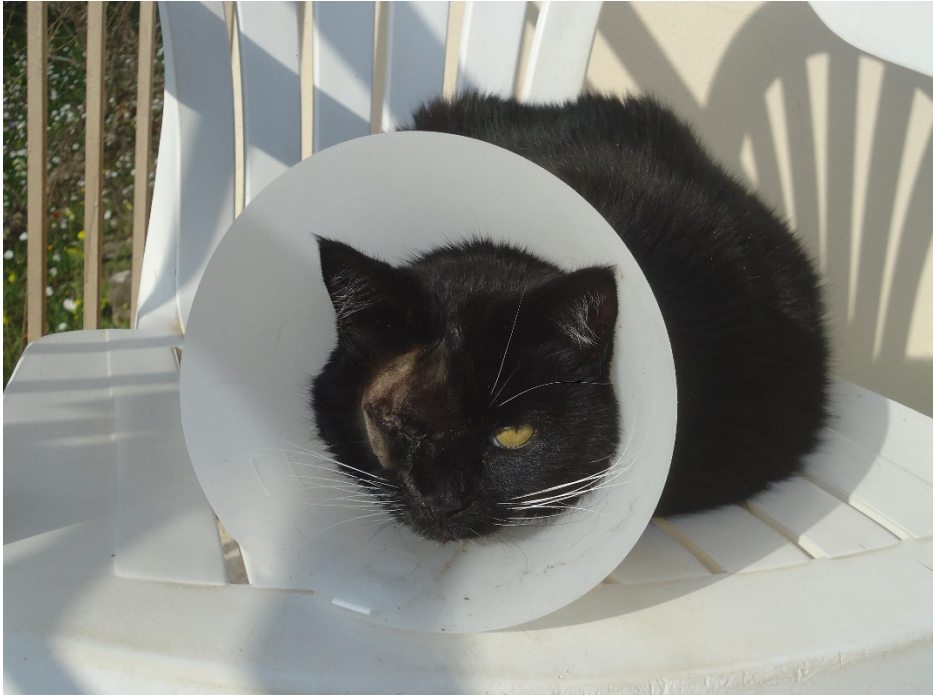
In my next life I want to live my life backwards. You start out dead and get that out of the way. Then you wake up in an old people's home feeling better every day. You get kicked out for being too healthy, go collect your pension, and then when you start work, you get a gold watch and a party on your first day. You work for 40 years until you're young enough to enjoy your retirement. You party, drink alcohol, and are generally promiscuous, then you are ready for high school. You then go to primary school, you become a kid, you play. You have no responsibilities, you become a baby until you are born. And then you spend your last nine months floating in luxurious spa-like conditions with central heating and room service on tap, larger quarters every day and then, voila! You finish off as an orgasm!

"Next Life" by Woody Allen, read as part of a eulogy at Paul Templeton's funeral service

22/03/19

46. "In the Land of the Blind, the One-eyed Cat is Queen.."

I crave my readers' indulgence for adapting the adage "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king" for my title. I hope that Dad's hero of the northern Renaissance, the late 15th/early 16th century Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus, to whom this proverb was first credited, would have forgiven me too. Just my way of trying to cheer up my sister, Minnie.



Minnie in her Elizabethan collar recuperates after her eye operation

She has been in the wars recently. Three weeks ago Dad had to take her to Athens to a veterinary ophthalmologist who removed her right eye. Briefly this is her tale of woe. She has been going blind in that eye for six months or so, but after Christmas she developed a bad infection which did not improve with antibiotic eye-drops. Dionisis in Kalamata reckoned that the eye might need to be extracted but he recommended a second opinion. In Athens, Dr Ignantios Liapis, confirmed that the eye was now permanently useless. He diagnosed an ulcerous cornea and high glaucoma, in addition to the infection. "The eye is destroyed," he concluded, so it was a straightforward decision to operate as soon as possible and the procedure was conducted successfully the following morning. Dad was very impressed with Liapis, who clearly knew his stuff and had a superb cage-side manner. He is an extremely urbane and charming 50-year-old with movie-star good looks and greying temples, who wears crimson-framed reading glasses cleverly connected at the nose-bridge by magnets.

Throughout the ordeal of a four-hour journey each way and the surgery itself Minnie was a "very good girl," says Dad. She hardly complained at all, even though she must have been in considerable pain beforehand, and I am pleased to report that she is now back to her normal, happy behaviour. She hated the veterinary cone collar as we all do, but once that was taken off on the fifth day she was content. I must admit that when she returned home wearing the strange collar I started to growl at her since

I didn't recognise my own sister. Dad told me off in no uncertain terms but it didn't deter me from uttering further unwelcoming noises if Polyphemia came too close.

She herself has been very philosophical about the loss of the eye. She explained it to me like this, "The difference between the two-legged tribe and us is that we don't dwell on how much better off we'd be with two eyes. We accept our circumstances as they are. So, provided we have our food and other creature comforts we are carefree. We live in the "now." We leave it to Dad to do the worrying about "what ifs?" "

And worry he did. "What if the surgeon takes out the wrong eye, what if she dies under the knife, etc, etc?" On the long drive home he was at last able to relax by listening repeatedly to a soothing album of jazz ballads, "For the Guv'nor," by his favourite saxophonist, Ben Webster, whose warm and breathy laid-back style always has a calming and beneficial effect on the old boy. It opens with the classic, "I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good," which summed up his mood. It's a relief to see them both content again now, even if the Cyclopean is getting more attention than me at the moment. "The Guv'nor" by the way refers to Duke Ellington, Ben's former employer.

On the morning of the operation he lessened his anxiety by going for a long walk in the outer suburb of Athens where he had stayed the night. He came upon a bizarre and surprising sight, a breaker's yard full of old cars of which at least a dozen, lined up in a neat row, were Trabants. Manufactured in East Germany for over thirty years until 1990 the Trabant is probably the worst car ever made. It was loud, slow, poorly designed and badly built, yet more than three million were produced in various models and it has now become something of a collector's piece. There is even a modern move to convert the clattering, smoke-spewing Trabi into an effective lightweight electric car.



A graveyard of Trabants in Paiania, a suburb of Athens

Dad first saw them on a brief visit with Geoff into the former DDR soon after German reunification and he has been fascinated by them ever since. A 1:43 scale miniature toy Trabant given to him by his friend sits proudly on his desk. "The spark plug with a roof" had sufficient power for a decent-sized lawnmower and even the latest 1980s models had no tachometer, no headlights or turn signals indicator,

no fuel gauge, no rear seat belts and no external fuel door. Drivers had to pour a mix of gasoline and oil directly under the bonnet! They were a supreme example of the triumph of closed-market command economy crap over consumer-driven capitalistic quality.

Dad has no idea how these particular wrecks ended up in a Greek junkyard but he knows of at least one traceable connection between this country and the Trabant. A doorless jeep version with folding roof called the 601 Tramp was primarily exported to Greece, of all places...

In another transport issue, it was surprisingly reported last month in a major national newspaper that part of the Peloponnese railway system would be reopening. Pretty much the whole network south of the Isthmus was closed at the end of 2010 in the midst of the country's general economic difficulties. Rail authorities have announced that they will reinstitute the rail link between the two biggest cities in the Peloponnese. The still extant Patra-Pyrgos-Kalamata narrow metre gauge track hugs the west coast south of Patra before heading inland to the Messinian capital.

There is a functioning service already from the western port city of Patra to Athens, but you wouldn't want to travel all the way from Messinia to Athens by train via Patra unless you had plenty of time on your hands. In the old days there was a slow and winding rail service from Kalamata to Corinth via Tripoli and Argos, but the new toll motorway, enabling frequent daily intercity buses to get to Athens in 2½ hours, made the rail route redundant.

No further details about the reopening are available. There is a rumour that Italian money is behind it. Dad, old cynic that he is, is convinced that unicorns will be discovered by local shepherds in Arcadia before anything happens. We shall see.

Number Five, Shipley Court, had been the home of Peter Mills's aunt. She had died the previous year and so the property had become available as staff accommodation for a married Highfield School teacher. The court comprised 18 modern three-bedroomed townhouses set out in blocks of six. They surrounded three sides of an attractive communal green square laid out with well-manicured lawns and mature trees. Each house had a small garden front and back and the up-market development, ideal for retirees and elderly down-sizers, was centrally situated in what could then justifiably still be called a village, albeit a large one of about 4,000 residents. The prep school was one-and-a-half miles away to the south-east. About two-thirds of the way down the trunk road from London to Portsmouth, Liphook also had its own railway station which offered a regular semi-fast service into Waterloo, a journey of about one hour. It is claimed that Admiral Nelson stayed the night in the coaching-house, now the Anchor Inn, on his journey to join HMS Victory before sailing to victory and death at the Battle of Trafalgar.

On their arrival the Wardrobes' first act was to acquire an Old English Sheepdog whom they called Wellington Boot, though his first name was soon abandoned as unnecessarily cumbersome. He became an integral part of the family for the next eleven years and would even go on to play a small part in the history of Highfield School. He was an extremely good-natured dog, who received much loving attention and was very protective of Pauline. With his sheepdog intelligence he quickly picked up some good habits from his training classes whilst always maintaining an occasional wilful naughtiness. His bark was impressive too, a deep, booming almost echoing sound which is often referred to in this breed as pot cassé. In French this means "broken urn." Boot never smashed any pots but he did chew up the furniture and rip the cushions if left alone in the house too long.



Boot at 7½ months

They redecorated the open-plan living room, simultaneously watching daily TV coverage of the Munich Olympics, tragically memorable for the terrorist attack on the Israeli team more than for any individual victories. One afternoon James was studying the textbooks he would be using to teach Latin when Peter Barham turned up with his teaching timetable. As well as Classics he would be taking a class of French. When he expressed surprise, Barham explained, “The Head said that Oxford Greats graduates can teach anything and I had a gap to fill..” “Any alternatives?” asked James, slightly panicking, since he was aware that his French accent was worse than Edward Heath’s. “History?” suggested the Housemaster. “Much better,” agreed the tyro teacher, sensing for the first time that school life was in many respects going to be quaintly and delightfully informal.

They also met some of James’s other colleagues before term started. The Head of History, Michael Lumb, and his wife Lorna, who was the School Bursar, kindly invited them to a welcoming dinner at their cottage on the school grounds. The other guests were the Head of English, Bob Perkins, and his wife Val. The Lumbs were exceptionally decent people who had devoted their life to Highfield. Michael, now in his nineties, is one of the world’s natural enthusiasts, not least for History, but also on a wide range of subjects including music. He had sung as a choirboy in Westminster Abbey at the Coronation of George VI. One of his many contributions to the life of the school was playing the organ in Chapel every morning.

After an enjoyable meal they prolonged the evening with a nightcap at the Perkins’ home which was a few minutes’ drive away. It was yet another school property, called New Shepherds Farm, and it had a vast garden. That night Pauline and James would never have believed anyone who correctly foretold

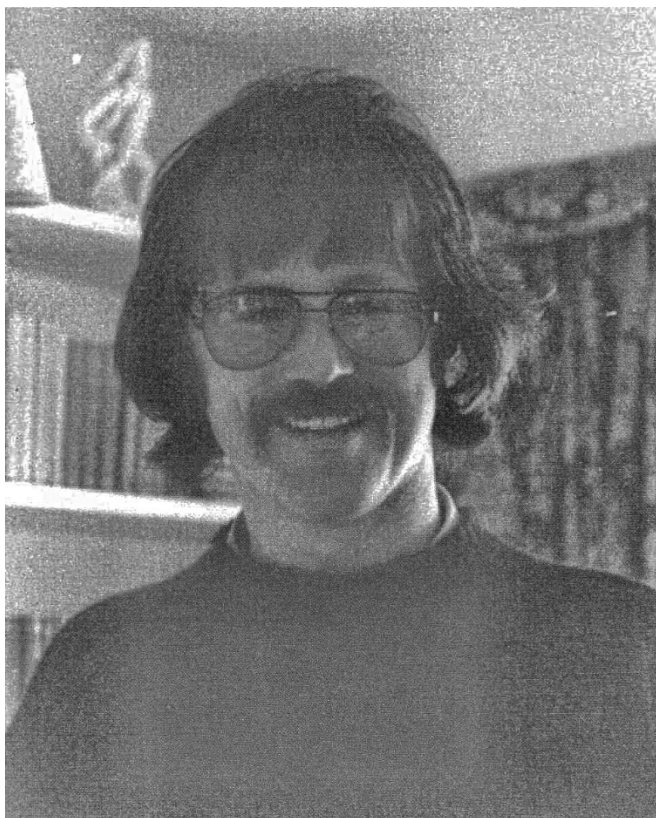
the future of this house. Sixteen years later, much extended and renovated by then and no longer owned by Peter Mills, it would become their second and long-lasting Liphook home.

Bob was one of the younger teachers. He had already been a member of staff for a couple of years and he gave James some useful advice. "You'll find that there are a great number of extra-curricular activities, not mentioned in anyone's contract, that require staff involvement," he explained. "The Head will ask you if you would help out with X, Y or Z. I made a mistake and kept saying Yes. So say No to everything for the first year while you find your feet. Then at your leisure you can pick and choose what suits you best." This turned out to be excellent counselling.

A few days before the start of term James met another teacher, who would have a massive impact on his life. As he parked his car behind the school prior to doing some preparation for the imminent start of term, a broad-shouldered, prematurely balding man in his mid-twenties, was strolling up the back drive. He addressed the newcomer in a distinctive West Country accent. "You must be James Wardrobe," he stated with utter confidence. He was only slightly taken aback when James replied, "And you must be Malcolm Wiseman.." The Head of P.E. and Games then proceeded in a seemingly casual and yet determined manner to ask James some personal questions, which it seemed churlish not to answer.

By the time they entered the school building perhaps ten minutes later, through his astoundingly effective interrogation techniques, which he later confided were acquired from his police Superintendent (Bristol Constabulary) father, Malcolm had unearthed more about James's life than the naïve grillee had ever before or since revealed so easily to a complete stranger. They would go on to become the closest of friends and on many future occasions James would witness Malcolm in similar detective mode. The secret of his success depended to a major extent on a total lack of embarrassment. His polite, insistent inquisitions of his unknowing victims were often hilarious to watch, usually irresistible to counter and invariably led to some insight "which, you never know, James, might be useful in the future." Knowledge is power, etc. So inevitably if you ever wanted to find out, for example, what was really happening in the school, he was the go-to guy, the font of the most reliable and up-to-date information. As for the unlikely friendship of the unathletic scholar and the non-academic sportsman, the story of The Odd Couple will unfold in subsequent chapters.

At last the first day of term, the Day of Judgement for the neophyte, had arrived. He had decided that the key to survival would be to take complete control of class discipline immediately – the rest would follow. Old Highfieldian Mark Lumsden Cook told James many years later that the 3B wolf pack of less able 12-year-olds, of which he was the self-proclaimed leader and proudest naughty boy, had other ideas. Mark remembered that they were therefore thoroughly wrong-footed when Mr Wardrobe's opening gambit was to encourage the class to laugh out loud "for one minute" at his ridiculous surname. Having got it out of their system, he then informed them, they were never to mock it again. And they never did. After this successful pre-emptive ploy, which also worked a treat with the more docile classes, the teaching went well and he found that he was comfortable in the classroom domain, where the boys were mostly a congenial and hard-working bunch.



“I shaved the beard off, Headmaster, and now the boys all say I have a moustache like Mark Spitz..”

It undoubtedly helped his burgeoning relationship with the pupils that he was the second youngest member of the teaching staff. The beard was long gone, as requested by the Head, but the boys liked Wardrobe’s fashionable long hair and they nicknamed him Mark Spitz because of his Zapata moustache. Spitz had just caused a sensation at the Olympics by winning seven swimming gold medals, achieving world records in each event, so James sensibly took this bit of cheekiness as a compliment.

The youngest member of staff was the other new boy that term, the Science Master. Like James, John Simmons was young, dark-haired and bespectacled. So, although John was five inches taller, it took the Headmaster until Christmas to distinguish between them. On meeting James in the corridor, Peter Mills would ask if he needed any more science equipment for the lab. When he came across John he would ask him how the Latin scholars were getting on. A bit like people asking David Hockney for Alan Bennett's autograph and vice versa, John and James quickly learnt how to pretend to be the other... Which didn't help Peter remember which of them was which at all.

As James had discovered at his interview, the Head’s natural diffidence sometimes caused him difficulties in expressing himself clearly. On the other hand, John had missed out on Bob Perkins’ advice about saying No. It soon became apparent that as the Science Master he was expected to know about plumbing, electricity, central heating and car mechanics. On numerous occasions he was asked by Peter to do various repair jobs around the school and even fix kitchen appliances in the Head’s private quarters. One day he found himself underneath the Head’s old Rover 2000, mending the sump. He was getting fed up of being treated as an unpaid dogsbody when Peter summoned him to the Headmaster’s Study and said, “Would you like to go to the fishmonger’s?”

This was the last straw. John reacted badly to this ludicrous imposition and for the first time in their increasingly feudal relationship said No. When he returned to the Staff Room he angrily regaled his colleagues with the story of Peter's latest demand. An elderly teacher, Eric Dickson, wise in all matters Highfield, smiled and said gently, "I do hope you said Yes."

"What? I'm a science teacher, a Geology graduate of Imperial College, London, and a member of the Royal College of Mines, not his bloody shopping assistant!" exploded John.

"You've misunderstood. The Headmaster wasn't asking him to go to the village on an errand. It was an invitation," patiently explained the quietly amused Eric.

"INVITATION? To what?!"

"Peter is a member of the Fishmongers' Livery Company in London and I believe he was inviting you to the sumptuous white-tie Dinner held every year at Fishmongers' Hall to celebrate the winners of the traditional Doggett's Coat and Badge rowing race on the Thames. A seven-course meal, lots of booze and merriment. It's a fabulous event and you're privileged to have been invited. It's his way of saying thank you."

Setting a very bad example to the boys John sprinted back down the corridor, knocked on the door of the Head's Study, entered sheepishly and exclaimed breathlessly, "Erm, Headmaster, I will gladly go to the Fishmongers'..."

You can listen to Ben Webster's 1969 album "For the Guv'nor" here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awr25cPsqKE>

20/04/19

47. Independence Day

March and April may well be the best months of all in Greece, although others would argue for September and October when the sea is warmer. This year the spring sunshine has only occasionally been diminished by rain storms. The yellow butterflies flit ceaselessly between the lemon and orange trees, both still laden with ripe fruit from the autumn. En route they settle on the surviving flowers of purple and magenta *bourgainvillea*. Above, the honey buzzards have returned from the tropics. They glide and soar with no apparent effort, observing with disdain the red-throated swallows beneath, which perform their early-season, high-speed aerobatics as they noisily search for insects on the wing.

Dad was revelling in having finally put paid to winter, so I felt I needed to keep him on his toes....literally. I decided to celebrate Greek Independence Day by dropping a lizard in one of his empty shoes. I was so excited about catching something worth eating that I gave the game away with triumphant squeaking noises. Unfortunately this alerted the suspicious old codger, who came to investigate and found me staring intently at one half of his favourite pair of Eccos. He took the shoe outside in a vain attempt to “rescue” this extra ounce of tasty protein snack but the foolish gecko jumped out too soon and I pounced. Twenty seconds’ chewing and chomping later, just a smear of blood was left on the tiles. Disgusting said Dad; delicious say I.

Independence Day is celebrated on 25th March and is one of the Big Four obligatory, official public holidays here, along with Easter Sunday, The Dormition of the Mother of God (known as Παναγία, *Panagia*) on 15th August and Christmas Day. There are eight further “non-fixed” national holidays, hence twelve in all although three always take place on a Sunday. In contrast the UK has eight. The Brits however should not feel too hard done by, since if a Greek holiday falls on a Sunday, that’s it, with no weekday off in compensation. The exception is 1st May which is regarded by locals more as a General Strike day than a Public Holiday.

In addition to the national days, there are public holidays that are not celebrated across the whole country, but only by a specific professional group or a local community. For example, many municipalities have a *Patron Saint’s Day*, also called ‘Name Day,’ or a *Liberation Day* when it is customary for schools to have a day off.

March 25th commemorates the start of the War of Greek Independence in 1821. It coincides with the Greek Orthodox Church’s celebration of the Annunciation. The Greek revolt against nearly 400 years of Ottoman rule was precipitated on this day, when Bishop Germanos of Patras raised the revolutionary flag over the Monastery of Agia Lavra near Kalavryta in the northern Peloponnese. The cry Ελευθερία ή Θάνατος, *Eleftheria i Thanatos*, “Freedom or Death,” became the motto of the uprising. The Greeks experienced early successes on the battlefield, including the capture of Athens in June 1822, but infighting ensued. By 1827 Athens and most of the Greek islands had been recaptured by the Turks. Just as the revolution appeared to be on the verge of failure, Great Britain, France, and Russia intervened in the conflict. The destruction of the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet at the Battle of Navarino in October that year proved decisive. The war ended in 1829 when the Treaty of Edirne established an independent Greek state.

On the hill opposite Agia Lavra, a monument to the Heroes of the 1821 Revolution looks down upon the monastery which stands as the symbolic birthplace of modern Greece.

Meanwhile back in the 21st century some readers have been asking how the building of the new house is coming along. I decided to go and have a look for myself. As you all know I have a reputation for curiosity, so one day I followed Mum and Dad up there. I strolled around and even rolled over in what will be Dad's office, where I hope to be spending a fair bit of time. The "first fix" by the electricians and plumbers is finished and the plasterers are due to start work any day now.



"What's that white tube for?" With due caution Mickie visits her new house for the first time.

More government bureaucracy lay in wait for Mum and Dad recently. They have had to respond to the nationwide cadastral survey, which has finally reached Messinia. A cadastre is a comprehensive land recording of all the property of a country. It commonly includes details of the ownership, tenure, precise location, dimensions and value of individual parcels of land. The word came into English through French from the late Latin *capitastrum*, meaning a register of the poll or head tax. In Greek it is called κτηματολόγιο, *ktimatologio*, and the explanatory website for owners stresses that the property information provided will not be used for tax purposes. Registration of your land is obligatory and the authorities are obviously trying to encourage as many landowners as possible to comply. If you fail to register, your property will be recorded as belonging to an "unknown owner," and an extreme consequence might be forfeiture of your asset to the state.

Greece has never had a central land registry before and by establishing a national record of boundaries and land ownership the aim is to minimise disputes, ease transfers and generally clear up what can sometimes amount to horrific confusion. Dad's hairdresser in Petalidi told him a sad story of what happened to her cousin's land in Crete. He had been "given" an attractive piece of land on the coast by his grandfather. No paperwork, no deeds, no mention in a will. He emigrated to Australia. After a number of years he decided to revisit his Cretan homeland. Whilst there, he checked out his inherited land and found that a five-star hotel had been built on it. In his absence members of his family had claimed the land as theirs and sold it to a developer for a tidy sum. Maria's cousin has very little

recourse, and certainly not without hefty legal fees.

So the completion of the cadastre will be a good thing. Mum and Dad went to register our land in the temporary cadastral office set up in Petalidi. He had heard that the scheme had begun in other parts of Greece many years ago, so he asked a helpful employee when the whole process had started.

“1910,” wisecracked the official. His assistant giggled, but perhaps he wasn’t joking. He added, “It was restarted in 2010 and the end is now in sight, although I can’t say exactly when we will finish the entire country.” Our own registration was straightforward, since we were only dealing with one piece of land and all the paperwork is up-to-date. On the other hand if your many olive groves were handed down from generation to generation to generation by word of mouth and maybe split up on the way informally between family members, God help you. You’ll be in the registration office time and again for hours, if not days.

Although Mum and Dad’s registration itself only took ten minutes, they had to wait their turn for over two hours. They were stuck behind an old farmer who was declaring umpteen separate plots of land. When they finally got out into the fresh air, Dad said to Mum, “ I feel as if we’ve been in there since 1910..”

Boot would grow to weigh about 40 kilos. Pauline, at barely 47 kilos, knew that he would need to be properly trained if he were not to become an uncontrollable nuisance. She took him to dog-training classes in Haslemere Hall, probably starting when he was too young. On the first day the six-month-old puppy widdled on the floor of the auditorium in sheer excitement at meeting so many other dogs. But he turned out to be a quick learner. An ex-police dog handler they met in the Green Dragon - their local pub in those early days - said that the best treats for rewarding canine obedience were small pieces of cooked chicken liver, and so it proved. Boot would have danced a fandango on his hind legs to the tune of *Long Haired Lover from Liverpool* if required, so long as he received his favourite titbits.

He could still be a handful. He had acquired the annoying habit of attacking the daily post when it dropped through the letterbox. No letters survived unscathed nor escaped the imprint of his teeth marks.

One afternoon Pauline and James returned home and found Boot unusually sluggish and unresponsive. They were concerned about their normally lively young pet until they saw the torn and half-devoured package on the floor, which had arrived while they were out. A London crony of James had sent an unsolicited present of cannabis resin via the Royal Mail and it was clear that Boot had wolfed down a good portion. The dog was high as a kite. After an extremely sound night’s sleep he was fully recovered by the next day. Bulletins were issued to all point north that under no circumstances were illicit substances to be sent again by post to Shipley Court.

On another occasion, during a friendly rough-and-tumble with Boot, James fell awkwardly and dislocated his right thumb. At that time your local GP did home visits and Dr Ron Connor duly arrived to treat a patient in considerable pain. Ron was the brother of Kenneth Connor, the comic actor most famous for his numerous appearances in *Carry On* films and subsequently in “*Allo, Allo!*” The siblings shared a similar and wicked sense of humour. The GP explained that he would relocate James’s thumb by means of a sudden jerking procedure. “Will it hurt?” whimpered James. “What I can say for sure,” dead-panned the good doctor, “is that this is going to hurt you a lot more that it will hurt me...” And at that moment with perfect theatrical timing he pulled hard. James wailed, Boot began howling in sympathy and the audience - Pauline and her visiting parents - applauded the living drama. Then it

was off to the A & E in Guildford for James to receive a dose of pethidine and an hour or two of joyous, unbridled delirium. Dog-wrestling was always conducted more circumspectly afterwards.

James settled easily into the routine of school life, which included running the Under-9's Football. Malcolm had seen his CV, was unimpressed by his lack of sporting prowess at school and university, and so had given him the youngest boys, who only had one school match that autumn and on whom he could inflict the least lasting damage to their footballing skills. During the course of the first term Malcolm quickly realised that James knew a great deal about team sports, even understanding the off-side rule, and had some talent as a coach if not as a player. Promotion soon followed. By the second term he was on the First Game Rugby as "Wiz's" assistant and in charge of the 2nd XV. They went on to run the 1st and 2nd XI soccer and rugby teams together until James's departure in 1980, holding their strategic team-selection meetings every Thursday evening in the Deers Hut public house.

His colleagues were helpful to the new boy from the start and very easy to like. For the most part they were interesting and somewhat eccentric characters. Some of their individual stories will unfold in later chapters.

In addition to the aforementioned Barham, Lumb, Perkins, Wiseman and Simmons, there was the magnificent and formidable Miss Vivienne Bunting (French), who was feared and revered by all her pupils; the delightful and by now almost retired "Dick" Dickson (also French), who had been a contemporary of Samuel Beckett at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen; Miss Shirley Pelmore (Maths) – a dead ringer for Joyce ("George, Don't Do That") Grenfell; Major Terence Tinsley (Maths and Geography), ex-Royal Engineers, and known as "Tin 'Ed" by the boys; Peter Head, the Chaplain, who left suddenly one term when it turned out that he'd never actually been ordained; John Strange (Music), as indeed he was; Miss Nicola Fraser (Form 1 class teacher), who was desperate for a man and eventually had to leave Highfield in order to find one; the calm and gentle Ann Sladden (Art); Tony Hey (Classics) who undertook marvellous, inconsequential activities in the woods with the boy scouts, known as Venturers; and various part-time peripatetic musical instrument teachers and "extra English" coaches. One full-timer, Richard Rickman, ex-Colonial Service, was away on a year's sabbatical. Matron ruled upstairs and Sister held imperious sway in the Sanatorium. Marigold was the Headmaster's Secretary, whilst also in evidence were various long-established estate workers and a maintenance man who taught Carpentry.

Most of the teaching staff had been at the school for many years, few were under 40 and only John Simmons was younger than James, with Malcolm a mere 17 days older. So what was to become of James and Pauline's social life in this rural backwater? Inevitably it revolved around the younger colleagues and their partners, but the Wardrobes frequently took under their wing the young assistant matrons and the temporary gap year lads. Practical training in drunkenness and timely advice given on such matters as Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n Roll was always well-received. Sometimes the girls were British but more often from abroad: Holland, Denmark, Norway, France, even Australia. The boys, who helped out with general duties and sports in return for board, lodging and a pittance of pay, were usually Old Highfieldians filling in time between their senior school and university.

Many amorous relationships developed between these resident teenagers, or at any rate much fornication. One youth in particular had a healthy appetite both for ladies and for his dinner, so Malcolm memorably nicknamed him "Leg Over and Chips." On one occasion, the night of the Liphook Carnival, a former gap year had returned for a visit and was staying the weekend with James and Pauline. He was introduced to a current assistant matron and the level of mutual lust soon became apparent. After they returned to Shipley Court from the pub, Pauline shocked them by ordering them

to “just go upstairs and get on with it..” Needless to say, they did as they were told. Pauline’s friends all knew that she rarely tolerated dissent.

Late one summer evening Peter Mills was walking his dog around the games fields as usual, when he heard a noise emanating from within the cricket pavilion. He shone his torch through the window but the bonking matron/gap-year combo had become aware of the Headmaster’s approach and to avoid being caught in flagrante delicto they had retreated beneath the trestle table on which teas were served on match days. Peter entered the large wooden hut to investigate further. The beam of his torchlight settled on the cowering, half-naked couple. Before making a diplomatic withdrawal the accidental ironist is reported to have asked them this priceless question: “Shouldn’t you two be in bed?”

There were some wild parties in the Masters' House, which was situated a short distance from the main buildings and really did provide accommodation for unmarried male staff until the late 1970s. On the first floor was a lavatory enclosed behind a door with a three-metre corridor contained within the lockable area. This private floor space therefore allowed the possibility, handy for non-residents, of horizontal copulation rather than upright knee-trembling, if the alcohol-fuelled urge suddenly came upon them. At least until another partygoer, perhaps not so much of an orgiast, needed the loo.



Travelling for three days by train to Istanbul on the cheap version of the “Orient Express,” Pauline sports a David Bowie haircut.

School holidays meant time for trips abroad: skiing in Austria in January and a longer trek to Turkey when the summer term ended after a successful and congenial first year. The joy of eight weeks off! Some cynics in the education profession would say that the best reasons for being a teacher are the long holidays. They travelled by train to Istanbul then by coach to Antalya, which became their base on the Pamphylian coast for a couple of weeks. In 1973 it was a pastoral town with a population of perhaps 100,000; now a sprawling metropolis of over one million people. The archaeological sites of Perge, Aspendos, Side and Phaselis were enthusiastically acclaimed by James and dutifully admired by

Pauline.

It was here In a café in Antalya's picturesque harbour that James's backgammon skills met their nemesis in the guise of a local taxi-driver. Worse was to follow. A young Turk befriended them and guided them around the town and the general area. His sob story, now long-forgotten, seemed genuine enough when he asked for a "loan" for a few days. They foolishly fell for it and gave him the money. They never got it back of course, but an important life lesson was learnt. Their final misadventure was to miss the stop for Ephesus on the bus back to Izmir, so a visit to the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, remains on James's wish list to this day.

A Turkish Maritime Lines ferry took them to Venice. After disembarkation they struggled though the crowds of tourists in a hurry to reach the railway station for their train north. James promised his disgruntled wife that one day he would bring her back to La Serenissima in style. He never did.

On the day after their return to Liphook, on his 26th birthday, James went into Holy Cross Hospital in Haslemere, as previously planned, in order to have two wisdom teeth extracted. When he came round from the general anaesthetic, the dental surgeon surprised him by saying, "I decided to take all four out.." James reflected, "Well, I always like to have something to remember my birthday by.."

It took Pauline another two weeks to get over the stomach bug - diagnosed by Ron Connor as amoebic dysentery! - which she had caught through drinking a bottle of dodgy Turkish black beer in a backstreet café in Antalya, but all in all they had both enjoyed a immensely glorious summer. James was ready and eager to resume his work at the chalkface and on the green playing fields of Highfield. And Pauline was about to be offered a job there.



Antalya harbour, August 1973

25/05/19

48. “Mummy, today I shot a teacher..”

Greek Easter, on 28th April, was late this year but not by as much as it might be. The last possible date is 8th May, the earliest 4th April. Compare this with Catholic Easter, for which the latest date is 25th April and the earliest 22nd March. Curious cat that I am, please indulge me whilst I briefly elucidate my findings on why Orthodox and Western Easters usually fall on different Sundays.

In principle Easter Day falls on the Sunday following the full moon that comes after the northern spring equinox, ie “the paschal full moon.” But whereas Western Christians calculate the dates according to the Gregorian calendar, the Orthodox Church still uses the Julian calendar which is 13 days behind. An additional quirk of the Orthodox calculation is that, in strict accordance with the format established at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, Easter must always take place after Jewish Passover. The western Church disregards this, having gone its own way on this and many other doctrinal matters since the Great Schism of AD 1054.

The switch to the Gregorian from the Julian calendar took place in 1582. Although Pope Gregory XIII’s innovation aligned itself much more closely to the astronomical calendar, its introduction established permanently the difference between Catholic and Orthodox calculation of the Christian Church’s most important and oldest festival. Hence (usually) the divergent dates for Easter.

Are you keeping up? Good. You will be relieved to read that I shall leave aside the issue of the “revised Julian calendar” also known as the Milanković calendar which was introduced in 1923 and which accounts for the two different dates for Orthodox Christmas, e.g. Greek and Russian.



Chrani celebrates The First Of May with a highly politicised free lunch.

So, on the Wednesday after Easter came the May Day public holiday. The Chrani Village Committee as

usual organised an annual party for the locals, which Dad was very happy to attend once he'd heard the phrase "free lunch." He arrived to find that you sat at one end of a line of tables if you were a Nea Dimocratia Party (conservative) supporter and at the other end if you were PASOK (socialist). A handful of other expatriate foreigners in attendance had either placed themselves in the middle, didn't care where they sat or were oblivious to the local politics. Dad decided to roam about from end to end, greeting people in both camps and then he settled down with the lefties, whose number included Fotine and Bob. It soon became apparent that the main reason for the increased politicisation of the event this year was the specific need of both parties to muster support for the forthcoming local council (and EU parliamentary) elections on 26th May. As Dad said to us on his return, "Who cares, when there's free souvlaki and wine available at both ends of the political spectrum?"

Shortly after we arrived in Chrani nearly three years ago a new road improvement project began, running down the western side of the Messinian Gulf and planned eventually to create a dual carriageway for most of the 30 kilometres from Rizomilos, the junction with the Kalamata-Pylos road, down to Koroni. The most significant element was the Petalidi bypass. Not much has been achieved so far owing to chronic lack of funds, but the much-needed 4km loop round the back of our traffic-congested local town seemed to be progressing well until... the archaeologists arrived on the scene.



"Oops! Better tell the gaffer that this bypass ain't gonna be finished any time soon.."

Smack-bang in the middle of the new route a large settlement dating back 3000 years to the Bronze Age, with additional Classical and Roman/Byzantine layers, has been unearthed. The archaeologists continue their painstaking work at a point in the hills behind Petalidi where, to the frustration of the engineers, only about 800 metres of the new road needs to be completed in order to connect the whole ring of the bypass. In addition to the ancient buildings a wealth of artefacts has been discovered.

There is an ancient acropolis further up the hill whilst the town below, originally known in ancient

times as Aipeia, was mentioned in Homer's Iliad. So these discoveries must have come as no surprise to the road builders. In Greece you just have to begin any major civil engineering scheme as intended and hope for the best, risking almost inevitable and costly delays to infrastructure projects due to archaeological finds.

Dad drove up there to have a look. For half-an-hour he tramped around the site, where there were no workers, let alone archaeologists, to quiz about what they were finding. Then by chance he met a friendly Athenian whose father's house stands very close to the works and who was happy to explain the entire situation.

"The ideal plan is to move everything carefully out of the way stone by stone, build the road and then rebuild the ancient village at or as close to its original location as possible," said Yiorgos. There is also talk of a new museum in Kalamata to house the artefacts. The problem of course is lack of money, with the likely outcome that this road which has been mooted "for at least fifty years" will not be finished, according to Fotine's brother Billy, in our lifetime.

On a national level the same issue has plagued another vastly bigger construction project, the building of the €1.85 billion Thessaloniki Metro. Work began in 2006 and was scheduled to finish in 2012. After eight years of delays due to an astonishing cornucopia of important material found in the city centre, primarily Roman, early Christian and Byzantine, most of the main line is now set finally to open in November 2020. Mini-museums will be provided in the stations, similar to the imaginatively designed Syntagma and Acropolis metro stops in Athens. Major discoveries in the central station of Venizelou will make up the world's first publicly-accessible open-air archaeological site contained within a metro complex.

Meanwhile, back in 1973..

Apart from three TV channels and a variety of village pubs, what other opportunities were there for entertainment in the 1970s in the Liphook area? More than you might expect in such a rural location. James and Pauline were blessed with a choice of three easily reachable repertory theatres, all with attractive and varied programmes: the Yvonne Arnaud in Guildford, the Redgrave in Farnham and the Chichester Festival Theatre.

Their most frequent "cultural" visits however were to the Rex Cinema in nearby Haslemere. This was a classic art deco picture house, which opened in September 1938 (first film shown: *Follow the Fleet* with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers) and closed in November 1986 (last film: Clint Eastwood's *Pale Rider*). Unaltered since the opening day it was a delightful example of a 1930s Super Cinema but sadly now demolished with a block of flats ("Rex Court") built on the site.

It showed movies on general release a couple of weeks after they came out in London, so the Wardrobes were able to keep up-to-date with one of their main passions. It was rarely full unless a blockbuster came to town, such as *The Sting*, *Godfather Part II*, *Blazing Saddles* and the modern noir *Chinatown*, one of James's all-time favourites. The locals also came in droves if a film contained pre-publicised elements of a sexual nature, such as *Last Tango In Paris*. The bourgeoisie always love to be scandalised but this art house movie probably left the good burghers of Haslemere quite disappointed with the infamous "butter lubricant" scene. James and Malcolm certainly were.

One appealing feature of the Rex was that no matter the length of the feature film it always ended exactly at 10pm. The word on the street was that screenings were timed to finish so that the projectionist

could get a swift one in before closing time. This certainly suited James and Pauline and their friends, who usually took the opportunity to do likewise. The mundane alternative explanation, viz. some council regulation to protect the neighbours from late-night noise pollution, never occurred to them.



The Rex Cinema in Shottermill was originally called The Regal, complete with café, electronic organ and 12-yard-wide proscenium stage.

Back at Highfield, Peter Mills had an astute policy of involving the wives of new teachers in the life of the school. He reckoned that they would then become less easily bored with village life and therefore less inclined to encourage their spouses to look for another job. As a volunteer Pauline had been doing the make-up and hair for the actors in Bob Perkins' school plays, so she became known to the management. Peter Barham asked her to help out with some private Extra English lessons, initially with two boys, but this quickly grew into an ample part-time weekly timetable as Mrs Wardrobe's popularity grew. Classroom teaching came later. There was no ESN (English for Special Needs) Department – a virtually unknown concept – in those days but Highfield was ahead of its time in using the services of a peripatetic dyslexia specialist from the Helen Arkell Centre in Frensham. As a dyslexic himself the Headmaster was well aware of the misunderstandings and misconceptions surrounding the condition and he was never averse to accepting dyslexic children into the school and providing appropriate support.

So Pauline too got to know and admire some of the delightfully eccentric characters who inhabited the Staff Room. A number of the older teachers had been at the school since the days of Canon Mills, the founding headmaster who was known as The Bug. He owed this nickname to the fact that his initials were WRM. Schoolboy logic determined that this clearly spelt "Worm," from which it wasn't a long leap to "Bug."

Miss Vivienne Bunting was one of these long-serving lifers. Short and stout, a chain-smoker in Harris Tweed suits who enjoyed a drink and took no prisoners in the classroom, "Bun" was an integral part of the very successful French Department. She had a justifiable reputation for getting weak students

good grades in one of the major subjects in their Common Entrance exams. This was due in no small measure to the amount of extra tuition she willingly gave, often in her cottage situated on the back drive next to the Wisemans. The boys always looked back in grateful appreciation when their French C.E. pass clinched their place in their senior school.

She could be an unrelenting taskmaster. Sometimes she kept the whole class back on a half-day and they resented their loss of free time. On one occasion she was detaining a particularly dim and resistant group of 13-year-olds in their classroom on a pleasant summer evening when James came across her in the corridor on the way to a fag break. "How's it going, Bun?" he asked. "Slowly," she growled, "but I'm not releasing them until they've satisfactorily mastered the passé composé. I've just told them, "You hate me and I hate you, but you're not leaving until you get it right." And master their êtres and avoires they surely did.

Gardening, about which she was extremely knowledgeable, was her great passion. For many years she undertook the oversight of the boys' gardens and she saw to it that if a boy had elected to look after a patch he certainly did it. James knew little of her private life, only that she lived with her sister in Bexhill-on-Sea during the holidays. He never found out how she knew French but he did learn that in a past life she had been a governess. In her deep, gravelly voice she told the story of the young children in her care coming to the railway station with their parents to wave her off. As the train drew away and she was leaning out of the window, one of the children shouted out, "Bun, you're a bugger - and your mother was a bugger before you!" Bun went on to become undoubtedly one of the great legendary figures in the history of Highfield.

Another legend was Major Terence Tinsley. Known affectionately as "Tin 'Ead" by the pupils, the former Sapper Officer was the epitome of calm self-reliance and unflappability. After his retirement from the army he had been teaching at the school for five years when James arrived. He was part of a formidable triad that constituted the Mathematics Department, also comprising Peter Mills and the incomparable Shirley Pelmore (see below). In addition, Terence taught Geography and later Scripture, and his contribution to the extra-curricular life of the school was immense. He coached teams in all the major sports and at 50 years of age he was fitter and faster around the soccer, rugby and hockey pitches than many of his younger colleagues.

He once gave an assembly about his time as a young officer in India. During a period of communal disturbances he was ordered to guard an ammunition dump overnight "at all costs." He decided that the best way to defend the vast heap of munitions was to sit on top of it. A stray shot would have seen him ascend to kingdom come in a vast explosion but he survived the night unperturbed, having done his duty.

Nothing fazed him, not even when he lost a boy on the Underground whilst taking a school trip to London. The child had got off the tube too early, so Terence and the rest simply alighted at the next stop, confident that the miscreant would appear on the next train, which he did. The school party got back on the Tube and continued their journey, no harm done.

Before the neurotic onset of Health & Safety bureaucracy began to limit life's possibilities, he ran a successful air rifle Shooting Club for boys of all ages. One day, whilst he was preparing the targets on the shooting range, a seven-year-old called Charles pulled the trigger on his air rifle by accident and shot Terence in the shin. As the blood flowed down Terence's trouser leg, the whole group of children became hysterical, with much howling and weeping. Terence is reported to have looked down at his leg and said out loud, though more to himself than to anyone else since there were no other adults in the vicinity, "This, I could do without..."

Charles was a day pupil and on the way home in the car that evening, his mother noticed that he was rather more subdued than usual. She asked him: "Charles, did anything happen at school today?" The little boy replied, "Yes Mummy, today I shot a teacher..." Understandably concerned, Charles' mother rang the Headmaster to find out what had happened. The Head hadn't heard anything about this incident and did some investigations. It turned out that Terence, not wanting to make what he regarded as an unnecessary fuss, had simply taken himself off to A & E, without mentioning to any of the school authorities what he considered a minor issue.

The phrase "This I could do without.." became a treasured catchphrase amongst his colleagues in the Staff Room, used whenever circumstances tried their patience to its limits.

It was thanks to Terence and his wife Shirley that James played his first round at Liphook Golf Club. Terence was a member of an unusual and cheap category of membership, Class A, which Canon Mills had negotiated soon after the Club was founded in the 1920s. The category was only open to "ordained ministers of the Church of England and schoolmasters of private schools," so James availed himself of the opportunity to join at a reduced rate until he left Highfield at the end of the '70s.

Terence lived an incredibly full and active life until the age of 93. James was proud to be invited to deliver one of many eulogies at his funeral and to have made the congregation laugh with gusto at the story of "the shooting incident."

The leading member of the Maths team was another "character." Shirley Pelmore was a single lady of middle years who came from the local area. Her brother would serve as Mayor of Haslemere at some point in the future. Since her professed religion was "of another persuasion," she never attended Chapel under the terms of a unique dispensation from the Head. She was de facto head of department and held unshakeable views on the teaching of Mathematics to children. For example, Maths must only ever be taught before lunch. In the afternoon, whether after winter Games or before Cricket in the summer, the boys' capacity to concentrate on sums was in her opinion seriously diminished. Woe betide the errant timetabler who disregarded this fundamental principle.

Her teaching style was High-Pitched Theatrical. She had deliberately fashioned a highly effective parody of herself, which went down a treat with children of all ages. In class, when quizzing her class in mental arithmetic, she ignored the noisy boys certain of the correct answer who not only thrust their hands in the air but urgently cried out, "Miss, Miss, pleeeese, Miss!" She responded with a classic put-down: "Honking monsters don't get asked.."

One morning break time Shirley and Pauline were drinking their coffee together. The older lady remarked, "It happened again today. I've been teaching Maths here for a long time and I've never understood why the senior boys always snigger whenever the number 69 comes up." Pauline decided to take the bull by the horns.

Putting her palms together as if in prayer, she calmly and deliberately began. "Shirley, imagine my hands are two people having sex in the normal, what we call the missionary, position." The Staff Room went quiet.

"Yes, I absolutely understand," replied the lifetime spinster of the highest moral standards.

Pauline now inverted one of her palms 180° and placed it back against her other palm. "This position however is generally known as sixty-nine, or in French *soixante-neuf*. The boys are laughing at the sexual innuendo. That's it." Colleagues gripped their teacups hard and held their breath.

Shirley's reaction was magnificent. "Oh, Pauline, you've explained it beautifully and I'm so grateful to

you. You are a natural-born teacher. After all these years someone has been brave enough to tell me the truth. And there'll be no more giggling in 4C at 69 from now on.." The collective sigh of relief in the Staff Room was almost audible. Then everyone burst out laughing when Bun added, " Funny, that. They never snigger at all when I say soixante-neuf in French class."

In return Pauline had reason to be grateful to Miss Pelmore and to all her other willing mentors on the teaching staff. At the beginning of her life as a schoolmistress, she learnt from them the tricks of the trade, which served her well over the unexpectedly long period in which she matched, if not exceeded, their many years of service to Highfield.

After two years at the school some indefinable ambition was beginning to give James itchy feet, despite the fact that he loved the work and the lifestyle. He started to apply for jobs outside of teaching, but unbeknown to him Peter Mills had other plans for the 27-year-old.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ua1BkfDeNVc>

Excerpt fom "Chinatown" (1974), directed by Roman Polanski

Robert Towne, the Oscar-winning scriptwriter of *Chinatown*, acknowledged that his screenplay was heavily influenced by Sophocles' *Oedipus The King*, the earliest detective story in European literature, with its themes of incest and the inevitability of the too-clever hero's failure and self-destruction.

19/06/19

49 Cats, Dogs and Shoes like Clogs

Chrani is not an easy place for our stray feline cousins to stay alive. They brazenly frequent the rubbish bins and restaurants in search of food, but they also run a high risk of being poisoned by the locals. Two cat-loving couples who live in the centre of the village, Jutta & Willi and Sally & Dick, told Dad about the recent spate of poisonings. Jutta was regularly feeding thirteen strays and had even paid to have some of them neutered. She returned from a trip home to Augsburg to discover that ten had been poisoned; in all sixteen were found dead in one week. This occurred shortly before the restaurants opened for the season. She believes that this is not coincidental, although others say the events are unconnected. Anyway, Minnie and I are very happy to live outside the village up the hill, where we are well-fed and part of a loving two-legged family.

The practice though technically illegal is widespread in Greece, where cats are generally regarded as vermin. Insecticides, strychnine and warfarin (rat poison) are commonly used, mixed with strong tasting foods such as canned pet food, sausages, meat balls, raw meat or sardines to disguise them. Mostly officialdom turns a blind eye. It is widely believed, although denied by the authorities, that thousands of stray dogs and cats were poisoned to clean up the streets and parks before the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Traditional attitudes towards animals still pretty much belong in the Dark Ages. Dick was horrified to watch a Chrani local briefly stop his truck in order to throw a live chicken over a fence to be savaged and eaten by his guard dog.

The situation is slowly improving. Since joining the European Union, additional pressure has been placed on the Greek government to bring its animal policies in line with those of the EU and to enforce existing laws. In 2007 the European Commission reported Greek authorities to the European Court of Justice for continuing lack of action for animal welfare. In response to government inaction there is now a profusion of animal welfare societies and charities run both by Greek citizens and by expatriates. Some groups have adopted colonies of feral cats and follow “trap-neuter-return” initiatives, treating diseased animals, giving inoculations, and neutering to control breeding, often with the help of volunteer vets. At the very least nowadays most Greek veterinarians, like Dad’s enlightened friends, Costas and Matina, try to keep their costs down for neutering both male and female cats.

We are of course highly regarded as useful killers of rats, mice, snakes and lizards. When Dad and his mate Paul visited Mount Athos in 2012 they heard a heartening and amusing story about the value of our species to the monks who inhabit the Άγιο Όρος, *Ayio Oros*, “Holy Mountain,” in northern Greece.

The religious community of twenty monasteries, various smaller communities and many solitary hermitages of monks living on the easternmost peninsula of Halkidiki is an autonomous state under Greek sovereignty with its own laws and customs, some dating back to the Byzantine era and strictly enforced by its ruling Council of Abbots, known as the Holy Community. Visitors, known as “pilgrims,” must obtain a permit to enter the area, only accessible by sea. Females, both human and domesticated animals, are categorically forbidden. Except for female cats..

Until a century or so ago only male cats were permitted to live on the Holy Mountain. They dealt effectively with the rats and other prevalent rodents. Unfortunately as the mousers died they needed to be replaced and the monks were obliged to purchase their feline successors from “male-cat-merchants” operating breeding programmes outside the sacred peninsula. This was proving to be increasingly expensive for the monks, more and more profitable for the traders. During a particularly invasive

plague of rats, an urgent Council meeting was called to discuss the problem. The obvious solution was to allow female cats in and let nature take its course. A free population would quickly develop and the commercial trade would cease. But no females were allowed on the Holy Mountain. What to do?

The Council meeting began with a sermon delivered by one of the leading Abbots. He explained that the previous night he had a stirring vision in which Panagia, the Mother of God and the only female whose icon is worshipped by Athonite monks, had appeared to him. In this revelation she reminded the wise and venerable Abbot that the area was consecrated from early monastic days as “the Garden of the Virgin Mary” and that it was in her gift to declare that from now on and in her honour female cats could live within its precincts. This miraculous news went down exceedingly well with the synod and an exception to the general rule of Ἀβατον, *Avaton*, “No Entry,” was quickly agreed. The monks were canonically satisfied, the rat problem was permanently solved and the redundant cat merchants were thoroughly furious.



Two Mount Athos cousins, relaxing outside Koutloumousiou monastery, April 2012.

Male or female? The monks don't need to care these days.

Apparently egg-laying hens are pecking around the monasteries now, but it is unrecorded whether this is permitted as a result of another fortuitous vision of the Panagia.

STOP PRESS: Dad is more than excited to have unearthed a proper Indian restaurant which opened in Kalamata two months ago. He went with Stephanos last week and found that the “Milo Milo Indian Palace” has a comprehensive Anglo-Indian menu with all the expected dishes, even washable down with Cobra or Kingfisher beer. Their choices were authentic and tasty. The chef is Punjabi and the waiter, from the same village in northern India, explained that the new venture is run by a group which already has three establishments in Athens, one in Mykonos and one in Santorini. It is located on the ground floor of the Rex (sic) Hotel in the centre of town, only about 50 minutes' drive away, so quite accessible for more curries in the future. Result, or what?

In September 1974 James went back to Ampleforth for the first and only time. Bill Wakely had asked him to be his Best Man at his wedding in the Abbey. He had no qualms about his return and it gave him the opportunity to show Pauline a piece of his history. Vanheems had departed six years earlier to the infernal halls of Lucifer, whilst none of the monks who would attend the ceremony and the subsequent feasting had done him any direct harm. Patrick however did not come, since he was now living in South America. He had recently moved from Barcelona with his Catalonian wife to Caracas, where he continued to teach EFL.

Pauline and James stayed with Tommy and Brenda who were now living in Scalby, a quiet village north of Scarborough and within an easy drive of the North Yorkshire Moors. They too had been invited, so this was a trip into the past for them as well. What Pauline thought of the place, sinister in oft-told description yet gleaming that day in charm and warmth from the late summer sunshine, James has long forgotten. Curiously detached, he believed that after nearly a decade the passing of time had cleansed his soul of those painful years. He was wrong of course. In old age he realised that a key part of his character had been carved there in immutable alto-relievo.



Outside Ampleforth Abbey before Bill's wedding.

Bill: "My two-tone clog-shoes are truly superb, aren't they?"

James: "Shh, I'm posing for the camera, and by the way my flares are stylishly wider than yours.."

Bill had fonder memories of his schooldays. He had been well cared for by his Housemaster, Dominic

Milroy, who now conducted the service. James's speech went down well, with Thomas pleased to discover that his son had inherited his own facility for humorous public speaking. James never afterwards felt the need to visit his alma mater again.

Boot had spent the wedding in kennels near Scalby where he seemed to have behaved himself, apart from making all the other dogs bark themselves hoarse all day long. Still very young and high-spirited, he had got into a few scrapes that year.

Margaret and her family had arrived from Australia for six months for one of Graham's academic sabbaticals, this time at Manchester University. When Pauline and James visited them at Easter, Boot had accompanied the brothers-in-law on a run in what appeared to be a public park. Off the lead, Boot spotted a flock of sheep. Before James could catch him his sheepdog instinct told him to herd them up by running round them. Unfortunately he had not been trained as to what to do next. So he simply ran barking through their midst, scattering the frightened animals so that he could round them up again. James caught him just before an extremely angry farmer with a shotgun arrived in his Land Rover. Suitably chastised, James kept Boot on the leash in public places after that.

At Highfield where all dogs were welcome he had the freedom to roam the grounds on his daily walk. Unlike the sheep the boys loved being "herded" and then barked at, as their yelling and running group was broken up for yet another encirclement. He was friendly with dogs and humans alike, except Peter Barham's Saluki. Built for speed and agility this "middle eastern greyhound" was sleek and beautiful, all grace and symmetry. She teased Boot mercilessly as he tried in vain to catch her. She darted past him this side and that, jumping over his back and leading him a merry dance. He steadily plodded on in pursuit, eventually driven to exhaustion in a game he could never win.

Then one day she made a mistake and he had his revenge. By accident or design he chased her into one of the cricket nets, a cul-de-sac with only one three-metre-wide means of escape. The huge sheepdog patiently guarded the exit. As she made her bid for freedom and dashed past him he administered a perfect right hook which caught the Saluki flush on the head and sent her sprawling. Witnessing the whole episode, James swore that if sheepdogs could smile Boot was grinning. She behaved with more caution and respect towards him after that.



Boot in prime adulthood

He could be an embarrassment. Most of the classrooms had large windows facing the main cricket pitch. During lessons the boys naturally spent time looking outside, no doubt daydreaming of scoring a hundred, taking five wickets or ... but what is Boot doing to the Mills' Labrador on the cricket square? In full view of all the pupils and teachers Boot was humping Daisy with some vigour and thereby bringing the teaching work of the school to a complete standstill. "Miss, Miss, look at Boot!" "Look, Sir, what's he doing?" "That's not soizante-neuf, is it, Miss?" The teachers finally regained control and the boys loved Boot even more.

In those all-boarding days the boys' parents were not much in evidence, though a hard core turned up to watch their children play in school matches on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Match teas were an opportunity to get to know them. There were no parent-teacher evenings nor any Parents' Association. Refreshingly they just let the Headmaster and staff, to whom they had trusted their offspring, get on with it. In return Peter listened carefully to the advice of a smallish group of parents whose judgement he valued. Major events such as sports days, concerts and plays were well attended and gave James a chance to meet them all.

Some of the parents were celebrities in their own fields of endeavour, their names even familiar nationally. Nick Ryman, for a while in partnership with the Old Highfieldian Terence Conran, was well-known for his chain of high-street stationery and office equipment stores. His son Hugh went on to become a successful winemaker in France. Ronnie Hampel, later Chairman of ICI, is well known

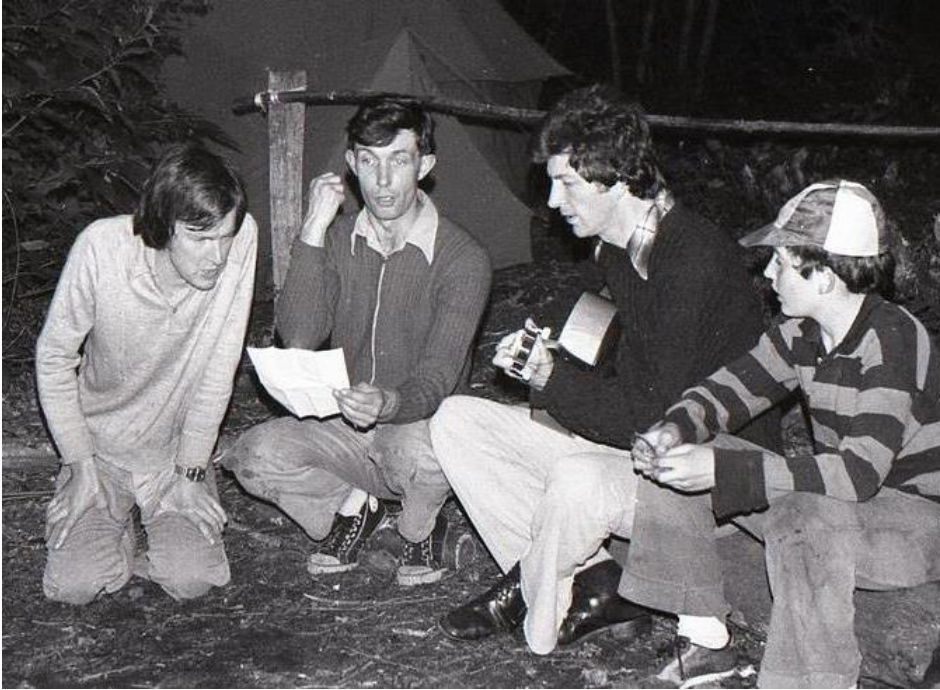
in the City both for fending off a hostile takeover bid from Hanson and for the Hampel Report on corporate governance. He had three sons at the school and was a massive supporter of Peter Mills. A further generation of his grandchildren were Highfield pupils. Jason, a grandson of Frank Whittle, inventor of the jet engine, attended the school in the '70s.

The parent most admired by James was Major General John Frost, CB, DSO, MC, whose son Hugo was at Highfield at this time. He played golf with the old soldier a number of times and found this genuine "war hero" humble, self-effacing and very amusing. As a Lieutenant Colonel in the 1st Airborne Division, Johnny had a prominent part in Operation Market Garden, the ill-conceived allied disaster that took place in the Netherlands in September 1944. As commander of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Parachute Brigade, he was dropped on the north side of the Neder Rijn in the first wave of the airborne landings. Along with about 740 of his battalion he managed to reach and defend the road bridge at Arnhem, their primary objective. The much-delayed relief force never arrived. The survivors held out as long as possible against vastly superior numbers until forced to surrender.

In the 1977 movie, *A Bridge Too Far*, Frost was played by Anthony Hopkins, who captured Johnny's clipped, no-nonsense, good-humoured character perfectly. He had been a military consultant for the film and enjoyed going to the premiere. James asked him if the German "surrender" incident (see end) was true. He replied that it certainly was. The bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem was renamed *John Frostbrug* ("John Frost Bridge") in his honour in 1978, despite his reported reluctance. He once told James that he "earned extra pocket money" in retirement guiding tour groups round the Normandy D-Day beaches as well as the Arnhem battle sites.

Johnny was a local farmer near the village of Milland and at the end of every summer term he invited Tony Hey's Venturers to use his land for their scout camp. Tony always encouraged colleagues to join in and sleep in tents, etc., during this three-day annual event. James participated on one occasion but found the "campfire fun" difficult to take as seriously as did the earnest scoutmaster. He still considers songs such as "Ging Gang Gooly" and "Kumbaya" utterly ridiculous. On the other hand he remembers his delight at Bob Perkins' hilariously effete parody of *Poof* (sic) *The Magic Dragon*.

On the final day James foolishly volunteered to help clear up. He was detailed to refill and dig over the latrine trenches. This was the last straw - his camping days were done.



Compulsory sing-along at Venturers' camp:

(from left) Chris Fearnley (John Simmons' successor as Science master), Tony Hey, Bob Perkins & unknown boy.

Meanwhile he was now attending a number of interviews for jobs ranging from personnel management at Massey Ferguson in Coventry and management consultancy with an American firm based in Mayfair to assistant curatorship at the British Museum in the department of Classical Antiquities. (Imagine if Wardrobe had ended up in charge of the Parthenon Marbles!) Nothing came of them, probably because his lack of focus on any definite career path was manifestly apparent to his interlocutors. Gerry had once told him that career-wise he himself had "gone through life on his arse" and James felt that he was heading the same way. The problem was that he liked teaching but couldn't see himself explicating Latin grammar to young boys for the rest of his life. He harboured thoughts of following Patrick into EFL, which would at least mean teaching adults. This would lead to a three-week stint at a language school in Munich during the following summer which he enjoyed more than he should have and not because of the work.

An interview at British Steel in Croydon for some white-collar job brought him to his senses. The first question was: "Is your father called Tom?" It turned out that the interviewer and James's father had worked together at Urwick Orr on various projects in the old days. This former colleague expressed his great respect and admiration for the older man. James still wonders if his being invited to the interview in the first place and what happened next was born of that fondly remembered relationship. The interview progressed along predictable lines for a while until the ex-Urwick man said, "You don't really have a clue what you want to do next, or even why you want to leave your current job, do you?" He then flipped the recruitment interview into an extended career advice and analysis session, in which James was forced to consider why he wanted to give up teaching in pursuit of some unnameable chimaera, that thing known vaguely as "a proper job." As a result he began for the first time to consider education as a long-term professional option.

During the 1975 summer term Peter Barham gave notice that he would be leaving in December. He was going to Dhahran in eastern Saudi Arabia to an extremely lucrative job teaching English to ARAMCO employees. At this stage, no one on the staff was aware of the Housemaster's impending departure, not even Malcolm, who seemed to know everything or at least "far too much that he shouldn't," according to the Head.

So, when Peter Mills asked James if he and Pauline would like to become resident Housemaster and Housemistress, James was dumbfounded on many counts. Chiefly, he had never considered himself appropriate for such elevated responsibility. He would in effect be running the whole school administration, including the timetable, as well as taking on a major pastoral role. Peter, on the other hand, had successfully risked taking James on the teaching staff in the first place and characteristically he wasn't troubled at all now about promoting him. He had seen something in him which James hadn't seen in himself, an insight which kick-started the young man's career in educational management roles. Peter was always a shrewd talent-spotter. Perhaps he had also wisely calculated that he would lose James soon if he remained an Assistant Master.

Peter added that he would convert Barham's flat on the top floor of the main building to be suitable for a married couple. And Boot was most welcome to reside in term-time too. They could retain Shipley Court as their main home for the holidays and days off. His timing was perfect and the Wardrobes accepted his offer, which would keep them at Highfield for another five happy years. Pauline would spend more time than before as a classroom teacher, which was a move she wanted. When the news was announced all their colleagues seemed genuinely delighted. They would continue to be very supportive in the days to come, as James with growing confidence learnt to climb the greasy pole of school management.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Li65P_3lvM

The German "Surrender" scene from the film, A Bridge Too Far (1977),

directed by Richard Attenborough

18/07/19

50. Election Antics and the Art of Headmastering

There has recently been a general election here. Constitutionally the government is given a maximum four-year term but the Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, called it three months early, owing to his party's poor showing in the local and EU parliamentary elections in May. All the predictions were that his party, SYRIZA, a coalition of the radical left, was νεκρωμένο, *nekromeno*, “toast,” to use Nigel Farage's lapidary metaphor for the Tory Party if it fails to deliver Brexit.

The forecasters were right, although at least SYRIZA came second and will be the main opposition party. The traditional leftists, PASOK, now renamed KINAL (short for *Movement for Change*), were a dismal third. Winners were the other long-standing dynastic party, the centre-right NEA DIMOKRATIA (*New Democracy*), who gained a comfortable overall majority of 186 in a parliament of 300. Six parties, from the eighteen to choose from, have some level of representation in the new parliament. I shall spare you the complex details of the Greek electoral system, which is entitled “reinforced proportionality.”



Chraniots wait to perform their civic duty on Election Day

The new Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, is the son of Constantinos, who was PM from 1990 to 1993, and his elder sister is Dora Bakoyanni, who was Mayor of Athens during the 2004 Olympic Games and is a former Minister of Foreign Affairs. Representing the Hellenic College of London on a trip to Athens in 1993 Dad met her when she was the Minister of Culture in her father's government. She was polite and attentive throughout the twenty-minute meeting, but she must have wondered who the hell had arranged this tryst with an irrelevant Englishman. It was of course a London-based member of one of the ten oligarchic families who rule Greece.

Cynics here know that all politicians are in the pockets of these oligarchs, who serve their own rather

than the national interest in protecting their wealth at all costs. They used to be just shipowning billionaires, but now they have their fingers in every profitable sector of the hellenic pie. So whether Mitsotakis's new policies effect any significant improvement in the life of ordinary people is a matter of conjecture.

Boris Johnson telephoned the new premier to congratulate him on his election victory. "I know him," said Mitsotakis. "We have spent time together on some Greek islands.." I wonder whose gin palace ferried them around the Aegean? Did Boris amuse his hosts by regaling them in Classical Greek? Their almost simultaneous accession to the top job begs another question. Who will outlast the other in power? The liberal Mitsotakis will probably have more difficulty handling the traditionalists within his own party than the official opposition, nevertheless at the moment he looks like a survivor. As for Johnson? One miaow says Kyriakos will last longer, two miaows say Boris. Miaow.

On a more upbeat note, Dad observed some splendidly idiosyncratic Greek elements in the electoral process. People tend to be first registered to vote in their village or island of origin and they don't change their registration when for example they move to Athens to work. Iphigeneia from the Caribbean Beach Bar told Dad that this applies to four out of five voters who currently live in the Athens area. Since the capital has a voting population of five million, up to four million will potentially abandon the city for the family home on the weekend of an election, which always takes place on a Sunday. In practice they make a long holiday weekend of the whole business, whilst students are given four days off anyway. (Incidentally, this was the first national election to take place since the voting age was lowered from 18 to 17.) General travel chaos however was limited because of a high overall number of the electorate who didn't bother to vote.

"But voting is compulsory in Greece, isn't it?", I hear you say. This is a splendid example of a charming feature of Greek life: *things both exist and don't exist at the same time*. "Compulsory" voting is indeed the law. So with the lowest turnout in decades for a general election, at 58% of approximately 10 million eligible to vote, it is easy to calculate that a mere 4.2 million Greeks broke the law on 7th July 2019.

In the past a citizen had to present an up-to-date election booklet in order to be issued a driver's licence or a passport, or else justify why they did not vote (e.g. because of absence, infirmity, advanced old age or because they lived more than 200km from the nearest polling station). Nowadays the civic duty of voting is still considered "mandatory," but there are no sanctions for failing to vote. This law is not enforced, ergo compulsory voting is not compulsory. As one of Dad's Greek friends explained, "We may have invented logic, but that doesn't mean we have to take any notice of it."

Jiannis, the fast-talking landlord of the Poseidon Bar, had no objection to casting his vote, but he balked at another civic duty imposed on him. The polling stations are manned by members of the public who have been selected by lot by the electoral registration commission. This is similar to the process in the UK for jury service selection, the difference being that it is much harder here to defer or avoid election duty which is stringently administered. So you have little choice but to spend the whole day, traditionally "from sunrise to sunset," as a polling secretary. If you fail to turn up, you face jail and/or a big fine.

Some time before the election an official document dropped through Jiannis's letterbox requesting his obligatory attendance as an electoral clerk at his local polling station. With a busy bar to run at the height of the tourist season, Jiannis needed an exemption. What to do? He explained his solution. "I went to my lawyer and he found an appropriately qualified medical expert. For a fee this man signed a statement confirming that I had contracted a highly contagious disease. He stressed that the voters would be at risk of infection if I were to spend the day preparing ballot papers at close

quarters with members of the public.” His request for release was accepted. Problem solved. “What disease were you supposed to have?” asked Dad. “No idea,” replied Jiannis, “I think I was supposed to have spots all over my body. I just paid the money - 50€ to the lawyer and 50€ to the doctor.”

Meanwhile our different kind of problem is how to get electricity into the new house. This is an issue which is mightily frustrating our electrical engineer, Andreas Koutoumanos.

Dad first met Andreas five years ago through a UK Greek connection when he was investigating Messinia as a possibility for our earthly paradise. Andreas is a tall, balding forty-year-old, bearded in the style of the modern Greek male, a native Kalamatian whose father had been city mayor and even has a central street named after him. The son inherited a half-share in a smart hotel on an attractive part of the sea front, but his profession is mechanical and electrical engineering. With an MBA from a US university and a penchant for ready laughter he was the perfect early local contact for Dad. At their first meeting over dinner in the roof-top restaurant of Andreas’s Pharae Palace Hotel, he assured Dad of his help with any house buying (which became house building) project. He has been as good as his word.

Andreas advised Mum and Dad on their land purchase, arranged the initial “beauty contest” of architects and civil engineers and is now an indispensable part of the construction project management team. Naturally calm and good-humoured, Andreas is only ill-tempered on one subject: the Electricity Board, or to give it the full name, the Hellenic Electricity Distribution Network Operator – DEDDIE is its Greek acronym. He had warned Dad in advance that it was by far the worst public utility in Greece. He was right.

As a precaution against delay we signed a contract with DEDDIE for the supply of electricity and paid the required sum last August, well before we would need it. The contract states that supply will be provided in 30 days. “Now we wait for nothing to happen,” said Andreas gloomily at the time. Eleven months later we are still waiting.

The Board has now managed to erect a new pole and brought the necessary cabling to within five metres of our land, where we have provided the necessary meter point, or “tombstone” as Dad calls it. In the process they ran the new cable across Bob and Fotine’s land without initiating any consultation with them. In Greece the electricity network can be extended across anyone’s land without the owner’s permission. So they take the shortest and cheapest route. Their justification is that DEDDIE is virtually bankrupt.

The time is now fast approaching when we shall need electricity. The “second fix” is completed and the builders don’t want and shouldn’t need to continue using diesel generators. Andreas and Costas the electrician take turns every week to go along to the DEDDIE offices and have a row with the man in charge. Guess what he says. “We will complete it αύριο, *avrio*, mañana.” Yesterday Andreas’s brow darkened thunderously as he explained the latest hold-up. “The new reason for not having connected the electricity is that when the contractor arrived he couldn’t reach our meter because the tombstone is situated 30 centimetres behind the chain link boundary fence. So he went away again.” We have now removed the offending section of barrier. I shall let you know when “avrio” comes, but in the meantime Dad won’t be disturbing Andreas’s equanimity by bringing the matter up again in the near future.

What else? I dropped another live lizard in Dad’s empty shoe last night but he heard my triumphant hunter’s shout of “Look what I’ve caught!” and rescued it. Maybe I’ll get lucky the third time.

The dormitories at Highfield were all named after famous Britons such as Wellington, Dickens and Gordon, reflecting a very different conception from today of heroic celebrity in the Edwardian era when the school was founded. The Wardrobes' flat on the top floor was next to the youngest boys' dormitory, named after one of the great military figures of the British Empire at its height: Field Marshal Frederick Sleight Roberts, 1st Earl Roberts, VC, KG, KP, GCB, OM, GCSI, GCIE, KStJ, VD, PC, FRSGS. But the dormitory door just said ROBERTS.

In January 1976 they manhandled their colour TV for the first time up three flights of stairs in what would become its termly ritual transfer from Shipley Court to Highfield and back six times a year. The accommodation comprised three rooms: a light and airy sitting room, a smallish bedroom with a partial view of the 1st XI cricket pitch and a "dog's dining room." Their bathroom was along the corridor beyond the dormitory.

Within three weeks of residence the television hauling paid off. They were thrilled to be able to watch in full colour one of the best televised sporting achievements of all time: Franz Klammer winning the Men's Downhill at the 1976 Innsbruck Winter Olympics. In bright yellow ski suit, red-helmeted on tricoloured skis, Klammer, local hero and race favourite, last of the top seeds out of the gate, knew that he had to take huge risks to beat the formidable time of the Swiss Bernhard Russi. James can still remember the kick of anticipation he felt when the Austrian jumped out of the starting hut. Klammer skied the 3km Patscherkofel course on the very edge of disaster and won by 0.33 seconds. The home crowd went mad with joy and the winner was taken away from the finish in an ambulance for his own safety.

The rest of the boarding team, comprising Sister (the nurse), Matron and her bevy of assistants, had a well-organised routine, so it was easy for the new Houseparents to settle in. James was determined to maintain the happy atmosphere which already prevailed upstairs, spurred on by memory of his miserable years at Ampleforth. Unsurprisingly Pauline proved to be a born substitute mother for the youngest boys. The children showed a quite different, more relaxed side to their personalities when in their pyjamas, so the Wardrobes were able to get to understand them much more thoroughly as individuals, which helped in dealing with them downstairs as well.

They were now at an ideal age to start their own family but after her miscarriage experience in Oxford Pauline was unenthusiastic. She loved her new job and was determined to develop her burgeoning career as a classroom teacher, so the matter was put on indefinite hold. She never had any regrets, unlike her husband.

In running the day-to-day administration of the school, he was ready for action from the start. The Head was responsible for all the big strategic decisions, including hiring and firing, but he gave James a remarkably free hand in most other matters including discipline. Peter Barham had conducted a thorough handover-takeover, including the workings of the timetable, for which James was now responsible. This was constructed manually on a large pinboard covered with pins of many colours. Each colour denoted a different subject and to each pin was attached a small paper tab with the initials of the teacher. Some subjects were setted, e.g. Maths, and since all the full-time staff worked on Saturday mornings their afternoons off occurred on different weekdays, but the constraints were few. The bane of a timetabler's life, viz part-time staff with limited availability, was virtually non-existent, so the timetable creation was relatively straightforward in those pre-computer days for any logical mind.

As the de facto deputy, he was the Head's eyes and ears in the staffroom, but there were never any issues of trust with his colleagues, old and new. Nor did the couple's social life suffer in the least.

Around this time a number of younger staff joined the school who would quickly become part of James and Pauline's group of close friends. To the names of Richard Rickman, Mary Lou White and the Wisemans could be added a new brigade: Tim Pyper, Thea Ebbeling and Pia (later married to Anthony) Gay. And, as the Old Guard retired, there would soon arrive Richard Mathrick, Richard Pepys ("Two syllables please. The Y is spoken."), Mildred Foley and Jonathan Butcher. Much beer was drunk in the local hostelrys on days off and much gin was consumed by all concerned in the Houseparents' flat after Lights Out.

Boot adored living in the school. He had the freedom of the vast grounds and all the public indoor areas except the Dining Room, with plenty of young friends who constantly petted and cuddled him but also confided their secret fears and anxieties to a willing and trustworthy listener. He learnt how to open fire doors by barking and waiting. If he heard his master's voice behind a closed door he would insist on access, otherwise he was content to rest up in the Housemaster's Study. He was welcomed in Morning Chapel, settling comfortably in James's pew, sometimes even joining him at the lectern when he was reading a lesson. In class the boys ignored his presence, except to let him in and out when he scratched or barked at the door. During a school inspection this greatly impressed Her Majesty's Inspector Of Schools who in his report deemed Boot's presence in the classroom an enhancement of the "family atmosphere" and "in no way a disturbance to the teaching and learning." If he had shown any aptitude at all, he certainly attended enough Latin lessons to walk a Winchester Election (Wykehamist language for Scholarship).



Mary Lou White, Pauline and Thea Ebbeling in the school grounds.

Also after Lights Out James would from time to time join Peter Mills in his Study for the strongest dry martini cocktail he has ever tasted: virtually neat gin with just a sniff of vermouth. They would discuss school matters, but also life in general. It was during these years that James learnt from his mentor most of the total sum of knowledge that he would ever acquire about the minds of children and their parents. Behind his diffident manner lay much wisdom about effective pedagogy in practice. The listener would always be well-advised to consider Peter's remarks carefully even when on the face of it they might appear illogical or absurd. Here's a classic example: "When a boy's parents make an appointment to see me, I usually know in advance if they are coming to tell me that they are separating or getting a divorce.." How on earth? "I can see it in the uncharacteristic recent deterioration in their son's Mathematics. His atypical inability to function logically sends out a strong signal of some emotional problem."

His headmasterly expertise could be light-hearted too. On hearing that James had punished some misbehaving boys by sending them up to bed immediately after Tea, Peter counselled, "Not a good idea. They won't go to sleep. They'll just lie there and play with themselves." He objected strongly to denial of food as a punishment. In this he was absolutely correct and was probably also influenced by his personal experience of deprivation as a prisoner-of-war in northern Italy towards the end of WW2.

Sometimes his awkwardness of expression led to unfortunate misunderstandings, as in the case of the repainting of the dormitory doors.

Angela Birbeck was one of the Art teachers. She was a professional potter and artist who led a bohemian life in a nearby country cottage. Her son was a roadie for Supertramp. She was a sociable and even-tempered lady, but well-meaning Peter managed to enrage her by "impugning her professional integrity," by accident obviously.

The names on the dormitory doors were looking tired and in need of a touch-up if not a full renovation. The Head asked Angela if she would undertake the task, for which he would pay her extra, and she readily agreed.

As she was leaving his Study, he added, "Don't do your best work."

She exploded in fury, accusing him of suggesting that she compromise her high standards. All he had really intended was to make clear that he didn't need the Roof of the Sistine Chapel on these doors. He just wanted something adequate, not a series of fifteen overpriced masterpieces. He accepted the verbal battering with his accustomed politeness, the issue was resolved amicably and the dormitory names got their inexpensive makeover.

After Highfield Angela had a successful nose job for a congenital deformity and went off to join an artists' commune in St Ives. Her legacy to James and Pauline was a magnificent ceramic sculpture of Boot which sits proudly and prominently in his office to this day.

Art teachers did seem to cause Peter more trouble than he suffered from other departments. The rather too shouty and irascible Wendy Spooner collared him in his Study and demanded a pay rise. When he refused, she unleashed a torrent of abuse at this mildest of men and resigned on the spot. James quizzed him later about what had transpired. Peter concluded his explanation with this exquisite comment: "I don't mind being cursed at, but I really don't like people "fucking and bugging" at me when I'm trapped in my Study."

Years later James would sympathise fully with this sentiment when he himself was penned in his

Headmaster's Study with no means of escape by some obdurate parent or implacable teacher. His own protégés would become all too familiar with his pithy management advice, expressed in boxing metaphor, for dealing with these occasions: "Bob and weave," "Jab and move, jab and move," "Remember that it's harder to hit a moving target." And in extremis, "Oh dear, is that the fire alarm? Let me just go and check.."

Peter's handwriting also ran a severe risk of misinterpretation. At the end of each term he was in the habit of enclosing a personal written note of gratitude with the pay slips. James received one which read, "Jane you have been a great heap this term Pet." Familiar with the paths of Peter's ink-footed spider, he decoded the message immediately: "James, you have been a great help this term, Peter." Legibility makes a difference, see, especially if you ever have to write to the Art Department.

Much sought after by the staff were petrol expenses, authorised by Peter on a torn scrap of paper thus: "Tone, 4 gals, Pet." Armed with this chit, you sought out the faithful retainer, Tony Phillips, who would pump the due amount of fuel into your tank from the underground reservoir. The Phillips family, including brothers Charlie and Fred, had worked at Highfield since the days of the Canon. One of their nephews was the actor and director, Robin Phillips, who emigrated to Canada and revitalised the Stratford Festival, Ontario, in the late 1970s.

There are many hilarious stories of Peter's eccentricities, most of them true. The following, told to James by two American parents, is one of the best, not just for its amusement value but because it highlights a key feature of his psychology, viz *if you behave logically you don't need to add an explanation*.

The prospective parents parked their car in front of the school. There was nobody else about except a man standing in the car park wearing striped pyjamas over his day clothes. They wondered if they had arrived at a mental asylum instead of a school. They approached the inmate with caution and explained that they had an appointment with the Headmaster to discuss the enrolment of their son. The gentleman did not introduce himself but helpfully directed them to the front entrance, telling them to ask for Marigold, the Headmaster's Secretary. He then disappeared round the back of the building.

Five minutes later they were ushered into the Head's Study to find the same man, now sans PJs, waiting to greet them as if he had not met them earlier. The interview was conducted without any mention of the bizarre encounter outside. It was only later that the couple found out that Peter was a bee-keeper whom they had chanced upon as he was returning from tending his bees. The pyjamas were his protective clothing.

An amusing tale, because Peter did not adhere to the expected initial introduction, such as "Hello, I'm the Headmaster and I've been looking after my bees. Please go inside and I'll be with you shortly." But it also illustrates that he simply did not see the need for unimportant explanation. Finally, it is heartening to note that the Americans did enrol their son that day.

So the biggest lesson of many that James learnt from Peter was that the only way to stay sane and happy in a highly visible job such as headmastering was to be true to your own nature, however idiosyncratic and non-conformist that might be. You can't fake it and if you try you'll probably go mad.

The two of them, known as Batman and Robin when seen together in their academic gowns, would soon be driven mental anyway when a young meteorite was appointed Director of Music with the undisguised ambition to turn Highfield School into Toad Hall.

Franz Klammer wins the Men's Downhill at the 1976 Winter Olympics:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94unvz-6iNw>

17/08/19

51. "Toad of Toad Hall"



Stairway to Heaven? It makes you wonder.

"Would you like to inspect the roof, Kyrie James?" "Not today, thank you."

No hard hats, no hi-vis jackets, rickety scaffolding, dodgy ladders and yet the builders are all still alive and uninjured. And working well, even in the August heat. We have reached the stage when various trades can work simultaneously, so air-conditioning units and plasterboards are installed, insulation is almost complete and the sewage system is about to be connected. At last we have the all-important electricity supply.

The workers take a week off for "Panagia" (Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God on 15th August) and then the big push to make the house habitable begins. A firm date for occupation is still uncertain but next month Manos will have prepared a lockable room so that we can start transferring less-used possessions.

Readers should not be alarmed at the horizontal blue stripe running across the house, as pictured below. We are not planning to copy the five blue lines of the national flag of Greece. It is simply the colour of some external insulation before it is plastered or painted white.



As for the "blue-white," Γαλανόλευκη, *Galanolefko*, or Κυανόλευκη, *Kyanolefko*, most of you will know that the Greek flag has five horizontal stripes of blue alternating with four white. There is a blue canton in the upper hoist-side corner bearing a white cross, which represents Orthodoxy. Tradition tells us that the nine stripes represent the nine syllables of the revolutionary rallying cry, Ελευθερία ή Θάνατος, *Eleftheria i Thanatos*, "Freedom or Death." White and blue represent the Greek sky and sea. The exact shade of the blue colour is not officially specified and has varied from very light to very dark since the flag's adoption as a national symbol in 1822.



The upper floor of the new house, as at 15/08/19. The blue panels will be soon be white.

In the spring of 1977 after a bout of flu, the occupational hazard of teachers, James gave up smoking for good. He had started at Ampleforth when he was about fifteen and had nearly succeeded in stopping at the end of the previous summer. Defeated by the stress of the breakdown of their Triumph 1500 on the notorious Boulevard Périphérique during the Paris rush hour, he had lit up one of Pauline's fags during the 24-hour wait for the repair amongst the banlieues of the Algerian quarter. The single happy memory of this episode was their first encounter with cous-cous, part of a delicious meal at their seedy hotel. There was no glass in the windows and no lock on the door of their room. The following afternoon as the patched-up car limped back to Dieppe smoke, both nicotine-based and metaphorical,

continued to emerge from James's ears, nose and mouth, probably from his other orifices too.

He knows that he must take the blame for introducing Pauline to smoking ten years earlier in Cyprus, where NAAFI fags were cheap as chips. Unlike her husband, she never stopped and the habit killed her in the end.

They had been returning from a long holiday in Spain and especially Catalonia where they stayed with their friends Anna and Maria, who had worked briefly at Highfield to improve their English. Boyfriendless Anna and Pauline were particularly close.

One year later, by complete coincidence – or was it? – the Wardrobes bumped into the beautiful Anna one day on Paros and they spent a congenial evening together. They were on their way back to Athens after a Cretan and Cycladic summer. But what odds on a chance encounter 2000 kilometres away from the wealthy farming area of Mollerussa, near Lerida, where Anna lived? Superstitious and suspicious, James has always feared such freak concurrences as possible evidence of a higher power, whether malign or beneficent. “Spooky, possums!” says Dame Edna. Peeling the onion of memory, to use Günter Grass's apt image (incidentally, his exquisite autobiographical masterpiece, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, “Peeling the Onion,” is a must-read for all fans of “The Tin Drum,”) leaves many gaps and yields no clues concerning this event. Its inner skin reveals only that on this same day in Parikia bay they saw their first ever wind-surfer.

It had been a cold winter. In January the staff had complained bitterly to James that the temperature in the classrooms was too low. “Isn't there a law against it?” they moaned. In 1977, probably not. Peter had either not turned on the central heating or, whether by accident or design, deliberately kept it down. James interceded on behalf of his colleagues and received one of Peter's vintage headmasterly replies, which he has treasured ever since and sometimes himself used when driven to similar provocation by whingeing teachers. He said, “Tell them that *only fools are cold.*” James returned to the Staff Room and interpreted this unambiguous response as diplomatically as he could: “The Headmaster suggests that you might like to consider wearing more clothes.” The next day the more bolshie ones began to wear overcoats, gloves and hats in class.

In contrast, things were definitely hotting up in the Music Department. To call the new twenty-something-year-old Director of Music “a live wire” would be a gross understatement. Jonathan Butcher's descent in January 1977 upon the sleepy environment of the school was a battering whirlwind of creative ideas and energetic action that took 2½ years to blow itself out and then away to other musical domains and challenges. He was short and slim in stature but theatrically large in manner, with a piercing voice of authority and a mop-cut hair style which accentuated his likeness to a young André Previn. The children knew he was coming down the corridor long before he came into sight. Peter Mills had once again opted for untried talent rather than the safety of experience and it paid off. According to Jonathan, Peter asked him at interview one of his typically unexpected yet practical questions, quite unrelated to the requirements of the Music post. “Could you fish a boy out of the swimming pool?” he enquired. The young maestro said Yes and the job was his.

Allied to his musical talent was a camp and mischievous sense of humour, a vast appetite for hard work and an unrelenting determination to achieve the goals he set himself, the school and the pupils. He quickly endeared himself to James and Pauline, emptying many a bottle of Gordons with them after Lights Out in the Houseparents' flat.

Peter Mills soon asked him to produce the School Play for the following December. The Head cannot have imagined the extent of Jonathan's ambition to deliver the biggest and best production Highfield

had ever seen. His choice was *Toad of Toad Hall*, the musical dramatisation by A.A. Milne of Kenneth Grahame's classic children's novel *The Wind in the Willows*. The venue would be the Sports Hall, more spacious than the Theatre; three performances instead of the usual single show; dry ice for the Wild Wood scene transported by helpful parents from South London on the day; a full orchestra of friends and colleagues; dramatis personae to include not only children but some staff members and even spouses; most other teachers to be assigned a back-stage function. Even James was a props man.

In this role he learnt an important new word. A chandelier needed to be raised and lowered for appropriate scenes in *Toad Hall*. James was asked to arrange the fixing on the wall for the adjusting rope. He went to see John Budd, the school maintenance man. The know-all Oxford Classics graduate approached him thus, with outstretched thumb and forefinger, "I need a sort of thingy with two opposing hooks that stick out like this to screw to the wall to wrap a rope round..." If only he'd joined the Sea Scouts in his youth, done some sailing. John was a man of few words. He looked at know-nothing James without expression. "What size of cleat would you like?" A *CLEAT!* Never to be forgotten. At school the only word with a matching homophonous syllable the monks had ever taught him was *ParaCLETE* – totally useless in comparison.

In truth, John and James always got on well because they had a common interest. The older man was a fine low-handicap golfer who had won the Club Championship of Bohunt Manor Golf Club, which uses Liphook GC's course, on numerous occasions.



A one-sided musical discussion? Michael Lumb (left) was Jonathan Butcher's (right) greatest supporter. As the final weeks of the Christmas Term beckoned, rehearsals became more frequent and more frantic.

James raised “Toad Hysteria Threat Level” to DEFCON 2 in anticipation of nuclear explosive reactions. “What happens at DEFCON 1?” asked the always inquisitive Malcolm, who had been left relatively untouched by Toad, apart from losing his Sports Hall to the holoscholastic drama for most of the term. “That’s when you and I retire immediately to the safety of the bunker, otherwise known as the back room of the Deers Hut, and drink much beer,” replied the man who was supposed to be in charge of running the school.

The Staff Room was by now thoroughly fed up with the disruption to the school timetable whilst for his part Jonathan felt unsupported in his great endeavour. He told James recently that by the time of the first performance none of the staff was talking to him except Michael Lumb, who was always his most loyal fan. Nowadays he would have a credit in the programme as Mental Health Advisor to the Producer. If Jonathan was in despair about the project’s success, Michael would raise his spirits by calmly saying something like, “But it’s a challenge, isn’t it?”

Bun (Barge Woman) was a supporter too, albeit sustained by whisky. In the clear-up afterwards empty Scotch bottles were found in Bun’s dressing-room. She advised Jen Wiseman (Phoebe the Gaoler’s Daughter) after Jen had had a fearful row with Jonathan at the dress rehearsal about her costume that “allowances should always be made for GENIUS!” Jen didn’t dare to disagree.

At a particularly tense moment shortly before Opening Night, perhaps at the point when Jonathan discovered that Badger was hors de combat with mumps, Tony Hey, the stage manager, rashly ventured to suggest, “It’s only a school play..” The reading on the Richter Scale for the subsequent volcanic eruption is not recorded for posterity. Badger’s understudy, Angus Collett, whose father was not yet Lord Mayor of London, stepped in magnificently as if the part had always been his and the crisis was resolved.

The show was a triumph. Jonathan had pulled it off without compromising his artistic principles. The cast rose superbly to the occasion, especially the boys who played the four leading roles. More importantly, all the participating children learnt an important lesson about the cost you must pay to make a dream come true. The contemporary review of the play written for the Haslemere Herald by Bob Perkins, who had left Highfield the previous term to become the Deputy Head of Dunhurst, Bedales’ junior school, can be read at the end of this chapter. Two members of staff not named in the press write-up deserve a special mention: Scientist Chris Fearnley for the lighting and sound, newly-arrived French teacher Richard Mathrick for set construction and major props. And James’s cleat worked perfectly too.

Forty-two years later Jonathan confessed to Jen (they were speaking to each other again by then) that Toad had consumed his every waking minute and that he had treated everybody appallingly. “I was an absolute prima donna and I’ve felt awful about it ever since.” He was quickly forgiven and school life returned to its normal pace.

The following year Jonathan embarked on another ambitious project: the choir would record an album, with piano accompaniment by Donald Swann, the surviving half of the famous Flanders and Swann musical comedy double act. The LP was called “Highfield Style.” The high-quality recording was duly and successfully completed, but with much less disturbance to the school routine this time since it involved only a couple of dozen boys. Once again, Michael Lumb was a mainstay, particularly throughout the many hours of rehearsal.

Michael’s academic subject was History, his passion was Music, but his knowledge covered an astonishing range of unrelated topics. An impressive polymath, he was a life-long learner who possessed a rare

capacity to be genuinely interested in other people's interests. This made him an attentive listener and an involved conversationalist. He was enthusiastic and optimistic about virtually everything. This was very good for Staff Room morale and it impressed the children to the extent that they nicknamed him "The Kenyan," pronounced Keenian with a long ē in the old colonial manner. In coaching the Under-XIs both in football and cricket he was indeed unremittingly keen to instil sound basic skills. In the winter his boys learnt to pass the ball with the instep *using both feet*. In the summer he taught only two strokes, the *forward defensive* and the *sweep*: his straightforward philosophy was that equipped with one stroke to defend the good ball and the other to score runs every 10-year-old could become an effective batsman.

Cricket is the setting for the ideal anecdote to illustrate Michael Lumb's incorrigible positivity.

Every summer Peter would invite the local fire brigade to an evening 20-over cricket match against the Highfield staff. Afterwards multiple barrels of beer were consumed and, win or lose, the volunteer firemen always went home happy. It was a light-hearted affair, during which young spectators hung out of their dormitory windows to cheer or jeer their teachers' skills or lack of them. The Head liked to maintain a cordial relationship with the firefighters since occasionally in the past a naughty boy had set off the fire alarm "by accident" and caused them to make a fruitless and annoying trip up from Liphook. By the seventies that risk had diminished, so the game had become an annual tradition enjoyed by both sides for its own sake.

One year Michael was batting at 4 and James at 5. Michael had recently gone to the crease and was now heading back to the pavilion after a triumphant cry of "Howzat!" had alerted James to get his pads on double-quick. As the two batsmen crossed, James asked, "So what happened?" Michael beamed at him and replied, "I was out for a duck fourth ball." The Number 5 muttered his sympathy and was about to continue on his way to the wicket when he heard these unforgettable words: "*But I played the first three rather well.*" The quintessence of class, true class.

When Pauline was asked to teach History to the junior classes Michael was an immensely supportive and wise mentor. He freely gave her all his extensive notes on the relevant periods of history on the curriculum and encouraged her in every aspect of her teaching. Of all her colleagues he was the exemplar, the paragon she respected and admired the most. When he retired in 1989 after 38 years of service, he dedicated his time to writing a comprehensive textbook of English History, which was successfully published and is notable for the same clarity of detail to be found in his classroom hand-outs.

Ever loyal to the school, in the late '70s he and Lorna would enable Peter Mills to implement a strategic decision about its future direction, but more of that in the next chapter.

As for Jonathan, he left the school on good terms with everyone. His friendship with the Wardrobes has been life-long. And he came back to Highfield in the 2000s to help out for a term when the Music Department was undergoing some difficulties. Before he left in July 1979 James asked him to join Pauline and himself in judging the annual Modelling Competition. There were various categories of award. Unlike a friend of his who was visiting him at the time and had misunderstood the nature of "modelling," a popular hobby at the time, Jonathan knew that the category "Own Materials" did *not* involve watching boys mince up and down a catwalk in gowns of their own creation. He understood that these awards were for the best-made Airfix plastic scale models, mainly of aircraft, and for the cleverest original constructions, often made of balsa wood. He readily agreed to take part as a judge.

All the exhibits were carefully laid out in the Library which was closed to the public during the judging.

The Wardrobes tried to treat the matter seriously but Jonathan was in a silly mood. Then Pauline started giggling. Matters were already getting out of hand when Jonathan came upon a piece of work in the Under-10s Own Materials section, a group of unidentifiable round brown objects placed carefully in a small sand-box. The three of them considered this untitled oeuvre in bewilderment. Finally, Jonathan said, "Well, it's not a winner, but I have the perfect title for it.." "What's that?" asked Pauline. "Shit in a box," he replied. Any onlooker peering through the Library window from outside might have wondered why three adults with clipboards were lying on the floor in hysterics, wagging their legs in the air.

Among his many other roles Jonathan now teaches drama students at RADA how to sing, he is the Artistic Director of Surrey Opera and Principal Conductor of the Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra.

Fine performances in Toad of Toad Hall

ONE of the most striking impressions of Highfield School's production last week of *Toad of Toad Hall*, A. A. Milne's dramatic adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, was the way in which the producer, Jonathan Butcher managed to involve boys, staff and friends in every facet of the production, so that one ceased almost at once, a very special kind of corporate delight in the undertaking.

The school's sports hall for the play's setting presented every possible problem to the stage manager and the lighting crew, and they showed great ingenuity in creating the right atmosphere and engineering efficient and effective scene changes. The scenery itself was excellent, a delightful caravan and a hollow tree being two of the most outstanding properties.

The main characters were all played by boys, admirably costumed and strikingly made up. The sheer size of the parts failed to daunt the four who were on stage nearly all the

time, and they gave their performances without a single awkward pause or moment of uncertainty.

Richard Stafford, as Toad, was charmingly vain-glorious, and seemed totally at ease on the stage, and James Blackburn, as Water Rat, was the linchpin of the whole. His demeanour matched his diction in quality, and his singing was a delight.

Mole, William Lucas, was suitably small, dark and engagingly anxious, while Angus Collett played the dignified avuncular Badger with such word-perfect aplomb, it was almost impossible to believe that he had stepped in for the original Badger, who had been stricken with mumps only four days before.

Other notable performances by boys were those of Gideon Agar, a snide and gangsterish Chief Weasel, Lawrence James

as Alfred the Horse, and Peter Law as the persistently curious young rabbit.

The staff taking part included a gay and gloating judge, Mr. Oliver-Jones; a marvellous belligerent bargewoman Miss V. Bunting, and what was considered to be the best cameo performance of the evening, Mrs. Wiseman's Phoebe, the gaoler's daughter.

A 13-piece orchestra provided the essential professional touch to the music, and was conducted, at the piano by the producer, who must take the credit for having brought off magnificently one of the school most ambitious productions ever to be attempted. But he would, I am sure, be the first to acknowledge the tremendous contribution made by all those involved in presenting the performance.

R. G. L. Perkins



Taking part in Highfield School, Epswich's production of *Toad of Toad Hall* were (left to right) — William Lucas (Mole), Lawrence James (Alfred the Horse); James Blackburn (Water Rat) and Richard Stafford (Toad).

Haslemere Herald review, December 1977

23/09/19

52. A Greek Funeral and Three Lost Friends

The church bells always toll when someone dies. Dad recently attended the funeral of a local man, Tasos Vrettis. The ceremony took place the day after he had passed away, the norm in Greece being to have the burial as soon as possible after death, a common practice in countries with hot climates, including in the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Tasos owned one of the beach bars which Dad frequents, the Maistrali, and he was a very popular and well-liked figure in the community. He also ran a successful ice and ice cream wholesale business in the village. Chrani church holds a maximum congregation of about 150 and yet at least five hundred mourners, more than the permanent population here, attended the service. The small εκκλησία, *ekklesia*, is typical of many such Orthodox village churches. Inside, its blue ceiling is covered with small golden stars, representing the sky, in the centre of which is a large panel icon depicting the Pantokrator, the Almighty Christ figure, arisen, above us all in Heaven. The walls are filled with scenes from His life on earth, whilst the white and gold iconostasis – the screen that separates the sanctuary from the nave - contains images of apostles, saints, Fathers of the Church.



Chrani church, well-supplied with bells.

Before, during and after the half-hour service, for at least ninety minutes a silent never-ending queue shuffles past the open coffin to pay their respects and bid Tasos a “last goodbye.” A rectangular silver plaque is positioned on a stand next to the head of the casket which faces east, Tasos’s feet pointing towards the altar. He lies peacefully as if in sleep, covered to his chest in white roses and lilies. Each mourner pauses and bows. They cross themselves and kiss the burnished plate, giving the Farewell

Kiss, also called The Kiss of Peace and Anointing. In former days a deceased's head would receive the light touch of the lips directly, but modern sensibilities have led to a change in observance, an awareness perhaps that half-a-thousand kisses will disturb the embalmer's waxy artifice. Open coffins are becoming less common in Athens and the cities but in the villages it is still the standard custom.

There is constant movement in and out of the church, as is the Greek way - with weddings and baptisms as well as funerals. The line moves slowly on round the end of the casket to offer condolence to the family. Accepting the individual sympathy of hundreds is a lengthy ordeal for the widow Ria, her two sons and the extended family. All the while the three priests and the cantors chant the New Testament Greek, η Κοινή, *the Koine*, of the Orthodox funeral liturgy, eerily calming in its effect. The packed church, stuffy on a hot August morning, with more people outside than in, is suffused with the pungent smell of incense.

Very special sympathy is felt for Tasos's 91-year-old mother who has now lost both her sons, both at 57, both from cancer. She is overwhelmed, moaning in the extremity of grief at her son's corpse, which is almost within reach, a mere two metres away. She faints, she is resuscitated and still the queue files past, offering "Συλλυπητήρια, *sylypitiria*, condolences," still the priests drone on, until a close friend delivers the eulogy. He is Fotis, a retired police chief and an accomplished public speaker. It is particularly striking to an English observer that he does not address the family or the congregation. He speaks directly to Tasos in the second person throughout, as if he is still alive.

Of all the differences between a Greek and an English funeral, the most significant is the greater emphasis on the emotion of loss, openly expressed. In Britain there is more buttoned-up formality, a stress on remembrance, on celebration of life rather than on the need for an outpouring of grieving at death. Each way serves its purpose, each equally unsatisfactorily.

Dick, Sally, John and Dad were among the handful of foreigners in attendance. Dad recognised many familiar faces in the crowd, knew quite a few by name and exchanged greetings with some of them outside. He did not attend the interment at the small cemetery up the hill in Vigla but together with John accepted the traditional hospitality of the family at a local café afterwards.

The beach bar was closed for two days, reopening the day after the funeral. The neighbouring bar played no music during this period. The village πανηγύρι, *paneyiri*, festival, was cancelled as a mark of respect. All in all, it was a moving and very Greek affair.

They had also made friends outside of Highfield. One of James's best mates in the late '70s was Tony Twisleton, whose full surname was triple-barrelled. Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes is a family name famous for its exploring and acting members but which Tony was always reluctant to acknowledge. Its boys were traditionally sent to Winchester College - well, the place was founded by William of Wykeham, innit? - but Tony hated it so much that he only lasted there a year. He then loved his time at Giggleswick, located near Settle in North Yorkshire, which he always affectionately referred to as "Gig."

He was a Classics teacher at a neighbouring prep school, a post of expediency whilst he waited to join the British Council. James knew well about the unplanned longevity of "short-term" jobs but Tony, a few years younger, was more single-minded about his career path. They met on the touchline when the football teams they coached opposed each other in school matches. It was obvious before the conclusion of their first encounter that these two peas came from the same pod. The pair had many shared interests and a similar juvenile sense of humour. They happened coincidentally both to be

reading the satirical novels of Tom Sharpe and revelling in his South African anti-hero from *Riotous Assembly* and *Indecent Exposure*, the hilariously obnoxious policeman, Konstabel Els.

He also gave James useful advice on ski jumping, gained on a Scandinavian holiday when he had drunkenly and at night been persuaded to “have a go” off a junior hill by an equally blathered Norwegian, who happened to have all the appropriate ski gear in the back of his car. As Tony took off from the table at the end of the ramp and before losing consciousness on landing – the Sprawling Limbs technique rather than the more orthodox Telemark – he remembers hearing his friend shouting, “Kiss the tips, kiss the tips..”

Tony was sociable, witty and clever. Here are two examples of his humour. Once they attended together a regional conference for Classics teachers from both senior and preparatory schools. After a boozy pub lunch. At some point in the meeting the discussion turned to the familiar and inevitable question: what is the point of teaching and learning Latin in the modern world? Tony listened to the usual sermons to the converted until his patience ran out.

“Here’s a new reason, of which you may be unaware,” he interrupted, his breath beery from three recently downed pints of Gale’s HSB.

“We’d be delighted to hear it,” replied the chairman, cautiously.

“I recently went to see Derek Jarman’s film, *Sebastiane*,” Tony continued. “It’s about gay Roman soldiers and the dialogue is spoken entirely in Latin.”

“English subtitles, surely?” piped up a white-haired Clever Dick with leather patches on the elbows of his tweed jacket.

“Of course.” Tony moved undeterred towards his punchline. “However, only a classical education and a knowledge of Latin gives access to Jarman’s deliberate humour implicit in these translations. So, in a scene where one youth greets another, “Ave, Oedipe,” the subtitle reads, “Hello, motherfucker..”

The stony silence was broken only by forty pairs of grey flannels shifting uncomfortably in their seats and some barely suppressed snickering from the Highfield delegate. The representative from Fernden offered no further contributions and snoozed throughout the rest of the meeting.

His closest friend was a London-based Old Amplefordian, an exact contemporary of James called Tony Heaton-Armstrong. Tony T affectionately referred to him as “Heaving Armpit.” James and Malcolm first met Tony H-A when they all accompanied Tony T to see his beloved Q.P.R. playing at Loftus Road. Heaving Armpit was the perfect foil for Twisleton. He was quietly spoken and sensible, just beginning what would become a successful career as a barrister. He had his leg in plaster after a skiing accident, so the three others were invited to write something amusing on the cast. The Highfield duo struggled to come up with a witty graffito, but Tony T was straight there.

Without hesitation he simply wrote: “It won’t stand up in court.”

Tony’s landlady and girlfriend was another Fernden teacher called Caroline, who became a close friend of Pauline and Jen. She was spending her twenties being a single mother to her younger siblings since both their parents had died tragically young. This seriously-undertaken responsibility did not stop her from hosting magnificent parties and delightful dinners at the family home in Haslemere. James recalls savouring many a post-prandial nightcap whilst listening to her diverse album collection, memorably Steely Dan’s *Can’t Buy A Thrill* and Lou Reed’s *Transformer*.

The three ladies enjoyed cooking, so they signed up for a Cordon Bleu evening course where they

learned to prepare such dinner party favourites as Stuffed Boned Chicken with Mushroom Sauce and Black Forest Gâteau. They regularly exasperated the tutor by not taking matters too seriously. One of them was even involved in the Great Christmas Cake Scandal, submitting a shop-bought product as her own creation. The “cheating” was found out, obviously. What fun! What embarrassment! Afterwards they would go drinking in one of the local pubs. One evening Pauline came home and declared, “We won’t be able to go to The Mill Tavern in Shottermill again, dear.” “Why not?” “There was an altercation. We’ve just been permanently barred by the landlord for bad behaviour.”

When they had entered the pub, the tiny bar was very crowded and extremely hot. They had to push their way to the counter. The thirsty trio were irritated that they couldn't get to the bar quickly enough. Perhaps a drink was spilt. An argument ensued with some locals. The upshot was that they were asked, not very politely, to leave. Being strong assertive women they threw a few goodly insults on the way out, which upset the landlord even more. This threesome always constituted a feisty and formidable team when they were together.



Roda, Corfu, September 1979.

(from left) Lucy with her mother Jen, James, Caroline, Malcolm, Pauline.

Tony eventually received his first British Council posting to Brazil. He dropped out of touch after a couple of postcards, but Caroline maintained a life-long friendship with the Wardrobes. After her younger brothers came of age and she was free at last to reclaim her own life, she emigrated to Buenos Aires in the early '80s, gallantly staying there throughout the Falklands War and developing a successful career in EFL.

Some years later James was walking down Guildford High Street when he thought he caught sight of Tony Twisleton disappearing into Boots. That evening he found that he still had Heaving Armpit's telephone number so he rang to see if Tony had returned from Brazil. Tony T-A's wife answered the

phone and was immediately guarded when James explained the reason for his call. All she would say was, "I'll get (my) Tony to ring you when he comes in." Which he duly did. James was in for a shock.

Heaving Armpit sounded sad but he was commendably direct. "I'm terribly sorry, but it can't have been Twisleton you saw in Guildford. He committed suicide in Brazilia a few months ago. He left a letter. He was very depressed.." James was stunned. To him Twisleton had been a heroic figure and now, barely thirty-years-old, he was gone.

James had been attracted to this charismatic extrovert because of a characteristic which he later came to understand was a regular component, if not a necessary condition, of his closest male friendships. He liked people who took on the world when he himself didn't have the courage to, best summed up by a line in Joni Mitchell's greatest song, *A Case Of You*: "I'm frightened by the Devil and I'm drawn to those ones that ain't afraid." He never suspected that Tony T had demons of his own that he was not able to confront and overcome.

Another telephone call brought more upsetting news. Philip and Maggie Hartley, friends from the Wardrobes' London period, had been living in Pangbourne for a few years now since Philip moved to work for D.E.C. in Reading. He rang to say that Maggie had died that very day from a brain tumour. They immediately drove over to offer some comfort to a forlorn man whose young children would now grow up motherless. Philip appeared calm but that was because he was in shock. Maggie too had only been thirty. In time he would remarry and find happiness again, but these events provoked an escalation in James's obsession with mortality, especially his own. His chronic fatalism was reinforced a couple of years later by a further death, much closer to home.

Patrick reappeared from Venezuela, wifeless now but less troubled, more content. He visited Liphook a few times and introduced James and Pauline to his new amour, a scientist called Margaret. In due course they married, lived in Twickenham for a while and had a son, Thomas. He announced that he was giving up teaching and had enrolled on a training course to become a joiner and carpenter. He had decided that he wanted to work with his hands, but James reckoned that he was also striving to escape from his overactive mind. He never discovered whether Patrick succeeded in this attempt. Their bond of youthful friendship was fraying. Patrick finally closed the book on it in 1981 when he moved house and did not disclose his new address to either Bill or James. From time to time they wondered what became of him, the pair of them being more nostalgic and sentimental than Patrick would ever want to be. Nevertheless they respected his determination to walk away from his past and they never tried to track him down.

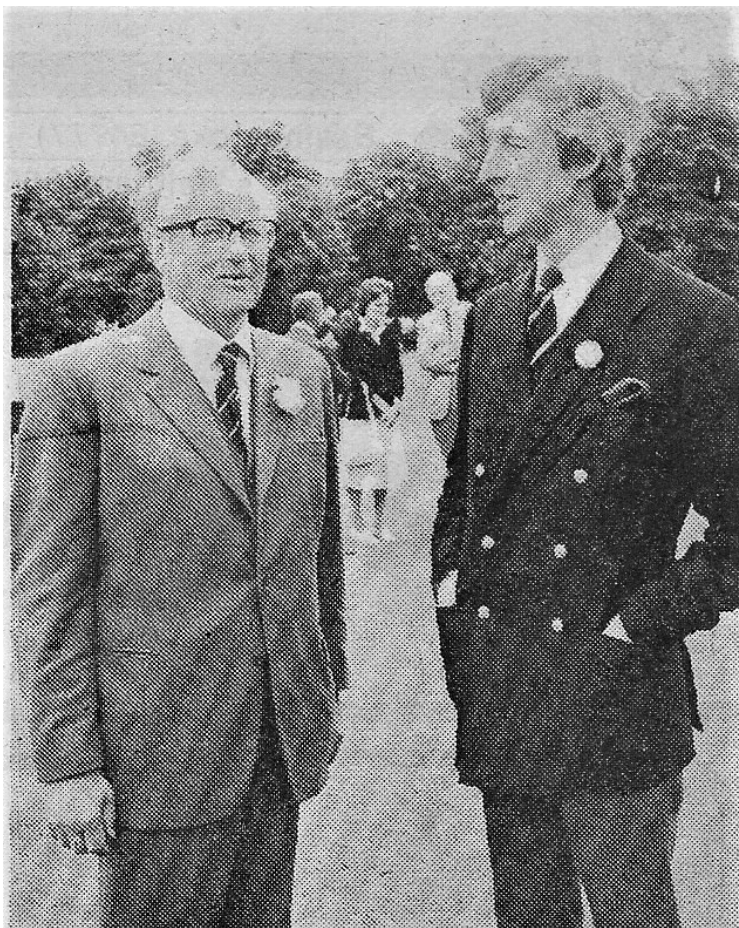
Big changes were afoot at Highfield. Peter Mills made two major decisions about the future of the school. In the late 1970s most boys-only boarding prep schools were suffering from falling rolls and Highfield was no exception. Other local schools had started taking day boys but Peter favoured a different strategy: girl boarders. The first two girls, Jean Brown and Holly Edgar, lived with the Lumb family until the first girls' dormitory – NIGHTINGALE – was established with the arrival of the Head's three daughters the following year. This proved to be a successful plan as the number of girls steadily rose throughout the '80s and beyond.

This positive outcome was in part due to Peter's second pronouncement. It was time for him to retire. He had noticed that prospective parents, contemplating perhaps a five-year future for their children, were increasingly expressing concern about whether he would be still be around to "see them through" to their senior schools.

Communication of his retirement was made well in advance of the handover date to a new Head, which

was to be the start of the 1979-80 academic year. His successor would be Robin Orr, which appeared to be a safe choice since he was another Old Wykehamist who had been the bachelor Housemaster at the school in the Sixties before Peter Barham. Robin was now married to Mary, also a teacher. Peter confided to James that he was particularly keen for her to play an active role as the Headmaster's wife, since he had high hopes that she possessed the necessary dynamism and ambition to build up the number of girls. This hunch would prove correct.

One benefit of Peter's plan to retire was that James and Pauline were able to buy 5 Shipley Court, the school accommodation they had occupied since 1972. Peter was famous for never selling any of the land or properties he owned around Liphook. Since they were ready to purchase their first house, James approached him on the off chance and was not surprised at his refusal. A few weeks later Peter unexpectedly changed his mind. Timing is all, they say, and James had serendipitously asked him at the right moment. It transpired that Peter needed liquid capital for the renovation of another house he owned near the school. This would become his retirement home when the Orrs moved into the Headmaster's school residence the following year. Generously, since this was a private sale, he also volunteered to reduce the price by what would have been the seller's fee payable to an estate agent. So, without the inconvenience of having to move even one stick of furniture, the Wardrobes now became homeowners for the first time.



Pictured at the Sports Day at Highfield School, Liphook are (left) the retiring headmaster Mr. Peter Mills with the new head Mr. Robin Orr. (G.K.).

July 1979: Peter and Robin pose somewhat self-consciously for the press.

As John Simmons had done before him, James finally got to go as Peter's guest to the "Fishmongers." Richard Pepys, the new Science master, was approached to chauffeur the two of them, in full white-tie evening rig, to London Bridge and back for a resplendent Livery Dinner at Fishmongers' Hall. Richard was happy to oblige since he could spend the evening with his fiancée Jane, who lived in London. He recalls his great amusement at the legless state of these two king penguins on the return trip to Liphook.

"When they emerged from the building about midnight," he laughed, "they seemed bewildered when the fresh air hit them. It had clearly been a well-fuelled dinner. They staggered across the road and more or less fell into the car. They babbled incoherently for a while and then there was silence until Peter wound down the window and muttered, "I need to let out some gas.." He then proceeded to fart loudly and intermittently for the rest of the journey." In his first term on the staff Richard found it hilarious to observe at close quarters the senior management letting their hair down.

Meanwhile, in Peter's final year as Headmaster, James was starting to plan seriously for life after Highfield. Together with Caroline he took a part-time course leading to the RSA Diploma in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Chichester College. They would both land their next jobs because of this newly-acquired qualification.

James was conscious that after having been the Head's Number Two he was about to undergo a de facto demotion. Mary would now be the second-in-command in all but name. In addition, Peter had also announced that Michael Lumb would become Assistant Headmaster in the new regime. This was a largely honorific title with no additional duties attached, the main purpose of which was for Peter to have a trusty Keeper Of The Flame in situ who would ensure that the Highfield ethos would be protected and preserved after his own departure.

During the summer term before he took over Robin had meetings with Michael and James at which he spoke grandly of his vision of the management as a "triumvirate," but the Housemaster knew that while continuing with the same workload he would from now on be pecking fourth in the management hierarchy. It seemed inappropriate terminology to a Classicist. He knew better than Robin the inglorious history of the famous Triumvirates of 1st century BC Rome. Julius Caesar's fellow triumvirs, Crassus and Pompey, were murdered. Subsequently, one of Octavian's two partners, Marcus Antonius, committed suicide whilst Lepidus was marginalised and sent into exile.

It really was time to move on..

You can listen to Joni Mitchell singing "A Case Of You" (from her 1971 album "Blue") here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YuaZcylk_o

23/10/19

53. A Greek Wedding

The weekend of Lefteris' and Artemis' wedding was blessed with glorious sunshine and unseasonably high temperatures. On the evening before the ceremony Dad was reunited with former pupils from his Hellenic College of London days, including Lefteris' elder brother Vassilis and Michaela Papagiannakopoulou (sic!) née Vergotti, who along with her husband Ioannis would be the *κουμπάροι*, *koumbari*, Maid of Honour and Best Man, the following day.

The occasion was planned to be “mostly a traditional Greek wedding,” according to Lefteris. But, he confided, he would not be shaved beforehand in public by the Best Man. Nor would Artemis be listing the names of her unmarried girlfriends on the sole of her right shoe. If she did, at the end of the night the names rubbed off would be the next to be married. Like catching the British bride's bouquet, I suppose.

The marriage service took place in the early evening in the highest of the many churches of the Zorzos family's village, Pyrgos, which is also the highest settlement in Santorini. With a former Venetian castle at its peak this attractive and well-maintained locale is a labyrinth of white houses in the Cycladic vernacular, with innumerable steep alleys and stairways all leading to the Church of the Virgin Mary at its summit. The prenuptial procession of the couple up the hill was accompanied by the music of *bazouki* and fiddle.

The fourteenth century church is small yet richly adorned. Its cruciform interior of no more than 100 square metres is dominated by six enormous chandeliers, mighty lighting for such a restricted space, supplemented by a number of free-standing three-metre-high candlesticks, topped bizarrely with tiny candles. The imposing pulpit and intricately carved wooden iconostasis have recently been fully restored after centuries of wear and tear. Two towering longcase clocks stand guard inside the entrance doors. With sufficient space for about eighty seated worshippers but with nearly 300 invited guests in attendance, only the lucky few including Mum and Dad nabbed a seat, the rest standing inside and out. The bride and groom were on their feet throughout the 70-minute service, which Lefteris agreed afterwards was somewhat of an ordeal, especially for Artemis who is expecting their first child in January. He himself was wiping his brow after forty minutes. “Unfortunately the priest went for the longest liturgy he knew...,” he remarked. The number of thrice-recited *Kyrie Eleisons* exceeded 100 according to Dad who has a tendency to keep count of such inconsequences. Towards the end the hubbub from those chatting outside grew so loud that the chanting of the priest and his cantor were almost drowned out.

Artemis's bridal gown sparkled in the late afternoon sunlight which poured through the westerly entrance and enlivened her radiant blonde curls. At the point in the proceedings when the celebrant declares, “The wife shall fear her husband,” the bride traditionally stamps on the groom's foot in order to show who's the boss. Lefteris's feigned expression of shock and horror when this happened drew peals of laughter from all the delighted onlookers. Ever the comedian, he plays every situation for laughs, which is why he was always one of Dad's favourite pupils. Not that teachers are supposed to have favourites, but they all do.

At the climax of the ceremony the *στέφανα*, *stephana*, the “crowns,” are exchanged above the now-married couple's heads. After these silvery-white halos are swapped by Michaela three times (everything happens in threes in Orthodox liturgy) with much repetition of prayer by the priest, the *stephana* are

joined together by a band of white ribbon. Lefteris and Artemis drink red wine from the same loving cup then proceed (guess how many times?) around the altar accompanied by their koumbari. One final trial awaits them.

The guests are given their ammunition: a cone of rice each. They form a narrow corridor outside the church along the pebbled mosaic courtyard and they prepare to fire. As the bride and groom emerge, the well-wishers gleefully hurl their rice at the newlyweds with surprising aggression and excessive force. The victims would still be picking rice out of each other's hair six hours later. Συγχαρητήρια, *Synharitiria*, Congratulations!



Lefteris and Artemis make their way to their Wedding Reception.

The high-spirited attackers are now bussed to a tomato canning factory for the Reception. This is not one of Lefteris' jokes. The plant, sited in the nearby coastal village of Vlychada, closed in 1981 after many decades processing tomato paste, the "red gold" of Santorini which was sold throughout Greece and which along with eight other factories helped to create relative prosperity here in the post-war years before tourism took off.

It reopened as the Tomato Industrial Museum and Santorini Arts Factory, an arts & cultural events centre, in 2014. It offers visitors a journey back to the industrial past of Santorini, guiding them through the cultivation, processing and production of tomato, one of the island's most famous and traditional products. With a glass of Virgin Mary and the local speciality of *τοματοκεφτέδες*, *tomatokeftedes*, "fried tomato balls," in hand the happy throng stroll past industrial machinery dating back to 1890 and gawp

at primitive tools and hand-written records of a bygone era. They arrive in a large open square which, under a full moon and clear sky, is set with enough tables for the three-hundred diners. “What if it might have rained?” asks Dad. “There was no Plan B,” replied his host. “We’ve got away with it..”

The dinner was sumptuous and thoroughly delicious. Better still, in the Greek custom, there were no speeches. Just plenty of dancing, to both Greek and Western music, gallons of local wine and a joyful reunion for Dad with the whole Vergottis family. On departure Mum and Dad were loaded down with favours and keepsakes, including *μπομπονιέρες*, *boubounieres*, delicious sugar-coated almonds wrapped in gauze. The five *koufeta* (almonds) in each pouch represent health, wealth, happiness, prosperity and long life.



Dad with the Vergottis family: (from left) Lambros, Maria, Michaela and Marina.

Behind Maria in profile sits Lefteris' elder brother, Vassilis.

The final event of a meticulously planned weekend was a beach party at Sunday lunchtime for the extra-insular guests on the black sands of Perivolos. This involved cocktails, a camera drone and canisters of coloured smoke. During a chat with the owner of the beach bar Dad gleaned new and shocking evidence of Santorini's uncontrolled tourist boom. If they hadn't been part of the Lefteris-Artemis group, Mum and Dad would have had to pay €25 for their umbrella and two beds. Exorbitant? Wait for it. “In the high season I can charge €25 per frontline bed, that is €50 for an umbrella,” he laughed, adding, “Santorini is expensive!”

And gradually destroying itself. This extraordinary island will always have its unique caldera, its impressive sunsets and Akrotiri, its astounding Bronze-Age Pompeii. Many areas, including Pyrgos, are still delightful, but the two major towns of Fira and Oia are grossly overcrowded, not least with day-trippers off the cruise ships. They have become increasingly tawdry places, with overpriced restaurants and shops full of Greek kitsch. An example of their vulgarity is the Greek Wedding Show, as garishly advertised on the local buses. It is a ludicrous parody of a genuine wedding such as the one to which Mum and Dad were honoured and privileged to be invited.

Back in Chrani Minnie and I have been adjusting to changed circumstances. We spent our 14th birthday having to move from our rented house to the one next door. This is because in three or four months' time we shall finally get to live in our own new place and the move has allowed Bob and Fotine to accommodate a new long-term tenant. I adjusted straightaway to our new surroundings, which are only thirty metres away from the old, but Minnie got a bit confused. She spent the first few days in her favourite bush, emerging only at the shout of "teatime, teatime." Then she appeared to disappear. After a brief search she was discovered very close to the new rental but four metres up a tall olive tree. As we cats all know, *there is no need to panic and call the fire brigade* when we do this, since we eventually come down when we get hungry enough. Dad however was straightaway up the tree via a ladder. He tussled with my reluctant sister until she gave in, but not before giving him a good scratching. Fortunately she has now settled in and not been up the tree since.

As for the new house, the floor tiles are laid, the windows are ordered and Dad never wants to visit another kitchen or bathroom showroom ever again. He is thoroughly exhausted by decision-making about taps basins sinks toilets shower units extractor fans etc etc. "I'd much rather be on the golf course, agonising over whether to play a 7- or 8-iron," he begged, but Mum has been relentless in keeping the project on track.

Then he found some large droppings on the new basement floor which Vassilis the tiler said were from *ποντίκια*, *pontikia*, mice. "They must have been huge mice," joked Dad. Then he realised that the Greeks must use the same word for "rats" as well. Vassilis's solution? "When you move in, don't feed your cats for a few days... end of problem." What impertinence! I reckon that my ratting days are over, though Minnie says she's still up for a bit of easy hunting. We shall see what happens when we take up permanent residence, probably early in the New Year.



Nobody breaks plates anymore in the real world.

When the announcement was made that Robin would be the next Headmaster, James was content enough since he had never coveted the top job. So he was taken aback by the uninhibited comment of his best mate, “He should have made you Head.” He added, “You’re only 31 but you could handle it easily.” In selecting his sports teams Malcolm always lived by the maxim: “If you’re good enough, you’re old enough,” never afraid to pick talented 10-year-old soccer players in his (under-14 y. o.) school First Team. James was touched by the West Countryman’s faith in him but he knew he needed wider experience elsewhere before he was ready for a headship. Peter had made the right decision. Wilbur, as his friend called him, would shortly depart, Malc himself would stay on until his early retirement twenty years later. James’s Highfield story would be incomplete without an extended mention of Malcolm Wiseman and their close relationship.



Malcolm and James , Estepona, April 1982.

To the casual and sometimes puzzled observer they seemed so different, yet they revelled in each other’s company. The Bristolian was 100% sportsman who rarely read a book, James was 100% bookish with two left feet and appalling hand-eye coordination. What the hell did this Odd Couple see in each other? Firstly, they were an unabashed mutual admiration society of what they saw as the other’s unattainable talent; secondly, as typical teachers they constantly educated each other in their own specialist area of expertise. So while James learnt about the “inside hand” theory of wicketkeeping, Malcolm discovered the pros and cons of inductive logic. Thirdly, they shared the same values: for example, a belief in mental toughness, self-awareness and stickability. Unsurprisingly Malc’s favourite poem was Rudyard Kipling’s “If.” Next, they both espoused quite a cynical and despairing view of their fellow men; and finally, they made each other laugh... a lot, often at their own expense.

Malcolm always regretted following his father’s “sensible” advice to get a teaching qualification after school rather than plunging into the uncertain and underpaid world of professional sport. He rarely mentioned his youthful accomplishments and never boasted about them. At Colston’s School in Bristol, it was he and not his team-mate Dave Alred, famous for being Jonny Wilkinson’s kicking guru, who took the place kicks in the school rugby team. At the same time he was playing football on the left wing in the Bristol Rovers Youth team, alongside Larry Lloyd, later to be a stalwart of the great Liverpool

team of the seventies, and Ray Graydon, who later played for and managed Aston Villa with distinction. Meanwhile in the summers, then and later whilst at St Luke's College, Exeter, he was keeping wicket for Gloucestershire Second Eleven and Somerset Twos where Peter Denning and Brian Rose were amongst his team-mates. Cricket was his favourite sport, and he continued to play the game at a high level after he came to Highfield in 1969. He was a regular capped member of the Dorset minor counties team in the Seventies. Having gained national cricket coaching qualifications he coached future county cricketers such as the Surrey brothers, Darren and Martin Bicknell, and a number of other notable players. James watched him play on a number of occasions and could see that he was a high-quality batsman and an outstanding wicketkeeper. He still remembers witnessing one particularly stunning leg-side catch, which would have graced the national, let alone the county, arena.

His sharp and teasing sense of humour was legendary. In their younger days accompanied by Boot the pair would go running in the woods behind the school. For a while there was a field of pig-sties, fenced in, next to their usual track. On one occasion a sow and its piglets had escaped and were blocking the normal route. Malcolm gently suggested that they retreat and retrace their steps, but James was foolishly insistent that they keep going. "We can outrun that sow, if necessary," he said. They proceeded with caution but Boot spooked the porcine mother of eight. The sow, inevitably defending its young, attacked them, chased them close, too close, for about seventy metres and finally they escaped by hurdling over a five-bar-gate, with Malcolm in the lead. On recovering their breath, James complimented Malcolm on his sprinting ability. He replied: "Oh, I had something to spare. I just had to keep you between me and Miss Piggy, and then I knew she'd bite you first..."

When their running days were over, they spent more time walking and swimming together. The two families went on foreign holidays together, to Spain, Greece and Cyprus. Once, on a summer holiday in Spetses, after a longish walk in the hot sun they attempted a detour up a steep hill to reach a convent where they had been told was a visitors' shop and a possibility for refreshment. Unfortunately -James's idea again - they found ourselves approaching the convent from the wrong side, but they did find a back entrance. They did not realise that this gateway had led them, dressed in tee-shirts and shorts, into the nuns' closed quarters and private courtyard. Within seconds they were being chased out of the gate by three nuns screeching in Greek, "Get out, get out!" After making good their escape down the hill and having finally stopped laughing, Malcolm put on his finest Oliver Hardy voice. "That's another fine mess you've gotten us into, Wilbur."

This friendship lasted 35 years until Malcolm's death from esophageal cancer six months before his sixtieth birthday. The two of them were supposed to spend their retirement growing old together: swimming, walking, drinking in pubs, putting the world to rights as old men do; dedicated sun worshippers both, lying on a Mediterranean beach somewhere debating the big recurring issues such as why do so many supposedly intelligent people behave so stupidly? Or pondering smaller matters, like the chances of Bristol Rovers or Newcastle United avoiding relegation. A lost idyll. A decade and more on James misses him still.

In his final year at Highfield the reluctant triumvir concentrated his efforts on two tasks. The first was a serious attempt to find another job. He was spurred on by the upsetting news in December 1979 that Brenda was diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer. She was given about a year if she was lucky. This increased James's sense of urgency about making the most of his own time on earth and shook him into action. Once more and for the final time Brenda, though unwittingly, was to give her son the extra motivation to change his life. In the spring he landed the post of Director of EFL at a private sixth-form college on the south coast. Notice of resignation was tendered, with Pauline planning to stay on as a non-residential teacher.

In this period he also spent many hours learning to play the tenor saxophone. The newly-arrived trumpet teacher, Bob Thompson, who incidentally is an outstanding raconteur and a supreme teller of jokes, both one-liners and shaggy dog, found a serviceable second-hand horn in a Pompey music shop and off James started in pursuit of his long harboured ambition. He reached the point where he could play tunes with competence. Caroline's latest tenant, an American hippy and draft dodger called Steve Davis-King, gave him a better mouthpiece and taught him to growl. (Steve once took all his clothes off in front of Pauline, Caroline and James at a post-prandial moment. He was completely and gloriously ignored by all three. James remembers simply tightening his tie in reaction. For a while Steve sat on the floor starkers, no doubt hoping for a unlikely foursome, then he re-dressed. The evening continued as if nothing had transpired. On the way home Pauline muttered, "What an attention-seeking prat," and the Wardrobes burst into laughter.)

In his farewell Highfield House Supper in July 1980 James entertained the troops with a raucous rendition of "The Pink Panther." The following year he joined a band in Farnham and might have become a decent player if commuting and the long hours of his new job had not intervened. As it was he had the enjoyment of blowing his horn in the comfort of his own home for many years into the future.

In memory of Malcolm Wiseman:

*Multas per gentes et multa per aequora vectus
advenio has miseras, frater, ad inferias,
ut te postremo donarem munere mortis
et mutam nequiquam adloquerer cinerem,
quandoquidem fortuna mihi tete abstulit ipsum,
heu miser indigne frater adempte mihi.
nunc tamen interea haec, prisco quae more parentum
tradita sunt tristi munere ad inferias,
accipe fraterno multum manantia fletu
atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale.*

Through many nations and through many seas borne, I come, brother, for these sad funeral rites, that I may give the last gifts to the dead, and may vainly speak to your silent ashes, since fortune has taken you away from me. Ah, poor brother, undeservedly snatched from me. But now receive these gifts, which have been handed down in the ancient manner of ancestors, the sad gifts to the grave, drenched with a brother's tears, and for ever, brother, hail and farewell.

Poem 101: Carmina of Gaius Valerius Catullus (c84 - c54 BC). Translation by Leonard C. Smithers (1894)

24/11/19

54. 1981

Running a good school is about predicting the future and then preventing it from happening. Peter Miils had done a pretty good job in this respect by making some correct strategic decisions in the late 1970s when the pupil numbers were dwindling. But his tactical fortune-telling is also worth a mention. He made a habit of tracking the commodity markets and utilising the expert knowledge of his many contacts, often with hilarious consequences. Whenever he sensed a forthcoming price hike in any commodity relevant to the running of the school, he traded in it physically and in bulk. Maintaining his own subterranean petrol reservoir was just one example.

One day a lorry arrived at the school to deliver a ton and a half of sugar. As a result every pantry and larder in the school kitchen was full to bursting for months if not years with bags and bags of the white crystals, soon to become a much more expensive substance. Peter had had a tip-off from a parent in Tate & Lyle that something disastrous had happened to sugar, presumably a major crop failure somewhere in the world of beet and cane. Sure enough its price went up sharply soon after the delivery.

On another occasion Peter asked James when he was expecting the termly visit of the stationery salesman from Philip & Tacey. The Housemaster was puzzled by this sudden interest in a normally mundane piece of administration. The Head explained, “Rather than putting in your usual order of exercise books, I’d like you to get a quote from him for five years’ supply. The price of paper is going to go up steeply, you see...” Time proved him right of course.

On his next routine visit the stationery salesman thought James was pulling his leg. When he realised that he was about to land the biggest order of his life he knew that all his Christmases and Birthdays had come at once. He told James later that his wife was so pleased with the enormous size of his commission that they had sex for the first time in two years. Shortly every spare nook, cranny, cupboard and attic space was crammed with thousands of reams of paper and countless packets of exercise books, small, medium, large, lined, unlined, with and without margins wide and narrow, small-squared and large-squared, for at least a lustrum (that’s a five-year period, you non-Latinists) and probably many years beyond. James had long departed before they ran out.

After James left and Pauline was no longer resident Robin Orr tried to change her terms and conditions of employment and cut her pay. In the early ‘70s very few of the Highfield staff were members of a teachers’ union. By the end of the decade almost all of the newer and younger teachers such as Malcolm, James and Pauline had signed up, realising that union membership was the cheapest and most effective form of employment insurance policy. Unfortunately in this instance for the Headmaster.

The union of choice for teachers in the private sector, including IAPS* schools, was the AMMA, the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association. (The name was changed to Association of Teachers & Lecturers (ATL) in 1993 and following a merger with the NUT in 2017 has now become part of the National Education Union (NEU)). Pauline contacted her union and spoke to the quietly impressive “Mr Heather.” He listened attentively to her tale of woe and declared that he would see the Headmaster and sort the matter out. “Don’t worry,” he asserted with surprising confidence. Shortly afterwards he visited Robin, spent barely half-an-hour in the Head’s Study and emerged triumphant.

* IAPS stands for Independent Association of Preparatory Schools, the august body of which Highfield

is a member. To this day Jonathan Butcher delights in referring to it as IAPLPS, the Independent Association of Potty Little Prep Schools.

Mr Heather reported back that he had “clarified certain facts of employment law of which the Headmaster had been unaware” and the Head had caved in on all points. Moral: always join a union if you get the chance.

Many years later when as a Headmaster himself James was negotiating a redundancy issue with the union he enquired of his opposite number whether he had ever come across “Mr Heather.” The ATL man chuckled with delight and replied, “Yes, indeed! He was a legend in the office, a heroic figure who was loved by his colleagues and highly respected by the members he served. He rarely lost a case.” Thus did Pauline’s 25-year independent, James-free career commence at Highfield.

Meanwhile, James’s move to Kirklands Sixth Form College in Selsey could have been a disaster. Within a year, however, a bad move would turn out well. The college was located in a large mansion overlooking the beach on Selsey Bill. It was owned by Mary Laurence, a delightful lady who had recently been widowed and was soldiering on as sole Principal in what turned out to be testing financial circumstances. The students were virtually all from overseas, studying A-levels and EFL, prior to entry into British universities. They came mainly from Arab countries of the Middle East, some from Iran, sub-Saharan Africa and the Far East. They were all boarders, but total numbers were suspiciously lower than James had anticipated. The departmental organisation of English Language teaching had been criticised in an inspection report the previous year, hence James’s appointment to sort out the shambles. In order to generate a new income stream for the college he had also agreed to set up an EFL summer school, starting the following year.

He travelled back and forth over Goodwood hill in his little red Renault 5. He remembers in particular listening to Abba, Bowie, Madness, Police, Roxy Music, Dr Hook (Pauline’s favourite) and especially Ian Dury & the Blockheads. Still a treasured ballad from that period is the magnificent Randy Crawford’s *One Day I’ll Fly Away*. He enjoyed teaching English to teenagers instead of Latin to 10-13 year-olds, whilst basking in the weekend freedom after years of working on Saturdays and Sundays. His new colleagues were mostly local and long-standing, though there was a new and bumptious young Economics teacher who had to be firmly put in his place when he exclaimed, on the morning after John Lennon’s murder, that the ex-Beatle was largely inconsequential in the history of popular music.

Sadly it was apparent by soon after Christmas that Mrs Laurence would have to close the business and make the most of the sale of the extremely well-located seafront property. It had the makings of an ideal residential care home and that’s probably what became of it. Mary was a clever woman with all the personal qualities to make her a caring and dedicated Principal but she was no businesswoman. Sooner than he had expected yet not regretting his lack of due diligence before accepting this job, James was once again scouring the Appointments Vacant columns in the back of the Times Educational Supplement. 1981 would turn out to be a pivotal year both professionally and personally.

His new boss was immensely kind and supportive when news arrived in late January that Brenda had finally succumbed to her terminal illness. James had last seen her on a visit to Scalby towards the end of the Christmas holidays but strangely for a man famous for his memory he can remember nothing of their final meeting. On the other hand he vividly recalls viewing her corpse before the funeral in the undertaker’s parlour. He could not find his mother in what he saw.

Tommy was a broken man. Typically Brenda had tried to prepare him for his lonely, widowed future, also enlisting Margaret’s support the previous summer in her belief that he should go and live with

his daughter in Sydney. This would come to pass in due course, with disastrous consequences.

James's father had long lived under the delusion that being a good person, as he correctly judged Brenda to be, guaranteed a longer life than he himself, the self-avowed dissolute, would be granted.



Tommy and Brenda, Scalby, April 1980. This is James's last photo of his mother, taken nine months before her death.

But Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, the Three Fates who spin the thread of Life, care not a jot for Virtue. His son had understood this as he gazed upon the shrunken remains of his mother and he vowed not to make the same mistake. Goodness is an irrelevance in the longevity game. Tommy had wrongly assumed that his lifestyle of booze and cigars would kill him off well in advance of his abstemious wife. He had even set up all his pensions, etc, on this principle. His false assumption that he would predecease Brenda now left him stranded and helpless.

The funeral was well-attended by relatives, for most of whom Brenda had been their favourite sister-in-law or aunt. For James the ceremony was a bad joke. His mother's full name was Mary Brenda Wardrobe. The idiot parish priest who purported to know her called her *Mary* throughout the service, thereby detaching *Brenda's* son even further from the hocus-pocus proceedings than he could have imagined possible. It was as if he were attending another woman's funeral. In his grief Tommy barely registered the gaffe, but for James it fuelled his lifelong and cynical contempt for the dog-collared brigade.

The son's relationship with his mother had improved considerably in the years since he had become

more or less an adult. Throughout his twenties he had come to realise that his resentment towards his parents for being abandoned at Ampleforth was not entirely fair. There had been pluses as well as minuses arising from their well-intentioned decision to send him to the best Catholic boarding school. He was independent, Oxford-educated and eminently employable. If he had been happy there too, they would have been fully vindicated. Unfortunately personal feelings were never discussed when he was young and too much was left unsaid on both sides.

Recent years had seen him grow closer to Brenda, but neither of them was quite ready to open their hearts about the past. Her death deprived them both of that burgeoning possibility, a breakthrough which James is convinced would have happened if she had lived longer. His astute sister must have sensed this too, since she told him years later that she always felt sorry that he had lost his mother at a relatively young age. Nevertheless their family rounds of golf at Scarborough North Cliff and their numerous jaunts to North Yorkshire village pubs for scampi in the basket (a dish long ago banned by the EU on health & safety grounds, by the way) on regular visits to Scalby live on fondly in his memory.

Back down South, nothing came of an interview at a Language Centre in Hastings, but soon afterwards Pauline spotted an advert: “Principal of leading London tutorial college required.” James was hesitant but his wife told him to be more gung-ho. So he was. The college was Mander Portman Woodward, based in Wetherby Place just off Gloucester Road in Kensington. To James’s amazement Robert Woodward, co-founder and co-Principal, invited him to come and discuss his application the following week. On the due date he sat down with Robert, Rodney Portman and the third partner, Joe Ruston. Sir Charles Nicholas Mander, 4th Baronet, had long since departed the scene.

James had done his homework on private tutorial colleges, generally known as “crammers” in those days. Not without reason MPW was the crammer of choice for public school boys and girls who needed to improve their grades. It was fashionably run along the lines of a junior Cambridge college and unlike most other independent sixth-form establishments it could afford to eschew the overseas market, owing to strong home-based referrals from Housemasters and Heads.

As the proceedings drew to a close, Robert asked James if he would be prepared to move to Birmingham, where there was “also a vacancy for Principal” in their branch there. James had learnt always to give an irrespective Yes to any proposal offered in job interviews, but something about his response must have given the game away. He was caught bat and pad. A move beyond commuting distance from Liphook to the Midlands was not part of the Wardrobe plan. There was Pauline’s job at Highfield to take into account, after all. A week later James received a polite rejection letter from Robert, but the MPW episode would prove invaluable at his next interview.

Many years later, when James had got to know the MPW people personally as friendly competitors, Joe confessed to him that there never had been a vacancy for the London job, just the Birmingham one, but they didn’t want to alert the incumbent there that they were looking to replace him. Hence the subterfuge about a London post in order to get some potential appointees through the door. He also admitted that, in the light of what happened to James next, they should have snapped him up before their rivals did.

Incidentally, the Portmans are well-known local Liphook grandees. Rodney’s father Berkeley was a Captain and President of Liphook Golf Club. His daughter Rachel writes film scores and won an Oscar in 1996 for *Emma*. In the ‘90s Pauline taught Rodney’s son at Highfield and found herself in high regard with the whole Portman family because of her pastoral work with the boy. Small world, etc.

Stone the crows if an identical “Principal of leading London tutorial college required” advert didn’t

appear in the TES a month or so later! On investigation it proved to be a different institution from MPW but also in a smart area of Kensington, this time situated near the top of Palace Gate. It was called Lansdowne Tutors. Mary Laurence knew the owners from meetings of the Conference for Independent Further Education, the private colleges' professional association. When he was invited for interview, James quizzed her about what he might expect. "There are three Templeton brothers, but I've only met the identical twins, Peter and Paul. They are young, about your age, and they are live-wires, full of energy and ideas. They are good fun. I think you'll get on with them."

More duly diligent than the year before and now armed with useful knowledge gleaned about this sector of the education market from his previous encounter in W8, the interviewee turned left out of Gloucester Road tube station and headed north for one of the most decisive and life-altering events in his career.

In May 1981 James was aged 33 and the twins were 32. Hugh was a couple of years younger. Half-an-hour after the time set for the interview he was eventually taken upstairs by the receptionist, Debbie Marsh, to the best room in the splendid neo-classical building, where sat the brothers, wearing what he came to recognise later were their most serious and "professional" expressions. This was an important appointment, since it would be the first time since its founding in the mid-'70s that Lansdowne would have a non-Templeton Principal. The three of them had all had a go at it with varying degrees of success, but now they wished to grow the business so they needed to leave the mother ship in safe hands.



One of the twins (Paul left, Peter right) has just got married, not long before James first met them.

From James's point of view the interview went well but it was a bizarre experience. Judging by their performance, the twins must have written the book: *How Not To Conduct An Interview*. They talked too much, then they talked over each other, then they shouted over each other and then they shouted AT each other and had a proper row, about nothing particularly significant but including some judicious effing and blinding from Peter. Suddenly the door of the room burst open and an elderly gentleman appeared. The boys went quiet. "I hear you're having a really important meeting then," growled the old man, who promptly disappeared. Peter recovered his composure first and said, "Don't worry about him. He's our father." Order was restored and the interview continued to its finale.

At the second interview a few weeks later, Paul explained to James with a straight and solemn face that he had been shortlisted for the post, but they now needed to "explore his credentials" in greater depth. Fair enough, but James was immediately distracted. Why was Peter winking at him and grinning, even giving him the thumbs up? Paul spotted this and kicked his brother, so at this point Hugh took sensible control of the rest of the meeting. After the conclusion of this charade, they asked James to wait downstairs while "they made their decision." Paul got his own back on Peter when he came to bring the candidate back upstairs to hear the verdict. On the way up he said, "Look, the job's yours,

but pretend to be surprised when Peter offers it to you...”

The third meeting was at a lunch to sign the contract. Hugh had brought the paperwork, but Peter wanted to start the bonding process straightaway, so as well as food there was, to use another of his favourite terms, a lot of “guzzling” to be done. As the four of them fell out of the Italian restaurant a few hours later, Paul said, “If you come to work with us, you're gonna make a shitload of money.” Peter guffawed and with an inimitable twinkle in his eye added, “AND, if you come to work with us, you're gonna get laid...!” The world of work suddenly became an extremely attractive prospect.

And so it would prove: pure ROCK 'N ROLL, in the broadest possible figurative sense: innovative, chaotic, unpredictable, high-octane, limitless. In a word, exciting. James couldn't wait. He would start on 3rd August, five days after Charles and Diana's Wedding, two weeks before A-level results came out and the annual four-week period of intense student recruitment began. This was known as the “Silly Season,” and very silly it was.

Ian Dury, a musician who took being silly very seriously indeed, epitomises the Lansdowne ethos in the stupendously absurd and hugely entertaining “Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U5d7X7sE4k>

14/12/19

55. “Bangers and Mash” by Albert Camus

The black VW Tiguan turns left off the coast road and heads for the hills. It passes through two empty villages, deserted at midday because the inhabitants are busy collecting their olives. It is the height of the harvesting season in Messinia, where two out of every three households produce their own olive oil. A slight drizzle turns into more persistent rain as the car with its three occupants approaches the cloudline, leaving the groves far below. The distant mountains beyond the Messinian Gulf are obscure, the intervening sea a dull grey shield. The trees are taller and greener now, part of the wild high forest the men are seeking for a very specific purpose. The tarmac road becomes a rutted dirt track, yet onwards and upwards they proceed, though more cautiously.

The two in the front seats are Englishmen in their seventies, one of them much more enthusiastic for their mission than the other. From previous experience he guides the driver to exactly where he wants to go. The man behind the wheel is wary, an unconvinced first-timer. The third man is Greek, middle-aged but lean and athletic. He seems childishly excited, being always desirous of any “adventure involving Nature.” He is slightly touched by Dionysos, a polite way of calling him a bit mad, which is how the other two affectionately regard him.

The car draws to a halt at a point where the dense forest begins to engulf the trail. As he gets out Silenus shouts, “We are hunters!” but this is a mistake or perhaps a satyr’s metaphor. They are in fact gatherers. They have arrived at this secret place to search for Chanterelle mushrooms.

In Greek they are called *παπαδάκια*, *papadakia*, yet the locals show little interest in these prized fungi. On the other hand, sophisticated gourmands worldwide are passionate about their spicy flavour. In the UK they fetch £26 per kilo. These meaty, funnel-shaped mushrooms are amongst the most expensive in the world because they need specific growing conditions, impossible to create artificially for farming purposes. They require established woodland in which they develop symbiotic, mycorrhizal relationships with the root systems of mature trees. They thrive in coniferous forests and in the grass next to herbs. A heavy rainfall followed by several days of heat and humidity helps them grow best, but the season for them here in Greece is short, perhaps only three weeks long.



Chanterelle mushrooms picked in the forests above and behind Chrani.

Equipped with baskets, knives and paint brushes (for cleaning off the dirt) they tentatively enter the wood on the steep and slippery downhill side of the track. They are prospecting for orange specks of gold among the brown and muddy leaves of the forest floor. They see recent signs of foraging by their major competitors, the wild boar who dwell in this dank and dismal place. Rain drips through the canopy above their heads, as they widen their search.

John ventures somewhat apologetically to Dad, “It’s wonderful here when the sunlight dapples through the leaves..” Not today, John, reflects Dad as water runs down the back of his neck. But he staggers on, keeping his morose doubts to himself : *Will they actually find any of these elusive toadstools? Will they poison him anyway when he eats them? Will he fall in the mud and break his leg? Where have Noddy and Big Ears disappeared to now? Will he ever be able to find his way back to the road? What if he comes across a bad-tempered piggy, disturbed in its digging and scraping?* He cheers himself up with the thought that the tusker would be in greater danger. Stephanos would tear it from limb to limb in a bacchic frenzy induced by his ardent communion with Mother Nature.

Then he spots a bright yellow star in the dark earth, and then another. His first chanterelles. His mood changes dramatically as he cuts, cleans and baskets the precious fare. The expedition has been worthwhile after all. An hour later they are drinking coffee in the kafeneion of the nearby village, content with a decent haul from their joint endeavours. “Would you like to come again?” asks John. “Absolutely,” replies Dad, “but preferably not in the rain.” “OK, but if you ever tell people where these chanterelles grow, you’ll then have to kill them.” And bury their bodies in the forest, I suppose, never to be seen again, pushing up mushrooms rather than daisies.

They went back a few days later, on a dry and cloudy day, so still no dappled light upon the undergrowth. However, the chanterelles were more abundant and they quickly picked twice as many as before. Dad has now declared himself converted to a pastime he would never have associated with living in Greece.

Autumn is a short season here, so short that the locals disown its existence altogether in their discourse. There is a perfectly good word for Autumn, Φθινόπωρο, *Phthinoporo*, as there is for Spring (Ανοιξη,

Aniksi) but Summer and Winter are all they ever talk about. “Summer’s over, it’s winter now” (overheard in September after the summer holidays). “Have a good winter” (a common expression of good wishes from October onwards). “Summer’s here now” (frequently heard in April and May).

Nevertheless Dad recently witnessed an undeniable autumnal phenomenon. As he drove into Petalidi one sunny morning, the sky darkened over his head. Fifty metres up, an enormous flock of starlings was swirling, wheeling and swooping, in their thousands – a stupendous birding spectacle. By the time he had reached Messini twenty minutes later he had observed three more similar shapeshifting murmurations. The old boy enthused to me on his return, “Mick, don’t believe anyone who says to you that autumn doesn’t exist in Greece.”

Money was tight after James left Highfield. He had given up the considerable perks and side-benefits of a residential post for not much if any rise in salary. But the killer was the interest rate increase on their Shipley Court mortgage. In the late 1970s rising wages and oil prices forced the new Thatcher government to raise the UK base rate to 17% in order to combat inflation. Those really were the days, my young friends. The Wardrobes would take no foreign holidays for three years and they did not step on Greek soil again until 1984.

He had enjoyed his single academic year at Kirklands and he reflected subsequently that without the sideways move from the prep school world to a sixth-form college he would never have landed the Lansdowne job. Like three parallel travelers moving at different speeds, he would not have been able to cross from the first to the third without spending at least a short time on the second walkway.

During his summer break between Kirklands and Lansdowne James helped his close Highfield friend Tim Pyper move into his new house in Liss Forest. Monday 20th July was the Fourth Day of the 3rd Ashes Test at Headingley. They were both cricket-lovers but England were heading for an inevitable defeat, so they didn’t mind missing Australia nailing the lid on the coffin. The previous day he had had to endure the dispiriting spectacle of an unknown American golfer, Bill Rogers, win the Open Championship at Royal St. George’s. It was twelve long years since a Brit had held aloft the Claret Jug. James was therefore not in the mood for further unpalatable TV sports viewing.

When they had finished their removal labours, they were astounded to discover that they had missed one of the great match-changing Test Match innings of all time. Ian Botham’s one-man assault on the Aussie bowling (145 not out at close of play) had given England a very slight chance of victory the following day. More in hope than expectation they watched the Fifth Day unfold with an extraordinary bowling performance (8 for 43) by Bob Willis, another man with a point to prove to the selectors. So it was he, the mop-haired, melancholic 6’6” Dylanologist, who actually won the “Botham Test.”

After the fall of the last wicket, Richie Benaud described the result as “one of the most fantastic victories ever known in Test Cricket history.” In the chaotic aftermath Fred Trueman rightly gave the Man of the Match Award to Botham, but he shamefully failed even to mention Willis’s name in his accompanying speech. As a tribute to the best English fast bowler of his generation, who died recently, I conclude this chapter with the YouTube video of Bob’s blazing-eyed heroics on that damp Yorkshire day. Even my Australian readers might admire if not enjoy his destruction of their team.



Not Palace Gate, but this row elsewhere in Kensington is identical.

As you walked north from the underground station up Gloucester Road, past Mr Waite and Mr Rose's first central London grocery shop, opened in 1913, the street changes its name to Palace Gate at about the point where Da Mario Gastronomia Napoletana used to make indisputably the best pizzas James has ever eaten in his life. Number 9 was the home of Lansdowne Tutors, a grand nineteenth-century terraced townhouse with its white Doric-columned portico, typical of this area of Kensington. It was situated at the top end, a couple of doors from Maxims Casino and close to one of the southern entrances to Kensington Gardens. The Templetons had acquired the lease three years before, moving the college they had founded in 1975 from its original location in Ladbroke Road, Notting Hill. It derived its name from nearby Lansdowne Road.

James's new bosses promised "extensive" training in the ten day's lull between his starting date of August 3rd and the day the A-level results came out, colloquially known as "the day the shit hits the fan" and the official opening of "the Silly Season." The critical market for enrolments on specialist Retake courses, Lansdowne's bread and butter, then lasted a mere four weeks.

Pete was in charge of Operations, Paul Marketing and Hugh Finance. Their father, retired REME Brigadier Douglas Templeton, had recently been invited to become non-executive Chairman of the Board. An expert in logistics, he had been brought in to give the expanding venture more structure and a defined strategic purpose. He took no prisoners, and that included his sons. In his pithy manner he explained to James how things worked: "Peter has the ideas, Paul turns the ideas into money and Hugh stops them both spending it."

The Brigadier came in a couple of times a week and had been given an office at the top of a building without lifts. A heavy smoker with emphysema who was struggling for breath well before he reached the fourth floor, he was known to the teachers as Puffing Billy. Some wags in the staffroom reckoned that the boys had deliberately based their father up there in order to kill him off, but they failed to appreciate his value to the business at this point in its growth.

One of James's first tasks was to read and digest the Brigadier's 25-page statistical analysis of the student recruitment process, including how it could be monitored and driven by targets based on measurable performance in order to improve efficiency. This bible informed an innovative approach to enrolment which gained Lansdowne an advantage in this most competitive of education sectors until its rivals cottoned on a few years later and adopted a similar analytical methodology. All course enquiries, by week and by source, interviews arranged, interviews done, collectively and by each interviewer, all enrolment outcomes were subject to his merciless appraisal, generating key ratios that became watchwords of the Silly Season for years to come. The author ended his meisterwerk with this memorable epigram:

$E = mc^2$ (Albert Einstein)

$IER = E/ID$ (Douglas Templeton)

(where E = Enrolments & ID = Interviews Done, yielding the all-important Interview to Enrolment Ratio.)

This also proved to James that behind his gruff exterior Dougie Templeton had a similar sense of humour to the one he had bequeathed to each of his sons. The military man was friendly and helpful to the new boy from the start. "They've seen fit to make you Principal and they think highly of you, so here's some pertinent advice about my twins: *they are really only one-and-a-half people*. When you understand that you'll understand them better." Come again? In time James would unpick this gnomic utterance, but in his first week he was more concerned about the Brig's next piece of counsel, which was on the subject of Leadership: "The higher the monkey climbs the tree, the more it displays its red arse.." Thank you very much. With the father's wise words ringing in his ears, he began his "training" with the sons.

He spent time first with Hugh, who went through the college budget in careful detail. The younger brother was a chartered accountant who had become a partner in 1978, bringing much-needed financial stability and discipline to the operation. The twins, dynamic and entrepreneurial, were always excited by the prospects of making and spending money, but looking after it was very boring indeed and best left to their rigorous and reliable sibling. So Hugh's control of the purse strings was an incalculable asset for the enterprise. James learnt that the key to meeting or exceeding the bottom line was controlling the variable costs, which in this arena meant teachers' pay. Their rates were already set for the following academic year, so his and Hugh's obsession would be class size. With virtually every A-level and O-level subject offered through courses ranging in length from one term to two years, it would be a tough ask to achieve an average group size of seven across a huge diversity of classes.

Pondering this issue, James next met up with Paul in order to learn the black arts of recruitment interviewing. Paul was a natural salesman with outstanding interpersonal skills and a level of self-belief that was off the scale. "The art is to *sell yourself* to the prospective student or parent. The product is a secondary consideration." With mixed feelings James tried to feed off Paul's joyful optimism as Week 34 (as designated in the Brigadier's bible) approached. It was Paul's favourite time of year, when he did what he did best.

"OK, this is the plan," he enthused. "This week you sit in on interviews that I'll do, next week I'll sit in on yours. That should give us about ten overall, enough experience for you to then go solo." In theory an excellent training scheme, but Rabbin Burns knows better. The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley. James sat in on one of Paul's, Paul reciprocated once, and that was it. The new Principal found himself taking over all the diary appointments, so he quickly developed his own

style of successful sales pitch. Where had Paul disappeared to? In fact, where had all the brothers disappeared to?

The following morning he entered the building to find it devoid of all Templetons. In Reception Debbie laughed knowingly as she threw light on their absence. "They won't be in at all today. It's the annual Templeton Family Golf Tournament. And you'll be lucky to see them tomorrow. All five of them will be nursing hangovers..." *Five* brothers? Whaat? Debbie calmed James down. She patiently explained that neither the fourth nor the fifth were remotely involved in the running of the college. Ian, the eldest, managed the student hostel in Harrington Gardens and Dougal, the youngest, ran Venue, a Time-Out-style listings magazine, in the Bristol and Bath area. This was a source of relief since three bosses were already quite enough for James to handle.

The good news was that both the twins were golf-mad. Paul was a genuine 12-handicap member of West Hill, whilst Pete was a more dubious 12 at Foxhills. James's game had lain dormant for many years but the twins eagerly reactivated his interest. Ahead stretched many years of D'Artagnan playing highly competitive four-balls with the Three Musketeers in Hampshire, Surrey and notably in Spain, where the boys had a villa near Estepona. Los hermanos Templétinos were about to become members of Sotogrande, where intensive week-long bonding sessions both on and off the course would take place every December alongside "strategic planning meetings" and the occasional incident-packed visit to the Casino Nueva Andalucía near Puerto Banus.

James's initial induction was completed by Pete over lunch at Da Mario's pizzeria. As one of the interviewing team of three, he would need to be familiar with all the many subjects and syllabi offered by the college. In future years Heads of Department would conduct or support interviews in their own disciplines but in 1981 the Principal was expected to cover the whole gamut of A-level and O-level specialisms by himself.

"But I know nothing about, for example, A-Level Chemistry or Economics or Mathematics," panicked James. "Don't worry," replied Pete. "Just ask the students about what they think let them down and let them do the talking. To get started you just need to learn *one key question per syllabus*. You'll soon get the hang of it and become an expert.." He then proceeded to scribble the following on the back of a pizza menu:

"Where do you think you did badly?"

Physics : Theory or Practical?

Chemistry : Organic, Inorganic, Physical?

Economics : Micro or Macro?

Maths : Pure or Applied?

Modern Languages : Language or Literature? (Note all the set texts)

English Literature : Which books in particular? (Write them down)

History : British or European?

Geography : Physical or Human?

Sociology : How was the Methodology paper? (invariably a weakness).

Pete put his pen down next to his Capricciosa, pushed the annotated card across the table and grinned at James. "Here you are. It's easy-peasy," he concluded. James swallowed hard, considered the pressing

and vertical nature of the learning curve ahead of him and decided to tuck into his Quattro Stagioni instead.

When Selwyn Jones, a magnificent and charismatic Welsh mathematician who went on to become a Lansdowne legend, was being trained as an interviewer a couple of years later, he was invited by Pete to observe him conduct a typical interview of a retake student. They sat down with the parents and their teenage daughter who had fluffed her A-level French and was keen to resit the exam at the earliest opportunity. Pete magisterially asked the girl to give a full list of the books she had studied in the Literature paper. She nervously voiced such texts as *L'Etranger* by Albert Camus, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* by Marcel Proust, *Candide* by Voltaire, and so on.

Presenting a solemn and earnest face, Pete wrote all this information down conscientiously on the interview sheet. After a few pensive moments of deliberation he said to the girl, "Excellent! We have no problem with these texts. I think you will be absolutely fine," and the interview was an immediate and total success. The punters signed up on the spot. Selwyn was gob-smacked by such a swift capture and afterwards he confessed to Pete that he could never manage such an interview. He was a Franco-illiterate mathematician with absolutely no knowledge of French literature. Pete smiled and replied, "Don't worry. It's a piece of cake." He then showed Selwyn the list of the texts he had written down with such serious and thoughtful intent: *Bangers and Mash*, *Bacon and Eggs*, *Toad in the Hole*.. Yes, thought Selwyn, I can do this after all.

The short-lived training sessions ended and James was thrust into the maelstrom of his first Silly Season. He would do seven or eight student interviews a day, seven days a week, until mid-September and he would lose 7kg in weight in a single adrenaline-fuelled month.

Adrenaline-fuelled? Watch Bob Willis's finest hour:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtPw_ZtIm_Q

08/01/20

56. Identicality Antics

The olive harvest this year in Messinia has produced a bumper crop. The quality of the oil is stupendous: very low in acidity, viscous and green. In comparison UK supermarkets’ “extra virgin olive oil” might as well be vinegar. This is ambrosial nectar, the medicine of the Olympians. Owing to the glut however the wholesale buyers’ price, at 2.10 to 2.20 euros per litre, is ridiculously low and very disappointing for the farmers.

Even our meagre twenty trees yielded 17 litres of high quality oil, twice as much as before, with one tree alone producing 25kg of fruit (see photo).



This is the yield from our best olive tree this year.

Dad always used to tell his friends that his ambition was to live on a olive farm in Greece. That won't happen now but I suppose this is as close to his dream as he will get. But let me tell you about his latest scheme involving olive oil.

Readers may remember Dave, the long-distance lorry driver who brought Dad and us girls in our cages over to Greece in the first place more than three years ago. Since olive oil retail prices are so much higher in the UK and northern Europe than here, Dad is seriously thinking of getting into the export business. In a couple of months' time, when our new house is ready for occupation, Dave will be driving a furniture van of Wardrobian possessions from Liphook to Chrani. On his return trip to the UK the van will be empty. Or will it? Dad can source at least 500 litres of top quality, early-pressed litres from Bob and Fotine and more than cover the transport costs of the two-way trip. If he gets his sums right and can sort out his UK distribution, he might even make a killing. He explained it to me like this: “Mick, I'll be like Vito Corleone in *The Godfather Part II*, except without the dead bodies..”

He'll even have an Italian partner for UK sales. His friend in the catering business, Rocco, has tasted

a sample and it blew him away, almost literally because of its peppery quality. If the first delivery doesn't leave Dad with 400 litres of unsold oil in his warehouse (ie the garage of New Shepherds Farm), it might even become an annual event, depending on Bastard Boris Brexit tariffs of course.

Dad concludes, "I'm sure some of your readers are connoisseurs and lovers of exceptionally high-grade oil available at a reasonable price. Tell them that you'll let them know next month if this idea has legs. If so details including price, ordering process and delivery to follow!"



The basic principle of beating the olives onto nets has not changed in 3000 years: on the left, a 4th century BC Greek vase painting; on the right, a modern mechanical olive harvester makes the beating work easier.

By their early thirties the Templeton twins were still extremely identical. Anyone who is familiar with the monozygotic phenomenon will be aware that sibling identicality diminishes with age, both naturally and in the competitive striving for individuality through clothing, behaviour, speech, etc. By the time James met Pete and Paul they diverged in appearance sufficiently for him to tell them apart quite easily, at close quarters at least. Pete was leaner, more hirsute, more casual in his dress and in his general demeanour. But at a distance of 200 yards on a golf course he would never be able to distinguish between them until one or other of them swung a club. Then Paul's more classic, compact and faster swing or Pete's longer, loopier and more languid version was a dead giveaway.

However, when they were born they must have been so identical that even their mother would have been forgiven for failing to tell them apart. There is a famous family photograph of the four oldest boys – Dougal was not yet born - when the twins were toddlers. They are perfectly dressed in the same clothes, both beaming mischievously at the camera. Only family members and seasoned Templeton watchers would spot the distinctly individual features of their shared naughtiness.

The Brigadier encouraged competition between them throughout their childhood, embedding an adult trait which would manifest itself in spectacular, volcanic arguments when stuff was said which seemed to any observer fatal to any possible reconciliation. The intensity of the personal insults they exchanged would guarantee instant divorce between most married couples. They appeared to have crossed that irrevocable line beyond which there was no return. Yet half-an-hour later they would be happily drinking and plotting together down the pub as if nothing had happened. When James first witnessed these formidable disputes, perhaps at a board meeting, followed by the unexpected calm after the storm, he remembered their father's remark about "one-and-a-half people" and he began to understand. He saw that they were mentally conjoined. The depth of their mutual trust and acceptance meant that the psychology of separation each from the other was alien and unthinkable. This helped to give them when in harmonious combination a unstoppable potency.

As for their physical "sameness," they would neither confirm nor deny the received tradition that in their days of sowing wild oats they swapped and serviced each other's girlfriends without the ladies in question realising that they were being bedded by the twin brother.

After leaving their state boarding grammar school, Wolverstone Hall near Ipswich, where the novelist Ian McEwan, another army child, was an exact contemporary, they trod very different paths for a while. Pete studied Sociology at the University of Essex, a notorious hotbed of leftie student unrest in the late '60s. At the other end of the behavioural spectrum Paul went to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, to train as an army officer.

An authentic story that they themselves told of their "identity japes" dates to these late teenage years. The long-haired hippie from the University of Essex visits his smart officer cadet twin one weekend at Sandhurst. They go "on a serious guzzle" and return to barracks to sleep it off. Paul is due to report on parade early the next day. He oversleeps. Rather than rousing his drink-sodden sibling, Pete quietly dons Paul's uniform, grabs his rifle and in a totally dishevelled state, clueless about the requirements of military marching, joins the other cadets for an early-morning square-bashing session. The drill sergeant, understandably mistaking Peter for Paul, assumes that this travesty of a soldier is Paul taking the monumental piss, bollocks the grinning and guffawing Pete rigid and dismisses Templeton toot bloody sweet to await imminent and harsh reprisal for gross indiscipline. In the retelling Pete always laughed longer and louder than Paul at this point in the tale.

Nevertheless Paul survived the rest of his basic training and subsequently joined the Royal Artillery as a Second Lieutenant on a Short Service Commission. Unfortunately his interpretation of the regimental motto, *Ubique Quo Fas Et Gloria Ducunt* ("Everywhere That Sacred Duty And Glory Lead") was unorthodox, focussing too much on the final syllable of this stirring martial maxim. It led to a far briefer army career than originally intended. On his first posting, to northern West Germany, he was soon sleeping with his commanding officer's wife. The Brigadier used his influence to pull his son's nuts out of the firing line and engineered him back into civvy street before any scandal erupted. The honour of the regiment was preserved. Paul then went to L.S.E. instead, where he read Economics.

After graduation they both taught for a while at MPW and Pete quickly realised that along with his brother he could make a go of running his own tutorial college. Throughout their working life the twins shared a passionate belief that they could deliver the highest quality service to students and make a commercial success of it at the same time. Their gung-ho approach sometimes masked the fact that first and foremost they were committed educators and not just in it for the money. It was for this reason that in all their ventures, however crazy some of these might appear, they attracted so many loyal followers, including James.

The empire was already growing when he arrived. The boys had acquired another tutorial college a few years before, a long-standing establishment in South Kensington called Duff Miller. It offered the same courses as Lansdowne, so when James naively queried the strategic logic of having two similar colleges in such proximity, Paul explained it thus, "It's the same with washing powders. Daz and Tide are both owned by Procter & Gamble. Multiple brands can give you a larger market share." The new Principal had a lot to learn about business.

They were also partners in an EFL summer school operation called International College, which used the classrooms at Palace Gate during July and August. The clientele were mainly rowdy Italian teenagers, who could prove to be a nuisance in the Silly Season if one were showing prospectives around the college facilities. Stories will be unfolded in a later chapter about the embarrassment caused by the general unruliness and daytime sexual behaviour of these young Romans.

Lansdowne Tutors (Oxford) was on its last legs by the summer of 1981 and James can't recall it lasting for more than another academic year. Based in the Gloucester Green area near the Bus Station, which was the heart of the Oxford drugs trade, its rented premises had some undefined and murky past connection with the notorious international cannabis smuggler Howard Marks. Pete's reason for closing it down, however, was commercial and typically hard-headed : this outlying satrapy was unprofitable and proving difficult to oversee from London.

So it was that James plunged into the vortex of retake student recruitment. The work was stressful, addictive and exhilarating: one interview after another all day long every day, with keen competition between the three of them to compare their "hit rates" as the numbers of pupils interviewed started to convert into enrolments. James emerged as a highly effective recruiter, but neither he nor Pete could compare with Paul, who was always electrifying at this time of year. He was truly in his element, analysing the daily statistics after his final interview and taking instant, decisive action. Perhaps he would allocate more staff to man the telephones, perhaps demand more follow-ups of initial enquiries, sometimes targeting exclusively the highest value enquiries (personal referrals) at the expense of low-grade ones (e.g. from agencies). And much more. Meanwhile, the Brigadier produced frequent military-style "situation reports" based on thorough analysis of all the available data and which pointed the college management in the direction of corrective action. The word "campaign" would be used many times without irony during this and every Silly Season.

Sometimes such pressure can induce panic. On the occasions when James felt close to gibbering, Pete had the perfect stress-busting solution. He would grip James by the elbow and steer him out of the front door of the madhouse, turn left and head for the sanctuary of Kensington Gardens fifty yards away. To walk around the Pond in a peaceful, natural environment had an immediate calming effect. Pete said that this always worked for him and James found that watching folk feeding the ducks, sitting on the grass, eating their lunch, etc., quickly dissipated his anxieties. After twenty minutes or so he was ready again for the fray.

On these walks with Pete, especially as the priorities of preparing for the start of term began to weigh more heavily, James learnt some valuable lessons about leadership. Their conversations were wide-ranging. Here is a well-remembered snippet of Pete's advice: "When term starts and the shit really hits the fan, don't fucking shut yourself away in your office. Confront the issues by talking to people. Otherwise you'll develop a Bunker Mentality. Hitler in his Führerbunker lost touch with reality and he didn't know what was actually happening outside.." From this precept James developed his policy of Management By Walking About, which stood him in good stead for the next twenty-five years.

He also became familiar with many of Pete's mantras, which he soon adopted as his own: "The best is the enemy of the good," emphasised Pete, convinced that it was one of the Brigadier's axioms until James told him it was Voltaire. "The force of logic will prevail," was another favourite, usually stated in suitably grave tones and sometimes when he had been outvoted by Paul and Hugh in a board meeting. On those occasions what he actually meant was "The force of my iron will will prevail." And it usually did.

The pace of life was relentless. One day amidst the chaos and stress of averaging eight recruitment interviews a day James was surprised to discover that the overseas student sitting in front of him had given Patrick Donnell as his academic referee. The lad was attending a language school in Oxford Street where Patrick was his English teacher. During a rare moment of peace later on, James rang the number on the application form and the two erstwhile best friends enjoyed a long conversation, partly about the student in question but mainly a mutual catch-up on their recent personal lives. James reckons that they almost certainly agreed to keep in touch. But it never happened. This phone call would turn out to be their final contact.

And the background noise to this period? The New Wave, of course. Nowadays James can never hear the sounds of The Human League, Spandau Ballet, New Order, Depeche Mode, Ultravox and Gary Numan without revisiting the insanity of these months of 1981. As for Soft Cell's massive hit that autumn, a synth-pop version of Gloria Jones's 1965 Northern Soul classic *Tainted Love*, it earwormed its way irretrievably into his long-term memory and there it remains today despite his indifference towards this stuck song as a piece of music.

Both twins had a prodigious capacity for camaraderie. Their bonding sessions with colleagues were often lubricated with alcohol, usually taking place in a local hostelry after work. Many friendships initiated in this way became lifelong. Pete in particular proved to be extremely loyal to his coterie of close friends, which came to include James. One such was Joe Veitch, who had been Director of Studies at Lansdowne before James came on the scene and who had been appointed to the Principalship of Duff Miller earlier in the summer. Another, whom James would come to befriend too, was a brilliant History teacher called Huw Thomas. Huw had briefly been Principal of Lansdowne Tutors (Oxford) and he had also done a stint at Duff Miller, which gives rise to the following Silly Season story.

The Duff Miller building, at 151 Old Brompton Road, was a large detached house with a porticoed entrance leading directly into a smallish ground-floor reception area, which contained the secretary's desk and a limited amount of seating for visitors. A door on the right rendered the only access to the Principal's office.

During his brief period in charge Huw was doing all the student interviews on his own, supported by Clare, a very efficient lady who later went on to marry Pete. Unfortunately Huw was developing a serious alcohol problem, which would lead to his tragic death fifteen years later. So it was difficult for him to spend all day interviewing prospectives without a break for a liquid lunch next door in the Drayton Arms.

Taking advantage of a suitable break between appointments, Huw headed for the Drayton, where he was "unavoidably detained" beyond the time for his next interview. As he hurried back, he saw to his horror through the Reception window that two families were stacked up in the waiting area. He felt embarrassed to stride past both into his office. Then he remembered that he had left his large sash window round the side of the house open, owing to the summer heat. He decided to clamber through the window, so that when he invited his visitors in his room they would think that he had

been occupied there all the time, not round the pub.

Meanwhile Clare, faced with two dilemmas, decided to use her initiative. There was no Principal, for whom she had already made her best excuses, and there were insufficient seats for both sets of customers. So, whilst unbeknown to her Huw was making his way round the corner of the building, she ushered the first family through to sit in the Principal's room, so that at least everyone would have a comfortable wait.

Huw then climbed into his room through the window and collapsed in a heap on the floor. He looked up to find an astonished student and his parents staring at him in disbelief. What happened next is lost in time. One might conclude that Huw was merely reinforcing Peter Mills's important tenet that a Head should first meet prospectives *in his actual room* and not on the way to it. But PCMM had a back door to his Study. And then again, everyone did silly things in the Silly Season.

When term started, Huw had reverted to doing what he excelled at: teaching A-level History.

Extract from LT prospectus

Lansdowne Tutors

Message from the Principal

"The consistent aim of Lansdowne Tutors remains the same today as when it was founded in 1975: to prepare students successfully for a wide range of G.C.E. subjects by providing high-quality tuition at both O and A-level, as well as giving specialist tuition for the Oxford and Cambridge University Entrance examinations.

What has changed, however, since the mid-nineteen-seventies are the increasingly competitive grade requirements demanded nowadays for entrance into Higher Education, both in Britain and overseas. In enabling students not simply to pass their exams, but to achieve the necessary high standards required, we have continued to use the well-established Lansdowne formula to maintain our record of success.

Our courses are taught either in small groups or on an individual basis by experienced graduates who are well-versed in all the particular syllabus requirements in their subject. In addition to the intensive course tuition, which consists of a combination of

seminars, lectures, and tutorials, we include considerable practice in examination technique, so often a stumbling block of students inexperienced at taking public examinations. Close and friendly contact between tutor and students is encouraged in order to help students develop a positive approach to their work, whilst regular homework tasks and careful supervision of a student's performance are equally essential ingredients of the programme.

My senior staff and I are always pleased to advise students and their parents on the best choice of G.C.E. programmes to suit individual requirements, and also to help clarify options and offer guidance on the post A-Level stage.

We set great store by the preliminary interview which students attend before enrolment, at which we are able to make an initial assessment of a student's academic potential. We are also happy to give advice on suitable vocational and professional courses, should a non-G.C.E. educational path be recommended.

Our prospectus is designed to give a clear and full picture of the services we offer."

James Wardrobe

Principal: J.W. Wardrobe, M.A. (Oxon)

Vice-Principal: J.S.D. Jones, B.Sc., Dip. Ed.

Heads of Department:

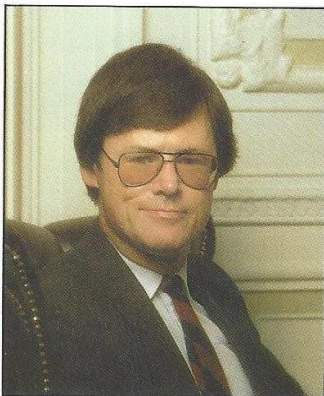
Huw Thomas, M.A. (Oxon)

Neal Thornton, B.A. (Oxon)

Academic Registrar and Student Welfare Officer: Miss Cherry Howell

Bursar and Accommodation Officer: John Cole

Admissions Secretary: Miss Debbie Marsh



James Wardrobe, M.A.(Oxon). Principal.



Senior Staff

Senior Staff photograph: (from left) Debbie March, Roger Keeley, JWW, Huw Thomas, John Cole, Cherry Howell

04/02/20

57. Timetabling By Night

The cormorant shook its shining bluish-black plumage vigorously and spread its wings to dry in the January sunshine. Easily distinguishable by its white chin and long, thin beak it sat on one of five wooden piles extending a foot or so vertically out of the water close to the shoreline. It ignored the squawking seagulls on the other perches and considered its next move. It had spent the previous ten minutes diving for fish but to no avail. From a nearby café Dad had enjoyed watching its surface dives, always begun with a characteristic half-jump which gave a more streamlined entry into the water. The scientific genus name for this family of aquatic sea birds is *Phalacrocoracidae*, which is Latinised Ancient Greek, from φαλακρός, *phalakros*, "bald" and κόραξ, *korax*, "raven." So predictably the Modern Greek for a cormorant is φαλακροκόραξ, *phalakrokorax*.

As Dad sipped his cappuccino he was reminded of the time when he first learnt that various species of this bird are commonly known as shags. When an Australian friend had introduced him to the down-under simile "As useless as a shag on a rock," Dad completely misunderstood the meaning and said, "Surely you mean "As painful as a shag on a rock?" " The Aussie patiently explained the avian, non-sexual reference, concluding, "They just sit there, mate, and do bugger-all. Geddit?" Got it.

By and by the cormorant tired of doing bugger-all. It was joined by its partner and they flew off to hunt a few hundred metres out to sea. It would be back on its "rock" tomorrow, just as Dad would no doubt return to his own perch to drink his mid-morning coffee.

Until he spotted the "bald raven" he had been reading an article in the Koroni News about the tourists who stayed in the local hotels last summer. A Messinian travel agency conducted a survey of hotel employees to find out who were the best foreign customers. The findings are unsurprising. The British were named as the friendliest and the most generous, but their children are the most difficult to handle. The French and the Americans are the least polite. Quelle surprise! The French also score low on generosity along with the Danes and the Finns. The Germans make the greatest effort to speak Greek. They may be heavy beer drinkers at home in Germany but not when they are on holiday in Greece. In pride of place as the biggest consumers of food and alcohol are, you guessed it, the Brits. Brexit won't affect this national habit nor make the slightest difference to their self-satisfied and patriotic excesses.

At last the windows have arrived and been installed in the new house. It is starting to feel like a residence now rather than just an airy building site. After a two-month delay intensive internal work can proceed, so that it will be habitable if not finished by March. Suddenly electricians, plumbers and carpenters have all turned up at once, and visible progress can be seen on a daily basis. We are expecting our first visitors towards the end of April, so a meaningful deadline really does exist.

No cat flaps there apparently, due to the complex apparatus of shutters, mosquito nets, double glazing, etc, so Minnie and I will just have to be let in and out at our leisure and convenience. We are already proficient at scratching on doors to make our presence felt. Meanwhile Dad just scratches his head whilst wrestling with the issue of how many megabits per second we can get through satellite internet rather than via a fixed data line. He really should have paid more attention in those Ampleforth Physics lessons.



Finally, the windows are in.



The view from Dad's study.

As well as conducting daily student interviews James was preoccupied from his first day with filling key teaching vacancies. The annual churn in those early years was high since most tutors were on hourly-rate contracts which were easy for management to adjust according to subject demand. This situation changed for the better during the '80s, with more full-timers bringing greater stability and continuity to the teaching force.

He inherited some talented “old lags”: for example the afore-mentioned alcoholic Huw Thomas (History), game board king Nigel “Bomber” Wells (Economics), the exotically named Anita van der Vliet (English Literature), accomplished jazz pianist Neal Thornton (Physics) whose partner was the well-known mezzo-soprano Sally Burgess, and the not yet famous modern composer Orlando Gough (Mathematics). Orlando, brother of architect Piers Gough, only taught Further Maths A-level, a classic instance of how colleges such as Lansdowne could outshine schools in their provision of the ultimate specialist practitioner. At that time the young minimalist was just beginning to get work composing jingles for TV commercials and until his musical career took off he was happy to continue teaching on a part-time basis.

At the very least James urgently needed teachers in Geography, Biology, History and, late in the day in areas where enrolments were indicating unpredicted demand, English Literature and O-level Maths. Whether by luck or good judgement he took on a number of young graduates who would develop into star performers and stay with him throughout his nine years’ tenure, notably Roger Keeley (Geography), Lesley Falconer (Biology) and ... Paul Tagg (Mathematics).

Just as term was about to start, James realised that he would need to hire an extra part-time O-level Maths teacher. There was only one applicant. So it was desperation stakes when a tall, long-haired and very scruffy Mathematics graduate with a raddled complexion and a nervous demeanour entered the Principal’s Office for interview. Paul Tagg looked as if his fixed abode might well have been a Kensington Gardens rhododendron bush and he seemed reluctant to sit down. He had a slight stammer and spoke in short bursts, which James later came to appreciate was because his speech could not keep up with the speed of his powerful intellect. After a short conversation James judged that Worzel Gummidge from Wakefield was worth the risk, for three reasons. The vacancy was only for a couple of O-level groups; the scarecrow’s CV indicated that he was clearly a proper Mathematician; and thirdly James was fast learning a lesson that would prove useful for the rest of his career: putting a live body in front of a class buys you more time than no body at all, though you can sometimes get away with a warm corpse for a day or so if the students are a particularly docile group.

Ah, Paul Tagg. He would go on to be an essential part of the manic Lansdowne landscape for many years, soon moving on to a full-time A-level teaching position. He made Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* Dixon and Tom Sharpe’s *Henry Wilt* look as if they were tranquilised versions of Mr Chips. He is worth a whole chapter, if not a book, to himself. He became the archetypal staffroom wag, a disruptive genius whose mission was to foster the inherent anarchy of the place. His guiding principle sounded suitably Nietzschean but was uniquely Taggian: “Out of chaos come order, *but first there must be chaos.*”

Handling Tagg, who was generally cherished by his students except on the occasions when a severe hangover got the better of him and he failed to turn up, would pose a challenge for James and for his successor Selwyn Jones. Dealing with an unpredictable yet valuable asset like Tagg would hone James’s management skills more acutely than any leadership training course. As far as James, Hugh and Paul were concerned, Tagg was often an exasperating nuisance, but Pete had a soft spot for him. Because his soul was Nietzschean too. Pete embodied the German philosopher’s maxim: “Man muss noch Chaos in sich haben, um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können.” “*You must have chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star.*” As for the wacky Yorkshireman, more will be revealed in later episodes.

As early September loomed, James began to worry more and more about the Teaching of the courses rather than just the Selling of the courses. Paul was unconcerned and would continue recruiting until the enquiries dried up deep into the first or second week of term. He was on track not merely to make the budget numbers but to meet the more ambitious marketing target, so he was a driven man. It would

turn out to be a bonanza year, good for profit, excellent for James's bonus and status, but problematic in the logistics of meeting the needs of the additional students. Were there enough classrooms or sufficient teaching hours in the day? What about the Dreaded Timetable?

Personal computers were yet to arrive on the scene, school timetabling software was in its infancy, with no products yet available on the market. So producing a workable timetable for such a range of courses as Lansdowne offered was an annual nightmare. With a week to go James approached Pete, who immediately noticed the flecks of froth on the distracted New Boy's slack jaw. After some well-needed duck-feeding in the Gardens, they settled down to discuss the start-of-term preparations and in particular the timetable. Pete reassured him, "Don't worry, we've got this amazing new piece of software tailor-made by our guy in the Imperial College Computer Science department. It does a filling procedure of the students according to subject, level and length of course. It resolves most clashes and produces a clash-free number of teaching groups. From then on, it's a piece of piss." This was wishful thinking.

That afternoon their man at I.C.L. ran the program on the university's mainframe computer and sent over a wheel-barrow load of print-outs. The output was riddled with clashes and had created about 350 groups for 450 students, an average group size of less than 1.3. How could an impending disaster be averted? Definitely not just by a brisk walk round The Pond. "This calls for a late-nighter," said Pete with relish, so after completing a hard day's interviewing the intrepid duo met in the college office in order to sort out the timetable manually, using a large board and pins with heads of different colours. This would entail James staying overnight with Pete and his wife Clare in their basement flat in Olympia.

The work started sensibly, but then they opened a bottle of Keo Five Kings brandy, a gift James had received earlier that day from a prospective student, the nephew of the prominent right-wing Cypriot politician Glavkos Clerides. They drank every drop and then found some more booze, so who knows the state of the long-abandoned timetable when they finally rolled into the flat at some ungodly hour after midnight? Clare had gone to bed many hours before. Even though James was legless, Pete displayed impressive stamina and insisted on a nightcap, or "final snifter" as he quaintly called it.

He then put some very loud rock music on the stereo and proceeded to demonstrate his not inconsiderable skills on the air guitar, accompanied by his hallmark drunken grin. Suddenly a banshee appeared. Clare, many months pregnant with their first child, came storming out of the bedroom and screamed at Pete to turn down the music. This she actually did herself because Pete ignored her. He was still grinning like a loon and riffing away on his non-existent Fender Stratocaster like Eric Clapton or Jimmy Page. He briefly paused, only to say, "Meet James, our new Principal," and he added sheepishly, "We've had a bit of a problem with the timetable..."

The next morning, before the household stirred and nursing the devil of a sore head, James skulked away early in time for his first interview at 9.00am. When Pete rolled into Palace Gate a few hours later he was amazed to find that James had kept his first appointment. There would be more "late-nighters" in the call of duty in the days to come, but that first drunken session was when their bond of friendship coalesced.

The timetable was sorted out largely thanks to the sanity and logical skills of Balliol physicist Neal, who produced a workable version after holding out, as he did every year, for a higher fee for the work until management was truly desperate. They always caved in in the end. Coming from Tadcaster, he knew a thing or two about earning brass. So the term began and everything eventually settled down. The twins told James that it would take a couple of weeks for the college to subside into a stable routine.

It took two months. James came up for air sometime around the end of October.

Although exhausted and a stone lighter James was exhilarated and undaunted by the challenges of his new job. At the beginning of the year he had lost his mother and faced an uncertain future. Now as 1981 drew to a close the 34-year-old was a College Principal in charge of nearly 500 students and 50 teaching staff. The good news was that the Templetons did not interfere. They let him get on with it but they were available for advice and support when required.

In December the brothers decamped to their villa near Estepona for “strategic planning meetings” on the fairways of a variety of Costa del Sol golf courses. They suggested that the following year James might like to join them. He agreed with alacrity. In the meantime he could use their villa for a holiday at Easter if he wished. By now Pauline had met the twins socially and although she was an old hand at recognising and dealing with “naughty boys,” they charmed her into accepting that her husband had hitched his wagon to successful times ahead. She judged correctly that they would probably be a “bad influence” but she was delighted to see him happy in his work. Her own career was blossoming at Highfield, where she was now teaching exclusively English and History, her favourite subject.

Around this time the Wardrobes acquired a second dog who was at the other end of the size spectrum from Boot. He was a long-haired Yorkshire Terrier called Wellington, but known as Willie. He quickly became a well-tolerated companion of the aging sheepdog and adored by Pauline and James.



Willie: Boot even let the little terrier jump on top of him and sleep on his woollen back.

The next spring, along with the Wisemans, the professional Surrey cricketer P.H.L'E. (Hugh) Wilson and his girlfriend Helen, they headed to Spain for a well-deserved soak in the sun after a shocking Mediterraneanless gap of nearly three years.

The Christmas 1981 Number 1 Single:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPudE8nDog0>

Don't You Want Me, by The Human League

26/02/20

58. The Welshman And The Iraqis

The Wardrobes and their friends were having a quiet drink in an Estepona bar when the owner, who was watching the Spanish TV news, suddenly turned to them with a fist raised in triumph and laughed. “Viva Argentina!” he exclaimed. “Viva Las Malvinas!” The Falklands War had begun. During the rest of their holiday in the Templetons’ Bahia Dorada villa which commanded a splendid view of Gibraltar it became evident that the locals were 100% in sympathy with their Latin American friends’ aggressive action. The reason? The Rock. The land frontier, closed by Franco in 1969, was still shut until the end of 1982, so at that time there were no employment opportunities nor other economic benefits for the general area and especially not for the impoverished and run-down border town of La Linea. The general Andalusian sentiment was, “Bugger the Treaty of Utrecht – we want our piece of the British Empire back as well.”

None of this prevented the seven of them from having a great time. Although Malcolm damaged his dodgy sportsman’s knee diving into the cold sea and had to be wheeled at will into and out of the shade on his sunbed, he didn’t lose his sense of humour. “I say unto you, take up my bed and walk. John, Chapter 5, Verse 8,” he demanded biblically. Hugh won enough pesetas at the Casino Nueva Andalucia to fund a “free” visit to Tangiers with Helen. With Pauline’s reluctant approval, James bought a studio apartment down the road in a new urbanización called Pueblo Mexicano. It was close to the up-and-coming marina of Puerto Duquesa and would overlook the as yet unbuilt golf course. They would spend many happy weeks there over the next twenty years.

Hugh Wilson was a quietly-spoken, kind and gentle giant. Then 24, he was in training for his fourth season at Surrey CCC. He ran along the beach every morning, including (with Malcolm and James in tow) past the sun-worshipping and ostentatiously splayed nudists (“What a disgusting image!” Ed.) at the Costa Natura resort, and on one occasion he toiled 13 kilometres uphill to Casares, one of the region’s famous cliff-hugging pueblos blancos, where the photo below was taken. A well-built 6’5” protégé of Malcolm, he was a Liphook lad who held the batting record at Wellington College and yet came in at Number 11 for Surrey. Nicknamed “Flea” because of his initials (P.H.L’E), he was trained at the Oval by Alf Gover, the highly distinguished coach of so many world-class players. Hugh bowled right-arm fast medium, his stock ball being a big “inner.” The highlight of his career was the 1979 Benson & Hedges Cup Final when he took 4 for 56 against Essex, but Graham Dille was picked ahead of him as “the young quick” for the 1979-80 England tour of Australia.

He once played for fun in the Highfield Staff vs Liphook Fire Brigade cricket match. Peter Mills told him to “bowl slowly” because the pitch was dodgy and he didn’t want any of the helmetless firemen to be injured. James remembers being persuaded to keep wicket that day with kit lent by a mischievous Malcolm. When Hugh came on he stood so far back that he found himself also fielding at Long Stop. Yes, Hugh was quick. In 1983 he went to Somerset for a couple of seasons, playing in the same side as Ian Botham, Viv Richards and Joel Garner. Then, as often with tall fast bowlers, his back let him down and he retired prematurely. However, he still holds an odd cricketing record in that he was not dismissed until his 18th first-class match, by which time he had batted seven times and scored 29 runs.

His wedding in the mid-80s was a bona fide cricketing occasion. He married the daughter of Raman Subba Row, Michele, who was given away by M. J. K. Smith, the former England captain. As guests of the groom, the Wardrobes, Wisemans and Tim Pyper were delighted to mingle with his former

Surrey colleagues, including Micky and Alec Stewart, Monte Lynch, David Smith and Sylvester Clarke. Hugh's borrowed "going away" garb was Ian Botham's extremely loud, multi-striped blazer, a dubious promotional device by Botham's manager at the time, the colourful "Lord" Tim Hudson.



Hugh in poncho and cowboy hat goes Mexican at Casares.

Pauline and James also discovered an outstanding restaurant called "The Yellow Book." Named after the 1890s literary journal of which Aubrey Beardsley was the first art editor, it was owned by a successful London restaurateur who had migrated to Estepona in the seventies with his Australian lover, Robbie, now the maître d' and inspiration behind the establishment's unique ambience. The visual style of the restaurant was late 19th century Aestheticism, the walls covered in Beardsley's drawings in black ink, full of sinuous Art Nouveau curves and whiplash lines. The background music was an anachronistic yet seamless fit: 1920s jazz. The Jazz Age sounds of Bessie Smith, Bix Beiderbecke and King Oliver complemented the inventive setting perfectly. And the food was excellent too.

A couple of years later The Yellow Book found itself in the path of the new Estepona bypass and the family of the now-deceased owner closed it down. But in 1985 Robbie reappeared with his own restaurant in an old part of the town and it remains open to this day. The theme of "Robbie's" is kitsch American glamour, with every nook and cranny stuffed with garish celebrity memorabilia and with every dish named after a Hollywood legend. Photos of all the great movie stars and singers cover the walls; the soundtrack to a special meal is Sinatra, Garland, Holiday, Bassey, Nat King Cole. Despite defying all the principles of good taste, the place exudes an alluring glitz that wins you over in the end. James and Pauline never visited their flat in Spain without including a night out at "Robbies."

Meanwhile, los hermanos Templétinos were in the process of buying another villa, this time in

Sotogrande, which gave them the chance to become members of the Old course there, one of the best in Spain. (Sotogrande New would later be developed into Valderrama.) Back home the empire was rapidly expanding. They acquired Number Seven Palace Gate and started Lansdowne College, a Higher Education establishment offering professional and vocational courses, even American degrees. But their biggest and most lucrative deal was with Saddam Hussein.



A relatively recent photograph of the interior of “Robbies” restaurant, Estepona.

Note the vinyl album place settings.

To be more accurate, the contract was with the UK Ministry of Defence, which had fingers in many of Iraq’s military pies before and throughout the period of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). This included British support in establishing an aircraft industry in Iraq.

The Brigadier had close connections within the MoD, which gave the boys the chance to bid for and win two consecutive contracts to train Iraqi Air Force cadets in English, Mathematics and Physics to a standard required for entry onto Engineering degree courses at UK universities. In effect, each contract was for the provision of a residential, intensive one-year A-level programme. The Lansdowne Group would be responsible for all the boarding and teaching requirements, which meant swift and immediate action by Peter and Paul to set up the first operation in time. The students would be accompanied by Iraqi Air Force personnel, who would supervise their social and extra-curricular activities in what turned out to be the remote Shropshire countryside. “They’re really political commissars,” Pete confided in James. “Their job is to keep the cadets in line and not allow any anti-Saddam infection by our teaching staff.” Somehow the intrepid twins managed to acquire suitable accommodation for the initial batch of 100 cadets and their support staff at Attingham Hall, a neoclassical National Trust

mansion set in a Park of 8000 acres, five miles from Shrewsbury. They hired the best staff they could get at short notice and vowed to give themselves more time to recruit teachers for the next contract, which was to be based in Woking.

This is the point at which the Welsh wizard, Selwyn Jones, entered the Lansdowne story. Selwyn is a charming and eccentric personality who shrewdly used his “Welshness” to weave his utterly captivating magic both in the classroom and out. He looked the part too. With wild, unruly hair and a beard that put fear into the hearts of barbers everywhere, he was the Merlin of “MathÉmÁtics” and, like all who met him, the twins fell in love with him on their first encounter. As well as his teaching prowess, he played the organ and was something of an impresario in his spare time. He was the manager of Carlo Curley, the renowned American “Pavarotti of the Organ,” and arranged all his concert engagements throughout the UK.



Attingham Hall became an Iraqi boarding school for one year.

Disillusioned with his role as Acting Head of Department at Merton College in Morden, where he was running a huge department but which faced an uncertain future, he applied for both Head of Mathematics and Head of Physics for the Woking project, due to start the following September.

Selwyn himself takes up the tale: “The application deadline had already passed but I decided to submit my CV anyway and stated in my letter that I was perfectly capable of doing both jobs simultaneously, which could save the organisation a not insignificant amount of money; if they were interested in my proposition I could give names of referees, etc. Days later I received a letter asking me to come for a preliminary interview where I met Pete and Paul for the first time.

They said that they had already appointed the two Heads of Department as advertised, but they still wanted to meet me. The brothers were curious because of my CV and all the diverse experience I had accrued. They suggested that I might be interested in doing some “inspection work” in connection with the first contract at Attingham Park. After a lengthy discussion I eventually agreed to do it, since I would be able to arrange a day off from Merton College every other Friday by doing evening duties in

lieu.”

So Selwyn began to travel up to Shrewsbury by train every other Friday to monitor the cadets' progress. He set homework and tests for them to complete (in both Physics and Maths), took the scripts home to mark and then returned them on his next visit. It soon became clear that with a few exceptions these students were totally incapable of gaining even a pass grade. It was also apparent that many of them were submitting homework copied from the brighter few (including the identical errors). The Iraqi authorities had sent over the sons of regime cronies rather than the scholarly elite they had promised. Later, partly as an insurance policy against exam disaster, Pete brought in an external agency to assess the cadets' general intelligence levels and the results confirmed their poor academic quality.

“The cadets were all incarcerated in the grand mansion at the heart of the estate. Pete had wanted them to be housed with local host families to give them an opportunity to experience a little bit of home life and to improve their conversational English, but the Iraqi military authorities were totally against the idea and adamant that they should be isolated from outside influences. So they were confined to their Attingham Park base, attending their daily lessons in classrooms that had a large picture of Saddam Hussein staring at them from just above the blackboard, - apart from Friday and Saturday evenings when they were allowed to go into Shrewsbury to visit the local brothels. Taxis were lined up to take them there and bring them back. I presume this was a recreational activity organised by the Iraqi officer in charge of their welfare. I really felt sorry for the lads.

The standard of the teaching of Maths and English was good, with the younger teachers in particular fully committed to helping the cadets. The same could not be said about the Physics department. As today, there was a dearth of good teachers of Physics and Pete had found it extremely difficult to recruit satisfactory specimens. “Who the hell would want to come to a place like this,” he kept telling me, “Out in the sticks, having to teach Physics during the day and then do pastoral duties every evening?” The situation was so desperate that he had been forced to employ an elderly gentleman who had previously been a senior lecturer at the old Regent Street Polytechnic. He was clearly passed his expiry date but he was A Body Who Could Speak Physics, which was enough to satisfy the minimum requirement. He wasn't a “teacher” but a “lecturer” and it didn't help matters that he was only able to perform during the mornings. After lunch he ran out of energy and nodded off while the cadets did some private study. The students felt so sorry for him that they used to wheel in a comfy armchair, give him a glass of orange squash and encourage him to have a nap!

The elderly Physicist only made it to the Christmas holidays, prompting a staffing crisis. We interviewed a handful of unsuitable candidates. One applicant did display an inordinate degree of enthusiasm for the job. He was Luigi, a loquacious Italian professor with a prolific amount of flapping arm action. He was intensely keen to implement his ideal strategy for student success in Physics at Attingham Park, a formula that had proved most successful in the past - apparently. He explained his master plan: he would set up an elite squad of cadets to spearhead the battle to success. Pete and I had visions of something like Hitler's “Sturmabteilung” appearing in the grounds of the Grade 1 listed stately home. After Luigi had left the room, Pete placed both hands over his face and muttered, “fucking lunatic.”

Exactly one week later, on New Year's Eve, two days before the start of the new term, Pete and I are back in the office trying to work out a solution to our “Physics problem” when the phone rings. It is

Luigi.

Luigi: "Hello, hello, I haven't heard from you about the job. Do you have any news for me, please?"

Pete: "Hang on a moment, Luigi, let me check with my secretary."

With his hand covering the microphone, Pete turns to me and asks: "Should we take him? We are in a hell of a jam. What do you think?"

"Well," I said "we urgently need A Body Who Speaks Physics in front of a class and he can do that."

Pete: "Luigi! You've got the job. Now get your arse up to Attingham Park PDQ. The term starts the day after tomorrow!"

Luigi was overjoyed. The immediate problem was solved. It transpired that he was living in Kent in a motorised caravan with his wife and two, possibly three, children. He eventually made it to Shropshire two days late because his motorhome broke down on the way and had to be repaired. He did set up his task force of elite "stormtroopers" but regrettably they failed to make a significant difference to the eventual outcome.

With three weeks to go before the A-level exams were due to commence, a formal top-level meeting was called at Attingham Hall under the chairmanship of Brigadier Templeton. Attending the meeting were Pete, Paul and two or three Iraqi military representatives. I was not invited to attend the meeting from the start, but I was asked to sit outside and wait to be summoned. After about ten minutes I was called into the meeting to be addressed immediately by the Brigadier in his usual clipped and peremptory manner.

"Selwyn, I'm going to ask you a simple question and I expect a straight answer."

"Yes, Brigadier."

"In your opinion, bearing in mind your long and extensive experience in the teaching profession, do you think any of the students on this course stand a chance of gaining a pass grade in the forthcoming A-level examinations?"

"Three or four, perhaps, but in the case of most of the students, Brigadier, no."

"In other words you are telling us they are fucked."

"You could put it that way, Brigadier, yes."

"There you are, gentlemen, there's your answer."

I was then asked to leave the room.

After the meeting ended Pete told me that the Iraqi officials had said that the morale of the cadets was at a low point. They wanted him and me to address the students in order to forcefully and positively inspire them to work hard in preparation for their final exams.

It was a hot summer's afternoon. The students were rounded up and ordered to sit on the lawn at the back of the mansion and wait for the pep talks. One of the Iraqi officers made a brief speech in Arabic and then Pete began, "When Mao Tse-Tung led his soldiers on the thousand-mile Long March across China, he told them that the hardest step of the journey was the first step and I say to you today that the hardest step on your path to the final exam is...blah blah blah." I was quite impressed by his impassioned speech about working hard towards a successful outcome, but the cadets remained unmoved.

Now it was my turn. I tried to stir them up by asking them in loud, declamatory mode, "Are you *mice*, - or are you *men*? Are you *mice* wanting to hide timidly inside your hidey holes, or *men* ready to carry on the fight to the end to achieve success...blah, blah, blah." The cadets were still unmoved. I guess they thought we were both raving lunatics. Or maybe they'd just heard too many of Saddam's ranting harangues in the same vein. On reflection my speech did sound a bit like a call to arms before going over the top on the front line. Sadly this is where some of the weaker cadets probably ended up months later, as cannon fodder when the Iraqi offensive became bogged down in World-War-One-style trench warfare.

That day was my last visit to Attingham Park. When I first began to do this work my briefcase was always jam-packed with cadets' scripts. On the last day, however, when Pete and I travelled up to Shrewsbury together, Pete's briefcase contained four cans of Foster's lager and mine four cans of Guinness."

What happened next? Most of the cadets in this batch almost certainly failed to get accepted onto their intended university degree courses in aeronautical, mechanical or electrical engineering. Selwyn suspects that subsequent to the exam results an arrangement was made for them to attend some kind of appropriate military training in the UK. The second contract in Woking was much more successful. Valuable lessons had been learnt. Pete insisted on a higher quality of student intake and had more time to plan the operation, which was also easier to monitor closely from Lansdowne's HQ in London. There was talk of a third contract based in Malvern, but it never materialised. Nevertheless, to use one of Paul's favourite expressions, "We made shedloads of money..."

Shortly afterwards, Selwyn resigned from Merton College and joined the Lansdowne Asylum on a full-time basis.



Selwyn Jones is caught in the act of playing the theme from Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 at a funeral in a Golders Green church in the late 1980s.

Thank you for your story, Selwyn. This video clip is for you:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fK6PIPGdAm8>

Theme from Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, played by Rodney Jantzi.

10/03/20

59. True Tagg Tales

A couple of overseas friends have asked Dad how the Greeks are reacting to the coronavirus outbreak. He replied that they are panicking a bit but not unduly, since there have to date only been 89 cases, all imported from abroad, with no confirmed reports yet of community transmission. The nearest occurrences to Messinia have been in Elia and Achaia, both prefectures of the north-western Peloponnese, and in the island of Zakynthos where schools, sports centres, cinemas, theatres and other public gathering places have been closed. More than half (47) of these positive cases were all members of the same group which had just returned from a trip to Israel and Egypt.

Nevertheless, there is growing evidence of hysterical stockpiling. A friend recently stood in the check-out queue behind a woman whose trolley was fully loaded with large bottles of Dettol. So far the national flight from rational behaviour is nothing compared with the buying frenzy at the time of the Gulf War, when as soon as Operation Desert Storm began in January 1991 the supermarket shelves throughout Greece emptied in a matter of hours. Perhaps people thought that they were within range of Saddam's Scud missiles. Not possible of course (Scud B range: 400 miles; Baghdad – Athens: 1200 miles), but fear is a powerful weapon.

Yesterday in journalistic mode Dad asked our local chemist in Petalidi about his virus-driven sales. "I've sold out of masks," he said. "There's been a run on disinfectants, alcohol-based cleansers, hand gels and sanitisers, but no fights have broken out yet over the last items in stock." Then he smiled devilishly and added, "We shall have to wait and see what happens when proper panic arrives."

The word "panic" originated in this part of the world. It is a noun derived from the ancient Greek adjective πανικός, *panikos*, which relates to the rustic god Pan. He lived in the sylvan glades of Arcadia, which is just down the road from Messinia, and he spent most of his time fornicating with nymphs and nanny goats when he wasn't playing his pipes. But if he was disturbed by errant shepherds whilst having a nap in some secluded woodland grove, he would put the wind up them by shouting angrily in their direction, thereby inducing "panic fright," (*panikon deima*). He was famous for causing terror. Following the Titans' assault on Mount Olympus, Pan claimed credit for the victory of the gods because he had frightened off the attackers. In the Battle of Marathon it was said that he favoured the Athenians and so inspired panic in the hearts of the Persians.

At the moment the general public seems more concerned with another issue, an old story with a new twist. The major focus of attention of the Greek media is not the coronavirus but the latest crisis developing at the land and sea borders with Turkey. President Erdogan's decision to open the Turkish land border with Greece to refugees is the main story on the TV news. In reaction to being caught in the middle of what is described as Turkey's attempt to "blackmail" the EU, the Greek government has closed its own border, leaving thousands of immigrants stranded in the no-man's land between the two countries. Daily footage is shown not only of those trapped in this way, but also of coastguards forcibly turning back yet more unfortunate souls from Lesbos and even of a few lucky refugees, mostly young males, successfully rowing, swimming or even wading across narrow and unguarded crossing points of the Evros River.

The national authorities have however taken some decisive and unpopular action to contain the spread of the virus. All Carnival (Απόκριες, *Apokries*, "Away, meat") events due to take place just before Lent, this year at the beginning of March, were to be cancelled. Any local council which defied the edict

would result in its mayor facing up to two years' imprisonment. Many communities reacted negatively to this ruling. In Patras, which traditionally hosts the largest Carnival in Greece, the Communist mayor Kostas Peletidis declared: "This directive creates bitterness, anger, and disappointment in city workers who have put a lot of effort into preparing for the top carnival of Greece, but we are called upon to implement the Joint Ministerial Decision." So, in the time-honoured Greek way of acting in defiance of the government, unofficial Carnival groups in Patras and elsewhere went on with their traditional celebrations, which were allowed by and acceptable to municipal leaders. What is the Greek for: "Two fingers to the lot of them," I hear you ask? Possibly something like: "παρ'τα," *par'ta*, "take these," accompanied by an offensive *ten-fingered* gesture, the double moutza, but Dad says he'll have to check that with Greek friends. One of these, Costas, is an entertaining veterinarian working in the Pyrgos area amongst a farming community that faces constant economic difficulties. His droll and despairing comment on the Carnival ban was: "So what? Every day of the year is a carnival in Greece, so one day less makes no difference.." You need a good sense of humour when you spend half your life with your arm up the backsides of sheep, pigs and goats.

Under normal circumstances the Patras Carnival is one of the biggest in Europe. Giant decorated cars, carts and coaches along with colourful papier-mâché figures fill the city streets for a full weekend of street parades and parties. And if you ever find yourself in Athens at Carnival time, you might want to head for the Plaka district to join in the exuberant merrymaking, whilst running the risk of being bopped on the head by hollow plastic clubs (ρόπολα, *ropola*) wielded by gangs of rampaging teenagers. This happened to Dad when he was there with a group of his sixth-form students at the start of a Classical Civilisation trip in the mid-1990s. Never again.

At least the splendid tradition of flying kites on the first day of Lent, Καθαρά Δευτέρα, *Kathara Deftera*, "Clean Monday," could continue as usual. A kite is called an eagle in Greek (αετός, *aïtos*) because it was long believed to be the bird that flies the highest. Flying a kite on this national holiday is symbolic of the effort to reach the Divine. Having your gaze fixed in the sky for as long as it flies is spiritual and mental elevation in preparation for the 40 days of Lent. It is in fact 42 here since the Orthodox Church counts the days exclusively, which explains why its Lent begins on a Monday and the Catholic version starts on a Wednesday.



The first kite in Greece appeared around 400 BC and was said to have been invented by mathematician

and engineer Archytas (440-360 BC), from Taras (Taranto), southern Italy, for his aerodynamics studies. He was a good friend of Plato and a Pythagorean.

Two of the country's biggest industries, tourism and shipping, have already been affected by COVID-19 and the situation is certain to deteriorate further. The Tourism Minister announced last week that nearly 70% of Chinese visitors have cancelled their trips to Greece. Speaking on Greek TV, Harry Theoharis put a brave face on it: "Last year Greece received 31,350,000 tourists – not counting 5.5 million cruise passengers – and of those visitors, only 200,000 were Chinese, which is a small figure." Dad is convinced that most of these were in Santorini when he and Mum were there last October.

The Minister also referred to China as a "market still opening up" to Greece and added that the cancellations of Chinese travellers "does not affect the Greek tourism product so negatively." He continued in the same over-optimistic vein: "The ministry's aim for Chinese tourists is a target of 500,000 in 2021, so there is still time." Then with a staggering lack of awareness of the global nature of the threat he concluded, "One positive impact is that many European tourists that had chosen Asia as their destination will now switch to markets such as Greece. We have seen a rise in bookings and therefore the picture is positive for tourism." Whaat? It's no wonder that the Greeks are so cynical about the level of intelligence and honesty of their politicians.

James's second Silly Season came and went. Once again student recruitment was a success. Lansdowne's reputation was growing and now attracting the children of celebrities, for example the film director Michael Apted, who recommended the college to David "Chariots of Fire" Puttnam and Mike "Get Carter" Hodges.

James remembers with fondness his first meeting with the maker of the hard-boiled 1971 thriller which starred Michael Caine in one of his finest roles. His two boys have already started their A-level courses when, some months later, the movie director arrives back in London from filming in Hollywood and wants an update on his sons' progress. A short, bearded man bustling with energy is shown into the Principal's Office. Within seconds of his entrance James becomes his Number One Fan and remains so to this day. How so? Because Hodges's first words to him are a charming once-in-a-lifetime surprise: "Mr Wardrobe, may I congratulate you on your wonderful surname.." Needless to say, after that they got along like a house on fire.



The Family and their consigliere drink sangria after playing at Real Club de Golf Sotogrande.

(from left) James, Pete, Hugh, Ian, Dougal, Paul.

James was promoted to become the newly created Deputy Director of Group Operations in September 1983. Selwyn arrived in August to be initiated in the seasonal silliness and then took over as Principal at the start of term. James's new position had a grand title, though in reality he would be Robin to Batman Pete, to whom of all the brothers he had become closest. He visited the Woking Iraqi project a few times, usually after a game of golf at Pete's nearby club, Foxhills, but he was not closely involved in its implementation.

Mainly he worked with Steve Allen, the recently appointed IT guru, on an in-house timetable program and on the introduction of networks in all the colleges. Steve, a very likeable and hard-working guy, knew what he was doing but needed someone like James to be the communication interface between his nerdspeak and the many potential users. The DDGO found that his post-university work as a computer programmer enabled him to understand what the devil Steve was talking about. In those pre-WYSIWYG days ("OK, Steve, hold on a moment and let me explain that to the others: What You See (on your screen) Is What You Get, folks"), you still needed some programming skills to use a terminal effectively. Steve chose Unix-based operating software called Fortune Plus, a wise decision which paid off despite early teething problems. The system served all the Lansdowne institutions reliably for many years.

Late in 1983 eleven-year-old Boot died of leukemia, a sad loss mitigated to some extent by their attachment to their cute young terrier, Willie. At work James was enjoying his role away from the heat of the day-to-day management kitchen but it was to last for less than one year. Two disasters hit Duff Miller in 1983-84. Firstly, its Principal, Joe Veitch, was killed in a car crash whilst on a Geography field trip somewhere in the region of Lindisfarne, Northumberland. Then the college failed its HMI inspection, largely due to the inadequate facilities at 151 Old Brompton Road. The boys' solution was to buy a far more suitable building in Queens Gate and to put their trusted lieutenant, "Tom Hagen" Wardrobe in charge of Duff Miller's resurrection. They made him an offer he couldn't refuse, based on a substantial profit share.

After a cloudy Easter holiday in Rhodes, he then spent some months equipping the building and recruiting fresh teaching staff. He remembers that for a few weeks before the cricket season started he employed Hugh Wilson as a temporary handyman, but he has no other recollection of this preparatory phase. He took on some future stars, for example Phil O'Malley (Biology) and Topsy Horsley, née Rickards (English). Phil worked at Duff's for thirty years whilst Topsy went on to become a much-loved Principal of DLD College.



Glorious Goodwood 1984: Mary Lou clutches Tommy's purloined shampoo.

James should be looking happier after his win on Chief Singer in the Sussex Stakes.

After flying up to St Andrews to watch The Open with Steve Allen and Paul (though the latter mysteriously disappeared back to London the same morning – it turned out to be for a weekend assignation with his secretary), James took Tommy to Glorious Goodwood with Pauline and Mary Lou. His father was over in the UK for one of his periodic visits from Australia. At the end of the day's racing Wardrobe Senior was proud to discover and snaffle an abandoned but almost full bottle of quite decent champagne. There was life in the old dog yet.

James then tightened up his gut for another Silly Season. Left to his own devices he was able to manage all the student interviews himself, and in a calmer environment than at the mothership, whence news would occasionally reach him of unpredictable antics in the primary cuckoo's nest. His own target for the first year was a modest total of 75 students and he enrolled comfortably over 120, largely by offering the same courses as Lansdowne at a better price. The sales team up the road regularly shouted abuse down the phone at him when they lost to Duff's what they thought had been a sure-fire "hit." They didn't realise that Paul, Hugh and James had agreed in advance a policy to sell Daz cheaper than Tide in order to kick-start the revival. It worked.

At some point in the autumn term Her Majesty's Inspectors returned. They were virtually speechless at the positive transformation of the college and immediately gave it a clean bill of health. James was on a roll and settled down to a sane three-year stint as Principal of Duff Miller. Little did he know that twelve months later he would be back at Lansdowne, where the staffroom rogues' gallery assembled

by Selwyn and himself since 1981 awaited him.

The circumstances that led to his return to Palace Gate will unfold in the next chapter, but now is the time for tales of Paul Tagg, who flourished under both the English and Welsh regimes throughout the '80s and beyond. Over to Selwyn, who unfolds the first story, a Brian Rix farce which took place whilst James was still based at Duff's. "Sometimes," he sighs, "the ethos of LT was not dissimilar to that of St Trinian's of Ealing Studios fame. At times I felt like a ringmaster in charge of a circus."

"One balmy summer's evening at the end of a normal working day, an impromptu teachers' drinks party materialised in one of the basement rooms - a party of which I was totally unaware. It was about 6.30 p.m., when I had agreed to see the parents of one of our overseas students. I had arranged to meet them in a large and airy front office on the first floor of No. 9 Palace Gate.

The meeting was proceeding satisfactorily in sedate fashion when suddenly the door flew open and in rushed a breathless Barbara Cunningham (*English Literature*) in a colourful and flowing summery dress. She gasped a fleeting "Excuse me" and made a swift exit through the glass door that led to the front balcony. A nanosecond later, in charged Paul Tagg (*Mathematics*) in a highly excited state. He was dressed in a cream jacket, bible black trousers and rampant red silk sash. He looked like a sommelier from the Ritz avidly searching for a missing bottle. After the briefest of apologies he also made a beeline for the open glass door, hopped through and disappeared.

I calmly carried on as if nothing had happened. About twenty seconds later in bumbles a hot and bothered Paul "Tommo" Thomas (*History, no relation to Huw*), huffing and puffing with exhaustion. "I am so sorry but I was told that Barbara was here," he muttered and beat a hasty retreat, slamming the door behind him. At this stage I felt obliged to apologise for the bizarre interruptions. I explained light-heartedly that some of the staff were in high spirits because it was almost the end of the academic year, so they were engaged in an early celebration. The parents then began to apologise in turn for having insisted on having a meeting at such an inconvenient time, etc. etc. I reassured them and they left in a happy and satisfied state of mind.

I then made enquiries as to "What the hell has been going on?" It was explained to me that Tommo had the hots for Barbara and was a seriously earnest and ardent suitor. Barbara was already semi-engaged to a part-time organist from Hampstead and not really interested in Tommo's advances. However on the evening concerned and full of booze Barbara was in a flirtatious mood. Tagg decided that he would make a challenge for her attentions. But History, detecting Mathematics' designs on English Literature, immediately made a pre-emptive strike. As Tommo moved towards her, she bolted and the chase began. Barbara swiftly leapt up the flights of stairs, pursued by the two suitors who challenged and jostled each other along the way. Barbara must have thought that the front office would be a good hiding place and, once in, she was clearly horrified to see me there with parents. She disappeared onto the balcony to hide but Tagg, who had overtaken the Bunterish Tommo, caught up with her. They then climbed over the partition railing and entered the corresponding first floor front room of No.7."

Tommo meanwhile went on an extensive and fruitless search of the two buildings, flinging open every classroom door. But one door at the top of No. 7 seemed stuck. Highly suspicious, he shouldered it a number of times with his considerable bulk. It didn't budge, but only because the combined weight of Paul and Barbara was pressed in silence against its inside. Eventually Tommo gave up and returned to the basement. The hunted couple remained in the classroom. Rumour has it that the English and Maths Departments were happily conjoined that evening, but nothing is certain beyond History's jealous chagrin.

Practical jokes were also part of the culture amongst the bachelor boys of the staffroom. Paul Tagg found himself a victim of one of Roger Keeley's (*Geography*) well-researched japes. At one point Tagg became fond of a particular college secretary but he was keen to keep quiet about the liaison. Not much escaped the attention of his drinking buddies. He decided to take her for a secret weekend break to Venice. Having boarded the flight together, shortly after take-off they heard the following announcement over the public address system. "This is your Captain speaking. I am delighted to tell you that we have on board today a newly married couple, Mr and Mrs Paul Tagg. I would like on behalf of Alitalia to congratulate them and wish them all the very best in their married life together. The stewardess will bring them glasses of champagne with our compliments." Roger had somehow discovered the flight details of the romantic tryst and then phoned the airline with the fake news.

Inevitably Tagg had his revenge. One morning when Roger was teaching an A-level Retake class, there was a knock on the classroom door. Roger opened the door to find a policewoman standing there. "Is your name Roger Keeley?" she barked. "You are under arrest." "Why am I under arrest?" asked the mild-mannered and flustered Roger. "Because it's your birthday!" she screamed. She then started to undress in front of him and his 18-year-old students. Tagg had sent him a stripogram, who now went through a complete striptease routine in a sensuous fashion whilst humming the tune to David Rose's *The Stripper* throughout the procedure. Roger's ruddy complexion turned an even deeper red and his embarrassment was total. As for the students, they loved it and never gave the game away.

One day Tagg informed James that he had applied for a job at GCHQ, the national spying centre in Cheltenham, and that he had as requested given his boss's name as main referee. Unsurprisingly he passed the complex tests to become a cryptographer with flying colours and he would now undergo the Positive Vetting procedure, a rigorous and detailed investigation of a candidate's character, lifestyle and beliefs, before his application could move forward. A more unreliable person to be employed to protect the nation against the Soviet Union was hard to imagine, but so far Her Majesty's Government was aware only of his shining intellectual capabilities. GCHQ's recruiting slogan is: "It takes a certain type of person to keep our country safe. Someone like you." But not, Your Majesty, someone like Paul Tagg.

The vetting process involved a visit to Tagg's place of work by "a government official," which James recognised as a euphemism for a member of MI5, and a face-to-face interview with his employer. This is when the trouble began. By prior appointment a doppelgänger for George Smiley as played by Alec Guinness entered the Principal's Office. The Vetting Officer was short in stature, dry in manner and wore large, horn-rimmed spectacles. His bowler hat, overcoat and scarf had surely come straight off the film set of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. James thought to himself as he shook Smiley's hand, "You must be joking." But no scintilla of humour was on this man's agenda.

James knew that the truth about Tagg would demolish any chances of an appointment and so he decided to lie through his teeth in support of his madcap teacher. He also tried to inject some wit into the proceedings, an approach doomed to failure. After an hour-and-a-half of relentless grilling about Tagg's personal life, James at least now understood one undeniable fact: whatever Tagg's job outcome might be, he himself, the untrustworthy James William Wardrobe, would never under any circumstances be recommended by this security goon for any form of sensitive employment by HMG.

Here is a taste of the difficulties faced by James (who looked not at all like Patrick Stewart's Karla in *Smiley's People*) in being honest about Tagg on that memorable afternoon:

Smiley: "Mr Tagg seems to have moved address without letting us know."

Karla: "If you ask in Reception, Debbie should be able to help you."

TRUTH : Tagg was currently servicing Debbie and staying in her basement flat in South Kensington, so she would indeed know exactly where he was living.

Smiley: "I met Mr Tagg downstairs. He seems to have a bruise on his face and be limping a bit."

Karla: "I can't say that I'd noticed."

TRUTH : Following a typically excessive boozing session in the Harrington Arms the night before, after throwing-out time Tagg had tripped and fallen down the steps to Debbie's flat entrance. He needed the support of a walking stick for about three days afterwards.

Smiley: "How would you characterise Mr Tagg's alcohol consumption? Light, moderate or heavy?"

Karla: "Moderate."

TRUTH : You could almost hear Tagg's liver groaning at the enormity of this lie.

Smiley; " Is he a reliable and punctual employee?"

Karla: "Generally."

TRUTH : Except on the occasions when he wasn't.

Smiley: "What about his politics? Any communist or left-wing sympathies?"

Karla: "He never talks about politics."

TRUTH: Is anarcho-syndicalism left wing enough for you? His non-recognition of authority and other controlling systems spoke volumes about his politics.

Smiley: "To your knowledge is Mr Tagg homosexual?"

Karla: "Not to my knowledge."

TRUTH: At last Karla is able to give an honest answer. Tagg may have been working his way enthusiastically through the female staff but not the men "to my knowledge."

The inevitable upshot was that Tagg was not invited to work at GCHQ Cheltenham, but he did buy James a drink in the Harrington for having manfully and unsuccessfully dissembled and lied on his behalf. The moral of this story? Positive vetting works.



Thirty years on Paul has a respectable job as IT Director of the International School of Paris and is a member of the school's SMT. Is that a glint of the old mischief I detect in his eye?

One November Tagg went on an away-day to Calais to celebrate "Beaujolais Nouveau Day." This Day was a successful marketing ploy by the French to sell the earliest wine of the season to undiscerning yuppies and other fad-seeking idiots. Gamay, from which Beaujolais is made, is an unremarkable grape variety at the best of times. To ferment, bottle and release it for sale in mid-November makes this *vin de primeur* one of the most disgusting wines imaginable. However Tagg was always up for a new wheeze and was not deterred by such a trivial matter as the taste. To solve the problem of absenting himself from college on a weekday, he set his A-level Maths & Stats classes a "Beaujolais Nouveau Test."

Thanks to Selwyn, a copy of the test has survived and it is attached to the end of this chapter. You don't have to be a statistician to enjoy Tagg's idiosyncratic sense of "fun."

On the other hand, Dad reckons that among my readership there are at least fifteen "proper" mathematicians, who will surely feel obliged to attempt the test and report back on its successful completion? Your time starts now..

BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU MATHS AND STATS TEST

Time Allowed: One Hour

Attempt as many questions as possible.

Each question is worth seven marks.

1. The quantity of BN drunk at any time during the year is a periodic function for which,

$$f(x) = 1 - 4x^2 \quad 0 \leq x < 1/4$$

$$f(x) = \frac{4}{3}(1 - x)^2 \quad 1/4 \leq x < 1$$

Sketch the BN consumption curve for the next two years.

Does this function have an inverse if $x \in (0, 1)$?

Is f odd or even?

2. In an analysis of the shapes of drinkers beer guts the following model is proposed;

$$y = x^2(1 - x) + 1 \quad 0 \leq x \leq 1$$

where y is the distance between the front and back of the drinker and x is the distance from his neck to his backside (you may assume that the drinker is horizontal). Assuming a uniform cross section and a width of 0.5 estimate the volume of the drinkers gut.

[See figure 1.]

3. The rate at which Happiness (H) increases is directly proportional to the quantity (Q) of BN already drunk and the quantity remaining. Show that Happiness is increasing most quickly when exactly half the BN has been drunk.

Sketch a graph showing how Happiness changes with time.

4. A student is asked to evaluate

$$\int_0^1 (e^x + 1) dx$$

unfortunately, due to excessive refreshment of the parts other beaujolais cannot reach, he is seeing double and so attempts;

$$\int_0^1 (e^x + 1)^2 dx$$

What is the percentage error involved in making this blunder?

5. In how many different orders can one drink four bottles of red wine and three bottles of white wine;

(a) if all the bottles are distinguishable,

(b) if one's palate is so jaded that it is only possible to tell red from white.

6. A glass of BN contains a volume of wine which is Normally distributed with a mean of 12cl and a standard deviation of 1cl.

Find the probability that six glasses contain a total volume of less than 70cl.

7. The chance that a bottle of BN is 'corked' is 0.02%. On a quiet ~~evening~~^{night} in the Harrington 4,000 bottles are drunk. What is the probability that 2 or more are 'corked'?

8. Mark the following trivia true or false.

- I Sir William Rowan Hamilton, the discoverer of Quaternions, drank himself to death.
 - II Calculus is the Latin word for a pebble.
 - III Sir Isaac Newton was in charge of the Royal mint.
 - IV Differentiation was originally known as Disintegration.
 - V The Poisson distribution is so called because it is fish-shaped.
 - VI England's most accomplished statistician R A Fisher was employed by Arthur Guinness & Sons.
 - VII P A Tagg did not get a grade A in his 'O' level maths.
-

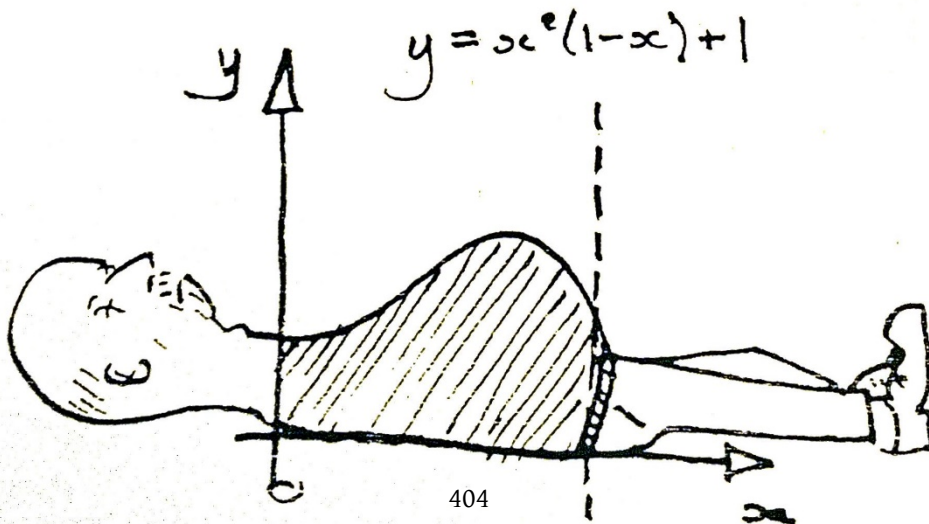
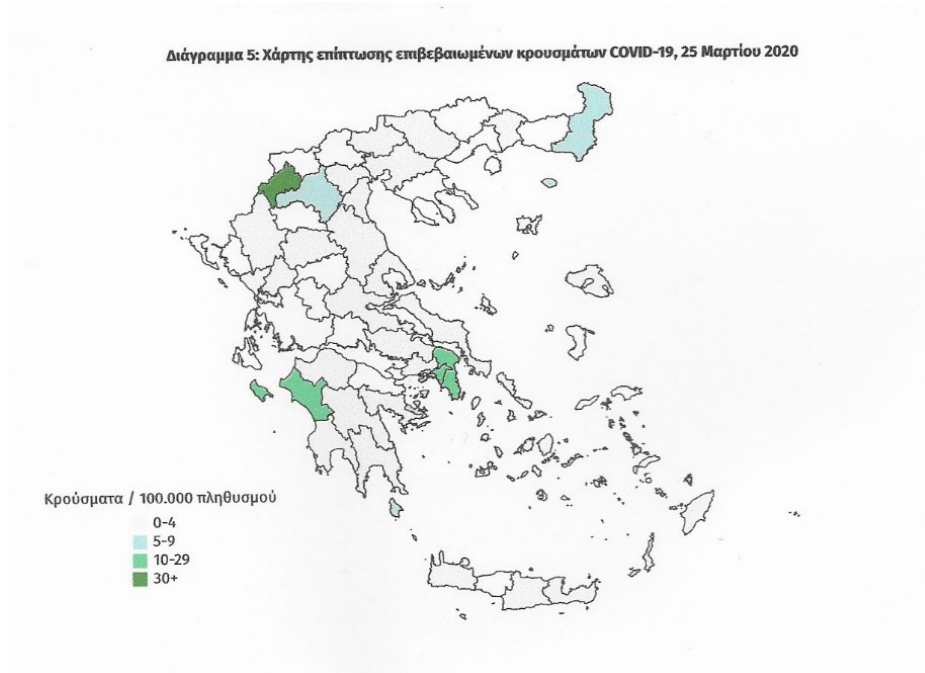


Figure 1.

26/03/20

60. Coronavirus in Greece: Special Edition

I have taken up Dad’s suggestion to suspend my coverage of Lansdowne’s high-spirited ebullience in the 1980s and to focus this month on the worsening COVID-19 situation here and the national reaction to the threat the Greeks call Κορονοϊός, *Coronaïos*, which was first reported here on 26th February. One calendar month seems a lifetime ago.



Map of geographical incidence of COVID-19 cases in Greece, 25th March 2020
(published by the National Public Health Organisation).

Most noticeably, there is a stark difference between the contrasting approaches of the British and Greek governments. Prime Minister Mitsotakis’ attitude, as reflected in his government’s early interventions and public statements, has been far less relaxed than Johnson’s. Although Greece (892 cases, 26 deaths to date) is acknowledged to be some weeks behind the UK (9849 cases, 477 deaths) in the spread of the virus, step-by-step measures such as closing schools, then museums/archaeological sites etc., then bars/restaurants/clubs et al, have all been implemented here well in advance of such actions in the UK. Also shut down are non-essential shops, most hotels, ski resorts (in Greece? Yes, for example on Mount Parnassos) and “organised” beaches, whatever they are. The government has already closed the country’s borders to all non-European Union citizens, while the only shops open are supermarkets, pharmacies, gas stations, pet shops, food delivery companies, groceries, bakeries, kiosks and banks. This is similar to most other European countries, causing all of Dad’s Greek friends and local contacts to wonder why Britain was slower in reacting to the inevitable.

One recent example is telling. On the same day (Sunday 23rd March), separated by only one hour, the two PMs appeared on their respective national TV stations to address the issue of how to deal with people not adhering to official advice about “social distancing” and staying at home. In both countries

too many citizens were ignoring government guidelines and heading off to the beaches as if they were on holiday, whilst many were fleeing to their second homes (and in Greece's case to their ancestral villages) outside the cities. How did the authorities in each country react? Kyriakos promptly ordered a full and immediate lockdown, à la France, Germany, etc. Boris just kept pleading with the public to behave more responsibly. One, performing solo, had taken the decisive action of a determined leader, the other seemed uncertain, constantly deferring to his "expert" advisors. You know who is which. The British PM was even taken aback when questioned about the possibility of police enforcement of the measures. Twenty-four hours later he was obliged to impose lockdown anyway. By now the Greek police were applying their curfew with helicopters and military drones and had already fined dozens of Athenians for non-compliance.

The Greek ban, to be implemented within twelve hours, applied to "all unnecessary movement by citizens," Mitsotakis explained, stressing the need for "bold and timely initiatives." He thanked the majority of Greeks for acting responsibly and self-isolating to avert the spread of the virus. "But I will not allow a frivolous few to undermine the safety of the majority, because a few irresponsible people can harm thousands of responsible citizens," he added. Swift action followed.

Under the new directive, initially applicable for two weeks but certain to be extended, only those going to or from their workplace, shopping for food or medicine, visiting a doctor or pharmacy, taking brief exercise (Dad: "1000 metre swims? You bet!") or walking their pet will be allowed to leave their homes. People returning to their permanent places of residence will also be exempt, as will those who are unable to do banking transactions online or have serious family obligations.

EXTRAORDINARY MOVEMENT PERMIT

SECTION A

Full Name: _____
Date of Birth: _____
Home Address: _____

Time of transportation: _____

I hereby declare that my transportation is related to the following reason:
(Mark **X** in the corresponding box in Section B.)

SECTION B

B1 Going to the pharmacy or visiting a Doctor, in the case that this is recommended after a previous contact.

B2 Going to a Supply Store in operation, where its commodities cannot be delivered.


B3 Going to the bank, when electronic transactions are not possible.


B4 Going to help people in need.

B5 Going to a ceremony (e.g. funeral, marriage, baptism), under the conditions provided by law or transition of divorced or legally separated parents, which is crucial for the communication between children and parents, in accordance with the applicable provisions.

B6 Short commute, near my home, for individual physical activity (excluding any collective sporting activity) or for pet needs.

Place _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____
The Declarant _____

 HELLENIC REPUBLIC
Ministry of Citizen Protection

 GENERAL SECRETARIAT
FOR CIVIL PROTECTION

English version of the “Exceptional Certificate of Citizens’ Movement” form (ΒΕΒΑΙΩΣΗ ΚΑΤ’ ΕΞΑΙΡΕΣΗ ΜΕΤΑΚΙΝΗΣΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΩΝ), required to be completed whenever you leave home.

This may resemble the UK’s lockdown, but in Greece it is more stringent. If Dad wants to leave the house he must inform authorities in advance of the reason for his exodus. They are three options: downloading, printing and filling in a special form from a government website; sending details via an SMS to a specific number; or, for those without access to the internet or mobile phones, explaining your reason in a signed personal declaration written on a simple piece of paper. Fines of 150 euros are being issued for breaches of the rules, which include always carrying your ID or passport when you are out and about. The Ministry of the Interior publicises the ban with emergency messages on your mobile phone, via the civil defence system. The incoming bulletins are more intrusive than texts. Each one makes an alarming noise like a klaxon horn, making Dad jump. It takes over the entire screen of

your device.

The authorities here are preparing for a crisis that it fears is beyond its capacity to handle. As elsewhere, there are concerns about the healthcare system's ability to cope. One particular worry is that the frequency with which doctors, nurses and administrative staff at hospitals are testing positive for the virus is growing, with dozens positive for COVID-19 and more than 300 in isolation.

Although the official numbers at present are low, the government is acting as if the virus statistics are high: they are rightly more afraid of what is coming than what has already happened so far. They have drafted in 2,000 doctors and nurses on new government contracts, which is far in excess of the number of current patients. People estimate that Athens has around 500 ICU beds in total. It will not be enough if the lockdown fails.

Another highly disturbing factor is the looming catastrophe which awaits the overcrowded refugee camps, through which the virus will spread rapidly once it takes hold. The supporting infrastructure in such hellholes as Moria on Lesbos is already pitifully inadequate. This disgustingly insanitary camp, constructed for 3,000 but holding 20,000, has no clean water, no soap. There will be no chance of not getting infected. One Afghan teenager there told a news reporter, "I think everyone here will die.."

On a brighter note Greece has some natural advantages which might help slow down the spread of the virus. The people on its 227 inhabited islands have a better chance of quarantining themselves successfully. Almost half the population of nearly 11 million live either in Athens, its surrounding Attica region, Thessaloniki or Patras. The rest are spread thinly in largely rural areas where there is a greater possibility of avoiding contagion. The first positive cases in Messinia have been a doctor and nurse who had come down to Kalamata hospital from Athens before diagnosis.

On the economic front the situation is as fragile as ever. Tourism, one of Greece's biggest earners, is wiped out for this year. Shipping, apart from cruises and passenger lines, is holding its own in an extended period of low demand, according to a Greek friend of Dad's in the business, with tankers doing well. The shipping community worldwide, not just the Greeks, are looking to China for signs of recovery and greater export activity. The largest contribution to Greece's GDP is made by agriculture, which can maintain its production more easily in this crisis than for instance manufacturing industries, of which the country has few. But in the end the government will need massive financial support from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM).

The supermarkets remain well stocked and there is little evidence of panic buying. Toilet paper is plentiful, but people have been buying up all the soap and disinfectant they can lay their hands on. The Greeks are not natural stockpilers of food, explains Dad's friend, Yiorgos: "We rarely do a *weekly* shop. We are accustomed to buying fresh bread every day, so we might as well buy other stuff daily too. It's part of our culture. We never know when we might go out to eat, so why buy in a lot of food unnecessarily? It's almost as cheap to eat out as at home anyway." It will be interesting to see if and how much food shopping habits change under the new restrictions.

In supermarkets there must be 10 square metres around each customer to minimise the risk of infection and the number allowed in shops at any one time is controlled by staff. The practical implementation of "social distancing" takes some getting used to for all the Mediterraneans, not least the Greeks, who have less regard for personal space than the northern European tribes. They love to socialise in groups, herding closely together with their *παρέα*, *paraia*. No single English word can convey the meaning, for which an apt paraphrasis might be "one's circle of friends and family." So adopting the new norms of physical separation will be tricky.

On the other hand, psychologically rather than socially, they must also quell their individualism, much admired by Dad, for the greater good. At the moment a general calm prevails and the population is being sensible about taking the necessary precautions. The Greeks are famous for preferring to ignore authority but so far they do seem to appreciate the necessity of the controls. This nation is definitely more goat than sheep, but it is gratifying to report they are obeying the government goatherds thus far.

So they are defying their stereotypical image - most of the time. When two weekends ago the government advised Athenians to stay away from the beaches on the Athenian Riviera, they duly obliged and headed for the hills instead, literally. Mount Ymittos (Hymettus), one of the three mountains overlooking Athens, was heaving with locals having a grand day out. They had stuck to the letter of the law but not its spirit. This is much the same phenomenon as safety helmets on motorbikes. The law says that these must be “carried”, so some motorcyclists do just that - they carry their helmets on an arm.

Meanwhile, you have to feel sorry for the new President of the Hellenic Republic. Katerina Sakellaropoulou, the country’s first female president and a former high court judge, was formally sworn into office on 13th March, when the national shutdown was already well under way. So the swearing-in ceremony took place in an almost empty parliament, with only a handful of politicians and journalists present. Two months earlier she had been voted in as Head of State with an overwhelming majority.



The newly-elected President during the swearing-in ceremony at the Greek Parliament on 13th March 2020.

Now, as I write this on the most important national holiday of the year, Independence Day, she cuts a lonely figure in Syntagma Square, laying a wreath at the Memorial of the Unknown Soldier, in front of a minimal group of politicians and a sparse military band, all studiously maintaining a two-metre distance from each other. An unusually thin and downbeat rendition of the Greek national anthem echoes eerily around the empty square, where in previous years packed crowds would join in the joyful celebrations with lusty singing and flag-waving.



Katerina Sakellaropoulou lays a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Constitution Square on 25th March, the 199th Anniversary of Greek Independence.

All over Greece hundreds of towns and villages which would normally host their own local parades and ceremonies every 25th March present a dismal picture of deserted streets and silent plateias. Today is the 199th Anniversary of the Revolution, so the nation must simply wait in hope and live in expectation of a singularly magnificent bicentennial bash next year.

As for Chrani, it will be strange when the winter quietness of this hamlet does not shift to the annual seasonal bustle of a smallish summer tourist resort. Before the lockdown some Athenians were coming down to their “safer” holiday homes in the area, a move not welcomed by the locals, but now they are required to stay in their primary residences in the capital. There is an air of nervous anticipation in this region of the storm to come. Only five positive cases have been confirmed in Messinia so far, but when will the full blast arrive?



Our local town, Petalidi, has recently been visited by a person in a hazmat suit, here seen spraying disinfectant on the wall outside the Venetia pizzeria.

Dad's situation is not ideal. Having enjoyed a wonderful Alpine weekend, in celebration of Mum's birthday, staying in Zurich ("unbelievably f*cking expensive") with their friend Rob the Aussie, he reluctantly decided to return to Greece whilst she came back to the UK. She has work commitments and he was worried about being shut out of Greece if he went with her to Liphook as originally planned. This would be problematic on at least two counts. Firstly, there's us cats to look after and secondly we are finally set to move into our new house next week, on 1st April. He just got out of Switzerland in time, as borders were closing all over Europe. He arrived back as a quasi-voluntary 14-day quarantine for all travellers from abroad was being introduced. He is on his 11th day of virtual self-isolation.

Living in the new house will be more of an adventure than Dad had bargained for. Unfortunately, due to the virus, for some months it will be a home with no furniture. Dave was going to bring over our stuff this month from Liphook in a Luton van, driving across France and northern Italy before taking a ferry to Patras. That plan has gone for a ball of chalk, as Pete T used to say. Dad has managed to borrow a bed from his Chraniot English friends, Dick and Sally, and he has a couple of chairs bought locally, but all the shops that sell household goods are shut for the foreseeable future. We have our cat beds of course, until Dad starts using them as cushions. Wifi installation has been delayed, which may prove to be a bigger problem. Anyway he says that, provided he can transmit, he will add a video of the Villa Wardrobe interior to my next blog for your interest.

Needless to say, the Warleone olive oil export venture has gone tits up, as Paul T used to say. At least until Dave eventually makes it out here.

Dad is missing Mum and the kids, but he has told us, more than once, that Minnie and I are a major comfort to him. This is partly because we pets just carry on as normal, carefree about a disease which does not affect us, provided our food supply chain remains secure. I haven't heard of any cat-human transmission or vice versa, so I am continuing my lifelong policy of "social approaching," which Dad seems to appreciate. This involves trying to stay within two metres of all humans in the vicinity, especially him. Minnie on the other hand throughout her life has always, owing to her nervous disposition, kept a prudent distance from virtually all two-leggers. She has confirmed to me that she

is not changing her behaviour any time soon.

In conclusion I suppose we are all self-isolating, but this is not a huge problem for Old Wardrobe, who knows of no more interesting a person to spend his days with than ... himself.

I leave you with a poem by Constantine Cavafy, who you will know by now is one of Dad's favourite poets. Any analogy you might care to draw with our modern leaders is up to the reader. As context, you only need to know that Galba succeeded Nero as Emperor of Rome.

Η Διορία του Νέρωνος

Δεν ανησύχησεν ο Νέρων όταν άκουσε
του Δελφικού Μαντείου τον χρησμό.
«Τα εβδομήντα τρία χρόνια να φοβάται.»
Είχε καιρόν ακόμη να χαρεί.
Τριάντα χρονώ είναι. Πολύ αρκετή
είν' η διορία που ο θεός τον δίδει
για να φροντίσει για τους μέλλοντας κινδύνους.

Τώρα στην Ρώμη θα επιστρέψει κουρασμένος λίγο,
αλλά εξάισια κουρασμένος από το ταξίδι αυτό,
που ήταν όλο μέρες απολαύσεως —
στα θέατρα, στους κήπους, στα γυμνάσια ...
Των πόλεων της Αχαΐας εσπέρες ...
Α των γυμνών σωμάτων η ηδονή προ πάντων ...

Αυτά ο Νέρων. Και στην Ισπανία ο Γάλβας
κρυφά το στράτευμά του συναθροίζει και το ασκεί,
ο γέροντας ο εβδομήντα τριώ χρονώ.

Nero's Deadline

Nero wasn't worried at all when he heard
the utterance of the Delphic Oracle:
"Beware the age of seventy-three."
Plenty of time to enjoy himself still.
He's thirty. The deadline
the god has given him is quite enough
to cope with future dangers.

Now, a little tired, he'll return to Rome—
but wonderfully tired from that journey
devoted entirely to pleasure:
theatres, garden-parties, stadiums...
evenings in the cities of Achaia...
and, above all, the sensual delight of naked bodies...

So much for Nero. And in Spain Galba
secretly musters and drills his army—

Galba, the old man in his seventy-third year.

*C.P. Cavafy, Collected Poems. Translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard
(Princeton University Press, 1992).*

21/04/20

61. Necessity Is The Mother Of Cardboard Furniture

We heard about the tiger in the Bronx Zoo catching the coronavirus from his keeper. It occurred to Minnie and me that perhaps we should keep our distance from Dad from now on but we decided not to, since he would get too upset and then who knows? We might not get any dinner.

This blog is mainly an update on the general situation here. So far the lockdown restrictions appear to have been effective. As of 20th April officials reported 2,245 cases and 116 deaths, one of the lowest rates in Europe. Before the Greek Easter holiday weekend the Prime Minister addressed the nation on TV. Kyriakos Mitsotakis began his speech with a big “thank you” to the Greek citizens for the personal sacrifices they had made in order to limit the spread of the virus. He warned that this was the most critical week, because “a thread separates victory from disaster.” The PM was well aware that compliance would be tested during the Easter celebrations, when hundreds of thousands of Greeks traditionally flock to churches and to their ancestral homes to celebrate in large family groups.

So, in addition to repeated statements from the government that in effect declared that this year “Easter is cancelled,” further restrictions were introduced banning gatherings and transit during the holiday period. Extra controls were put in place at toll posts and ports, and only those with a permanent residency in a particular area were allowed to travel there, thus preventing trips to visit relatives or to escape from Athens to second homes in the countryside. The stricter measures went into effect at 9.00pm on Holy Saturday until midnight on Easter Monday. Fines were doubled to 300 euros and offenders’ car plates were temporarily removed. The only exception was for people assisting others, but limited to the driver and one passenger.

Even the Orthodox Church, in the 21st century less powerful than at any time since the days of the Ottoman Empire, has had to toe the line, despite early non-compliance by clerics who thought they were above the law. Early on, Metropolitan Seraphim of Kythera was dobbed in by the local mayor and arrested for not adhering to mass gathering regulations. The coppers let him off with a caution.

The police have been very busy enforcing the rules. In the first eleven days of the curfew they imposed more than €4 million in fines for violations. One joke doing the rounds is that if the constabulary had been as assiduous in fining drivers for traffic offences over the past few years the national debt would have been paid off ten times over by now.

In his brief but succinct message, Mitsotakis also highlighted some specific positive outcomes to emerge from the current catastrophe. In particular, he spoke of a National Health System being “built up in just five weeks, with results accomplished that had not been done in decades.” One example of rapid improvement is the digitisation of prescription requests, which helped to keep 250,000 people off the streets in the first days of the lockdown. His cabinet includes a Minister for Digital Governance, who driven by necessity has apparently been able to streamline and simplify many bureaucratic processes faster than the government had originally planned for or expected. Time will tell whether this long overdue momentum of transformation is sustained after the crisis has passed.

The lockdown has become more severe since it was first introduced a month ago. Much to Dad’s chagrin swimming, along with fishing and water sports, was added to banned activities at the beginning of April. Apparently too many Athenians were congregating on the small beaches of the Athenian Riviera such as Glyfada, Vougliameni and Vari. This ruling was not widely publicised until a woman caught

swimming by the coastguards near Chania in Crete was fined for “inappropriate movement.” Dad’s initial reaction to this was to assume that the lady was penalised for doing poofterstroke (Strine for breaststroke) and that she’d have got away with it if front crawling. But no, all swimming was now deemed an unacceptable form of exercise. This was harsh for Old Wardrobe In His Wetsuit, barred from pounding the lonely waves in an empty sea off a deserted beach. Until a possible legal loophole emerged...

The mother of an autistic boy wrote to Mitsotakis explaining that swimming was a necessary and highly beneficial therapy for her son and asking that he be allowed to continue for the sake of his health and well-being. The Prime Minister immediately accepted that there was a case for medical exemptions. This breakthrough means that, provided you have a consultant’s (not a G.P’s) letter stating the justifiable medical need for swimming, you can natate again – “like we did last summer” (C. Checker, 1961).

The upshot is that Dad is awaiting his “This Man Must Swim” letter from his diabetologist, David Russell-Jones, which his lawyer will translate into Greek, just to be on the safe side of the local cops. Not that there are any police or coastguards in the Chrani area, but he’s been warned by Greek friends to beware of a village ρουφιάνος, *roufianos*. As well as meaning “informer” and “gossip,” this delightful word also means “pimp,” “bastard,” “creep,” and the speaker always smiles or laughs when he uses it. A happy word to describe a diasagreeable person. Anyway, Dad hopes soon to be plunging into the briny again but in the meantime he must wait patiently. DRJ, magnificent professor of endocrinology whom Dad worships as a veritable divinity, is currently running a Covid ward at the Royal Surrey and “getting very good at ventilating people..... not something I had planned on!”

How have people been reacting to the lockdown? They have generally taken it in their stride, with stoicism and good humour. “It’s one of the few times we have understood that authority is doing something for the public good, and not against it,” explains Professor Christos Kechagias, who teaches philosophy and epistemology at the University of Athens.

Another factor, according to Dad’s vet friend, Matina, is that Greeks have been inured to hardship by ten years of painful recession. Their tough, philosophical attitude is rooted in the country’s decade-long financial crisis, from which ironically Greece was just beginning to emerge. “We couldn’t go out in 2008 because we had no money,” she says. “Now we can’t go out in order to protect our health and ... again we don’t have any money.”

Learning to do more with less is a lesson everyone already knows well. There was never a shortage of loo rolls in the shops here, but rather of flour and yeast, both live and dried. The housewives were preparing to make their own bread. This run on bread-making ingredients continued up to Easter, as Greek women began to make their own τσουρέκι, *tsoureki*, a delicious sweet Easter bread, of which the special ingredients are mastic and mahlab.

Also, people’s ready compliance with the lockdown rules, says Stella, the wife of Carlo, another friend in Athens, is partly a result of “Greeks being a nation of hypochondriacs. They worry about their health at the best of times, so this virus really frightens them.” Υγεία, *ygeia*, “health” is certainly a recurring theme in the language of social discourse in Greece.

As in every country, there are plenty of heartening stories. One widely-reported tale tells of chocolate Easter bunnies getting protective face masks and gloves this year. To brighten up spirits, a patisserie in the north Athenian suburb of Lykovrysi humourously took the safety regulations to a new level and dressed up their bunnies with protective medical gear rather than the usual eggs and flowers. Sales

went through the roof.



Chocolate Easter bunnies must wear masks and gloves this year.

Every evening on primetime TV the same two government officials give the COVID-19 briefing to the populace. Always the same duo. They have become unlikely cult heroes, a bit like the UK Ministry of Defence spokesman during the Falklands War, Ian McDonald, who became famous for three months for his restrained and idiosyncratic style of delivery. The first is Professor Sotiris Tsiodras, Greece's infectious diseases expert and the government's chief scientific advisor on the pandemic, whose humble and soft-spoken style of truth telling has endeared him to all viewers. In an opinion poll conducted recently by Alpha TV the unassuming, Sydney-born, Harvard-educated, 54-year old father of seven was voted the most popular person in Greece. He has even had a candle designed in his honour and engraved with his image.



Government spokesmen Tsiodras (left) and Hardalias perform their daily duet.

The role of his “bad cop” constant companion is to carry a big stick and bend the ears of the TV audience about their civic responsibilities, so it was surprising that he was chosen in the same poll as the Second Most Popular Greek. Nikos Hardalias is the Deputy Minister of Civil Protection, the government’s enforcer, and his message is always the same: STAY AT HOME! He is determined to be as harsh as he needs to be, from time to time announcing the introduction of new protective measures. As well as locking down two refugee and migrant camps recently, he quarantined a Roma settlement near Larissa after people there were found to have the virus. The Roma camps are outside the mainstream of society and difficult to control, so he banned all movement in or out of this settlement in Central Greece. In a show of support the local leader of the gypsies put out an unexpected statement, which rather hilariously acknowledged the stereotypical view of them held by most Greeks. In a call to adhere to lockdown laws and follow the recommendations of the state, the President of the Thessalian Federation of Roma People urged his community “not to leave home to go out begging and stealing!” I suppose there must generally be less opportunity nowadays for house burglary, which is yet another global business suffering from everyone staying at home.

Hardalias reacted magnanimously to the upbeat song he inspired that went viral on social media over Easter. He sent a Facebook message of thanks and approval to the musicians who lightheartedly adapted the words of a traditional folk tune to the coronavirus situation. It begins: “I asked Hardalias where I will make Easter and he told me to *stay home*, the flu is coming out and you will go out again on Tuesday.” It is expected to become the hit of the season and there is a video link at the end of the chapter to this cheering and enjoyable piece of fun.

At the media briefing on Easter Monday, Nikos Hardalias said that a discussion has already begun on the gradual lifting of restrictive measures, but he did not provide any details or a timeline. He also thanked citizens for their for “the very high level of collective responsibility” they showed over the holiday period. He did not mention the widely-watched video taken by a passerby which captured a man dancing a slow zeibekiko in an empty Athenian street to the applause of residents cheering from their apartment balconies. Greece is still Greece despite all...

So we are making plans for the day when quarantine ends. According to a poll by Star TV which asked, “What is the first thing that you want to do after the lockdown?” the top answer was “Visit a barber shop or a hair salon” (35%). This may have prompted the rumour that hairdressers might be allowed to open in May. We shall see. In the meantime, Dad continues to dream of consuming Billy’s mouth-watering souvlakia, “the best in Messinia!”

On a sad note, Dad has heard about the death from the virus of the first person he knew personally. Panayiotis was a local Chraniot whom Dad used to meet and chat with, usually in Billy’s. He had been an air traffic controller in the Greek Air Force and then as a civilian at Kalamata Airport. He spoke fluent English, bizarrely with a strong Glaswegian accent. He had been brought up in Scotland and had family connections there, splitting his time between Greece and the Auld Country. It was in Glasgow that he caught the virus. In his late 70s with a heart condition, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. If only he had stayed in Chrani... RIP, Panayioti.

Along with his feline friends Dad has been in the new house, wifeless and furnitureless, for three weeks now. He has made good use of empty cardboard boxes, large and small, as substitutes for sideboards, bedside cabinets and tables. He is also hobless in the kitchen, since one of the builders dropped it and bent the frame. He seems to have learnt to cook all his meals in either the oven or the microwave whilst awaiting the return from Athens of his repaired hob. Plenty of cleaning inside (“So much dust!”) and clearing up outside is keeping him busy, but he is missing Mum and vice versa. In “normal”

circumstances she was due to arrive on today's EasyJet flight. Tomorrow we would have been greeting our first house guests from the UK, Graeme and Sheila Fairley.

We cats have adapted to our new surroundings, me straightaway and Minnie eventually, after an initial period of trendy quarantine. She still buggers off daily back to Bob and Fotine's rental which is only 100 metres away. However, she knows her way home at dinner time. The satellite wifi was installed on the second day, so global communication resumed without a hitch. There is still much to do in order to finish the house, primarily the exterior painting, but we are all pleased to be in residence at last. It is hard to believe that the land was bought three years ago and the first rocks bulldozed on 12th June 2018. Twenty-two months later, here we are.

In my last missive I had promised you a video of Villa Doulapas. At the suggestion of our friend, Stewart Bussell, it could have been called "From Bauhaus to Our House," which was the title of Tom Wolfe's 1981 fierce critique of modern architecture. Unfortunately the Old Boy has been unable to manage a large electronic file transfer, so here are some photographs instead.



View at dawn from the main veranda



Northern aspect Living room with wood-burning stove



Kitchen (& Dad's mess!) Office with contemporary furnishing



Eastern view from first floor veranda Master bedroom with... no bed
The lyrics of the traditional folk song "To My Child The Joy" have been adapted

to suit modern times:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qyz4OAXQ044>

Ρώτησα τον Χαρδαλιά, "I asked Hardalias," is sung by Corfu Angelidou

Meanwhile, back in 1985 in Kensington...

21/05/20

62. "Have we dodged a bullet, Prime Minister?"

The easing of the lockdown started cautiously on 4th May but has been gathering pace since. The government must be satisfied with the virus statistics, since they have speeded up their original schedule. Travel restrictions between prefectures have been lifted. Soon schools, churches, bars and restaurants will join the non-essential shops, hairdressers and beach bars which are already permitted to open, albeit with strict social distancing constraints. On Chrani beach the Caribbean and Maistrali were either caught on the hop when their permitted opening was brought forward a week or they just couldn't be bothered to start up for just a handful of customers.

Appropriate distancing must be maintained on the beach (and in the sea?). Numbers of umbrellas and beach beds will be strictly controlled. One enterprising beach club owner in Santorini has developed yet another way for glass panelmakers to get rich quick. His beach lounge chairs are surrounded by plexiglass screens! Proprietor Charlie Chahine says he does not like it, but if that is the way it has to be for tourists to return, then that is what he will do. Dad says It may catch on in the country's most popular and affluent resort island, but thankfully never in Chrani..



The latest fashion on Santorini's black beaches? You've got to be kidding.

Last week Kyriakos Mitsotakis went on a widely-publicised walkabout in central Athens to meet and greet shopkeepers and shoppers in Ermou. The public were so pleased to see him that he had to remind the old ladies to keep their distance and not to hug him. One happy retailer asked him, "Have we dodged a bullet, Prime Minister?" to which he replied, "We've dodged the first one.."

Although the total number of cases and deaths attributable to COVID-19 remains remarkably low, the daily briefing duo of unlikely TV stars, Sotiris Tsiodras and Nikos Hardalias, keep stressing that there will be another clampdown immediately if the epidemiological data warrants it.

Greece has been experiencing a heatwave for the past week, with temperatures reaching the high 30° Cs, a very rare occurrence in mid-May. With this in mind, last Friday Tsiodras was quick to kill off

one piece of national wishful thinking. Ahead of what was expected to be one of the warmest May weekends of recent years, Tsiodras pointed out that “direct sun exposure and temperatures above 25 degrees Celsius have no preventative effect against the novel coronavirus.” Not surprising, given the strength of the MERS outbreak in the heat of Saudi Arabia in 2012, but a widely held misconception here.

Meanwhile, we have a new companion in the grounds of Villa Doulapas. Minnie got the fright of her life the other day when she saw the biggest tortoise Dad has ever seen in the wild ambling across our veranda. My nervous sister stood up on her hind legs and balanced like a meercat for at least thirty seconds, staring intently with her single eye at what she thought was a rock on legs. He’s been around the house a few times now and Dad has named him Themistocles. I think he lives in the bush under the big carob tree, but a few days ago he had to be rescued after an adventurous descent to the bottom of the basement external staircase, where he was rattling around trying to enter a drainhole that was too small for him. He looked at Dad as much as to say, “When I went to sleep last autumn, none of this building work was in the way.. What’s been going on?”



Themistocles enjoys the view from the front veranda

Why Themistocles? By chance, on the day Dad first spotted the tortoise, Vassilis arrived unannounced to apply the final coat to the pressed concrete of the veranda. Vassilis is a comic character, who insists on calling himself an “artist, not a craftsman.” He was accompanied by his son, who was introduced as Themistocles, or Themis for short. And so, by happy association... Of course, there’s a 50/50 chance that the land turtle is female, so the short name works quite well in that eventuality.

The ancient Athenian after whom the reptile is named was a populist chancer cast in the same mould as Boris Johnson’s hero, Pericles. He was the powerful politician and general who developed Athens’ successful naval policy in the 480s BC. It was largely because of this that Xerxes’ invasion of Greece failed when the Persians were defeated at the sea battle of Salamis in 480BC.

Now, where were we, before the coronavirus distraction...?

After two years at the helm Selwyn decided to return to the calmer waters of Merton College and was due to leave Lansdowne at the end of July 1985. He had had to deal with too many crazy Templeton-inspired situations, all of which he handled with cheerful aplomb, but in the end enough was enough. Here are just two of the scenarios he dealt with as Principal, told in his own words.

“Some nerve-racking events occurred from time to time under the direction of the twins. Such an example was the incredibly swift and complete conversion of the whole of No. 7 Palace Gate from classrooms in the morning into the “bedrooms” of a student hostel, displaying some half-naked towel-wrapped students (employed for a tenner), in the afternoon. Although both Nos. 7 and 9 PG were customarily being used for teaching purposes, it turned out that only No. 9 had the appropriate Educational User permit from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Which was news to me.. Meanwhile, the twins were unfazed at having to handle an imminent crisis.

Within the space of half an hour at lunchtime, “Silver Ghost” vans were to be observed devouring desks and chairs extracted from No. 7, followed soon after by other vans disgorging beds and wardrobes to be hauled inside and distributed throughout the building by an army of willing workers (possibly also for a tenner). All this was done to satisfy the council authorities, who had announced at 24-hours’ notice that they were to do a routine ‘spot-check’ in order to ensure that the building was being used for its officially designated, ie residential, purpose.

The student population was to be given an ‘afternoon off’. “What shall I say is the reason, Paul?” He thought for a moment, smiled and gleefully replied, “Tell them it is in honour of Templeton Memorial Day!” Without much choice I duly agreed. A deputation of part-time teachers came to ask if they would get paid for the afternoon off, to which Paul said, “But of course.” The inspectors came and went. No. 7 was back to being half the college again by the following morning.”

Another untoward incident took place, predictably, during the Silly Season. Selwyn and his team were embroiled in an intense period of student recruitment, but they were obliged to cede the use of the classrooms to another Templeton enterprise, International College, which was the EFL Summer School operation. Its clientele were unruly and high-spirited teenage boys and girls from Italy. Selwyn takes up the story:

“International College were using the basement rooms of No. 9 PG as teaching rooms and most of the upper floors of No. 7 PG as student accommodation for the Italians. During a particularly busy period of interviewing it was arranged that I would interview prospective students and their parents in the Principal's office in No. 9 and afterwards Huw Thomas would escort them on a tour, firstly of No. 9 to show the classrooms and then into No. 7 to show the library and laboratories. If the 'punters' were interested in seeing the student accommodation in the Bryanston Square hostel but didn't have time to visit the place, Huw's tour would also include the showing of a room in No. 7. This had been specially set up as a bedroom to show the style of student accommodation available at the hostel.

One afternoon a rather nervous girl and her particularly protective parents turned up for interview from the depths of rural Herefordshire and after a fruitful discussion about how we, at Lansdowne, would be able to provide excellent tuition that almost guaranteed total success in her examinations to satisfy her post A-level academic aspirations, the conversation turned to accommodation. Cue Huw - and they were soon traipsing wearily around the building.

”And now we come to a room that shows you the excellent facilities we offer in our student accommodation,” says Huw confidently opening the “bedroom” door. The reticent smiles of parents and daughter turn to shock and horror as they witness a couple of naked teenagers engaged in a vigorous, oscillating

horizontal tango, which is taking place on a sympathetically springy single bed to the accompaniment of distinctively Italian squeals and sighs of ecstasy.

Huw swiftly ushers the punters out of the room. With profuse apologies he explains that the lovers are students from Italy on a six-week English language course that involves “tuition in the mornings, but afternoons are reserved for students to pursue their own particular extra-curricular activities..”

In spite or possibly because of that unexpected introduction the girl signed up and did well. I'm not sure if she stayed at Bryanston Square or with her aged aunt in Hounslow. As for the Italians, that year they were truly an ill-disciplined lot. One evening they threw plates of spaghetti through the open windows of their upper floor bedrooms, which landed on the roofs of several limousines lined up outside waiting to disgorge wealthy high rollers into Maxim's Casino next door. There was hell to play.”

In July the Wardrobes spent three weeks in the Peloponnese. They drove in their hired car from Athens down to Kalamata, a full day's journey in those times before the A7 Moreas motorway was constructed. The capital of Messinia struck them as seedy and disappointingly unimpressive, the seaside promenade run-down and lacking in charm. They stayed for a single night in a shabby hotel on the waterfront and headed off into the Mani. The following September a 6.2 magnitude earthquake caused heavy damage in Kalamata and killed more than 20 people. Most of the old buildings became uninhabitable and many had to be demolished. It would have been unimaginable for James in 1985 to foresee that 30 years later this smartly reconstructed town would become the hub of his new life after Pauline's death.



A five-story building containing 17 apartments on the Kalamata waterfront collapsed after the earthquake of 13th September 1986

They reached the attractive port of Gythio and found it much more to their liking, so they stayed put for a fortnight. Their hotel on the front was next door to an ice cream parlour, a boon in the record-breaking high temperatures of that summer. The newspapers were full of alarming stories about heat-related deaths. They visited the Byzantine fortified town of Mystra, where Pauline declined, not for the first or last time, to tramp to the summit of an ancient hilltop site (cf Mycenae, 1972; Acrocorinth, 1997). James on the other hand was happy as a pig in shit – he was in Greece, wasn't he?

Meanwhile, back in Kensington, the Templeton brothers continued to move onwards and upwards. They had now acquired Nos. 3 and 5 Palace Gate, into which Lansdowne College, the Higher Education outfit, would now move from Harrington Gardens. As the property mastermind of the family, Paul was keen to highlight to James the added “marriage value” of having four adjacent terraced houses in Palace Gate.

Selwyn’s planned departure had precipitated James’s early move back to the flagship from Duff Miller. What Sigmund Freud would have made of this regression is unknowable, but then, as Ken Dodd once said, the trouble with Freud was that he never had to play the old Glasgow Empire on a Saturday night. Anyway, the boys sweetened the pill. James retained a financial interest and a watching brief at DM. He used to joke in later years with Hugh that since it was with the proceeds from Duffs’ that he was able to buy New Shepherds Farm he should have renamed it Duff Miller House. He was also involved in appointing his successor, Michael Rymer, who had been Deputy Head at St Albans School.

Unusually everything about the transition seemed under control, but just before Selwyn was about to depart, he found that Lansdowne had something in common with Hotel California. *You can check out any time you like, Mr Jones, but you can never leave.* The LT Head of Maths had resigned at short notice and so between them James and Pete persuaded the Welsh Wizard to prolong his stay in the asylum for five more years as one of James’s HODs.

Once the autumn term had settled down, James began a much-needed reorganisation of the LT management structure. He enlisted the help of the Brigadier, who according to his sons knew everything there was to know about organisational change. Pete quipped, “I have to warn you that unlike me Dougie doesn’t use the back of an envelope..” Their first meeting went like this:

Brigadier: “Right, the first thing to do is to create an *organogram*..”

James (who had never come across this Americanism but guessed what it was): “Ah, yes, that’s a musical instrument, isn’t it?”

Brigadier (harrumphing loudly): This is no joking matter. It’s your livelihood that’s at stake here..”

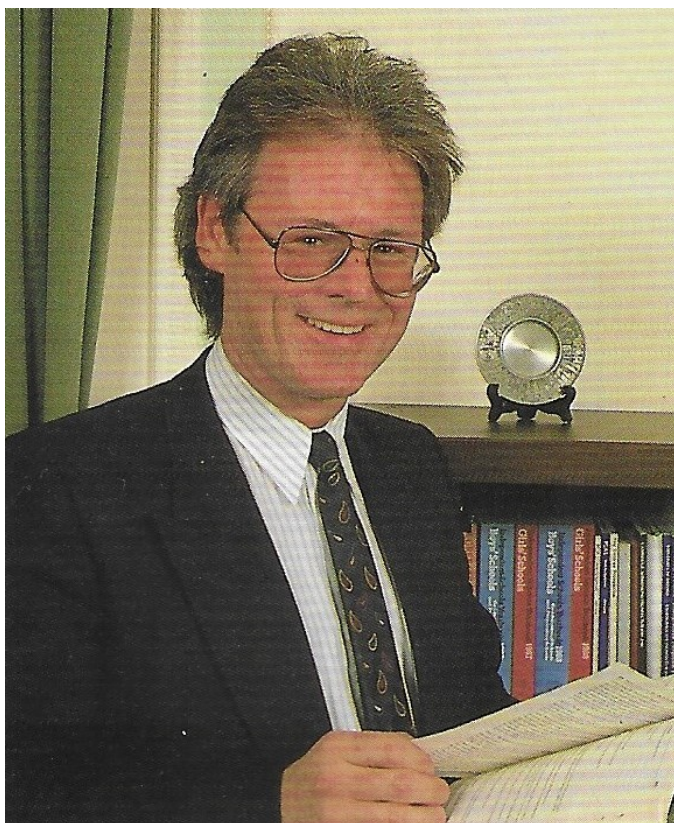
He stubbed out his cigarette with some venom. Suitably chastened, James watched him pull about 50 small pieces of rectangular white card out of his briefcase and place them on the vast boardroom table. The younger man remembered that Dougie Templeton had once told him, “I am *not*, and never will be, a computer man.”

Brigadier: “Our first task is to write down on separate cards all the management functions needed to run the college. Forget who does what now. No preconceptions. We shall then arrange the cards into logical groupings which will constitute an appropriate number of job descriptions. The job titles come last and are largely irrelevant, usually based on institutional tradition. Then we shall organise the groups of cards into a family tree of “line” management responsibility, but not forgetting to indicate input of “staff” functions. By this logical method we shall produce a theoretical best-case *organogram*.” And that was exactly what they did.

The Brigadier was pleased to hear that James fully understood the military concept of “line and staff officers” and he even seemed impressed by his knowledge of Colonel Urwick’s “optimal span of control” (thank you, Thomas). He gruffly concluded the first meeting: “you and I will get on like a house on fire, provided there are no more musical instrument jokes..”

It took them about five hours over three meetings to design the ideal structure. Pete laughed when he heard this and said, “I could have told you what the new model should be in five minutes..”

The results of the management review showed that as Lansdowne evolved from a tutorial establishment into an "independent sixth form college," James needed a Number Two (who could be designated either Vice-Principal or Director of Studies) and a team of departmental heads who were primarily paradigms of excellence as teachers, star performers who would be exemplars to those they led, not merely middle managers. So he set about creating the most cohesive and collaborative group he ever worked with throughout his whole career.



Taken from the prospectus of the newly branded "Lansdowne Independent Sixth Form College," this is the nearest the Principal ever came to having a 1980s mullet.

He already had Selwyn (*Mathematics*) and Lesley Falconer (*Science*) in place. Within a year a Dylanologist of compelling charm and easy disposition, Los Haward, would arrive as Head of *Humanities*. With something of the features and hairstyle of Barry Manilow, but rather better looking, Los was an outstanding teacher of English Literature. James remembers sitting in on one of Los's lessons as part of his annual appraisal. The subject was "The Tempest," about which his thoughtful and thought-through exegesis was perfectly packaged for A-level students. James left the classroom that day with a crystal-clear understanding of the resolved and unresolved elements in Shakespeare's final play, and much more besides about the nature of the Bard's Comedy and Tragedy. Stunning and unforgettably first-rate.

James completed the revamp of his HODs team by promoting Roger Keeley to Head of *Social Sciences*. His pedigree was impeccable: Manchester Grammar School and St Edmund Hall, Oxford. Roger was the sanest and most restrained of the hard-drinking bachelor boys, partly because of his natural shyness. Rather like Peter Mills, his natural response to a difficult situation was simply to keep quiet, as the

following anecdote illustrates.

Duff Miller and Lansdowne were located within a ten-minute walk of each other in South Kensington. Sometimes classes in minority A-level subjects, such as less common Foreign Languages, Accounts, Geology, even Geography, would be amalgamated and one combined group would be taught at one or other college, depending on where the subject teacher was based. Another salient point to note is that immediately after the A-level results came out, the most organised resit pupils often visited four or five different tutorial institutions in a single day before making their choice of college.

During the peak period of the Silly Season Lansdowne was now using up to ten senior staff as interviewers, whilst Duff Miller could get by with three. Early one day James received an urgent call from Michael Rymer. One of his key interviewers was off sick and Michael had no one in reserve to handle the absentee's packed schedule. Would it be possible to "borrow" an experienced LT recruiter, from lunchtime at least? James agreed, shuffled his pack and asked Roger Keeley to spend the afternoon at Queens Gate after he had completed his morning appointments at LT. To which the ever-amenable Roger agreed.

At 2.00pm an unaccompanied prospective student, an 18-year-old lad called Dan Visser who was looking to resit his Geography A-level (Roger's subject), entered the room. Roger realised immediately that he had interviewed the same boy at 11.00 that morning at Lansdowne. Absurdly, neither party acknowledged that they had met earlier in the day, the interviewer out of embarrassment, the interviewee out of politeness. So Roger conducted the whole interview as if they had never met. Dan played his part to perfection, maintaining the charade. Finally, Roger asked the teenager if he had any questions. Dan replied, "Yes, just one question. I have an interview at 4.00pm at Davies's College. *Will you be doing that one as well?*"

The ice was finally broken, Dan signed up with Roger, never got to Davies's and became one of the Geographer's favourite pupils in a combined DM/LT retake class. Whether he joined Duffs or Lansdowne is lost in history, but if he had any sense he would have gone to DM, where the identical product was cheaper. Tide and Daz, etc.

Roger's nine years at Lansdowne coincided exactly with James's. He went on to a highly successful career as a schoolmaster at Bradfield College, where he achieved the rare distinction of two long Housemasterships. Every three years he would host James's visit to the Greek Play, until the open-air theatre was shut down for health and safety reasons.

With his revamped management team now only short of a Number Two, James was able to turn his attention to the infantry, the talented graduates who are the life blood of every successful sixth-form college. You will meet this Rogues' Gallery in the next chapter.

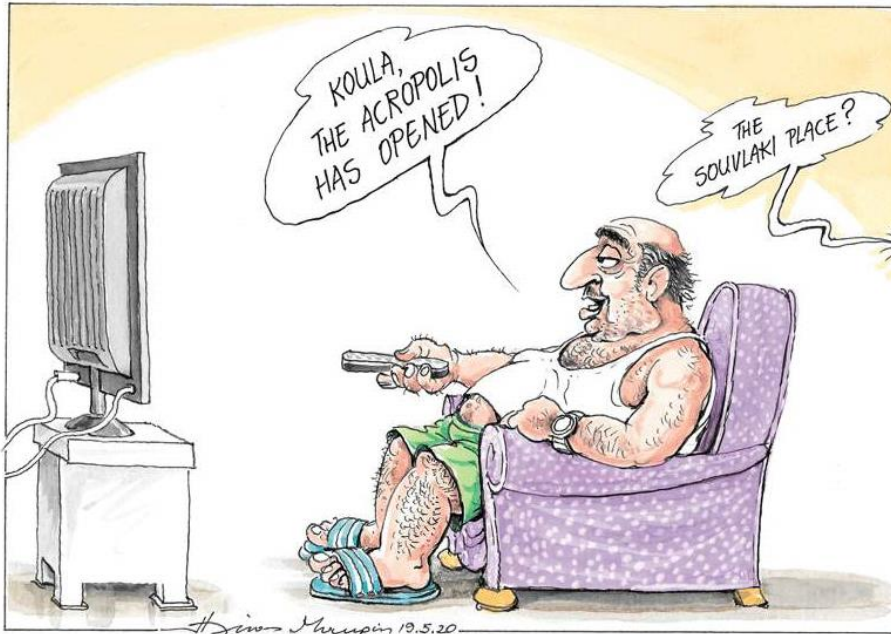
James's favourite speech from his favourite Shakespeare play:

*Caliban: Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked,
I cried to dream again.*

Act III, Scene ii, 130-138, "The Tempest."

18/06/20

63. And Seve said, "Good shot."



Dad, who loves his souvlaki, had a similar reaction to Koula when he heard the good news.

The seventh phase of the easing of the lockdown is well under way, with bars, clubs and restaurants now allowed to operate indoors as well as outside. All non-essential shops are open. Localised lockdown will be swiftly imposed if cases increase from the current minimal level. In a bid to salvage the 2020 tourist season, travellers from 29 countries are being welcomed back on direct flights from 15th June. They will be subject only to random tests. This "Group A" of nations is deemed to constitute a low epidemiological risk. The UK, still regarded by the Greek government as toxic, is in the bottom "Group D," along with – guess who? – Turkey. This is bad news for Mum and Dad, since she is unable to come out and reunite after three months apart so far. Dad has cancelled a long-planned trip back to Blighty in August, since he prefers to stay in Messinia, one of the safest areas of Greece, indeed in Europe.

There are two clouds on the local horizon, which could change the situation quickly and dramatically for the worse. The first is the growing tendency of people to ignore the "social distancing" rules. Dad observed at the beach bars over the three-day holiday weekend of Pentecost that there was a new laxity about compliance. On TV government spokesmen have been reminding the public about the dangers of not adhering to "apostasy". By this they are not encouraging the general public to abandon the tenets of their Orthodox religion. The word has the general meaning of "distance," so απόσταση ασφαλείας, *apostasi asphaleias*, "distance of safety," is the Greek term for the two-metre mandate. However, Dad was amused to note that the Greek tradition of "family distancing" was still very much in evidence. Even the younger men continue to sit together and drink coffee well away from their childcaring wives and noisy offspring.

Secondly, there is a widespread concern about foreign tourists importing the virus. The general view

here is that they will inevitably arrive infected with coronavirus. Manolis Dermitzakis, a professor of Genetics at the Medical School of the University of Geneva, says it is a given that a number of tourists will enter the country with the disease and not show any symptoms. According to his very rough estimate 6,000 to 10,000 incoming tourists will be asymptomatic. The economy needs a boost from tourism but even Mitsotakis said last Sunday that the government is expecting and prepared for the second wave. We wait in hope and fear of the barbarian hordes. The Chraniot bar-owners and restaurateurs can do the maths. They would prefer their businesses to be saved by Greek visitors, but the reality is they need Johnny, Johann, Juan, Jan, Jens, Jön and Giovanni Foreigner if they are to make it through to next summer.

The annual “strategy planning” trips to Sotogrande had revived James’s enthusiasm for golf. Having rejoined Liphook GC he now signed up regularly for the Saturday medal and stableford competitions. This proved doubly beneficial, not only enabling him to lower his handicap but also to meet other members, some of whom have become close friends.

One of these was the charming and affable TV producer, Michael Blakstad, whip-smart yet humble in his considerable achievements. They introduced themselves on the first tee and to their mutual surprise and delight by the time they pulled out their putters they had already discovered much in common: the same school and the same Oxford Classics degree. Michael, seven years’ senior, had left Ampleforth before James arrived, but he was always gleeful in later years when other golfers asked them if they had been contemporaries there. James was less amused.

Michael had already enjoyed a successful career with BBC TV, Yorkshire Television and Television South. He was now running his own independent production company. For many years he had been editor of *Tomorrow’s World* in its heyday as the most popular weekly science programme, where he gained brief notoriety as the man who sacked Raymond Baxter. He described Baxter as “the last of the dinosaurs,” while the long-established presenter reputedly retorted that he could not work with someone who arrived at the BBC each day on a bicycle. He also produced *Whicker’s World*, including the episode in Haiti where Alan Whicker interviewed the dictator “Papa Doc” Duvalier. Although Michael respected Whicker’s professional skills he did not remember him with fondness.

Another golfer whose friendship with James began on the same tee is Simon Sheppard. At the time Simon was a serving RN officer, soon to become First Officer on HMY Britannia, whose home berth was Portsmouth. This led to some memorable dinners in the officers’ mess (“Don’t stand up to toast Her Majesty”) when Simon was on duty and The Queen was elsewhere. The boatswain’s call which piped them aboard made the Wardrobes feel very important indeed.

The Royal Yacht was full of memorabilia, a curious mixture of naval history and extravagant gifts from other heads of state, for which HM had no room, or possibly little desire, to display in one of her non-floating palaces. Highlights of the guided tour included the State Dining Room, with its table seating over twenty guests. Its centrepiece was the most expensive table adornment kitsch Pauline and James had ever set eyes on: a foot-high palm tree made of diamonds and emeralds, with rubies for the coconuts, presented to Her Majesty by some oil-rich potentate.

They were in for a bigger surprise when Simon showed them round the Royal Apartments, including The Queen’s en-suite bedroom. The loo roll in the “throne room” was *pink*. “That is so truly naff,” exclaimed Pauline, who took ages to recover from seeing such a bourgeois manifestation in the sanctum of the monarch.

After leaving the Navy Simon had a second career as a golf club secretary. If you play golf with him, you never need to carry The R & A Rules Of Golf booklet in your bag. He knows them all and he would be the last man on earth to break any of them. As for crimes such as the use of the “leather wedge” (kicking your ball into a better lie), such transgressions are beyond his contemplation and contempt. He is not only honourable, reliable and disciplined but also a good-humoured optimist. An ideal comrade-in-arms In the face of difficulties and the perfect foil for his long-term, doom-laden golfing partner.

One year Pete and Paul were unable to make the annual December trip to Sotogrande. Perhaps they were in the process of buying an American university, about which more later. Hugh and James went anyway and played golf on most days. One afternoon for a change of scene they played a different course, La Duquesa Golf, near the Wardrobes’ Pueblo Mexicano apartment. Out in the open country on the back nine they were caught in the epicentre of a monumental electric storm. Totally exposed and with no shelter nearby, all they could do was abandon their metal clubs and crouch in the deepest bunker available. Eventually the lightning moved on and the storm passed, but the memory of a terrifying half-hour lingered on.

Back at Sotogrande the next morning they were unaware of, or probably ignored, the instruction that the long 6th hole was temporarily out of play. They hit their drives, Hugh’s down the middle, James’s with too much draw to the left edge of the wide fairway. He watched with chagrin as his ball rolled to a halt five metres from the feet of The Greatest European Golfer Ever. Severiano Ballesteros had been interrupted in the process of making a coaching video for Japanese TV, the reason the hole was closed. James approached in trepidation and fear of a tongue-lashing from the Great Man. He went to pick up his ball and clear off smartish, but Seve was having none of it. He smiled and said, “Eez OK. Play your shot.”

James was now on the verge of an irrational panic but felt he had no alternative but to obey the godsent request. The intensity of pressure that the knee-shaking, hand-trembling amateur felt at having to hit that ball cleanly was ridiculous and on the face of it illogical. It was a just a 3-wood down the fairway, he was a competent golfer who had played the same shot hundreds if not thousands of times before. But this time, to execute it in front of his idol, the real-life, here-in-the-flesh Spanish maestro... Somehow he made a decent contact and the ball sped though the air in the general direction of the green. And Seve, as he turned back to face his Japanese cameraman, uttered the immortal and never to be forgotten two words, “Good shot...” Ever walked on air? James did.

This wasn’t their only encounter with Seve that day. James and Hugh happened to be playing with an unknown Englishman who had asked to join them on the 1st. As they reached the green on the difficult dog-leg par-4 10th, they became aware that Seve, having finished his filming and accompanied by a caddie, was now playing the course behind them on his own. He had hit a towering drive over the trees into the perfect spot for his approach iron into the green. With due sense of etiquette Hugh called him through. Seve played out the hole and thanked them. At this point the third member of their group, who regarded himself as a comedian, pointed out to Seve that he was fortunate that they had let him through since “one-balls have no standing on the course” (true then but not these days). Hugh and James were mortified but the Spaniard was still in a relaxed mood and joked back: “Thank you. If I’m still in the bar when you come in, I’ll buy you a drink.” Famously careful with his money, he chuckled to himself knowing that he would be long gone before these chumps got to the 18th. Sure enough, when they completed their round he was nowhere to be seen.

After Liphook GC James has played Sotogrande more than any other course and to this day rates it as

his second favourite of all time.

The summer of 1987 saw the Wardrobes return to Limassol for the first time in 19 years. The town, indeed the whole island, was transformed since 1974 but all their teenage haunts were still identifiable. They rediscovered the much-enlarged Alasia Hotel, took photos of James's apartment in Aristotelis Valaoritis Street and spent time at RAF Episkopi, remarkably light on security in the 1980s. They visited the church of their youthful wedding, the erstwhile family quarters in Hampshire Terrace and their beloved Tunnel Beach. Just off Archbishop Makarios III Avenue they found the nook of ancient nookiness beneath the stairs (see Blog 30). No dustbins now, since the area was filled with boxes and packing cases, nevermore available for energetic coupling.

Buoyed by many happy memories they retreated each day to the Elias Beach Hotel, one of dozens which now occupied the shoreline for a 15-kilometre stretch eastwards along the Nicosia road. They had mixed feelings about Limassol's inevitable change from sleepy Levantine port to major Western tourist resort. Thankfully, whenever in the future they thought about Cyprus the mythic images of the 1960s came in their mind's eye, not the urbanised realities of the 1980s.

In their fortieth year they were in their prime. Pauline loved her job at Highfield, where to parents and outsiders she had become known as "the fashionably dressed lady in the Porsche." James was the most senior and trusted non-Templeton executive in the Lansdowne operation and in spite of his long daily commute by train he still enjoyed the challenges and the rewards. If he needed to remain overnight in London, he could stay at the Reform Club, where he had been introduced to membership by the Principal of another Kensington college, Milestone Tutors. Richard Smart was a larger-than-life toff with the distinguished curls of Augustus Caesar and a plummier voice than Brian Sewell. He was a mainstay of the Council for Independent Further Education (CIFE), the professional association of private sixth-form colleges, of which James would soon become Vice-Chairman. The co-founder of this fine educational establishment, which was located above Kentucky Fried Chicken on the corner of Gloucester and Cromwell Roads, was called Andrew Thick. You couldn't make this stuff up.

The steamship Lansdowne struck a smallish iceberg on 17th August 1987, James's 40th birthday. At the beginning of the Silly Season a critical article appeared in *The Observer*. It was written by a former Biology teacher called Diana Barker, who had left in July after her insistent demands for a pay rise had been refused by James. He had been glad to see the back of her. Unfortunately before she departed in seething disgruntlement she had attended James's training session for teachers who might be involved in the forthcoming student recruiting period. Admissions interviews were no longer conducted solely by senior managers but devolved where appropriate to capable subject teachers. In the article Barker stated that the Principal had encouraged interviewers to sign up students for "Arabian Motorcycle Maintenance GCSE, if that's what they want.." She omitted to mention that James had added, "If such a course were to exist, since in the capital city we can almost always find a tutor for even the rarest of minority subjects." GCSEs were about to replace O-levels and the exam boards were promising a wider range of subjects, but the joke had backfired thanks to the vengeful biologist.

James was worried about the negative impact such a knocking piece might have on enquiry levels at a crucial time. Paul was unfazed. He wrote a rejoinder which was published the following week. "It's a great marketing opportunity," he reassured James. "Not that any of our potential clientele read the *Observer* anyway." They both knew from the Brigadier's detailed analysis of enquiries by source that the majority of media advertising referrals came from *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and their sister Sunday editions. Amazingly it turned out to be a bumper year for enquiries and hence enrolments. A cheering instance of "no such thing as bad publicity," but James was more careful with his throw-away

remarks in future staff training events.

But this was not how the article was received by the newly-appointed Director Of Studies, John Foulkes-Jones, who was due to start the following day. James's Number Two told James later that he wondered what kind of dodgy set-up he had enlisted for. His friends in Bath, where he had been working for the International Baccalaureate Organisation, warned him against joining an evident bunch of cowboys but John was ambitious and brave enough to give it a go. He overcame his shock and his doubts about what he was letting himself in for and in the end it proved to be a good career move for him. He went on to become Vice-Principal, then Head of a variety of international schools in Argentina, Germany, Sweden and finally Spain, where he teamed up again with Paul Templeton in the late 1990s. Paul had recently "retired" to Sotogrande, where he was unable to stop himself from taking over the unremarkable local International School, rehousing it in a superlative new building and transforming it into a hugely successful and thriving institution.



The Wardrobes and John Foulkes-Jones enjoy the CIFE Annual Conference Dinner held in Canterbury, March 1988.

John was a multilingual and cultured Physicist with a strong sense of dedication to his vocation as an educator. He also possessed a sharp sense of humour, a sine qua non for survival at Lansdowne. Although he quickly adapted to its distinctive ethos he frequently tore his hair out at the high jinks of the more wayward members of the Staffroom. He remains a good friend.

There were many sensible and reliable members of staff: Orlando Gough (*Further Mathematics*) who taught in an Andy Pandy jumpsuit and whose whiteboard writings were works of art, as were his pay claims; Mark Troughton (*French*), the only non-acting son of the second Doctor Who; Paul Caira (*Mathematics*), who moved on to proper schoolmastering, possibly at Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School; Elias Gourtsoyiannis, (*Mathematics*), whose Cretan family brewed the most lethal raki James has ever tasted; Paul Murphy (*Politics*), the epitome of cool, whose matinee idol looks endeared him to his female pupils, including Jade Jagger; and Florrie Yiannoullou (*Modern Greek*), a delightful Cypriot who made a

living by teaching part-time in at least four different sixth-form colleges in the area.

Such stalwarts, however, do not generate the best stories, so let us now consider some of the incorrigible “characters” of the rogues’ gallery. They all happen to be in the photo below of the “Lansdowne Cricket Club.” It was taken either at Wormwood Scrubs Park or Wandsworth Heath - conveniently close to a prison anyway – either in the summer of 1987 or 1988.

These hard-drinking bachelor boys spent most evenings playing snooker in the upstairs room of the Harrington Arms where much of their mischief was conceived, not least by Paul Tagg, their natural leader. They all had nicknames, useful when at least five of them were called Paul.



The Lansdowne staff cricket team:

(from left, standing) Paul Whiteside, Paul Murphy, Jenny Lyder, Roger Keeley, Mark Silcox,

David Moynihan, Paul Thomas, Paul Tagg; (from left, squatting) Paul Langley, Nigel Wells, John Scullion.

Paul “Whipper” Whiteside (*Sociology*) led a hidden life in Leytonstone, where the wags imagined he pursued an unorthodox sex life owing to his tendency to leer at all females who crossed his path. He was flagged by management as one who would attempt to get inappropriate end-of-term reports past the censor. Occasionally he succeeded but generally JFJ was wise to him.

Nigel “Bomber” Wells (*Economics*) had been taught at Keele by Martin Dent (see Blog 41) and like the rest of the group he was an extremely bright young man. He had an additional rare talent. In the 1980s most pubs and bars sought to increase their profits via the then craze, quiz machines. Until Bomber darkened their doors. His general knowledge was so comprehensive that he regularly emptied these machines, which first appeared on the scene in the UK in 1985, of all their available cash. He was banned from many pubs throughout London because of his highly lucrative raids. He had a special dispensation from the landlord of the Harrington Arms as long as he never played the machines there.

One day after work James casually enquired of Bomber if he had any special plans for the evening.

He replied that he was off to either Heathrow or Gatwick, but he hadn't decided which yet. "If you're meeting an arrival, surely you know which airport?" queried James. "It doesn't matter," giggled Nigel. "All the airport terminals have banks of quiz machines. I can work my way through them and make a large amount of dosh quickly in a single evening." He became so successful that an article was written about him in one of the Sunday broadsheets.

Before the extent of his gaming prowess became common knowledge, James and Roger "Keels" Keeley unwisely took on Bomber and Tagg in a late-night series of games of Trivial Pursuit, another '80s fad. The losers would buy the victors a slap-up meal at The Ark, a favourite restaurant of James's in Kensington Court. Keels and The Boss soon realised that they were in trouble, since once Bomber had the die he had won the game. If a player answers a question correctly, his turn continues... They never got a look in. Tagg cheekily offered a double-or-quits rematch but the vanquished had learnt their lesson. The last James knew, Bomber had become a successful property developer.

John "Scullion" Scullion (*Economics*) was an engaging breath of fresh air, a Glaswegian and rabid supporter of Celtic FC. His main extra-curricular interests were football, beer and women, not necessarily in that order. He shocked James once when they were having a conversation about surnames. "There was a boy in my class at primary school called James Wardrobe," he said. No joke, but it challenged the Head's belief in his own uniqueness. When John finally settled down, he invited Paul Tagg to be Best Man at his wedding but Tagg failed to turn up, so the ever-dependable Keels stepped up and made the speech instead. John left Lansdowne in 1990 at the same time as James, having been recruited by Euan MacAlpine to join Bedales School in Hampshire. John was now ready to abandon the bright lights and promise of excitement that had brought him down from Scotland and opt for a more sedate and rural lifestyle. He stayed successfully at Bedales for most if not all the rest of his career. As with teachers, Heads are not supposed to have favourites but The Boss always had a soft spot for "Scullion."

Paul "Thommo" Thomas, PhD, (*History*) was a peripheral member of the gang and often the butt of their humour (which was well defined by Keels as "cruel but arguably fair"), owing to his rather self-important manner. Along with his namesake Huw, he was a key ingredient of a highly efficient and successful History department. Between the two of them, they were capable of covering whatever variant of A-level History period or special subject that their retake students needed. James never failed to be impressed how they could confidently handle every option the different exam boards threw at them.

On leaving Lansdowne Thommo went to teach at The Mount School, a prestigious and long-established Quaker girls' school in York. Before he left for the North he had been charged with a drink driving offence which would require an appearance in court back in London a few months later. The due date arrived, for which he had organised a day off, explaining to his new Headmistress that he "had important business to attend to" in the capital and studiously concealing the embarrassing truth. Having received the expected driving ban, Thommo travelled back North from King's Cross, confident that his old life would remain secret and unseen by Yorkist eyes. Arriving at York station he bought a copy of the local evening newspaper. The headline read: DRINK DRIVING BAN FOR MOUNT SCHOOL TEACHER. Somehow, lovable as he was, calamity always seemed to seek out Thommo. By all accounts he survived the Head's roasting for damaging the school's reputation and kept his job.

Mark "?" Silcox (*Chemistry*) enjoyed practical jokes, usually accompanied by loud "ho, ho, ho" laughter. By a strange quirk of fate there is currently a stand-up comedian called Mark Silcox who also used to be a Chemistry teacher – but not the same person. Spooky, possums? He was part of a group that occasionally went to watch Chelsea matches, at which there was always a guy in a nearby row who

would stand up and shout foul-mouthed obscenities at the opposition and the referee. Mark dubbed him 'Mr Sociology.'

Mark and Thommo seem happy enough standing next to each other in the photograph, which was therefore probably taken before the Lansdowne staff party at which Silcox unexpectedly produced a pair of scissors from his pocket and snipped off the merrily dangling tongue of Thommo's flamboyant tie. Needless to say, they had to be kept far apart for the rest of the evening. (These days they call it social distancing.) James vaguely remembers that Mark moved on to a school in the Gulf in order to make loadsamoney.

Paul "Licker" Langley (*Computer Science*) acquired his nickname from an unfortunate habit of constantly licking his lips like a hopeful lizard whenever he spoke. Cruel but arguably fair. He would accompany the gang on various trips, always reminding the rest that if he got lost or separated from the group he would follow his father's advice and stand still until somebody found him, which amused the lads greatly. He stayed at Lansdowne for many years, but James never heard what became of him afterwards.

James sometimes wonders if he was too lenient with this motley crew of young graduates, a happy band of rich talent who behaved as if they were still undergraduates. On the other hand, they were totally dedicated to their students, knew their subject backwards and consistently helped their pupils achieve excellent results. Very rarely did he ever receive complaints either from students or their parents. At Lansdowne through their example he confirmed his beliefs, already coalescing from his experiences at Ampleforth and Highfield, about the true essence of what matters in teaching. The rest is boring flimflam, peddled by too many mediocre classroom practitioners to this day, and to be avoided like ... COVID-19.

The best film of 1987 was "Withnail and I." This four-minute drinking montage seems an apt conclusion to this episode. Please watch responsibly.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxWT6bhM_xg

Excerpts from "Withnail and I" (1987), directed by Bruce Robinson and starring Paul McGann, Richard E. Grant and Richard Griffiths.

12/07/20

64. Greece, The Land of Many Doctors and Few Nurses

It is the season of snakes, lizards and grasshoppers. The only sign of snakes around the house has been a metre-long skin of a harmless “tyflinos” (like a grass snake) extending out of a hole in the rocks near the parking area. At first glance Dad thought it was a live one and jumped about a foot in the air. Then he realised it was only a sloughed-off remnant. He’s seeing a great many more lizards, which is entirely my fault. If they are small I eat them whole, if large I bring them into the house, bite off their tails and then leave them to fend for themselves. They seem to survive quite well without tails. Apparently they regrow them, but I’ve never yet seen a big gecko with a small tail. With or without, Dad often saves them via his adept use of dustpan and brush. As for grasshoppers, Minnie and I enjoy catching and chewing them as a tasty and crunchy snack, whatever their size. There’s no such thing as a vegan cat.

Moving on from feline diet to human health, the above title was the headline of an article Dad read recently in a local magazine. According to an OECD survey Greece leads Europe in its number of doctors per head of population (6.6 per 1000 inhabitants, with a European average of 3.6). On the other hand it is next to last of 28 countries with only 3.3 nurses per 1000, whilst the average is 8.4. Why does Greece present by far the largest discrepancy? The usual socio-economic and cultural factors are in play – nursing is very poorly paid and the profession is held in low esteem. As Dad himself witnessed in Kalamata Hospital in 2016, Greek mothers, wives and daughters often provide free basic nursing care for their hospitalised menfolk anyway, whereas what self-respecting parent would not want their child to become a doctor, thus guaranteeing life-long medical care on demand and at no cost?

However, the key determinant behind these figures is more likely to be that a huge number of nurses lost their jobs during the ten-year recession. Many emigrated abroad and never returned. The current COVID-19 health crisis has brought this issue to the fore and the government has made familiar noises about rectifying the situation. Doctors, meanwhile, although suffering pay cuts along with all public employees, were the last to be sacked from the National Health Service and this is reflected in the statistics.

Bear in mind also that, although the public healthcare system is widely available and free, most people use private GPs who are therefore ubiquitous here. Unbelievably, another survey states that one-third of Greeks tip their doctor. This is particularly surprising in a country which has no strong tipping tradition and where “rounding up” the bill is the more common practice. On the other hand, it is a cheap insurance policy for ensuring prompt attention from the doc next time he or she is needed.

What else? The house will be as ready as Dad can make it for Mum’s imminent arrival. He knows that he will have to turn the kitchen, which he has been using as a convenient office, back into a kitchen. He has scrounged some pieces of furniture from friends and cleared up the outside area. In the end he filled 14 sacks with builders’ rubbish, mostly plastic and metal, but also with an unexplained discovery. Lurking in the long grass was a pair of black ladies high-heeled boots, size 37, in good condition. This has led Dad to view the builders in a new light. Cross-dressing? Lunchtime legover? Suggestions on a postcard? Assessing the material evidence like some latter-day archaeologist he can pronounce with authority on their favourite drinks (full-strength Coca Cola, water) and cigarettes (Winston & Marlboro) but the boots demand a controversial research paper on “The Lesser-known Leisure Pursuits of 21st Century Greek Builders.”



Villa Doulapas: the external render and roof insulation is now complete. After much debate with the architect Mum and Dad went for a grey & white two-tone style.

After four months apart Dad is now desperate for Mum to get out here. He was encouraged that direct flights from the UK were to be allowed from 15th July and he bought her a ticket to Athens for 19th. Unfortunately the international travel situation remains precarious and fluid. Restrictions can



Takis is much more comfortable working all day at the Caribbean Beach Bar in a “welder’s helmet,” rather than in a conventional mask.

be reintroduced at any time and he won’t stop worrying until she is in his arms. You will read in my next blog whether or not Mum arrived and if Dad has therefore stopped howling at the moon and verbally abusing inanimate objects.

Incidentally, he preempted the official announcement about UK flights by a few days and bought Mum’s one-way British Airways ticket for about £200. After the government’s positive confirmation the same flight (and all similar in that week) now costs £724. Supply and demand red in tooth and claw? Or just plain bastards.

As widely predicted the daily number of virus cases is on the increase, thanks to the influx of foreign tourists since 15th June. The understandable efforts to salvage some of the summer season are a matter of much debate and some trepidation both nationally and in our village. Tourism accounts for 20% of Greece’s GDP and so any realistic attempt to restart the economy must involve this sector.

In Chrani “safe” Greek visitors from the Kalamata area and “quite safe” Athenian families are sustaining the beach bars, which will therefore survive until next year, but the restaurants and bars that depend on evening trade are suffering badly. Jiannis’s Poseidon Bar relies exclusively on tourists from abroad. In mid-July he still has virtually no customers and he may not get through to the 2021 season. The permanent ex-pats on the other hand are generally happy to see as few “unsafe” foreigners as possible. Dad is trying to take a balanced view, provided one special foreigner arrives next Sunday.

As in his next job, James recruited mostly competent practitioners, more than a handful of superstars and a few rotters. Well, we all make mistakes. (*A note to readers who are ex-colleagues: Please refrain from sending James gleefully malicious e-mails with lists of his bad appointments, which are crisply embossed on his brain for ever. These disasters haunt him still, since he is acutely aware of the protracted damage that useless teachers inflict on undeserving young minds.*) He quickly came to realise that by far the most important skill of a headteacher is the ability to be a “good picker” and so he refined his interview technique to basic principles. In the end, confronted with a promising interviewee he just had to ask himself one question: If I were a pupil or student in this person’s class, would I be switched on, or would I be bored witless?

But he never plucked “a good ‘un” out of thin air with more speed and clarity than when he hired Keith Barrett (*Mathematics*). The crisis was familiar. Over-recruitment of students in Week 37 meant that he was short of one part-time Maths teacher (remember the urgent signing up of Paul Tagg?), but this time he found out only after the timetabler had to split some GCSE groups on the first day of term. At 0900 he trawled through on spec CVs, found one to his liking and made a phone call, at 1000 he interviewed a quietly confident Oxford graduate and at 1015 he offered him a job. James knew that he was onto a winner when Keith asked, “When would you like me to start?” and then showed total composure when James replied, “The class’s first lesson starts in half-an-hour. We’ll do the paperwork afterwards. Is that alright?” “That’ll be fine, just tell me where to find them,” ventured the Imperturbable One, and thus he began a successful LT career which led on to his teaching A-level Philosophy and Psychology as well as Mathematics. A lucky appointment? Not really. Ernest Hemingway, probably in relation to bull-fighting, defined courage as “grace under pressure.” James applied the pressure, Keith displayed the grace.

The typically difficult subjects to recruit for were, and probably still are, Physics and Computer Science, but the hardest of all was A-level Accounts. The only suitable candidates were retired accountants and by “retired” I mean closeish to the grave. Eric Castle (*Accounts*) survived longer than most. He was yet another staffroom “character,” still teaching Accounts in his late seventies. He commanded the special hourly rate of £25 because of the dearth/death of alternatives. He never completed the standard pay claim sheet, but would always present a piece of paper headed “To Debtor” and then, in long hand, list the various classes in detail with the appropriate fee. He was an avid fan of Southend United FC and, at one time in his earlier days, had a trial to play football as a professional.

He regularly came into the Principal’s Office as if to report for duty and then, as he left the room, would declare, “And now I’m off on my mission to rid the world of ignorance and superstition.” Eric had written many best-selling textbooks on the principles of accounting and was highly respected in those circles. However, as Selwyn recalls, “He did have a disagreement about ‘teaching method’ with the other elderly Accounts teacher whose name I forget but who was known as ‘Mr. Slippers’ (because he taught in slippers). Mr Slippers was an earnest-looking old boy who carried his violin case wherever he went. I always had visions of him having a sub-machine gun in his case but apparently he was a competent viola player with one of the lesser known London orchestras.” There was a standing joke amongst the young wags that the timetabler deliberately allocated a classroom on the top floor to the Accounts classes as part of a sinister plot to kill the old gents off on their long and winding ascent, owing to their exorbitant hourly rate. Not true, since they were a prized commodity.

When the supply of aged accountants dried up James pulled off a remarkable coup which even the twins told him would indubitably fail. Who did he know that had all the knowledge to teach the shortfall of six hours per week to an A-level class? Sitting there in the next building in front of his adding machine was the perfect solution, Lansdowne Group Finance Director, Hugh Templeton. At first Hugh rejected the idea out of hand:

Hugh: “I’ve never taught before,” “I’m too busy,” etc, etc.

James: “Well, I’m in a fix, please just look at the syllabus before deciding...”

Hugh: “I’ll do that, but don’t build up your hopes.”

James: “You’ll love it. Prepayments, accruals, all that stuff you taught me years ago. For a chartered accountant this is a piece of piss, and I’ll even pay Group £25 per hour out of my budget..”

Hugh (finally laughing): “And the rest!”

A few days later Hugh succumbed to James’s wheedling and despite his initial reluctance went on to enjoy his Accounts teaching for many years to come. He was committed to his students’ success and the classroom made a welcome change from the office and the boardroom.

I conclude my Lansdowne teachers’ review with a rhyming couplet, from each end of the “lovable” spectrum: Millett and Tuckett. Ken Millett (*Law*) had been a Detective Sergeant in the Met. He had a Law degree and an ambition, later to be fulfilled, to become a barrister. He had all the necessary forensic skills: a copper’s guile, powers of persuasion, charm and the gift of the gab. He possessed a decent operatic tenor’s voice and apparently had sung in the chorus of *Cats* in the West End. Being an excellent salesman he was one of Paul’s favourites but he was never trusted by James, Pete and Hugh. He was a masterful political operator and a notoriously slippery customer. However, when it came to the inevitable “He goes or I go!” showdown with Wardrobe, he was outgunned. Curiously, he jumped on the very day he was about to be pushed, presumably having been tipped off by Paul just in time.

David Tuckett (*Classics*) on the other hand was a kindred spirit, whose idiosyncracies were readily tolerated by his fellow-Classicist boss. Older than the Harrington drinking crew, he was a semi-detached but popular member of the group. He always asked for Room 37 to be his own personal 'Ancient History/Classical Civilisation' base and was amusingly unorthodox in his ways. His student induction session comprised one statement/question. "Do any of you have any serious objections to me smoking during the lesson?" to which the usual answer was, "As long as you don't mind us smoking too." David considered it a most civilised arrangement. He would sometimes give his students a test essay to do in class during which he would escape for a few minutes to place some bets at the local bookies. As a result of an alleged passion for a Chinese girl he was cruelly teased one Valentine's Day by his younger colleagues, who sent him an anonymous message which read, "I am the chink in your amour." He forgave them.

The Higher Education establishment next door, Lansdowne College, offered a range of courses leading to professional qualifications and also an external US degree programme. The sister college was therefore peopled with various American academics in addition to what seemed like an excessive number of good-looking administrative secretaries. The Harrington Arms drinkers encouraged these young ladies to fraternise after work, sometimes with spectacular success, often with predictable failure. Some of the American educators were Vietnam War veterans, all with interesting stories to tell. James remembers two of them swapping yarns about water-skiing off the back of their motor torpedo boats, known as PBRs, in the Mekong Delta. They made Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall)'s obsession with surfing in *Apocalypse Now* seem perfectly sane.

James's best-loved Yank was the absurdly named Gordon Bennett, the LC Principal, whose unsuspecting parents were blissfully unaware when they proudly named their child of the burden their son would carry when he came to reside in Blighty. How were they to know the Cockney euphemism for Cor Blimey? Or that his name in Britain was a quaintly old-fashioned expression of surprise, puzzlement, incredulity, shock? Gordon, an affable and good-humoured extrovert, took all the unfunny comments in his stride.

He was also a consummate teller of tales, one of which has lodged itself in James's declarative memory. In his younger days Gordon had been a "roadrunner," that is, a travelling salesman across the length and breadth of the USA of degree courses for a private university. After every trip he submitted his expenses meticulously, with receipts attached. On one such marketing expedition he lost his favourite hat and consequently put in a claim for its replacement. To his chagrin the university accounts department rejected his submission for the cost of a new chapeau. Some weeks later, after his next trip, he gave in his expenses sheet, accompanied by all the receipts for the usual allowable items, e.g. travel, accommodation, food, etc. He was particularly thorough. And he added a special note for the accounts clerks. It read: "Find the hat."

Sometimes the differences in institutional cultures were a source of mirth to the more laid-back LT tutors. They particularly enjoyed a sign which appeared on the LC Bursar's locked door every day at lunchtime: *Office closed between 12.30 and 1.30, except for the payment of fees*. When a new Lansdowne College Principal with illusions of greatness and a fancy Christian name ("Graddon") was installed, they laughed at the graddiose (sic) redecoration of his office in the style of Louis XV, with drapes and furniture to match. "It's like a French tart's boudoir," they jubilantly exclaimed. "He won't last!" He didn't.

Nevertheless, there was a degree of cooperation and synergy between the three colleges. Bryan Hooton, a forthright pipe-smoking Northerner, had taken over from Michael Rymer at Duff Miller. He was an

experienced school leader who had at one time been the Careers Master at Eton. He became a trusted senior management colleague, whose blunt Lancastrian aphorisms creased James up. Here's two about the Templetons: "Thou can't breed tame 'uns from wild 'uns.." and "When there's five int' litter and four places at t' trough, thou learns to shove.." Priceless. Fine words butter no parsnips.

Bryan also did some work in Group with Pete, notably organising in-service training for all senior managers, which included a few jaunts to Sotogrande. The most useful and memorable course for James was based on an Open University module about the nature of business organisations. The core text was Charles Handy's *Understanding Organisations*, which at last provided James with a conceptual framework for where he was and what he was doing. It was an eye-opener, revealing why certain organisational strategies work in particular types of institutions and others are doomed to fail. Still a best-seller, and well worth a read for anyone in the world of work. Also recommended is Handy's 1989 *The Age Of Unreason*, a visionary exhortation to adapt to a changing world for our survival. Perhaps worth re-reading in the post-COVID-19 era.

There was collaboration on the marketing front too. James benefitted from a joint trip to Kenya with Mike Frayn, LC Marketing Manager. Wardrobe gave a talk at the Nairobi Hilton on the UK universities admissions system and even enrolled an A-level student, but the highlights were a safari in the Masai Mara and a visit to the nature reserves of Lakes Naivasha and Nakuru in the Great Rift Valley. The home-cooked Gujarati dinner with the parents of one of James's Asian students still remains the best Indian meal he has ever tasted. And entirely vegetarian. The father's business was the international export of those colourful, palate-cleansing seeds (mukhwas) which you are given along with the bill at every Indian restaurant. Mr Shah sifted and identified each different grain, James studiously learnt all the names, but alas thirty years later he knows only aniseed and fennel.

"The force of logic will prevail," Pete used to say. Therefore the boys' next move was no great surprise. Why should they pay through the nose for the privilege of running US degree courses accredited from elsewhere when they could buy their own university and offer their own degrees? So off they scampered to South Dakota and in January 1989 bought Huron University, morphing Lansdowne College into the "Huron University USA in London" campus. Three years later they sold it to the then Japanese Minister of Finance, Yoshiro Hayashi, for a stonking profit. Where on earth did Paul find these people, who were prepared to buy whatever he was offering? Then again, he was without question the best salesman James has ever come across. He still has a bottle of Paul's snake oil in his bathroom cabinet. It works wonders.

Some of the crazier schemes were less successful. Paul decided to back an American psychologist called Helen Irlen, who specialised in studying methods of helping children and adults with reading and learning disabilities, including dyslexia. Through her research she had discovered that a subgroup of individuals showed a marked improvement in their reading ability when the text material was covered with coloured acetate sheets. As well as using these overlays she had begun to prescribe tinted lenses in a variety of hues, ranging from yellow to violet. The scientific evidence for her "scotopic sensitivity syndrome" remains inconclusive but at the time Paul was excited about the possibilities of "rose-tinted spectacles curing dyslexia," as he enthusiastically put it. So he set up The Irlen Institute and gave Irlen a consulting room and a secretary in Palace Gate. Various clients were seen coming and going and coming back in garishly tinted glasses. The staffroom comedians went through a childish phase of inventing dyslexia jokes, the best/worst of which involved the atheist who attempted to disprove the existence of Dog. Financially the project went nowhere. Hugh reckoned that "we made about threepence halfpenny."

The boys also set up a satellite Lansdowne College in Northern Cyprus, west of Kyrenia. Pete was always grumbling about the difficulties of employing and retaining good staff for this venture. There were chronic problems getting the fees income out of the place too, but James for obvious political reasons had little sympathy. He thoroughly disapproved of establishing a new business in a pariah state that existed only through Turkish invasion and conquest. How long it lasted and what became of it he knows not.

During this period the twins were much taken with the teachings of the American business guru, Stephen Covey, whose self-help book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, became their bible. They may even have had some professional dealings with him. Their conversation became littered with references to Covey's concepts and precepts. This could be confusing if you hadn't read the book. "Is Pete talking about Habit 4 or Habit 5?" James asked himself in meetings. "And do I care?" Increasingly he didn't.

The enforced introduction of psychometric testing of all candidates for senior positions in the organisation put the tin lid on it. Pete had discovered this new fad, which he was convinced could scientifically measure an individual's mental capabilities and behavioural style, an invaluable tool in job selection. James, who believed that he could "read" any candidate sufficiently in a one-hour face-to-face interview, regarded such testing as unnecessary pseudo-scientific bullshit, a process which could be easily undermined through wilful dissembling. He therefore agreed to take a trial test and lied in answer to every significant question. When Pete gave James his results, he said, "You came out exactly as I would have expected. I'd employ you tomorrow."

The time had definitely come for James to consider his long-term future and to look around for pastures new.

Wednesday, 12th April 1989. A year and a day after the seven-year-old miniature Yorkshire Terrier had moved into his new house with its extensive garden, he was let out as usual for a morning perambulation of his territory. He spotted an intruder entering through the open gate at the bottom of the driveway. Small and feisty, unwisely fearless, he ran yapping at the large black Labrador. It was a swift and deadly encounter. The much bigger animal caught Willie by the neck, shook him like a rabbit, bit through his spinal cord and tossed him dying onto the gravel. Pauline had heard the commotion and ran down the drive, but too late to save her darling little dog. She held him in her arms as he breathed his last. She was inconsolable. Not a single drop of Willie's blood had been shed. The Labrador ran off into Chiltley Lane, never to be seen again.

As a tribute to the composer Ennio Morricone, who died recently at the age of 91, here is the theme music to *Cinema Paradiso*, which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 1989. Elegaic and sentimental, it was a movie much revisited by Pauline and James. And, yes, those smudges on the page are his tears.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FzVWlOKeLs>

22/08/20

65. Visiting a Greek Dentist

Shall I start with the dog episode or the dentist? First, the dog. He is a friendly, young hunting hound, recently acquired from the owner of one of the Chrani restaurants by Peter and Andrea, expat acquaintances of Mum and Dad. He is also a Peter, but called Petros since his Greek comprehension is better than his English. He sometimes accompanies them to the Caribbean Beach Bar where he is walked along the shore and encouraged to take a dip in the sea. The beach bar is full of visiting Greeks at this time of year, mostly Athenians or other non-locals – all potential plague-carriers in Dad's opinion.

Last week, whilst Old Petros was teaching Young Petros how to improve his doggie paddle, a Greek woman approaches and announces that the Englishman *is breaking the law by permitting his dog to enter the sea*. “Dogs are not allowed in the sea in Greece,” she declares. Peter understands Greek well. “Really?” he replies dismissively and tries to ignore the interfering old bat. She insists on arguing the toss and in the end threatens to call the police. “Go on then. Do that,” retorts Peter. “I’m sure they’ll be very interested.” She retreats in self-righteous dudgeon.

And, as Peter discovered later when he looked it up, she was right! Law 4235/2014 views differently pets that are just on the beach and pets that are swimming in the sea. It's OK to keep or walk your animal on a leash on free beaches, provided you have the pet's health booklet with you, but as for the sea the law states: “Pets are not allowed to enter the water when there are other swimmers present.” Fines can range from 50 to 150 euros. In this case there were no bathers anywhere near Petros, but technically he was paddling illegally. I wonder what Max, the large white dog who all year long roams freely along Chrani beach and enjoys his daily swim, makes of it all, legislation which is rooted in very different cultural attitudes towards animals generally between southern/eastern and northern/western Europe. Max, by the way, belongs to the owner of the Kivotos Beach Bar and after his swim he enjoys shaking himself vigorously in close proximity to some unsuspecting sunbather and sometimes even cocking his leg on his/her sunbed. Dogs, eh!

The depressing irony of this incident that you have no chance whatsoever of catching COVID-19 from a dog in the sea, whereas from the Athenian tourists who crowd the local beaches in August with no regard for social distancing, .. gotcha! There have been seven recent cases in Messinia and closer to home a new hotel in the next village, bizarrely named The White Donkey, has been rumoured to have had one instance, but this is still unconfirmed.

Some unduly alarmist stories have appeared in the British media about the coronavirus “surge” in Greece, where the upward trend of cases since July has coincided with the height of the tourist season. Against general expectations very few of these are foreign visitors. Most of those infected are young Greeks, who are determined to enjoy their summer in the usual way: night clubs, beach parties, all-night raves, etc. They have very little interest, if any, in social distancing. Meanwhile, the government continues to walk a fine line between helping the many thousands of businesses involved in hospitality and tourism earn enough to survive until next year and on the other hand controlling the spread of the virus. At approximately 250 cases per day, the numbers are indeed higher than ever before but few are hospitalised and the death count remains extremely low. The young are simply sent home to quarantine and recover there.

Therefore the latest government restrictions are specifically targeted against the hedonistic activities

of Greek youth and also focus on local outbreaks, often in holiday centres such as Paros and Mykonos. “Bad Cop” Deputy Civil Protection Minister, Nikos Hardalias, recently imposed a curfew on bars and restaurants in popular tourist areas - obliging such establishments to close between midnight and 7 a.m. - and has now extended this and other measures to the Athens area and Halkidiki, the northern tourist region close to Thessaloniki. Additionally, gatherings must be limited to no more than nine people. Parties, open-air markets and religious processions are also banned. None of this deterred a parish priest who was arrested in Athens last week for calling on his flock via Facebook not to wear masks at Sunday Mass.

The Greek press has given much coverage to the complaints of business owners in Mykonos, who have signed an angry letter accusing the government of wanting “to render us mere spectators of the destruction of our businesses.” These people make their big money from crowds, a dangerous ingredient of virus-spread, and Dad has no sympathy with them at all. Fortunately neither does the government. As in Corfu and Santorini, they suffered not a jot during the ten-year Greek recession, growing rich in their booming island micro-economies. And now after 10 times Seven Years Of Plenty they start to squeal in the first Year of Famine? Pathetic.



Delos: the Terrace of the Naxian Lions.

The whole of this virtually uninhabited Cycladic island is an extremely important archaeological site. The only worthwhile reason for visiting neighbouring Mykonos, according to Dad, is as a staging post for the 20-minute boat ride across to the illustrious birthplace of Apollo and Artemis.

Mykonos is a textbook case of summer overcrowding. Off-season, it is home to 10,000. In the summer it traditionally receives over 2,000,000 visitors who are attracted by its reputation for the high life. This year of course there will be nowhere near the same number. There are no cruise ships, for example, which account for about a third of visitors. Nevertheless, it is reported that hotels are at about 70% capacity, a high percentage compared to most other Greek tourist resorts and definitely nothing to complain about in current circumstances.

Since it is evident that the younger generation has been almost exclusively responsible for the increase in virus infections, Prime Minister Mitsotakis gave them a serious telling off on national TV. Directing his remarks specifically at young people, he accused them of complacency and warned, “Be careful;

take care of yourselves; you are not invulnerable, and those who are particularly not invulnerable are your parents and grandparents.” Then, in what one newspaper report described as an apparent act of desperation, he berated them for not showing φιλότιμο, *philotimo*.

This most withering censure needs some explaining to non-Greeks. “*Philotimo*” is one of those untranslatable words that every language possesses and for which any dictionary definition is inadequate. The lexicon might say “sense of honour,” “respect,” “pride,” “dignity,” “self-esteem,” but the concept is far wider and more complex. The word is marinated in centuries of Greek history and culture. It encompasses the notions of pride in self, pride in family, pride in community, and doing the right thing because you have a duty to do the right thing. So “*philotimo*” is regarded as the most supreme of Greek virtues and yet many of the older generation now fear that its potency as a moral imperative is weakening with the passage of time. Nevertheless, it was still strong language for Mitsotakis to use against those who don’t wear masks or maintain social distancing in their eager dedication to partying.

Time to move on from lexicology to odontology. In normal circumstances Dad goes to his Liphook dentist and blog reader, Robert Herron, on his occasional visits to the UK for a “clean & polish” and check-up. Since COVID-19 has confined him to Chrani since March, he decided it was time to get his by now rock-hard tartar removed by a local practitioner in Petalidi. Maria-Eleni was recommended independently by two friends “as a dentist.” What the hell does that mean? It’s a “dentist” he wants after all. Sally explains, “She’s young but she’s good. However she has no nurse and no receptionist. You’ll have great difficulty getting through to her for an appointment,” adding that despite repeated attempts she has been waiting for nine weeks for a call back to fix an appointment to complete her treatment. This does not augur well.

Suitably forewarned, Dad leaves two voicemail messages and receives no response. He is planning to employ the old-school tactic of banging on the door during her alleged opening hours but decides to ring her mobile a final time. Lo, she answers. Dad introduces himself and then:

“I would very much like to make an appointment.”

“Unfortunately I can’t see you until next week..”

“That’s fine, it’s not an emergency. I just want a clean and polish.”

“Oh, OK, I’ll ring you..”

“And *when* might you ring me?”

“In a few days’ time..”

Dad is not hopeful. Two days later at 9.00pm Maria-Eleni’s call catches him by surprise.

“Can you come at six o’clock on Monday?”

“Would that be a.m. or p.m.?”

“In the evening, of course.”

He arrives on time, notes the sign on her front door which states that the surgery closes at five o’clock on Mondays but is nevertheless given immediate access. After a mere ten-minute wait, he is back on the street calculus-free before 7.00pm. She has done a good job but there are some interesting variations from Robert’s dental procedures.

She is masked and goggled throughout, but alas no ocular protection for Dad so he is squirted in the eyes a few times by water from the high-speed drill. She attacks the worst tartar first, behind the lower

incisors and then works outwards, whereas Robert works systematically from lower left, across and back to upper left. This means you can anticipate exactly where the next pain will befall and calculate (dental pun, ha!) a useful running percentage of torture still to come as he proceeds. Maria-Eleni prefers random skirmishes with more blood-letting, sometimes disconcertingly revisiting an area twice.

Her telephone rings frequently and remains unanswered. In the middle of the process the doorbell buzzes and Maria-Eleni opens the door remotely. A few seconds later a middle-aged man bursts directly into the surgery holding his jaw. “Stop! Who are you?” cries the dentist. Not a previous customer then. She ushers him away from the dental chair occupied by Dad, who reclines with mouth still open, suction tube intact, dreaming of the tantalising impossibility of a large gin and tonic as a substitute for the mouth wash.

“The tooth is broken. It requires your immediate attention,” exclaims the interloper. Maria-Eleni is commendably calm, sits the gentleman down in the reception area and assures him that he will be next. Ah, so that’s the way to get a swift appointment, thinks Dad. Meanwhile, Sally waits and waits..

Finally, in spite of Dad’s fears about sudden changes in travel restrictions, Mum eventually arrived in mid-July. They celebrated his birthday at a newly-discovered beachside restaurant which looks across the bay towards the Koroni seafront. An idyllic location with excellent food, where those of a romantic nature might ask waiter Costas (Tom Conti) to place Shirley Valentine’s table in the shallows. The inevitable restaurant cats are a young family up to mischief, so they provided free entertainment for the diners. One of them climbed high up an overhanging *αλμυράκι*, *almyraki*, “salt cedar,” where it learnt an important lesson: our cat claws are really useful for going up trees and rather useless for coming down. The solicitous mother, hearing her kitten’s plaintive cries, immediately ascended the tree and, as the photos show, escorted the young daredevil to safety.



At the Artaki Restaurant, Koroni: adventurous kitten goes up the tree alone, cries when it is too frightened to come down and is rescued by mummy cat.

Mum has now returned to the UK for work, leaving strict instructions that neither of us girls is permitted upstairs on the new bed. Minnie is biding her time. And I have a cunning plan..

One evening quite early in 1989 James and Pauline were having supper with William and Jo Godfree at their home in Wey Hill, Haslemere. William was a Highfield colleague of Pauline and the school's Director of Music. He was the latest, and one of the best, in that long line of inspirational and talented teachers and performers who had given Highfield its long-standing and deserved reputation for excellence in Music.

William mentioned en passant that he was writing a musical to put on as the annual show for the winter of 1989-1990. It was to be a Wild West version of *The Tempest* and he played a couple of the songs he had already finished. The musical was entitled *INJUNS*. Somehow by the time the Wardrobes left for home James had been enlisted as a willing volunteer to help with lyrics and book. He knew the Shakespeare play intimately, which may have been a determining factor in William's offer, but he had never written any songs in his life. Some melodies already existed that needed all or additional verses and original lyrics were also required which William would put to music.

James entered the project with colossal enthusiasm and stupendous naivety, working on the principle that song-writing was like composing poetry. Over the following months he dedicated himself to explorations in rhyme and rhythm, whilst fleshing out the plot and dialogue. William was happy with the results and the collaboration led to a successful outcome. It was many years later that James heard Stephen Sondheim magisterially assert in a radio interview that writing good lyrics is *totally different* from writing poems. He is also quoted as saying, for example, "Lyrics have to be underwritten. That's why poets generally make poor lyric writers because the language is too rich. You get drowned in it," and "One difference between poetry and lyrics is that lyrics sort of fade into the background. They fade on the page and live on the stage when set to music." So much for Wardrobe as a budding Hammerstein.



Stephen Sondheim and William Godfree at the Garrick Club in March 2012.

INJUNS was performed to three capacity audiences in the Highfield School theatre in late January 1990. It was directed by the ebullient Head of English and former professional actor, Nigel Ramage - later to succeed Robin Orr as Headmaster - with William as Musical Director. One of the stars of the show had some pedigree. Tom Lindup, as Cal (Caliban), brought the house down with *Hangover Blues*, James's best comic lyric. His elder brother Mike was the keyboard player with the Isle of Wight jazz-funk band, Level 42, whilst their father David had enjoyed a long career as a composer, arranger and orchestrator, best known for his work with Johnny Dankworth and for his library music. The Lindups' plaudits after the last night, coming from seasoned old pros, were therefore particularly gratifying to James and William.

In those years James kept an occasional diary which survives. In it he recorded his thoughts two weeks after the enterprise was completed. Here are a couple of extracts:

"Nigel and William were right to cut Fresh-Air's (Ariel) last verse in *For Many Seasons*. It would have been "too long," as Dick Dickson used to say à propos visiting preachers' sermons in Highfield Chapel. Even though the final verse contains one of my favourite lines: "This cactus flower has mescal dreams.."

"Michael Lumb's encouragement was heartening. His quality of heartfelt enthusiasm is so enriching and humbling for the rest of us. Lorna and Michael show us something great about the human spirit."

William generously shared the writing copyright with James when a publishing company specialising in school plays added *INJUNS* to its list. It remains his only published work to date. The annual royalties were so meagre that they were paid in postage stamps. It was the end of James's brief dabble as a lyricist, but the experience confirmed him in his belief that written words rather than musical notes or visual images would be his best artistic currency in the future.

About this time James had also started to look for a new job challenge. After the Christmas holidays Joe Ruston invited him to lunch to discuss the possibility of his opening and heading up a new college in what he termed "Solent City," ie the Southampton/Portsmouth area. This appealed to James for

a number of reasons but before they could develop the proposition further, he spotted the word “hellenic” in an extremely small lineage advertisement in the Times Educational Supplement. This unprepossessing advert sought a Headmaster for the “Hellenic College of London,” giving no further details. He had never heard of it. “It must be some kind of tin-pot institution to embark on recruiting its Head with such a feeble ad,” he thought, but the possible Greek connection intrigued him and so he did some research. The upshot was that he sent in his CV and speculative covering letter to a Greek shipping office in Queen Anne’s Gate, without much anticipation of the matter going anywhere. Sometimes you can be as wrong as wrong can be.

Watch Mike Lindup on Keyboards and Vocals (falsetto). Is there a better pop music genre than Funk? You’ve got to love Mark King’s thumb-slap bass guitar technique...

“On the One,” everybody..!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x1RcVrGjGM>

Lessons in Love (1986), by Level 42

19/09/20

66. Snakes in Paradise

Firstly, an update on the virus scenario in Greece. The Mitsotakis government is pushing its luck as it continues to balance the conflicting needs of the economy and the health of the nation. The total number of cases since the onset of infections in March has now topped 14,000, which may seem low in comparison with most other European countries, but 9,500 of these have occurred in the last seven weeks. To date COVID-19-related deaths total 327 and are currently recorded at 3 or slightly more per day.

More of the younger generation are being hospitalised. A recent report by the COVID-19 Observatory, the country's official virus watchdog, sounded the alarm about the rising number of young people being infected and having to be admitted to hospitals, even intubated. It stated that the average age of Covid patients in intensive care dropped to 39 in the first week in September from 67 in late April.

“Mister Sotiris” Tsiodras, the Health Ministry's top scientific advisor on coronavirus, has returned for live televised briefings on developments, appearing jointly with his regular bad cop partner, Nikos Hardalias, twice a week. Everyone's favourite professor ended his briefings at the end of May, when daily infections were at very low levels. In their final appearance back then Deputy Civil Protection Minister Hardalias joked: “If you see us doing a live briefing again, this will mean that things have not gone well.” And now they are back.

The ongoing policy of stringent localised restrictions has in particular affected Attica and a number of popular tourist islands, not least Zakynthos (or Zante, as British tour operators insist on calling it). The tourists who caught the virus there or on the TUI flight back home would have been staying at Laganas, which Dad characterises as Greece's answer to Sodom and Gomorrah. He drove through it without stopping in 1993. Unsurprisingly his list of Greek Sodoms and Hellenic Gomorrahs is extensive and authoritative, including Kavos in Kerkyra, Faliraki in Rhodes and Ayia Napa in Cyprus. However, he reluctantly conceded when I ventured that it was preferable to corral Mr Bogan, Miss Grockle and their associates in a few notoriously insalubrious resorts, leaving the rest of the country unspoilt for the rest of us.

As for Chrani, unfortunately there are some Snakes in Paradise: on land house-breakers, at sea jellyfish. Then there are the wildfires.

Over the past few months there have been at least ten burglaries in Chrani and the neighbouring villages, according to Jiannis. Dad takes this number with a pinch of salt since the local bar-owner has been a bit depressed this summer owing to the downturn in tourist trade and he is therefore prone to alarmist exaggeration. Nevertheless, there has definitely been a spate of summer break-ins. One English couple known to Dad and who live in the next village were burgled twice in six months, probably by the same gang. The thieves are only interested in money and jewellery. They strike empty houses in the middle of the day when the occupants are for example on the beach. The locals disagree on whether the culprits are gypsies or Albanians, but they are in absolute accord that they are never Greeks..

So our alarm system will be completed when funds allow and we have finally got round to buying house insurance. Contents are few and have little total value at present but the damage caused to the expensive metal shutters by a break-in would be considerable and needed covering with buildings

insurance. Heavy and remote-controlled, they should be a deterrent in themselves but you never know.

A number of swimmers, including Fotine, have been stung by jellyfish off Chrani beach. This is the first time in four years that Dad has come across this occurrence in our stretch of the coast. Last year they was a well-publicised influx in the Gulfs of Patras and Corinth but none were reported in Messinian waters. These τσόυχτρες, *tsouchtres* (a difficult word to pronounce), are also known as Medusas, after the mythical Gorgon with snakes for hair, and they seem to have been attracted by the higher temperatures at the sea surface this season. They are also driven inshore by strong waves, especially those stirred up every lunchtime by onshore breezes.



An MRI scan of a Laganas tourist's brain. Only joking. It's a Greek jellyfish.

Because of this, says Sotiria at the Caribbean Beach Bar, she has only heard of people being hurt in the afternoon but Dad, ever the morning swimmer, is sceptical about this claim given that Fotine was stung early in the day. He himself remembers the pain of a jellyfish sting in Corfu in 1979. If you can't access the necessary ammonia-based medication, he tells us, you can use vinegar or urine.

So the Medusas bring us back to snakes, of which we have not seen a real one all summer.

Until two days ago there had only been a couple of days of rainfall since May. There are five levels of fire risk in Greece and Messinia stood at Level 4, the second highest category. From time to time an emergency alert on Dad's Greek mobile phone sounds off like a klaxon horn, causing us all, cats and humans, to jump in the air. The messages are sent by the Ministry for Civil Protection and relate specifically to our region.

Last month the nearby village of Mathia, which is only three kilometres higher inland than us as the crow flies and the wind blows, was evacuated as a forest fire began to encroach the houses. The firefighters worked all day and with the help of three helicopters and two aircraft they won the battle at nightfall. Every five minutes the aircraft flew overhead on their way to and from water collection in the Messinian Gulf.

Whereas the other four aircraft utilised a scooping action to extract the seawater, one of the choppers, a specially designed Erickson S-64, extended a long tube and sucked the water up like an elephant's trunk, with greater efficiency and speed than the others.



The custom-built Erickson S-64 firefighting helicopter sucks up water at high speed.

More recently, during a period of high winds, the local town of Harokopio was under serious threat as a westerly blew the fire closer and closer to the inhabited area. Fortunately the fire had broken out at dusk and with nightfall the wind died down. The fire crews prevailed after about five hours.

All apart from the visiting tourists wanted rain, and plenty of it. A rainstorm finally arrived on Thursday, when the forecast Mediterranean tropical-like cyclone, known as a “Medicane,” named Ianos and widely reported by the British press, came in from the south-west. Everyone battened down the hatches but the worst of it missed Messinia. Since her favourite bush was drenched, Minnie spent a couple of days indoors, unusually for her. And the hole where the unfinished swimming pool gapes is now gathering water.

In February 1990 James received an invitation to interview for the post of Head of the Hellenic College of London. Since the meeting would take place off-site, it was suggested that if he wished he could arrange to have a prior tour of the school. Shortly before what would turn out to be the first of three recruitment interviews, James arrived at the main door of the school, whose Knightsbridge premises extended from Pont Street into Lennox Gardens, opposite St Columba’s Church of Scotland.

The contrast in architectural styles between the two buildings is striking. In 1955 the all-white Scottish church was rebuilt after destruction by wartime bombing to a striking contemporary design by Sir Edward Maufe, who also planned Guildford Cathedral and the Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede. The Hellenic College, on the other hand, was classic “Pont Street Dutch,” a term coined by Sir Osbert

Lancaster to describe the style typified by the large gabled houses built in the street in the 1880s, which Pevsner portrays as "tall sparingly decorated red brick mansions for very wealthy occupants, in the semi-Dutch, semi-Queen Anne manner.." Outside each edifice fluttered a large blue and white flag, on the church St Andrew's Cross with its diagonal saltire, on the school the horizontally striped flag of Greece.



The "Pont Street Dutch" frontage of the Hellenic College of London.

The door was opened by someone whom James would come to learn was by far the most important and certainly the best-loved member of the school community: the Madeiran caretaker, Santos Teixeira. His friendly welcome was a harbinger of the warm reception James would encounter from almost everyone he met there in those early days. Santos will reappear many times as we progress through the next fourteen years. Though not a Greek he was the embodiment of traditional φιλοξενία, *philoxenia*, the spirit of the hospitality extended to all visitors. His story will end tragically, but not yet.

The receptionist Maria Boura was equally good-natured and helpful, despite being imprisoned behind a sliding glass panel window, which reminded James of the restricted access to a Soviet-era railway booking clerk. He managed to stop himself from requesting "One fourth-class ticket from Moscow to Minsk, *pozhaluista*." He later found out that the barrier had been specifically installed by the management to help Maria fend off the frequent distractions of the many adults and children who unceasingly passed by throughout the day. It failed of course, because Maria loved to chat. And much as he came to value her pivotal contribution to the life of the school, especially her rare talent for spreading happiness, James too would never solve the problem of her yielding to constant interruptions.

His guide would be Edmée Leventis, a member of the Board of Governors. It was quickly apparent that this enthusiastic and articulate Cypriot lady was totally committed to the success of the school, which both her children were attending. Their initial discussion took place in the Library, an attractive room looking out onto St Columba's. Three walls were packed to a great height with shelves of English and Greek books, but too many of them appeared to be large sets of colourless and inappropriate tomes which were probably donations and therefore rarely opened by the pupils. James made a mental note

not to mention this bibliographic blemish at his interview since it might well be that one of the very donors was on the recruitment panel.

A tour of four of the five storeys of the double building (half in Pont Street, half in Lennox Gardens but adjoined on every floor) ensued. He visited the spacious Nursery, the brightly coloured Primary department, three well-equipped laboratories, the low-ceilinged gymnasium, the dining area and a multitude of classrooms. Everywhere smiling and well-behaved children, not a single one with fair hair. The highlight was the imposing triangular Assembly Hall with its half-wood-panelling and magnificent ornamental fireplace. They then retreated to the Library where Mrs Leventis, who confided that she would be unable to attend his forthcoming interview, was clearly doing her own sizing up of Mr Wardrobe. James's philhellenic sensibility, coupled with his extensive knowledge of Greece and particularly Cyprus, went down well. After this mini-interview he felt confident that she would report back on him positively. Later, in addition to being the most dependable contributor on the Board to the College's practical needs, she would emerge as the new Head's most ardent and trustworthy supporter.

At her request the Director of Studies now joined them. At this point James was able to get all the hard info he had been hoping to glean about how the school actually functioned, including its bilingual curriculum, daily routine, pupil and staffing distribution, etc. Roger was impressively on top of all this management data. Also Head of Mathematics, he was needless to say responsible for the academic timetable, a topic which was always an area of interest to James since his Highfield days of pins of many colours. He had always believed that if you really understood its mechanics and governing principles you were halfway to understanding the essence of the whole institution. Roger recalls that when the visitor quizzed him on the timetable, "he asked one question that made no sense at all. Unfortunately I can't remember what it was, but he recovered well after I explained..." Nor can James remember. Perhaps it was about what colour pins he used to distinguish Geography from Greek Geography lessons. Or the size of his pinboard.

He quickly formed the opinion that this bearded and rather serious young man in his mid-thirties was a key asset in the management team. In addition, Roger was clearly dedicated to the bilingual and bicultural ideals of what was becoming clear to James was a rather unique educational establishment: pupils aged from 3 to 18; one class per year; a compulsory Modern Greek component; a minute Sixth Form – how could such a full-time, independent, ethnic minority community school survive financially? It was blithely ploughing its eccentric-hellenic furrow in one of the most exclusive parts of SW1. It was patently well-organised, as evidenced by Roger's thorough exegesis, and its Greekness greatly appealed to James, but how secure was its future?

Pondering these questions James duly presented himself at Goulandris Brothers' first-floor shipping office in Queen Anne's Gate, still unsure whether this job would be the correct next step in his career. Dino Goulandris soon appeared and introduced himself. He was a balding, well-tanned, dapper man in his mid-sixties. He wore a well-cut dark suit and an expensive silk tie. His shirt was probably hand-made too. His aftershave was exquisite and reeked of oodles of money. He spoke fluent but charmingly accented English, into which from time to time he would throw the odd Greek phrase, usually beginning his sentences with *τελοσπάντων*, *telospandon*, "anyway." In other words he was exactly what you would expect a Greek shipping billionaire to look and sound like. Having taught two Goulandris boys (who turned out to be the children of one of Dino's many cousins) at Highfield and having got to know their parents quite well, James was comfortable with this living quintessence of ship-owning wealth as they stood together having a preliminary chat in the corridor. As planned, he slipped his connection with the family into the conversation before they entered the interview room.

Dino's office was the size of a small house. Light and airy with high ceilings, it had a delightful view of St James's Park across Birdcage Walk. There was plenty of space for a couple of architectural models of Panamax cargo ships, about two metres in length and encased in glass. These are made at the preliminary design stage and then presented to the owner after a new ship's commissioning.

James was in for a shock. Seated around the room on various sofas and armchairs were *nine* interviewers. Dino, as chairman of the panel, did the introductions. As well as an assortment of Greek governors, he had co-opted some big guns: David Summerscale, Head Master of Westminster School, and Dickie Dawe, Master of Westminster Under School, "to add some educational expertise," as he put it to the now fully wide-awake candidate. When James realised how seriously everyone else present was taking this appointment, he knew that he had better bury his inner insouciance about the post and put in a decent performance. He can recall only one question flooring him throughout the demanding hour-long session. One of the Greek ladies, Mrs Parsons (because married to an Englishman), asked him his views on the older girls wearing make-up and jewellery at school, a subject which he had never considered and on which he had no opinion whatsoever. He got away with an incoherent answer along the lines of what he guessed she wanted to hear.

After Dino escorted him out, he enquired if James would be available, if required, for a second interview in order to meet the governors who were absent from the first meeting. This was a promising sign, but as he soon found out the whole process had some distance yet to run and would even involve meeting the former King of Greece.

Entry from James's diary, 24th February 1990:

Billy Connolly on TV last night: "Chic Murray once told me that he fell down drunk in the street, and a woman looked down at him and asked, "What are you doing down there?" He replied, "I'm trying to break a bar of chocolate in my back trouser pocket.."

17/10/20

67. Frank Miller, Noisy Nights and a New Job

I've been rather poorly. I started vomiting one night, went right off my food, my back legs gave way and I was very listless. So Dad quickly took me to the vet. I spent five nights in hospital, in other words in a big cage in Dionysis's back room. I had a viral infection (not corona!), a fever and then a secondary bacterial infection. My lovely Dionysis put me on fluids, treated me with great care day and night and declared that I was "a good patient." When he gave me recovered back to Dad to take home, he said more than once that I was "a sweet cat" and I think he meant it. I'm back to my old self now, having great fun not being sweet at all and resisting the steroid tablet which Dad administers every morning for my back legs (now much improved). Begloved, cursing and increasingly desperate, he rolls around the floor forcing my mouth open in an attempt to drop in the pill, which I usually manage to spit out at least once. In the end he always wins and after this routine ritual, which the onlooking Minnie finds extremely tedious, I can proceed to a hearty breakfast.

My illness caused me to dwell on my mortality and in particular what will happen to my blogging if I join Lulu in Pussy Heaven before the task of Dad's memoirs is completed. I decided to discuss the matter with Minnie on our 15th Birthday (5th October).

"I need to have a serious discussion with you about my last will and testament."

"OK, but after I've finished breakfast, please."

"You will have to take over my writing duties if I die before you without finishing the family magnum opus."

"But I'm an eater not a writer."

"You can do it between meals and when you're not chasing Tweety Pies and lizards."

"I've only got one eye, which affects my pawscribing and as you know my spelink is apaling."

"Excuses, for Sylvester's sake! If it comes to it, you've got the job. I hereby bequeath the responsibility to you."

"Alright. Is it time to shout for lunch yet?"



Mickie and Minnie pose warily for the camera.

So, my loyal readers, you have been forewarned, but with luck I'll be OK for a good while yet. I have to admit I was slightly worried when I saw Dad choosing which shovel to use if he had to dig a hole next to Lulu's final resting place.. He's put it away now. To cheer us all up, here's everyone's favourite cartoon cat:



If only Sylvester had eaten that annoying Tweety Pie. Here's their song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvNfPSXWZqw>

Moving on from the sublime Sylvester to a ridiculously overrated "travelogue" of Greece, Dad has finally got around to reading Henry Miller's *The Colossus of Maroussi*, the American modernist's account of his nine-month visit to Greece in 1939-40. He had been invited to Corfu by his friend Lawrence Durrell and then he spent some time on the mainland and various other islands. Dad had enjoyed reading *The Rosy Crucifixion* trilogy (far superior to the two *Tropics*) fifty years ago but was always suspicious of approaching Miller on Greece. With good reason.

There are some entertaining descriptive passages of places he visits and people he meets, but generally the Greece he sees is anything but real. His solipsistic philosophical ramblings derive from a vision of the country which even at the outbreak of WW2 was spectacularly misconceived. Most of the writing is overblown and laughably pretentious, but his worst crime is cultural condescension. This is based on an extremely superficial understanding of the modern Greek psyche. He views the Greek as some kind of "noble savage," touched by the ancient gods and spiritually rich and content in his present squalor. He knows little of Greek history, ancient or modern. He claims, for example, that the Minoans "bequeathed to the Western world the greatest single contribution yet known to man – the alphabet." Really? Linear B is not the Alphabet, mate, which was developed by the Greeks centuries later from a Phoenician prototype.

Miller was by no means alone in writing such rot – most American and Northern European writers of the first half of the 20th century idealised, misunderstood and misdescribed modern Greece. Durrell with his extensive knowledge of demotic is a notable exception. After the War the picture begins to improve with for example Leigh Fermor and Woodhouse, who had endured the realities of Greek life though living and fighting with the Resistance during the occupation.

I append at the end of this chapter two extracts, in order to illustrate the worst and best of Miller. The first is a typical slice of pure and overblown bollocks about the island of Hydra. Private Eye's Pseud's Corner is crying out for stuff like this. The second piece in contrast captures his arrival in Herakleion in breezy, impressionistic, irreverent and amusing tone. If only he had maintained this style throughout and abandoned the self-indulgent metaphysics.

Meanwhile, real Greek life up the hill behind the village is peaceful enough - during daylight hours at least. In the hollow of the night, however, the animal noise level can reach an intrusive pitch. Dad's friend, Andreas, once said to him about property location, "We Greeks learnt from the foreigners where best to construct our holiday homes.." In the past the natives always wanted to build as close to the seashore as possible, but with the influx of overseas buyers came a higher priority: the view. So nowadays the desired ideal site is somewhat above sea level and therefore further inland. But perhaps the current generation's predecessors knew a thing or two, and especially that the beach is much quieter than the hills. Just the relentless beat of surf on sand and shingle.

So every night Dad's sleep (not ours) is disturbed by: barking dogs, midnight-crowing cockerels, screeching owls, bleating goats, neighing horses and howling choruses of jackals. No braying donkeys these days, since the farmers all have trucks. Yet the craziest noise over the summer was man-made: it sounded like rifle fire and continued intermittently throughout the night. Surely even the keenest wild-pig hunters need daylight hours? A mystery to us all. Then Pyrgos vet, Costas, explained the conundrum. "They're not hunters' guns," he laughed. "They are "bird bangers", propane-fired scare-cannons, set by farmers to protect their crops, in particular vines, not just from birds but from all the

hungry wildlife that roams the Greek countryside, for example boars, jackals, foxes, pine martens..” And, sure enough, since the fruit was harvested this noise at least has ceased. Back to merely the cacophony of beasts then, which isn’t seasonal, and the rare disturbance of drug-crazed bikers and boy racers careering along the main road at 0300 hours.



Numbers of the Golden Jackal, *τσακάλι*, have recovered in Greece over recent years and are causing increasing problems for livestock farmers, according to a local newspaper report.

The second interview was a lunch. It was hosted by one of the HCL governors who had missed the first encounter. Dolla Nomikos’s stylishly appointed top-floor apartment on the north-west side of Eaton Square was, to put it mildly, spacious. Dolla is married to (guess who?) a shipping grandee who hails from Santorini. His family was responsible for the cable car linking the arrival dock of the lighters from the cruise ships with the main town, Fira, which is perched on top of the cliffs overlooking the caldera. Completed in 1982, it has made redundant many, though not all, of the donkeys and mules which trudge up the 500 steps with their human burden. (For the sake of the animals there is a maximum weight permitted which therefore excludes the most obese tourists.) The Nomikos Foundation still pays the muleteers a percentage of the ticket price of the gondola lift in order to help this four-footed tradition survive.

Also at the lunch, which was in part designed to check out Wardrobe’s social skills, James remembers as well as the hostess only three of the six board members present:

Roy McCormish, founder and headmaster of Box Hill School, had been Kurt Hahn’s Head of Art at Gordonstoun and was heavily involved in the Round Square organisation of international schools, about which you will read later;

Lydia Carras, a sometime film-maker and close friend of Edmée Leventis, was well-connected to high-ranking circles in the London Greek community;

Matteos (also known as Matthew) Los ran a successful shipping company with his two brothers. Wealthy, but not in the same league as the big boys, he was worth multi-millions rather than billions.

They were all thoroughly charming people who soon realised that not only could James hold a knife and fork properly but he could also talk the hind legs off a Santorinian donkey, and never with his mouth full. He gave them both barrels of his all-embracing philhellenery and the gamut of his hellenic awareness. During the post-prandial coffee Matteos took James aside and enquired about his “salary expectations.” James took this to mean that he was almost home and dry but Matteos added a final twist. “I think Dino will want you to meet “The King” - just a formality, really. He’ll ring you about it shortly.” There had been mention of another short-listed candidate, but James was inclined by this stage not to believe in his or her existence. He knew this recruitment ruse from Peter and Paul.

Before he received Goulandris’s call he made one of his own, the final component of his due diligence. Through a mutual friend in Hampshire he acquired the contact details of Tim Slack, former Head of Bedales School (1962-1974). In the early 1980s Tim had been taken on by Dino, initially as an academic consultant and then very briefly as headmaster, following the enforced return to Greece of the first Head, a Mr Kanellopoulos. More on this chaotic teething period later.

Tim was delighted to talk about the Hellenic College and gave the governors, especially Dino Goulandris, a glowing report, praising their genuine philanthropic commitment to the school and its mission to provide a bilingual education for the Greek children of London. After hearing about James’s background and affinity with Greek culture his conclusion was: “Give it a go – they are decent people with good intentions..”

Thus emboldened, James went to the third and final interview, conducted early one evening in Dino’s highly fortified multi-storey corner flat in Chesham Place, opposite the Embassy of Germany and almost next door to Margaret Thatcher’s post-Downing-Street London residence. He would discover later that the main reason for the high level of security was the apartment’s abundance of original 19th and 20th century Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art. Yes, that IS a Manet on the wall, and that IS a genuine Cezanne opposite. What’s this on the sideboard? Indeed, a Picasso bronze.. A few years on, James and the Art teacher, Inger Heddy, would identify these masterpieces at a Christmas Drinks Party that Dino held for the teaching staff in his Belgravia bastion.

The meeting had been presented to James as a “courtesy” to King Constantine, who was not an HCL governor but Chairman of the Hellenic College Charitable Trust and the inspiration ten years earlier behind the founding of the school, which all five of his children had attended or were currently attending. However, after gaining entrance to the stronghold from Dino’s circumspect butler and whilst waiting confidently to be received and duly anointed, the drawing room door opened and a younger man, smart in his suit and tie, emerged and departed through the front door. So there really was another candidate. Miserere mei! He turned out to be a Greek Maths teacher at Westminster School who was everyone’s second choice, but James of course did not know this. Tightening his belt another notch he entered the fray. He was introduced to a tall, good-looking, deep-voiced gentleman of about 50 years of age, who immediately asked James if he minded if he continued smoking. Which he didn’t, particularly since he had always liked the exotic aroma of Basma (Greek/Turkish) tobacco (now banned from cultivation in Greece thanks to EU agricultural policy).

The smiling lady accompanying the studiously polite former monarch of The Hellenes was his wife, Queen Anne-Marie, the youngest sister of Queen Margrethe II of Denmark. James would in time become one of her biggest fans. The fifth occupant of the room, who arrived late, was another shipowning governor, Michael Chandris, who along with his elder brother had expanded their inherited passenger

fleet and renamed it Celebrity Cruises. He was busy building ever-larger ships and conquering the American market for Caribbean cruising.

The only surviving echo of this interview is a bizarre question from HM Constantine. He asked if James would *allow him* to continue to use the School Library for occasional meetings of the Council of a schools' group of which he was Patron. How astonishingly gracious and correct! I suppose royalty usually asks questions to which there is only one right answer, but James was charmed nonetheless.

A day or two later Dino offered James the job, which he readily accepted. A starting date of early August was agreed. His next task would be to break the news to the Templetons and to all his colleagues at Lansdowne.

Hydra is a rock which rises out of the sea like a huge loaf of petrified bread. It is the bread turned to stone which the artist receives for his labors when he first catches sight of the promised land. After the uterine illumination comes the ordeal of rock out of which must be born the spark which is to fire the world. I speak in broad, swift images because to move from place to place in Greece is to become aware of the stirring, fateful drama of the race as it circles from paradise to paradise. Each halt is a stepping stone along a path marked out by the gods. They are stations of rest, of prayer, of meditation, of deed, of sacrifice, of transfiguration. At no point along the way is it marked FINIS. The very rocks, and nowhere on earth has God been so lavish with them as in Greece, are symbols of life eternal. In Greece the rocks are eloquent: men may go dead but the rocks never. At a place like Hydra, for example, one knows that when a man dies he becomes part of his native rock. But this rock is a living rock, a divine wave of energy suspended in time and space, creating a pause of long or short duration in the endless melody.

We came down at the seaport of Herakleion, one of the principal towns of Crete. The main street is almost a ringer for a movie still in a third-rate Western picture. I found a room quickly in one of the two hotels and set out to look for a restaurant. A gendarme, whom I accosted, took me by the arm and graciously escorted me to a modest place near the public fountain. The meal was bad but I was now within reach of Knossus and too excited to be disturbed by such a trifle. After lunch I went across the street to a café and had a Turkish coffee. Two Germans who had arrived by the same plane were discussing the lecture on Wagner which they were to give that evening; they seemed fatuously unaware that they had come with their musical poison to the birthplace of Venizelos. I left to take a quick stroll through the town. A few doors away, in a converted mosque, a cinema announced the coming of Laurel and Hardy. The children who were clustered about the billboards were evidently as enthusiastic about these clowns as the children of Dubuque or Kenosha might be. I believe the cinema was called "The Minoan." I wondered vaguely if there would be a cinema at Knossus too, announcing perhaps the coming of the Marx Brothers.

Both extracts from "The Colossus of Maroussi" by Henry Miller (1941).

16/11/20

68. Kalavryta

Mum, Dad and Edwin went on a trip to Kalavryta recently. It is a town known to all Greeks and few foreigners. Nestling in an Alpine-like valley and surrounded by pine-covered hills in a mountainous area of the northern Peloponnese, it is famous for two historical events, one glorious, the other gruesome. The area is popular with Greek visitors in winter for its skiing facilities on the nearby slopes of Mount Chelmos and all year round as a site of pilgrimage. It is also well-known for its mountain food, for example forest honey, and for its dairy produce. The feta cheese from this region is rightly celebrated for its flavour and texture. As for the meat, the local restaurants offer wild boar stew, goat in oil and lemon, goat soup (“really delicious,” said Mum and Edwin whilst Dad tucked into the best saganaki he’s ever eaten) and other choice delicacies abhorrent to vegans. The trout, both fresh and smoked, from a fish farm encountered on the journey home is stupendously tasty.

Perched on top of a picturesque cliff four kilometres southwest of Kalavryta and offering a view of the entire valley is the Monastery of Agia Lavra, which is inextricably linked with the Greek War of Independence. It was here that the call for Ελευθερία ή Θάνατος, *Eleftheria i Thanatos*, “Freedom or Death,” was first heard on 25 March 1821, launching the revolt against the Ottoman Empire. On that day, having performed a doxology and administered an oath to the Peloponnesian fighters, Metropolitan Germanos of Patras raised the revolutionary flag under the plane tree outside the gate of the monastery. The raising of the banner is re-enacted every year on Independence Day.



Dad stands beneath the plane tree where the flag of the Greek Revolution was raised on the Feast of the Annunciation (Evangelismos), 25th March 1821.

This site will feature prominently in next year’s national 200th Anniversary Independence celebrations,

currently being organised by Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, who not only delivered the 2004 Olympic Games for Athens but is known to Dad as the parent of two boys at the Hellenic College of London in the 1990s. But more of Gianna later.

In the centre of town stands an old-fashioned, one-platformed railway station, the southern terminus of the Diakopto–Kalavryta rack railway. Built by Italian engineers between 1885 and 1895, it was the brain-child of Charilaos Trikoupis, the modernising and progressive Prime Minister who was also behind the digging of the Corinth Canal. Another project that he envisioned was a bridge between Rion and Antirion across the Gulf of Corinth, but this scheme was beyond the technical and financial capabilities of Greece at the time. When this magnificent bridge was finally completed in 2004 it was officially named the Charilaos Trikoupis Bridge in his honour. But the implementation of his ambitious infrastructure plans brought the country to financial ruin. In December 1893 he stood before parliament and, making the most famous comment of his career, shocked Greece’s international creditors by declaring: “Δυστυχώς επτωχεύσαμεν,” *Thystychos eptochefsamen*, “Unfortunately, we are bankrupt..”

Nevertheless his legacy of the single-track Odontotos (toothed) railway lives on, delighting all who make the hour-long journey. Through tunnels and over bridges it runs steeply down to the sea for 22 kilometres along the spectacular limestone Vouraikos Gorge and past the Mega Spilaio Monastery, which appears to perch precariously, vertiginously aloft on the side of a sheer rockface.



A trip on the Odontotos is a “must” for any visitor to the northern Peloponnese.

Opposite the railway station stands the former primary school which now houses the Municipal Museum of the Kalavryta Holocaust in a restored building directly linked to the tragic events of 13th December 1943, during the WW2 Occupation of Greece.

The Peloponnese was under the relatively mild authority of the Italians until their capitulation in September 1943, after which the Germans took over control. Greek partisan attacks increased from this time on and by the winter were causing considerable difficulties for the occupying forces, whose policy was to respond to German deaths with executions and wholesale slaughter of civilians in reprisal. One of the most infamous examples took place in Kalavryta, near which 81 Wehrmacht soldiers had been captured by the Resistance and four killed on the spot. The rest were initially treated as prisoners of war but then shot. Two survivors raised the alarm and five days later, in retribution for the killing of the captured soldiers, German troops rounded up all the male residents of Kalavryta who were aged 14 years and above and marched them to a field just outside the residential area. Some 1300 women and children were locked in the primary school, after which the town was set on fire while the men were forced to watch from the nearby hillside. Then the 438 men and boys were machine-gunned. Only 13 survived. The women managed to escape from the school building before it caught fire. The next day

the Monastery of Agia Lavra was burnt down and three monks killed. In total, 693 Greeks were killed in the region during “Operation Kalavryta.”

Dad initiated a potentially difficult conversation with the very knowledgeable museum historian by asking him directly about contemporary Greek attitudes towards the Germans, especially in Kalavryta. The helpful young curator replied that generally there was still some ambivalence, much of which in recent years had related more to the harsh conditions of the financial bailouts imposed during Greece’s recent ten-year recession than to WW2. With the passing of generations feelings about the war had softened. However, he added that there are still some elderly Kalavrytans who will welcome German tourists into their houses as traditional hospitality demands but cannot bring themselves to speak to them. Interestingly, although most visitors to Kalavryta are Greek, the largest number of foreigners who come are from Germany.



The Place of Sacrifice: the words on the left: “No more wars”, on the right “Peace.”

In the central square of Kalavryta time has literally stood still. The Cathedral, which faces the plateia and is dedicated unsurprisingly to The Annunciation, has two clock towers. Whereas the clock on the right displays the correct time of day or night, the one on the left is stopped for ever at 2.35pm, a permanent reminder of the moment of the massacre. A more prominent symbol of remembrance is a large white cross situated on an eastern ridge above the town. It overlooks the memorial site, “The Place of Sacrifice,” where the executions took place and which is also the burial ground of the victims.

It is impossible to visit Kalavryta without encountering both the illustrious and the tragic aspects of its history. The Wardrobes have promised themselves a longer visit in the near future. Any downsides? Yes, Dad spotted a China City emporium near the centre. At least there is no sign yet of a Jumbo store - the tawdry Greek equivalent of Woolworths.

The Templetons took the news of James's departure well. They were surprised yet philosophical. Peter was pleased that his disciple, now a close friend, had the confidence to break out in a new direction. "Never stop howling at the moon," he said. Later, on James's final "training" jaunt (which now included about 40 middle management and admin staff) to Sotogrande, they had a quiet hour together in a San Roque café where Peter expatiated on the supreme virtue necessary for a happy life: self-belief. "Your talent will be as great as your self-doubt allows," was one of his more memorable comments.

It was on this same trip that, as Los recalled in his well-received eulogy at Peter's funeral, the two of them had a particularly heavy late-night drinking session. In order not to have to stem the flow of one of his lengthy homilies on God knows what, Peter relieved himself in his empty wine glass, thus obviating the need to leave the table. Some time later, fully engaged in the ongoing discussion, he drank deeply from the glass and gave absolutely no indication that he realised it held urine rather than vino blanco. Turning to Los, he pulled a face and said to him, "Yuch, I thought we'd bought some pretty rough stuff in for the staff to drink, but that's as bad as retsina," then continued with his current train of thought. This story has been verified by a third party, Jenny Templeton, who witnessed the whole episode, so splendidly and quintessentially Peter.

James would continue to play golf with the three brothers for many years, mostly either at Sotogrande or Liphook. It was Peter who taught James that successful putting is virtually all about mental strength, which he possessed in bucketloads. "I have just two thoughts in my mind before every putt," he once said. "*Intention and belief. I intend to sink this putt and I believe I shall..*" And they both sank a higher percentage of their putts as a result.

A year or so later, after a round of golf at Sotogrande, Paul confided to James that they should have kept him by offering earlier "a piece of the action," but in 1990 they weren't quite ready to give equity shares in their businesses to non-family members. They would do this for senior managers in the future with new ventures. Who knows whether James would have been tempted to stay on, now that there was a Hellenic bride waiting expectantly for him at the altar?

James's Lansdowne colleagues were generous in their congratulations. His diary entry for Friday 16th March 1990 reads as follows: "It was fun to tell Roger, Los and Lesley, and then the staff, about my leaving at the end of the academic year. Also interesting to gauge their reactions, from Los's stunned and silent weighing-up of the implications for him, through Roger's self-satisfied glow at correctly predicting the event, to receptionist Sarah's absolute shock and dismay. Selwyn, Mark Silcox and David Tuckett have all expressed genuine pleasure at my success. Monday will bring more responses..

My opening gambit to the Heads of Department, "I have decided to take over from Roger (who had previously announced his Bradfield appointment) as Chairman of the Escape Committee," was not fully understood until I think Los replied with "Who's going where?" or similar. JFJ's representation of his mixed feelings at the good news was well put by my Number Two: "This is like hearing, whilst still inside, that a fellow Colditz POW has made it back to the UK, where he's enjoying a gin and tonic at the Savoy Bar – joy and envy combined." "

The following Friday James attended the first of many Hellenic College National Day Celebrations, held in the large basement hall of St Columba's Church. The event was a delightful festival of singing and traditional dancing and it introduced him to what would become one of his favourite tunes: Μήλο μου κόκκινο, *Milo mou kokkino*, "My Red Apple," danced to a Kalamatianos, the simplest and most popular of Greek folk dances. Or possibly to a Macedonian Syrtos? His memory fails him. However, he did record

in his diary that he found the colourful costumes “stunning” and that he was very impressed by the “big family” atmosphere of this happy occasion.

A few of the more astute parents guessed who the strange Englishman in the second row was and approached him afterwards. One of these was a Mr Angelakos, a shipowner with three children at the school, who later in life would become mayor of the island of Oinousses (Inoussa). James had never heard of it, but would soon learn of its significance in the Greek shipping community. In fact, he would learn more about the shipping industry in his first year at the school than about anything connected with headmastering.



HCL primary children in their traditional national costumes, worn at the March 25th and October 28th Celebrations.

His first Chairman of Governors, Diamantis Pateras, would also turn out to be an Inoussan. This tiny island off the north-east coast of Chios only has about 800 inhabitants, yet it is the origin of a cluster of successful ship-owning families: Lemos, Pateras, Hadjipateras, Kollakis and Lyras. Later on, when James asked Diamantis, a shy, humble man with a dry sense of humour, why he had never come across Oinousses before, the reply was proffered with a wry and somewhat apologetic smile, “We prefer to keep our island a secret. We do not encourage any form of tourism.” James then asked him where exactly it was. “It is very close to Turkey. We have a saying: if you stand on the eastern shore of the island, you can see the moustaches of the Turks opposite..”

The HCL Chairmanship rotated every two years and James would be fortunate in his collaboration not only with Mr Pateras but with all his successors – except the last.

During the summer term James conducted a couple of briefing visits to the school and met the senior management. He also met Edmee Leventis and Lydia Carras again, who explained why they had been the Governors most instrumental in ousting Lydia Anderson. Hearing about the different factions within and outside Pont Street he realised that he needed to become an expert in Balkan politics

Greek-style – fast. He had already worked out that the major internal faultline was the internecine warfare that raged between the Head of Primary and the Head of Greek, an issue he would need to address straightaway.

One Sunday in June he would also meet some of the teaching staff at King Constantine's 50th Birthday Party weekend-long celebration. In accordance with the highly embossed invitation card Pauline and James presented themselves at Spencer House, an aristocratic 18th century townhouse off St James's Street, overlooking Green Park, and owned by Princess Diana's father.

They were immediately ushered via a temporary walkway over the garden wall into the grounds of the neighbouring and equally grand neoclassical mansion, Bridgewater House. The marquee they entered was the largest they have ever seen, before or since. And it had two floors!

They felt slightly lost amongst the hundreds of guests, who were mainly Greek, until, God bless him, the ever-observant Santos spotted them. He greeted them warmly and led them to the HCL table, where James at least knew Roger Whittaker. Soon he was being given the third degree by two terribly serious young Greek teachers, Alexandra Samara and Katia Kollatou, who wanted to know all his ideas for change. James was polite but revealed nothing of his intentions. In order to escape further inquisition the Wardrobes took themselves off for a tour of the marquee and whatever rooms in the house were open to visitors.

On the broad staircase of the house they witnessed an extraordinary altercation between an elderly Greek male and a Greek lady who turned out to be an HCL teacher. Elsa Turcenioff was escorting two or three teenage girls in national costume back to the marquee whilst being loudly harangued by "Captain John" Latsis, the billionaire shipping magnate who owned Bridgewater House. The girls were at the party for a show of Greek dancing and were under Elsa's supervision. Apparently Latsis had invited them for an upstairs personal tour of the building, to which Elsa, in loco parentis and diligent in her duty of care, had objected. She was now in the process of chaperoning them back to safety in numbers. Latsis is known to the British media as the man who lent his 400ft yacht to Prince Charles on numerous occasions, including his "second honeymoon" with Princess Diana in 1992.

Later on, Pauline became aware that they were being stalked. Sure enough, wherever they went a strange-looking middle-aged Englishman was following them and staring at James. They shook him off and returned to the HCL group. A few minutes later this odd bird appeared there too and was promptly introduced to them as ... Alf Ledsham, Physics teacher. High marks, Alf, for scientific observation, none for social interaction. Oh dear, this lot were going to need careful handling..

They had travelled up from another Birthday Party at a Solent country hotel the previous night. The 40th of their good friend and GP, Andy Neville-Towle had been a less formal, more relaxing affair. Andy is one of triplet brothers, whom James had first met in the 1980s over the fence between Shipley Court and Ship House Surgery where everybody's favourite Liphook doctor was living in the upstairs flat with his Australian wife, Susie. They shared a common interest in golf and went on some memorable "golf and booze-buying" trips across the Channel with fellow golfing chums, Simon Sheppard and John Coley. Once, on the return journey, the boot of John's car had been so full of wine cases that its headlights were pointing at the sky rather than the road. Andy and Susie would return to Sydney in 2000, sorely missed both by Pauline and James and all his many patients. He is caring, compassionate and good-humoured, just what you need both by the bedside and in the bunker.

As for King Constantine's bash, the Wardrobes had a most entertaining day but they never so much as caught a glimpse of their host or any of his family. But then they hadn't brought him a birthday

present, had they? What do you buy a former monarch for his birthday, anyway?

This video is the nearest reproduction I can find of the joyful atmosphere created by the HCL children when they sang and danced to "My Red Apple."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W939JvWxoMM>

Μήλο μου κόκκινο ρόιδο βαμμένο

γιατί με μάρανες τον πικραμένο

Παένω κι έρχομαι μα δε σε βρίσκω

βρίσκω την πόρτα σου μανταλωμένη

Τα παραθυρούδια σου φεγγολούνε

ρωτώ την πόρτα σου "πού πάει η κυρά σου;"

Κυρά μ' δεν είναι δω πάεισι στη βρύση

πάεισι να πιει νερό και να γεμίσει.

Red apple of mine (like a) coloured pomegrate

Why did I languish I am so pained

I come and go but still can't find you

I look at your door and it is latched

Your windows glow like the moon

I ask your door 'where is your lady going?'

Lady is not here she is going to the fountain

She is going to drink some water and to fill her water supply.

Μήλο μου κόκκινο, Milo Mou Kokkino, a traditional Macedonian folk song.

12/12/20

69. A Tale of Two “Prescriptions” and Three Ties

Those of you who used to fly into Athens before March 2001 will remember the old international airport, Ellinikon, which was squeezed between the mountains and the sea, located to the south of the city centre and west of the up-market suburb of Glyfada. Dad recalls the final descent from the east over the bunkers, greens and fairways of the capital’s only golf course. One of its quirks was that there were two terminals, one on the west of the runway for Olympic Airways and the East Terminal for all other carriers. By road in light traffic they were 15 minutes distant from each other. This caught James and Pauline out in 1985 when they arrived by Olympic and two weeks later handed in their hire car at the same terminal before their return flight with British Airways. Λάθος! *Lathos!* Mistake! Plus a modicum of panic when their BA flight was inexplicably absent from the departure screens until they were informed that they were on completely the wrong side of the airport. Time was short, but thanks to a taxi driver who didn’t hang about, they made their flight and learnt their lesson.

Since its closure and replacement by the excellent Eleftherios Venizelos Athens International Airport well in advance of the 2004 Olympic Games, a debate has raged about what to do with this prime piece of available real estate. A metropolitan park? A coastal resort? Or a commercial development to attract much-needed foreign investment? The site is some three times the size of Monaco at 1,530 acres (or nearly 2.5 square miles), with the result that successive privatising governments and entrepreneurs have been smacking their lips at the huge opportunities this vacant space offers in a congested city such as Athens. Unfortunately all the various projects to redevelop the land so far have failed to get off the ground (inappropriate metaphor, sorry).

Pre-2004 the north-west portion was redeveloped for various Olympic sport venues, including canoe and kayak slalom, field hockey, baseball, softball, basketball and fencing. Sixteen years later, a large part of the former airport is still derelict and not much has been done to change that. Many immigrants and refugees have set up camp there, much to the annoyance of the local community.



Grand design for the former airport at Ellinikon. You can see Glyfada golf course on the far right.

The latest plan, much touted recently in the Greek media, involves a 950-million-euro investment by a consortium which includes a casino business, Mohegan Gaming & Entertainment, based in Connecticut and owned by a Native American tribe, who in the past may or may not have been called the Mohicans. Anyway, their Greek-sounding chief executive officer, Mario Kontomerkos, has stated that once the necessary licences are issued the contractor's formal obligation is to complete the project within three years. A realistic estimate would therefore bring the casino's opening day to about the end of 2024. Kontomerkos added that special emphasis will be placed on the "Greek footprint" of the complex, which "aspires to become a popular leisure and entertainment destination for people from all around the world, with restaurants, conference halls, luxury hotels and cultural events." You can get more of an idea of the prodigious scale of the enterprise at <https://thehellinikon.com/en/>

Dad is preparing to take bets on whether the Ellinikon project or the Petalidi bypass will be completed first. He is offering shorter odds on success for Chingachgook's descendants than for the roadbuilders of Messinia.

Meanwhile, he is mourning the passing of one of the great laissez-faire traditions of Greece, sunk by the ineluctable logic of medical science. Until September you were able to buy antibiotics over the counter from any chemist without a prescription. Cheap too, at <3€ for a week's course, you could pop them like Smarties for the slightest ailment, as most Greeks do. They don't really care about the reduction in efficacy through overuse argument. "I've got a slight cold. Where are the M & Ms, αγάπη μου, *agapi mou*, my love?" Then the government decided that it was time for the country and its citizens to start behaving responsibly, hence the recent directive.

Dad likes to keep a reserve supply of amoxicillin "just in case.." and was upset to find his request denied by Thanasis, the friendly Petalidi pharmacist. Well, a deferred denial. "OK, I'll give you them today but it's the last time," he whispered apologetically.

Soon afterwards our devious Dad comes up with a wheeze which avoids having to go to the doctor for a prescription. He happens to be visiting Dionysis, our lovely vet, about some other matter and he casually asks him, "Do you ever have occasion to prescribe amoxicillin for animals?"

"Yes, but only for dogs, not cats," smiles Dionysis, knowing what's coming next. "The bigger the better."

"I think I've just acquired a German Shepherd, called Bruno, and he's big," winks Dad. "To save me going to the doctor, can you do me a prescription for a couple of packets?"

"Of course, but if the pharmacist asks, you have to say it's for Bruno, who has... (*at this point Dionysis gives the name of some incomprehensible dog disease*). And don't take this prescription to the chemist next door. He's been a friend of mine for forty years, but he's fed up with me now because he says I'm writing too many antibiotics scripts for owners rather than for their pets." He writes "Bruno" carefully and conspiratorially on the top of the order and hands it over. "No charge."

Thus is achieved an effective, typically hellenic solution and a partial restoration of the traditional status quo.

Getting round another of the government's new medical measures also required some ingenuity. Until this winter if you wanted a flu jab you just turned up at the pharmacist and for a small sum he or she stuck a needle in your arm. Again Thanasis finds himself apologising to Dad: "You need to bring a doctor's prescription this year..."

So off he toddles to Doctor Kyriakos, armed with his EHIC medical card.

“Do you have Greek medical insurance?” enquires the local quack, a short, excitable man who reminds Dad of the comedian Bobby Ball.

“No, just the EU blue card.”

“No good,” proclaims Dr K. “Since Greece bought only four million flu vaccinations for an estimated need of eight million people, there is a priority list this year, with insured Greeks at the top. Sorry!”

“What do you suggest?”

“Find a Greek, preferably over 60 and in a vulnerable group, who doesn’t want the injection. Ask him or her to get the prescription for it anyway, and give it to you. Then you go to the chemist and...etc, etc. Good luck!”

Dad rings his friend Andreas and explains his dilemma. Two days later the dependable hotelier calls back. “I have your medication, as required. Without a prescription. No problem.”

“How come?”

“I’ve already had my vaccination, but I contacted my doctor who is a personal friend. He told me to go to a *specific pharmacist at a specific time* and quietly say his name.. I handed over 10€ and was then slipped a small package from the refrigerator. All very James Bond. Job done.” And job done by Thanasis the next day.

Sometimes it makes you wonder why the government even bothers...

“More Smarties, anyone?” “Rock on, Tommy!”

Dino Goulandris rang James up and asked him if he would be prepared to make a short speech at the HCL Prize Giving Day at the end of the summer term. “We’ve told the parents about your background and so on in a letter,” he explained, “but they want to get a look at you for themselves and can’t wait until September. I’m afraid impatience is a national characteristic, but it would be good PR if you can face it.” James was happy to agree, provided Lydia agreed too. He decided to wow the audience by beginning his speech in Greek. He knew that this would go down very well but he was also aware that he was making himself a hostage to fortune. He would be obliged to use Greek on every big public occasion thereafter. And so it was for the next fourteen years.

He remembered the hilarious success of his Best Man’s speech at Anthony and Pia Gay’s wedding in Esbjerg in 1978. A heavy night’s consumption of Akvavit (Danish snaps) in the company of Pia’s two playful sisters on the eve of the ceremony had resulted in their writing a phonetic Danish version of his opening five minutes, which went down stormingly with all the guests, Dansk og Engelsk alike, as well as with the bride and groom. At least this time he would understand what the hell he was talking about.

He had his text checked by Eirene Crook, Head of Greek, and comfortable with the grammar and content he focussed on delivering a half-decent pronunciation, in the best traditions of clever African Grey parrots rather than the numerous British politicians mocked for their accent when they attempted French, the worst of whom was probably Ted Heath. He survived this first Hellenic College public performance intact and with his philhellenic credentials untarnished, although he was hunted down and pinned in a corner by a few of the more persistent and curious mothers afterwards. On his

release he found himself in Sloane Street. In celebration and relief he bought two very expensive and extravagantly colourful printed ties from the shop of fashion designer Georgina von Etzdorf. He treasured them for decades, mementos of the dawn of his new journey, until he undertook a massive clear-out before he departed to Greece for good. In the meantime he was content to have arrived at what he would often refer to as his “oasis of Hellenism in the middle of Knightsbridge.” The school was the nearest he could get to his spiritual home without actually being there.

All that remained at Lansdowne were the last rites, a joint Leaving Party held for him and Roger Keeley, who was off to Bradfield. His memory of this is patchy, since he drank far too much, including an injudicious quantity of Elias Gourtsoyiannis’s home-brewed family raki. There are however a few surviving remembrances, glimpsed fleetingly through the ever-thickening smoke of the past. His official leaving present, organised by assistant bursar Jenny Lyder, was perfect: a magnificent maroon Parker Duofold fountain pen, with JW engraved on its cap, which became his writing weapon of choice up to the end of his headmasterly career and beyond. He finished his thank-you speech with the final sentence of *Catch-22*, “*The knife came down, missing him by inches, and he took off*,” and then issued his personalised battlecry, “*Let the atrocities commence*.” This had always been a favourite expression of his father, who claimed that Roman emperors used it when declaring open the murderous contests of the Coliseum. Almost certainly not true, but a good line to get a party started. James has been using it ever since.

In his speech he had paid tribute to Roger, mentioning inter alia the geographer’s extensive knowledge of the Sao Paulo public transport system, as witnessed by James in a recent classroom observation. Recollection now becomes more hazy. Had the staffroom wags organised yet another strippergram for their long-suffering colleague? Was she dressed as a policewoman, who announced “Anything you say will be taken down and may be used in evidence?” Did the assembled multitude actually shout out in unison, “Knickers!”? Probably not, but it would have been thoroughly in keeping with the way the evening was deteriorating into classic Lansdownian abandon.

The outbound Principal then proceeded to get more legless than he has ever been since. He half-remembers sharing some of Elias’s Cretan firewater with his black-shirted Head of English and declaring admiration for his pale yet elegantly contrasting tie. Los immediately whipped it off and presented it to James as a leaving gift.

In the dregs of the night and before he lapsed into a drunken stupor, he offered to have sex with one of the Lansdowne College secretaries, who was possibly called Lucinda. Her polite refusal seemed perfectly logical at the time. She said, “That would be marvellous, James, but I’ve only got one kidney.” Then he passed out.

In November 2019 he found himself in Gloucester Road on his way to an association dinner in an Italian restaurant in Old Brompton Road. For fifteen minutes he wallowed in a fog of nostalgia as he strolled past many of his familiar haunts. Many of the shops and eateries had changed since the ‘80s, but he was heartened to see that pubs such as The Hereford Arms and The Drayton Arms had stood the test of time. They looked no more run-down than they had in 1990.

Shortly after he left Palace Gate for the last time James went sailing with Chris Cooling, a Lansdowne IT teacher. Chris had a Vancouver 27 (ie 27 ft) pocket cruiser in which he had sailed single-handed across the Atlantic and back, so as a sailor he was the real deal. As a second job he was often asked to put a crew together to move large yachts from one country to another, eg Ireland to Spain, or France to Greece. He kept his own boat somewhere in London Docklands, from where the old salt and the absolute beginner set off down the Thames and round the Kent coast. James remembers lazy days

in the reaches of the Medway estuary with the weather perfect, gentle, heart-warming. The musical accompaniment to the rhythmic splash of the water, the mesmeric glittering of the sun on a benign sea, the pulsing flap of rigging and sail in the light breeze, was the second best Pink Floyd album (2nd = DSOTM; 1st = WYWH, natch?) and similar 70s classics in Chris's onboard collection.

In one conversation Chris talked about the dangers facing a lone sailor on a long crossing. One of the major single-handed challenges is managing the need to sleep, since a good watch must be kept at all times whilst at sea. But for him the greater risk was psychological, due to prolonged social isolation on a solo voyage in the days before modern global communication enabled regular human contact. It is not a myth that you can go crazy if cooped up alone at sea for weeks on end. He showed James the navigation logbook of his return trip. It started off with succinctly recorded readings and events, written in a neat hand – all very normal. Then at some point towards the end the handwriting degenerates into a childish scrawl and the narrative descends to the level of the ravings of an unsound mind. Chris's seamanship got him home, with his instinct to thank rather than his reason. The spectre of the ill-fated Donald Crowhurst, who went mad and committed suicide in the 1968-69 Golden Globe solo round-the-world yacht race, comes to mind.



A Vancouver 27 similar to Chris Cooling's.

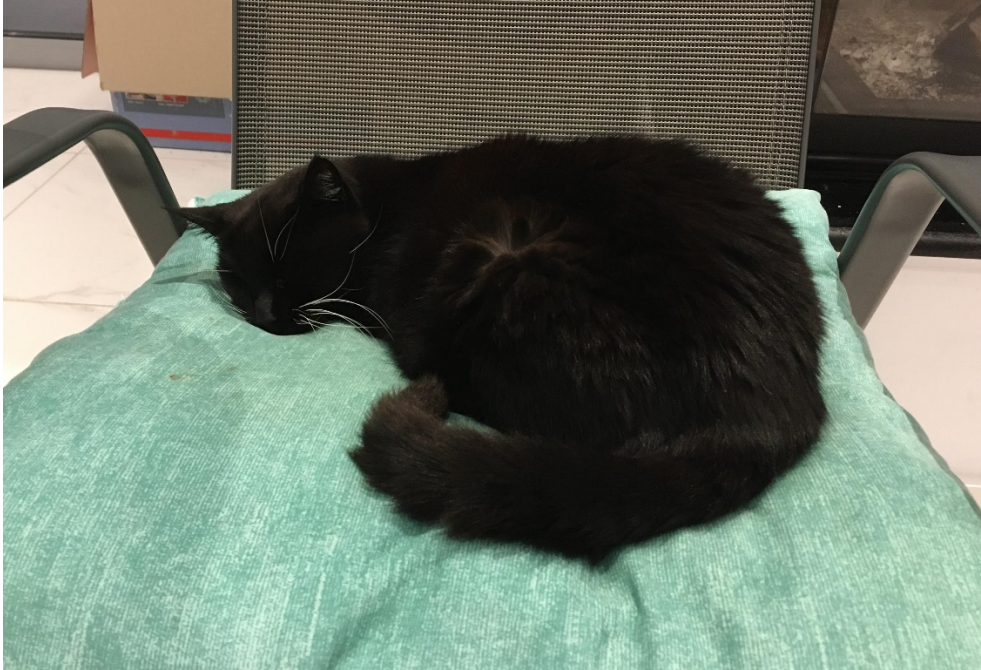
James went into work in August. There was no one about apart from Santos, Sydney and Maria, until the A-level and GCSE results came out when Roger Whittaker arrived to handle distribution and outcomes. Since the Fifth and Sixth Forms were small this was not burdensome. For the first time in ten years James was not embroiled in the midsummer madness of The Silly Season. He contemplated the inevitable state of goings-on just a mile away as the cuckoo flies. He could not resist a broad smile before he settled down to the self-appointed task of reading every single file in every cabinet in the Head's Study. Especially the personnel files..



A very Happy Christmas and an early-vaccinated New Year to all my readers!

18/01/21

70. Farewell, Minnie : 5th October 2005 – 4th January 2021



Minnie sleeping peacefully on New Year's Day, three days before her death.

In *The Waste Land* T.S.Eliot was wrong about April. January is the cruellest month. It turns out that Dad was worrying about the wrong cat last autumn. Minnie died after a short illness on 4th January, so I must now soldier on as the last of the three sisters from that glorious litter of October 2005.

I reckon that quite a few of you knew her from either Liphook or Chrani, so here is the brief, sad story. She refused to eat on New Year's Day and spent all day sleeping on her special cushion. Dad took her to Dionysis the following morning. She had a mouth infection but blood tests revealed that her kidneys were failing. He kept her in for treatment, as he had done twenty months ago when she had the same symptoms. On that occasion Dionysis managed to stabilise her condition, but this time he couldn't save her. She had improved a little on the Sunday ("She tried to scratch me!" he said), but when he came in to work the next morning she had recently passed away, dying in her sleep; her body was still warm. Dad had expected the worst but his premonition fortified him little against the pain of the loss. We go back fifteen years as his pet companions and provide a strong emotional link to our First Mum.

He drove to Kalamata immediately to collect her and with Stephanos's help buried her next to Lulu's grave, a second limestone cairn raised between an old olive and a young lemon tree, overlooking the house and not by accident visible from Dad's office. Crazy, sensitive Stephanos sang an improvisation about the everlasting spirit of cats.

So what was she like, my loud-purring twin? A good-looking black cat, with white socks and chest blaze, who was notoriously independent and until her older years difficult to catch. From kittenhood Minnie was the least tame of the three of us. She was the best hunter/killer in the family and the one who saw off stray cats who tried to steal our food. As you know, she loved to eat and could be relied upon to

hoover any leftovers in her sisters' bowls. She was famously wary of two-leggers, always running from strangers, especially men. Ears back, tail down... away! Our First Mum affectionately called her "fritty cat" (as frit = frightened). This is the complete opposite of sociable me, who will approach and befriend anyone and everyone. She was sparing in bestowing her trust, but she recognised true cat-lovers straightaway. These included, notably, Mary Lou White, Pam Todd, Dad's sister and brother-in-law Margaret and Graham, daughter Edith (who calls us her "sisters"), and, more recently in Greece, Dick Duker (who feeds nine English, Greek and German cats in Chrani on a regular basis). After her right eye was removed nearly two years ago, which inconvenienced her not a jot, she became significantly more loving and was always looking to jump on Dad's lap for attention, which he was more than happy to give her. Farewell, and rest in peace, Minnie mou.

As for Dad, I am keeping a closer watch on him than usual. He is assuaging his grief by listening to jazz, especially the great saxophonists: Bird, Prez, Ornette, Hawk, Cannonball, Sonny, Coltrane, Getz, his personal favourite Ben Webster and the peerless Dexter Gordon. I'm not sure that having Dexter's version of the classic ballad, "*I'm a fool to want you*," on repeat is good for his mental health (you can listen to it yourself at the end of this chapter), but it's encouraging that he is also adopting some basic tenets of Mindfulness, especially the one about not thinking about anything except the next ten minutes, viz. whether to make a cup of tea or not. He is also contemplating nugatory matters which he calls The Big Questions. Here's a few examples:

- What is the difference between a cad and a bounder?
- Was the greatest 20th century chanteuse Ella Fitzgerald or Judy Garland?
- Has there ever been a movie sequel better than its original (apart from *The Godfather Part II* of course)?
- Why are men often called c*nts or tw*ts whereas women are never called knobs, pricks, tools or dicks?
- What is the point of lettuce?

If you feel you know the answers to these or other equally trifling issues, dear readers, please feel free to e-mail me with your comments and suggestions. Be assured that I shall only pass on to Dad for consideration totally inconsequential topics.

Thankfully his NY resolution is to give up doomscrolling, abandoning the obsessive search on his mobile for news, which is mostly bad and usually about the continuing devastation of the Plague, the unintended consequences of Brexit or the shitshow that is US politics. "Why do they need two-and-a-half months to transfer power?" he moans. "If the furniture removals van arrived the day after the election, as in other democracies, there would have been much less opportunity for all this festering grumpy-trumpy nonsense. Who needs a lame duck President anyway? And as for the decrepit electoral college system, don't get me started, Mickie.." OK, Dad, can we get back to hibernating now? Which is more or less what a winter self-isolating lockdown comprises.

The pandemic in Greece? The situation seems to be improving at last in Thessaloniki and the North, thanks to the continuance of the second national lockdown, which started in early November and has been strictly maintained to date, with little let-up for Christmas and New Year. It looks set to be extended for a few more weeks. Meanwhile the vaccination programme has barely started.

To much, but not enough, national outrage the Greek Orthodox Church flexed its muscle and defied government restrictions which include church closure by conducting services on Epiphany (which is called Theophania here). Depending on your point of view, it was diplomatic or weak of Mitsotakis not to take the Synod on. Imagine if the Archbishop of Canterbury had told Boris that the Church of England would be flouting public health measures on religious grounds. You can read the jaw-dropping tale of the Greek bishops' defiance here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/06/greek-churches-open-on-epiphany-despite-coronavirus>

At least the Theophania celebrations, part of which relates to the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan, were kept low-key, with few "Dives of the Cross" taking place this year. This is the ritual whereby the priest throws a cross in the local sea/lake/river and some of the hardy faithful dive into the icy waters to catch and rescue it. Sometimes no one goes in and the priest has to get it back himself.

A diary entry on 28th September 1990, three weeks into James's first HCL term, reads: "When am I going to hit stormy waters for the first time? I can't believe how smooth this voyage is so far..." The start of the academic year had been busy but nothing like the non-stop madness he was used to. There was plenty to do, but he had been given time to implement the changes he had planned. And he had a lot to learn, not least about the direct impact of Greek politics on the history and the current situation of the school.

When the Hellenic College opened in 1980, the centre-right New Democracy (*Nea Dimokratia*) government, formed by Konstantinos Karamanlis after the fall of the military junta in 1974, was within a year of being succeeded by the left-wing administration of Andreas Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). This lasted for two parliamentary terms from October 1981 until July 1989. The arrival of the PASOK government had profound implications for the fledgling London school, which the leftists regarded as a "nest of royalists," favoured and even partially funded by the previous Greek Ministry of Education.

The initial bilingual curriculum tried to force a quart into a pint pot. As much as possible of the English national curriculum and its Greek counterpart was crammed into the weekly timetable, an ambitious but doomed attempt at cakeism. What killed it off after about a year was not practical unfeasibility but politics in Greece. The Founding Fathers, ie King Constantine and shipowners Dino Goulandris, Diamantis Pateras and Fotis Lykiardopulo, had managed to do a deal with the New Democracy government, whereby it would pay the salaries of the Greek teachers, maintaining their pension rights etc, as if they were teaching in a state school in Greece. The ND party was the natural home of the monarchist rump, even though Karamanlis had cleverly shafted the possibility of Constantine's return in 1974 and ensured that he would continue to remain *persona non grata* in his former kingdom until at least 1993. The fascinating story of post-junta machinations is a red herring for another day.

When PASOK took over, any notion of supporting "the King's school" was anathema, deeply repugnant to their left-wing sensibilities. So they told the half-dozen Greek teachers that unless they gave up their jobs at the Hellenic College of London and returned home they would forever lose their teaching status and corresponding entitlements in Greece. This ultimatum was also made to the Headmaster, Mr Kanellopoulos (whom James made a point of meeting many years later in Athens and found to be a very friendly and supportive fan of the school and its backers). Along with the other teachers, Kanellopoulos could not afford to lose his career and pension benefits, so with one brave exception they reluctantly resigned en masse and departed. The surviving member of the original Greek department was still

on the staff when James arrived in 1990. She was Anastasia Psoni, a highly experienced and sensitive “philologos,” whose daughter attended the school and who had no desire to return to Greece. For this act alone she deserves her place in the Fifth Sphere of Heaven which Dante reserves for Warriors of Faith.

The HCL governors acted swiftly and decisively in the face of this existential crisis. They closed the school, shed themselves of all connection with the Greek state and reopened the next day as a completely independent institution, to be registered as an educational charity and funded by fees, trust income and donations from supporters. The academic timetable was modified, with a preponderance of lessons taught in English but about 20% of the core Greek curriculum retained throughout the year groups, made up of elements of history, geography, Orthodox theology in addition to the language teaching. This led to early exams in O-level and A-level Modern Greek, with an O-level option in Ancient Greek. Such was the more manageable and appropriate curricular state of play in 1990, not forgetting the weekly Greek Dancing lesson for each of the primary classes. These took place directly opposite the Head’s Study in the Assembly Hall whence the captivating sound of folk music and the dance mistress Erasmia Panayiotopoulou’s cries of encouragement became the constant, delightful backdrop to James’s school day.

In a further attempt to undermine the Hellenic College, the PASOK government opened a rival “Greek Embassy School” in Acton, fully funded by their Ministry of Education. No fees charged, primary classes only. However, it never rivalled the more prestigious school in Knightsbridge. Throughout his tenure James never lost a pupil to this establishment and on the other hand from time to time he even enrolled a few refugees from it.

Some amusing anecdotes of the creation myth reached James’s ears soon after he arrived. One treasured story related how the first million pounds was raised for the Hellenic College Trust. Picture the scene. In his Mayfair office Constantine is confined to his desk, phone in hand, with Dino Goulandris standing earnestly at his shoulder. Dino meticulously provides a long sequence of telephone numbers of all his wealthy shipping contacts for the King to ring up and put the squeeze on. HMC’s job is just to announce to these magnates who he is and say, à la Bob Geldorf, something along the lines of: “Give me your money for my new Greek school..” Judging by the list of names on the “Major Benefactors” honours board outside the Assembly Hall, it was a successful tactic. You didn’t get on this board for less than £25k. Today that would equate to about £83k, an amount not to be sniffed at. And it wasn’t just Greek companies and individuals up there in gold lettering. John Fredriksen, for example, at the time Norway’s richest man and still the owner of the world’s largest oil tanker fleet, was near the top. There was also a “Benefactors” board, which you could get on for a mere £5k, a piffling and embarrassing amount for these billionaires. James suspected that the shame of being damned with faint praise and outed as a skinflint by appearing on this board was enough to encourage some of them to cough up = or > £25 grand.

Whatever the prevailing policies and frequently hostile attitude of successive Hellenic Republic governments might be, the London Embassy and in particular the Consulate General staff were always more pragmatic and generally helpful, albeit unofficially. The diplomats and senior officials could never risk their careers by being present at any public event which HMC might attend, but they often helped James out through backroom channels. After all, as one Consul General put it to him, “Part of our mission here is to serve the needs of all Greek nationals living in the UK, irrespective of politics, and that includes the parents and children of your school.” In addition, a number of them sent their own children to the College, for example, the Head of Security, the Naval Attaché, the Commercial Attaché and later on the Consul General himself. They got a generous discount on the tuition fees, of

course.

The ambivalence and anomaly from this quarter was described to James by his first Head of Greek, Eirene Crook, as “normal Greek behaviour.” One invaluable means of assistance from the Embassy, freely given every September by the Education Attaché’s section, was the provision of as many copies as needed of all the textbooks issued annually to state schools in Greece. James often wondered whether the authorities back home knew what was going on, but he didn’t delve too deeply. If asked, his Greek teachers put their fingers to their lips and told him not to worry about it, so he didn’t.

There were other welcome instances of informal generosity from the Holland Park Embassy, always undertaken for the benefit of the children. For example, when the reconstructed trireme *Olympias* visited the Thames in 1993 to take part in events celebrating the 2,500 years since the start of Athenian democracy, the Naval Attaché organised a trip aboard for a group of HCL primary pupils. Since *Olympias* (named after the mother of Alexander the Great) bizarrely is a commissioned ship in the Hellenic Navy, the ancient warship was under his command. “I can do what I like,” declared the ebullient Captain Theofanides.



The trireme *Olympias* under sail off Poros in 1988.

James found that the Greek staff tended to be left-wing in their views, as teachers the world over usually are. Some of the expat metropolitan Greek parents were more royalist in their inclinations, to the extent that a ludicrous few were desperate for their child(ren) to be in the same class as Princess Theodora or Prince Philippos, the youngest of the King’s five offspring. This was more about σνομπισμός, *snobismos*, “snobbery,” and boasting to their friends, than political allegiance. The non-Greek parents of mixed marriages and the Cypriots couldn’t give a damn either way. Fortunately the wider political background never impinged on the day-to-day running of the school.

Nevertheless, James invariably played the “naïve Englishman” card, whilst assiduously absorbing every nuance of the Greek political landscape, past and present. Soon after the start of term he was invited to lunch by King Constantine’s Private Secretary, a former General whose name is lost in the

fog of time. Before he went, he asked around about his future host. The unanimous view was that this long-term advisor was one of a number of courtiers who in the 1960s had given the young King disastrous counsel which had ultimately led to the loss of his throne. This low opinion whetted James's appetite and off he went to Claridge's, a stone's throw away from HMC's top-floor offices in Brook Street.

The General was greeted as a regular customer by the waiters. He was a polite and charming elderly gentleman, studiously diplomatic in his language and manner. It soon became clear that the purpose of the meeting was to warn the new Headmaster of possible pitfalls ahead. "The King has enemies," he explained, "who might try to use you to exploit an advantage. There are forces at work.. Be careful what you say and to whom about His Majesty." James nodded agreement as he tucked hungrily into his smoked salmon starter. He had never before been served lemon slices *covered in gauze* to stop the pips falling onto the fish when you pressed for juice. As for the friendly advice, it was stupendous cloak-and-dagger stuff and he lapped it up with relish. After a splendid three-course lunch, washed down with an excellent white wine and laced with the old boy's wonderfully paranoid conspiracy theories, James tottered back to Pont Street in an excellent mood.

But whereas there was little he could do to moderate the effect of national politics on the advancement of the school, he was well aware from Day One of his responsibility to tackle its debilitating internal schisms. These he attempted to address.



18-month old Minnie in 2007.

Many fine singers and jazz musicians have recorded this song, but Dexter Gordon's version is the best. And watch out for Freddie Hubbard's exquisite trumpet interlude.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN6li_-aGnA

“I’m a Fool to Want You” (Joel Herron, Frank Sinatra, Jack Wolf) performed by Dexter Gordon, from the album “Clubhouse” (recorded in 1965, but not released until 1979).

02/03/21

Epilogue

Farewell, Mickie : 5th October 2005 – 5th February 2021



“This is my bed too, Dad.” August 2018.

She wasn't even the most good-looking of the three sisters. That distinction belonged to beautiful Lulu, with her vulpine tail and her feline hauteur. Even Minnie had the sleek look of a elegant black panther. Mickie was what the vet noted in her kitten's vaccination book as a DSH, a “domestic short hair,” ie a regular moggie with absolutely no pedigree at all. Her best feature was her face, a strikingly symmetrical Batman mask encasing huge eyes that watched your every move and indicated a high sense not just of natural curiosity but also of a more elevated intelligence.

From her fighting days as a youth she bore the legacy of lost battles. Whereas her sisters' tails attained the perpendicular throughout their lives, as upright as the defiant salute of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the Mexico Olympics, Mickie's had been bitten and broken at the root whilst escaping from some lascivious tom, so that even at her happiest she could never afterwards achieve more than a disappointing 45° “Heil Hitler.” The point of her left ear was irreparably torn after another hostile encounter, probably with Lulu. But these minor physical defects added to her charm. She was naughty, clever, stubborn, fearless and above all sociable. She gravitated towards all humans she met, known and unknown. For these reasons she was selected as the narrator of my Greek adventure and as a result she acquired quite a fan club, even amongst those who never met her. I received over seventy messages of sympathy when she died.

She had been struggling with arthritis in both her back legs for some time. Jumping and walking became increasingly difficult, though she maintained a good quality of life. Dionysis was unable to administer anti-inflammatory medication owing to her kidney condition. When, finally but quite

suddenly at the beginning of February, she stopped walking and eating we risked that treatment, but her atrophied muscles were beyond recovery and it was time for the hard decision to end the long life of this wonderful companion. Another link to Pauline and my past life was broken. Again with Stephanos's support, and to the musical accompaniment of a familiar great tit singing in our biggest carob tree, I buried her next to Lulu and Minnie in what has become a cats' graveyard of three limestone cairns. Farewell, Mickie mou, and αναπαύσου εν ειρήνη, *anapafsou en eirini*, rest in peace.



Cat cemetery: (from left) Lulu, Minnie, Mickie.

As for me, the peerless Irish balladeer Neil Hannon captures my current mood perfectly:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4Y3iTJtzgM>

“The Light of Day” by The Divine Comedy, from the album “Victory for the Comic Muse” (2006).

26/09/21

72. The Greatest Modern Greek?



Bertie waits for his breakfast

Καλιμέρα, *Kalimera*, Good Morning. My name is Bertie and I was born four or five months ago on the roof of the restaurant of the Caribbean beach bar. An old Englishman whom you know well uses this bar as a base for his daily swim and seems to have taken a shine to me. I live up there with another kitten, who is called Little Blickie. He was the runt of the litter, is very small, partly black and named on a day when the Inglesi gent happened to be wearing his South African teeshirt. We run down the almiriki (aka tamarisk or salt cedar) tree every morning shouting for the Whiskas biscuits he brings for our breakfast. Whereas Little Blickie is too nervous to be touched I allow myself to be stroked, petted and even picked up by my new friend, James. This sociable approach also endears me to the lunchtime customers who are thus more inclined to feed me as well. I do a judicious amount of purring, as required. Young children are a nuisance, all obsessed with chasing cats for some reason, but they stand no chance at all of catching me.

I am therefore a smart cat who might survive the winter, especially as James continues to come here regularly to swim out of season when the bar is closed. However, he won't take me home. He says he needs the freedom to travel to the UK for longer periods. So we are developing a cautious but mutually beneficial, semi-attached relationship. Technically I belong to the bar owners, Willie and Iphigeneia, but in return for breakfast I have agreed to take up Mickie's writing duties and, in memory of her and her sisters, I am retaining the series title of Mickie's Blogs.

What, then, has been going on in Greece this summer?

James and Bea returned from the UK to find that they had guests. They had arrived in the spring and are now getting ready to depart. Two house martins had built their nest under the eaves and have

been entertaining the humans every evening at dusk with their swooping and diving around the house with their spectacular flying skills and their happy chattering on the wing. In July they were joined in flight by their three offspring, who are now mature enough to attempt the arduous journey south to Africa. They will be missed at Villa Doulapas but their home of mud will be waiting for them next year.

The Greeks generally call them χελιδόνια, *helidonia*, “swallows,” who are their larger cousins. To be accurate, they should be called λευκοχελιδονα, *lefkohelidona*, “white swallows,” easily distinguishable by their white rumps. As elsewhere their nest is regarded as a great blessing for a house, a sign of joy and prosperity. There are countless songs, poems, children’s stories and folk tales that feature swallows. Traditionally on 1st March children in Greece would always welcome their arrival and the coming of spring by going around neighbourhoods holding a paper swallow and singing “The Helidonismata” and other songs.



British belief in the good luck bestowed by the residency of these “martlets” is equally long-standing. In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* King Duncan arrives at Macbeth’s castle and in a scene heavy with irony says:

“This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.”

To which Banquo replies:

“This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet does approve,
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle:
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,

The air is delicate.” (*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 6)

It wasn't a lucky place for Duncan. Macbeth murders him that night in his bed. Nevertheless these small birds, the inveterate fighter pilots of the sky, always lift one's spirits with their aerial acrobatics.

The highlight of July was the wedding of Elsa Amanatidou, James's former colleague at the Hellenic College of London, and Byron MacDougall. They both work at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, but the wedding took place in Naxos, one of the larger, greener and historically more interesting Cycladic islands. The guests were a mixture of American, British and Greek friends and family. The perfectly planned and totally secular ceremony took place in the empty centre of the island at a delightful setting: the 17th century Venetian Bazeos Tower, a former castle and monastery. The subsequent bash at a nearby village restaurant was very Greek and yet also had a carefree international flavour. My lips are sealed as to whether music and dancing, banned as part of anti-COVID restrictions, took place until the early hours or not *Να ζήσετε! Na zisete! May you live!*



James, Elsa, Byron and Bea on a remote Naxian hillside after the ceremony.

The big national story of July and August has been the forest fires. Temperatures reached an unprecedented 47.1C (116.8F) and exceeded 42C for several days. Driven on by gale-force winds the infernos caused immense destruction although fortunately very little loss of human life. Many homes were lost and animals killed. Firefighters and specialist equipment were drafted in from around the world to help fight what was at times a losing battle. In a normal summer about 1700 hectares of forest are lost to fires; this year the first 14 days of conflagration consumed nearly 100,000 hectares of forestry and farmland. The north part of the island of Evia, Athens' northern outskirts and the southern Peloponnese (but thankfully not Messinia) suffered the most destruction. It will take many years for

the natural environment to recover in these territories.

There was as usual much talk of arson. A widespread belief, probably well-founded, is that since building is not allowed on land designated δάσος, *dasos*, “forest,” unscrupulous landowners and developers deliberately cause fires in order to remove the trees and then proceed to acquire planning permission for what have now become deforested areas. Until this year very few arrests and convictions for arson have been made but there are some signs that the authorities are taking stronger action against perpetrators. There has even been a move to introduce a new law, which would make forested land “forest” in perpetuity, so that even if burnt down it can never be developed. We shall see.

Last week Prime Minister Mitsotakis hosted a summit in Athens of leaders of nine Mediterranean countries to address the growing common threat posed to the European region most at risk from climate change. Various joint agreements on transnational collaboration were made, but this is a first step in a long journey. More frequent and intense heatwaves, droughts, floods and forest fires are inevitable. Athens itself is by far the hottest metropolis in mainland Europe. It is predicted that it could become the continent’s first uninhabitable capital city if temperatures keep rising. The city authorities have taken the unique step of appointing Europe’s first “urban heat officer.”

Then at the beginning of September Mikis Theodorakis died at the age of 96. If your reaction is “Who he?” you are definitely not a Hellene. Every Greek on the planet knows Mikis. If I add that he wrote the music for the 1964 film “Zorba the Greek,” you will now reply, “Oh yes, him!” An English friend, Tim, sagaciously commented: “He was probably more responsible than anyone else for sending the Brits to explore Greek tavernas in the '60s and '70s.” In Greece he was a towering figure (including literally at 6’4” – he was known as Ο Ψηλός, *O Psilos*, “the Tall One”) not only in its musical and cultural life for over 60 years, but in the country’s often turbulent politics throughout the twentieth century.

On the announcement of his passing, flags including the totemic standard on the Athenian Acropolis were lowered to half-mast and three days of national mourning were declared. His body lay in state in a central Athens church where thousands upon many thousands queued to pay their respects. When the police tried to close the church doors at the end of the second day, “scuffles broke out” (to use a phrase beloved of journalists) between the public and the coppers, who were therefore obliged to extend the opening hours. The third day saw an official memorial ceremony with a suitably fulsome eulogy from the President of the Republic before his remains were taken to Crete for the funeral in Chania and burial in Galata, the village of his birth.



Theodorakis's Funeral: his coffin enters the cathedral in Chania. The blue subtitle reads "Final Farewell to Mikis."

To and from the Chania Cathedral (see the TV screenshot above) the route was packed with mourners who clapped, sang his songs and threw flowers onto the hearse as the slow procession passed by. A brass band comprising adults and children played his music, mainly in tune, but it was weird to hear it without the accompaniment of bouzoukia.

Throughout the six days between his death and interment all the major TV channels had wall-to-wall coverage, starting with recorded tribute concerts and recent interviews with the man himself and culminating in 12 hours of live reporting on the day of the obsequies. As an outpouring of grief and love which seized a whole nation the closest UK analogy would be the funeral of Princess Diana in 1997. It was as if all the Beatles had survived and worked together into old age and then died on the same day. One of the major ferry companies, ANEK, gave free return tickets from Piraeus to Crete for anyone who wanted to attend the event in person.

Mikis himself would have smiled at the irony of the prodigious "unifying" public reaction to his demise. A controversial and divisive political figure throughout his long and adventurous life, which featured resistance against the Occupation, imprisonment and torture during the Civil War and exile in the Junta years, he was an avowed communist and yet also for a while in the early 1990s a centre-right government minister. However, his death did unite the nation according to the tributes from the full spectrum of politicians and commentators. Yet even in death he caused a row. The media were spellbound by the unseemly infighting between his family and executors about the location of his final resting place – Corinth or Crete. The issue was settled in court where the judge found in favour of the executors, hence Galata.

His music is of course his true legacy. You can read in one of the many obituaries how, along with Manos Hadjidakis and others, this classical composer revitalised popular Greek music, developing a new style called *έντεχνο*, *entechno*, “art song,” derived from traditional idioms such as *rembetika* (*Rembetika*, the music of the underclass is often referred to as “the Greek blues”). This included the introduction of folk instruments such as the *bouzouki* and using as lyrics the work of the most eminent 20th century Greek poets. And he was prolific. In addition to over 200 songs, he composed 10 symphonies, 2 oratorios, 3 ballets, a folk opera, numerous film scores (including “*Ill Met By Midnight*”, “*Z*” and “*Serpico*”) and extensive music for theatre.

Mitsotakis called him “the last great Greek of the 20th century.” There are many who would go further and assert that he was the *greatest* Greek of the modern era. Here are some other striking comments made by notables about “the voice of the people”:

“Immortal,” “colossal,” “monumental.”

“It is as if the Acropolis has disappeared.”

“The world cannot contain our sighs for Mikis.”

“The trees weep, the clouds weep, your friends weep” (from his daughter Margarita).

He himself got it about right. He once likened himself to “a supertanker on Lake Ioannina.”

At the end of this piece one of James’s favourite songs is added, but any of dozens could have been chosen. James and Pauline fell in love with his music in Cyprus in 1966, especially the songs sung by his major collaborator, Grigoris Bithikotsis. *Καημός*, *Kaimós*, “Heartache” was played at Pauline’s funeral.

Meanwhile James continues to clamber up the lower slopes of the magic mountain called *Ρωμιοσύνη*, *Romiosyni*, ‘Greekness,’ knowing that he will never reach the summit. But he was recently greatly encouraged by Taki, who runs one of the village tavernas. Unsolicited he exclaimed, “James, you are now a *Chraniot*.” Praise indeed!

An amusing anecdote to finish with. Many of us have stories about eccentric teachers who we encountered in our youth. Costas, James’s “sheep and goat” vet friend from Pyrgos in the north-west Peloponnese, recalls his Small Animals Professor from his days at the University of Thessaloniki Veterinarian School. Every week without fail he would stop his three-hour lecture halfway through for a short break. He would then summon his assistant to bring his “ouzo with meze.” A bottle of ouzo and a tin of dogfood would be brought to the lectern, where the straight-faced academic would open the tin into a bowl, add a generous helping of ouzo and tuck in. After ten minutes he would declare the break over and impervious to his students’ reactions return to the subject matter in hand, which might even have encompassed the difference between the digestive requirements of omnivores and obligate carnivores. “Sniffer” Ridley, erstwhile teacher of English at Wellington College, who would famously go down on all fours like a dog and cock his leg on an inadequate piece of homework would have been proud of him.

Right, I’m off to pester the punters for a bit of lunch.

If you don’t love this song, you’ll never understand Modern Greece:

https://youtu.be/B-GBPx_GXQw

Maria Farandouri sings 'Αρνηση, Arnisi, "Denial." Nobel prize-winner George Seferis's poem was first published in 1931 and set to music by Mikis Theodorakis in 1960. It is commonly referred to by its first line: Στο περιγιάλι το κρύφο, Sto periyiali to krifo, "On the secret shore."

ΑΡΝΗΣΗ DENIAL

Στο περιγιάλι το κρυφό On the secret seashore
κι άσπρο σαν περιστέρι white like a pigeon
διψάσαμε το μεσημέρι we thirsted at noon;
μα το νερό γλυφό. but the water was brackish.
Πάνω στην άμμο την ξανθή On the golden sand
γράψαμε τ' όνομά της we wrote her name;
ωραία που φύσηξεν ο μπάτης but the sea-breeze blew
και σβήστηκε η γραφή. and the writing vanished.
Με τι καρδιά, με τι πνοή, With what spirit, what heart,
τι πόθους και τι πάθος, what desire and passion
πήραμε τη ζωή μας λάθος! we lived our life; a mistake!
κι αλλάξαμε ζωή. So we changed our life.
English translation by Edmund Keeley and Phillip Sherrard

20/10/21

73. Death of a Father

It turns out that my Greek name, given by Willie and Iphigeneia, is Αργυρό, *Argyro*, “Silver.” That’s because I am in part a rather fetching colour of light grey. James prefers Bertie and so do I. All the “Hi, ho” jokes about The Lone Ranger’s horse would do my head in. The Caribbean Bar is shut now that the season has ended, so there’s not much human company for me and Little Blickie, except when James comes for his swim. Which means food too of course!

Storm Ballos brought all the beach bars here to a halt last week but its worst effects were felt further north. There was severe flooding in Corfu, where 170mm of rain fell in one day, and in Athens passengers in a bus had to be evacuated from an underpass of one of the major thoroughfares when the water reached window level. After the fires, the floods - the shape of things to come.



The new bronze statue of Maria Callas, located opposite the Theatre of Herodes Atticus below the Acropolis hill in Athens. She doesn’t look pleased.

A recently unveiled statue of the Greek opera singer, Maria Callas, has caused controversy and much amusement on Greek social media. The 1.8 metre gold-plated bronze has been ridiculed as “Gandhi in high heels,” C-3PO from Star Wars, the killer robot from The Terminator films and likened to a life-size Oscar statuette. The most apt criticism comes from Michael Moussou, a former opera singer and artistic director of the Athens Festival, who commented that the work commits the cardinal sin of getting her posture wrong. “Nothing could be less representative of Maria Callas, as no opera singer, not even a second-grade student at music school, would ever adopt such a pose with crossed arms in front of their chest,” he said, noting that to do so would “block voice production.” He added, “Opera is about singing and ... freeing up the voice. If Callas were to try singing in real life in the stance conceived by the sculptor, the result would be like a violinist trying to play on a broken violin.”

On a local note, Callas has a Messinian connection. Her parents came from a village called Neochori, near the town of Meligala, about 20 miles from Chrani. They emigrated to New York before Maria was born and shortened their surname from Kalogeropoulos. About four years ago her father's abandoned house, in which she never lived, was acquired by the municipality. They decided to repair and rebuild it, converting it into a visitable Callas museum.

James was very well-received on his arrival at the Hellenic College of London in September 1990 by (almost) all the different elements of the tight-knit school community: staff, parents, governors, trustees, other interested parties in the wider London Greek scene and, not least, the pupils. At his first Assembly he vowed publicly to learn all the children's names as quickly as possible, a relatively easy task in a small school, and he visited all the classes that day too.



HCL pupils in 1991: not a blue-eyed blonde in sight.

The pupil lists gave him great joy as a classicist. Throughout the year groups there were Olympian goddesses (Athina, Aphodite, Artemis, Hera, Dimitra (Demeter)) and even a god, Dionysis (Dionysos), although the boy was known as Denis. There were heroines of classical tragedy (Elektra, Antigone, Iphigeneia, Helen (Eleni)), but understandably no Clytemnestra, the husband murderer, nor Medea who killed her own children. That would be a bit like calling your son Adolf. There were legendary heroes (Achilles, Jason), Spartan and Macedonian kings (Leonidas, Philippos, Alexandros), Athenian philosophers (Socrates, Aris(totle)). Soon he discovered that the parents were well-named too: perhaps after the inspirational Muses (Calliope, Clio) or the towering figures of fifth-century BC Greek history (Miltiades, Kimon, Perikles).

For the next fourteen years he always kept his eye open for new arrivals who were exemplars of the

classical canon. The Trojans Paris and Hektor came and went, as did Iro (Hero), the princess for whose love Lysander swam the Hellespont, and in the end how could James not employ a teacher called Melpomene (aka Meni), the muse of tragedy?

As for learning who was who, the only problem were the identical twins, Pavlina and Gabriella, who he was still mixing up years later. Lovely girls that they were, I think they forgave him.

Management and teachers? He swiftly identified strengths and weaknesses in the different sections and departments.

The Nursery (and Reception) was rightly exalted for its quality, well-run by a no-nonsense Aussie called Phillipa. All it lacked was a full-time Greek teacher, a matter which was soon resolved. This department remained the jewel in the crown throughout James's tenure, often running a waiting list and, despite being a bilingual environment, even attracting local non-Greek children from time to time. Of these the most famous parent was Luc Besson who was based in London for a while, filming *The Fifth Element* at Pinewood.

The Primary School was well-organised and plentifully resourced under the strong direction of vicar's wife, Jane. She had unified the junior department in a way that was sadly lacking in the Secondary School. She was one of the triumvirate who, along with the Headmistress and Bursar, had in effect run the whole school, the Deputy Head proving to be quite ineffectual in leadership, though a competent teacher of English. The negative office politics, about which James had been forewarned, was submerged yet virulent. The Head of Primary and the Head of Greek Studies, a wily Maniotissa called Eirene (which means Peace, ha, ha!) were at daggers drawn and would remain so, in spite of the new incumbent's best efforts. The Primary Greek staff in particular felt undervalued – a massive irony in a *Greek* school – and torn between two warring bosses. Line management and communication issues could be fixed, but the prevailing psychology of Greek resentment and British condescension was a micro-mirror for James of the 170-year history of fraught relations between Greece and The Great Powers.

In order to ease this situation through a perceived balancing of power, but also to start raising the status of the Secondary School, James immediately added to the SMT both Eirene and the Director of Studies, Roger. She thus became less subversive (though she had recognised a true philhellene and potential ally in James anyway and always supported him) whilst Roger brought a wider perspective and the sanity of logic to the group. He warned James at the start that Eirene could be expected to leak information from their confidential meetings, but the new Head was prepared to take the risk for the greater benefit of joined-up management. Nevertheless, it was a typically useful insight and in this instance useful to know, especially if you deliberately wanted to fly a kite or plant disinformation, etc. James used other tricks he had learnt at Lansdowne to diversify ownership of the decision-making process, e.g. by rotating the chairmanship of the weekly meetings and producing minutes which flagged specific responsibility for action.

Secondary subjects in good health were: Mathematics, Physics, English, Classics, Modern Greek of course, Art and PE. Less so were Chemistry, Biology, French, History, Geography and Music. Business Studies and I.T. were ripe for growth. Time, patience and the introduction of an appraisal system would enable James to improve the quality of the teaching generally. A larger Sixth Form was desperately needed, for reasons of economy and wider subject choice. James was persuaded by Eirene, who was also Head of Classics, to teach some modules of A-level Classical Civilisation, at first Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, then Plato's *Republic*. This proved to be a welcome distraction from headmastering and helped him develop a closer relationship with some of the Sixth Formers.

With marketing initiatives he could take immediate action. He was firmly of the opinion that the school was much better than it judged itself to be and needed to sell its success not only throughout its Greek market but also in the wider educational world. As a unique school it was ploughing a lonely furrow and was unheard of beyond the Hellenic community. Such diffidence sapped morale, he believed. He therefore set out to spread the word, acquiring membership of the Independent Schools Association, the European Council of International Schools and the London International Schools Association within the first year. And he persuaded Dino Goulandris to go for a massive hike in the fees, which were ridiculously low, and reflected a damaging lack of self-confidence in a special product.

Internally, no meaningful data had been logged on enquiries, recruitment interviews, enrolled students or reasons for leaving. If questioned, staff hazarded a guess about, for example, what proportion of the pupil population was Cypriot rather than metropolitan Greek. Information about how many children had a non-Greek parent was anecdotal. No analysis of catchment areas had ever been done. With his Templetonian training and experience James quickly introduced the systems and procedures to yield the knowledge and the statistics he needed on which to base an efficient marketing strategy. He also commissioned a new bi-lingual prospectus. The existing out-of-date version was written only in English - for a Greek market!

Then in the middle of what was an exciting, productive and enjoyable first year, at the very end of the Spring Term, a family tragedy took him to Australia at the shortest possible notice.

In 1982 his father had emigrated to Sydney at the age of 71, not long after the death of his wife, Brenda. Aware that she was dying she had insisted that he should go and live with their daughter Margaret in Australia, in the knowledge that he would not cope well on his own in their apartment in Scalby, a remote village north of Scarborough. When the time came, he duly sold up and left the UK although he would return every few years on extended trips to see his siblings and his son. His life after Brenda was not a happy one. He had been certain that he would die first because of his unhealthier lifestyle – booze and cigars, etc. But he also made what the philosopher Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* calls a “category-mistake,” confusing morality with longevity. So he never got over the shock of his “good” wife predeceasing him. He was in the habit of calling her “a saint” and he felt himself to be morally inferior. He therefore had an absolute conviction that he would justifiably shuffle off first. He was wrong in this of course and he never recovered during his ten years’ survival as a widower.

During their retirement together Brenda had controlled her husband’s drinking, but in Sydney he gradually declined into alcoholism. Sometime in early 1991, he became jaundiced, was diagnosed with and treated for Hepatitis A. About 23rd March James received a telephone call from Margaret in which she explained that Thomas had terminal cancer of the pancreas and bile duct. If James wanted to see his father alive he needed to travel to Sydney immediately. Within 48 hours he was on a flight to Australia.

The following account comes from his contemporary diary entry. Virtually unabridged it captures, I hope, the immediacy of his slightly unhinged reaction to the events that ensued. It was written during the flight home and dated 4th April 1991.

“Flying back from Sydney at the end of an extraordinary, emotionally intense week, I find myself in the bizarre circumstance of sitting astride my cabin luggage which contains the ashes of Thomas, my father. They are neatly packaged in a smallish cube covered in brown paper, which fits easily into the hold-all (? sic!) that Tom himself used on his last trip to the UK (where “last” = “previous” rather than “final,” which is this one). The casket, to use the language of Value Funerals of Gordon, NSW, has caused me no mental discomfort in its physical manifestation – neither what it truly is, the incinerated

material of my father's body, nor as a tangible symbol, all that is left of a life. The idea of coming home with his remains, when mooted a few days ago, filled me with dread but, as with much that has happened recently, I just got used to it. God speed, Thomas, and bugger the lot of 'em. Whether or not I need to pass through the "Goods to Declare" channel at Heathrow, I am determined to take the Red Route and to enquire if Thomas is duty-paid and tax-free. Is this a Customs or an Immigration issue? His ashes must be alcoholic enough to warrant careful scrutiny from the Revenue Men.

I arrived in Australia eight days ago on the evening of my 24th wedding anniversary, Wednesday 27th March, expecting.... what? A difficult series of hospital visits, in which I would talk to my father about myself and my life, him and his life, with death only an oblique but ever-present reference point for my sudden and unexpected appearance. The reality was quite different.

Graham met me at Sydney Airport Arrivals after I was whisked through Customs with only hand luggage. There followed an abortive traipse up to a bar, from which Margaret and their friend Stephane (from whom I would soon be borrowing a mourner's dark suit) had already descended by alternative means to meet me. Stephane is an extremely pleasant and largely incomprehensible Frenchman who had been a running and drinking companion of Graham before they were both crocked. Now they simply drink together. It is announced that we are proceeding immediately to Sydney Hospital on Macquarie Street to visit Thomas – the urgency is a slight surprise – and during my briefing from Margaret on the 20-minute trip into central Sydney, I begin to appreciate how much closer to unconsciousness and death he is than I had realised when I left the UK. The photographs I have brought to show him, would, I am told, be of no avail. Margaret has wrecked herself worrying that he wouldn't last even until I arrived. He did, but whether in his comatose state he really recognised me that night I'll never know for sure. My sister was convinced, having seen how little he had responded the previous day to other stimuli. Since he gave no further indication of acknowledging

anyone afterwards, I am inclined to believe - thinking wishfully, I know - that he did. That little, old, dying, yellow man opened cloudy eyes that surely could not see and worked his hollow cheeks, blowing some voiceless message with no success nor sound, whilst I held his hand and shouted, "It's James here, I've come from Liphook. It's a long way, but I'm here now, etc., etc." After that I knew I had come for a funeral.



Sydney Hospital, formerly known as Governor Macquarie's Rum Hospital, is the oldest in Australia.

The sick-visiting of an unconscious man became, in the three subsequent days, less purposeful than the support my presence might give to Margaret and her two boys. The Thursday, Friday and Saturday visits witnessed an inexorable decline. Heart and mind were begging for his death soon, for his sake and ours. I had programmed my expectations - very sensible, very rational - to see a figure similar to his own father in his last days, my grandfather William Wardrobe. I was unprepared for the bright yellow jaundice of his skin which was caused by bile leaking from the cancer-riddled duct linking the liver to the intestine. I first saw it fully in the cold light of the Thursday morning, when I visited alone. On the previous night the dimly lit sickroom had deflected me from this grim variation of The Reaper's scything of the flesh. God bless those Australian, English and Irish nurses whose kindness and professional caring helped all of us, and especially Thomas, through those days. Death however is more capable than the best nurses.

When the telephone reporting his expiration rang at 5.00am on Easter Sunday, I was awake enough to be ready to go straight into Ward 5 but the general assumption was that we should present ourselves later in the morning. So Margaret and I came to the moment when we said one of our many goodbyes to our father, this time in a drab and windowless room, his corpse not yet laid out, eyes half-open. These eyes had not opened for us in his final days although the sisters had said that he sometimes raised the lids when they turned him. His forehead was cold to the touch but now we had no need to wash our hands in fear of hepatitis. I remember my farewell to his living self more vividly - a few mumbled adieux twelve hours before.

My visit to his Clifford Street "unit" on Friday had touched me more, and more unexpectedly, than most of my time spent in W5 presiding over his losing battle. In his flat the familiar relics - boxes of matches, beer mats ("coasters") covered in aides-memoire, clothes, photographs, my last letter - dated 8th March - caused me to want to retreat elsewhere, but Margaret was keen to start clearing

up. His personal stuff was over-familiar to her, I suppose. Through those days, somewhat guiltily, his children would laugh about the ironies of his demise - a hysterical reaction that apparently is not uncommon. We set to clearing the place whilst he was still alive. David, who was closest of all of us to "Pop" his grandfather, was deeply upset by what appeared to be a premature and ghoulish division and discard of the poor man's possessions. But Pop was never coming back to that flat, a fact which understandably the grandson found harder to come to terms with than his mother and uncle.

The funeral took place the following Wednesday, 3rd April. The day before, I had travelled by train up to the Blue Mountains where I was looked after magnificently by Piet Ebbeling, whose sister Thea is a close friend in England. He and his family gave me a memorable away-day of comfort in the midst of the strangeness of this loss.

Before I describe the highlights of Pop's final public appearance, Margaret tells an amusing anecdote about an event just before I reached Australia. She had asked Thomas if he wanted a priest. At first he had said "No" à la Lord Marchmain in *Brideshead Revisited*, but later he agreed. Owing to some "maladministration" by the local Catholic Church, two different priests came and gave him what is now called the Sacrament of the Sick (I prefer Extreme Unction - it's closer to the Latin). Thus the old devil, who wasn't in a fit state to tell the second priest that he'd already been done, had a double dose. Margaret and I are sure that it wouldn't be wasted on him if efficacious in the cleansing of sin.

So, to the obsequies, 10.00am at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium. It was a much more apposite ceremony than many I have attended, including my mother's. Thomas would have appreciated: the Union Jack draped over the coffin; "Peg O' My Heart" played in the time of quiet reflection; most of all the fact that the celebrant, "Father" John, was a renegade Catholic priest. The truth is that he left the ministry to get married but it makes a better story to have him defrocked. Now he works as a professional performer at Value Funerals' services and very good value he is too. I like to think that we opted for Father John because he was cheaper (60 Aus. Dollars) than a real priest - Thomas would have loved that too. I wore mostly borrowed clothes, not only Stephane's suit but also socks, shoes and tie from Graham. Only the shirt and underwear were my own.

About twenty-five people attended. Many of them were Mosman RSL (Returned & Services League) Club friends of Tom from the younger generation. Their age took me by surprise, but it became clear that they had come because they felt a genuine affection for the old man. One quite rough type insisted on seeking me out after the service and shaking my hand. "Your Dad helped me out with some good advice when I was in a dark place," he said with cracking voice. "I can't thank him enough." It was these who came back to the house for the reception. Tom had often said that he wanted a traditional Irish wake, at which the corpse is propped up in the corner of the parlour while fights break out between various friends and relations. Although we couldn't manage this, we did stage what amounted to a 12½-hour drinking bout, commencing at 11.00am at the house before the residue decamped at about 6.00pm to the RSL. "The atrocities," as Tom would have called them, ended with one family member staggering home at 11.30pm and another (me) creeping back in from a night on the tiles at about 4.00am. One of the mourners got into trouble at the club for his drunken singing and may well have received a ban. Thomas would have enjoyed the unrestrained and heart-felt Aussie send-off.

In order to fulfil his request that his ashes be cast in Scarborough's North Bay, where he had strewn Brenda's ten years before, I am therefore conveying his remains back to the UK aboard a 747-400 appropriately named "City of Durham." Always quick to see the humour in every situation, my father wondered whether he would finally be with Mother even then "because she's probably worked her way round to the Pacific by now." He used to enjoy sitting out on his balcony looking out at the sea,

which he always said reminded him of “his friend.” How lonely he was after she died. Perhaps he got too little comfort from his children, but that was not entirely our fault since in his later years his heavy drinking destructively exacerbated his negative traits. Yet one mourner remembered him for his humanity; two others told me how proud he was of his son, even showing off the Lansdowne prospectus round the RSL. Well, why not, indeed!

I hope you know that I came. Requiescas in pace.”

On his arrival back at Heathrow James, clankingly laden down with at least triple the duty-free allowance, headed for the nearest Customs Officer and meekly enquired whether he needed to “declare” his father’s ashes. Treated with the utmost sympathy he was immediately escorted landside. A small final whisky-related victory for father and son.

Within twenty-four hours Pauline and James were on another flight, this time to their place in Spain, where jet-lagged James could start to recover from a very testing first, but not last, trip Down Under.

Thomas’s ashes stay in a cupboard in James’s office at New Shepherds Farm for eight years. He finally goes north for an Independent Schools Association annual conference in York in March 1999. He takes the Saturday afternoon off to travel to Scarborough, where with some difficulty on an incoming tide, he scatters the ashes off the rocks of North Bay. They keep coming back towards the shoreline, lapping around James’s feet. “Typical,” groans the trouser-soaked son as he hand-propels his dad’s floating fragments deeper into the briny.

Thomas had an extensive knowledge of popular music and he could tell the good stuff from the bad. Fats Waller was one of his absolute favourites:

<https://youtu.be/PSNPpssruFY>

“Ain’t Misbehavin’” (1929) by Thomas (sic) “Fats” Waller, Harry Brooks & Andy Razaf.

This version is from the 1943 film “Stormy Weather.”

09/11/21

74. The Search for Superstars

It's been a while since I gave you a Greek Covid-19 update, so here's the current situation as winter approaches.

Things are getting worse, in what is being called “the fourth wave.” The scientists are even predicting a fifth wave. Professor Sotiris Tsiodras, the infectious diseases expert who was the government's chief scientific advisor when the pandemic began and who gained the public's trust during the first lockdowns, has been re-enlisted for unavoidably downbeat media announcements. According to another expert on the advisory committee for coronavirus policy, there is now a rolling average of over 4,600 new cases per day, which is higher than ever before for Greece. The testing positivity rate has increased gradually and steadily, almost doubling from 1.09-1.1% at the beginning of the month to 1.96% last week, with hospitalisations, intubated patients and deaths also on the rise. Once again, growing pressure on the health service is significant and worrying.

About 60.5% of a population of about 11 million are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, less than the EU average of 64.7% and UK's 68.4%. The authorities had originally planned for 90% to be vaccinated by now, but a vociferous element of deniers and anti-vaxxers has undermined the government's target. There are weekly demonstrations of protest, especially in the northern parts of Greece where vaccine take-up has reached a standstill. Why resistance to vaccination is greater in the North is a mystery, to James at least.

The government has therefore introduced new measures specifically designed to make life difficult for the unvaccinated. As of 6th November they now need to produce a negative rapid or PCR test to enter banks, public offices, retail outlets, mixed entertainment venues and hairdressers. Long queues for access to these establishments are anticipated. This rule will not apply to grocery stores, supermarkets, pharmacies and religious spaces. The Health Minister, Thanos Plevris, said that the new regulations will “tighten the framework” for the unvaccinated. Controls for breaking the rules have been intensified, with fines now starting at 5000€ for businesses. Plevris warned that there will be “zero tolerance for those who admit unvaccinated people without tests” into spaces covered by the legislation.

This should put a stop to a uniquely Greek scam, exposed by a TV investigator. She interviewed unvaccinated youths who were getting into night clubs by flashing their grandfathers' vaccine certificates, together with their own ID, at the entrance. It is still a strong tradition in Greece for the eldest grandson to be named after his paternal grandfather and the second son to be named after his maternal grandpa. The same goes for girls being given their grandmothers' first names. So, keeping his thumb over the date of birth, hey presto, young George Papadopoulos gets past the bouncer because he's showing “George” Papadopoulos's genuine vaccine pass. Thanks, pappou. Genius, or what?

Another Greek custom which until now has militated against public health has been the use of large polythene sheets (known as “nylon” here) by bars and restaurants in winter to preserve an “outdoor” area, which is of course completely enclosed. This is traditionally a smokers' zone, thus technically complying with the EU-wide ban on smoking indoors in public places. Until now anti-Covid measures have demanded that vaccination certificates be shown inside, but not outside, the premises. Unquestionably these popular limbo locations are ideal hothouses for spreading infection. On TV they have been likened to polytunnels for people. So at last, to the annoyance of smokers, they have been designated by the authorities as “indoor spaces,” thereby requiring anti-Covid documentation to use

them. It remains to be seen whether they still function as permissible smoking rooms for the fully vaccinated or recently tested.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis has defended his decision to tighten restrictions on the unvaccinated, whilst at the same time ruling out the possibility of a new nationwide lockdown. “Now that the vaccine is available, economic and social activity will not be shut down,” he emphasised, adding that the government did not want to deprive vaccinated people of rights that were granted to them after following the safety recommendations of scientists and of the state. “Meanwhile,” he stated, “those who have not yet safeguarded their health with the vaccine will need to undergo stricter monitoring, with more frequent testing, so as to protect themselves and the people around them.” This hard line has generally gone down well with the public, and certainly with James and his friends.

Sometime during the 1991 summer holidays James had a phone call from a Nursery parent who wanted him to hear immediately and directly the news about the shocking death in Greece of a three-year old girl who was one of his son’s fellow pupils.

The parents of Anastasia Veloni had been locked in a bitter separation and an on-going dispute about custody of their daughter. In the end the mother had reluctantly allowed her husband to take Anastasia out of Athens for the weekend to his house in the country. Whilst there he had shot the girl dead and then killed himself, taking a senseless revenge against his wife. If he were to be denied his daughter then he would make sure the mother would not have her either. If ever afterwards any of James’s Classics students found the ancient story of Medea killing her own children in vengeance against her husband too far-fetched and distant from the realities of modern life, he would tell them this tragic tale from their own doorstep. The exploration of the human condition by the Greek tragedians is never out-of-date. The little girl’s memory was celebrated every year at Prize-Giving through an award in her name for a deserving Nursery child. In addition, since Anastasia had loved music and singing, her mother donated a fine piano to the Nursery Room.

Unfortunately this was not the only fatal telephone call that James received during his first three years as Head.

Let us now concentrate on the front-line practitioners of pedagogy (sic), in particular some of the star MVPs at Hell Coll in the first half of the Nineties.

In her final speech Lydia Anderson had talked about “the pioneering spirit” that gloriously prevailed during the school’s first ten years, and about handing over the torch to James. After the pioneers comes the “settlement” period. The second decade saw plenty of diversification and development, for example in the curriculum, the extra-curriculum, the never-ending IT provision, extensive in-service training, an all-inclusive staff appraisal scheme, etc, etc. All worthy and important stuff, which James drove forward keenly as part of the school strategy but at heart found rather boring. What interested him much more and what define the character and culture of any institution are not its systems and procedures but its *people*. In a school this means first and foremost its up-front actors, its players on the stage of learning, treading the boards at the chalkface or more topically at the interactive whiteboard. In other words, its troupe of teachers.

There were already some standout performers in place when James arrived at the Hellenic College, many of whom have been previously referenced. Others who merited this accolade included the talented and ever-dependable Inger (Art), as tall and blonde as a Swedish Valkyrie should be and whose beneficent regime in her attic studio domain lasted throughout James’s tenure. What a joy for

the fundamentally arch-delegating Head to be able to turn the switch in his cockpit marked Art to “auto-pilot” and leave it on without concern for fourteen years! Another was Gillian (Years 5 & 6), a true professional whose ability to get on with absolutely everyone was an underestimated gift. She would have been the obvious contender to assume the mantle of Head of Primary in due course from Jane but she moved with her family to Majorca in 1995, where unsurprisingly she was soon running her own school.



Two stalwarts: Inger Heddy (Art) and Guy Farrugia (Maths & IT) were already on the staff in 1990 and left with James in 2004.

James was always looking for more of what he called “Superstars,” the ones who are treasured for ever afterwards in a pupil’s memory as “my best teacher.” Every child deserves when reflecting on his or her school career to be able to say, “I adored (*fill in any subject*) because of Mr/Mrs/Ms (*fill in teacher’s name*).” Preferably about more than one. On the other hand, your heart sinks if and when you hear instead, “I never had a “best teacher,” someone who inspired me. I can’t remember any of them..”

The quest was never-ending and often doomed to failure. James did dozens of interviews for new staff every year and generally all short-listed candidates offered some positive attributes, but mediocrity was commonplace. Sometimes by force of circumstance you were obliged to compromise and would make a job offer with reluctance. Usually you came to regret it, though only once did James come within a whisker’s distance of an Employment Tribunal after sacking a History/Geography teacher who had been his worst appointment. He prided himself on being a “good picker,” but sometimes he got it spectacularly wrong, as Rob (see below) delighted in reminding him. One instance of this was

the Spanish Chemistry teacher whose English was unintelligible to all her pupils.

But then, perhaps four or five times out of a hundred, you strike gold. It happens like this. The interviewee is waiting in Reception. James picks up the phone and speaks to bubbly receptionist, Maria, “OK, wheel him (or her) in.” As she does so, behind the candidate’s back she gestures to James, perhaps a wink or a thumbs-up, which gives him a glimmer of hope. There is a possibility at least that you will not have to waste a dispiriting hour of your life with a hopeless case simply out of good manners. After five minutes an inkling grows into a cautious suspicion, which, as the meeting progresses, leads to a gradual dawning, an elation, a recognition that This Might Be The Chosen One. And, lo, before the end of the interview you are filled with the joy of certainty. Bingo! Although you proceed with the formalities, perhaps mentioning the existence of other candidates (which might be true) or the obligatory pursuit of references (a waste of time), you are happy because you have unearthed at last... a genuine Superstar.

Anyway, 1991 and 1992 were vintage years for the new crop of pedagogues. First came Lesley, a Biologist head-hunted with relative ease from Lansdowne. Eminently calm under pressure and hugely capable, she would go on to become an accomplished Director of Studies, leaving in 1999 to a GSA headship down the road at More House. By then they had worked together closely across the two institutions for 17 years.



Lesley Falconer was also UCAS & Careers Advisor. The charismatic Father Alexander Fostiropoulos.



The PE Department (Dave Starkey and Rob McHarg) before the annual School Photograph.

They knew that they would be standing in the back row, as usual.

Next, a young Australian arrived, initially as a part-time assistant to Dave in the PE Department. Ten years later through no fault of his own he found himself in the role of James's fourth (and final) Deputy Head. Dave and James had short-listed Rob and a female PE specialist who had the advantage of being Greek, which fitted the desired Person Specification better, but they both agreed that the Aussie was the stronger candidate. The final decision and job offer took what James calls "a little time" and for which Rob still castigates him as "an unprofessional delay" in getting back to him. They still argue about whether it was days or weeks. However, they remain close friends not least because of a shared sense of humour and overlapping musical tastes, although the older man is not such a Bowie nut, finds Nick Cave curate's eggish and places Dusty Springfield on a far higher pedestal than Rob's icon Marianne Faithful. As for Tindersticks (Stuart Staples - who he?) and that Ukrainian band... On the other hand, he would probably never have discovered Neil Hannon's *The Divine Comedy* without Rob's introduction.

The evolution of their relationship started like this. One morning, exiting the Assembly Hall after doing a talk on Leonard Cohen's multi-layered *Tower of Song*, James was approached by Rob who declared, "Good Lord, Headmaster! I didn't pick you as a Cohen fan." Within weeks they were together in the second row of seventh heaven at a Cohen concert in the Royal Albert Hall.

1992/93 saw the arrival of two potential Superstars but ended, in one case, in disappointment and in the other tragically.

Eirene had been planning to retire as Head of Greek before James arrived but agreed to stay on until he was well-established. Hara Dimakopoulou was recommended to James from all quarters as the heir

apparent to lead this key department. She had worked at the school in the late 1980s and had been an extremely popular and successful teacher. She was married to a German academic but was now living in London. Having met her, James was satisfied that she would make an ideal replacement and he made the appointment. The only note of caution came from the wise and empathetic Chaplain, Father Alexander, who knew Hara extremely well and who feared a potential dilemma might arise between marriage and career if her husband decided to return to Germany. He turned out to be right. After only one term she departed for Deutschland. Perhaps it was James's mistake to believe everything he'd been told, including by those whose judgement he trusted. Eirene had stayed on as a part-time teacher but James ran the Greek Department himself until he could find a suitable successor.

He had also appointed a new English and Drama teacher to succeed the splendid young Sarah, who was off to Australia with her fiancé. Athene Hariades, 23, was a recent Cambridge graduate with exactly the right profile for the bilingual Hellenic College: a living embodiment of the two cultures. She was born and bred in the UK with a Greek father and English mother. This would be her first teaching post, but James had no doubt that he was onto a winner. And so it proved, at least for the first six months. Athene had a bright, attractive personality and became immediately popular with all her classes and all her colleagues.

In March 1993 Athene was cycling home, helmetless, up the Edgware Road on a dark, damp evening after a regular mid-term HCL parent-teacher meeting when a Royal Mail van driver turned left without seeing her and knocked her off her bike. By all accounts death was instantaneous.

Early the next day James received the call with the tragic news from Father Alex, who knew the family well since they were parishioners at his church, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Ennismore Gardens. He will never forget the disbelief and shock on the faces of Athene's colleagues, whom he called together in the Staff Room, and then the outburst of emotion and tears of the children in School Assembly, at his devastating announcement.

The collective response of the whole school community was impressive, not least the immediate support of the parent body. Young and old sustained each other throughout this difficult period, all displaying the best of themselves. The esprit de corps of the staff was immense - they all played a blinder, as the saying goes, at a time of crisis. This rallying round made it easier for James to manage the practical consequences at the time, but he has never yet overcome the lingering sense of irrational guilt that ... if he had never given Athene a job she would still be alive today.

The school was closed for the day of the funeral, so that pupils and staff who wished could attend. James found himself standing between his Director of Studies and a striking, very tall and long-haired mourner. Roger whispered in James's ear, "John Tavener," and James then recognised the composer of many well-known choral religious works, for example, the achingly beautiful *The Protecting Veil*. He was not only a member of the Orthodox Cathedral's congregation but also a friend of the Hariades family.

Not long afterwards Athene's mother gave James a cassette recording of music which Tavener had written in memory of his young friend. It was called *Song for Athene* and is a profoundly moving work. He had heard Athene reading Shakespeare in Westminster Abbey and after her funeral developed the idea of composing a song which combined words from the Orthodox funeral service and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This wretched story should end here, but there is an unexpected twist.

Four and a half years later Tavener's personal musical tribute moved into the global sphere. When Martin Neary, Organist and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey, was organising the music for the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, he approached the composer about a particular item of his

music that he felt would ideally accompany the departure of the cortège from the church at the end of the service. Tavener came up with a better idea, a piece written for another young woman cut off in her prime. Thus, on 6th September 1997, was *Song for Athene* heard by millions internationally on TV and radio, becoming Tavener's best-known composition.

On his website, he wrote: "*Song for Athene* came to me at the funeral of a young girl... In the graveyard after the funeral I heard the repeated Alleluias and then I heard a melody for the verses. I wrote the whole piece down when I got home. Later ... it was sung at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales and was heard around the world. I am glad that I was able to share this parting gift from Athene with so many people."

Teachers would come and go, but Athene was the biggest and most tragic loss of all.

The following year saw the arrival of Neil, an experienced Physicist, who had been a Head of Department elsewhere but was looking for a slightly part-time post. He wanted Fridays off, so that he could write *The Great British Novel*. He never did of course. We never do. Within minutes of meeting him, James was ready to employ him. He was the real deal. Full of optimism and a sense of fun, he brightened the atmosphere wherever he went. He soon came to love the school unconditionally as much as it loved him, and he never let his colleagues forget how much he enjoyed coming to work. He adored any excuse for a party, champagne, foreign travel and The Royal Family. He cycled to the school from Earls Court but kept a Bentley in his garage. Sadly, he died in 2018 after a long illness at the age of only 66. Many Hellenic College alumni attended his funeral. He was indeed "a character" and an exemplar of what a top-class educator should be.



Neil Simpson, with his customary smile and a glass of .. what else but champagne?

In September 1995 a megastar would breeze into the Hellenic College, a pub manager from Norwich of all places, but more of her next time.

James looked in vain for a special photograph of Athene Hariades until by chance he found one on this YouTube version of Tavener's choral tribute:

<https://youtu.be/rjhTLhd-u3I>

Alleluia, Alleluia
May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest
Alleluia, Alleluia
Remember me O Lord, when you come into your kingdom
Alleluia, Alleluia
Give rest O Lord to your handmaid, who has fallen asleep
Alleluia, Alleluia
The Choir of Saints have found the well-spring of life and door of paradise
Alleluia, Alleluia
Life a shadow and a dream
Alleluia, Alleluia
Weeping at the grave creates the song Alleluia
Come, enjoy rewards and crowns I have prepared for you
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia

“Song for Athene” (1993) by Sir John Tavener, sung by King’s College Choir, Cambridge.

22/12/21

75. Meetings, Meetings, Meetings

Makis and Takis sounds like a good name for a Greek variety show double act, doesn't it? They are local friends of James who helped him harvest his olives early this year, prior to his departure for the UK at the end of November. I say James "helped" but the Greek guys actually did all the work. Experts, they have been harvesting olives since they were children. James's contribution was a bonfire of all the pruned branches. Green olive wood will burn well even on the day it is cut, owing to the oil content of the leaves and twigs.

James and Bea have over twenty trees, but many of them are wild olives which produce no fruit. They would have to graft them to get a sizeable crop. However, the remaining trees yielded over 100 kilos and after a morning's work the visit to the Petalidi pressing factory resulted in 23 litres of the highest quality oil imaginable. Enough for the family's personal needs for a year. The acidity is 0.2%. Green gold, with a peppery aftertaste. The earlier you pick the higher the quality, albeit less volume than if harvested towards the end of the season, in January or February. James knows of a German lady nearby who sells this early-picked stuff for about 50€ a litre to Finland. Yet the Greek wholesalers' price to farmers this year is... 2.30€ per litre.

There is also one very productive tree which yields olives for eating. These larger olives have to be picked by hand. This year James has deviated slightly from Fotine's grandmother's recipe and added lemons to the marinating brine. We shall know by Easter if this was a good idea.



Takis is separating the twigs and other detritus from the light green fruit gathered in the dark green net.

Staying with the agricultural theme, a local beekeeper has been busy recently. He has cleared an area

the size of a football pitch in the middle of an olive grove about halfway between the house and the sea, setting up about a hundred gleaming white beehives. Greek beekeepers usually paint their hives in bright primary colours, believing that bees are attracted to certain hues. In the past there have been a number of delightfully highly coloured hives spread sporadically around the village, but this looks like a more ambitious venture. Timely too, in the light of the widespread reports since the summer about the damage to Greek honey production by the extensive forest fires in July and August. 30% of all the pine trees of Evia, the large island north of Attica, were destroyed. 70% of Greece's renowned pine honey comes from this island, so a massive shortage is expected over the next few years until the sources of pine pollen are restored. As for our local bees, James is investigating two questions: 1) It seems the wrong time of year to introduce honeybees to a new home, but perhaps there are none in situ yet, until the spring; or perhaps the overwintering queens are already hibernating there? 2) What will be the source of the pollen? Definitely not pines, as you can see in the photograph below. Apart from the occasional cypressus, we overlook a sea of olive trees. Olive and herb-flavoured honey then? Some of my readers keep bees - all answers gratefully received.



The new view from the veranda: over a hundred new beehives have appeared about 250 metres down the hill.

A quick Greek COVID-19 update: a massive spike in vaccination bookings recently, with 557,000 registered in a single weekend. There are two reasons. Firstly, not only has Mitsotakis made vaccination mandatory for people aged 60 and above, but from 15th January 2022 the unvaccinated in this age group will be fined 100€ every month until they get jabbed. In the draft legislation the fine was €500 pcm, but the government relented in the face of widespread protest. Secondly, the Omicron variant has put the wind up a great number of previously hesitant deniers and anti-vaxxers. As I have written before, the Greek nation is notoriously independent, but fear of illness and death trumps its deep-seated and traditional suspicion of authority.

Some English friends have been asking about the “correct” pronunciation of the new variant, which means *Little O* and is the 15th letter of the Greek alphabet. Is it *Ō* (as in *opera*) *Mick Ron* or *Oh Mike Ron*?

The latter accords with the Erasmian pronunciation of Ancient Greek familiar to Western classicists, scientists and mathematicians. The former short-vowelled version in common use in the UK and elsewhere in the world is the precise Modern Greek pronunciation and it seems to have been generally adopted from the very start for this strain of the virus. Somewhat perversely, the vowel is articulated in Greece exactly the same as *Big O*, Omega, the 24th and final letter of the alphabet. Let us hope that the British public doesn't have to learn how to pronounce the whole Greek alphabet as it grapples with more COVID-19 variants over the next few years...

James's only memory of his first HCL Governors' Board Meeting, apart from its genteel politesse in contrast to the rambunctiousness of Lansdowne meetings and the fact that Dino Goulandris took control from the start although Diamantis Pateras was notionally Chairman, was an amusing surprise: a comic altercation between Dino and Mathew Los about donations to the Hellenic College Charitable Trust. It went like this:

Don Taylor (Bursar): "I can report that since the last meeting we have received donations of £xxxxx from The Leventis Foundation, £xxxx from the Goulandris family and £xxxx from Mr Chandris."

Dino: "Mathew, isn't it about time the Los family made a contribution?"

Mathew: "Well, we gave something last year."

Dino: "We need an annual commitment, like the donations mentioned by Mr Taylor from other governors."

Mathew: "I'll discuss it with my brother.."

Dino: "You Chiots are so mean.."

Mathew: "I think we are just as generous as you Andriots, Dino."

At which point, Mr Pateras (neither from Chios nor Andros, but from tiny Oinoussai), intervenes: "Gentlemen, less of this childish inter-island rivalry, please."

The Headmaster swiftly realised he had a great deal to learn about the parochial side of Greekness, which was patently if light-heartedly in evidence even between wealthy shipowners. The truth was that Mr Goulandris had given and would continue to give millions to the Hellenic College and was the only founding Governor to persevere in this level of generosity throughout its lifetime. Mr Pateras was no longer in a position to contribute financially and Mr Fotis Lykiardopulo had resigned from the Board just before James became Headmaster after a long-standing disagreement with Mr Goulandris about the future direction of the school. He visited James in his first term to explain his views and to wish the new Head well. He was as courteous and refined as you would expect an Old Carthusian expatriate Greek shipping billionaire to be.

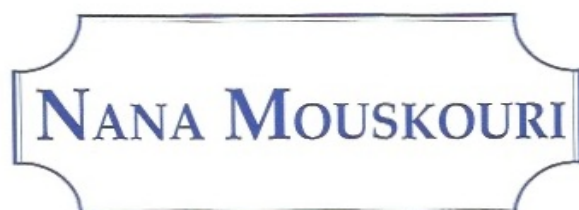
Notwithstanding Dino Goulandris's caustic remarks, the existing Governors were ungrudging in their financial and moral support. However, Edmée Leventis, whose two children were pupils, often complained to James that more of the Governors should be nailing their colours to the mast by sending their own children to the school rather than to some posh public school.

Their social reach and untrammelled ambition when it came to organising fundraising events was spectacular. In this they had the support of King Constantine, who could call on his connections with the British Royal Family as well as London high society in general. There had already been charity

polo matches in the '80s involving the Prince of Wales and there would be more during James's tenure. King Constantine and Prince Charles have an enduring relationship, being godfathers to each other's sons. So the Nana Mouskouri concert at St James's Palace in 1991 was a classic example of Anglo-Greek charitable cooperation at its apex. When James was introduced to HRH after the show, Prince Charles said, "You're the Headmaster? I hope these Greeks are paying you enough.." The next time they met, some ten years later after a fund-raising polo match, James was rather impressed that Charles seemed to remember him. "Still the Headmaster?" he joked. "So they must have been paying you plenty." As for Nana, she did not disappoint, ending her set with one of Thomas's favourites songs, *The White Rose of Athens*.

IN THE PRESENCE OF

*His Royal Highness
The Prince of Wales
and
Their Majesties
King Constantine & Queen Anne Marie*



*at
St. James's Palace*

Reception, Concert and Dinner

In support of
THE HELLENIC COLLEGE TRUST

16th December 1991 at 7.00pm

The first of many invitations to unmissable HCL fundraising events.

The full Board of Governors only met twice a year, since the main work of governance was conducted through the Executive Committee, which met monthly in term time. Unusually the Chairmanship changed hands every two years, although this lapsed to three years in the mid-1990s. After Mr Pateras came Roy McCormish, founding Head of Box Hill School and a former colleague of Kurt Hahn at Gordonstoun. Those who followed will be mentioned later.

Princess Alexandra, whose mother was Greek, was a dutiful and reliable Patron, a logical choice. As for the other two Patrons, Robert Runcie and Harold Wilson, James never found out why or how they had become connected to the Hellenic College. They never replied to any communications from the

school but remained on the letterhead until they died. The Queen's cousin, on the other hand, always replied to correspondence, visited the school occasionally and every few years sent eagerly anticipated invitations to Buckingham House Garden Parties.

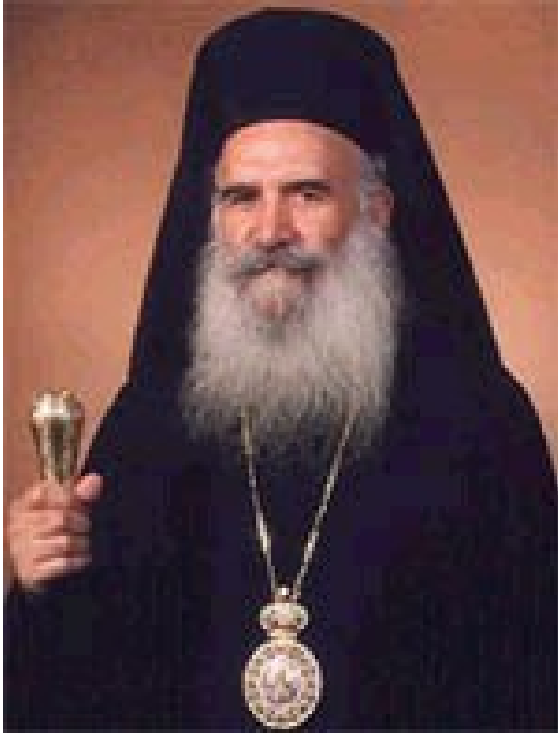
The meeting James looked forward to most was the annual gathering of the HCL Trustees. King Constantine, as Chairman of the Trust, had assembled in addition to Messrs Goulandris and Pateras an impressive collection of the great and the good, both Hellenes and Hellenophiles. The most celebrated academic Trustee was Sir Steven Runciman, the historian whose magisterial works transformed our understanding of Byzantium and the Crusades. He has been accused by some contemporary historians of bias against the Crusades, which he called the last of the barbarian invasions. He once characterised the Fourth Crusade as the greatest crime committed against humanity. James would have enjoyed discussing this contentious subject with him but he rarely travelled down from Lockerbie in Dumfriesshire for the meetings.

Lord Jellicoe was the most famous military and political Trustee. George, whose father had won the naval Battle of Jutland in 1916, had been Runciman's pupil at Cambridge. His wartime exploits had included action in Crete and the Dodecanese, and he was the first British officer to enter Athens (on a bicycle) after the Germans left in 1944. He once told James that whenever afterwards he visited Greece he was never able to buy himself even a coffee let alone a meal, such was the outpouring of affectionate hospitality always shown towards him. After a distinguished career in public service, he resigned as Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords in 1973 over a minor involvement in the Lord Lampton affair. Many thought that his honourable resignation should have been refused by Ted Heath. But then George possessed φιλότιμο, *philotimo*, that highest and most untranslatable of Greek virtues. James always relished his sociability and entertaining gossip during the preliminary session before the formal meeting began.

John Hadjipateras was the acknowledged Godfather of the London Greek shipping community. He even looked and sounded a bit like an ageing, wheezing Marlon Brando. As the long-time Chairman of the London-based Greek Shipping Cooperation Committee, he was famous for having seen off the Thatcher government when her first Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, attempted to tax "non-doms" (people with non-domiciled status) in the early 1980s. The overseas earnings of many wealthy Greek shipowners who live in the UK are still exempt from British tax.

The most recent former UK Ambassadors to the Hellenic Republic did a short-term stint in turn as ex officio Trustees. Such worthy and distinguished diplomats included Sir Peregrine Rhodes, Sir Michael Stewart, Sir David Miers and Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith.

However, of all of the Trustees, it was Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain to whom James would become most attached.



Archbishop Gregorios was James's favourite Trustee

Gregorios Theocharous has risen from humble origins in the Famagusta district of Cyprus to become the leader of the Orthodox Church in the UK in 1988. He was beloved in the community for his humility and tireless ministry. As Archbishop he never appeared remote, grand or bureaucratic. He possessed a rare combination of great spiritual wisdom, human warmth and a great sense of humour. As well as coming to the Trustees' meeting, he was a frequent visitor to the school. He could be relied upon to attend all the key annual events to which he was invited, including the Blessing of the School at the start of the academic year, the Vasilopita ceremony in January and Speech Day at year-end. On the rare occasions he was unable to attend, he conscientiously sent a Bishop to represent him. He always stayed for a coffee with James afterwards and they would chat about everything from theological matters to his travels around his UK dioceses and even his personal history. On one occasion he recalled his years as a pupil in the early 1950s at the Pancyprian Gymnasium in Nicosia. He told James that at one point his English teacher had been Lawrence Durrell, who would later write about his time in Cyprus in *Bitter Lemons*. James asked him what Durrell was like. Gregorios laughed and said, "He may have been a great writer, but he was not a great teacher."

The last time James saw Gregorios was in 2012 prior to a very special trip with his friend Paul Majendie to the monasteries of Mount Athos. He asked the hierarch to suggest the best ones to visit and those to avoid. Gregorios was full of useful advice and he also wrote a supportive letter of recommendation which helped James acquire the necessary permit to travel to this unique outpost of Orthodoxy on the easternmost peninsula of Halkidiki. Gregorios never retired and died in 2019 at the age of 91.

As for James's least treasured get-togethers, they were the Committee meetings of the Hellenic College of London Parents' Association (HCLPA). They took place in the School Library every month and James was expected to attend in a liaison role. The problem was that these evening meetings dragged on too long. However, the upside was that the parents, in particular the mothers, were magnificent

fund-raisers.

The HCLPA, led at the time of James's arrival by the formidable Angèle Nomikos, was the main conduit for their energetic, imaginative activities. The wife of a wealthy shipowner, this powerful and highly respected lady was an early ally of the new Headmaster. She had extended her two-year term as HCPLA Chairman in order to support James and "see him in," a decision for which he was extremely grateful. It gave him time to adjust to the inevitable politics of the association and some of its more vocal members. Her disarming grandmotherly image disguised a very astute operator who controlled the Committee members with an iron hand in her charming velvet glove, not least an uppity shipbroker called Nikos. He was loathed by the mothers and failed in his bid to become Angèle's successor as Chairman. It was clear to all that his primary objective was to use the position in order to increase his prestige and therefore his business opportunities within the wider community. Later on, he skulked off to make his name via a secular role at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral. On the other hand, the Chairpersons who were elected subsequently, notably Lia Polemi, Smaro Mytilineou and John Carras, had their hearts in the right place and always supported the school and its staff. Lia was Chairman at the time of Athene Hariades' death and rallied her troops magnificently at a difficult time.

Angèle was born in Cephalonia and as a teenager had lived through the worst earthquake in modern Greek history, known as the Great Ionian Earthquake of 1953. It devastated most of the island, especially the capital, Argostoli, the major towns of Lixouri and Sami, as well as affecting the neighbouring islands of Zakynthos, Ithaca and Lefkada. It is vividly described in Louis de Bernières' historical novel, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. There were in fact three earthquakes between 9th and 12th August, the last of which caused the worst destruction, and hundreds of tremors, shocks and aftershocks in the region. The majority of houses collapsed (about 33,000 out of 33,000) and the rest were severely damaged. Old mansions and bell towers came down. In the capital only two houses and a bridge survived intact. Argostoli was home to many neoclassical Venetian buildings, which were completely destroyed. The beauty of the originals was somehow lost in the rebuilding, with the replacements characterised as looking like "cement bunkers." The port of Fiskardo on the north coast was one of the few towns that felt no ill effects. It is only there that you can still see the picturesque pre-1953 Venetian architecture.



Argostoli in the immediate aftermath of the 1953 earthquake.

More than 450 people died and over 2,400 were injured. Angèle's family lived in Argostoli, but she was lucky. She and her sister had left the town on a trip and were in open country when the worst earthquake happened. All of her close family survived but she knew personally some of the victims.

There is a further link between the Great Ionian Earthquake and the Hellenic College. The village of Kourkoumelata, nine kilometres from the capital, was razed to the ground and subsequently rebuilt by the shipowner, George Vergottis. Three members of the Vergottis family, Marina, Michaela and Antonis, were HCL pupils in the 1990s. Their mother, Maria, was an active and cooperative member of the HCLPA Committee for many years. James is still in touch with the family, who still live in this prettiest and most flower-adorned Cephalonian village.

The Parents' Association organised both annual and one-off fund-raising occasions. The highlight of the recurring events was the Christmas Bazaar, held on a Thursday in late November. The school day was thoroughly disrupted, with little teaching and learning achieved, as the parents took over the Assembly Hall, the Dining Room and even the Headmaster's Study for their activities and stalls. After initial misgivings about the loss of virtually a full day's teaching time, James became reconciled to the pre-festive madness, especially when he discovered that a five-figure sum was regularly raised in a single day. Over the years, many different teachers took the role of Father Christmas, a fate assiduously avoided by the Head, who always drew the raffle instead.

Meanwhile, occasional concerts featuring well-known singers and musicians from Greece, e.g. Dimitra Galani, Vicky Leandros, Giorgos Hatzinasios, proved very popular and lucrative. Overall, the HCLPA did a superb job and gave the Head relatively little hassle. They deserve great credit for their successes, but those tedious meetings... In the photograph below James looks as if he is reflecting on that famous Groucho Marx quip: "I've had a wonderful evening, but this isn't it."



Attending a Parents' Association Committee meeting in 1992:

(from left) Maro Pantazi, The Headmaster, Lia Polemi (Chairman), Smaro Mytilineou.

And then there were the Staff Meetings...

<https://youtu.be/mRpMCG5Wjck>

A live performance of "The White Rose of Athens" (Manos Hadjidakis and Dimitris Stergiou) by Nana Mouskouri. The song was originally adapted in 1961 by Hadjidakis from a folk melody.

24/01/22

76. Vintage Years

It was her 35th birthday and she wore black. Burns Night 1995, but too early for a celebration. She was cautious yet excited, as any good candidate should be before a job interview. Anyway, she was Greek not Scottish. Her skirt felt unfamiliar since she normally wore trousers or jeans - black of course. For years afterwards the man she was about to meet, who would become her boss, would say in jest that she had “deceived” him at the interview, extravagantly claiming that she never again wore a dress or skirt at work. She also felt awkward because she realised that she had a hole in her tights below the knee. She hoped he wouldn’t spot it but he did of course. At least he had the good manners to wait until he had got to know her better before pointing out that without her “deception by apparel” he wouldn’t have been able to notice.

On entering the Headmaster’s Study she had been warmly welcomed by a bespectacled, slightly overweight yet lively man in his late forties, who seemed inordinately pleased both with himself and at the prospect of meeting her for the first time. Although she lived in Norwich, she knew about the Hellenic College of London. She knew the London Greek scene and had many contacts through her academic work at the University of London, especially King’s College with its thriving Byzantine & Modern Greek Department. They chatted about her CV briefly, including her current teaching work at The University of East Anglia, and then he said:

“You realise that if you become Head of Modern Greek here, you’ll be sailing into the eye of the storm. Greek parents can be very demanding. In my experience they gravitate towards the Greek teachers to solve their problems, irrespective of the formal lines of communication we have in place: Deputy Head, Director of Studies, Form Tutors, class teachers, etc. It’s easier for them to relate to a compatriot than, for instance, to a mere Englishman like me. We haven’t had a proper Head of Greek for over a year – I’ve been holding the fort myself until I get the right person, so they’ll jump on you from Day One like a pack of ravening wolves. This job is about management as much as teaching.”

“Oh, I have management experience. I run a pub in Norwich,” she replied with a slightly diffident laugh. Immediately his eyes lit up. He quickly put aside the CV which he had been carefully annotating. His animated response was unexpected.

“Brilliant!” he cried enthusiastically. “Just the kind of people-management skills I’m looking for, but why didn’t you put it in your curriculum vitae? It’s the most relevant experience you can put forward for this post. The academic stuff is a given from any short-listed candidate who walks through this door. I want leadership. Tell me about running a pub, especially how you deal with difficult customers...”

After that, James and Elsa got on like a taverna ablaze with burnt souvlakia and red-hot gyros. She was confident from the Headmaster’s parting pleasantries that she would be invited back for a second interview. He was already convinced that he’d won the lottery. The appointment was within the Head’s purview but, as he had explained to her, for reasons of diplomacy he needed the Chairman of the Governors’ Greek Sub-Committee (sic), Edmée Leventis, to vet his preferred appointee. Edmée was Comrade General Wardrobe’s political commissar. Elsa liked the fact that he was not a “head in the clouds” Hellenophile but quite hard-bitten, even cynical, about the pluses and minuses of her fellow countrymen. He seemed to know his Greek onions. Still a Classicist with romantic notions of ancient Greece, but five years in the job had made him more knowledgeable and realistic about the modern version.

James arranged the second interview date swiftly. He had already decided that Elsa Amanatidou was the right person to run the Greek Department, but he wanted Edmée Leventis to give her stamp of approval. Unfortunately she was not an experienced staff recruitment interviewer. She seemed quite unaware that it was, even back then, illegal to ask certain questions of a job candidate. Nowadays asking questions about a candidate's "protected characteristics," which include age, disability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marriage, pregnancy and gender reassignment, could open you up to a discrimination lawsuit. James knew all this and even broke the rules himself sometimes, but subtly. Before he could stop her, Edmée weighs in thus: "We need someone who is going to stay for a good few years. Are you planning to get pregnant any time soon?" James turns a whiter shade of pale and intervenes: "I don't think we can ask something like that.." Elsa was taken aback but smiled sweetly and gave a non-committal reply. He remembers nothing else about the meeting, except apologising after the Governor had left and hoping that Elsa had not been irrevocably put off.

A few days later she accepted the job offer without demur. She would start in September 1995 at the beginning of the new academic year. She went on to spend six years at the Hellenic College, including a final two-year stint as Deputy Head, and was probably the best ambassador the school ever had in its twenty-five year existence.

Meanwhile, on July 1st an event took place which was the highlight of the year for the Greeks of London and celebrity watchers everywhere. This was the marriage of King Constantine's eldest son, Pavlos, to Marie-Chantal Miller, the daughter of an American billionaire. A perfect amalgam of old European royalty and New World zillions which propelled the readers of Hello magazine into seventh heaven. The combined wedding ceremony, receptions and celebrations reportedly cost Duty Free Shops supremo Robert Warren Miller US\$8 million.

The traditional Greek Orthodox wedding was conducted by Archbishop Gregorios and officiated by ten prelates. 450 guests attended Aghia Sophia Cathedral in Bayswater and another 850, including the Queen, the Queen Mother (who arrived in a golf buggy), James and Pauline were seated at Hampton Court Palace where the liturgy was broadcast via satellite. The occasion brought together the largest gathering of royalty in London since the wedding of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in 1947. More crowned heads were in attendance than at the 1981 wedding of Charles and Diana. The Queen had given permission for Hampton Court Palace to be used for the reception lunch, which took place in a monstrously large marquee in the grounds. The first, and possibly the best, joke of King Constantine's post-luncheon speech was that having begun "Your Majesty.." it took him a further two minutes to reel off the titles of all the attending aristocracy and heads of state before he reached "Ladies and Gentlemen" and could finally commence his address.

James and Pauline had a thoroughly enjoyable day of celebrity spotting and extravagant hobnobbing with the haut monde. On their arrival they found themselves in a slow-moving queue immediately in front of Lord Carrington and Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then Secretary-General of the United Nations. James was delighted to eargwig their conversation in which they reminisced about the political machinations prior to the Falklands War. This simple act of covert listening was made harder than necessary because of the tiresome braying of the bumptious Spectator columnist Taki immediately behind these celebrated diplomats.

At the meal Pauline found herself seated next to King Constantine's English lawyer who was acting on his behalf in a well-publicised and ongoing legal dispute with the Greek government of Andreas Papandreou. Constantine was in the process of suing Greece at the European Court of Human Rights over his entitlement to the seized property, including privately-owned art treasures, within the royal

palaces and also concerning the state's withdrawal of his Greek citizenship. The lawyer was optimistic about the outcome, though it later transpired that HMC won only €12 million in compensation out of €500 million claimed. As for the passport, the court decision also ruled that Constantine's human rights were not violated by the Greek state's decision not to grant him Greek citizenship and passport unless he adopted a surname (e.g. Glücksburg), which he did not wish to do. So he got himself a Danish passport instead.



James & Pauline at the Wedding of the Year Pauline's smoking buddy, King Hussein of Jordan



The Queen chats happily with the celebrant, The newly-weds with close family

Archbishop Gregorios (hidden beyond his priests)

At one point during the lengthy proceedings Pauline sneaked out of the tent for a fag. King Hussein of Jordan had done exactly the same and gave her a light. He was the only guest to have been allowed an armed bodyguard at the wedding. They chatted amiably for about ten minutes, during which time Hussein confided that his doctor would be very upset if he knew he was still smoking. Pauline found him an extremely charming companion. He died of cancer less than four years later. They were both heavy smokers and the cigarettes did for her in the end as well.

Half a football pitch away but still under canvas James had been put on a table whose guests were all from Greece. To his left was a kindly old gent who had been Queen Anne-Marie's gynaecologist. After a few glasses of wine and under close questioning he came close to indiscretion but just about stopped short of breaching his professional code of confidentiality. On James's right was a conservative New Democracy Member of Parliament from Volos. James enquired whether the MP was worried that he might get into trouble back home for attending such a "royalist" event. The politician laughed it off, saying that it was too good an invitation to have declined. Later, James discovered that ten Greek MPs had accepted invitations, which sparked fierce controversy in Athens. Socialist prime minister Papandreou asked for the resignation of each Member of Parliament who had travelled to the wedding, claiming that by attending these MPs had lent "tacit support" for the abolition of the Hellenic Republic and the restoration of the monarchy. Opinion polls taken after the wedding, which was televised live in Greece and attracted an appreciable audience, did reveal a boost in the popularity of the Greek Royal Family but the truth was that these ten MPs had come over as much for a unique bash with a free slap-up meal as for domestic political reasons.

Elsa's arrival at the start of the autumn term revitalised the Greek Department but more significantly her charismatic qualities gave the whole institution a positive boost. In addition it convinced James

that the time was now ripe to join The Round Square, a network of international schools which share a commitment to offering a holistic, not purely academic, education with an emphasis on personal development and responsibility. Two HCL Governors, Roy McCormish and Tim Hatton, had been keen for James to apply for membership from early in his tenure, but he insisted that he had many internal school issues to resolve first. King Constantine, RS President and Patron, never pressed him but he was understandably delighted when James announced that the right moment had come.

The origin of the organisation dates back to the 80th birthday party in 1966 of Kurt Hahn, the legendary educationalist and founder of Gordonstoun, where the celebration took place. His other accomplishments included founding two schools in Germany (Stiftung Louisenlund & Schule Schloss Salem), the Outward Bound scheme, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the first of the United World Colleges, Atlantic College in Wales. The idea of starting an affiliation of all the schools whose mission was based on Hahnian principles was mooted. King Constantine was present, having attended Anavryta College in Athens, which was founded and led by Jocelin Winthrop-Young, a keen disciple of Hahn. At the formative meeting the question arose about a suitable title for the association. Hahn insisted that his name was under no circumstances to be part of it. The gathering was sitting in the distinctive and perfectly circular Round Square building at the school, when someone looked around and suggested...

James had attended the annual conference at Rannoch School in 1993 when the membership comprised not many more than 20 schools, mostly with Hahnian connections (for example, Box Hill School whose founding Head, Roy McCormish, had been a Housemaster and Art teacher at Gordonstoun). All the delegates, whether teachers or pupils, took part in a variety of group discussions and physical activities. James remembers a fascinating lecture delivered by James Lovelock on his controversial Gaia hypothesis and a tasting tour of a whisky distillery in Pitlochry. He also gained long-lasting notoriety by capsizing a dinghy on Loch Rannoch and having to be pulled out of the water by student lifeguards of the Loch Patrol, an incident which his new RS friends never let him forget.

By the end of the 1995-6 year he had applied for membership and had Elsa lined up as the school's RS Representative. Unsurprisingly, given the HCL's connection with HMC, the inspection was a wave through and, along with four Sixth Formers and Dave Starkey, James and Elsa headed off to Starehe School in Nairobi in December 1996 for their induction at the annual conference.



James, 3 students and Elsa at the Round Square Annual Conference, held at Starehe School, Nairobi, in December 1996.

A few months earlier James had mentioned to the outgoing Consul General, George Kostoulas, about the school's forthcoming trip. George, a big fan of the Hellenic College, was about to become the Ambassador of Greece in Kenya and insisted that he would "look after" the visiting party. He was true to his word. He put his official limousine, complete with chauffeur, CD plates and Greek flag on the bonnet, at their disposal. The other school delegates were suitably impressed. James has to confess that one day, whilst everyone else was toiling away on admirable work in The Great Rift Valley, he used the diplomatic limo service to whisk him off for a day of sunbathing at the Muthaiga Club. Thanks to a reciprocal arrangement with James's London club, The Reform, he could avail himself of temporary membership at this former gathering place in colonial days of the notorious Happy Valley set. In its heyday it had been the pink-walled epicentre of their White Mischief antics. The club had a rule, still in force today, that a member is entitled to damage any loose property as long as he pays double its value. In the 1990s it was a much more demure establishment but still very conducive to relaxation.

Kostoulas invited the Hellenic College party to a formal dinner at his Embassy residence. The conversation flowed and the drink kept coming. Too much for some. The most sensible student, Anastasia, failed to make it to the loo and threw up in the corridor. The Ambassador, who had a reputation for incautious and somewhat unambassadorial behaviour, asked Elsa to accompany him privately into the garden. She told James to come and rescue her after five minutes, but he forgot. By the time he remembered and rushed out into the jasmine-scented night air, he arrived just in time to save her from an undiplomatic grope. Overall, an unforgettable evening and an appropriately "holistic" experience for the HCL Sixth Formers.

About two-and-a-half years later in the fall-out from the Abdullah Öcalan affair Kostoulas was expelled by the Kenyan government who were furious that he had sheltered the Kurdish PKK rebel leader

without its knowledge. After spending 13 days in the Greek Embassy residence it seems that Öcalan was given up to the Turks with Greek complaisance, but the details remain murky to this day.

In 2016 when James met the Ambassador of Greece to Zimbabwe, Leonidas Kontovounisios, they reminisced about their mutual acquaintances in the Greek diplomatic service in 1990s London. It turned out that the Öcalan episode had not totally destroyed Kostoulas's career. He ended up as Greece's top man in Cuba.

As for the Round Square, James got to travel widely to the annual conferences, including to Germany, California, Canada, Australia and South Africa. Many HCL pupils benefited greatly from the opportunities afforded by the school's participation. He himself made many enduring and important friendships through the association, which itself has gone from strength to strength. It now maintains and facilitates a worldwide network of 150 schools in 40 countries. Every year more than 25,000 students take part in a community service project; collectively Round Square schools organize in excess of 1,700 service projects; more than 7,000 RS school students attend a conference; and 1,500 students go on an exchange to another school. This international organisation may well prove to be the most durable aspect of King Constantine's legacy.

During his lifetime, Kurt Hahn summarised his beliefs about the younger generation into six points which are collectively known as:

The Six Declines of Modern Youth

1. *Decline of Fitness due to modern methods of locomotion;*
2. *Decline of Initiative and Enterprise due to the widespread disease of spectatoritis (i.e. "excessive indulgence in forms of amusement in which one is a passive spectator rather than an active participant");*
3. *Decline of Memory and Imagination due to the confused restlessness of modern life;*
4. *Decline of Skill and Care due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship;*
5. *Decline of Self-discipline due to the ever-present availability of stimulants and tranquillisers;*
6. *Decline of Compassion due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted or, as William Temple, former Archbishop of Canterbury, called it "spiritual death".*

Hahn also proposed four solutions to these problems:

1. *Fitness Training (e.g., to compete with oneself in physical fitness; in so doing, train the discipline and determination of the mind through the body);*
2. *Expeditions (e.g., via sea or land, to engage in long, challenging endurance tasks);*
3. *Projects (e.g., involving crafts and manual skills);*
4. *Rescue Service (e.g., surf lifesaving, fire-fighting, first aid).*

10/03/22

77. The Golden Age

More than wild pigs and jackals, pine martens (κουνάβια, *kounavia*) are the most frequent wildlife visitors to James and Bea's house in Greece, especially since the demise of the cats who used to enjoy chasing them away. They often leave their calling card overnight on the veranda. As far as James is concerned they are a ferret-sized annoyance and he has no truck with the sentimental nonsense portrayed in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, where the heroine had tamed one as a pet. Despite being classified as carnivores, martens are highly opportunistic animals with a varied diet which includes small mammals, fruit, small birds, insects and carrion. They are also many local stories of martens chewing through cables, whether rubber or plastic. And now..

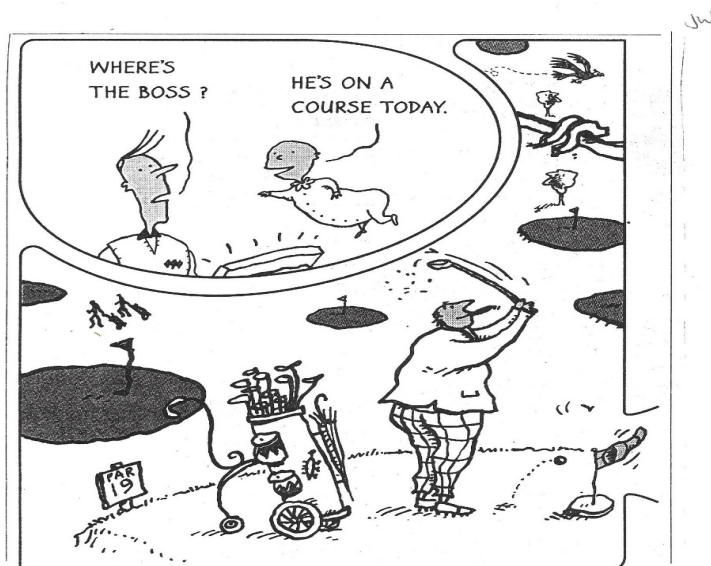
During a long sojourn in the UK, soon to end, James left the Chrani house under the watchful eye of his friends Dick and Sally. From time to time Dick has been running the car engine, so as to avoid a flat battery. A few days ago, sitting in the driver's seat and gently revving the throttle to circulate the oil, he was shocked by a loud bang under the bonnet, swiftly followed by a startled kounavi bolting harum-scarum from under the car into the distance. On lifting the bonnet lid he discovered that the insulation and sound-proofing material had been eaten away by the little bugger(s), who had found a cosy refuge from the winter storms. To deter a return to this nest Dick has applied the standard remedy: plenty of mothballs. Smelly but hopefully effective. Thankfully it seems that the cables are intact.



Pine marten damage under the bonnet.

If he gets the chance, James will gladly offer his summer guests a new culinary delicacy: *Rillettes de martre des pins haché*, which roughly translates as “potted meat of minced pine marten.”

1995 to 1999 were the Golden Years of the Hellenic College. James was able to assemble his best Senior Management Team, comprising Elsa, Roger, Lesley, Jane and the new Bursar, Chris Wells. He opened a second HCL Nursery in the premises of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Golders Green and initiated one-year UK University Foundation courses for students from Greece, under the leadership of two of his favourite parents, Maria Capsaskis-Triantopoulou and Victoria Koroneou. Strategic planning objectives were developed through two-day residential INSET conferences for all staff at the end of each summer term. The school joined the extended Assisted Places Scheme, disappointingly scrapped at its earliest opportunity by the Blair government in 1997, and underwent a successful re-inspection by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. Round Square membership gave the secondary pupils new extra-curricular opportunities, an obsession which James had been pursuing since 1990. Staff turnover was low and pupil numbers stable though not as high as he would have wanted.



This cartoon was given to James, who was extremely proud of his delegatory style of leadership, by a member of his SMT after one of his occasional “self-authorized” absences.

It might even have been after he went to Spain for the 1997 Ryder Cup at Valderrama.

Many Greek celebrities (totally unknown to Brits) visited the school and talked to or performed for the children. Evgenios Spatharis, the most prominent Karagiozis (shadow-puppet theatre) artist in Greece brought the house down with his uniquely Greek equivalent of Punch and Judy. He is famous for having introduced these traditional comic folklore plays to many generations of children through television, recordings and cinema.

Alki Zei, the Greek novelist and a national favourite owing to the popularity of her children's books, entertained the primary pupils with her life story. At the time she was in her mid-seventies. She died two years ago at the age of 97 and is probably most famous for her first, semi-autobiographical, children's novel *To Καπλάνι της Βιτρίνας* (literally "Wildcat under Glass," but usually translated as "The Tiger in the Shop Window").

Professor Georgios Babiniotis, philologist and lexicographer, regaled the students with his stories of the pros and cons involved in producing his definite and mighty 10 lb door-stopper, the *Dictionary of Modern Greek*, more commonly known as the *Babiniotis Dictionary*. It gives the fullest picture of Greek since the demise of diglossia and to this day it remains James's go-to Bible.

This massive volume of 2,064 pages is a landmark in Greek linguistics and became a bestseller, but it was met on its publication in 1998 with huge public debate. Babiniotis gave a hilarious description of the trouble he encountered with his definition of the word "Bulgarian," for which he had been taken to court. The dictionary provided a dual definition, first its normal use referring to persons descended from Bulgaria and secondly a definition marked as vulgar and derogatory to denote a fan of PAOK, the Thessaloniki football team. The initial court case ruled that the "obscene" definition had no place in a dictionary, so the publisher had to delete the second definition from every unsold copy of the dictionary or otherwise it could not be legally sold. The following year a higher court overturned the decision of the lower court. The work is now in its fifth edition. Meanwhile, as has always been the time-honoured and widespread practice, PAOK fans continue to be called "Bulgarians," including by James. It is worth pointing out that Bulgarians are generally held in low esteem by Greeks since along with the Italians they assisted the Nazis during the Occupation of Greece in WW2.

There were celebrity parents too. In the 1980s Demis Roussos's daughter, Emily, had been a pupil but that was before James's time. Surely you all remember his big 1973 hit "Forever and Ever"? In the mid-1990s the daughter of singer Anna Vissi and long-haired rock star Nikos Karvelas attended the school. WHO THEY? I hear you non-Greeks cry. Anna is the Greek Shirley Bassey or perhaps Greece's Kylie. She has been ranked second top certified female artist in Greece (behind Haris Alexiou - *for Greek readers only*) in the phonographic era. If you watched the Closing Ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games, you have seen and heard her. See the video clip at the end of this chapter. She represented Greece in the Eurovision Song Contest in 1980 and 2006, and Cyprus in 1982.

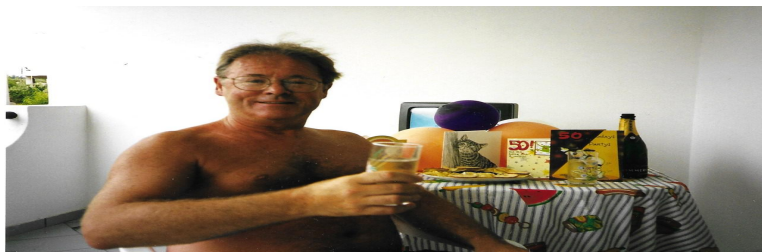
Nikos Karvelas is her long-time musical collaborator and lyricist. Notorious as a Bad Boy of Rock, Nikos is, as they say, "well-known to the police." They were married at the time, living in London whilst Anna attempted to establish an international career. This failed but she has continued her remarkable 40-year success story to this day. She has become one of the country's best-selling artists of all time, having sold over 10 million records worldwide and remains one of Greece's highest earning performers. Although the couple are now divorced, they remain friends and still work together professionally. James always found both of them charming and helpful.

On one occasion in Athens they also exposed him inadvertently to the downside of celebrity status. He had gone to see Anna in her mansion in the northern suburb of Ekali for a meeting about a possible charity concert to raise funds for the HCL Trust. At one point during their chat she went over to the drawing room windows and closed the curtains. She allayed the Headmaster's sudden alarm and beckoned him over to the window, from which they had an uninterrupted view of the driveway down to the main entrance. A crowd of people were standing outside the securely-locked metal gate, craning their necks to get a glimpse of movement within the house. "Fans," she smiled wearily and they both sat down again.

After the meeting Nikos turned up and they asked James if they could give him a lift somewhere. He was planning to meet a friend in the main square of Kifissia, which they said was on their way. During the short trip James remembers discussing *The Blues Brothers*, since he had found the vinyl album next to him on the back seat. Nikos was driving, with Anna in the passenger seat. As they approached the Kifissia plateia, the traffic slowed to a halt as many strolling pedestrians were blocking the street ahead. After a few moments a passer-by looked into the musicians' very nondescript saloon and recognised Anna. The word went round like wildfire - "Anna Vissi, Anna Vissi" - and within seconds the car was surrounded by a large group of excited people, pointing, calling and shouting at the celebs trapped in the front seat. The couple remained silent and stared straight ahead, while James observed the pressing hysteria in astonishment. After a minute or so, the traffic eased and Nikos was able to drive on. No harm done, but for James it was a salutary lesson in the price of fame. Shortly afterwards they dropped him off without further incident and each went their separate ways.

Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki is a well-known political figure in Greece albeit a total nonentity to non-Hellenes. Her first foray into Greek politics was as an Athens Municipal Councillor in the 1980s. She was (briefly) a New Democracy MP by the time she married the shipping and steel magnate, Theodoros Angelopoulos in 1990. She is famous for being the leader of both the Bid Committee for the 2004 Athens Olympics and subsequently the Organising Committee, stepping in to rescue the Games at a late stage. More recently, Mitsotakis appointed Gianna as President of the "Greece 2021" National Committee, a multidimensional initiative designed to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of the Greek Revolution. The events were sadly truncated due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Her sons, Panagiotis and Dimitris, were pupils in the HCL Primary School when the family moved to London in the 90s. The Headmaster had a cordial relationship with Gianna, not least because he always enjoyed receiving the biggest Christmas hamper that Harrods could offer, as did all the boys' teachers. Since James had long ago broken his own rule that he would only accept free villa and yacht holidays *from governors but not from parents*, yuletide gifts were always greatly received and in Gianna's case they were more than a mere bagatelle - for him if not for her.



James celebrates his 50th birthday in August 1997 in Loutraki on yet another “freebie” Greek holiday. Having hosted the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, Greece was bitterly disappointed over losing the bid for the Centennial Games in 1996 to Atlanta, Georgia. The Greek general public were so annoyed that they even went so far as to boycott Coca-Cola for a while. Athens had been regarded by many observers as “the natural choice,” but its bid was described as “arrogant and poorly prepared” and came second in the final round of voting. The Greek government of Costas Simitis was determined not to make the same mistakes in their attempt for 2004.

One day in the mid-Nineties James received a telephone call from King Constantine’s office, asking if HM could use the Headmaster’s Study after the end of the school day for a private meeting. James agreed, wondering if something “political” was afoot. He found out the next morning from his spies (caretaker, cleaners, etc) that, along with some important-looking gents from Athens, Gianna had attended the secret conclave. Talking to her afterwards he discovered that this was the occasion on which she was first approached to lead the 2004 Bid Committee. As an IOC Honorary Member, Constantine had oiled the wheels for the PASOK government.

Gianna duly delivered the goods and the selection victory was announced on Friday, 5th September 1997, an event largely ignored by the British media since it was the day before the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. The cheering crowds in Syntagma Square merited a 20-second slot at the end of BBC1’s Six O’ Clock News.

On her return to London with the family at the start of the new school year, James and Gianna had a revealing conversation. After congratulating her on the successful bid, he asked her if she would now run the Organising Committee. She smiled wryly and said, “Absolutely not.” She was an astute and prescient politician, but should she have now trusted in the Headmaster’s discretion? She paused momentarily and then added, “At least not at the moment. It’s better if I let others mess it up and then step in later on to sort it out.” Which is of course exactly what happened. By 2000 the International Olympic Committee under Jacques Rogge was panicking about Greece’s commitment to the games and its ability to complete all the preparations in time. Gianna was asked to return and was named President of the Olympic Organizing Committee in May 2000, the first woman to hold this position. Under her watch, competition facilities were completed and security issues resolved. IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch and his successor Rogge, whom she comfortably outshone in

the Opening Ceremony speeches, both specifically credited her for the success of the games. The post-mortem on the financial cost of €8.5 billion and Gianna’s alleged profligacy would come later.

Her new job meant a permanent return to Athens, so the boys were withdrawn from the Hellenic College at the end of the 1999-2000 year. The family had been living in The Old Rectory, a grade II listed house in Old Church Street, Chelsea, bought in 1995 for £22 million. It was for many years London’s most expensive property sale in the UK. After their departure they sold it to another shipping billionaire, the Norwegian John Fredriksen, for £37 million. In 2004 it was reported in *The Evening Standard* that Roman Abramovich had offered £100 million for the 30,000 sq.ft. house even though it was not for sale.

And the bad news? No more Harrods hampers for the Headmaster!

Meanwhile, via a Highfield connection Pauline was also hobnobbing with celebrities of her own. In 1996 the parents of one of the boys in her class allowed their early nineteenth-century country house, Rotherfield Park, to be used as the location for a TV mini-series remake of Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*. The whole class including their form teacher was invited to the set of “Manderley,” where

they spent a happy day meeting all of the stars. Pauline reported back that they were all very friendly and welcoming, especially Geraldine James. The two episodes of the series were first broadcast on 5th and 6th January 1997.

The wedding of Constantine's eldest child, Princess Alexia, to Carlos Morales Quintana, architect and champion yachtsman, in July 1999 attracted less publicity than her brother's marriage ceremony, but it was nevertheless attended by a large royal contingent (three Kings and eight Queens, including QE2) and the reception, to which James and Pauline were again invited, was a splendid bash at Kenwood House in Hampstead. Of the other guests they spent most time with Selina Scott, the former TV presenter, who, although guarded at first, became trusting enough to express her loathing for the tabloid press in vituperative terms. Among other documentaries about European royals, she had made *The Return of the King* about Constantine's return to Greece after 25 years of exile and has remained a friend of the family, despite red top rumours of a "relationship" with him.



Pauline at Rotherfield Park in 1996, flanked by Emilia Fox (the second Mrs de Winter) and Charles Dance (Maxim de Winter).

By September 1999 the glory days of the Hellenic College were drawing to a close. Jane Jenkins, Roger Whittaker and Lesley Falconer had all departed and Elsa Amanatidou would follow two years later. It was the start of a long decline, a tale to be told in the next chapter.

Anna Vissi sings *Misirlou*, an old rembetiko song, at the Closing Ceremony of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. The title is a Greek pronunciation of the Turkish word *Mısırlı*, which means "Egyptian girl."

<https://youtu.be/Z0cWEELBKu0>

09/04/22

78. Assemblies

After a longish stay in the UK James arrived back in mid-March to Arctic conditions, strong winds and rough seas, but at least a wintry sun was beaming down on Chrani on most days. Daytime temperatures of 8 degrees Celsius were well below the seasonal norm of 16°. The length of overgrown vegetation told the story of the unseasonal volumes of rainfall over the past months. So, no swimming but plenty of strimming. After a week the joyful sights, sounds and smells of spring returned. Smoke from sweet-smelling bonfires rises from many of the olive groves below. Bees are busy in the sage bushes and noisy amidst the carpet-spread of vernal flowers. A pair of honey buzzards float regally above, chestnut brown with greyish heads, occasionally adjusting their glide path with a casual twitch of their distinctive, under-roundelled wings. In the high reaches of the giant carob tree the familiar great tit (now nicknamed Will Smith) has resumed his persistent song. And on April 2nd two house martins were spotted close to the house, raising James's spirits and confirming the onset of warmer weather. Now they are fluttering and twittering in the eaves around last year's nest, hopefully restoring it before they take up family residence again.

There has been no further sign of pine martens after their vandalism of the Tiguan. Nikos at the VW garage says they know the insulation is good for nesting and realise that it's not food. Small comfort, at 117€ for a new bonnet silencer. Every Greek has a story about kounavia damage, usually involving chewed cables, so perhaps James got off lightly. Sadly, no sign of Bertie down at the deserted Caribbean Beach Bar, so henceforward your narrator will be Doulapas himself.



Bob and Fotine's goats came for a day to help clear the long grass.

I've extolled the virtues of Costa Navarino Resort on the west coast of our Messinian peninsula before. Its two existing golf courses, the Bay (designed by Robert Trent Jones Jnr) and the Dunes (designed by Bernhard Langer) are now well-established and highly-regarded parkland circuits which meander

through olive and citrus groves, with spectacular views of mountains and sea. They are similar in style to many of the best Spanish and Portuguese courses. Last November two new courses were opened, the Hills and the Olympic, both designed by Jose Maria Olazabal. The Hills was named “Best New Golf Development” at the 2020 World Golf Awards and was a pleasure for me and my English friend Paul to play for the first time last week. We had the course to ourselves: this is known as “millionaires’ golf.” Our only criticism was the rock-hardness of the greens, but we were assured by the Director of Golf, Adam Kritikos, that they will soften as they mature. The fairways are generous, but if you hit a wide ball into the waste areas, don’t bother to search for it. It is a 100% goner, crying in the wilderness. More red lines and posts for lateral penalty area relief needed, please!



View of Navarino bay from the Hills course.

The Scandinavians, Germans and French have discovered Costa Navarino but not the British. Adam confirmed that this tourist template still holds true 12 years after the Dunes opened and that there are still relatively few visitors from the UK, despite cheaper golf deals than in Iberia. He has no answer to this. Every aspect of this operation is five-star plus, except the marketing department. Next week we play the second new course, whose full name is the International Olympic Academy, another 6300m layout with the highest slope difficulty rating of the four. Since golf was reinstated as an Olympic sport in 2016 there is a strong ambition to be able at least to enter a Greece team in the near future. When that happens, Costa Navarino, with its outstanding facilities and its thriving youth academy, will have been largely responsible for such a national achievement.

What else? Any village gossip? The Russian oligarch who owns a grand mansion just beyond Koroni left before the invasion of Ukraine. His floating gin palace disappeared from Kalamata harbour about a month ago. According to Dimitri, James’s taxi driver, Putin attended this guy’s daughter’s wedding a few years back, so he’s almost certainly on the EU sanctions list. Meanwhile in Chrani there lives a Ukrainian woman who recently had a big bust-up with an English ex-pat when she surprised everyone by declaring herself a big Putin fan.

Energy, fuel and food prices have gone through the roof here, as everywhere in Europe. The Energy and Environment Ministry is planning to double lignite production and to review its carbon reduction plan for lignite plant withdrawals. It is reported that a relevant order has already been given to the mines

of Western Macedonia and to the Arcadian mine of Megalopoli. The latter fuels the local power plant from which the daily emissions of smoke are always clearly visible as you drive down the motorway towards Kalamata from Tripoli.

On a cheerier note, as a foreigner who speaks the lingo you can get into some bizarre conversations with strangers. Here's a translation of one from two days ago in a Messini DIY shop:

James: "Good morning. I'd like some metallic paint, RAL7040, please."

Grizzled Shopkeeper (shows James the colour chart): "I'll have to mix it, minimum one litre."

James: "That's fine."

A brief chit-chat ensues whilst they wait on the mixing. Eventually:

Shopkeeper: "Where are you from? Your Greek is very good."

James: "England. Have you ever been there?"

Shopkeeper (lowers his voice because his wife is behind the nearby till): "No, but I lost my virginity at an early age to an English woman..." With a knowing look he clutches his genitalia.

James: "Er, so you speak English then?"

Shopkeeper: "No!"

James: In that case, very well done."

Shopkeeper: "Thank you. That'll be 9 euros."

Sometime in 1995 when another European war, the Bosnian War, was at its height, James was visited by a Serbian gentleman called Mr Popovich. He was the headmaster of the Serbian community school in West London. This was one of the many part-time schools run by and for the benefit of ethnic communities throughout the UK, of which the main purpose is to teach their particular language and culture to their children. Dozens of such Greek schools exist, often but not always connected to the local Orthodox parish church. James was familiar with many of the London Greek schools, but he had not previously come across the Serbian school. In this case it ran independently of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Mr Popovich introduced the purpose of his visit. He was representing both himself as the parent of a young daughter and also acting on behalf of other Serbian families whose children attended his weekend school. He wanted to know if Serbian boys and girls would be permitted to join the Hellenic College of London. James was intrigued by this unusual request, the reason for which would soon become apparent. He explained that in principle the school was open to all but the compulsory element of Greek in the curriculum was usually a practical deterrent. There were already a few non-Greeks in the Nursery and one or two children of staff in both the Primary and Secondary departments, whose parents were happy for them to learn Greek.

"Owing to the war in Bosnia," Popovich continued, "We Serbs are regarded somewhat as pariahs here nowadays and people do not view us kindly. The biggest problem for us is that our children are being bullied at their mainstream English schools for being Serbian. On the other hand, the Greeks are our friends and we believe that our children would be welcomed and well treated here. In fact, we think Greece is our only friend left in western Europe."

James understood exactly what the Serbian meant when he called the Greeks friends. On his first marketing trip to Athens in 1993 he had arrived armed with an impressive list of appointments, set up for him in advance by top-level London Greeks. He met the Minister of Culture, Dora Bakoyannis (scion of a political dynasty - daughter and sister of two Mitsotakis Prime Ministers) and thence proceeded to an audience with a senior mandarin at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His strategic aim was to put the Hellenic College of London on the map in Athens as well as in London. This also led him to meet the Heads of the top private schools too, including Athens College, Moraitis School and Campion School, initiatives which would lead to fruitful collaboration in the future.



According to these joke maps, Greeks and Serbians are “brothers.”

However, his most instructive meeting was a lunch with the political correspondent of one of the leading national newspapers. They got to talking about the topical subject of the Bosnian war. Of all the EU countries it seemed that Greece was most willing and best placed to act as the leading channel of communication between the West and Milošević’s government in Serbia. James wondered why. The journalist gave the uninformed Englishman a brief lesson in Balkan politics and concluded with a masterly summary of Greco-Serbian relations that James never forgot.

“There are three historical factors which will always bind the two countries together, irrespective of contemporary politics,” he said. “First, our common religion: Orthodoxy; secondly, our subjugation under the Ottoman empire for four hundred years; thirdly, we shared a brutal occupation by the Nazis in the Second World War. Finally, never forget what the West often does, that Greece is a *Balkan* as well as a Mediterranean nation state.”

James subsequently discovered that, if you want to start a lively discussion in these parts, just suggest that Greece is a Balkan country. Light the blue touch paper and stand well back. But the seasoned hack had a point, geopolitically if not culturally. She always has some skin in the fun and games of politics “up north.” Consider Greece’s long-standing obsession, unintelligible to Westerners, with the correct “naming” of North Macedonia.

So, James fully realised why Mr Popovich saw the Hellenic College as a possible safe haven for Serbian children and he was prepared to accept them as pupils, provided their parents accepted the various constraints. In the end none enrolled, but James’s education in Greekness had advanced a little further.

The routine meetings that James enjoyed best were those with prospective parents. They had usually booked to see him about their child(ren)’s enrolment as a result of a personal recommendation, so they mostly signed up without the need for the Head to go into super salesman mode. He was always fascinated by the family histories and what had brought them to London and specifically to his door at this point in their lives. Often insightful, as in the case of Mr Popovich, and sometimes hilarious.

For example, one day an American lady brought her young son along as a possible pupil. He had a Greek patronymic, she an Anglo-Saxon surname. James enquired about the boy’s father. Her reply included the best one-liner about Greek husbands that he has ever come across. She said, “He’s long gone. I divorced him years ago. I thought I’d married a Greek god, but he turned out to be just a goddamned Greek.” James was still laughing when he picked himself up from the floor.

Less amusing was the comment of a father who came for a preliminary recce before his family arrived in London. When James asked him, “How many children do you have?” he replied “Two. Oh, and a daughter.” Even twenty-five years ago that was deplorable.

His least favourite gatherings were the monthly staff meetings. Since they took place in the Staffroom, he couldn’t use the old trick which he sometimes used in his Study of turning off the heating. A cold room always encourages brevity. Making the punters stand up also keeps meetings shorter but in this forum it would have caused a riot. Although he always chaired the meeting tightly and controlled the agenda, he insisted on full minutes, rotating the minute-taker alphabetically round the teachers. As all chairmen know, the most tedious and potentially dangerous part of any meeting is “Any Other Business.” This was when the moaning Minnies could have their moment in the sun, bleating on about hair styles make-up jewelry skirt length and other matters largely irrelevant to the process of educating the young.

One such ten-minute timewaster on the unacceptable shortness of girls’ skirts (yes, you guessed it - the harangue was from one of the female teachers) occurred in the days when Eirene Crook was still Head of the Greek Department. She viewed these issues with the same ironic detachment as the Head. The day after the meeting she presented him with a beautiful miniature red cloisonne enamel tape measure. She began her explanation cryptically: “This is a gift which will help you, Headmaster, or should I now call you General Pangalos?” “Who is he, Eirene, and how will the tape measure help me?” “General Theodoros Pangalos,” she went on in the throes of much giggling, “was a right-wing dictator in the 1920s, who enacted a great number of repressive laws, including a ban on freedom of speech.

The most notorious of these was a law dictating the length of women's skirts, which were to be no more than 30 cm above the ground. I thought the tape measure might aid you in enforcing a similar rule, above the knee of course, for Hellenic College girls.” “Fuck off, Eirene, and thanks for the history lesson.” James treasures the tape measure to this day.



Round Square trips abroad with Sixth Formers were always a delight.

Here (from left) James, Elsa, Artemis, Michael, Marina and Pavlos at Yosemite

before the 1998 Annual Conference held at The Athenian School, Danville, California.

Looking back, James is proud of the way the daily School Assemblies developed from short, religious-based and notice-giving events into entertaining and educational experiences for the full age range of pupils and for the staff too. He encouraged teachers to talk about any of their interests and enthusiasms, covered a wide variety of stuff that he himself found stimulating and brought in outside speakers when he could. The acquisition of a digital projector in the late '90s enabled easy use of video material. Memorable home-grown assemblies included Rob McHarg (Darth Vader) and the Nursery children reprising the whole of the first Star Wars trilogy in ten minutes, not without incident; Michael McGrath extolling the joys of consuming a Bounty Bar (milk chocolate, *not* plain); the Headmaster's tour de force on "The Sixties," which included clips from *Woodstock* ("With A Little Help From My Friends" by Joe Cocker) and *Easy Rider* ("Wasn't Born to Follow" by The Byrds), and involved the deliberate smashing of a 78 rpm shellac record. A small sample of the multiplicity of assembly topics is listed at the end of this chapter.

End-of-term assemblies were a light-hearted affair. His departing pièce de résistance as a stand-up comedian manqué was his presentation on "Saint Grobulinus," who he explained to the assembled school on the last day of his final academic year was the patron saint of headteachers.

Reconstructed from his contemporary notes, this is the gist of his nonsense. Grobulinus lived in the North of England in the early fourth century AD. He was a Roman Briton, about whom we know a little from St Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. (Enthusiastic corroboration at this point from Dr Michael McGrath, Head of History.) He was a very wise, friendly and gentle teacher who spoke

Latin and whose motto was “illegitimi non carborundum.” Unfortunately his pupils were naughty, disobedient and failed to learn their Latin grammar properly. One day, travelling from Salford to Chorlton-cum-Hardy, he had a blinding flash of revelation, like St Paul on the road to Damascus. The heavens parted and a celestial voice spoke to him: “You’ve got to be cruel to be kind!” In the light of his Chorltene conversion Grob realised that to get RESULTS he needed to change his teaching approach completely.

He became a very harsh, humourless and unkind teacher. He used the whip and the stick - the phrase “six of the best” is attributed to him. He invented most of the school sanctions and punishments we use today, such as detention, suspension, contortion, expulsion - all Latin words. He employed them viciously but achieved fame and success for his students’ excellent exam results, thereby greatly pleasing the education establishment. He became a headmaster, then he founded the first and oldest teacher training college in Britain, the Saint Grobulinus Academy, known to its alumni as St Grob’s, now called the Institute of Education.

How did he become a saint? He was martyred by his students. They prodded him to death with the sharp tips of their styli and their quill pens. And here’s the strange and wonderful part of this true story: on his deathbed he understood his big mistake and repented. He finally appreciated that his conversion on the road to Chorlton had been misguided and false. He had become renowned and respected by serving and satisfying parents and the official authorities with his so-called successful methods and results. He’d earned *their* respect instead of the respect of his pupils. What’s the moral of this story? You should all of you, especially the teachers, remember and pray to St Grobulinus next year, so that they keep their priorities right, which are YOU the students. And if they stray, don’t stick your pen nibs into them, just say “Remember St Grobulinus!” Who is also the patron saint of tall storytellers.

All the secondary students and most of the staff got the joke about this daft figment of James’s invention, but perhaps there are some former Nursery and Primary pupils from that time, now adults in their twenties, who still believe in the truth of St. Grobulinus. He fervently hopes so.

Small sample of Headmaster’s assembly presentations:

- Provenance of *Alexandra Leaving* by Leonard Cohen (Plutarch’s *Life of Antony*; Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*; Cavafy’s *The God Abandons Antony*.)
- *Stairway To Heaven* by Led Zeppelin (theme of reward for waiting patiently)
- Ryuichi Sakamoto (including *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* theme music)
- George Harrison (after his death)
- Johnny Cash (after his death)
- Martin Luther King (including excerpt from *I Have a Dream* speech)
- Why are there two Easters?
- Buddhism
- Gandhi

- *The Great Gatsby* by Scott Fitzgerald
- *Ozymandias* by Shelley (on the occasion of the dismantling of Saddam Hussein's statue)
- *Pieta* by Michelangelo (theme of teamwork)
- 20th Anniversary of Harrods bombing
- 50th Anniversary of Conquest of Everest
- 50th Anniversary of the Sinking of the Titanic
- The Robin That Feeds From My Hand
- Hitler's Girlfriend Lived Here (in the 1920s Lord Redesdale's family had lived at 11 Lennox Gardens)

14/05/22

79. Olive Tourism

About 25 years ago the Director of the London office of the Greek National Tourism Organisation, Panos Argiros, was a parent at the Hellenic College. James remembers a wide-ranging discussion with him about the future of tourism in Greece. Panos waxed lyrical and somewhat bombastic about the strategy of his bosses at the Ministry of Tourism to attract more “high-end” foreign visitors. Without throwing the baby out with the bathwater of course, the *μωρό*, *moro* (baby) being sun, sea, souvlaki and cheap booze, swaddled in plenty of traditional Ελληνική φιλοξενία, *Elliniki philoxenia*, “Greek hospitality.”

Sailing holidays, cruising, classical tours and “long weekend” city breaks in Athens were already and remain an established part of the scene. However, among other new initiatives, now lost in the fog of James’s aging synapses, Panos talked of skiing, health spas and golf holidays. Did they happen? Unfortunately not a lot.

Nevertheless, you may be surprised to read that there are more than twenty well-established ski resorts in Greece, the most famous of which is centred on Arachova in the Mount Parnassos range. It is very popular with Athenians, as James witnessed when he used this attractive Boiotian town, owing to its proximity to Delphi, as an over-night stop on his biennial winter HCL A-level Classical Civilisation trips. These resorts are spread all across the mountainous mainland, from Florina in northwest Macedonia to the Chelmos range near Kalavryta in the Peloponnese. They are well-used by locals during the winter months but are still virtually unknown to foreigners.



Top of Parnassos Ski Centre, considered by many to be Greece’s best skiing resort, is less than two hours by car from Athens.

A number of health spa hotels and retreats have sprung up over the past ten years and attract a very wealthy niche clientele from home and abroad, but they do not add much to Greece’s GDP. If you want to do a creative writing course in an idyllic environment with sunny weather, you can do that at The

Writer's Lab in Skyros, but this is at the extreme and cultured end of the tourist spectrum. On the other hand, the fleshpots of Kavos in southern Corfu, Faliraki in Rhodes and Laganas in Zakynthos may be "low-end" destinations but as the 21st century equivalents of Sodom and Gomorrah they are unbeatable for quality, price and sin. Meanwhile, more up-market mass tourism booms on in Mykonos, Santorini, etc. So not much has changed.

As for making Greece a major golf destination, Panos' 90s dream of the future depends a generation later almost exclusively on Costa Navarino, now with its four high-quality courses. There is also a new high-spec Jack Nicklaus-designed course being built at Kilada in Argolis on the eastern side of the Peloponnese. In the meantime, The Constantakopoulos shipping family are pulling off a spectacular long-term success in Messinia and their ambition will continue to have a growing impact on the tourist map in Greece, especially in our region. Think Costa Smeralda in Sardinia or Puerto Banus near Marbella and you get the picture. Soon there will be a major redevelopment of Kalamata airport, in which they will be closely involved. Already Easyjet has increased its weekly flights from Gatwick in the summer season from three to five. The reason? Costa Navarino is a large part of the answer.

James was reminded of his conversation with Panos Argiros when he read recently about the latest scheme to attract a different type of international visitor: olive tourism. The term "olive tourism" was first used in Spain in 2002 to describe the totality of travel experiences relating to the olive and to olive oil. In Greece, the first steps were taken around fifteen years ago and were centred around the olive harvest, which happens between November and February.

The notion covers everything from visits to olive presses, themed walks, dedicated museums, soap-making and spa treatments using olive-based products. The Ministry of Tourism has introduced a quality mark and a set of standards for olive presses which are open to the public in its bid to develop this new sector. Enterprising producers offer oil tasting sessions, along the lines of wine tasting. This includes the use of blue glasses, so that tasters are not influenced by the colour of the oil. James recalls a similar ploy at a blind wine-tasting session in the Barossa Valley for which black glasses were provided. The first hurdle was simply to identify whether the wine was red, white or rosé!



Since you can see the colour of the oil being poured into the blue glass, what's the point?

Other creative ideas include combining oil and wine tasting experiences, “food pairing” sessions, spa treatments based on ancient practices and even night-time harvesting by the light of the October full moon. Costa Navarino sells olive oil therapies which they claim have their origins in inscriptions found at the nearby Bronze Age site of the Palace of Nestor. As Homer’s wise old King of Pylos might have said to the other Greek warriors at Troy: “There’s one born every minute..”



Harvesting olives by moonlight at Makri, near Alexandroupoli, in the north-east corner of Greece.

As an attraction to extend the tourist season beyond October, albeit on a small scale, olive tourism is theoretically sound. November, for example, can be a delightful month, with balmy weather, a warm sun and swimmable sea temperatures. Winter visitors to Fotine and Bob sometimes do a day or two's work on the harvest as an agreeable diversion, as James and Bea did in 2016.

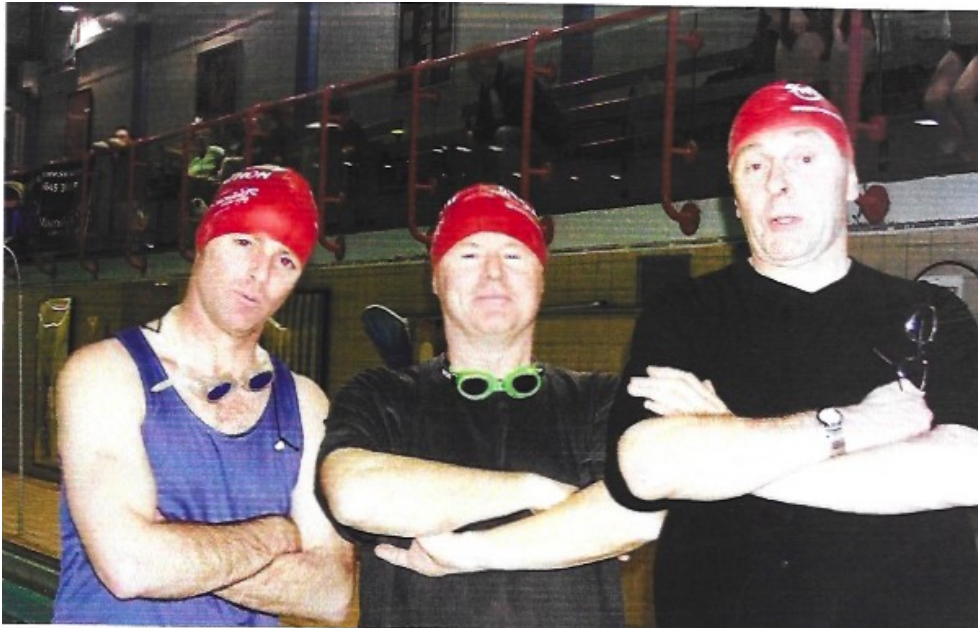
The problem in Messinia and I suspect in all other olive-growing regions, which are by definition rural, is that most of the tourist amenities - hotels, bars, restaurants, gift shops, etc. - are small family businesses which close down towards the end of October so that they can turn their attention to their other main source of income: olives. They have no wish to stay open for a much-reduced number of visitors during the harvest. There is also the fatigue factor. Thanos and his brother Adonis, who run the successful Theoxenia hotel in Chrani are a case in point. They have strong family connections with oil production and could offer visitor access to the whole process, but after a tiring 5-month, 7-days-a-week season they have no desire to remain open.

A few years before Covid struck, a proposal was made by some foreign tour operators and airlines to the Ministry of Tourism. If you can guarantee, they suggested, that sufficient amenities will be available for tourists in November and beyond, we shall commit to continue flying to the regional airports throughout the autumn at least. As Neville Chamberlain nearly said, no such undertaking was received. Consequently, international flights to Greece in the winter only route to Athens and Thessaloniki. So, along with bird-watching and various other specialist activities, olive tourism is destined to remain une niche de la niche in the Greek tourist market.

For golfers interested in Costa Navarino, here's a recent article by a U.S. journalist:

https://www.golfpass.com/travel-advisor/articles/is-greeces-costa-navarino-the-worlds-next-utm_source=GOLFPASS&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=GA_Weekly-Newsletter_20220506&mi_u=A9F4B293-6A01-42EC-AC15-D80ABA19C506

When Roger left the Hellenic College in 1999, James needed both a Deputy Head and a Head of Mathematics. The internal promotion of Elsa solved the former problem. For the Maths department he appointed Derek, known as “Dezza,” a suitably laddish nickname. He was an experienced and effective classroom practitioner and manager (“Good morning, team” was his daily greeting), who had spent most of his career in the state sector but now in his fifties he relished the opportunity to involve himself wholeheartedly in the totality of what he often referred to as “the offer” in a small private school. His charismatic and forthright character made him impossible to ignore. A man of many interests and opinions, he enthusiastically took up extra duties and responsibilities, cheerfully joined in the extra-curricular and pastoral life of the school and became a central figure in most staffroom social activities.



Before a Swimathon charity swim: (from left): Rob McHarg, JWW, Derek “Dezza” Fryer.

His weakness, though it might better be described as a divorcé’s hobby, was a predilection for mature ladies, of which there were more than a few on the HCL staff.

Every Headmaster worth his salt has spies in the Staffroom. The best will also be privy to pupil gossip and they will subtly filter rumour from fact before grading the information gleaned as worthy or unworthy of the Head’s ear. Throughout his career James was privileged to benefit from several masters of the craft of intelligence-gathering: Malcolm Wiseman at Highfield, Lesley Falconer at Lansdowne and subsequently the Hellenic College, Roger Whittaker and Elsa Amanatidou at HCL.

It was Elsa who approached James with confirmatory evidence of al fresco staff hanky-panky, as related to her with gleeful shock by a group of secondary girls. Dezza and the matronly Head of English had been spotted by Elsa’s trusties after school snogging in a nearby Pont Street porch (which incidentally was well within the school’s exclusion zone for *pupil* bad behaviour, e.g. smoking).

Elsa felt that the Head should know that what had been suspected for a while was now in the public domain. They agreed that Elsa would quell the witnesses and that for the moment the Head still knew nothing. Whatever action she took worked well since the story never broke and never required formal intervention. And that might have been the end of a rather boring tale of adulterous sex outside the

workplace. However..

The pair embarked on a lengthy and clandestine (except it wasn't) relationship in which by all accounts the Head of English became somewhat possessive. But Dezza was not a man to be contained and in time, unbeknown to the HoE, he successfully sought the favours of the School Bursar. Lorraine was an attractive lady in her forties. She herself subsequently told James the story of the collapse of the Head of Mathematics' love triangle with much amusement. Dezza's denouement took place at the Arrivals Gate at Stansted Airport.

Dezza had a mobile home in south-west France, where he had entertained the HoE during previous summer holidays, but this year he invited Lorraine instead. They had a high old time and flew back from Perpignon unable to conceal their smiles of contentment. The HoE had bought the HoM's fiction that he was going to France by himself. Knowing his dates of travel and the Ryanair flight times, she decided to surprise him by meeting him on his return to the UK. According to Lorraine, the look of horror on Dezza's face as they emerged through Arrivals to be confronted with the HoE was priceless. The thunderous gaze of the scorned woman would have turned a lesser mortal to stone, but Dezza quickly recovered his equanimity. It was only later that he discovered that in self-righteous revenge the HoE had rushed off to his flat for a hugely satisfying trouser-scissoring session. This perhaps explains his subsequent penchant for wearing cycling shorts. By the start of the school year in September he was back to his cheerful and affable self in the Staffroom, even when the HoE was an ever-glowing presence.

He was a memorable character, a raffish rogue who added a great deal to the entertainment quotient at HCL. As Rob (in his late thirties at the time) once said, "When I grow up, I want to be Dezza."

Over the first half of 2000 James lost about three stone in weight. He finally got round to visiting his GP and friend, Andy Neville Towle, at the end of the Summer Term. It did not take Andy long to diagnose the problem. As a medical greenhorn, James remembers not understanding why Andy was so serious and sad when he proclaimed, "James, I'm so sorry, but you've got diabetes." The disease's incurability never really registered with him and he was surprisingly naïve about its possible complications. It was only when he was referred some months later by Andy to Professor David Russell-Jones that he developed an understanding and a strategy which has worked well for the following twenty-plus years.

DRJ, or "The Prof" as he is known to staff and colleagues alike, is a towering figure in the world of diabetology and endocrinology. But it is not his academic track record that endears him to his patients so much as his personal commitment to each of them and his enthusiastic optimism on their behalf. The bottle is always half full. At their first meeting in November 2000, when pills, diet and exercise were having little beneficial effect (compare the poor physical appearance of James in the October 2000 RS photo below with the other "healthy" photos), he exclaimed almost immediately, "We'll do all the tests but you look like a candidate for insulin to me." He was right of course and the treatment would work, but it was his later exhortation that day which has remained James's guiding principle ever since: "I want you to become the best expert in the world on your own condition. After me, of course." In this way he cleverly incentivised James to gain and retain some measure of control over his life and health. What a stroke of luck to come under the long-term care of such a great doctor and such a bonzer person!

The arrival of Michael Chandris in 2001 as the new Chairman of Governors would signal the beginning of the long, last act for James at the Hellenic College. The Head regained his fighting fitness; most of the untroubled rituals and routines of the school continued as before; there was no shortage of fun, laughter and learning. Rob was doing a good job as Deputy Head after Elsa's departure to Brown

University, where she remains to this day happily ensconced as Distinguished Senior Lecturer and Director of Modern Greek Studies.

However, donor fatigue was corroding the financial stability of the College and a fatal decline had begun. For the Headmaster, the doom-laden Bags of Damocles (see below) were now being suspended from the elegantly carved ceilings of his Study. For the teachers with taste, on the other hand, it was the daily sight of Dezza's Cycling Shorts hanging out to dry from the second-floor Staffroom window of our decorous listed building that became a pearl-clutching cause for concern. The offending article was soon removed to its new home: the inner sanctum of the ladies' bathroom.

Round Square Annual Conference delegates



Starehe Boys' Centre, Nairobi, 1996 Appleby College, Oakville, Ontario, 2000



St. Philip's College, Alice Springs, 2001 St Stithian's College, Johannesburg

& St Cyprian's School, Cape Town, 2003



Three archetypal Classicists on the Antirion – Rion ferry, February 2003: (from left) Claire Hault (More House School), Dimitri Doulapas, Peter Millett (Campion School, Athens). In the background the new bridge across the Gulf of Patra was still under construction. *Yasoo Naftee* was their private joke. It means “Hello, Sailor” in Greek but has no camp connotation whatsoever.

17/06/22

80. Changing of the Guard

The past and the present coalesce in unexpected ways. In the late 1990s the new Greek Consul General in London, Angelos Carokis, enrolled his son Eugene, at the Hellenic College. Angelos had previously been posted in Germany, where the boy had developed a passion for golf, an unusual pastime for a Greek youth. So he became the only pupil in the school with whom the Headmaster could have an intelligent conversation about the Greatest Game on Earth. During a Round Square trip to northern California in 1998 James found time to visit Pebble Beach. He remembers bringing Eugene a souvenir ball back, since the pro's shop was already selling mementos in advance of the forthcoming 2000 US Open. (This major tournament would be won by Tiger Woods by an unprecedented and record-breaking 15 shots. Ernie Els and Miguel Ángel Jiménez were runners-up. Jiménez joked afterwards that he and Els won "the other tournament.") The Carokis family returned to Greece in 2000 when Angelos received his next diplomatic posting.

Fast forward to 2021, when James receives an invitation from Costa Navarino to join a new golf club with heavily discounted green fees et al, available exclusively for local Messinian residents. He would require two sponsors who were already members, a Catch-22ish problem. Until he spots the name of the Club President: *Evangelos Carokis, Ambassador of Greece to Sweden*. Surely not..!/? Yes indeed, the very same. A swift exchange of e-mails and telephone calls confirms a jovial reconnection after 21 years and the smoothest, fast-track introduction to membership of the Peloponnese Golf Club. Angelos was recently retired from the Hellenic Diplomatic Service, living in Athens and planning to host an inaugural competition at which he hopes they will meet again and play together.

The tournament took place three weeks ago, when James had a cheery reunion with Angelos and his wife Leoni. He also met Leoni's brother Vassilis and the Club Vice President, Andreas, both lovely men with many connections with London Greeks of James's former acquaintance. Andreas has a long business association through his cruise tourism business with – would you believe it? – the Chandris family. He has known James's HCL nemesis, Michael Chandris, since boyhood. Μίκρος κόσμος, *mikros cosmos*, small world...

The most upsetting event of James's final years at the Hellenic College, if not of his whole tenure, was the death of Santos Teixeira. The long-time resident caretaker was the unsung paragon of the school's virtues. In middle age he contracted an aggressive form of motor neurone disease and died in December 2001 within six months of diagnosis. The only time the Headmaster cracked up in public in his fourteen years at the helm was when he announced the devastating news to the children in Assembly.

At the risk of succumbing utterly to the sentimentality of nostalgia, I have decided to render the whole of James's subsequent eulogy, delivered at Santos' funeral which took place at St Mary's Catholic Church, Chelsea, on 9th January 2002. In justification, this is a written memoir not only of James's life but of all the best and memorable people who inhabited and shared it. Santos was without doubt one of these.

"I want to speak in celebration of the life of Santos Teixeira, a man who was very special to all of us, a great friend and a wonderful colleague.

Santos was born forty-seven years ago in the town of Santa Cruz on the island of Madeira. And.... he always made a point of saying that he was most definitely Madeiran rather than Portuguese. He was the sixth of ten siblings, having six brothers and three sisters. He grew up with a reputation for good humour and fun, a characteristic of his that all of us who knew him as an adult will recognise and remember with great pleasure and affection.

In 1976 he married Angela, whom he had first met at the wedding of one of his brothers, and shortly afterwards they came to England, in search of a different life and better opportunities, on the recommendation of his elder sister who was already in London. And so in 1981 began a long association with the fledgling Hellenic College, with Santos starting work at the school very soon, I think only four days, after it first moved into 67 Pont Street. By 1984 he had taken on the role in which most of us knew him, namely that of resident Caretaker. This was in many ways the perfect job for someone with his immense energy and capacity for hard work, with his sharp sense of awareness and ready initiative, his intelligence, his problem-solving abilities and above all his sociable and hospitable disposition.

In due course Santos and Angela were blessed first with the birth of their daughter Jane in 1985 and then their son Timothy in 1987. Santos was a very loving and well-loved father of his family, but he was also a very popular and well-known member of his local community, both the Portuguese community and also the locale around Pont Street. And he was of course a central figure in the life of the school in which he worked for so many years. In fact he was the longest serving member of this extended family, and I calculate that as many as a thousand children, dating back over the past twenty years, will have had the privilege of knowing him as a really approachable and friendly grown-up, ever-present and ever-helpful in the school. And this long-lasting association also applies to many generations of parents and colleagues, too. The strength of such friendships and of Santos' relationships with so many at the school is evidenced not only by the presence of you all here today but also by the frequent visits of alumni, of Old Boys and Old Girls, which he always received when they returned to their Alma Mater over the years - they always made a point of seeing Santos. He was a permanent feature and a happy point of reference for them all.

And they knew where to find him, as did all the current pupils, at certain times of day: running the Tuck Shop. They say that his favourite phrase was "No money, no tuck", but I think that there were a few privileged individuals, staff and pupils, who were extended a short line of credit from time to time. And I have to confess that I myself was sometimes one of these beneficiaries. The Tuck Shop was more than a service, it was a social gathering place over which Santos presided and where disputes were resolved and friendships formed.

We shall all remember Santos' love of football, both as a player and supporter. As a player he was a regular member of a Portuguese club side based in Stockwell, and I remember him in many Staff versus Students soccer matches as a skilful midfield general, usually wearing the black gloves which are much in fashion at the moment. But Santos wore them more in homage to one of his heroes from the great Benfica side of the Sixties, Simoes, who played alongside Eusebio and Torres in the 1966 Portugal World Cup semi-finals and a number of European Cup finals. This was his favourite team and we both agreed that it was the best side ever produced by Portugal.

These discussions often took place whilst he was driving the College minibus, which he always did with great gusto and excessive use of the brakes. He once told me that he might one day like to be a taxi driver in Madeira like one of his brothers. Those of you who have travelled around Hyde Park Corner or Parliament Square as Santos's passengers will appreciate his great amusement and laughter when I told him that he wouldn't be able to make much money as a taxi driver at the speed he drove,

since he would always be too quick to clock up a decent amount of time on the meter!

And that will be my abiding memory of him - the warm and ready sense of humour of a man who lived his life with a magnanimous spirit and who would want us to think of him happily and fondly, now and whenever we contemplate his life and our good fortune in having known him.”

Meanwhile, the billionaire shipowner, Michael Chandris, had taken over as Chairman of Governors in September 2001. Although he had been a Governor since the late 1980s and had even been involved in James’s recruitment interviews in 1990, he had rarely appeared at board meetings. Along with his brother John, he had been busy developing the family cruise business, now renamed Celebrity Cruises, into the US market. The ships retained their distinctive blue funnels with the white cross, indicating the Greek letter *chi*, the initial letter of ”Chandris. In 1997, they sold their interests in Celebrity Cruises to Royal Caribbean Cruises and Michael would have more time on his hands. As he said to James, “I’ve had enough of being a glorified hotelier at sea.”

Dino Goulandris had handed his younger cousin a poisoned chalice. Michael would now take full responsibility for the growing budget deficit and in effect paramount control of decision-making regarding the school’s future. Donations had always made up for the chronically inadequate fee income in a very niche market, but no longer. Michael’s approach, unlike previous Chairmen, would be pragmatic and unsentimental. He confided in James, “I’ve never been involved in a failed enterprise before and I’ve no intention of starting now...”

Over the following five years the Chairman made a valiant attempt to improve HCL’s parlous finances. His biggest success was to raise a six-figure amount from a magnificent fund-raising event in June 2002. This was a Charity Polo match in Gloucestershire, hosted by King Constantine and featuring the Prince of Wales and his two sons. Many high-rollers and various celebrities attended.

During one of the chukkas James found himself standing next to a very tall, elegant woman in her late thirties. Neil Simpson, Head of Science and professional celebrity spotter, sidled up to James and nudged him in the ribs. James fended him off and continued to watch the three princes at play. After a while the lady moved off, followed by Neil who seemed to be stalking her. Half-an-hour later he returned, still in a state of high excitement, and said, “James, you were actually *standing next to her!*” “Neil, calm down. Who is she anyway?” “Elle Macpherson, Elle Macpherson! The supermodel. What did she say?” “We didn’t talk. I’ve no idea who she is. Just another high-worth stranger to me.” “No, no!” he groaned and clutching his glass of champagne staggered off in search of other celebs.

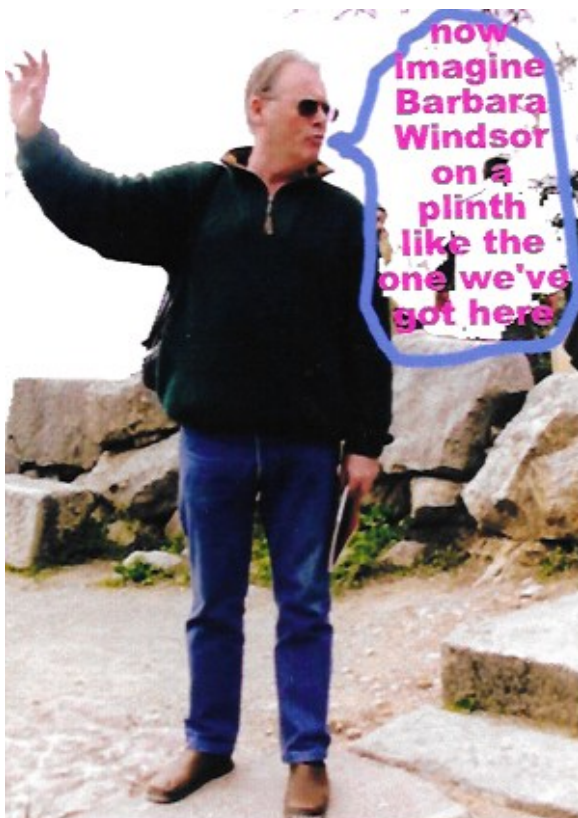
James did spend some time with a Greek celebrity he knew (and Neil didn’t), the singer Anna Vissi, and he sat next to Prince Charles for part of the post-match lunch. HRH was charming company and amusingly sardonic about “the Greeks” for whom James worked. He said he was happy to have turned up to help fill the Hellenic coffers.

Initiatives such as this sustained the College for a further year or so, but matters would come to a head in the 2003-2004 academic year. In the meantime, the vibrant life of a happy school proceeded as normal. The pupils blithely pursued their enviable bi-lingual education, untouched by the looming existential crisis. For James, his small daily dosage of Classics teaching gave him a disproportionate amount of pleasure and respite from the burden of keeping the HCL ship afloat. He continued with his annual Round Square trips and his biennial Sixth Form Classics tours to Greece. For a while the Parents’ Association had an uppity Chairwoman, a notoriously successful hedge fund manager called Elena. She proved difficult to deal with but was soon ousted.



A-level Classical Civilisation trip: Theatre of Dionysos, Athens, 2003.

James's final Classics excursion to Greece in February 2003 was particularly enjoyable. By now it had become a three-school affair involving the More House School girls and for the out-of-town leg a group from Champion School, Athens, accompanied by their Classics teachers, Claire Hoult and Peter Millett. Peter was responsible for the photo and speech bubble below.



Tour guide at Olympia, 2003

And so to the endgame. It was highly unusual for the Chairman to contact the Headmaster during the school holidays. In April 2004 Michael rang to invite James to lunch at the suitably plush restaurant of the InterContinental Hotel, which was very close to the Chandris (UK) offices in Old Park Lane. James smelt a rat and correctly assumed that this might be his “We’d like to let you go” meeting, as the euphemism has it. He was therefore ready for anything, especially an expensive free lunch, and accordingly prepared himself with a very light breakfast. As for the rest, he could handle that too.

James’s suspicions were confirmed when, even before ordering, Michael politely enquired about his diabetes. In three-and-a-half years he had never asked about James’s health before.

“It’s under control. I’m absolutely fine, fit as a fiddle.” This was going to be like playing poker with a man whose hand you’ve already seen in advance.

“So you don’t feel it’s affecting your energy levels or your ability to do this very stressful job?”

“Not in the least.” It is at this point that James decides to order the most highly priced starter and main course on the menu. And, yes, he tells himself, he would probably have pudding as well today.

“I was wondering whether you’d thought about retirement at all?”

“No, I have another three years until I’m sixty when I’ll be eligible for my Teacher’s Superannuation.”

They tuck into their starters, the Headmaster with more relish than his Chairman, who now attempts some small talk whilst distractedly picking at something pink and fishy on his plate. Michael’s choice of wine is excellent. James waits patiently for his adversary’s next move. It arrives with the main course.

“Would you consider early retirement, if the terms of a settlement were acceptable of course? We want to do the honourable and decent thing, of course, and play fair. There is nothing personal in this. You have served the school very well.”

“When would that be for, exactly?”

“At the end of this academic year.”

Time to look shocked and slightly aggrieved. “That’s extremely soon and potentially disruptive for the school. Headteachers in the independent sector are usually on two terms’ if not a year’s notice. Have you discussed this frankly unexpected proposal with the other Governors?”

“Yes, 75% of them agreed that I should broach the subject.” Is he lying or have three-quarters of them turned into bastards? (It turned out to be a bit of both. Some of them were told post eventum and others just played Pontius Pilate.) He continues, “So, would you like to think about what might be possible from your point of view?”

The moment is ripe to drop a small but perfectly formed, nonchalant bomb into proceedings. It has a much greater effect than James anticipates. The one-sided game of Texas Hold’em has gone on for long enough. “Well, I’d need to talk to my union representative. This Filet Mignon Romolo is cooked perfectly, by the way.”

Michael nearly chokes on a piece of his equally succulent food. “What? Are you in a union? I didn’t know Headmasters could do such a thing!”

“Oh yes, it’s called the NAHT, which stands for National Association of Head Teachers. It’s a very powerful and effective union.”

Having recovered his sang froid, Michael asks James to contact his union as quickly as possible, “time is of the essence,” etc., thereby strengthening James’s negotiating position. He talks of “rebranding” the school and that he has two potential successors lined up already for September, which is only five months away. He stresses the necessity of a “seamless transition” and the possibility of James retaining links with the HCL alumni, perhaps in a Development Officer role. He clearly needs the PR on this to go well. James refrains from asking Michael why he himself couldn’t be the Head to take the school forward in its new direction. By now mentally he is already long departed into a new life. If only he had known then what he found out later, after everything was agreed. Allegedly the Headship had already been offered to Fran Bayliss, former Head of Ibstock Place School in Roehampton (whom James knew quite well) before this lunch took place. If so, imagine the additional joys and benefits of a constructive dismissal case!

Incidentally, Fran had been suggested to Michael as a post-Wardrobian possibility by a freshly appointed Governor, a toxic Greek mother with a non-Greek surname. Whereas James holds no personal animosity towards Michael, the instigator of his downfall but who always behaved correctly in circumstances of his own devising, this interfering woman was another matter. Her meddling would end within a year in a bitterly ironic volte-face. She withdrew her two children, telling staff that she did not want them growing up in a “Greek ghetto.” To this day, when axing logs for firewood James occasionally comes across a particularly difficult piece to chop. However, if he concentrates fully and imagines that the log is actually the living skull of Mrs X, he seems miraculously with his next blow to cleave the tough wood with ease.

James cannot remember what he chose from the dessert menu, only that Bombe Surprise did not feature on it.

This splendid luncheon ended with the customary civility on both sides, but as James made the short walk on air to Hyde Park Corner tube station he felt an extraordinary sense of release and even heard himself singing a light-hearted tune. Suddenly his future *without work* would happen three years' sooner than anticipated. No need to get up at 5.15am every day, no more commuting - always his biggest bane, rather than the headmastering itself - no cause to worry about next year's looming ISI school inspection and its concomitant mass of document preparation, no more stropky parents or querulous teachers. The intensity of his relief also told him that he had underestimated the high level of stress to which he had adjusted simply in order to do the job well. Perhaps Michael was right on that. No matter, now for a telephone call to the NAHT.

A week later he had the first meeting with his union man, Derek Morris, who confidently took control. He began with the key question: "Do you want to stay or go?" "I want to go!" "OK, leave it all to me." And James did. Nothing can be revealed about the financial settlement, owing to a Compromise Agreement which endures to the end of time. Suffice it to say that Pauline, who always had a fondness for sports cars, went out and bought a Jaguar XK8 Convertible.



Pauline's pride and joy

Pre-agreed announcements were made in late May. James and Michael maintained the necessary charade through to the end of term, during which James tried hard and failed to suppress his de-mob happiness in the face of quizzical colleagues and the more astute parents. Prizegiving and Speech Day saw mighty tributes and gifts of solid silver. James concluded his final speech with a recitation of Cavafy's "Ithaca." Elsa happened to be in town and joked afterwards that "Caesarion" (see English translation below) would have been more appropriate.

Not only James was on a high that ultimate day. So too were his Greek audience, children and adults. Their national football team had just beaten the Czech Republic the previous evening in the semifinal of UEFA Euro 2004 and would proceed two days later to win the tournament, a fact that I would remind my English readers has never yet been achieved by England. James's HCL story ends with a drunken bout of late-night Greek dancing in the company of parents and colleagues in a seedy Hellenic nightclub somewhere along the Marylebone Road.

It was certainly the end of an era. The new broom decisively swept out many of James's trusties. Mrs Bayliss had already upset most of the teaching staff in 1-to-1 "meet and greet" sessions a month earlier. Eleven teachers, an astonishingly high number in a small school, left with James that glorious summer of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. They included three stalwarts who had started even earlier than 1990 (Erasmia Panayiotopoulou, Inger Heddy and Guy Farrugia). One exception who would soldier on manfully was Dezza, who unsurprisingly was able to utilize his previously noted allure with the older ladies to inveigle himself into the good books of his new boss. Neil Simpson on the other hand, arguably the most popular teacher in the Secondary School, fell out with her so badly when he first met her that he never even made it to September.

James's indefatigable P.A., Sydney Jones, also decided that it was the opportune time to retire. Her sharp humour, as well as her natural common sense and calmness under pressure, sustained James throughout his reign. In his tribute to Syd in his last speech he commented: "Her unflappability and patience in what is sometimes a surreal environment more akin to Bedlam than Plato's Academy is legendary." Amen to that.



Miguel Ángel Jiménez with his biggest fan (retired) at Kingsbarns Golf Links, Fife, in September 2006.

Photo courtesy of Alan Ross, James's Aussie compadre and fellow golfing RS Headmaster.

Thus did the Headmaster move on to prowl the golf courses of the world, occasionally frightening the local fauna with his wayward tee shots. What of the Hellenic College? At some point in that summer term Michael told James that he had given Bayliss three years to turn the school around. In Athens that autumn some friends who understood the hellenic mentality better than he did confidently speculated that Michael had already made the decision to close the school but needed to show that he had at least tried to save it. The Board Meeting minutes of 9th December 2003 record that his proposal to close the school at the end of the current academic year owing to its unsustainable deficit was rejected by the rest of the Governors. They opted instead for the Headmaster's compromise solutioneadmaster's compromise solution , ie to close the highly loss-making A-level courses. For Michael, from a business perspective, it was not enough, so he took the drastic steps described above and below. Bayliss would

be his willing and ruthless instrument.

Rob McHarg (Deputy Head), Phillipa La Fontaine, (Head of Nursery) and Fr Mark Underwood (Head of Primary) could only tolerate one year more. Other casualties in 2005, whether voluntary or involuntary, were Julie Fowler (Nursery teacher for fifteen years), Christos Marcou (Art and Primary) and Michael McGrath (Head of History). These were all excellent teachers but contaminated by their association with the previous administration. Fr Mark's parting shot was a devastating critique of the new leadership via a letter to all parents which he sent to the Parents' Association.

The new regime lasted two years. In April 2006 Michael took decisive action and announced the closure of the school in July. The lease on the two buildings was sold to Knightsbridge Place School Group, who established an international prep school which flourishes successfully to this day. Prince Nikolaos told James that the property deal with a venture capitalist contact of his took only a few days. "Other offers were rubbish," he added. Fran Bayliss was kept on for one further year to see the last HCL GCSE cohort through to their exams. However, the new school still retains some Greek DNA, with a full-time teacher of Modern Greek, James's final staff appointment. The money raised from the sale of the lease went to the Hellenic College Trust, which continues to fund scholarships at the school for Greek pupils, in accordance with the trust's stated mission specifically to support the education of Greek children in London.

Some months into his retirement James visited Dino Goulandris in his Queen Anne's Gate offices. He was gratified to learn that Dino had never wanted James to be replaced and he had continued to support his cause but having handed over the reins of absolute power to Michael Chandris he now had to accept his decisions. "Θα δούμε," he said, "*Tha thoume*, "We shall see." Heroes and villains abound in every life. For everything he did for the Hellenic College of London over the twenty-five years of its existence, Dino Goulandris will forever reside in the pantheon of James's heroes.

Caesarion

Partly to verify an era,
partly also to pass the time,
last night I picked up a collection
of Ptolemaic epigrams to read.
The plentiful praises and flatteries
for everyone are similar. They are all brilliant,
glorious, mighty, beneficent;
each of their enterprises the wisest.
If you talk of the women of that breed, they too,
all the Berenices and Cleopatras are admirable.

When I had managed to verify the era
I would have put the book away, had not a small
and insignificant mention of king Caesarion
immediately attracted my attention.....

Behold, you came with your vague
charm. In history only a few
lines are found about you,

and so I molded you more freely in my mind.
I molded you handsome and sentimental.
My art gives to your face
a dreamy compassionate beauty.
And so fully did I envision you,
that late last night, as my lamp
was going out -- I let go out on purpose --
I fancied that you entered my room,
it seemed that you stood before me; as you might have been
in vanquished Alexandria,
pale and tired, idealistic in your sorrow,
still hoping that they would pity you,
the wicked -- who whispered "Too many Caesars."

Written by Constantine Cavafy (1863 - 1933) and published in 1918.

20/08/22

81. Retirement

It never ends. As Michael Corleone says in *The Godfather Part III*, “Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.” James thought he had finished with his tale of the Hellenic College of London but it has clearly not finished with him, even 18 years on. A few nights ago he had one of his recurring absurdist nightmares. Their leitmotif is always frustration, accompanied by a bewildering lack of understanding. He always wakes up feeling like Brian Stimpson, the hapless Headmaster played by John Cleese in *Clockwise*. Over the years a number of similar repeating themes occur, e.g. an inability to hit a golf ball off a tee owing to external interference such as overhanging branches, the ball constantly falling off the tee peg, the correct club missing from the bag, etc; commuting home in the crowded rush hour without a stitch of clothing on – no one else seems to give a damn; worst of all, the first day of the Autumn Term at HCL.

This time it was a long spell of the familiar torture: That First Day. Here is a stream of consciousness description. If you find it difficult to follow, well, that’s postmodern surrealism for you.

James sits on a side chair in the first Assembly of the year in a diminished role not standing headmasterly as usual at the podium which is occupied by a confident primary school pupil who is telling jokes to great acclaim. This is odd until James realises that he is watching a standard Primary Joke-Telling practice session then it makes perfect sense. There are more staff than pupils in attendance. After Assembly a young man in the corridor who seems to recognise James but who is a complete stranger to him says he has come for the Chemistry teaching vacancy so James pretends he knows all about it until the youth is whisked off to be interviewed by a.n.other. Roger Whittaker appears. He has a problem with classroom space he needs an executive decision because the room he had allocated for Greek Geography has been occupied by “the Run Rabbit Run people,” implying that James knows about them and has somehow colluded in this piece of unHellenic maladministration. James has a sinking feeling that he is implicated in selling classroom space to outsiders for cash. Before he can reply Maria Boura on the telephone shouts out for him to take the call it’s from Momo a Greek woman who apparently knows him and has “a modelling job” for him but it has to be this afternoon and he’ll have to leave the premises *on the first day of term* to do it. James is conflicted. She hands the receiver to Roger by mistake who becomes confused. Both Roger and James now have handsets and are hearing Momo speaking on the end of their lines. Scene cuts back to the corridor where a young black-robed Greek priest strangely beardless smiles at James who had better say Hello. Who the f**k is this sinister, clean-shaven heterodox and why is everyone else so comfortable in his presence? Meanwhile Roger is doing a great impression of Virgil the guide in Dante’s *Inferno* and explains that the cleric has a most wonderfully deep and impressive speaking voice.

James wakes up in a sweat on one of the hottest nights of the year. What does it mean? Over to you budding Sigmunds, but old HCL hands will probably say that it all sounds like a normal Wardrobe day at the office.

Back to the present. This has been the season for more house guests than ever before. In May came Jimmy the Liphook tree surgeon, who did a splendid pruning job on the carobs and other mature trees. He was mightily impressed with the house which he likened to a Columbian drug baron’s lair. “I guess you must have all the Cali cartel bosses’ numbers on speed dial,” he joked. James did not disabuse him of this notion. June brought Paul Majendie, an international travelling companion of

James since 2010. The two vain and glorious Old Gits had planned to go to Armenia and Georgia in June but Putin's War put a stop to that, not least because Paul was scheduled to fly to Yerevan with Ukrainian International Airlines via Kiev. Instead they spent a few dreamy days in the deep Mani, a delightful throwback to an earlier Greece, and they almost got to the top of the Byzantine fastness of Mistra until a rare bout of common sense got the better of them. In July Rob and Michael, former HCL teachers and returnees to Chrani, arrived and allowed themselves to be drawn into what their host called "a bit of concreting." Finally, early August saw Edith bring a gang of eight lively friends over for her graduation party, damaging forever James's closely guarded reputation in the village as the Reclusive Englishman Who Lives On The Hill.



May: Jimmy loves Greek food June: Paul halfway up Mistra



July: Michael and Rob earn their keep August: Edith's party at Jiannis' Bar

Retirement in 2004 allowed more time for escapades abroad. The first of these took place in August 2005 and was recorded in an article written in April 2010 for the Reform Club Review. It was entitled "My Byronic Swim across the Hellespont." Here it is, in its entirety:

"May 3rd 2010 marked the 200th anniversary of Lord Byron's successful swim across the Hellespont. As another confirmed Hellenophile I was inspired by his feat to attempt the same swim in 2005, shortly after I had retired as Headmaster of the Hellenic College of London. Byron's swim was motivated by the Greek myth about Hero and Leander. They were ill-fated lovers who lived on opposite sides of the Hellespont (Dardanelles). Hero was a priestess of Aphrodite at Sestos on the European shore, and each night she would light a lamp in the window of the tower in which she lived, to guide Leander as he swam across to her from Abydos on the Asiatic side. In this way they met and made love through many summer nights. But winter came with its stormy weather, still Hero lit the lamp and still Leander braved the treacherous seas. Then one night during a violent storm, the lamp was blown out by the wind and Leander, losing his way among the dark and heaving waves, was drowned. Next morning Hero looked down and saw his body washed up on the shore. In her grief she flung herself from the tower, falling to her death beside her lover.

In May 1810 Byron was twenty-two, and ten months into his two-year tour of the Mediterranean. He was not yet famous for his poetry or his profligacy, although he had just finished the first draft of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Long distance swimming was Byron's favourite sport and he prided himself on his ability. (He also swam across the mouth of the Tagus River at Lisbon and from the Lido to the Rialto Bridge in Venice.) Whilst travelling in the region of the Hellespont and being well-acquainted with the myth, he wished to emulate Leander's swim. On his first attempt in mid-April, accompanied by Lieutenant Ekenhead, a Royal Naval officer from the frigate HMS Salsette which was at anchor in the Dardanelles, he had misjudged the strength and direction of the current. After an hour in the water, they was only halfway across and decided to give up. Two weeks later, also with Ekenhead, he successfully swam from Sestos to Abydos in one hour and ten minutes, according to his close friend,

John Cam Hobhouse, who was watching from a nearby ship. It is reported that the strong current forced them to swim about twice the distance of the shortest crossing. Byron subsequently caught a fever, about which he jokes in his poem written to celebrate the exploit:

...Twere hard to say who fared the best:

*Sad mortals! thus the Gods still plague you!
He lost his labour, I my jest;
For he was drowned, and I've the ague."*

My effort was a far less romantic achievement, even though I was thirty-five years older than Byron was at the time of his swim. It was late August, the sea was flat-calm and its temperature was much more pleasant than it would have been in May. Although the shortest safe distance across is about 2000m, I trained on good advice to swim 4000m non-stop, just in case. This is because, with the prevailing current running strongly from the Sea of Marmaris in the north-east towards the Aegean, one has to swim elliptically in order to reach the point opposite.

My apprehensions at the beginning were also much reduced by other factors. Firstly, there were three others doing the swim: Chris the policeman, Elaine the Physics teacher and John the civil engineer, all experienced open-water swimmers, younger and fitter, and very supportive of me. Secondly, we had a lead guide, John Coningham-Rolls, with impressive credentials: an Iron Man triathlete, he had swum the English Channel in about fifteen hours and, incredibly, done the 28-mile Manhattan Island Marathon Swim in under nine hours. Also, he had taken us for "a training swim" of about a mile the previous evening along the Canakkale coast, deliberately (I think) taking us through shoals of drifting surface seaweed. This initially induced some panic in my first-ever open water swim of any real distance, but after ploughing on regardless for a while I became quite comfortable with this distraction and was thus psychologically better prepared for the next day. Next, we had a support boat with two experienced local boatmen on board. Finally, once I had started the swim I realised that all the months of training had paid off, since I knew absolutely that the distance and whatever time it took were well within my capacity. The advice of my brother-in-law had been true: "Train so that you have a realistic and healthy contempt for the distance." In the end I felt I could have swum a good deal further.



The Hellespont – it doesn't look far across, does it?

On a hot yet cloudy early Saturday morning we set out from Abydos in Asia, aiming for the ruined castle of Sestos in Europe. The four swimmers were soon some distance apart from each other. The

Turkish boatman, Girol, held station slightly aft and to port, blowing his whistle and shouting at me when he needed to correct my insecure navigation. The first part across the current was quite hard going, but when I turned downstream I can honestly say that the rest of the swim was highly enjoyable. That is, until the last two hundred metres when I misjudged the final cross-current and found myself drifting past the finishing point, the ruins of Sestos castle, resulting in a frantic swim back against the current, with Girol shouting “The castle, the castle,” as if I didn’t know my destination by then.



After the Hellespont swim, August 2005.

Afterwards, John reckoned that because of the currents and the zig-zag nature of the swim we had actually covered about three miles, from start to finish. This was longer than I had expected, but he wisely didn’t give us this information until afterwards. So I was pleased with my time of one hour and fifty minutes. I had front-crawled the whole distance, as planned, with two stops to take on water and food from the side of the boat, which one was not allowed to touch according to the rules of solo swimming.

Looking back, I still have vivid memories of the exhilaration I felt throughout this “intercontinental” swim. An extra benefit was raising over £4000 for my nominated charity, Diabetes UK. And I didn't catch the ague.”

James also took the opportunity to visit the nearby Gallipoli war memorials and Hisarlik (Troy), and to indulge in a rare pleasure in Istanbul: a thrillingly close shave from a Turkish barber wielding a cut-throat razor.

Needless to say, more golf was now on the Wardrobe agenda, both playing and helping with the Juniors at Liphook GC. He was approached by the then Club Captain, George Tremlett, about becoming a Junior Organiser. “With your professional experience you’d be ideal to deal with children and teenagers,” says George. “Anyone with common sense can deal with kids,” James replies as if he is shaping up to refuse the job but then he confuses the Captain with a schoolmaster’s joke. “However, it is very true that you could use my very special skills in this area.” “Oh! What are they?” puzzles George. James

serves the punchline deadpan. “Only I can deal with their *mothers*.” This first volunteering step would lead seven years later via numerous Sub-Committees and General Committee work to the ultimate accolade of the Club Captaincy.



Alan and Kirsty Ross with James on the Swilken Bridge at The Old Course, St Andrews

There was watching of professional golf too, e.g. The Open at Hoylake and the Ryder Cup at The K Club in 2006. An additional highlight of that year was a memorable golfing trip with Alan and Kirsty Ross up the east coast of Scotland on the way to the Round Square International Conference at Gordonstoun, to which James had been invited as an Honorary Member. They stayed in St Andrews during the Dunhill Links tournament. The exceptional courses they themselves played (some of which involved sneaking away from the conference activities alongside another Aussie friend, Robin Angus) included Elie, Royal Aberdeen, Cruden Bay, Nairn and Royal Dornoch.

Meanwhile, Pauline had retired in 2005 after 30 years' service at Highfield. She enjoyed a more sedate life at home with the new cats, by now well known to you all – Mickie, Minnie and Lulu. Her avid interest in cooking defined her as a genuine “foodie,” always experimenting with new recipes, devouring the programmes of the TV celebrity chefs and surrounded by their latest cookbooks. In the photograph below Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall is signing his latest food tome for her.



Pauline and Hugh F-W in November 2005

There was an unintended downside consequence of retiring from classroom teaching for Pauline. Working in a school all day had meant that there was limited opportunity to smoke. After this constraint was removed, her tobacco consumption rose considerably. This undoubtedly exacerbated the furring of her arteries, which would lead to her death seven years later.

It is a long-standing cliché that when you retire you often end up busier than when you were working. So it was with James. At one point he counted up his commitments, both pro bono and paid. They came to a slightly shocking total of nine. These included short-term educational consultancies, A-level revision courses, Oxbridge interview preparation and regular Classics tutoring. It even led to a chucklesome stint back at Highfield School teaching Latin for two-and-a-half terms, where he found himself teaching a boy whose father he had taught in the 1970s – *in the same classroom*. There was an enjoyable ten-year period as Press Officer for an association of private colleges (CIFE), which even continued after his emigration to Greece in 2016.

Many, many overseas adventures too in this period, mostly short trips on his own to visit classical sites: Sicily (Segesta, Selinus); Syria (Palmyra, Bosra); Libya (Leptis Magna, Sabratha, Cyrene, Apollonia et al); Albania (Butrint); Jordan (Jerash, Petra, Amman citadel); Lebanon (Baalbeck, Biblos, Tyre, Anjar); and of course to fill in some unacceptable gaps in his direct knowledge of Greek archaeology: Delos; Dodona; Akrotiri & Ancient Thera on Santorini; Pella & Vergina in Macedonia. This leaves just a few sites on the bucket list: Timgad, a Roman city in the Aurès Mountains of Algeria, first mooted by Philip Smiley in an Ancient History lesson in 1964; Ancient Alexandria; Masada in Israel; and a few lesser-known ancient cities in Asia Minor, e.g. Pergamum, Sardis, Miletus. Watch this space.

James made lasting friends on these trips, for example Stella and Jenny in Syria, who became companions on further expeditions. Having met Paul (see photo above), a kindred spirit, in Beirut, James organised a memorable visit for them both (as “pilgrims” not tourists) to Mount Athos in 2012, followed by many subsequent trips together: Oman, the Azores, Andalucia, Estonia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Iran. They have not yet ruled out Georgia and Armenia for the future.



James with “archaic smile” as kore (ancient young woman), Bosra, Syria

The years between 2004 and 2012 were exhilarating in the utter freedom that is bestowed by a healthy retirement. What happened next was an unforeseen catastrophe.

“Dreams are constructed from the residue of yesterday.”

Sigmund Freud

20/11/22

82. Bastille Day 2012

28th October is a national holiday in Greece, a day on which the nation celebrates its successful entry into WW2 in 1940. Mussolini, having taken Albania in five days, mistakenly thought he could walk into Greece too. A harsh winter campaign fought by the Greek defenders in the northern mountains stopped his army in its tracks. Il Duce had to ask Hitler to intervene, hence the German involvement in April 1941 which led to Greece's defeat and occupation by June. The generally accepted view here is that the five-week delay to the start of Operation Barbarossa which was caused by the Balkan campaign was a major factor in the ultimate failure of Hitler's invasion of Russia. Some modern historians are less convinced. Sir Antony Beevor, for example, wrote in 2012 about the delay caused by German attacks in the Balkans that "most [historians] accept that it made little difference" to the eventual outcome of Barbarossa. Irrespective of this, the national pride demonstrated in military and school parades and ceremonies throughout Greece on Ochi ("No") Day is similar in scope to what is celebrated on 25th March for Independence Day.

James remembers his first Ochi Day celebration at the Hellenic College in October 1990. He found himself sitting in the front row next to Sir Peregrine Rhodes, recent British Ambassador to Greece and therefore an ex officio Trustee of the Hellenic College. It was a typically joyous festival replete with traditional songs, dancing in costume and tales of heroic endurance in the Pindus mountains. So James, in his first term as Headmaster, was rather taken aback when in the midst of such patriotic fervour Sir Peregrine leant over and whispered in his ear, "I can understand the Greeks on Independence Day still celebrating beating the Turks, but not this banging on about 1940. The Italians are supposed to be their friends now - all together in the EU and so on - so I find the Ochi Day stuff a bit excessive..." Then he grinned unashamedly at his own blasphemy and began applauding a splendid rendition of Παιδιά, της Ελλάδος παιδιά, *Paidia tis Ellados paidia*, "Children, children of Greece," the wartime song made famous by Sophia Vembo, who was dubbed the "Songstress of Victory" and was Greece's equivalent of Vera Lynn.

The weather on Ochi Day followed the pattern of the whole of October and continues unseasonably hot and dry deep into November. This is just as well for James since he was absent from Greece this year from early July to late September. Hence the sparseness of blogs. A number of tedious matters, some medical, others relating to the house downsizing in England, required his presence in the UK. All issues have been auspiciously resolved and he has now been able to catch up on his sea swimming in this glorious Messinian autumn.

His prolonged stay in Blighty was not without its serendipitous Hellenic moments. On a rare visit to London he was taken by Mike Kirby to a Greek delicatessen/diner in Kensington Church Street, which James's friend had previously discovered was owned and run by a former HCL parent, Panos Dimopoulos. Traditional dishes accompanied by much reminiscence with the grizzled and jovial Greek left James in an excellent mood as he sauntered down towards Ken High Street. Then came a totally unexpected and uplifting second HCL reunion. He caught the eye of an approaching woman and they both spontaneously burst out laughing. She was Irene Kotsalis, last seen by James twenty years before as a graduating 18-year-old. Hugs and kisses were followed by 15 minutes of catch-up and gossip on the pavement whilst Irene's young son sat patiently on the entrance steps of a nearby shop. The smiling faces in the photograph below say it all.

Another chance HCL encounter happened more recently in the departure lounge of Kalamata Airport. This time it was Maria Economou, former Head Girl, and her parents, Andy and Katia, along with Maria's husband and two children. Since the flight was delayed they all had plenty of time to enjoy reviewing their respective life's journeys since they last met.



Irene Kotsalis and her ex-Headmaster met by chance in Kensington Church Street in August.

A planned meeting in Athens with Alina Polemis, her mother Lia, Fanis and Maro Pantazis was delightful and informative. They dined in an excellent Italian restaurant in Maroussi. Alina told James about a forthcoming HCL alumni reunion to be held in Athens in February 2023 and issued him with a three-line whip to attend. For more info Hellenes can visit the Facebook page of Elliniko Collegio Londinou. She also sent James a recent photograph of his first Head of Greek, Eirene Crook, who must be at least 90 years old and yet, as seen below, with Caterina Mytilineou and Jenny Panteli, looks in remarkably fine fettle. You may recall that it was she who dubbed James "General Pangalos" after the staff debate about controlling the shortness of girls' skirts.

It seems impossible for James to lose touch with his Hellenic College past. Long may this continue.

What else? The olive harvest has begun. Unsurprisingly the price of oil is predicted to rise considerably this year due to higher labour costs. The fruit is plentiful this year, including on enough of James' and Bea's trees to yield sufficient oil for the family's annual use. A task for December, when as usual the hardest trees to harvest will be the oldest. Unlike younger trees they have no low branches. This is because in olden days the farmers cut them off to prevent their goats climbing up into the trees. These days it is rare for goats to be pastured in the olive groves, so no such preventative measures are

necessary.



Eirene Crook discovered alive and well in London by Caterina and Jenny.

Greece has had a bumper tourist season, its best since 2019. It seems to be more popular than ever with the British, whose second favourite destination (after Spain) it has become, with more than three million visitors so far this year. Italy has dropped to third place in the Brits' affections. The government has pledged to give the surplus budget income from 2022 tourism in more energy relief. If the Doulapas' last electricity bill is anything to go by, the subsidies are already substantial. Their €370 bill for the four months from June to September was reduced by €335 to a staggeringly paltry €35. I leave others to make comparisons with other countries. However, to a non-aligned outsider like James it seems as if Mitsotakis, who committed early in the crisis to use the available EU COVID Recovery Fund money for the first tranche of energy support, is handling the current cost of living plight quite well. As elsewhere, everyone is feeling the pinch but there is a sense of competent leadership here. The Prime Minister is also acutely aware that a general election is looming within the next six months and he is nothing if not politically astute.

Local news? Neighbour John (he of the 1974 unexploded bomb in his Famagusta hotel) knows very little Greek. His backgammon partner, Theodoros, has even less English. Somehow Theodoros communicated to John that the wife of a mutual friend, Costas, had died. Would John like to come with him to the funeral that afternoon? Of course. It was only when John arrived at the church that he discovered it was the wife of a different Costas, a complete stranger to him, who had passed away. There are too many Costases in Chrani...

Finally, a special photographic treat for those of you who have visited Villa Doulapas in person. All visitors generously express their positive feelings about the house, the view of the sea and the mountains, etc., etc. Without exception, however, - and this also applies to James and Bea's Chrani friends, Greek and English - they have commented most unfavourably about the state of the unmade 100m driveway: "Embarrassing," "A disgrace," "I'm leaving my car at the bottom gate," "Concrete,

paving, tarmac? Something, anything, please, but when, when, when?” Such vituperation must now cease forthwith, after the recent surfacing job, which incidentally cost an arm and a leg given the price of metal mesh and ready-mixed concrete. See photos below.



Doulapas driveway before and after.

In May 2012 James and his equally antique new friend Paul Majendie went as “pilgrims” to male-only Mount Athos, which the Greeks call Άγιο Όρος, *Agio Oros*, “the Holy Mountain.” It is often recorded how this easternmost peninsula of Halkidiki is a throwback to Byzantine times, a land of twenty Orthodox monasteries run by a local government of abbots, although technically part of the Greek state. The medieval rituals and liturgical functioning of the monasteries hold good today but modernity intrudes in the form of monks on their mobiles, flatbed trucks in place of donkeys and even helipads. Some of the guesthouses are well-appointed and plush, including that at Vatopedi, often visited by Prince (now King) Charles who many Greeks believe has converted to Orthodoxy. A frequent pilgrim told James and Paul that everyone knew when Charles was in residence. “How come?” asked Paul. The wag replied, “Because every morning whilst we are eating our monkish gruel we can smell the bacon that the bodyguard is frying for his (own) breakfast.”

In one monastery chapel James was persuaded by his Christian companion to light a candle and pray for a loved one. Reluctantly as a heathen, he did so, for Pauline of course, but such a fraudulent act for a non-believer made him feel uneasy. His prescient fear would soon prove to be well-founded.

After four days of asceticism they retreated to the fleshpots of Thessaloniki to reacquaint themselves with the hedonism to which they were better suited. On their last night they ate in a *Laladika* restaurant with live Greek music. A group of gymnasium children on a school trip from Cephallonia started dancing. The musician played *Milo mou kokkino*, “My red apple”, an old HCL favourite, and the kids sang along. As he was leaving the restaurant James burst into tears. The concerned patronne rushed over and exclaimed, “Are you upset because the food was not good?” Paul intuitively replied, “It wasn’t the food. My friend loves this country. Tomorrow we leave for England and he doesn’t know when he will return

to Greece.” He was at least half-right. The rest of it was about his HCL past, but the cause of his tears could equally be interpreted as irrational doubts about the future.

Subsequent events are swiftly told since the memories of intense shock, grief and loss remain painful to this day.

In mid- June Pauline fell ill with an illness which the GP failed to diagnose. After some days in bed she was hospitalised. In addition to her general debility she was found to have diabetes and severe macular degeneration which meant that she would never be able to drive again. After 25 days she was discharged. She was tremendously pleased to be reunited with Mickie, Minnie and Lulu. The following lunchtime she suffered a fatal cardiac arrest. James’s attempts at CPR succeeded only in cracking a rib. The paramedics were unable to revive her and she died in the ICU of Royal County Surrey Hospital at about 1700 hours on 14th July. Bastille Day forever remains, to borrow FDR’s phrase “a date that will live in infamy” in James’s mind.

The funeral was very well-attended. Throughout the ordeal of those days James was magnificently supported by his sister Margaret and brother-in-law Graham, and by many close friends. They deserve to be extolled: Simon and Sue Sheppard, Michel Mansour, Bill Wakely, Anthony and Pia Gay, Jen Wiseman, Mary Lou White, Tim Pyper, Rob McHarg. On the other hand, Pauline’s brother Stephen found himself unable to return from his holiday villa in Spain and sent his youngest son to the funeral “to represent the family.” Later he demanded “his mother’s jewellery” back from James, rings which Maud had bequeathed to her only daughter in 2005. It took a solicitor’s letter to see him off and all contact thereafter has permanently ceased. The “anger” stage of the grieving process can last forever.

Meanwhile, he has no recollection at all of the 2012 London Olympic Games, which completely passed him by that summer.

In late 2011 James had been elected Vice-Captain of Liphook Golf Club, an honour which would traditionally lead to the higher office of Captaincy the following November. His whole life had now been overturned in an instant. Could he now continue with a year’s serious commitment to LGC? Within a few seconds of deliberating this question he knew the answer was yes, for three reasons: firstly, Pauline would have wanted him to do it. To use a term she might have used, she would have called him “a wetleg” if he didn’t; secondly, he would be gainfully occupied and busy in this substantial role. It might also help to assuage the grief; thirdly, the money he raised through his Captain’s Charity could be donated to a worthy medical cause related to her demise, in this case Professor David Russell-Jones’ Centre for Endocrinology and Diabetes Research (CEDAR Centre) at the Royal Surrey.

How do you account adequately for forty-five years of happy marriage gone in a flash? Too difficult, even ten years on. Perhaps the whole of James’s memoir can act as a fitting tribute to Pauline, who always gave him her unremitting support and steadfast love.

For James, his ambition was just “to survive” in as positive a manner as he could. The arc of his life was at its lowest point and now he must force it higher.

<https://youtu.be/18JzuSXsOGU>

Sofia Vembo sings Παιδιά, της Ελλάδος παιδιά, *Paidia tis Ellados Paidia*, “Children, children of Greece,” arguably the most significant and monumental song of the Second World War for Greece. The “children of Greece” are the soldiers fighting against the invading Italians in 1940/41. The song is written on an existing well-known and beloved melody; the original was *Zehra*, a love song already recorded by

Vembo. Mimis Traiforos along with Vembo decided to change the lyrics, adjusting them to the Greek reality of the time. They created an inspiration not only for the soldiers but also for their mothers, for women who were waiting for their sons, husbands or even their fathers to come back from the war.

One of the most touching and powerful songs written at the time, the last verses of this hymn of national resistance were not those originally set down by Traiforos. He had written, "If you don't win, do not come back!" At the last moment Vembo changed the lyrics, considering them too pessimistic and dark.

Μέσ' τους δρόμους τριγυρνάνε Λέω σ' όσες αγαπούνε
Οι μανάδες και κοιτάνε ν' αντικρίσουνε Και για κάποιον ξενυχτούνε
Τα παιδιά τους π' ορκιστήκαν Και στενάζουνε
Ότο σταθμό όταν χωριστήκαν Πως η πίκρα κι η τρεμούλα
Να νικήσουνε Σε μια τίμια Ελληνοπούλα
Μα για 'κείνους που 'χουν φύγει Δεν ταιριάζουνε
Και η δόξα τους τυλίγει Ελληνίδες του Ζαλόγγου
Ας χαιρόμαστε Της πόλης και του λόγγου
Και ποτέ καμιά ας μη κλάψει Και Πλακιώτισσες
Κάθε πόνος της ας κάψει Όσο κι αν πικρά πονούμε
Κι ας ευχόμαστε: Υπερήφανα ας πούμε
Παιδιά της Ελλάδος παιδιά Σαν Σουλιώτισσες;
Που σκληρά πολεμάτε Παιδιά, της Ελλάδος παιδιά
Πάνω στα βουνά Που σκληρά πολεμάτε
Παιδιά στη γλυκιά Παναγιά Πάνω στα βουνά
Προσευχόμαστε όλες Παιδιά στη γλυκιά Παναγιά
Να 'ρθετε ξανά. Προσευχόμαστε όλες
Να 'ρθετε ξανά
Με της νίκης τα κλαδιά
σας προσμένουμε παιδιά.

In the streets are wandering I am telling to those who love
The mothers and are searching And stay awake for someone
To see their children who promised That bitterness and shaking
At the station when leaving Are not proper
To win. For a fair Greek woman.

But for those who are gone Greek Women of Zaloggo
And are wrapped in glory From the cities and rural areas
We should be happy Women from Plaka
None of us should ever cry However bitter is our pain,
She should burn her sorrow we proudly stand
And we should all wish: like women of Souli.

Children, children of Greece, Children, children of Greece
Who fight a tough fight on the mountains Who fight a tough fight on the mountains,
Children, to the sweet Virgin Mary Children, to the sweet Virgin Mary
We all pray that you come back again. We all pray that you come back again

With the branches of victory
We are expecting you children.

Music by Michalis Soyul, lyrics by Mimis Traiforos (1940)

15/12/22

83. The End?

On reflection it was madness but they got away with it. For a couple of years James and Bea had been pondering how best to transport some furniture and personal possessions from Liphook to the Greek house. International removal costs are exorbitant, even for a few cubic metres. If they did it themselves James thought that they would need a 3.5-tonne Luton, which he did not fancy driving across Europe. When their local removers moved them from New Shepherds Farm to the Highfield School rented accommodation in September, they used one Luton and one Transit. James was mightily impressed with how much they packed into the smaller van. Bea was keen to go on a European adventure, so they hired a long-wheel-base, wrong-hand drive (for Europe) Ford Transit, then booked the Eurotunnel Shuttle and the Ancona-Patras-Ancona ferries for a “fast trip.” The best decision they made was to pay the professional removers to load the van – brilliantly – to the gunwales.

Having flown over three days earlier they left Liphook very early on a dank November Tuesday and were back there at Wednesday midnight eight days later. They had driven 2,800 miles, almost entirely along the motorways of France, Italy and Greece. However, unlike James’s first trip in 2016 with Dave and the cats (as described by Mickie in Blog 1), this was a significantly more nerve-wracking journey.



On the ferry in Ancona harbour after two hard days on the road.

Firstly, he had miscalculated the daily mileage you can reasonably cover in a van rather than in a car. Travelling at an average 50mph, not 60mph, means an extra two hours per day at the wheel. Hence much more driving in the dark than planned. Then there were the navigational errors which cost them valuable time. They even ended up in the Freight Terminal at Calais Eurotunnel on the way back instead of at the Tourist (= car) Terminal. The most daunting timewaster was the hundreds of kilometres of

roadworks – cones, bollards, contraflows, traffic jams – on the French and Italian motorways. Add to this the constant pressure of thousands of container trucks now in evidence on all major European roads (“Most of them up my arse...” insists James) and the result is undiluted stress. For James at least, who still keeps muttering in his sleep “nevermore” like Edgar Allen Poe’s raven and was a broken man for two days afterwards. He just recovered in time for his team (“The Parthenon Marbles”) to win the Liphook Golf Club Quiz Night – again. Bea was the senior driver and enjoyed the continental experience much more, managing the heavily laden then empty vehicle, the appalling weather in France and the constantly jabbering husband with steely aplomb. All plaudits to her, none to him.



Surrounded by olive trees, the van is ready for take-off back to the UK

Nevertheless, the mission was successful: the contents were delivered undamaged, the hired van returned unscratched, Bea and James unscathed, marriage intact. The highlights were the two 24-hour Adriatic ferry crossings, which afforded a chance to relax and recover from the tribulations of the road. And an outstanding Japanese meal in the resort town of Pesaro in northern Italy. Bea is up for another European road trip (if in a car). James has gone quiet on the matter. After a brief rain-soaked stay in the UK they have now flown back to the peacefulness of the Greek countryside to harvest their olives. Sunshine, snow on Mount Taygetos, a comfortable sofa and decent beds for their guests are now all guaranteed.

Regarding the HCL Reunion in February, detailed information is given at the end of this blog. James plans to be there but he is already fussing that he hasn't a thing to wear.

James was duly voted in as Club Captain at the November 2012 AGM. The overwhelming wave of sympathy that he felt that evening from the membership following Pauline's unexpected death seemed to last the whole year. A former Captain had told him to expect plenty of moaning letters but he received none. One long-standing member was notorious for writing the same letter of complaint to

every in-coming Captain. James never received even this annual billet-doux. Luck was also on his side. It was a relatively quiet period for the club and there were no major crises to deal with. Other Captains have had to cope with, for example, the outbreak of Mad Cow Disease, major staff resignations or, more recently and seriously, the COVID lockdowns. In addition, there were already excellent people on his General Committee and an experienced senior management team who ran the club very efficiently.





Gallery of very cool Aussie dudes, some with friend Wardrobe, December 2013.

Top row (left to right): Garry Ebbeling; Andy Neville-Towle;

Middle row: Kirsty and Alan Ross; Robyn Angus;

Bottom row: older nephew William Bowden; Rob McHarg with younger nephew David Bowden.

They were therefore able to initiate a number of new projects, even some relating to the Centenary celebrations ten years ahead. He played more golf than he had ever done in his life and enjoyed meeting a much wider range of members from all sections of the club. Many of them remain friends to this day. The inevitable chairing of committees, speechifying, prizegivings and socialising suited him fine. Problems? Like running a school really, except that the naughty boys are old gits. He achieved his three personal objectives, as outlined in the last blog, and generally steered the ship in the right direction. Overall, He did not miss too many short putts.

Within a week of handing over to his friend and Vice-Captain, Graeme Fairley, a year later, he was off on a long trip to Australia via Thailand. As well as visiting his two nephews, William and David Bowden, one based in the Blue Mountains and the other in Launceston (pronounced “LaunCESton”?!), Tasmania, he was delighted to meet up with some dear friends, notably Andy and Susie Neville-Towle, Garry Ebbeling, Alan and Kirsty Ross, Robyn Angus. See photos above. In Sydney he saw the irresistibly magical Leonard Cohen in one of his final concerts and in Adelaide a shocking performance by the England cricket team on their way to a 5 – 0 Ashes defeat. In Melbourne he watched Jason Day win the individual trophy at the World Cup of Golf event, held at the fabulous Royal Melbourne GC. Day and Adam Scott won the team event for Australia. On a visit to the MCG hosted by member Alan, he met former Test cricketer Paul Sheahan and Rex Trumble, grandson of late 19th/early 20th century Aussie legend, Hugh Trumble. Overall, a highly memorable six weeks. Golf in Hua Hin on the way out and sightseeing in Bangkok on the return bookended the tour of a lifetime.



This cement truck made from Victorian veranda iron work is one of many extraordinary exhibits at the remarkable Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), Hobart.

On his return he began actively to put into operation a plan to fulfil a long-held ambition. Although Pauline loved visiting Greece on holiday, she would never consider living there permanently as an ex-patriate. Her early life as an RAF child had taken her on moves to a new home every three years both in the UK and abroad. She was content to live in Liphook and travel to foreign parts once or twice a year. At some point after she died, and he cannot remember whether the idea came as a flash of the moment or simply evolved over time, he realised that he could now relocate for good to what had always been his spiritual home: Greece. What of the cats? They would come with him of course. Whether to fly them over or drive them was a decision for later.

It would take the best part of three years to raise the funds to buy a house in Greece. He did this by getting planning permission to build a property on the orchard of New Shepherds Farm, which he was then able to sell off to a developer. The sale was finally achieved on the eve of the Brexit referendum in June 2016, too late to avoid the overnight £ - € exchange rate crash which would cost him the equivalent of a new swimming pool. This is merely one of countless reasons why he loathes the Tory Party.

In the meantime his life was about to take a dramatic turn, this time for the better. He met Bea through an online dating website. She was living and working in Bognor Regis, a forty-minute drive from Liphook. On their first date they hit it off immediately. Their opening conversation was as follows: *She*: "Hello, I'm Bertha." *He*: "Hi, I'm James." *She*: "Yes, but what's your real name?" A few meetings later he broached the thorny issue of their age difference. *He*: "I'm rather older than you, which might be a cause for concern?" *She*: "No, not at all, at least you've got your own teeth..." With a shared sense of humour like that they were up and running. But would his firm intention to live in Greece be a problem? From her first visit Bea loved the country too, so matters progressed through to their wedding in October 2014. The ethnic and social mixture of guests was, according to one posh English friend, strikingly bizarre, producing both a hilarious contrast and a congenial togetherness: at one end of the spectrum were the ululating Africans, at the other the tightly buttoned Brits and somewhere in between the easy-going and unceremonious Greeks.



Beauty and the Beast, 11th October 2014.

The following two years involved planning for the move to Greece. Why Messinia? Three reasons. First, NOT an island, with potential winter access problems and/or the nuisance of tourism; second, as far south as possible for the better weather; thirdly, the golf courses at Costa Navarino were an attraction. In their initial scouting trips the west coast (Pylos, Gialova) was targeted, but in the end the east coast offered the best rental choice, in a coastal village called Chrani, with Bob and Fotine. Overlooking the Messinian Gulf, which turned out to be safer and more enjoyable for swimming than the rougher Ionian Sea, and nearer to Kalamata and its facilities including the airport, their house was also perfect for Mickie, Minnie and Lulu. It was a safe, rural environment yet close enough to walk to the main road and the beach. Arrangements for the move, including driving the cats in their cages to Greece, were finalised in May 2016. D-Day was to be 3rd September.

And so to the conclusion, which neatly brings us back to the beginning of the tale. Mickie and her sisters are rudely awakened by Dad from their mouse-chasing dreams at 3.00am and bundled into their cages... For what happened next, you must read Mickie's Blog 1 et seq. Or not.

A final observation, six years and 250,000 words after Mickie first dipped her paw into the inkwell: The youthful ghosts of Patrick, Pauline, Malcolm, Peter and Paul Templeton, even a dapper and self-aware Thomas Wardrobe, along with many others close to James who have already died, have regularly haunted his dreams and troubled his sleep these past years, as he has dredged his memory for accurate details of his life's story. Chimeras appear when they themselves decide, not just when you want to recall them. Certainly, during the period of writing this memoir there have frequently been recurring subconscious responses to James's multiple acts of necromancy, his summoning up of beloved spirits in an attempt to produce some literary magic. Perhaps from now on his beauty sleep will be less disturbed by these familiar visitors from his past.

He has always prided himself on his memory for factual precision and historical detail, without which this endeavour would undoubtedly be more of a work of fiction than some might say it already is. Μνημοσύνη, *Mnemosyne*, "Memory" is the mother of the Nine Muses. Therefore, he must end with a colossal tribute to her enduring power in aiding this autobiographical creation. He also hopes that the three Muses who in particular inspire him, Clio (History), Melpomene (Tragedy) and especially Thalia

(Comedy), are pleased with his efforts.

For HCL readers the following Facebook extract may be of interest:

[Hellenic Collegeo London](#) REUNION PARTY
18 February 2023 HOTEL OASIS GLYFADA at
8pm
TICKETS 40 euros to include
Buffet, wine, beer and beverages and a DJ till
2am
(Alcohol will be extra at cash bar)

Anyone wishing to stay at the hotel need to
book direct and mention HCL REUNION for
the discount, single rooms 60 euros and
double 80 euros per night with breakfast. Tel
210 8941555
info@oasishotelapartments.com

Please confirm attendance on the messenger
of this facebook or with [Maria Corinis](#) in
Greece 6944260640 or [Katia David-](#)
[Harmanda](#) in the UK 02083712999

We hope that as many of you can attend this
great reunion party that promises to be
amazing. For those Hellenes not on faceook
please tag them, share or let them know.
