

CHARTER III

Wage review – National Youth Clubs – DIY – Social Security Act – European competition – Grammar Schools – Harrow Public School – Comprehensives - Royal Academy Exams – School's Councils– Scouts – Driving lessons – Part-time working.

Some local education authorities started a comprehensive form of education in the sixties... by 1964, there were 200. Ten-years later there were 2,000, taking 60% of the pupils... by 1980 90% reached. Unfortunately, not enough money was put into the scheme to guarantee the scheme had a sound footing... Vociferous parents maintained their right to object to the system stimulating some authorities to retain their grammar schools. This caused some parents, through the intervening years, to move into these school catchments areas. Private education, cathedral schools and home based educators siphoned off another group of students. Both the local grammar and these private schools creamed off the most able students placating their more forceful parents.

Gradually teenage clubs and associations faltered. Television undermined the good work such bodies had encouraged. More, younger married women with children went out to work. Socially liberal forms of behaviour promoted by parents, mistakenly believing – to allow, ‘the full development of the child’. It was the time of the swinging sixties. There was a growing prosperity for all ages and classes. The Beatles became the top group exploiting the Mersey sound.

It was also the age of DIY prospering on the back of television advertising. Panelled doors were boxed in, dado and picture rails removed and staircases made dust free by hardboard facing. Neat roadside verges ripped up to provide the entry to lean-to garages; privet hedges gave way to fancy walls and learner drivers blossomed. Mini skirts abounded and ‘jeans’ were the ‘in’ thing. Young couples getting married planned to gain the maximum tax advantage. Women were demanding equal rights creating a stressful atmosphere. In statistics taken at the time there were one and a half million more women than men in the population. There were disturbances between ‘rockers’ – who wore black riding gear, and ‘mods’, those who wore Italian designed clothes.

The most far-reaching legislation was the Ministry of Social Security Act, which sought, to replace National Assistance by Supplementary benefits, which depended on a means test there, began to be a conscientious effort to increase conservation and control the numbers of high-rise flat developments. Trades Union unrest - trying to maintain the cost of living for their members, lost more workdays than their European competitors.

Edward Heath won the election for the conservative party in 1970. The following June Simon was faced with the eleven plus exam. There had been profound changes in educational ever since the 1944 Education Act. Sociologists, psychologists and educationalists were against this divisive split needed for grammar education believing that the comprehensive ideals should be encouraged and promoted by local authorities. At that time, Harrow Council continued with their existing secondary education, which included grammar schools – this state of affairs only lasted another three years.

Simon had been lucky with all his schooling. His classes had been populated mainly by girls and by children of parents who wanted their children to go to a grammar school. In this atmosphere together with our interest, we channelled his thinking which bought rewards. Simon passed and went to Harrow Grammar School. At the same time, we entered him for a scholarship to enable him to go to Harrow School... he was accepted, obtaining a Churchill Scholarship and a bursary for the full cost of tuition and boarding. Sally was beside herself thinking that taking him away from the family would be a disaster. She was content with his passing for Harrow Grammar, which is where he started that same year. I was delighted with all his accomplishments thinking that this would help the other children raise their expectations although I was sorry that he was not to go to the public school.

I had attended Harrow School with Simon to meet his House Master and whilst there be shown round the school; the classrooms and dormitories and to be shown where his box would be kept - discuss with the masters how he would fit in, where he would lodge and who would be his tutor. Whilst being conducted around I was trying to imagine what changes Simon would have to go through and what this would mean to the family.

To complement Simon's piano lessons the following year, [he had now passed Stage 5 Royal Academy Exam] I took him to the local church organist and choir master to see if he could give him lesson on the pipe organ. This he agreed to do for a limited period until Simon found that schoolwork forced him to stop.

David did not have to sit the eleven plus, by that time Harrow Borough invested in the comprehensive scheme of schooling. Therefore, he started at Whitmore Comprehensive School in 1972. The philosophy behind comprehensive schooling left us thinking that things would not be so bad; believing that suitable funds put into the scheme and higher qualified staff employed to make it successful.

We were very wrong in our beliefs. This was in line with what many other disappointed parents thought. It was a disaster. Not only was Whitmore turning out to be a poor school but Harrow Grammar was included into the comprehensive system too - failed to maintain standards.

Both schools declined in discipline and for the same reasons. The parents of the children going to both schools were not insistent that their children should do homework. It was an impossible situation for the teachers. The head teachers could not demand correct behaviour because there was nothing they could use to make the children conform. There was no "if you do not do this you will fail," because there were no failures and even if there were where were they to go? Standards of behaviour began to fall and with that, results went by the board too. This was the decline in educational standards, which resulted in a lowering of pass marks, and then towards a simpler marking system with continuous assessment and project work - to try to concentrate the students minds. The Schools Council brought in many new ideas to make curriculum more adaptable. Their detractors thought there was too much latitude and a greater effort made to inculcate skills that are more basic.

Stan, my elder brother, now had five children. Derek's first, Paul, was four, the same age as Rebecca... followed by Emma in 1973. We still met up on a regular basis to keep in touch and those visits interlaced with luncheon dates with our oldest friends the Selways and Sauls. Both Paicie and Bren, Sally's aunts, were corresponded although we saw far more of Paicie. Paicie was a schoolteacher and a dedicated Congregationalist who lived in a bungalow close to the main Waterloo station rail link. Our visits were generally on an every three-month basis and as such were much appreciated and savoured. She made a great effort to make our stay's enjoyable providing all the little treats the children liked. Paicie said she would buy a bicycle as each child attained the age of eleven when they would have perhaps passed the grammar school entrance exam. This promise unfortunately collapsed as our family grew. She was very critical of the size of our family believing that we would not be able to afford sufficient time nor money to each child and their education. She was someone whom I not only liked but also thought interesting - she held strong opinions and would not hold back from telling you what she thought. Her guiding principles firmly grounded on strict Christian teachings - the rule of self-help, abstinence and moderation in all things. She was scornful of her father who had left home to live with another woman and worshipped her mother for her fortitude. Rita thought her sister self centred, unadventurous - a thorough goody, goody questioning why her sister always had the school and class prizes whilst she had been overlooked. Rita also secretly admired her father. Paicie loved her cat, which held pride of place, dictating her every move. This prevented any extended visits away from home on the ground that Sammy would not like it.

Both the boys and the girls were in the scouts or guides and worked their way through the normal badges. In my youth, I had found great company and friendship with The Boys Brigade and so enrolled my children in a similar organization thinking they too would benefit.

Sally by this time wanted to drive. Her mother was taking lessons from an ex-police driver who ran his own school so he became Sally's tutor. This was after I had tried my hand at the basics finding that trying to teach driving with the young children in the back was no way to cement harmonious relationships. There was also the matter of the inconvenient road bollard, which got in the way and honed up my panel beating skills. Eventually Sally passed her test and took over the car - needing it to ferry the children about, which meant that I had to get transport for myself.

One day when I was out taking the young children for a walk I passed a house with a Ford Anglia, in the drive, with a for sale sign stuck in its rear window. The sign offered the car for a mere forty-five pounds. When I got back home, I went out to the bank and drew out the money. Round I went to the house in all haste and paid the money asked. When driving home concluded that, it was a good buy and suited me well. Previously I had relied upon motor bikes, which had transported me up and down from London. But these I finally gave up through the suffering I experienced during winter months negotiating the A40 in freezing conditions initially on a BSA 500 sports which dripped oil whatever I did to correct the leak, and, who's electric's continually let me down leaving me with no lights. Then on my little Honda 125 SL, flat out, head down, doing sixty with a fair wind behind me.

Sally started part-time work with a couple of firms, which did not prove to be happy one's for her. Eventually a vacancy came up at Northwick Park Hospital where she shared a position in the audio typing pool mainly covering arthritis, rheumatism and similar conditions affecting mobility and pain. This was a job similar to the work experienced when she first went to Wembley Hospital before we were married, fifteen years before.

At about the same time Sally found a vacancy for Rebecca to attend a pre-school class. The school was located on Harrow-on-the-Hill on the way to the hospital and was in the main attended by children of the Harrow School staff. There were only ten or so to each class and it was a happy, intimate and forward-looking establishment very much in the Montessori tradition. Rebecca took to it immediately and shone. Every skill awarded and praise given for even the slightest accomplishment making the children press for more.

When Rachel was aged, eleven we decided to try to get her into a better school environment - to that offered by the state educational system. A Catholic school, Saint Dominic's, which was also close by Rebecca's play-school, was the only choice. By much persuasion, we managed to convince them that we were true conforming Catholics dedicated to the school founding conditions. We thankfully succeeded and so had to go out and buy the brown uniform plus hat and satchel necessary to start that September. Because Sally could not always pick up the children from school, Sally's mother took over that job which was only about five minutes by car but still a blessing.

Both Sally and I were very pleased with ourselves that the children's schooling was going as well. Simon although initially bullied in his first year at Harrow Grammar had found his feet and was doing well preparing for his 'O' levels in a years time. He was practising hard for his seventh grade piano practice and five in theory. The scouts were taking up any extra free time he had. David was at Whitmore holding up well considering the poor state of education there. Rachel, as previously described, schooled at St. Dominic's to a high standard than normal state schools. Ruth at Longfield in her final year of junior school as was Benjamin - was a couple of years behind her. Rebecca continued to enjoy being at play-school.

The bulk of the shopping done on Saturdays, buying potatoes and vegetables by the sack, at the warehouse next to North Harrow station. Bread bought five loaves at a time and put in the freezer. Fortunately the milk delivered to the door. Sally juggled the cooking and housework fitting

in the part-time office work. We still went on holiday although it was getting difficult to entertain the older children. Rachel no longer wanted to walk on our countryside rambles preferring to stay in the car - it became clear that things had to change. Going on holiday with the children was never the same again... drawing to a close the innocent rambles... singing nursery rhymes whilst gathering wild flowers; only possible when there was no questioning of the order only an acceptance of the plan devised.

Gradually the children's personalities and attitudes showed through... not only did they want to follow what their peers were doing but wished to be independent - free of parental constraint. This of course is natural but upsetting, and certainly not so pleasant for me - the organizer... It was noticeable and felt - as the ages of the children increased, unquestioned obedience and compliance dropped off..., less discipline caused friction... visits to friends and relatives, less frequent, fewer gambols taken on visits - at a moment's notice. All this was unfortunate for the younger children - they would never undertake the thrills and spills experienced by their elder siblings... the on-the-spur-of-the-moment visits to historic buildings, rambles over hill and dale, just to see what was there... the fun and excitement visiting farms and lodging houses off the beaten track... greater numbers individual attention reduced, an obvious conundrum!

At home the displays of anti-social behaviour were expected, as were requests by the children to do what they wanted. These things, I was prepared for. It was the degree that took me by surprise. Having so many children in a small house without the space for each to develop in presented an ongoing problem. It was equally frustrating for me for it was clear the difficulties they were facing. All the time the younger children were losing out ... it was far easier for me, and their mother, to sit by the side of the eldest and discuss more adult things - what questions they were being asked for their exams, than to read a Janet and John book to the youngest...

Meanwhile, back at work, the Heath government tried to implement changes in trade-union law to limit flying pickets. He ended up with a 'three day working week' having failed miserably in his confrontation with the miners in 1973-4. I continued to work for five days - during the blackouts - limitations imposed by the electrical generating stations switching off supplies. At work, we held plate-glass up against the windows to use daylight to view the developed films!

The printing industry was greatly affected by the paper industry - suffered its greatest decline through the penetration of Scandinavian paper manufacturers. The profitability of the printing industry fell substantially and it estimated that by the turn of the millennium only half the workforce would remain. It was firmly believed by economists that a complete restructuring of the workforce was needed altering the balance between very skilled workers and those not so well trained. Economists also believed that there should be a relaxing of employment rules - so that workers could be laid-off.

I moved to Mabbutt & Johnson, Islington, from Sun Litho, Ruislip. As with all job moves I made it was for no other reason than to increase my wages. M & J were Trade Platemakers to the lithographic printing industry - begun by two employees of Sun Litho. An outsider who provided the venture capital joined these two entrepreneurial men, the Works Manager and the only Salesman. When they left Sun Litho, they took with them half a dozen key workers. At the end of their first year of trading clocked up a quarter of a million pounds net profit. This quick profit stimulated them to expand the business. This they did to be London's, if not the UK's, largest Trade Platemakers.

Their main customers were Littlewoods catalogue, National Geographic, Playboy and various travel companies. They also took on general trade work, which they thought would produce further clients.

I go into detail about this firm because it shows that they were not only versatile - taking on a varied selection of work, but had to be viable in a most competitive market. Much of their work came from companies who would have sent it abroad to be reproduced, made-up and then printed.

Whether the work done here or abroad the same photographic materials used. Agfa-Gaevert, Dupont and Fuji had their own specialist fields in graphic reproduction but at this time did not challenge Kodak for their Tri-Masking system, which reined supreme.

The expansion of M & J had been to promote an 'round-the-clock services', which up to that time was totally unknown in the UK. They hoped to corner a market. Engaging a large staff, they operated a twenty-four hour service operating in three shifts. Thankfully the retouchers, there were fifteen at the firms peak, kept to normal working hours and covered by working extra overtime when necessary. One retoucher was engaged to pass work from the cameras working on the night shift so that it was ready for the colour retouchers in the morning.

I travelled to Islington by car doing the journey in about forty minutes all along the A40 - from Harrow-on-the-Hill, Greenhill through to Kings Cross and the Angel. Leaving home at just gone seven, having a half hour lunch at twelve thirty and if not working overtime getting home just before five. However, more often than not I would work overtime at least twice a week getting home at nearly eleven and often on Saturdays too from six thirty to twelve thirty.

It was a happy firm to work for simply because the staff had to get the work out - had to co-operate with each other - any problems would affect everyone else and each part of the production process relied upon the next. If snags were experienced you could see that you would not get home until much later so it was essential to get the job done.

It was a simple process to see which worker could do his job well and who would co-operate when there was an emergency. On a large sheet of mail order work where there was perhaps twenty pages of fashion plates, [swatches of the actual material and colour the article was made from would be provided], it is easily see who could turn out a good job. For some strange reason workers would make the same old mistake repeatedly even when they were told to alter their method of working.

As with all my jobs, including the one apprenticed to, I enjoyed the work - preferring to be in an organised situation - to work within an established system. Eventually I became one of the senior members of staff with the grand title of Retouching Manager. My task was to pass all the separation negatives and positives prior to retouching sign-off all the printed sheets after machine proving, regulate all the overtime necessary to get the jobs out in time and see to the flow of work through the department. I also took on all the most difficult jobs simply because I liked doing them.