

MARWOOD HILL

The day came for us to leave for the airport. Destination: London. Our four boxes of treasures had long gone by air and would hopefully be waiting for us at Marwood Hill. We arrived at Heathrow exhausted and took the bus into town and then a taxi to my mother's flat. Margie slept that night in *The Slit*, I was on the sitting-room floor and the boys camped under the dining-room table. My mother was delighted by our arrival and in hindsight I see that our coming back to England filled the final years of her life with joy. She loved Margie and the boys and of course I was still her baby. Getting old can be a very lonely and sad affair, so our arrival must have been a blessing in her eyes.

Next morning we went to Paddington and boarded the express to Exeter and changed trains for Barnstaple. I had rung the taxi driver I had met in August and told him the time of arrival and he promised to be there to meet us. England was in the grip of a cold winter that was a far cry from the sun-soaked beach of Portsea we had enjoyed only a couple of days before.

The friendly taxi driver was waiting for us when the train pulled in and we set off up the hill towards Guineaford. The excitement mounted as we turned left down the lane that led to the house, passed the church hall and rectory and drove through the gates of Marwood Hill. It was wonderful for me to feel the tension rising as we got nearer and nearer. We all piled out and burst through the lovely Georgian doorway into the warm hall. The boys ran wild exploring their new domain as I showed Margie around downstairs. I had drawn a plan so the boys knew where they were meant to be sleeping. They quickly found their rooms and took possession while Margie explored the kitchen and wondered how to cook our dinner on the Aga, something she had never used before but soon became expert at. Jimmy had made sure the house was heated and the water was piping hot so straight after tea and a bath the boys fell into bed and we were not far behind, happily exhausted. Next morning we woke to a sunny white world as it had snowed in the night.



It snowed on our first night at 'Marwood Hill'

The boys couldn't believe their eyes as it was the first time that they had ever seen snow! The people who lived in the farmhouse behind Marwood had a toboggan that they lent to the boys. There was a perfect hill for tobogganing across the valley so we had an amazing morning playing in the snow.



The first toboggan ride

When the boxes arrived with our possessions from Australia we unpacked them and hung some of our own paintings on the bare walls so very quickly the house started to become our own. It was wonderful to have so much space, having lived in such a tiny house. Our bedroom was bigger than Chute's sitting room! The boys were meant to use Jimmy's old surgery as a playroom, but soon moved into the vast sitting room with us. The coal fire drew well and the oil-fired central heating was very efficient so we were unbelievably snug in our new and very grand home.

The postman came right to the front door in his little red van bringing letters from Margie's parents in Australia together with a box of quarter bottles of champagne from Uncle Joe to welcome us. I asked the postman if he knew of anyone who did wallpapering, as Jimmy had said we could change the sitting-room walls that were painted a very cold green. The postman told me that he and his mates hung paper and would be willing to do the job on a weekend. He measured up the room and told me how many rolls to buy. I asked our friendly taxi man to collect us so we could spend the whole day in Barnstaple, not only to buy wallpaper, but food and also a little car.

We settled for a funny little NSU car that was made in Germany. It had an engine in the boot, ran on the smell of an oil rag and we could all just fit in with a squeeze. Although it made a noise like a sewing machine, it was incredibly cheap to buy and was perfect for the unbelievably narrow lanes. Passing cars coming the other way was always a challenge and usually meant

either finding a gateway to pull into or backing for miles, so we soon became experts at reversing. What a difference to the wide open spaces of Australia!



The boys' first 'Snowman'

I had found out about the local school and met Mr Rochford, the headmaster, when I had first looked at the house in August, so he was expecting Tim and Peter as pupils at Marwood Primary School in a couple of weeks' time when the term started. Mark would have to wait a year before he could begin. It was a brilliant little school with superb staff and we soon made friends with some of the other parents.

As the postmen did such a good job with the wallpapering in the sitting room I asked Jimmy if they could do something to the hall that was also a very gloomy colour. He agreed and the postmen set to and very soon we felt that it was truly our home. The postmen also turned out to be electricians, so I asked them to fit up some lights in the barn. They hung four long strip lights from the rafters that were a great help, but because the grey rock walls absorbed all the light the men suggested that they whitewash the whole place. This made an enormous difference and I now had a magnificent space in which to work.

The only problem remaining was that I had no clay, but when I asked the postmen about local art supplies they told me that Barnstaple was famous for its Barum Pottery. I drove into Barnstaple and found the pottery in the centre of town. The showroom was full of lovely terracotta ware of every conceivable shape and size. The shop assistant asked me if I needed any help and I explained that actually I was hoping to buy some clay and would that be possible. "Of course," she replied, "how much would you like? It comes in 20-lb packs at ten shillings each." I was used to buying it dry and having to mix it with water myself as well as paying a fortune. I bought ten packs, which was

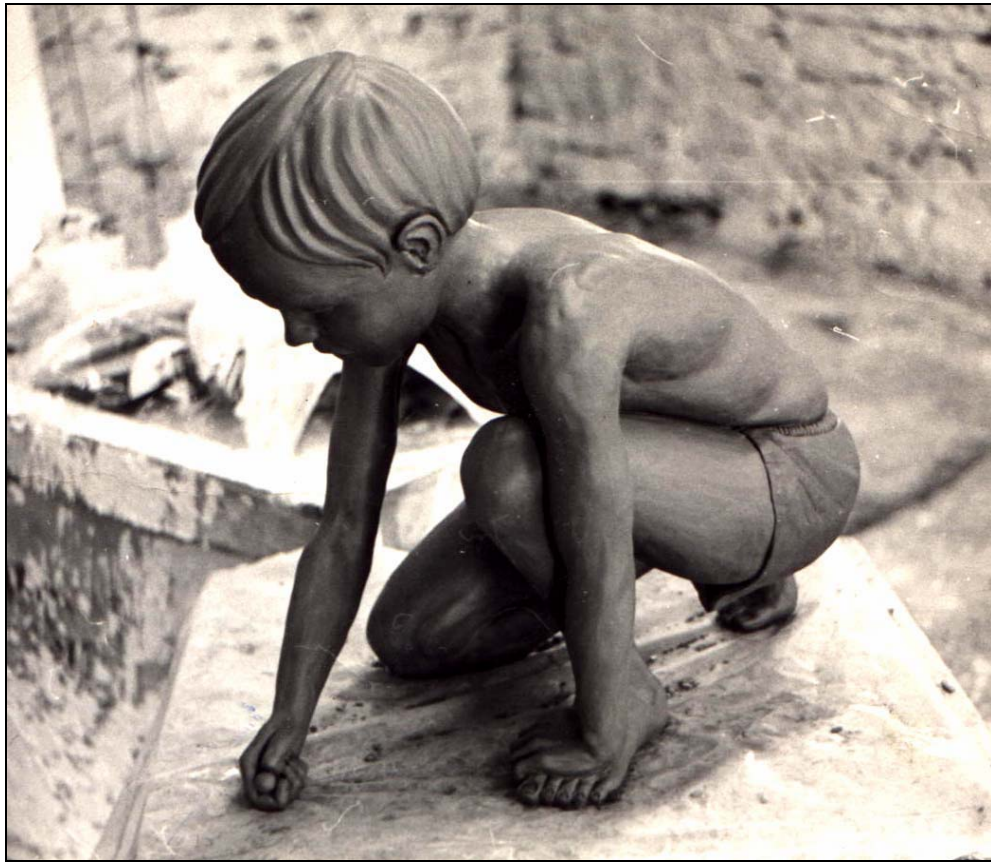
the limit that the suspension of the NSU would take. For a mere £5 I had enough clay to last a year! I just couldn't believe my good fortune or wait to get home and tell Margie.



*Peter seven, Mark five and Tim nine
Marwood School*

I looked around for a suitable subject for my first sculpture and decided that as I had done a sculpture of Mark the next victim would be Tim. I took several photographs of him posing as a marble player and a whole lot of measurements. I bought a developing tank and an enlarger and turned one of the little bedrooms into a darkroom where I made black and white prints. I then built an armature of wooden struts and started to work. The barn was so cold I had to have a bucket of hot water beside me to keep my hands from

freezing. Snow boots kept my feet from turning to ice and my excitement kept the rest of my body warm under several jumpers and long underwear.



Marble Player

Margie came over to the barn and had a look at the clay when I had finished the sculpture. I have always followed the practice that she is not allowed into the studio until I am satisfied that I have finished the sculpture. She approved of what she saw but being a practical girl asked, "What now?" It was a very good question!

I had read about a process called Cold Casting that used polyester resin and bronze powder. It cost half as much as real bronzes using the Lost Wax process, the traditional way of casting in a foundry. I had seen examples of this method in shops that sold table ornaments and although not having the feel or weight of real bronze, it did look similar from a distance. Not having the money for the real thing, I decided to investigate.

I looked in *Yellow Pages* and found Cold Bronze Casting. Sure enough there were some advertisements for foundries that specialised in the process, one of which was just south of London. I called the telephone number and talked to a Mr Tozer and explained about the clay *Marble Player* and asked if he could help. He said he would be delighted to cast the sculpture for me, if I could deliver a mould to him. I asked, "How am I to get the mould made?" He suggested I contacted a Mr Mancini and gave me a number to call.

I rang Domenico Mancini and had an amazing conversation with a cockney accent who told me to call him Mac. He would be delighted to drive all the way down to Devon, take a plaster waste mould and deliver it to Mr

Tozer on his return. He said he would work out the mileage and ring me back with a price, which he did the following day. He thought the job would take two full days so he would have to stay two nights with us. The price seemed very reasonable to me and I agreed, depending on when he could come. "I shall leave as soon as you send me a map so I know how to find your house when I reach Barnstaple," he announced.

The following Monday evening Mac arrived, and although he had been driving all day, he literally leapt out of his little van. He was an Italian gnome from East London, as cockney as they come and he wore a wonderful cartoon black French beret. We had dinner round the kitchen table and learnt all about Mac's life while he found out all about us. He was a character out of a storybook and we had never met anything quite like him in our lives. He had a twinkle in his eye and asked Margie if we had any female ghosts at Marwood Hill. He loved the girls, even though he was over seventy.

I took Mac to the barn and showed him to the *Marble Player*. I was very apprehensive about what he would say, having listened to all his marvellous stories about all the famous people he had worked for over dinner the previous evening. He walked around the figure humming and hawing for a while and then said, "Not bad." I was thrilled!

Watching Mac over the next two days was an education in how an artisan works. I learnt more in two days than I could have at an art academy in a year. He asked me to help him and taught me how to press the thin brass shims into the clay to form walls that divided the sculpture into sections. When this was finished I helped him mix the plaster and handed it to him when needed. By evening we had the whole figure covered in plaster so that it could set over night and be ready for opening up next day.

After breakfast we commenced stripping the waste mould off the clay. It is called a waste mould because eventually it is chipped off the cold bronze and thrown in a rubbish bin. If I wanted to make a second edition of the sculpture I would have to take a rubber mould from the cold bronze cast that would be backed up by a plaster shell. It was from such a mould that a lost wax model is taken for a molten bronze cast. I was a long way away from such an operation, so I didn't think about it.

When we had turned the lights out the evening before, the plaster was hot to the touch which is caused by the chemical reaction of the plaster setting. In the morning it was icy cold. Mac had designed the mould to have one large section under the figure so *Tim's* face, chest, belly and inside of his legs were all one piece. The top was divided into several removable pieces; the back of his head, back, bottom, outside of the legs and front of his arms.

As gently as a brain surgeon, Mac removed the back of *Tim's* head and revealed the clay inside. We had brought a bucket of very hot water over to the barn and this he started to pour onto the exposed clay. The hot water expanded the icy cold clay and started to force the waste mould apart. Soon water was seeping out along the line of brass shims that divided the mould into pieces and we were able to lift the back off. Next came the outside of his thighs and legs. Soon all we had left was the one large piece of mould under the clay figure. Now we were able to dig the clay out of the mould thus destroying the original sculpture and, without any ceremony, *Tim* was dumped into a plastic rubbish bin!

Mac washed down the inner surface of the waste mould, removing all traces of clay and then carefully put the small pieces back onto the large

section, making sure they all fitted perfectly before clamping the whole thing together with hessian wads mixed with plaster. *Tim* ended up looking exactly like someone who had broken every bone in his body and was in a full body cast. Mac explained that this was necessary as otherwise the plaster sections would distort as they dried and wouldn't fit together again properly. At last we shut the doors and went to have a well-earned bath and dinner. Mac, aged over 70, was still chatting away as merry as a cricket while I was utterly exhausted by a simply fascinating day of learning.

Mac set off at the crack of dawn as he had a long drive back to London ahead of him. When I waved him farewell I was left feeling extremely flat. I have had this same feeling every time a mould leaves the studio since that first parting and found that the only way of getting over the feeling is to immediately start a new project. *Tim* was out of my hands now and I wouldn't see him again until he was ready to be collected.

The trip to London in those days was an eight-hour drive on a good day and up to twelve on Bank Holidays, as there were no motorways. It was a long drive but we were used to such trips in Australia, besides which it was a chance to get to know the southern counties. It was now spring and the landscape was unbelievably beautiful as England's garden started to bloom. I spent a happy evening with my mother, but couldn't sleep because I was so excited about seeing my first cast sculpture the following day.

I arrived at the foundry mid-morning and was welcomed by Mr Tozer. His workshop was situated in a beautiful old wooden barn about the same size as mine at Marwood. The stink of the resin made the whole place smell like a nail-polish factory, so the large barn doors were kept wide open as much as possible. Inside three men worked on casting cold bronzes.

The process is really very simple and exactly like the one used for making the hulls of plastic boats. The plaster cast is opened up and the inside surface is sealed with a clear varnish. On to this surface is painted a thin layer of polyester resin mixed with bronze powder. When this has dried it is backed up with polyester resin mixed with wads of fibreglass until the skin is nearly a quarter of an inch thick. Once this has set metal rods are wadded on to add extra strength. The body of the mould is done first and then the outside pieces are fixed to it with clamps. It is a bit like a three-dimension jigsaw puzzle.

When all the pieces are in place and stuck together, the plaster is carefully broken off, exposing the bronze skin inside. The next thing is to make good the seams where the pieces meet by filling them with resin mixed with bronze powder. When the job has been completed, acid is brushed on to the bronze powder to give the sculpture the patination of an old penny. The sculpture looks exactly like a real bronze one, but is quarter the weight.

I walked into the barn and there sitting on the bench was *Tim*. I was thrilled. It was the most beautiful colour and shone like a real bronze in a museum. We carried him outside and I took a whole roll of film. There were various things I would have liked to have done better, but I have discovered this applied to every figurative sculpture I ever did! It wasn't until years later with the Symbolic Sculptures that I was able to overcome this disappointment and be satisfied by my own work. For now I was more than happy with the finished results. *Tim* looked like *Tim* as though a professional had sculpted him, or at least that is how I saw him, and I was simply thrilled and amazed!



The finished cold-resin bronze of 'Tim'

When Mac had left with *Tim's* mould, leaving me feeling flat, I had decided the time had come to be brave. With all this clay and such a grand space to work in there was no excuse to put off doing a large sculpture. I decided to leap straight in and tackle something I had wanted to do since reading Françoise Gilot's book, *My Life with Picasso*. I had read the book the previous year on the farm and been fascinated by a photograph of Françoise teaching her son Claude to walk on a beach in the South of France. It was a lovely photograph, slightly ruined by the father!

Having chosen the subject I realised that it would be essential to have a substantial armature to hold up the weight of the clay that would be used in a life-size sculpture of a kneeling woman and a standing child. Using Margie in her swimsuit and a large teddy bear as a model, I took photographs and measurements of limbs and the bear, then cut up stout inch-square lengths of wood and made up a skeleton using plaster to join them together. When I had finished it looked like a stick figure with large white knobbly knees and elbows! I added a few cross pieces of wood as ribs and this made the whole thing look even more bizarre.

I had made a six-foot diameter turntable that rotated on a marble to keep it located in the centre, and used four sofa casters to take the weight. It seemed to work quite well and I was able to turn it around with ease when Margie sat on top of it. I foresaw no problems and put the wooden skeleton on the turntable and started to add the clay, working from the photographs of Margie teaching the bear to walk.



Françoise teaching Claude Picasso to walk

The sculpture quickly took form as working with clay of a perfect consistency is a joy. The figures were blocked up within a week and then I started to smooth the surfaces. All of Françoise's body was very accessible except for her bosom and the only way I could work on this was to lie on the floor of the turntable and reach up. It was at this moment that disaster struck! Without any warning Françoise slowly settled down on top of me and trapped me beneath her. With a great effort I extricated myself from the tangled mess of clay, cursing like a cattle drover only knows how.

Staring at the mess of tangled limbs I couldn't believe what had happened, especially as everything seemed to be going so well! Obviously I had to learn more about armatures, as I now realised that even if the wood and plaster one had stayed together, it could not have supported the plaster mould. The armature was going to have to be as strong as a Brunel bridge.

I went into Barnstaple to see what could be found in the Do-It-Yourself store. As I walked around looking for something to use I realised that all the goods for sale were on shelves that were made out of long lengths of angle iron that were bolted together. If these could hold up gallons of paint surely they could hold up Françoise and a plaster mould with ease. I bought several lengths and a bag of nuts and bolts, a set of spanners and a hacksaw, and returned home.

One good thing about having already done the sculpture was that I had learnt a lot, which meant that I was able to avoid the mistakes I had made on the first attempt. I soon had the armature made, and as it bore my weight I felt confident it would hold up both clay and plaster. I also realised that if the chest was hollow it would not only lighten the sculpture, but also save clay. I bought some fine wire netting and turned the body into a basket, and stuffed it with wet newspaper. I wrapped netting around the legs and arms and made a ball of it for the two heads.

The new armature worked like a dream and within a week the sculpture was finished. The wet newspaper inside helped keep the clay moist and every night I covered the outside with sheets of the plastic from the bags that come back with the dry-cleaning. Soon it was done and I was really pleased with my first full-sized sculpture. It was time to ring Mac again.



The second attempt remained standing

Mac drove down and this time he had to stay for three nights. We worked away in the barn like slaves mixing plaster and applying it to the figures. At last we had the mould finished, cleaned up and safely in his van that looked decidedly tail heavy as he drove out of the drive.

This exercise had been even more fascinating than taking the mould of *Tim*, as much more planning had gone into the job. Mac had walked around the figures for an hour before deciding where the shims should go so the smaller upper sections could be removed from the large bottom piece. While he worked out what to do he also examined the sculpture, and I was delighted when he at last said to me that he liked it. Then he added, "Maybe her right thigh is a fraction longer than the left one." There was certainly nothing to be done about that at this stage of the proceedings, so I decided to keep that piece of information to myself.



'Mac' with the waste mould nearing completion

Having overcome the problem of armatures perhaps it would be challenging to sculpt a mother kneeling and holding a child up in the air.



Clay 'Mother and Children'

Margie and the large teddy bear were again called in for photographs and measuring before beginning work. Sculpture number three soon took shape and with the new armature system the child stayed up in the air, while a second child was crawling on all fours beside her.

I found that the used clay was full of plaster chips and not nearly as easy to work, so went back to the Barnstaple pottery for another load. What a luxury to have new material to work with every time! Years later I visited an art academy in China and was shown the sculpting studio where each student was working on a large nude figure. I picked up a piece of the clay from the bin and tried to model something with it, but found it was impossible as it was full of plaster chips. I thought of my days at Marwood and blessed the Barnstaple pottery, as I couldn't have done any of the sculptures with such awful clay as the students had in China.

Mr Tozer called to say that *Françoise and Claude* were finished. I had not been able to contain my curiosity while they were being cast and made a quick trip up to the foundry to watch the process of resin casting. I had arrived to see the cast with the back off and took a photograph of Roy Wakeford at work. This was the first time that I had met Roy.



'Roy Wakeford' working on 'Françoise'

My brother Pat had decided to buy himself a new car and offered me his old one. We now had two cars in the garage under the house so I could leave Margie with the NSU for the school runs and shopping while I drove up to London to inspect the completed sculpture.

I arrived at Tozer's barn and went inside to find *Françoise and Claude* with a sheet covering them. It was to be my first unveiling and wasn't I excited! The sheet came off. To see my first large sculpture looking like a real bronze was an amazing moment. When I see the sculpture in All Hallows Church by the Tower of London it makes me think of the barn at Marwood Hill, where I sculpted it, and the day I first saw it at the foundry, and met Roy. It now hardly seems possible that it all happened so quickly.

Mr Tozer and Roy lifted the sculpture out on to the lawn for another roll of film! In the sunlight the sculpture looked even better than in the barn. I

showed him photographs of the kneeling *Mother and Children* in clay and asked if he could do another job for me. If he could then perhaps Mac could down and take the mould as before, and bring *Françoise and Claude* down at the same time. This is how it all worked out and soon Mac was back at Marwood.



'Learning to walk'

Margie and I were worried about Mac when he arrived in his little van. He didn't look well and although over the time it took to take the mould he seemed in good spirits, somehow he had lost his twinkle. We waved him goodbye not knowing that we would never see him again.

When the *Mother and Children* were ready for collection, I drove up to the foundry to hear that Mac had died and was really heartbroken by the news. I had only known him for three working sessions, but during that time we had got on so well I felt we had known him for ever. He taught me an enormous amount, as he was always willing to share his knowledge. He was a true craftsman who had obviously had a tough life, starting to earn his living at 14, but never complaining about anything, which is a pretty rare thing to find in this world.

Domenico Mancini came into my life at just the right moment and was a godsend in those early days when I was learning to sculpt. He was one of the nicest and kindest men I have ever met and a major stepping stone in my becoming a sculptor as he was always encouraging, for which I shall never be able to thank him enough. Domenico Mancini was a gem of a man.



***Kneeling 'Mother and Children'**
my memorial to Mac now in Marwood Hill Gardens*

It was around about this time that Margie and I saw an advertisement on the Barnstaple railway station offering a weekend in Paris for £9 each return, hotel included! That sounds ridiculously cheap but in those days it was the same as a week's rent on Marwood Hill. The train would take us to London and then a coach to the Dover-Calais ferry and another coach would take us to our hotel in Paris. Once there we would have two whole days and two nights before returning overnight in the same way. It was so tempting we just had to do it, so we asked our friends Penny and Nigel Spink to see if they would mind looking after the boys for four nights. The Spinks had two boys who were also at the Marwood School so it would not be too great an imposition.

The train part of the journey to London was simple and the night with my mother fun as it was our first trip to town together since arriving in

England. The early rise to catch the coach was not difficult, but we were a little perturbed by the first sight of our coach because it didn't look very reliable.

Our fears turned out to be well founded as it broke down crossing Waterloo Bridge! A better-looking bus arrived in half an hour and we set off again and reached Dover without further trouble and boarded the ferry. We were relieved to see that the French coach was brand new and we were soon spinning through the countryside heading for Paris. Halfway there we stopped in a town to stretch our legs. It was now about one o'clock and we had been travelling for six hours and were feeling more than a little peckish. Margie and I saw a few tempting restaurants and hoped that we would soon be taken to one.

We couldn't believe our ears when we were all ordered back on board and set off again. Then we noticed that all the other passengers had brought sandwiches with them, which just added to our hunger. All we had was a packet of cigarettes and a duty-free bottle of brandy as a present for my cousin Rachel who lived in Paris. In those days everyone smoked so it was allowed on buses. We lit up and sulked.

We were both feeling so hungry that after a bit of humming and haing we decided that cousin Rachel would not mind if we sampled her brandy. In those days drinking out of a bottle in public was frowned upon! Luckily Margie carried her hairpins in one of my old tobacco tins so I emptied them out and used it as a cup. Well, of course by the time we reached the hotel in Paris we had drunk nearly a quarter of the bottle and were feeling very happy!

The hotel was in the Place de la République and looked quite respectable from the outside. Inside was a different story. The receptionist could not speak English and just handed each couple a key with a number on it. All the rooms were on the third floor and there was no lift. As we only had a zipper bag this was not a problem, although the winding staircase did trouble some people, especially a black American couple with a large suitcase. We found our room was furnished with a stained washbasin and the rug on the floor was so filthy it would be unwise to walk in bare feet! With some trepidation Margie pulled back the bed to inspect the sheets and to our relief found them to be spotless, crisp white. Then there was a knock on the door.

On opening it I found the black American man. "Could you please help? The receptionist doesn't speak English. Could you ask him if we could like a room with twin beds?" We had already come to the conclusion that the hotel was also a working brothel so I didn't really hold out much hope that a Frenchman would understand the American's request! Using my schoolboy French, unused since I was 16, I tried but was proved correct as all the man did was shrug his shoulders.

The hotel facilities were basic. There was one bath for our whole floor. The one cupboard lavatory on the spiral staircase between floors two and three had a door but no latch. Fortunately the space was so confined that you could hold the door shut with your foot, although as we went up and down the stairs we discovered that men didn't bother to shut the door anyway. The hotel definitely had a laissez-faire air about it, but what did we expect for £9!

None of this mattered, we were in Paris and neither of us had been there since we were teenagers. Our first job was to find cousin Rachel so we hailed a taxi, gave the driver a bit of paper with an address on it and set off for Montmartre. The taxi driver dropped us off and we looked around for Rachel's flat. We asked a couple of people who merely shrugged, but luckily she was on the lookout and heard our English voices, popped her head out of a window

and told us to wait. We were soon sitting in her flat apologising that our gift of brandy was somewhat diminished while desperately hoping we could sample what was left. Instead she offered us a cup of tea!

Rachel was our family hero as she had stayed on in Paris during the war and worked with the French Underground. She had married a Frenchman who was known to the family as 'The Chow' because he had a black tongue, like a dog of that breed, from drinking absinthe which eventually killed him. I don't think Rachel was terribly pleased to see us so we soon made our excuses and left, having done our duty by my mother and drunk the tea.

Not having eaten since breakfast we were famished so walked back to the hotel looking for a clean café with a Parisian atmosphere on the way. We found one and, after having a low-cost French meal and a bottle of cheap wine, strolled home feeling very content and very happy to be in 'Gay Paree'.

Our plan was to visit the Musée Rodin in the morning and in the afternoon take the train out to Meudon to visit his suburban studio. I had just read *Naked Came I* by David Weiss, so my mind was full of the great sculptor's life. In fact it was all too much. Not having seen anything larger than a six-inch high Rodin maquette, suddenly to be surrounded by a copy of every sculpture he had ever done including the *Gates of Hell*, was beyond our wildest dreams. We staggered out and fell into a café for a beer. Being very short of money we had decided to skip lunch and save our cash for dinner. One of the nice things about Paris cafés is that they always have hard-boiled eggs on the counter for beer drinkers. We made the most of their generosity and ate two each.

We found the right railway station for Meudon and took the next train out to the suburb. When we arrived a man gave us directions to the studio and we set off up the hill. It was a beautiful day and quite a climb, so by the time we were approaching the top of the hill we were hot and puffing. Suddenly a great jet of water fountained up from the middle of the road as a water main burst right at our feet. It was very spectacular and we took the opportunity to cool down in the spray-filled air.

We arrived at the front gate of Rodin's studio and rang the bell. A very grumpy man stepped out and grudgingly opened up to let us in. He pointed to a notice that said *No Photographs* and then led us round the back of the house to the studio and Rodin's grave with the *Thinker* sitting on top. We had the whole place to ourselves so walked around admired the studio drinking in the atmosphere. Although we found the place was very rundown and a bit depressing, one got the feeling that it must have been amazing in the past. We spent an hour taking it all in and then walked out down the drive. As I reached the gates I turned and took a photograph. We heard a great shout of rage and saw the old man begin to run down the drive towards us waving his arms, so we nipped through and shut the gate feeling like naughty school children.

Next morning we went to the Louvre and walked in the Tuileries Gardens, which is always such a pleasure. In those days Maillol's sculptures graced the lawns outside the Louvre making it a much more pleasant place than it is today. The museum was empty of tourists and we were able to inspect the treasures virtually on our own as we wandered through the empty galleries. We even had the *Mona Lisa* all to ourselves.

The trip home was uneventful and, as most of it was overnight, we just dozed in our seats and thought about all we had seen. We arrived back at Marwood happy but exhausted after a wonderful adventure.



Birth of Adam

Inspired by all I had seen I went to the barn the next morning and started my Rodin period! The first sculpture needed to be something that I could take a mould of myself now that Mac was not going to be able to help me any more. I decided to do a sculpture called the *Birth of Adam*. I still have it in the Agecroft garden. It is of a baby being born, umbilical cord still attached and being raised by the arm of God from Mother Earth.

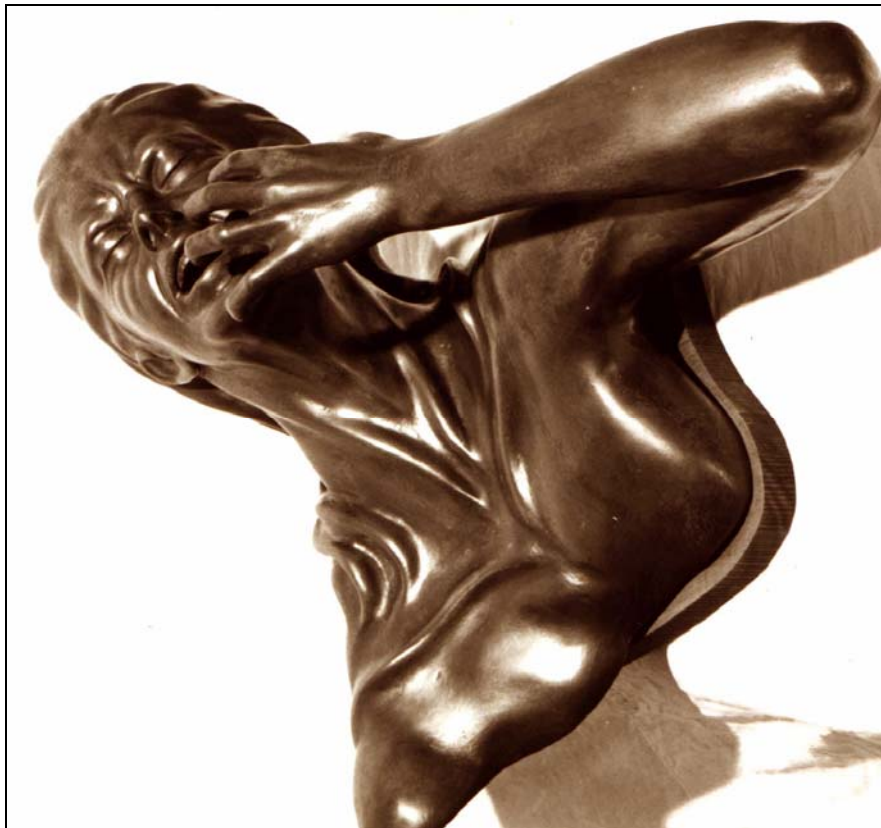
Jimmy Smart thought the child was too big and as he was the anaesthetist asked me down to the hospital to see a Caesarian birth. The surgeon asked me if I was all right as he made the incision and I replied, "Yes, it is no different to killing a sheep." He looked at me over his mask and replied, "I jolly well hope it is!" Jimmy continued to listen to the Test Match broadcast!

I took a one-piece mould except for the hand and foot that had a section that could be removed making it possible for me to dig out the clay when it was finished. I took the mould up to the foundry and left it with them to cast.

My next sculpture was the *Lovers*, and that was quickly followed by *Pain*, and then *Christ* that is now in All Hallows Church by the Tower of London. Next was Simeon's Song, *Nunc dimittis*, depicting the Prophet blessing the head of the boy Jesus. This sculpture is now the font cover of Marwood Church. When I saw it recently it brought back many happy memories of our halcyon days at Marwood Hill.



Lovers



Pain



'Christ', at 'All Hallows' by the 'Tower of London'



'Nunc dimittis', font cover at Marwood Church



'Peace', sculpture in clay



'Peace', sculpture in cold bronze

My next Rodin sculpture was more ambitious and was called *Peace*. It is of a man and a woman asleep in each other's arms. I was beginning to see that my moulding days were numbered. I could do simple moulds but only if they were lying down! Sculpting figures that are lying down is somewhat restrictive, although I was able to hang *Peace* on the wall when it was cast.

My Rodin period came to an end when I did a life-size sculpture I called *The Awakening*. On finishing the clay sculpture I wrapped the plaster up in plastic ready for the big day when I would take my first multi-piece mould. I went to the barn in the morning, prepared to start work, keyed up and ready to go. The first job was to put the shims in the clay and cut it into sections as Mac had taught me. I started to unwrap the sculpture and as I removed the plastic from the girl's bottom the whole of the back fell off. I stared at the figure and then decided that it was an omen and scrapped the project. Some years later I was commissioned to do a four-foot high version of the same subject, so all was not lost as I really enjoyed doing it a second time!



The Awakening

I had first met Roy when I had gone to see *Françoise and Claude* being cast and had realised then that it was only his skill that had produced such a fine finish from my moulds. I was immensely impressed by Roy's craftsmanship as the care he put into the finish of the job had to be seen to be believed.



Roy Wakeford, Master Plasterer and friend

This unassuming man was to make the whole of my sculpting life possible and over the years we have become great friends. Without his help there would be neither Figurative sculptures nor Symbolic Sculptures. I owe everything I have achieved to my partnership with Roy.

Mac's passing had left me with a dilemma. How was I going to carry on without him. The solution to the problem came when I was dropped at the foundry by my brother Pat, who wanted to see my latest sculpture. He left me there so I needed a lift back to London and when Roy heard this he offered to take me as far as his home in Morden to catch the Underground into town. I was delighted about this as I was dying to talk to him alone.

On the way to London he told me that he was not very happy with his job and as the conversation developed I found myself offering him all my future work if he decided to go solo. When we arrived at his house he showed me his tiny garage workshop and told me that this was all the space he needed and over the years he proved this to be correct. During the next 25 years, single-handed he made every waste mould, positive plaster and resin bronze cast of every one of my sculptures, and all in his garage!



Roy taking a plaster waste mould of the 'Girl on the Cushion'

On the train into town I wondered what I had done! To begin with I had better start working like a Trojan if I was going to keep my word and not let Roy down, so decided to do some more children. Margie had a friend called Sally to help her now and again clean up the enormous house. Sally had a very pretty little daughter called Melanie and they both agreed to my taking some photographs for my next sculptures. I have always liked action and found that this can be achieved by having children interact with each other. I thought of doing a group of three children gossiping on the lawn, calling it *Story Time*.



Story Time

The amazing thing about these three sculptures is that they are now being cast by the hundred in Asia and sold in Garden Centres in England, but without my signature! They are beautiful castings and one tenth of the price of what they would cost in Europe so sadly must be done by slave labour.

Before leaving Melbourne I had taken some photographs of the boys playing with a water hose in a garden. Peter had the hose while Tim and Mark tried to avoid getting wet, with little success. Fortunately as it was summer Margie didn't mind. The photographs came out well and I thought that the whole scene would make a great fountain, so I set to with confidence using my new armature skills. Tim running, Peter jumping backwards and Mark holding the hose with his shorts at half-mast as always.



'Peter, Mark and Tim' getting wet



Water Fight

When Roy first arrived at Marwood to take the moulds of *Story Time* I introduced him to Margie and the boys who all immediately adopted him as a member of the family. On seeing the three sculptures he knew exactly what to do and set to work. Being younger than Mac he worked twice as fast, which meant that I had to as well, fetching water, cleaning moulds and carrying cups of tea back and forth just like in the old shearing shed days on Chute! Roy was a joy to work with and we soon developed a system that lasted for 25 years.

Having committed myself to employing Roy I obviously had to find a market for the sculptures. I decided to write to Derek Crowther of Syon Lodge in London. Margie had seen one of his advertisements in the *Illustrated London News* at the dentist's and thought that there might be a chance of his being interested in selling my type of sculptures. I put together all the photographs that I had, and sent them off, including *Story Time*.

One of the sculptures I had done was called *Water Babies*. The crawling child was the same as the one in the *Kneeling Mother and Children*, so I only had to do the squatting child to complete the fountain. Roy cast a circular platform for the children to play on as a base.



'Water Babies', Harrogate Park

Another of the photographs I sent to Derek was my first life-size animal. The farm behind Marwood had been bought by a woman who owned a Great Dane, and she asked me if I would do a sculpture of her pet. I took masses of photographs and measurements and retired to the barn. The owner would bring the dog to see me and by the time the sculpture was finished both of us were rather pleased with the result, although neither of us asked the dog! Roy took a mould of the Great Dane and when he had finished I asked him to take a rubber mould of it and cast a plaster copy for me. When the plaster arrived I sculpted a little boy to stand beside the great brute with his arm around the dog's neck. It turned out to be a very popular sculpture and eventually we sold twelve copies. Because it was such a good seller I did an edition with a little girl in the same stance, but we only sold two! Why?



'Boy with the Great Dane', on 'St Lawrence Waterway', Canada

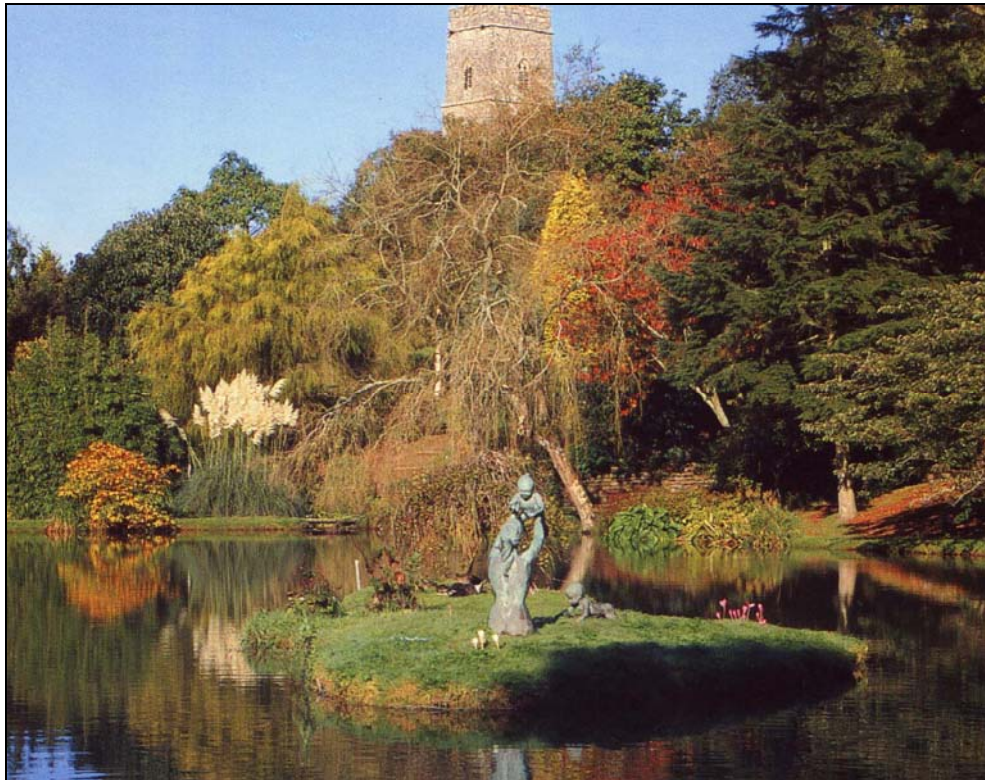
Several days passed before a letter arrived from Derek Crowther saying that the Chelsea Flower Show was in May and that he would take all the sculptures we could let him have and show them on his stand, *on sale or return!* We packed up *Françoise and Claude* and several of the children sculptures into a hired truck and delivered them to Derek at Syon Lodge.

Margie and I couldn't resist going to the Flower Show to have a look at the Crowther stand. We had a double interest in being there as Jimmy Smart was also taking his camellias for the first time.

As we weren't members we had to wait until the first public day, but that didn't matter as it gave time for something to happen if it was going to. We walked down to the Thames in bright sunshine and eventually found Derek's stand. We hid in the crowd and slowly worked our way forward. The children were displayed on plastic grass and the *Water Babies* fountain was bubbling away. We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw that all of them were wearing red *several stickers!*

With a push in the back from Margie, I boldly stepped forward and gave my name, asking if Derek was available. The attendant disappeared and soon returned with Derek wearing a big grin. “We have sold all the children and taken orders for more. When can you deliver them?” He went on to explain that the larger figures were too expensive, but added to the display. Luckily this turned out to my advantage as Jimmy wanted to buy the *Mother and Children* for the island in the middle of his new lake at Marwood Hill to celebrate the fact that he had won all the prizes for his camellias!

What a day it had become, in fact probably the best day of my life. Nothing is more pleasing to an artist than to sell his work. It means he can eat!



***Kneeling 'Mother and Children' on 'Jimmy Smart's' island
'Marwood Hill Gardens' in North Devon***

After the Chelsea Flower Show not only did Roy have to do my plaster work, he also had to make the resin bronzes Derek had sold. Fortune had certainly smiled on me the day I wrote to Crowther, as Roy now had a full-time job and I had a new career. In the end Roy cast over fifty children for Derek. One of the reasons we went up-market and started to cast in real bronze was because Roy was finding it hard to cope with the volume of work in his garage that Crowther's sales had generated.

Just sculpting children was not much of a challenge and I decided to try something new just in case the market dried up. Another stimulus to this move was the coming of winter. During the first winter at Marwood I had been as mustard keen so working in the barn from dawn to dusk in below freezing temperatures was not a problem. As there was no water supply in the barn I had to carry it over in rubbish bins and every morning the water left there had frozen over night. Only by wrapping the sculpture in plastic and then blankets could I stop the clay freezing, which was a pain, as the ice crystals would swell

the clay and destroy all my previous day's work. I kept a bucket of hot water beside me to keep my fingers from going numb on the cold clay. Come the second winter I was beaten and retired to the attic with a hot-air blower, as there was no central heating up in the servants' bedrooms.

My stepbrother, Peter, wanted to buy *Françoise and Claude* and give it to All Hallows Church by the Tower as a memorial to his father, my Uncle Fred. I was very flattered by this proposal as well as being delighted, as it meant that they would be permanently on display in a beautiful church. It is a very historic place as it was from the bell tower that Samuel Pepys watched and recorded the Fire of London. Below in the Crypt they have found mosaics that date back to the Roman city.



Françoise and Claude

*Memorial to my stepfather, 'Frederick Bowring',
at All Hallows by the Tower of London*