

Setting the Scene

My story begins just after NATO was formed: when the Attlee Government took the country to war in Korea, Churchill regained the premiership a year later, and three-quarters of all house building was by local authorities. It starts in the middle of a ten-year period – a period begun at the end of the war till the Macmillan government came to power, a golden age of local government power – parks, road verges and municipal gardens - restored to pre-war standards; social mores returned - presented a solid foundation from which the war torn populace settled into civilian life. When Macmillan declared ‘you have never had it so good’, did he really know how right he was?

The present consumer driven economy started in 1955 - it was the start to the television boom, gradually overtaking all other forms of popular entertainment. The writing spans a period when the Conservatives held approximately twice the length in government - over Labour. This was the start to the free-world industrial power exerted by the integrated circuit, proposed by G W A Dunner...an invention to have profound effects on all careers.

I started work as an apprentice artist - in a printing house, learning about a method of reproduction discovered at the turn of the nineteenth century... no sooner was I trained than the craft was superseded by photography – later, film-masking which in turn gave way to electronic scanning, finally, the whole page was capable of being designed including pictures and type matter. It was a forty-five year revolution in pre-printing technology.

Here are some of the cultural changes, which affected me, particularly those of the Trade Union. The period has seen enormous progress towards women’s liberation – to the position where few work places not served. These social changes affected physical and metaphysical sex, children, marriage, flexible working and consumer choice... how could I not be affected...?

The period covers a land where few ventured abroad, some, not out of their town or village. Within these years few have not flown, owned a car, had their kitchen designed or shopped at a supermarket... Britain was buying more than it was selling, ‘proclaimed The Times’, and Communism causing great anxiety - to the western world - particularly America. The general election in February registered a decline in Labour’s popularity. Later that year, the outbreak of war in Korea brought another economic crisis. It was a serious situation... prompted the following year by dissolution and subsequent election of Churchill, and the Conservatives. The death of George VI and coronation of Elizabeth II re-established Britain’s place in the world. These great events dwarfed my ‘going out to work, for the first time’. Industrially and economically, the country, through the media, admitted its consumer culture... well before Mrs Thatcher! The fifties were the start of many strikes - unofficial... in particular: the printing industry, coalmines and dockworkers. I was there, at the start, experiencing the effects it was having. Even for me - at such a young age - lacked working experience, it was unsettling! The negotiations between management and worker’s representatives became an annual event based upon ‘the cost of living’ as much as, ‘improving terms and conditions’. It took until the end of my National Service and final year of apprenticeship, to appreciate the seriousness of my position - I was now a skilled worker, in a redundant craft... In a technically changing industry that was in turmoil... I was coping with my sexuality and the effects of my upbringing. If that wasn’t enough... there was now industrial and social confusion. As with most, I married in my twenties and started out in a furnished flat... saving hard for a deposit whilst storing things away in our ‘bottom drawer’. It was the beginning of modern industrial life – information technology... and the disease of retraining each step taking me further away from handcraft to computer...! I hated its interruption... to ‘planning ahead’. I wanted to concentrate on my life not be continually plagued by a changing world about me. What an impossible thing to desire...! As with most marriages children arrived that added to the complications. My own upbringing directed how I should behave - plan for their futures... Now I could put into practice how I thought children, should be raised... in company with my wife’s thinking and Doctor Spock’s theories. Our long-term plans for the children were based upon the educational system then in place, plus a 1950s youth culture struggling with pre-war standards of social behaviour... This was also a new age ‘of women’s rights’. Their employment soaked-up vacancies in certain sectors of commerce and industry. By the beginning of the 60s, popular daily newspapers were printed and bought at the rate of two per household... indoctrinated by left wing theories.

I began working life in 1950, just before my fifteenth birthday... on a wage of thirty-seven shillings and sixpence. That I should stay on at school not considered worthwhile... my father, believing his children should bring money into the home as soon as possible, did not give the idea a moment's thought. My brother and I, in ignorance, acquiesced – not fully understanding that an improved education could lead to greater choice - of jobs. The excitement of feeling 'grown up' – being a worker along with everyone else - having money in our pocket, obscured the fast approaching technical innovations. Even if my brother and I had decided to follow the path of education, my father would not have wanted us to do so. Many of the attitudes and life-styles of friends and neighbours were somewhat similar. It was a working class environment - the emphasis was on 'working', and the money earned. It was a preordained way of life based upon a pre-war culture ... For my father it was a culture of discipline, hard work and principles and I suspect a fair dollop of 'knowing ones place'.

Naturally, the complications of life - personal and social - sometimes recognisable, become compounded - the older one gets. I was an innocent of fifteen years, unbothered by choices – of my own or my parents, poorly educated, and socialised by five years attendances at Boys Brigade activities. My parents did not associate or link current issues of the day - affecting industrial and social changes, with their own experiences. Technical advances - commercial and industrial, gathered apace... to my parents, unrecognised – beyond their understanding. My father read a newspaper everyday... he scorned worker's disputes, seen by him as ignorant follies.

There is no reason to suppose that the way they chose to bring up a family was any better than the way their parents tried. Each generation thinks they have the answer until faced with the realities of life - which are not forgiving. Children turn on their parents in every generation few escape criticism. With the divorce rate nearing fifty percent – including remarriages, there are going to be very many discontented children casting aspersions on their parents efforts - backs will have to be very strong! The only ones to escape will be those who have small families or no children at all.

Post war union struggles to improve worker conditions were threatened, by foreign competition and escalating cost of raw materials. These reasons not always recognised by office workers and housewives, but obvious to factory and manufacturing managers and workers.

Prime Minister Attlee's Second Ministry coincided with the Korean War - the Communist northern state invaded South Korea on the 25th. June 1950, the Berlin blockade - which lasted almost a year, only just been defeated in May 1949 by the Anglo-American airlift, and the forming of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Each, in turn, added further to our national debt.

The period 1950 – 1965 was in the main governed by the Conservative party under Churchill and Macmillan. In 1951, meat, butter, tea and sugar were still rationed. Rents were controlled and holidays abroad for the masses were out of the question. However, for those few who were lucky enough to have sufficient funds and could go abroad there was a fifty-pound limit - on what you could take out of the country. The wage restraint still working in 1950 was lowly relaxed...

At the start of the nineteen fifties, the average rate of inflation was nearly four per cent... fifteen years later over five. The growing power of the unions, particularly the various printing unions within newspaper houses - characterized the period. All the country's powerful unions, involving: the generation of power, imports, exports, and industrial manufacturing, played an enormous part in shaping Britain's economic future. The government, looking ahead, was greatly occupied with the nation's economic structures - planning national performance figures and influencing social services – education, health, and benefits. However, out of town – in rural areas, the war had forced greater productivity – new machinery, and land use. This had not appreciably changed the character of the people. The pace was still slower than the town. The extra labour used during the war had left... water meadows, steep hillsides and difficult field boundaries reverted-back - to pre-war usages. The demobbed, did not all want to go back 'to the land' – they had learned new skills and wanted a part to play in 'the industrial age'.

The war had been for Britain an economic disaster and would eventually cause the country to fall under the economic dominance of those countries they had previously fought... for they had the goad and goal - achieving something from nothing. The Marshal plan, which was an effort by the USA to stop Communism and to make aided countries beholden, enabled those past enemies to reconstruct new factories, which could incorporate new technological innovations. Their worker's organisations, initially, concentrated on work and

profit before conditions. Britain not only had to provide for the Korean War but also had to maintain the Welfare State, which took money away from investing in industrial expansion, renewal of outdated machinery and new technologies. There was student unrest, which stemmed from the Vietnam War... continued right through this period. It was an argument about consumerism [still with us today], the profit motive in big business and over production. Mass entertainment outside the home was from the motion picture industry exported from America. These films depicted the American way of life – behaviour, language, living conditions and expectations - new forms of dress and transport. It was only natural that we, in Britain, should aspire - to those new freedoms of expression and consumer objects. Educating Archie the most popular pre-television radio programme... this was the end of radio's golden age. TV began to take a hold even forcing the weekly visit to the cinema to decline in popularity... theatres lost audiences becoming uneconomic... pulled down... never to be rebuilt. At weekends, the towns and cities pulsed with the desires of an expanded population - eager to improve their living standard. The arbiter being 'The Media', and in particular, the latest fad promoted by the glossies.