

St Andrew's College years 1952-1957

Castlepark

Our move to 6 Woodside Drive, Castlepark, must have been during the Summer of 1952. My father had bought an unusual flat-roofed house with Art Deco elements. I think it originally belonged to the Fox tobacconist family. It dated from the 1930s and must have been one of the first houses built in Castlepark. For a number of years it had been let out and was in poor condition, with a leaky roof. It was also extremely cold - said to have been built with solid cast cement walls. The modifications my father made spoiled any architectural merit that it might have had by putting a pitched tile roof on it and filling in a balcony on the upper floor, as well as changing the internal layout of the ground floor somewhat. Awe added a greenhouse to the east side and in it my mother enjoyed growing cacti, geraniums and pelargoniums that reminded her of South Africa. We had an annual crop of tomatoes. The garden wall was increased in height to improve privacy. In the course of improving the garden itself a Leylandia hedge was planted that eventually grew to a great height and much have seriously annoyed the neighbours. The ground was not as fertile as in Malahide but nevertheless supported, besides the usual lawns, a vegetable and fruit section. My parents evidently liked the house, however, and my mother lived there until she died at almost 99 in 2009.

My father's sister Edna Ryan lived nearby in a small art deco house called "Nayr" [Ryan backwards] and this may have encouraged the move to that location. They later moved to a bigger house in Hillside Drive and afterwards to a rambling eighteenth century house in Stillorgan.

Of course, we got to know our neighbours over the years. Many were businessmen and professional types. My mother had the misfortune to outlive nearly all of them, dying at almost 99. My father was 81 when he passed on.

The square that forms Castlepark was still only about half complete, with new houses being built over the next few years. These were generally somewhat smaller and cheaper than the original ones, rather to the annoyance of some of the older residents. The builder was PL O'Brien, known to the locals as "Plob". He hated this nickname and was sometimes teased by naughty local boys. We used to play among his stacks of timber left out to weather. Of course, we came to know most of the other teenagers in the area. At one stage we decided to collect old newspapers that had a certain low scrap value. Some other boys helped with this. Smaller boys were recruited to help with collection and were paid of course much less. In no time we filled up my parents' garage to their great annoyance. I don't believe this business lasted more than two weeks before their patience ran out.

We were quite close to a "triumphal arch" that had been a gatelodge to Rathfarnham Castle and was the home to a very large family, presided over by a widow, Mrs Doyle. Nearby was a bridge over the Dodder River where we children played with "trap jars" for catching sticklebacks. At the far end of the park on the other side of the bridge was a kiosk where a lady named Nancy knew us all and in later years kept the "Irish Times" and the "Daily Telegraph" for our increasingly aged parents. This was where we caught the 47a single-decker bus to school if we were not cycling.

The move to Castlepark, Rathgar brought various changes. We had to make new friends and changed to a new church. The latter was the Rathgar Presbyterian Church, where we were also sent to Sunday School. It was very much frowned on in those days not to have some sort of religious affiliation. I also joined the Rathgar scout troop, connected to the church, that met in an old hall in Rathmines, known as the "Mission Hall" (now a Jewish social club). This troop went camping fairly frequently in Powerscourt, Enniskerry. Lord Powerscourt allowed several scout troops to camp there, on the banks of the river Dargle. Each troop had its own storage hut for tents etc. Every year there would be a summer camp, usually in England. I remember one at Westward Ho in Devon and another at Llandudno in Wales. However, following some episodes of bullying I left this troop after a couple of years, only rejoining the scouts through my school troop somewhat later, mainly so that I could go to the Jamboree held in Sutton Coldfield in 1957. Though I did the hikes, I never completed the First Class and Venturer badges since I could not then swim.

One of the neighbours, Harry Lauder, was the owner of a cable manufacturing business in New Ross and, in the pre-television days, would show 16 mm feature films every Saturday night for the benefit of his friends. He was also the first person we knew who had a television set. Weak signals could be received from transmitters in the English Midlands and later Belfast. I think the latter transmitter dated from the time of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953. Many houses soon sprouted large 4-element Yagi antennas. Local cable television, fed from receivers high up in the mountains, was started a few years later. The first Irish station started in 1961.

Our mother never went to church though our father did, at least in those days. He remained a nominal member for the rest of his life and paid his annual "fire insurance" as my mother called it. The minister was TAB Smith and the services were quite traditional.

Our parents got to know many of their neighbours. Sadly, my mother outlived nearly all of them and became quite lonely towards the end.

St Andrews College

The children of Castlepark attended private schools. These could be boys' or girls' schools, Catholic or Protestant. Few schools were then co-educational. The fees charged were usually quite modest. Protestant neighbours went to the High School, St Andrews (like me) or Wesley College (co-ed) and the girls to Alexandra College or Park House. The Catholic boys went to Belvedere, St Mary's or other schools run by members of religious orders. One neighbouring boy was a boarder at St Columba's, an English-style "public school". One of my friends was Tony O'Farrell who went to a school called Coláiste Mhuire that taught through the medium of Irish. My younger brother and sister at first attended a private primary school called Rathgar Junior. Later my sister went to Park House and my brother, after a miserable year as a boarder at the Armagh Royal School, also went to St Andrew's. There was a fair amount of snobbery among the pupils of the different schools. The St Andrews' pupils were from a very wide range of backgrounds, with widely differing economic circumstances.

Before leaving Malahide I had been attending Mountjoy School in Clontarf for three years. This was inconvenient to get to from the South side of Dublin and my father probably felt that St Andrew's, as a Presbyterian foundation and closer to us, would be the best place to send me. I was taken for an interview with PJ Southgate, then the headmaster, just before term started in September 1952. All I remember is a discussion on the high price of bicycles that probably arose since I had just received a new "Phillips" for my birthday.

At that time St Andrew's occupied three contiguous late Georgian or early Victorian houses at the end of Clyde Road in Ballsbridge. The front gardens were small and off limits to the boys. Behind the houses was a paved yard or playground containing bicycle sheds and the science labs that had been converted from the original coach houses. The caretaker, known as "Sarge" lived at the end of this. There was an attractive beamed hall, used for assemblies and, during the time I was there, a stage and extra classroom were erected at the far end. In the hall was a war memorial to those who had died and those who had otherwise participated in the First World War. During my time another part was added to do with the Second World War and I vaguely remember a ceremony for the unveiling.

Something like a quarter of the *ca* 220 pupils were boarders, some from farming families. They came from the various protestant denominations and there were quite a few jews. Several were from German or Dutch families. The school could boast several well-known old boys, for example JL Synge, a well-known mathematician, Bill Watts, Provost of Trinity, and Robert Briscoe, first jewish mayor of Dublin, who was a great hit in the St Patrick's Day Parade in New York! It was not unusual for pupils to leave school at 14, the minimum age allowed, to become apprentices or work in family businesses.

In the middle of the paved school yard was a mulberry tree. The school day always began with an assembly and on the first day of the Michaelmas (September) term the headmaster would read the Parable of the Talents and issue a strict warning not to throw mulberries at each other! On two days of the week, Rev G.B. McConnell, a Presbyterian minister, would say a prayer.

The main houses had a kitchen and a dining room on the basement floor. As a day boy I would buy yellow meal tickets for lunch and we would have such delicacies as "bangers and bullets", toad-in-the-hole, rabbit stew, followed by rice, sago, or prunes and custard. At break there was a Tuck Shop, run by one of the teachers, and mainly selling sweets and chocolates.

The next two floors contained the classrooms. These were almost unheated except for tiny ancient gas fires that had very little effect. Normally we stayed in the same room and the teachers moved around, except that art and science were in particular places. The topmost floor was the location of the dormitories for the boarders. I think that another house on Clyde Road was acquired during my time and used to accommodate boarders.

There was a room occupied by the school secretary who was the only administrative person and handled everything. The headmaster had his own office. There was a small

library that was open after school once per week but was very little used. One of the “ground” (actually first floor) rooms was the staff room, always a fug of cigarette smoke.

The school was run on a shoestring. Exercise books and a “jotter” were issued to each pupil at the start of the school year. When a book was full, it could be exchanged for a new one. The old one was carefully checked to make sure that pages had not been wasted or torn out (otherwise there would be a fine of 6d) and the book was partly torn to make sure it could not be presented again! Textbooks in most schools had to be purchased privately and the city bookshops would set themselves up for the rush at the start of every school year. There was an active inter-pupil trade also. Teachers were then paid quite badly and I think only the headmaster could afford a car, a very small Fiat.

School was several miles away from home and sometimes I got a lift with my father (my sister’s school was near St Andrews so he could lift both of us). Other times I went by bus, involving a change from the 47a to the 18! Later I mostly went by bicycle. Uniform was not compulsory, except for ties and maybe caps, though school blazers were available. School started at 9am. We had a short break during the morning and a full hour for lunch. It ended at 3 21 pm except for 1pm on a Wednesday and 1215 on a Saturday. The classes were usually quite small, 20 or fewer. Once in a rare while a fight would break out on the playground and a circle would form around it. A teacher would reluctantly emerge from the staff room to break it up. Sometimes there would be a bloody nose for the matron to deal with!

Fig 1: Teenager at St Andrew’s

The net result of my entrance interview was that I was placed in form 2b. My parents soon became concerned that I seemed to be doing very little homework and asked that I be put on “weekly report”. This meant that I had to go at the end of each class to have a report sheet marked by the teacher and have it signed by my parents at the end of the week, to be brought back to school. Since this was an indignity usually reserved for the “slags” or weakest pupils, it caused a lot of amusement among my classmates. In fact, I had found the work too easy and was made to join the 2a class at the start of the next term. I was unceremoniously ejected through the interleading door by the other pupils!



Teachers

All the teachers were male, and, of course, minutely observed by the pupils, and most had nicknames that they were well aware of. They normally wore academic gowns. Much of our effort was directed towards the “Intermediate Certificate”, an official government exam, taken at the end of 4th form. The school was subsidised according to the number of pupils working for this and the later “Leaving Certificate”, normally done in 6th form.

Mr Taylor (Bog) taught English. He was a hard-bitten cynic. He inculcated a strong dislike of Wordsworth but admired Keats. If one ever began an excuse with the words

“But I thought ...”, he would say “Never think!”. He also liked to remind us that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions”. He also claimed that the value of a human to a knacker was about 2/6 (two shillings and sixpence) and that this was what certain of my classmates were worth. We had the “Thirty-nine Steps” to study in 2nd form, which was regarded as very modern and progressive. On the other hand I remember an interminable set of dictated notes on figures of speech. I think the “Merchant of Venice” was one of the set works for the Intermediate Certificate and it was partly acted out. An interesting question that he asked the class one day was whether we considered ourselves to be English or Irish. Quite a few felt themselves to be “English” and his question caused us to think what we really were. This identification probably arose because we were mainly protestants whose parents were born in the time before Ireland became independent. I think most of us came to regard ourselves as primarily Irish by the time we were adults.

The headmaster, Mr Southgate, was a Cambridge graduate. He taught Latin and Greek, though very few pupils took the latter. Everyone was given a Latin nickname – I was “Vitrus”, Little was “Parvus” etc. The classes were conducted through the medium of Latin and one pupil would have to write the day of the month Latin style (nones, kalends etc) on the blackboard. I never could remember the rules about these! Latin was my weakest subject but later in life I wished I knew it better. One interesting setwork was Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico IV* and a later one was part of Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Caesar was at least interesting, especially the part about constructing a bridge across the Rhine. Southgate did not use the common Italian pronunciation of Latin but another such as Kai-sar for Caesar, and “u” for “v” etc. Southgate was a rather too gentle person to be a good head over teenage boys. He took very little interest in sports and also left the occasional caning to his colleagues. (Individual masters did not use the cane. Any pupil who “deserved” this form of punishment was sent with a note after school to the master whose task it was.) I was only caned a few times over these years.

Later, when I had English lessons from Mr Southgate in his office, I could see his method of dealing with correspondence. He would start each term with a clean desk. This would gradually fill up with incoming correspondence, very little of which was answered. If anything was important enough, the sender would write again. Before the next term began, his desk would be cleared and everything put on a side table whose load had just been discarded! Or that is how it seemed to me!

Irish was taught by a Kerryman, My Murphy (Spud). He was a genial character and knew that most of his pupils resented having to learn the language. It was compulsory and a government subsidy to the school was conditional on this. In those days Irish was usually written in Roman miniscule characters, with long accents and aspirates (dots). One of his tricks was to teach the “Deeds of the Day” in present, past and future tenses and these could be worked into essays on many different subjects. One of our setworks was “Eisirt”, something like Gulliver’s travels to Lilliput, and another was “Brian Óg”. A possible punishment was being kept in after school, which normally ended at 1520. Spud would tell a malefactor “Stuck 3-2-1” (ie., kept in after school). On one occasion I left a stuffed badger that I happened to own in the corner of the room and we managed to distract Spud for a whole period while he recounted badger tales.

My first maths teacher at St Andrew's was Mr Ruddock, but only for my first term. I just remember that for the last lesson before Christmas he read the amusing Stephen Leacock story about A, B and C. Ruddock later became the headmaster of another school. My second maths teacher was Mr Sleath, an Oxford graduate who did not get on with the head. He had just joined St Andrew's after having to flee from Iran during a period of political instability. I remember that on his first day in front of a class he had obviously mapped the names of each boy in relation to the desk he occupied and, of course, we all moved around before he came again! He was an exceptionally able teacher and, being good at maths, I was one of his star pupils. Near the end of my school career, Sleath had a major disagreement with Southgate and decided to leave but generously offered to stay for another year had I wanted to try for a mathematical scholarship to Trinity College. I remember he once set me Desargue's Theorem to prove without telling me that it required projective geometry.

My French teacher was at first Mr Scott. He made the learning of irregular verbs into a competitive game in which we all stood in a row and moved down if we missed a question.

He had a cousin who he disliked in one of my classes. I remember this boy turning spectacularly blue and fainting following an antagonistic outburst! Scott had a strange marking system of alpha to epsilon, modified by +, - and ?. On one occasion he shouted at a boy that his work was "not worth an omega", to which I cheekily added "minus, question mark". I was chucked out of the room and more or less thrown down the stairs. Later we had another French teacher called Mr Stiobhart (Sticky or Sticky Balls) who was a Northerner and a gaeilgeoir. Sticky tried hard to introduce some culture to his pupils and once arranged for us to attend an early production of "Waiting for Godot" at the Pike theatre. I think it was beyond most of us at that age.

Science (physics and chemistry) was taught by Mr Mullen (The Duke). For these classes we went to a building at the far end of the playground that was part lecture room and part laboratory. He was a good teacher up to about 4th form but had forgotten everything beyond that, in spite of having a MSc from Manchester (I think). I ended up taking private lessons after that. We worked in small groups and probably did some dangerous experiments that would not be allowed nowadays. If a boy answered a question stupidly he would bleat like a sheep and fall down behind his bench, rising again with a zombie expression! On one occasion he gave me a box of old radio junk – capacitors, resistors etc. My father knew him slightly but what the connection was I do not know. On one occasion he allowed me to go to Mason's scientific supply company (an experience of the old world in itself) to buy glass tubing and lycopodium powder to set up a Kundt's tube. Later he could be heard muttering to himself "Kundt, Kunt, Kund ..." to general amusement.

History and Geography were taught by Mr Ferguson (Slug). He loved to emphasize "fax" (facts). In 2nd form we learned Tudor history. We later learned European history from a British point of view, in preparation for the state exams, but used revision notes by an Irish author to make sure we did antagonise markers who might be Irish nationalists or Catholics! Irish history was taught from Carty's textbooks which were, of course, what we now call "politically correct". Ferguson was also the main person in charge of the sports teams, namely rugby and cricket, according to season. St Andrew's had sportsfields remote from the school, in another part of Ballsbridge. Unusually, there was

even a swimming pool, that had been dug out by alumni. As a result, swimming was popular. Unfortunately I came late to the school and so missed the opportunity to learn to swim, which I only did as an adult. At least I was able to learn artificial respiration to contribute to the School's points with the RNLI. The school also had its annual sports day when there were the usual races and jumping events. Since I never played sports, I was disliked by Mr Ferguson. Long after my time, the sports field was sold to Telefis Eireann and the proceeds were used for a new school building in Booterstown.

There was an art teacher whose name I forget, nicknamed "Rasher". We learned basic drawing and at least on occasion went out to sketch from local scenery. Rasher was succeeded by Patrick Pye, who was quite a well known artist, but far too other-worldly for typical rough boys.

Some of the Latin classes were taken by Mr O'Neill (Buster) though he never taught me. During free periods I sometimes had to sit in the back of one of his classes. He was known to have a yacht of some kind and was rather annoyed when this was immortalised in "Captain Buster", a poem by one of the boys that appeared in the school "Annual".

German was taught by Dr Ernst Scheyer, a German Jew who had fought in the first World War and as a consequence did not lose his position [I remember as a judge in Breslau, but perhaps this is not correct] until almost the start of the Second War. Fortunately he had a son-in-law in Belfast with whom he sought refuge. He had a part time job at Trinity College as well as one at St Andrew's. In I think 5th form Michael Little and I took German lessons from him. Most of his pupils had been sent unwillingly by their parents but we were voluntary and he particularly enjoyed teaching us. He was certainly one of the most interesting of our teachers and treated us almost as adults. In spite of his experiences he still had a remarkable love of German culture. We used a textbook called "Deutsches Leben" and studied "Immensee" by Theodor Storm. He was probably about 60 years old and a natty dresser and always wore spats. He had the duelling scars (schmisse) typical of his generation. He was one of a number of distinguished Jewish refugees who ended up in Ireland. A neighbour told me that he had encountered Scheyer while on holiday in Scotland and his late teenage daughter found it desirable to stay out of his way!

It was also possible to study "commerce", basically accounting, and those who took this option were looked down upon and referred to sarcastically as the "commercial gentlemen".

We had physical exercise classes ("drill") in the school hall, run by an elderly ex-army person. I was certainly not his star pupil!

In my fourth form I sat the Intermediate Certificate Exam and in the fifth I gave up history and geography which were taught in a very boring way by Ferguson. I also managed to avoid Irish classes unofficially, though we were supposed to be working for the Leaving Certificate in order to qualify for the government subsidy. In that year I took the "Trinity Entrance" exam at the University (officially Matriculation) which I passed, though failing in physics. This gave me a shock and in the following year I took private

lessons from my friend, a former St Andrews pupil, Billy Hipwell, who was a university student by then.

One of my schoolmates was William Carney, who already collected antiques and had a collection of old pistols. He also liked to smoke what he called "hemp", then quite an advanced taste! He later became a well-known antique dealer.

My last year, in 6th form, was a very interesting and stimulating one. We were divided into two small classes, there being only 6 in mine. The other 5 pupils were very bright and several were afterwards scholars at Trinity. Two had stayed an extra year to compete for entrance scholarships – Neville Keery and Joe Jefferies. Keery as a university student won the Observer Mace for debating skill and later became a [politically appointed] senator, among other things. Jefferies obtained a mathematics entrance scholarship but decided instead to study medicine and later became a psychiatrist. Peter Skelton studied history and Anner Fisher went into the church (I think). A late arrival at St Andrews was Jeremy Johnston, son of the playwright Denis Johnston (a former St Andrews pupil). He later studied at Harvard. He had many interesting stories to tell of his father's literary friends, including John Betjeman. Some of the class had been to London and seen the satirical "Beyond the Fringe" which was all the rage and Jeremy Johnston introduced us to the songs of Tom Lehrer [Years later I saw him perform in Boston]. It was a depressing time politically, with the "Suez crisis" and Anthony Eden as UK Prime Minister. The population of Ireland was still decreasing and the country had yet to experience its economic turnaround.

Some of us were studying for "Entrance Exhibitions" (Scholarships) to Trinity college and others for GCE A-levels (UK). Peter Skelton and I had quasi-private lessons from Mr Southgate in English, which formed part of the general curriculum for Exhibitions. We studied "Pride and Prejudice," "Twelfth Night" and bits of "Paradise Lost" and were encouraged to read the canonical English classics, mostly the Victorian novelists, which I greatly enjoyed. I specialised in Mathematics, Physics and Geography, the last by myself. I also took A-levels in Mathematics and Physics. I missed getting an Exhibition by two places, in the end. Before this time, my knowledge of literature was very limited, to the books that we had at home. I still have copies of "Treasure Island" and "Two Years Before the Mast", given to me by my cousin when I was about 12, among the thousands of books in my collection today. Another important resource at home was the somewhat antiquated 10-volume "Childrens' Encyclopaedia". We also at various times stored large numbers of very interesting books for my two left-wing cousins! My parents regarded these as a bad influence but did not actually stop me from reading them.

An interesting member of the other 6th form was Michael Little, who studied for the GCE A-levels. He was a very clever boy, an all-rounder and a pleasant person as well who had always wanted to become an RAF pilot but was devastated to discover at the last minute that he was ineligible on account of colour blindness. He sat for the entrance examination to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, instead, and I believe came second, an amazing achievement when it is realised that he was up against British pupils from some of the fanciest "Public" schools.

Once a year there might be a play, in which the female parts had to be played by boys. I would help with the lighting and I constructed a new switchboard for the stage at one

time. One I remember was “The Shop at Sly Corner”, starring Malcolm Yafee, an amazing talent, in the main part. He was quite well known later on in life but even then was an excellent actor, magician and memory

Of course, there was an annual prize day with some well-known person as an invited speaker. One I remember was ETS Walton, Nobel Prizewinner and Professor of Physics at Trinity College. He gave a kind of sermon about keeping up standards. I usually received a prize, though was not always top of the class!

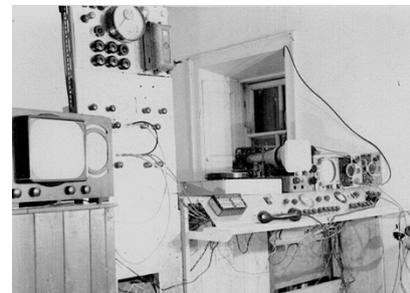
Outside School

Peter Skelton was about my closest school friend. He was a Quaker (Friend) and rather religious. I always tried to keep off the subject of South Africa when he visited our house, as my mother was a supporter of apartheid. Peter’s father I used to think of the archtypical “intelligent layman”, being widely read and fond of classical music. He was English born and worked for an insurance company. I helped him to build a hi-fi amplifier to use with his record player and I often enjoyed winter Sunday afternoons at his house listening to it. I remember borrowing Bertrand Russell’s History of Western Philosophy from him. Old Mr Skelton was in effect the “Chief Quaker”, although there was no such thing. He was occasionally invited as the Quakers’ official representative to presidential inaugurations etc.

Fig 2: In Billy Hipwell’s “studio” in Carlow, about 1955

In my early Castlepark years I had a “Meccano” set and also a Hornby “Dublo” electric train.

Later I went through a long period of interest in radio and television and constructed a number of radios and transmitters as well as closed-circuit television equipment. Of course, this was still the era of valve (vacuum tube) technology. I shared this craze with a friend Billy Hipwell who was also at St Andrews, but a bit older. We scrounged components wherever we could. A lot of very high-quality equipment was available as war surplus at very cheap prices. I could also buy new parts at wholesale prices through my father’s work. I had a big rack of equipment in my bedroom and my mother claimed that the maid we had at the time would bless herself before going in there! In 1955, when there was an exceptionally good summer, I went on a camping and cycling holiday to the West of Ireland with Billy. He graduated in physics at TCD before me and later worked in electronic design in the UK. We stayed in occasional touch until he was killed a few years ago by a learner driver who knocked him off his motorbike.



Other occasional hobbies were bookbinding and photography. My father had a very old Leica 35mm camera that I used from time to time. I did most of the developing and printing myself in an outside shed that could be more-or-less darkened. We had a simple home made enlarger made by my father during the War in the workshops of the Theatre Royal.

Both my sister Valerie and I took piano lessons from a strict widow who used to come to our house in an ancient Austin 7. I never developed sufficient discipline about practicing to be a good player.

We also attended ballroom dancing lessons at a house in Fitzwilliam Square where we were taught waltzing, foxtrot and “proper” dances of the kind one encountered at formal balls. I never became a good dancer! I very occasionally attended “hops” or informal dances at some of the church halls, but usually did not find them very exciting.

We went on very few family holidays. The earliest I remember was at Woodenbridge Hotel in County Wicklow where my parents had a brief flirtation with golf. We children found that we could talk down the drain of our washbasin to our neighbour, a “character” who claimed to be a descendant of the Colonel Blood who had once tried to steal the crown jewels! I remember a desperately boring trip when I was about 11 around the Ring of Kerry and to Gengariff, in bad weather. A more interesting trip was to Achill Island where we rented a cottage for a month in Dugort. The best times were at Brittas Bay where my father rented a house during a couple of summers. Our neighbours were the Robinsons, a family of four talented boys. The eldest was Michael, who afterwards studied mathematics. He was one year older than me. One of the others, Nicolas, became a lawyer and married Mary Bourke, later President of Ireland.

In 1954 my sister Isabelle was born with Down’s syndrome. This caused a major change in my parents’ lives as she had severe health problems as a small baby and had to be cared for continually as she grew up. My parents were getting on in years and found her hard to cope with as she grew older and stronger. We ceased to go on family holidays a few years later but eventually ways were found to look after Isabelle during the week and free them from constant caring. [Isabelle died in 2011 and was very fortunate to be cared for in later life on a Rudolf Steiner farm, Camphill Jerpoint in Co Kilkenny].

In spite of the fact that my father had worked as a young man as a recording engineer for HMV and had heard some of the most famous conductors and orchestras, my parents had very little interest in music. I nevertheless started listening to light classical music on the radio and used to go to Gilbert and Sullivan operas, probably influenced by the Skeltons. The D’Oyly Carte Opera Company used to visit Dublin on a regular basis and amateur groups often performed them as well. I remember going to a gala reopening of the Gaiety Theatre after renovations around 1956, when just about every famous Irish theatre personality took part in a show that lasted until the early morning. My father knew one of its owners, the impresario Louis Elliman, very well, and had been given tickets for the occasion.

My father at this time was manager for Ireland of Western Electric, a part of the US Bell Telephone Company. The main business, in Ireland at least, was supplying equipment for cinemas and theatres, such as projectors, arc lamps, sound systems, and screens¹. As a result he knew most of the people involved in show business as well as the film distributors and even some of the actors. He retired from this job around 1955 to concentrate on electrical businesses that he had become involved in. Western Electric was located in Veritas House, a building owned by the Catholic Truth Society, and the shops on either side of the office entrance sold religious articles and propaganda books.

¹ He used to receive all the reprints of the Bell Telephone Laboratories and the Bell System Technical Journal. These he would bring home for me to look at. Among other things were early papers about transistors.

They also had a travel agency, mainly for religious pilgrims, and they had been very helpful to our family just after the 2nd World War when my parents wanted to visit my grandparents in South Africa. Tickets were hard to come by at the time and we had to go first class in the way out!

We also had, also thanks to the Ellimans, free passes for the Theatre Royal – a huge building with *ca* 3500 seats, and for the Savoy, almost equally big. Both of these were knocked down many years ago. The Royal was a magnificently equipped building and I was lucky enough to tour behind the scenes, backstage, into their projection room and even a small private cinema. They ran a daily cine-variety programme with a huge rising organ and sing-alongs! They had their own band and a chorus line called the “Royalettes”. I often went there on Wednesday afternoons after school. When 3-D came to Dublin the censor had to see the first film, a horror story called “House of Wax”. His private cinema did not have the right technology so it was shown to him with most of the cinema trade at the Savoy and I was “lucky” enough to see it. As a family we usually went to the Christmas pantomimes at the Royal. Famous actors like Michael MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards would play parts like the Ugly Sisters in Cinderella, with lots of dubious jokes. My father had a half share in the Odeon, Dundrum, a local cinema that we kids also went to. The manager, Joe Riley, was the husband of the other partner, Ethel, and was a radio amateur who I often got parts from. Television came to Ireland quite late, in 1961, and this caused the demise of the traditional cinemas. Earlier than this, however, BBC programmes were available via cable-TV.

Around 1955 my father quit Western Electric to devote himself full time to a wholesale electrical business, Nugent and Cooper, and a small appliance factory called “Ideal” (Irish Domestic Electrical Appliances”. He had bought into these sometime after the Second World War, when they were not doing very well, and turned them around. I am not sure what fraction of these businesses he actually owned, probably at least 50%. He would spend an hour or two each morning at Nugent and Cooper, monitoring activities, and the rest of the day at Ideal. He enjoyed developing new products and solving production problems. He finally retired around 1966. I remember (much later on) suggesting to him some improvements to the Ideal factory layout to improve the production flow.

Towards the end of my schooldays I became interested in the history of Dublin, particularly the 18th century and I spent some of my spare time in visiting old buildings. For example, I visited Marsh’s Library which, in those days, was not yet a tourist attraction and unknown to the vast majority of Dubliners. The librarian had had two visitors that day and wondered what could be going on! I remember going with Jeremy Johnston to copy out Swift’s epitaph at Sr Patricks, needed by his father for a book he was writing. There he lay “where savage indignation (*saeve indignatio*) could no longer lacerate his heart”. I visited many old places such as city churches and the House of Lords that few people went to see in those days.

The first time that I visited the prehistoric sites at Newgrange and Dowth, they were also unexploited and, as far as I remember, one had to find out in which nearby cottage the keys might be found. One brought one’s own torch or candle. Dowth was entered through a low passage that one had to more-or-less crawl down. Whenever we visited castle ruins, of which Ireland has a great many, we always wanted to climb up into the

towers. I got hold of a book by HG Leask that described many of them. Near us, in Landscape, was the “Bottle Tower” an eighteenth century structure, part barn and part residence, shaped like a bottle.

I don't remember much about how I spent the last summer vacation before entering Trinity College. By then I knew the College quite well, having gone there for meetings of the scientific society DUESA, where I knew several students. Except, I did spend a few weeks getting paid a measly amount for assembling gramophones at my father's wholesale business! The building where it was located was in the same block as the Abbey and Peacock Theatres and was knocked down when the new theatre was built in the mid-1960s.

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