

SECOND DECADE

RUGBY SCHOOL

I was two years into my Second Decade when I moved from Sandroyd to Rugby and I had no expectations of my time at school getting any more acceptable. In fact, going from the top of one heap to the bottom of another, I expected things to get worse, which would have turned out to be true but for Fabio Barraclough. Anyone who tells you that their school days were the best time of their lives must either have had miserable holidays or led a very boring life since leaving.

By 1948 the Japanese had surrendered and the world was at peace, although the Cold War was beginning to hot up and soon the Russian blockade of Berlin would have to be broken by a giant Air Lift. My father was now both Chairman and Managing Director of the Zinc Corporation, which required him to live half the year in Australia. For me this meant that my mother and I spent even more time together during the school holidays.

My first trip to Rugby and introduction to the housemaster of Michell House was again with my mother and by car. Pat had been a very successful student at Rugby and had won a mathematics scholarship to Trinity Hall Cambridge where he obtained a Double First. Hopefully they didn't expect me to do the same!



Michell House

This time at least I looked like all the other new boys so felt less conspicuous than when I had arrived at Sandroyd. The required dress was a sensible pair of grey flannel trousers and a Harris Tweed sports jacket, black tie and House cap. The Michell cap was a brown and white striped affair that looked like a chocolate cake filled with thick layers of cream. Most of the studies held two boys and had been allocated in alphabetical order.

After one term at Rugby it was universally recognised that I was hopeless at both Latin and French so was allowed to do extra geography and art instead. My masters had seen the light.

My study mate was a boy called Shaw. We didn't have anything in common but got on well enough for the first year. At the end of the year we were allowed to choose our own study mate but I was slow off the mark and didn't get around to doing anything about this until too late. My only true friend was Colin Naylor and he had already agreed to share with another boy. Consequently as the odd man out I was told that I had to share with David Rawson, a boy from the year above my own. Like many other chance happenings in my life this turned out to be a blessing and by far the best thing that could ever have happened to me.

Rawson, being a year older, made my days at Rugby bearable. Sharing with someone from the previous intake dragged me up a notch that resulted in my being given privileges before any of my own year. However, the main advantage was that Rawson and I talked the same language.

Rawson was streetwise and taught me how to survive in what was to me a very hostile environment. He was not quite my height, stocky and non-athletic, which was another thing we had in common. However, he was a supremely gifted musician, played the cello beautifully and at the end of term concert he would give a solo performance in front of the whole school. His music ability excused him from all sorts of odious tasks as he would just say, "Sorry, I have cello practice," and simply disappear.

Rawson smoked a pipe. This was of course illegal and meant that even on the coldest days we would have our study window wide open if he felt the urge to light up. Because I was sharing with Rawson it meant we had a choice of studies before my own year and the advantage of this was that some studies were better suited to not being overlooked by Prefects. Rawson also knew which were the best ones for anti-smoke detection. I never took to smoking a pipe as it burnt my mouth, but occasionally while he was puffing away I would have a cigarette. How no one complained about the smell of the tobacco smoke is quite beyond me, but maybe it was because our housemaster also smoked a pipe and everyone thought the smell came from his study next door!

Rugby had a Boys' Army. Although the war with Japan was over, the Korean one looked possible, so the masters took the School Corps very seriously. Everybody was given a soldier's uniform, boots and a rifle, which we were shown how to clean but not to fire! Once a week we would have a parade and be taught to obey the orders yelled at us by a fierce Sergeant as we marched up and down backstreets. In the summer a General would come and inspect us after which we would be split into Blue and Red squads for manoeuvres, which meant slogging through muddy fields and hiding from each other in ditches. On one of these occasions Naylor and I had to lug a very heavy bren-gun around, so for fun, during a quiet moment of boredom, we set up a roadblock on a public highway. This turned out to be disastrous as the first car we flagged down was driven by the headmaster of Rugby School! Luckily he didn't report us, supposedly because he thought we had been instructed to do so!

The only time I saw the housemaster was for a caning or when he came up to the playing fields to watch rugby matches. He had a little terrier that I shall never forget as one day on our way home after the game, when he stopped to ask how we had got on, the dog lifted his leg and filled my boot!

Food was in short supply. We always had porridge for breakfast and, occasionally for a treat, one 'guaranteed-no-meat' sausage. Lunch was more substantial and always included mashed potato, while supper was bread and butter or occasionally a half slice of fried bread thinly spread with fish paste. Halfway through the morning between lessons we would return to our respective houses to change books for the next two lessons. This was when we each collected a slice of bread covered with salted beef dripping, which was simply delicious. The House matron had to supervise the bread and dripping dole-out so no one could steal two slices! Her room was also where, in the evening, we listened to *Dick Barton – Special Agent*. I can't remember what Dick, Snowy and Jock got up to, but I do remember the theme music very clearly and whenever I hear it I am immediately reminded of salted beef dripping on bread. It actually must have been a very healthy diet for although it was meagre I can't remember ever being hungry during my years at Rugby.

We slept in dormitories, the largest of which had about 30 beds each divided from the other by partitions. Down the centre of the room there was a row of basins, one for each person, and if you happened to leave water in the basin it would freeze on exceptionally cold nights.



The icy cold big dormitory

In the winter the classrooms were bitterly cold as the central heating system burnt coal, which was then in short supply so the heating was seldom turned on. In contrast to the cold winters I remember the summers as being gloriously hot.

The school had a wonderful Sanatorium that had only just been completed at the outbreak of war, so was very modern. It was here that we had to go to *cough* so the doctor could feel if we had a hernia or have our feet inspected and painted purple if there was an outbreak of athlete's foot. The only time I was admitted to the San was when I was knocked off a bicycle by a car and they thought I might have concussion. My overnight stay was a blessing as it got me out of potato picking, something that happened every year

when the local farmers needed extra hands to bring in the harvest. Potato picking is a back-breaking job and to be avoided at all cost.

We all had bicycles as the playing fields were miles away from the school. A shop in the town stocked a vast array of second-hand bikes where we could buy one when we arrived at the school and sell it back when we left. As there were 600 boys in the school there were a lot of bikes around. In those days gears were very rare and progress depended on straight pedal power. This became very obvious each year on the one day of the summer term when we were allowed to bicycle beyond school bounds.

Rugby is not far from Stratford-on-Avon so on this one particular day several of us would set off early in the morning and on arrival hire a punt and have a picnic on the Avon. We used to collect sandwiches from the kitchen after breakfast and start pedalling. It took over an hour to reach the Avon and was hard work but well worth the effort. Those hot summer outings were some of the happiest days of my time at school.

When you first arrived at Rugby everyone was enrolled into the Big Choir whether you could sing or not and of course over the years many of us were asked to leave. The first and only year I was a member we were taught the chorus from Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*, which was my first real introduction to real classical music.



Rugby School

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Memorial Chapel, Pepper Pot, Classrooms, School House

Every morning we had to attend a service in the enormous Victorian chapel that was called the *Pepper Pot*. It is an extremely ugly building made more so by being beside a beautiful Memorial Chapel built to commemorate the Old Boys who lost their lives in the Great War. The most impressive thing about the Pepper Pot was its colossal organ, which made an amazing sound.

Religious instruction was a build-up to our being confirmed. We all went along with this and became devout Christians although I never did manage to learn the Creed off by heart. It turned out that to be confirmed you had to

have been christened and have a certificate to prove it! Rawson's parents had never got around to doing this so one day we had a bizarre ceremony in the Memorial Chapel to witness Rawson being named David. The only sermon I remember was the one when the chaplain mounted the pulpit and announced that his text was taken from the top of a milk bottle!

Petrol rationing still made getting around very difficult but my mother always found enough to come down and stay at the Grand Hotel once a term. The highlight of her visit was Sunday lunch to which she would also invite Rawson and Naylor. Although the hotel didn't pretend to live up to its name it did serve a far larger meal than our normal fare. My mother also believed in giving us a glass of cider with our lunch, which was a great treat.

Colin Naylor was in the same year and form and we used to play squash together when we weren't chosen for one of the House teams. One Christmas he asked me to his home in Yorkshire for a party his parents were giving for him and his two brothers. It was the first time that I had ever stayed with a friend away from home and I loved the experience. Colin was the only person I kept in touch with after leaving school and many years later when we passed through Yorkshire with our three boys, we stayed with him, his super wife, Bev, and their three daughters.

We were forbidden to go to the cinema in the town, but Colin and I did and the risk of getting caught added to the excitement of the film. I don't suppose the ticket sales girl gave a hoot about us being from the school but buying the tickets was always a nerve-racking business.

Really I got more and more rebellious as my boredom intensified and my hatred of being at school grew. Before each meal we had to stand until a Latin Grace had been said. The housemaster usually did this but if he was away then the head boy would. One evening we stood for five minutes waiting for someone to say something so we could eat. In desperation I suddenly blurted out, "For what we are about to receive may we be truly thankful." There was the usual uproar as 60 students all sat down at once mixed with the clatter of plates and talk. My friends looked at me in utter amazement. I don't know what drove me to do such a thing and I spent the rest of the meal wondering what would happen to me as a consequence. Could I be caned for saying Grace? As it turned out nothing happened, not even a rebuke.

The art class was the one bright spot in my life at Rugby and the day Fabio Barraclough introduced me to sculpting really was the best thing that ever happened to me in my school days. The seed that he planted took 20 years to germinate but has grown into the joy of my life.

Fabio and I became friends and the finished *Hula Hula Girl* won me my only prize while at Rugby and meant I had a capital C (*Copy*) after my name in the school roll-call booklet we all were given at the start of every year. A prize for algebra at Sandroyd and one for sculpture at Rugby were the full extent of my scholastic achievements, but if I had to choose any two subjects to win prizes at, I would wish it to be those.

On seeing the sculpture my father claimed that no one could get into that position but then they say that none of the Sistine Chapel figures can *actually* stand up! Unfortunately it was the only sculpture my father lived to see, which is the biggest regret in my life. I shall never be able to thank Fabio enough for taking me under his wing and inviting me to his house where I worked in his attic studio before having tea and cake with him and his wife.

Apart from art, geography and geometry, all the other subjects I was forced to take continued to bore me rigid and I couldn't wait to get out of the place, so I asked my father if I could leave if I passed all my O levels. With a lot of luck I did manage to pass everything and left aged 16½. My one regret was being parted from Art. On my return to England 17 years later I was able to track Fabio down at his home outside Madrid where he now lived growing grapes and advising art collectors, while still keeping his hand in with mallet and chisel. Because he sometimes comes to London I was able to meet up with him and thank him for saving my life. He hadn't changed a bit from how I remembered him all those years ago.



Hula Hula Girl

Three of my friends were also leaving at the end of the summer term; Batty was off to Calcutta to join a firm, Hinton was going into his family's grocery business and Dyde was heading for Medical School. One day while chatting, the four of us decided that it would be fun to go camping on the French Mediterranean coast! I don't know how we all managed to persuade our

parents that it was a good idea, but we did. We met in London at my parents' flat a week after we left school. When the day came we all arrived on time and set off for the railway station.

I can't remember anything about the trip down, which is surprising as I am sure we were all very excited. I guess it was Dover, Calais, Paris, change stations, and then south. I have no idea why we were heading towards Barcelona although I do have a vague memory of studying an atlas, which presumably showed railway tracks heading west from Marseilles. I am sure the choice of heading towards the under-populated area just north of the French-Spanish border and staying away from expensive places like Nice, had something to do with the decision. As none of us spoke any Spanish we decided to get off the train at the last town before the border, which happened to be Port-Vendres. We hoped our money would go further in this out-of-the-way place, which was important as we were still only allowed to take £50 each.

The plan was that we would arrive and walk east along the coast until we found a nice cove and just settle down on a sandy beach. We each carried a small canvas bag full of summer clothes and bathers, but no proper camping gear such as a tent. We hoped that we would be able to exist on fruit and have just one hot meal a day in a café.

I remember the day we arrived at Port-Vendres was hot and that the coast road out of town was uphill. By the time we had walked a few miles we were exhausted and our spirits had sunk very low. We struggled on until we found a café and fell inside and begged the woman behind the counter for a glass of cold water, which she gave us and then asked where we were going. On explaining our quest for a camping spot by the sea she suggested that we go no further as below the café was her boatshed that we were welcome to use and she would give us supper every evening. Madame was an angel in disguise, but also a smart businesswoman, or should that be the other way round! Why let four boys with money go elsewhere? The boat shed, café and the sea were all utter perfection. We had certainly landed on our feet and just in time, as we were all absolutely knackered.

We settled in for our week of doing nothing but swimming and lazing around in the sun. The boatshed afforded shade during the day and the nights were warm enough to sleep out under the stars. The water was azure blue, deep and crystal clear. The seabed was covered with sea urchins that we soon learnt to avoid, as the spines proved to be painful and poisonous, but otherwise the spot could not have been better even though it had pebbles rather than sand.

Madame fed us every evening and sold us fruit for breakfast and bread and wine for lunch. She also told us of the carnival that was about to happen on the coming Saturday. The next town down the road was called Collioure and it was the home of the only bullfight in the whole of France. She told us that because it was in France, and because the French were not barbarians, the bulls were not killed so the odds of being hurt were all against the Matador. We could catch a bus from the café and buy tickets at the entrance of the bullring.

When the day arrived we caught the bus into town and as all the other passengers were going to the bullfight the party was already in full swing when we climbed on board. Bottles were passed around during the trip and by the time we arrived we were well into the spirit of the carnival. We bought tickets for the shady side and took our seats. What an afternoon and what a noise! The arena was small and packed with cheering people so the sound was

deafening. The bulls looked ferocious but had tennis balls glued to the tips of their horns. The horses were well padded and instead of spearing the bull's neck the Picador had to stick a rosette at the tip of his lance onto a pad roped to the bull's shoulders. The Matador, after playing the bull to a standstill, had to lift a rosette from between the bull's horns with his sword. It was all good clean fun and one of the most hilarious afternoons I have ever spent. Having seen the French bullfight I am more certain than ever that I don't want to go to a Spanish one.

Our holiday ended and it was time to leave. We sadly said goodbye to Madame and walked back to the railway station to catch the evening train to Paris. We got on board and, presenting a united front to the poor conductor, the four of us took over the whole of an old-fashioned eight-seater compartment refusing to let anyone else enter, saying that all the seats were taken. During the night two of us stretched out on the lower sofa seats, while the other two climbed into the luggage racks.

Early the next morning we heard a commotion in the corridor that turned out to be an argument between the conductor and a very rough-looking Irish sailor from Liverpool. Neither understood what the other was saying so our best linguist offered to sort out the problem. The sailor was unshaven, smelly and spoke a dialect that we could hardly understand ourselves so the poor conductor had no hope. We learnt that he had been kicked off his ship for fighting, given a one-way ticket to Paris and told to go to the British Embassy. According to him he had been given no money for food and hadn't eaten for days. As we drew into Paris we counted up what little money we had left and gave him enough for a meal at the station café. Nowadays I would probably suspect that he was lying, had his wages in his pocket and thought that four baby-faced English schoolboys would be good for a meal!

We had a whole day to spend in Paris before catching the night boat train back to London. We walked the Champs-Élysées, ate patisseries, drank coffee for lunch and to fill in the rainy afternoon we went to a cinema. So ended one of the most memorable holidays I have ever had. It was my first experience of organising something for myself and coping with the outside world on my own. Before this trip I had always been with my mother in good hotels with hot water and delicious meals. It was the perfect preparation for my next big adventures of being a Merchant Seaman on *Port Napier* and then a jackeroo in Australia. Right then I had no idea about my Australian future, but knew that I was about to step out into the world and I just couldn't wait to get going. I felt as though I was throwing off all my dull old clothes and exchanging them for bright new ones. Life was good!

I think of my years at Sandroyd and Rugby as just filling in time waiting for this moment. I am positive that I would have learnt a lot more from a private tutor. I didn't conform to the required pattern and therefore was outside the interest of the masters.

In those days Rugby was a mass of male teenagers jammed in together with not a girl in sight. The school made one brave attempt while I was there to normalise the situation by holding a dance for all those over sixteen. It took place in the gym during my last summer term. The needed girls were brought in from the local Grammar School and none of us had anything in common. They might as well have been from Tahiti as from Rugby! It would certainly have been more exciting if they had been.

In the last week before departing for good, all the Leavers were instructed to attend a mass lecture. The headmaster arrived and introduced the Town's Health Inspector who talked for ten minutes about Social Diseases. He actually said, "If you do catch a sexually transmitted disease and have to go to a doctor don't say you caught it off a lavatory seat. You might as well say you caught it off a train ticket."

Rugby was summed up for me by the event that took place on our last day before catching the train. As it was a glorious sunny morning four of us decided to go for a swim before breakfast in the school's Olympic-size pool that was surrounded by a high wall.

We arrived at the pool to find the gates locked, but could hear sounds of laughter and splashing coming from inside the walls so others had obviously decided that a swim before breakfast was just the thing to do before catching the train. We climbed the gates and had a wonderful half an hour before climbing back over the wall to find a master taking down names. We couldn't believe that he would report us, having told him that we were Leavers, but at breakfast our names were called out and we were ordered to report to the housemaster. In the study he told us that he didn't consider us to be Leavers until we stepped on to the train and therefore he would have to cane us, which he proceeded to do, each receiving six strokes! When I arrived in London I told my mother about the unfair treatment but she only found it very funny! It was certainly a dramatic way of bringing down the curtain on the final act of my formal education.

I couldn't believe it when I received a letter from one of my year's intake into Michell House announcing that he was planning a 50-year *Reunion Dinner*. I rang Colin and asked him if he was going. He was extremely doubtful about meeting a lot of people whom he had nothing in common with, but I eventually talked him into coming by pointing out that it would be fun to see how much we had all changed. I arranged for us to share a room for the night and go to the dinner together.

We arrived and found all but one of our year were present. Tony Dyde, who had become a heart surgeon, pointed out that statistically at least one tenth of our age group should have died so we were performing above average! The dinner was good and the chatter was constant, although a bit like a purposeless cocktail party. No one had changed that much in looks, which surprised me. What did astound me was that most of them had retired and spent their time playing golf, which seemed an awful waste of an education.

To end off the evening we lined up for a typical Michell House team photograph. I couldn't help but laugh inside wondering what my friends would say if they knew it was the only Team Photo I had ever been in!

The climax of the evening came with the organiser asking us all to stand and sing the Rugby School song. Of course Colin and I didn't know the words and never had, but everyone else did, which rather impressed me. I came away from the dinner knowing that life had been very kind to me and not at all regretting that I didn't know the words to the School song.

Several years after the dinner I was rung by Colin's brother, John, and with great sadness heard that my old friend had died from cancer. John told me that fortunately it had been a quick release, but I felt Colin had been dealt some pretty awful cards by Life having also lost his wife, Bev, to cancer when she was very young. Alone he brought up their three daughters while making a

great success of his women's fashion business, becoming fluent in French and the Commanding Officer of the Yorkshire Territorial Army.

The extraordinary thing was that John and Colin's voices sounded so identical on the telephone that I had the weird feeling I was actually talking to Colin. Our conversation brought back only happy memories of what was a very difficult time in my life.



*Year Reunion
'Colin' fourth from left top row, me left bottom row*

After 30 years of badgering by Margie to take her to Rugby and show her around, I eventually gave in; besides we were passing the town on our way back from Durham University where I had been advising the Institute of Computational Cosmology on the placement of three sculptures. It was lunchtime so I suggested that we have a meal at the Grand Hotel for old times' sake, parked the car near Michell House and walk down the High Street to the hotel. We arrived at the clock tower that was surrounded by smelly fast-food stalls and looked across to the Grand Hotel. It had gone, replaced by a noisy shopping mall.

Walking back we found the Three Horse Shoes still existed in what used to be called the Shambles because it had been the home of the town's butchers who used to throw the blood from the slaughtered animals out into the muddy street, but not in my days! Perhaps the brick pedestrian way was an improvement after all. The main gate of the school was open so we entered through the arch into the old quadrangle. What memories came flooding back! I must have walked across this Quad a million times. I pointed out a classroom door behind which someone had tried to teach me Calculus. Amusingly my

Symbolic Sculpture *Music of the Spheres* was used on the cover of the eighth edition of a 1200 page book called CALCULUS by Larson. The publication won the 2005 American Benny Award for *best cover*!

We walked past the entrance to the Debating Hall that had been the main schoolroom when Rugby was founded in Queen Elizabeth I's reign and out into New Quad that is surrounded by a prison block of classrooms and the 'Pepper Pot' chapel. Fortunately the chapel doors were locked. Out on the playing fields I showed Margie the plaque that commemorated Webb Ellis, who, *with a glorious disregard of the rules of soccer, first picked up the ball and ran with it*. At first the game was played with up to 100 boys taking part, all the boarders from School House on one side against the town dayboys on the other!

Here we had paraded in our ill-fitting army uniforms and learnt to march to orders. It did all look wonderful on the sunny day we were lucky enough to be enjoying. Out onto the road and past the Art School and then left down past Tudor House to the swimming pool where I had been caught on the last day at school. An aeroplane hangar with no character has replaced the beautiful open-air pool and the wall we had had to climb had been removed. Back down past the athletic grounds where I won a race but was deemed to be too slow to qualify and out onto the road to the B&B which my mother had used if the Grand Hotel was full. At last I found an improvement! The B&B was now a girls' boarding house; Rugby has turned coed. If only we had had girls in my day, life would have been so much more pleasant.

We walked back towards the school for the grand finale, Michell House. I pointed out the study window that Rawson and I had to keep open when he was smoking his pipe. Above were the dormitory windows behind which I slept and dreamt of freedom. We walked up the driveway to the Michell House back door. How many times had I walked that path? I looked through the door and saw an improvement as the brown passage had been painted cream. A boy offered to let us in through the door that can only now be opened by punching in a code for security, but I declined. "No, I was here a long time ago and don't think I wish to repeat the experience." He agreed that I might have a point.

The school now has a museum that we were allowed to enter for free when I said I was an OR. I bought a postcard of the playing field and Pepper Pot and hurried back to the car. We had to drive past the Art School to get out of town and as we did so I saw that the door was open. I asked Margie if she would like to see Fabio's sculpture studio where I had first held a hammer and a chisel and struck my first blow at a block of wood.

We entered, walked past the library on the left and down the stairs on the right that led to the basement and Fabio's studio, only to find it had been turned into a uni-sex washroom! Disappointed, but in need of relief, we made use of the facilities and left to drive home.